LAPIN AMK

Lapland University of Applied Sciences

DEVELOPING DESTINATION EXPERIENCES

A Study on Chinese Tourism in Rovaniemi

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Bachelor's Thesis
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Abstract of Thesis

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The number of incoming Chinese tourists is increasing rapidly in Rovaniemi, Finland, with an expected 50,000 arrivals during the year 2017. With such substantial growth, service providers must make sense of the needs and demands of these consumers in order to better the destination experience, maintain steady growth and receive repeat visitations.

This thesis explored travel behaviour specific to the Chinese and aimed to demonstrate how and why destinations are selected and what factors affect destination satisfaction. The findings were used to determine development needs for an enhanced destination experience. The theoretical basis consisted of Chinese travel behaviour, including definitions of consumer behaviour, the decision-making process, needs and demands, travel motivations and preferences, as well as destination choices.

A survey was used as the foundation of discovering travel behaviour specific to Chinese tourists travelling to Rovaniemi and to outline developmental needs for the destination. The survey was sent to 53 possible participants and answered by 12 respondents, with a response rate of 22.6%.

The results suggested there is a need for improvement in the availability of information in Chinese, shopping opportunities and local transportation. It was also evident that digitalization is a significant factor in reaching Chinese consumers and that platforms, such as WeChat and Alibaba, should be integrated into the services of local tourism providers. Additionally, differing travel preferences between generations should be noted and the Christmas brand of Rovaniemi should be expanded into the street view.

Key words   Destination experience, consumer behaviour, travel behaviour, Rovaniemi, Lapland, Chinese outbound tourism, tourism development

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Finnish Lapland has proved to be a rapidly growing luxury destination for incoming Chinese tourists, with the number of overnight stays by Chinese tourists rising "by almost 41 per cent year-on-year" (Invest in Finland 2017) and expected growth in the upcoming years. (Wong 2015.) With such rapid growth, service providers lack readiness to receive such high quantities of tourists simultaneously, with the resources and capacity currently available. According to Invest in Finland (2017), Virkkunen, the head of Finpros's Visit Finland, admits existing issues, such as the transporting of tourists from Helsinki to other parts of Finland and satisfying the needs of increasing numbers of quality-conscious Chinese. It is thus important to understand Chinese travel behaviour, including pre-, onsite-, and post-travel behaviour, to be able to respond to their needs and maintain a competitive destination.

The objective of this thesis was to study the travel behavioural traits of Chinese consumers in Rovaniemi in the form of a survey, based on the travellers' experiences, and suggest how service providers could improve the destination experience for the selected target group. Essentially, the thesis includes theory on travel preferences and the decision-making process, such as motivations for visiting Rovaniemi and information retrieval channels, on-site behaviour, including destination expenditure, travel itineraries, choice of activities and length of stay, as well as post-travel behaviour, with an emphasis on travel reviews and the possibility of repeat visitors. As a continuation, Rovaniemi as a tourism destination is introduced through its tourism strategy, illustrative figures and statistics, attractions and accessibility to the destination, followed by marketing strategies and their relevance to the thesis.

The research questions answered through this thesis are "What are the perceived traits of travel behaviour amongst Chinese tourists in Rovaniemi?" and "How can the perceived traits be utilised to develop tourism experiences for the Chinese in Rovaniemi?" The results are introduced after a compilation of the methodology and subsequently the limitations, validity and credibility of the

study are outlined. Suggestions for improvement and further research are detailed at the end of the thesis.

The reason for selecting this subject stems from the author's childhood, having lived and studied in China for seven years. With a boost in Chinese tourism to Rovaniemi in the past few years and an expectancy for increased growth in the future, Chinese tourism is a very current subject in Rovaniemi. This thesis enables companies in the tourism field within the destination area to familiarize with Chinese travel behaviour and realize how their consumer-specific service experience could be improved.

2   THE COMMISSIONER

The commissioner of this thesis is Rovaniemi based SantaPark Arctic World. The company has been delivering "professional Santa Claus services with deep insight already from 1997" (SantaPark Arctic World 2016). Along with Santa Claus services, SantaPark Arctic World comprises of Activity Park SantaPark, Santa Claus' Secret Forest Joulukka, Arctic Forest Spa Metsäkyly, luxury tailor-made travel company Lapland Luxury and the Arctic TreeHouse Hotel along with its restaurant Rakas. Of the lot, SantaPark was the first to be established back in 1997 and Ilkka Länkinen, the CEO of the company, started his professional career as a Santa Claus helper there, eventually acquiring the company together with his wife in 2009. SantaPark welcomes up to 70,000 visitors from 41 countries each year (Daily Finland 2017). Additionally, the SantaPark concept was launched in Chengdu, China in 2014, with further expansions in mind (SantaPark Arctic World 2016).

The company states that "values of Christmas are the core of the company vision" (SantaPark Arctic World 2016), also valuing the inner elf, sharing and caring, authenticity and locality. Furthermore, the mission of the company is "to make every moment of your stay a lifelong memory, whether you are looking for a Christmas fairytale, nature escape, cultural feast or a company retreat" (SantaPark Arctic World 2016). According to the national Trade Magazine (2016) the company obtained a turnover of 1 224 000€ in the year 2016, with a total of 17 employees. In reality, the number of employees is higher each year due to the growing number of seasonal workers and expansions within the company.

In 2014, SantaPark was awarded the Experience Stager of the Year award by Pine and Gilmore, the creators of the Experience Economy concept. According to the Embassy of Finland (2015) "Their main idea is that businesses must orchestrate memorable events for their customers, and that memory itself becomes the product – the experience". The value of the award is

immeasurable, as the only prior Nordic company to have won the award is LEGO (Embassy of Finland 2015).

3 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

3.1 Defining Consumer Behaviour

Consumers are individuals or groups of individuals who buy products or services and are the end users of these products (Osmawati 2012). More over, the decisions, feelings, thoughts and actions taken by these consumers translate to consumer behaviour, which is the process when "individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires" (Askegaard, Bamossy, Hogg, & Solomon 2013). The concept of consumer behaviour links more intensely to the decision-making process, and is affected by thoughts, feelings, cultural or societal norms, income, demographics, attitudes and other stimuli.

The need to understand consumers and their behaviour stems from the idea that consumers rule the market. Service providers who understand the needs of consumers are at a competitive advantage and will be able to offer solutions to these needs, as well as adapt to the changing needs of the consumers. (Egboro 2015.) As this thesis explores the future tourism of Chinese travellers in Rovaniemi, the following sections will further outline behaviour specific to Chinese consumers and allow the reader to understand why and how local service providers must adapt to the growing numbers of incoming Chinese tourists and whether their behaviour is expected to change.

3.2 Decision-Making Process

The decision-making process is a complex chain of events leading to the actual moment of purchase and following with post-purchase decisions. Swarbrooke and Horber (1999) resolve "Choices of tourism products usually involve considerable emotional significance and perceived and actual risk for the individual. As a result, individuals usually carry out extensive information search before they make their final purchase decisions". (Bao 1999.)

