Film Nostalgia Measured

The next step was to test these hypotheses. Based on preliminary interviews with Taiwanese tourists, students and film-lovers, the researchers painstakingly developed and pilot-tested a questionnaire that measured nostalgia for Hong Kong films, familiarity with film locations and future intentions to travel to Hong Kong for nostalgia fuelled film tourism.

The researchers then surveyed 737 cinema-goers resident in Taiwan. Among numerous other questions, the respondents were asked how many Hong Kong “good old days” films that they had watched, what they thought about the films’ music and backdrops and whether they ever searched for news about Hong Kong film stars from the period.

Only people who passed some simple set of questions were allowed to participate in this part of the research. For example, they had to be at least 40 years old, and to be familiar with some Hong Kong films from the 1970s to the late 1990s. About half of the respondents were female, and most lived in cities. Interestingly, more than 90% recognised all 11 of the most famous Hong Kong film stars from the period.

Nostalgia Tourism

The researchers’ analysis of their findings “confirmed the potency of nostalgia as a film tourism motivation”, and suggested some paths for promoting nostalgia-driven film tourism for cultural as well as economic gain.

Of five main film nostalgia dimensions, one was particularly influential for tourism intentions: the respondents’ memories of film backdrops, which they longed to experience “in the flesh”. Interpreting this finding, the researchers suggest that the nostalgia concept can play a significant role in “consolidating an association between branded destinations and a compelling narrative that relies on film locations”. Destination marketers can capitalise on the importance of film backdrops by featuring key locations and landmarks in their advertising and tour itineraries.

However, the researchers note that film sets should not be overly commercialised, because highly motivated film tourists want to view an authentic “world on screen”. This is an advantage from a sustainability perspective, as film-based nostalgia tourism “does not require large investments”. Instead, for example, local restaurants could simply encourage guests to reminisce by developing “good old days” menus and creating a nostalgic atmosphere with film props, photos and music.

Indeed, this kind of social and cultural exchange between tourists and residents may even promote longer-term market viability, “using the medium of film to understand community culture, traditions, and history”. To ensure the sustainable management of film destinations, destination managers should empower local communities as stakeholders in film tourism.

Future Film Tourism

Demonstrating that the emotional connections films evoke extends to film destinations, this study offers novel insights into the influence of film-related nostalgia on future travel intentions. The findings suggest that destination marketers and managers alike can effectively and sustainably promote local tourism through simple and creative ideas rather than making huge investments.

However, continued vigilance will be needed, because audiences’ memories of old films may fade as new fads emerge. “To plan, develop and manage film destinations, warn the researchers, “will involve an ongoing commitment to understanding different film tourists’ expectations and perceptions of destination attributes”.

Growth or Authenticity? A Difficult Choice for Rural Tourism

Owners of small business accommodation in rural China face a difficult choice over whether to expand or retain their authenticity, according to the findings of a study by the SHTM’s Honggen Xiao and his co-researchers. In a recently published study, the researchers aim to settle a long-standing debate over whether business expansion is beneficial or harmful to rural tourism businesses, and conclude that entrepreneurs must make a “trade-off” between “enhancing guest experience and achieving economic goals” because growth brings both advantages and disadvantages.

Success of Rural Tourism in China

Small accommodation businesses (SABs) such as B&Bs, homestays and guesthouses are especially important in rural areas, where the researchers note they “play a central role in tourism development, poverty relief and rural revitalization”. Visitors to rural China are most likely to stay in a type of accommodation known as Nongjiale (Happy Farm House), which emerged in the 1980s in response to the “flood of tourists heading to rural areas for leisure and sightseeing”. The government later initiated an official programme to encourage peasants to start their own accommodation businesses, and by 2012 the number of Nongjiale had soared to 1.5 million.

Yet the researchers note that as these businesses expanded, problems started to emerge. Unlike in developed countries, where entrepreneurs tend to open SABs for “lifestyle motivations”, rural SABs in China tend to be profit-motivated, and as demand grew, owners were inclined to expand to increase their incomes. Yet expansion also brought greater homogenisation of products and damage to the rural culture and environment. In response, the government introduced a new policy that encouraged SABs to “take more delicate growth strategies”. At the same time, new entrants began to offer what the researchers describe as “small-scale, exquisite, and well-designed and decorated” accommodation, referred to as Minsu (Local Home Stay), in an effort to overcome fierce competition.

Both Nongjiale and Minsu are popular with tourists, and local governments encourage their development as a means of revitalising rural areas while preserving rural culture and fostering rural nostalgia. Nevertheless, the researchers comment that there remains a debate over whether growth in this sector has positive or negative effects on the small business owners’ profits and on guests’ satisfaction. As businesses grow, they can expect to increase the number of guests and to expand the range of services and facilities offered, which should provide greater satisfaction for guests and greater potential for profits due to economies of scale.

Such expansion, though, eventually changes the nature of the business from a host family accommodating guests to a business enterprise attracting customers year round. Along with these changes, the researchers observe that “as entrepreneurs become more business-oriented and entrepreneurial and business management and operation relationships become more important than family relationships. While these changes might have positive effects, they may also influence guests’ perceptions of the business as offering an ‘authentic experience’ of rural life.”

SABs and Guests Surveyed

The issue of whether expansion is good for SABs and their guests has remained unresolved, argue the researchers, because previous studies have taken a “static perspective” that does not take account of how SABs grow and change over time. In this study they collected data from 188 rural SABs and 873 of their guests that enabled them to examine the relationship between business size, financial performance and guest experience.