The process follows a sequence of events (figure 1) as a need is recognised, such as the need to travel, and the consumer begins searching for a solution to fulfil this need. The desire to fulfil the arisen need is, however, dependent on the consumer's motivation to do so. As the options are explored, in this case a selection of travel destinations, the consumer evaluates the alternatives and makes the decision whether to purchase or not. The decision is heavily reliant on the perception of whether the purchase will satisfy the internal need. (Bao 1999.) In the case of a purchase decision, the consumer forms an opinion during the experience and often shares it directly with family and friends, on social media or on other online platforms. The experience subsequently influences post-purchase behaviour and future purchase behaviour of the individual and others exposed to the experience. The cycle repeats itself multiple times during the experience, for example when selecting accommodation or activities within the destination. (Kongalla 2012.) The illustration presented below is one simplistic model of the different phases of the decision-making process in the context of travel behaviour, followed by in-depth explanations of each phase.

Figure 1. Model by Mathieson & Wall (1982) (Kongalla 2012)

The cycle begins as an individual recognizes a problem or a need, which requires resolving. The need is either realised through internal stimuli, such as stress or the need for a break, or external stimuli, such as an advertisement or a brand name. (Kongalla 2012.) Brand names used in advertising are a typical marketing strategy, as they appeal to brand loyal customers and offer feelings of safety or social wealth. (Askegaard et al. 2013, 67.)

After the need has been recognized, the process of information retrieval begins. Information is collected through various sources, which may be personal (family, friends, acquaintances), commercial (advertisements, salesperson), public (mass media) or experiential (own or others' experiences). (Askegaard et al. 2013, 72.) The alternatives are cross-evaluated based on the information gathered and the benefits of each are weighed. During this phase the benefits may include those of the actual product/destination, brand beliefs, functionality, cost or expected satisfaction derived. (Kongalla 2012.)

Based on the information gathered and the perceived benefits of the evaluated alternatives, the decision to either purchase or not purchase is made. This regards not only the destination, but also the mode of transport, accommodation and possibly the type of activities planned during the trip. The biggest influence here is usually whether the purchase is anticipated to provide the desired satisfaction to fulfil the need in the first phase. When the decision to purchase has been confirmed, the bookings are confirmed and necessary arrangements, such as visas and validity of passport, are made. During this phase the actual travelling occurs and the experiences and first impressions are made. (Kongalla 2012.)

During the post-travel phase the experiences are analysed and evaluated, determining whether the purchase satisfied the needs, thereafter affecting future travel purchase decisions. The experiences are often shared to others online or offline, there over affecting the decision-making process of others as well. (Askegaard et al. 2013, 7.)

3.3   Factors Affecting Decision-Making

Although the sequence of events in the decision-making process seems rather blatant, the process is subjective to each consumer and influenced by a compilation of stimuli, such as reference groups, brand loyalty, economic situation and time constraints. The stimuli are often categorised under four factors (figure 2): cultural, social, personal and psychological. (Kasi 2010.)
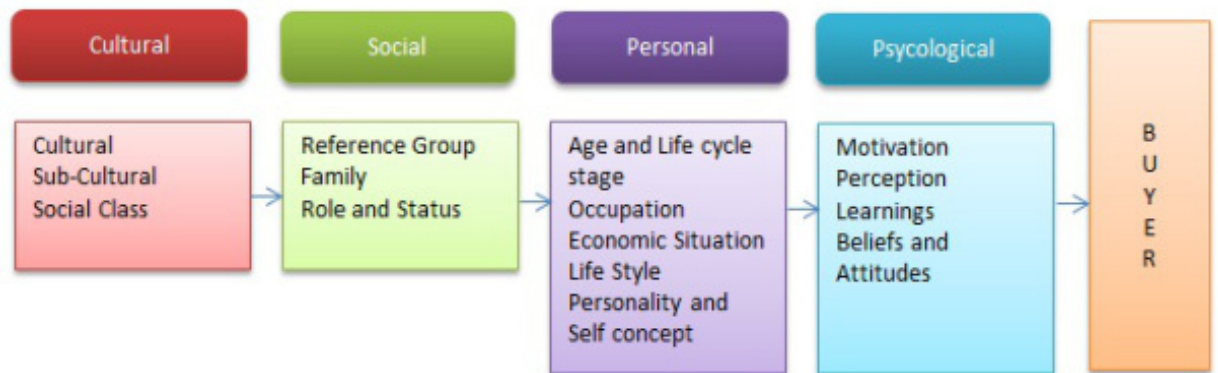
Figure 2. A Model of Factors Affecting the Decision-Making Process (Kotler & Armstrong 2014)

Cultural factors naturally incorporate the consumer's own cultural norms, subcultures and social class. Subcultures may encompass religions, nationalities, geographical regions and race. According to Askegaard et al. (2013) the Chinese are still vastly behind on gender equality and men often have the autocratic power to make decisions within a family. Furthermore, social class refers to not only income, but also stability in the form of wealth and educational and occupational status (Kasi 2010). Suomi & et al. (2014) reveal that both the degree of education and monthly income of Chinese travellers in Europe were on average higher compared to those who had never travelled.

Social factors are those related to reference groups, family, own roles and status. Reference groups easily alter individuals' behaviour as individuals have a basic need to fit in and conform to the behaviour of a larger group. Reference groups may comprise of friend groups, classmates or even public figures that are idolized by the consumer. Tommasini and Zhou (2016) found that a TV programme launched in China about celebrities travelling to European destinations in search of love acted as an encouragement for the Chinese to travel to these same destinations. "The first season of the *We are in Love* series has attracted some 950 million views across all online channels, and was ranked as one of the top three reality shows in China last year"

(goodnewsfinland 2016). One of the destinations seen on the show was Rovaniemi.

The effect of family members is also high, but with variations amongst cultures and lifestyles (Kasi, 2010). In cultures where family is highly valued, the effect of family as a reference group is naturally higher. According to Tommasini and Zhou (2016) word of mouth has genuine authority in the Chinese culture and highly influences travellers' decision-making. Askegaard et al. (2013) also reveal that social power in virtual communities can affect other users and consequently influence their behaviour to the extent that a product or service is purchased solely based on the opinions of others. Arlt (2017) complies with this by stating social media "plays a crucial role because this is the only information Chinese customers believe in. Whatever you put on your official website, whatever you write in magazines, the Chinese will see it as propaganda".

Personal factors have a lot to do with demographics and the decision-making process can be affected, for example, by the individual's age, occupation, economic situation and overall lifestyle and personality. Generally, the interests of individuals will change over time, which is why age has an influence. In addition, the individual's economic situation is often in compliance with their age and those with full-time jobs or financial security are more prone to make unthought-of and expensive purchases.

According to Kasi (2010) "lifestyle refers to the way a person lives in a society and expresses things in their environment…determined by interests, opinions, etc and shape their whole pattern of acting and interacting in the world." He also describes the changing nature of personality and states "personality is not what one has, but it is the totality of the conduct of a man in different circumstances". "In tourism, personality is a determining factor of tourist motivations, perceptions and behaviour" (Cohen, Prayag & Moital 2013; Swarbrooke & Horner 2004).

Lastly, psychological factors affect the decision-making process through motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes. Motivation is often based on varying needs and the urge to fulfil these needs, whereas perception refers to what an individual thinks about a product for instance. Perception is also very

much in correlation with past personal experiences and learnt beliefs, as well as how information is interpreted. (Kasi 2010.)

4 CHINESE TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR

4.1 Development of Chinese Travel Behaviour

Earlier, the Government restricted much of the travel in China; primarily allowing business travels to former communist states (Xu 2014; Page 2007). The government-run China Travel Services controlled outbound trips and it was not until 1998 that Australia and New Zealand received the Approved Destination Status (ADS), an authorization approving certain countries to receive leisure tour group travellers from China. A number of European countries followed some time after, with Finland receiving its ADS only in the year 2004. (Tommasini & Zhou 2016.)

In 2004, the number of Chinese outbound tourists was recorded at 29 million and after a period of substantial growth, by 2013 the number had already risen up to 100 million. By the year 2020, the number of Chinese outbound tourists is expected to reach 200 million (HMG Hotels 2014). These statistics illustrate the drastic growth of Chinese outbound tourism and are reasoned by a variety of influencers, of which one being the ease of attaining a visa and another the increased online visibility of foreign destinations on the Chinese web.

The attainment of visas became evidently easier for the Chinese, not only with increased numbers of cities in China offering services for visa applications, but also with eased restrictions by foreign countries. Tommasini & Zhou (2016) state that the Chinese have been able to apply for a multi-entry visa in the United States since November of 2014. Similarly, they add that a few countries in Europe, including the United Kingdom, provide benefits for Chinese travellers, such as being granted a UK visa in the case that the traveller has already obtained a Western European visa. These factors among others have influenced the growth of Chinese outbound tourism with very few Chinese travellers expressing discouragement towards travelling due to visa issues (Tommasini & Zhou 2016). Arlt (2017) explains that Chinese travellers are more self-organized and travel frequently, having visited many of the touristic

attractions in Europe, such as the Eiffel Tower. He also adds that many of these travellers are able to communicate and get around in English, which is why they are travelling to smaller destinations such as Finland.

4.2   Needs and Demands

Maslow's Hierarcy of Needs (figure 3) is possibly the most known psychological theory based on human motivation, sometimes suggested so because of its simplicity. The model is comprised in a hierarchic manner, with basic physiological and safety needs at the bottom and more complex needs, such as self-esteem, towards the top of the pyramid. These needs act as motivators for consumers. (McLeod 2016.) Maslow first proposed that the lower needs must be satisfied before satisfying higher needs, but later recognized that "individuals may be motivated by higher needs even if lower needs are only partially met and may, in fact, seek to satisfy more than one need at a time" (Xu 2014). In the tourism context this could be explained by a traveller seeking for adventure and spontaneity by travelling to an exotic destination, despite the lack of assured safety or availability of food.
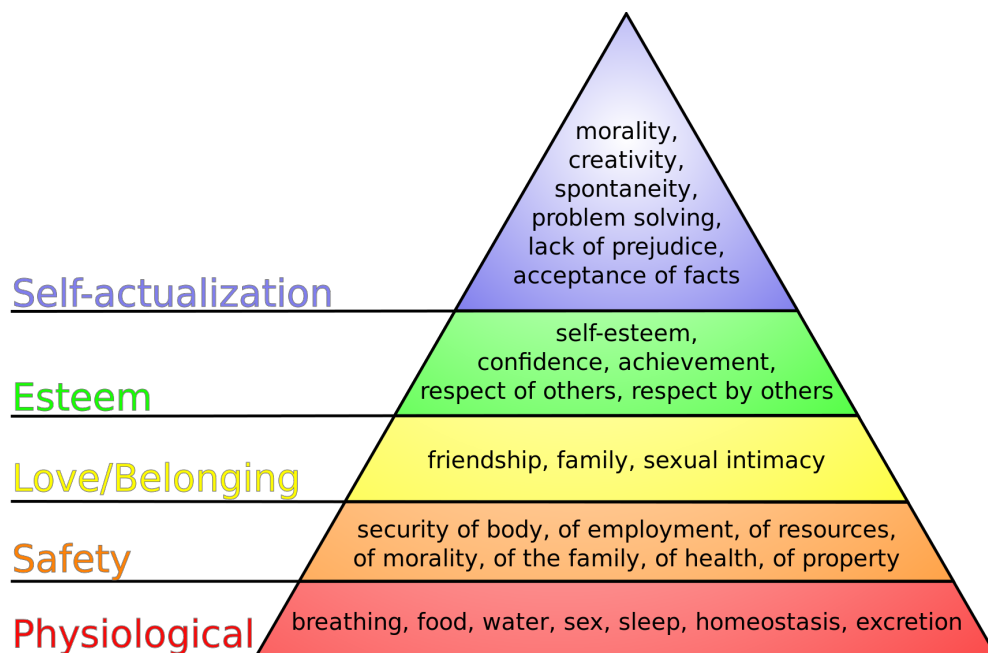
Figure 3. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs Model

As proposed, the model also applies to travel behaviour, as consumers are driven by internal and external needs and demands, hence Maslow's proposition for the needs for acquisition of knowledge as well as aesthetics – the appreciation of beauty – in the tourism context. Xu (2014) explains the model is "often regarded as a model to understand the relationship between needs, motivations, preferences and goals in individual holiday choice".

Nasolomampionona (2014) recites that the Chinese traditionally avoid uncertainty and adventure seeking whilst favouring basic needs of safety and trusting their knowledge as well as experts' knowledge. They will thus base their holiday decision on these basic needs. Similarly, Tommasini and Zhou's (2016) research found that many of the Chinese tourists who had visited Rovaniemi did not recommend it to others as a tourism destination for reasons such as "nothing to see", "too high price level", "no information in Chinese" and "too cold". Their research did also demonstrate the desire for getting acquainted with the local culture and food, as well as being involved in winter activities with preferences to safety and natural landscape, suggesting Rovaniemi is suitable for all ages. These factors are based on the needs of the consumers and such as explained in the section concerning the decision-making process; some of these needs were not fulfilled. Although the research does not describe whether the consumers were travelling independently, as a couple or as a family, this factor potentially had an effect on their motivation and perceived satisfaction delivered to fulfil the need, such as safety and suitability for all ages when travelling with children. On the other hand, Hofstede's cultural dimensions also suggest that Chinese culture is collectivist in nature, with a need for group affiliation and the act of connecting individualism with rebellion (Hofstede Insight 2017).

4.3   Travel Motivations

"Human motivation is based on people seeking fulfilment and change through personal growth" (Maslow 1943, as cited by McLeod 2016). Yoon and Uysal (2005, 46) dictate motivation as "psychological or biological needs and wants,

including integral forces that arouse, direct and integrate a person's behaviour and activity".