The SABs were located in five villages in Zhejiang province, in China’s Yangtze River Delta, where SABs are described as “the most popular place among rural tourism entrepreneurs in China”, where SABs account for the great majority of the available accommodation. The number of SABs offering accommodation in these villages gives some indication of the popularity of tourism in the area. Guzhu, for instance, with a population of just over 2,500, had the highest number of SABs (312), while Lingfengxi, with a population of less than 1,500, had the lowest number (53).

The SAB owners completed a questionnaire about their...
businesses, including the number of beds, amount of investment per bed, number of staff members per bed and annual revenue per bed. The guests completed a survey about their experiences while staying at the SABs. The questions were focused on three dimensions: functional experience, referring to the guest’s perception of the quality of goods and services; emotional experience, referring to the guest’s sensory pleasure and enjoyment during the stay, and authentic experience, referring to whether the guest perceives the SAB as providing authentic and genuine contact with the local people and lifestyle.

Growth Increases Profits

The results confirmed the researchers’ expectation that larger SABs have better financial performance. The greatest benefits were found among SABs that increased investment and the number of staff members, whereas increasing accommodation capacity had less of a beneficial effect. Hence, larger businesses with more staff and resources seem to be “more efficient and effective” than smaller ones, and investing in these areas would seem to make the loss of an area’s authentic rural lifestyle and culture may result in diminishing the attractiveness of rural destinations overall.

Bigger can also be Better

Nevertheless, growth does benefit guests in other ways. SABs with more staff per bed provide guests with more satisfactory functional and emotional experiences. The researchers comment that this is “reasonable as both service and hedonic experience are mainly related to interaction between people”. Employing more staff makes it easier to respond to customers’ specific needs and provide a better level of service, although as noted above, this is at the expense of authenticity.

The amount of investment was not shown to have any effect on guests’ emotional and functional experiences. The researchers describe this finding as surprising because investment usually means improvements in design and facilities, which “are supposed to better serve guests’ physiological and emotional needs”. One potential explanation is that SABs may not be investing their capital in the resources in the most effective way, which depends on the “strategy, taste and capability” of the owners.

Loss of Authenticity may Diminish Tourism

The study’s findings provide insights into the long-standing issue of whether small businesses gain or lose from expansion. Unfortunately, even with the information provided by the study, owners are still faced with a difficult trade-off. Transforming a business from a home with accommodation to a commercial hotel may increase income and improve service quality, but it may also diminish the business’ unique selling point: its authenticity. The issue is also one for destination management organisations to consider when making plans about rural SAB development because the loss of an area’s authentic rural lifestyle and culture may result in fewer tourists overall.

Points to Note

- Small accommodation businesses in rural China are an important part of the tourism industry.
- Owners want to expand to meet demand and increase profits but there is a trade-off.
- Investment improves economic goals and some aspects of guest satisfaction.
- Growth diminishes the authenticity of guests’ experience and risks dissatisfaction.


Tourism marketers and hotel managers report that one of the reasons the number of the distances people travel and offer them different packages, according to the SHTM’s Dr Sangwon Park and his co-researchers. In a recently published study, the researchers used information collected from TripAdvisor to evaluate how travel distance affects tourists’ satisfaction with the level of hotel service at the destination. They found what they called an “inverted U-shaped” relationship, which suggests that there is an optimum point at which the distance travelled maximises the perception of service quality, after which it begins to decline.

Demand Decreases with Travel Distance

The distance between a traveller’s origin and destination is an “important parameter in understanding tourist demand and behaviour”, the researchers suggest. Travel distance, they note, represents the “effort that a tourist makes to overcome the geographical obstacles” to travel, and the further a destination is from the origin, the lower the number of tourists willing to travel. The distance does not just influence demand, but also tourists’ behaviour at the destination, because the journey is often seen to stay longer and spend more after travelling a long way.

Nevertheless, distance is still something of a barrier, with travel demand increasing with distance up to a certain point, and then decreasing as both the financial and time costs increase. However, the extra cost and effort of long-distance travel may influence tourists’ expectations of, and hence their level of satisfaction with, their experiences at the destination.

How Far Can They Go?

Tourism and event facilities, that as the researchers note, “support the business travel market”.

The researchers chose to focus on the service satisfaction ratings provided in guests’ TripAdvisor reviews. Overall, there were 8,148 reviews for New York, 15,340 for Los Angeles, 44,922 for Chicago and 34,502 for San Antonio. However, a high number of these reviews were excluded from the analysis for various reasons, mainly to focus on travellers from other US cities rather than international tourists. Information about guests’ home locations was obtained from users’ TripAdvisor profiles, so that the geographical distance to the travel destination could be calculated.

The reviews were mainly left by “couple travellers, business travellers and family travellers”, with fewer solo travellers and travellers with friends. Among these different types, reviews from business travellers were the most common in Los Angeles and Chicago hotels, and family travellers were the most common in San Antonio hotels. About 60% of reviews were from business travellers, 27% from family travellers and 13% from business travel market”.

To determine whether distance does indeed influence tourists’ appreciation of their destinations, the researchers collected reviews from TripAdvisor hotel reviews in four cities in the United States: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and San Antonio. They focused on hotels in the three largest cities in the US, while San Antonio is the seventh largest. They are all highly popular tourist destinations and have a large number of event and facilities, that as the researchers note, “support the business travel market”.


Distance Creates a Positivity Bias

Through analysing the results, the researchers identified an “inverted U-shaped relationship” between the distance the reviewers had