When choosing to go on holiday, consumers are motivated by various factors, which according to Kim, Sun and Mahoney (2008) "mirror an individual's intrinsic and extrinsic travel needs and wants". The motivators can be as simple as need for entertainment, need for inclusion, fear of missing out, self-expression or social status. For example, Chinese consumers are highly focused on displaying their social status, hence the more money they spend on a holiday determines their status in society and portrays their wealth, which there over motivates them to travel. Similarly, the pricier the destination and the further it is, the more social status they will gain. Young (2016) also explains that the more exotic the destination is, the stronger the feeling to impress is. Alternatively, the director of the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute (COTRI), Arlt (2014), suggests that Chinese travelling to Europe are not in search of a holiday, but an investment in status, self-esteem and learning.

According to Dayour and Adongo (2015), Yoon and Uysal (2005) propose that push and pull factors catalyze tourist visitation to a particular destination (figure 4). The so-called push factors are those that explain the desire and reason for travelling – the biogenic and emotional factors. These factors include novelty seeking, cultural experience, adventure, escape, social contact and relaxation. The pull factors indicate the choice of destination and the features within that destination that attract them – the destination attributes. (Yoon & Uysal 2005.) "The attractiveness of a destination largely depends on its unique attractions, which could be a place, phenomenon or event" (Maoz 2007, as cited in Dayour & Adongo 2015).

The model illustrating the push and pull factors below also demonstrates the role of travel satisfaction and revisit intentions. According to Dayour and Adongo (2015), Santouridis and Trivellas (2010) state satisfaction plays a significant role on repeat visitations, hence satisfying the original push factor or motivation for travel will often result in repeat visits. This explains the importance of understanding consumer motivations, as service providers can

take advantage of identifying the motivating factors for travel destinations when targeting specific markets.
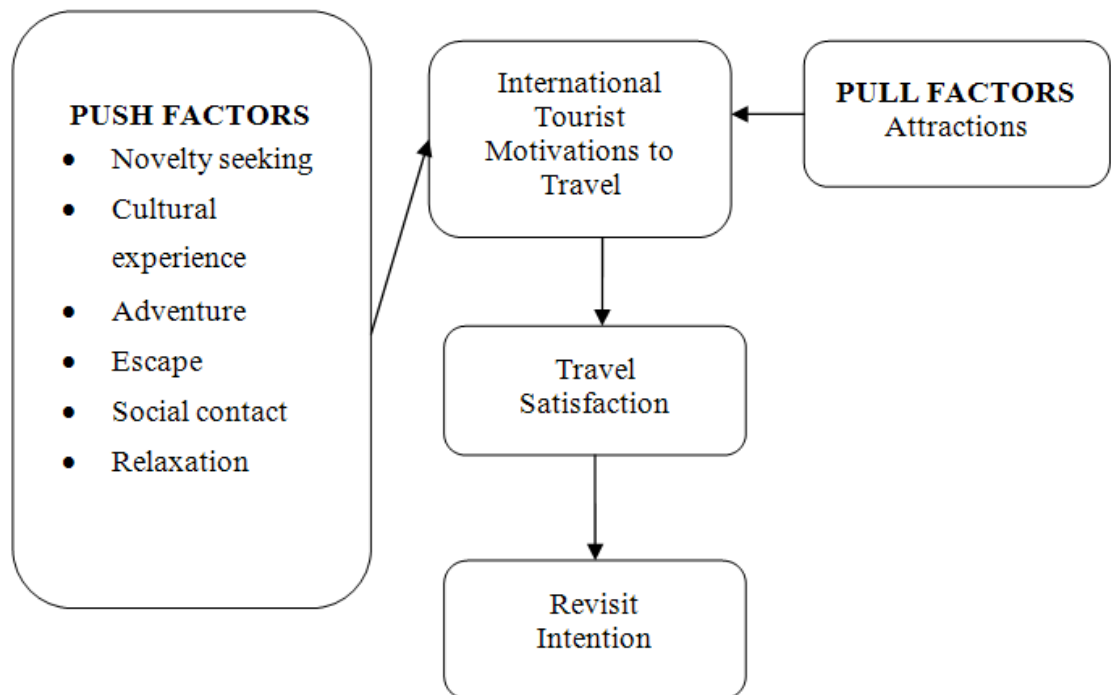

Figure 4. A Framework of Tourists' Motivations and Revisit Intentions (Yoon & Uysal 2005)

Swarbrooke and Horner (1999) present an alternative model on tourist motivation (figure 5), suggesting more extensive categories that create the desire for an individual to travel. The model suggests tourists are motivated to travel for either cultural, physical, emotional, personal, personal development or status related reasons. Each category is also presented with sub-motivators, such as increasing one's knowledge for personal development. The motivators proposed in Swarbrooke and Horner's (1999) model comply with many of the push factors suggested in Yoon and Uysal's framework.
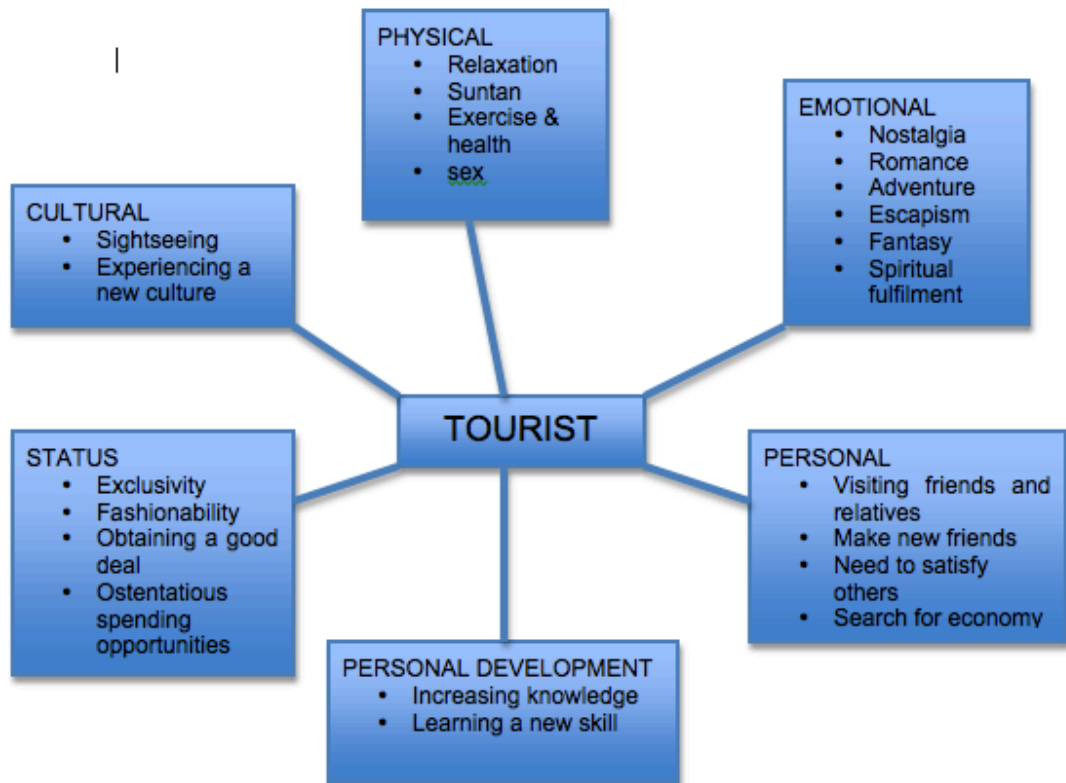
Figure 5. Swarbrooke & Horner's (1999) Model on Tourist Motivation

The emotional motivators presented in the model comprise of nostalgia, romance, adventure, escapism, fantasy and spiritual fulfilment. For example, the Chinese have recently been more and more motivated to travel for romantic reasons. Verot (2014) explains, "Weddings are very important in China's society, and are an occasion to show one's happiness and social status to others".

The personal motivators are very common reasons to travel, including visiting friends and relatives, making new friends, the need to satisfy others and the search for economic stability, such as finding a job. The motivators for personal development, however, include increasing one's knowledge and learning a new skill. Tommasini and Zhou (2016) suggest that for the Chinese, "The desire to travel could indicate a desire to validate one's knowledge".

As has become evident, status is an active motivator for Chinese travellers and encompasses exclusivity, fashionability, obtaining a good deal and ostentatious spending opportunities. Giele (2009) explains, "Chinese are much more likely to buy luxury products to improve or to keep their face, even if they do not have enough money to pay for housing and to buy sufficient food and clothes".

Cultural motivators naturally encompass sightseeing and experiencing new cultures, whilst physical motivations are relaxation, tanning, exercise, health and sex. For many elderly, health reasons are motivators to travel and some tour agencies in China have developed packages specifically aimed at offering "medical travels to countries where they can benefit from excellent medical services at affordable prices" (Verot 2014).

4.4   Travel Preferences

According to Verot (2014), an expert in marketing in China and tourism, the travel preferences, needs and demands of Chinese travellers are progressing rapidly and they are seeking to redefine their way of travel. As opposed to favouring travel agencies, as the Chinese have in the past, they have recently been aspiring to travel independently, resulting in less expenditure in destinations and selecting cheaper options for their travels.

Travelling in groups has been an easy way for the Chinese to avoid the language barrier and secure their feeling of safety and security while in a foreign country (HMG Hotels 2014). Zhou's (2017) research on Chinese travellers in Rovaniemi outlines that the percentage that preferred travelling in groups and never planned their journey on their own made up a substantial 81.3% in the year 2003, but has since dropped to 18.5% in 2016. As a comparison, in 2016, 8.7% reported they travel individually but prefer a ready planned itinerary by someone else, whereas 72.8% completely planned their own journey and travelled independently. The research outlines the changing travel preferences amongst the Chinese and highlights the growing need for autonomy.

Zhou (2017) also illustrates that more than 80% of Chinese travellers between the ages of 18 and 25 prefer travelling independently, whereas the percentage is only around 38% between the ages of 36 and 55. As a response, some travel agencies have reacted to these changing requirements by offering tailored products and services to independent travellers, such as discounts on single bedrooms (Verot 2014).

Subsequently, Verot (2014) explains that the trend of seeking for Chinese or Asian food during travels is likely ending, as the Chinese are more conscious of local cultures and food, wanting to try local specialities. They also seek adventure, authenticity and want to engage with the locals more. These changing behavioural patterns subsequently affect service providers, as the needs and demands of consumers may change drastically, affecting marketing strategies and the need for guided services.

4.5   Destination Choices

With stress on the individual nature of decision-making, destination choices include evaluating a range of product attributes and "any evaluation of potential travel destinations is also likely to involve a multi-attribute belief assessment of the destination" (Sparks & Pan 2008). As cited by Giele (2009), Kim et al. (2005) reported "the five top destination attributes (for the Chinese) as safety, beautiful scenery, well-equipped tourism facilities, different cultural/historical resources and good weather". Chinese consumers are also active users of the Internet and social media (platforms not restricted by the Chinese Government) and favour sites with other tourists' experiences when searching for information on travel destinations (Suomi, Li & Wang, 2014).

On the other hand, Chinese people are largely focused on collecting places and so they will often search for a new destination for each holiday. The more places they are able to visit during one trip, the more worthy the experience is to them and so the destination itself may not carry any value during the decision-making process, nor the activities offered. Going to a foreign country in itself is attractive to them, however, which country they are going to does not really

matter so much for many. Of course this comes with exceptions, as does each individual decision-making process. (Askegaard et al. 2013.)

5   ROVANIEMI AS A TOURISM DESTINATION

5.1   Rovaniemi for Chinese Tourists

Rovaniemi is described as the capital of Finnish Lapland and is located at the Arctic Circle. Although the geographical land area complies of 8017km^2, with a majority being forestland, the city only has around 60 000 inhabitants. (VisitRovaniemi 2017.) The city is favoured by both Finnish and international students alongside a large population of tourists, especially during the winter season.

According to Zhou (2017) the most attractive feature of Rovaniemi for Chinese travellers in 2016 was the natural landscape, followed by winter activities and being able to visit as many places as possible. Tommasini and Zhou (2016) state in their findings that "among the respondents, 20.4% reported wanting to visit as many places as possible, and Chinese tourists prefer tours that will take them to multiple countries when considering the price and the duration of a trip". This is related to the fact that the Chinese boast on their wealth and experiences, as a symbol of social status (Mosca & Gallo 2016, 15). On the other hand, shopping in Finland was seen as the least attractive, although according to statistics from Visit Finland (2016), China still ranks the biggest spender in Finland per trip, spending on average 137 Euros per day.

Tommasini and Zhou (2016) also explain, "recognizing characteristics of mingsheng (scenic spots) and identifying some cultural references associated with mingsheng is a part of a shared cultural grammar in China. And good tourists are those who learn the canonical representations of the sites they plan to visit", which may explain the enchantment towards the natural landscape, alongside the fact that many Chinese have not seen such pure nature during their lives.

5.2 Tourism Strategy

The tourism strategy for Lapland has been developed with the intent that it provides guidelines for the tourism actors in the area on how tourism should be developed in Lapland in mind of the near future. It offers the frames and vision for tourism development and guides public support. The strategy states that the vision for 2025 is for Lapland to be a vibrant, international, easily accessible, year-round tourism destination. The goal is to enhance accessibility, product development and marketing to reach a year-round travel and sales development. Lapland should thus be easily accessible via all modes of transport with fluent price-competitive transportation routes, diverse, internationally attractive tourism products and services all year round and obtain a strong tourism image, displaying itself as an appealing destination for both new and existing market environments. (Regional Council of Lapland 2014.)

With continuous growth, global travel has positively influenced the socioeconomic development in various countries, taking into account export earnings, the formation of new companies and subsequently new job vacancies, as well as the development of infrastructure. Lapland's biggest downfalls in staying competitive globally have been accessibility and pricing, which directly intertwine, considering the high expenses of transportation within the country. High taxation rates and labour prices also have an effect on this. The goal is to tighten cross-border co-operation with both Sweden and Norway to remain competitive, though these countries have also been competing destinations to Finnish Lapland in previous years (Regional Council of Lapland 2014). Finland's tourism strategy for the year 2020 also proposes the Government give additional resources to the Finnish Tourist Board for the means of developing, monitoring and promoting tourism in the whole of Finland to continue proficient growth prospects (Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2010).

5.3 Key Facts and Figures

In 2015, Chinese customers registered 210 500 overnight stays in Finland, accounting for 4% of all foreign overnight stays. A 13% growth in overnight

stays was seen between the years 2000 and 2015 and a substantial 40% solely during the year 2015. In the year 2016 the number of Chinese overnight visitors totalled to 271 300. A majority of the visitors in 2015 (17%) spent two days in Finland, followed by travellers that spent more than six days (14%). However, only around 48% of all Chinese were overnight visitors, with many merely transiting via Helsinki-Vantaa international airport. Of the overnight visitors, 14% stayed overnight in Lapland, being the second most favoured destination after the Helsinki region, which attracted 73% of all visitors. (VisitFinland 2016.)

Although Helsinki remained the biggest region in Finland for foreign overnight stays with 4,2 million (42%) in 2016, Lapland had the largest growth with a total of 1,3 million counts. Of these visitors, Rovaniemi took a share of 277 363 total overnight visitors of whom 155 390 were foreigners and 10 491 Chinese. (VisitFinland 2017.)

The seasonal nature of tourism in Rovaniemi restrains the destination from reaching its full potential. Being known as a winter destination, the highest demand for services is naturally in the wintertime and a substantial decline happens towards the summer season. In the year 2015, 69% of Chinese overnight visitors travelled to Finland during the summer season, whereas the remaining 31% travelled during wintertime. However, the percentage visiting Lapland remained the highest during winter, recorded at 26% of all Chinese visitors that travelled to Finland throughout that year. (VisitRovaniemi 2016.)

5.4   Accessibility

Accessibility in this case refers to the possibilities and ease of access to a destination. Finland itself is at an advantage with this, as its capital, Helsinki, is one of the main transit areas in Europe. In their research, Tommasini and Zhou (2016) resolved that "because of the short flying time and convenience of the Schengen visa, Finland is the gateway for Chinese travellers to Europe". Finland's most known global airline, Finnair, offers direct daily departures to and from various locations in China. Additionally, Chinese airline Beijing Capital

Airlines will open a route operating direct flights between Beijing and Helsinki next spring (Steensig 2017).

Although Rovaniemi's international airport is only a fraction's size of the one located in Helsinki, it has nonetheless been referred to as "the commercial centre to a wide region in the North" (City of Rovaniemi 2017). Finavia's director Sundelin (2016) explains "the strong growth in domestic travel comes from passengers on international routes transiting to Lapland. Direct connections from Europe to Lapland also boosted accessibility and passenger numbers to a new level". He also added, that in 2016 there was a 22.3% rise in international travelers flying via Rovaniemi airport. Despite the evident growth in passenger numbers, accessibility has persistently been one of the limitations of the destination, with very few direct flights from Europe and a limited number of daily flights between the main transit area, Helsinki. In addition to airway access, Rovaniemi is accessible from other cities in Finland by railway and the E75 highway (City of Rovaniemi 2017).

6 MARKETING

6.1 Marketing Strategies

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2014), marketing is often misinterpreted solely as selling and advertising products, whereas they define the concept as "the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return". The Regional Council of Lapland outlines that marketing strategies in Lapland have to be reinforced through networking and coordinating both the marketing image and marketing of products and services in accordance. They reveal that businesses are highly responsible for their own marketing, which is why there has been a deficiency in campaigns marketing the image of Lapland and the its products and services, as a collective destination. The strategy for 2018 includes Lapland securing a strong tourism image and presenting itself as an attractive destination both to existing and future marketing areas. International marketing is also sought to be carried out centrally in Lapland, with emphasis on digital marketing. (Regional Council of Lapland 2014.)

Although marketing is not the main focus of this thesis, it is essential to the study of Chinese consumer behaviour for reasons such as governmental bans on various international websites, which subsequently affect the selection of marketing channels to reach the Chinese. For example, the Chinese tend to favour alternative social media and search engine platforms, such as Weibo, WeChat (also known as WeiXin), RenRen and YouKu TuDou (Fang 2016).

6.2 Targeted Marketing

Targeted marketing is a means of selecting a desired customer group to whom a company will deliver value to and aim its operations at. In order to do so, the service provider must understand the needs and demands of the target group and be able to differentiate its services from competitors. As Kotler and

Armstrong (2014) explain, the marketing concept maintains that achieving organizational goals is dependent on knowing and understanding the needs and desires of the target market and delivering satisfaction better than competitors. They add that the process begins with a well-defined market; focuses on customer needs, and integrates all the marketing activities that affect customers. In turn, creating lasting relationships with consumers, based on their values and satisfaction, yields profit.

There are various ways to appeal to the needs of a designated customer group. For example, the use of Chinese people in marketing campaigns creates a sense of security and safety for many Chinese travellers, as many are taking their first trips abroad and feel uncomfortable in a foreign environment. Alternatively, Rovaniemi has reached the Chinese market by creating a Weibo account for Santa Claus (DailyFinland 2017).

Product placement is another surfacing way to appeal to selected target groups. "In China, product placement is emerging as a new way to get noticed… enterprising marketers are embedding product messages in the shows instead. A soap opera called Love Talks features such products as Maybelline lipstick, Motorola mobile phones and Ponds Vaseline Intensive Care lotion" (Askegaard et al. 2013, 537). Similarly, Professor Arlt (2014) claims that trips made by Chinese celebrities yield attraction to the visited destination amongst the rest of the population. He also adds that the Chinese are looking for something interesting to connect with, whilst referring to a photograph of Chinese president Xi Jinping and Santa Claus in Rovaniemi as an example. These are only few of the many ways that target markets are reached, but the essential factor here is to understand the needs of the customer and appeal to those needs through marketing. "Chinese are normally very well informed before they start traveling and the most important thing a company should encourage is user generated content…All this can help promote the positive sides of your product or destination by the users themselves" (Arlt 2014).

7 METHODOLOGY

7.1 Qualitative Methods

The research method selected for this thesis was qualitative methods. Qualitative research methods are an approach to study different research topics, taking into account human behaviour and emotions and also referred to as an inductive approach. With the use of qualitative methods, complex textual descriptions can be derived from people's personal experiences and opinions – the so-called intangible elements. "The term used is rich data, which means that they are rich in their description of people, places, conversations and so on" (Crane & Hannibal, 345). Qualitative methods also allow us to find in-depth answers or theories to research questions without predetermined assumptions, as new information may emerge during the data collection phase. "Purposive sampling is preferred in qualitative research; participants are often selected for their salient features, which are closely tied to the research aim" (IB Psychology 2016) and variables are not predefined. For a holistic perspective on Chinese travel behaviour in Rovaniemi, this was a suitable method for my thesis in contrast to quantitative methods, which may be less tedious to analyze but often do not provide as extensive results.

Qualitative findings are often more difficult to generalize to a larger population or phenomenon outside the research group, although it can be done in a few different forms. For example, studying Chinese travellers in Rovaniemi allows for the findings to be applied to a larger population of Chinese travellers in Rovaniemi although they have not participated in answering the survey. This is referred to as a representational generalization. On the other hand, the results cannot be applied to all Chinese travellers (inferential representation) and a representative sample or supporting studies should be considered for a higher degree of validity. (Crane & Hannibal 2012, 346.)

The sampling methods used for the collection of data for this thesis were partially purposive sampling and partially convenience sampling. Purposive sampling "targets a particular group of people" (Crane & Hannibal 2012, 349) and the criterion on which the sample is selected is determined early on. In this case, the criteria for my sample were being a Chinese citizen and having travelled to Rovaniemi. Although the use of purposive sampling is useful in obtaining a sample quickly, this may result in a biased sample. However, "if the sampling process is based on objective criteria, the bias is limited" (Crane & Hannibal 2012, 349). On the other hand, convenience sampling focuses on selecting participants who happen to be available and willing to participate in the research. In the case of this thesis, participants were selected using both online methods and face-to-face opportunity of chance, selecting those who happened to be available in the area.

7.2   Research Methodology

As the research method selected for this thesis was qualitative in nature, the study was implemented in the form of a survey (see appendix 1) with Chinese tourists who have visited Rovaniemi. This was done in order to gain a more holistic view of Chinese tourism and outline how the observed traits can be utilised by service providers to create better tourism experiences for the selected target market. The questions were formulated by incorporating basic questions on demographics, questions regarding the information retrieval process with consideration to the destination and decision-making process prior to travelling, experiences during the travel phase, as well as post-travel questions regarding sharing of experiences and revisit intentions. The survey was formulated to gain a holistic understating of the pre-, onsite- and post-travel phases of Chinese tourists travelling to Rovaniemi. The survey also aimed to answer the initial research question "What are the perceived traits of travel behaviour amongst Chinese tourists in Rovaniemi?", which would then allow to explore the second research question "How can the perceived traits be utilised to develop tourism experiences for the Chinese in Rovaniemi?". The research

questions were continuously altered according to feedback and the survey was tested amongst peers to assure it was legible and fully understandable.

After having tested the sophistication and effortlessness of completing the survey, as well as altering the questions according to feedback from supervisors, the search for varying ways to reach Chinese tourists began. Unfortunately reaching Chinese tourists who had visited Rovaniemi turned out to be a lot more tedious than originally expected, so contact was made via social media, e-mails, as well as by visiting onsite locations in Rovaniemi, such as Santa Claus Village and the airport, in order to find suitable participants. A few responses were also obtained from guests who had stayed at the commissioner's owned Arctic TreeHouse Hotel. "The face-to-face approach allows for clarifications if the respondent does not understand questions; this may yield more reliable answers but it takes time" (Crane & Hannibal 2012, 32). The participants contacted through social media and via e-mails were found through Facebook pages of tourism companies in Rovaniemi and other travel review sites, as the consumers had given feedback on their holiday. Some Chinese travel agencies and local businesses were also contacted in hope of spreading the survey to their customers, but no responses were received from any of the companies. The results obtained through a paper version or word document of the survey at the Arctic TreeHouse Hotel were entered into the online platform for easier analysis of the results.

For ethical considerations of the research, all participants were informed that the results are anonymous and no personal information was asked that could make the respondent identifiable through their answers. They were also notified that the participation is voluntary and they have a right to withdraw from the research at any time if they so wish. Lastly, the age limit for answering the survey was 18 so that no legal consent was needed from guardians.

The results presented in the following section are those gathered via the survey, demonstrating the travel behaviour of Chinese tourists in Rovaniemi based on their own experiences. The results answer the first research question of the thesis, regarding perceived traits of travel behaviour amongst Chinese tourists

in Rovaniemi. By analysing these results the author was able to identify aspects to improve the destination experience, which in turn answers the second research question. The total number of responses was a mere 12, with a response rate of 22.6% out of 53 questionnaires sent. This was a clear limitation to the study.

8   KEY RESULTS

8.1   Demographics

The first questions represent the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age and hometown. These results demonstrate whether a representative sample of the whole population was gathered and the distribution of these characteristics amongst Chinese travellers in Rovaniemi. Figure 6 displays the gender distribution amongst participants, revealing that 75% (n.9) of respondents were female whereas only 25% (n.3) were male.
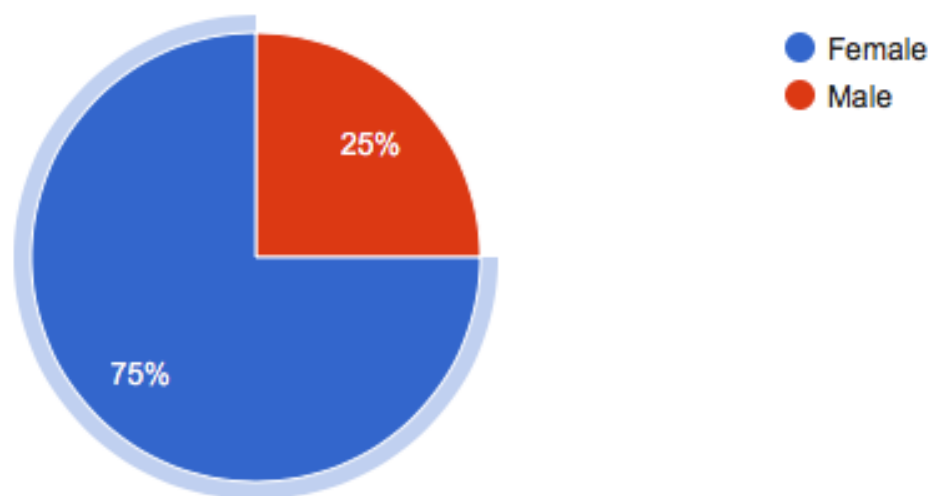

Figure 6. Gender Distribution

The second question illustrates the age groups seen amongst participants. The majority of respondents (41.7%) were between the ages of 21 and 30 and the least (8.3%) were between 41 and 50, noting that no respondents were over 50 years old. it may be that younger travellers are more connected via online platforms and were therefore easier to reach through social media and e-mail, which is why they represent a larger share of the sample. As mentioned earlier,

older travellers are also less prone to travel abroad due to learnt cultural norms, earlier bans on outbound travel in China and language barriers. Additionally, the age groups between 21 and 30 and 41 and 50, which represent the two largest groups of travellers, are more financially stable and can afford outbound holiday trips. The age distributions are indicated in figure 7 below.
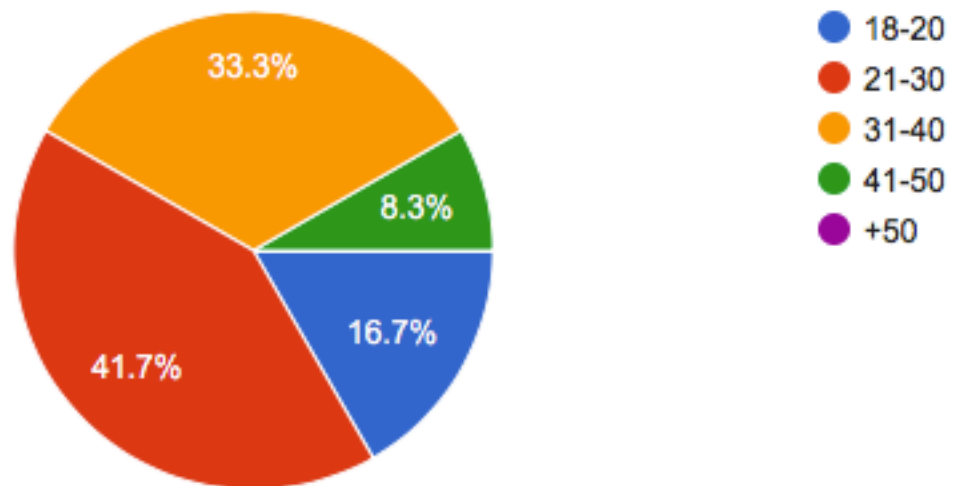

Figure 7. Age Distributions

The third question concerning demographics inquired about the hometown of the respondents. The results indicated that a majority of the respondents originated from cities with direct weekly or daily departures to and from Helsinki, those being Beijing (25%), Nanjing (25%) and Hong Kong (25%). Two respondents answered "China" as their hometown, suggesting they did not fully comprehend the question.

8.2   Travel Preferences

The travel preferences of the respondents indicate who they travelled with, how they travelled and for what reasons. As seen in figure 8, a majority of the respondents (41.7%) travelled with family, whereas 33.3% travelled with friends and 16.7% on their own. Only 8.3% of all respondents reported having travelled

with their partner. Being a very family-oriented culture, it is typical for Chinese tourists to travel with their family or even extended family. Travelling with friends is also on the rise for young travellers and some respondents reported having alternate travel preferences when travelling with friends compared to travelling with family. On the other hand, with a rise of independent, adventure-seeking tourists and lessened language barriers amongst the modern Chinese consumers, travelling alone may well gain extensive popularity in the future.
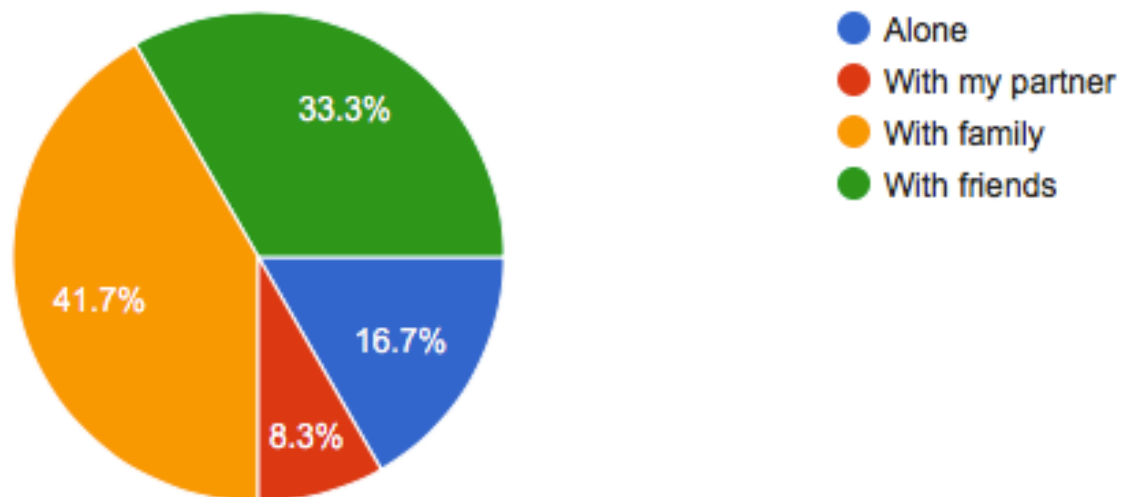

Figure 8. Travel Companions of Chinese Travellers

Similar to Zhou's (2017) research, 63.3% of respondents travelled independently and only about one third (36.4%) travelled with a guided group. One respondent stated that "we relied on travel agency, since this is a family tour and my Mom is used to depend on travel agency to arrange all for us", suggesting that significant differences in travel preferences exist amongst different generations and this should be considered by service providers when creating experiences targeted at the Chinese. This may also indicate that travel preferences differ according to travel companions.

The purpose for travelling to Rovaniemi for most of the respondents was to see the Northern Lights. Half of the respondents stated this as the number one

purpose of their trip, whereas seeing Santa Claus was mentioned by 25%. One respondent also mentioned travelling to various locations in Scandinavia during the same trip and selecting Rovaniemi as one of the destinations "because it is very famous for Santa Claus". Two respondents reported having visited Rovaniemi during their wedding anniversary and other points of interest were winter activities, spending time with family, enjoying the scenery and nature, as well as visiting Santa Claus Village.

8.3 Information Retrieval and Booking Methods

All of the respondents used online resources to find information on the destination. This demonstrates the high popularity of the digital world in China, despite the various Governmental bans on international websites. No specific websites were mentioned, with most of the answers stating "internet" or "website", suggesting the question was too vague to gain extensive answers. Additionally, one respondent had found information on travel blogs, which complies with Arlt's (2014) vision to invite Chinese bloggers or other well-known public figures to attract attention to the destination. Only one respondent had heard of Rovaniemi from a friend before searching for more information online and similarly one respondent had used travel agencies, stating "We all know Rovaniemi owing to Santa Claus. But about the tourism information, we relied on travel agency, since this is a family tour and my Mom is used to depend on travel agency to arrange all for us", suggesting yet again the differences amongst generational preferences. The comment also partially justifies the changing need for using travel agencies amongst Chinese travellers.

The booking methods used for and during the respondents' trips were very much in compliance with their information searches, as 75% of all respondents used online methods to book their trips. Out of these online platforms, Alibaba was the most favoured website with 25% of all respondents having utilized it, along with mentions of a hotel website, booking.com and an alternative online booking system. One respondent reported having booked accommodation through direct e-mail contact, whereas another had booked safaris through their hotel reception. One of the respondents also stated "We asked travel agency to

customize a unique tour for our family, including the air ticket, visa, all hotels and driver guide".
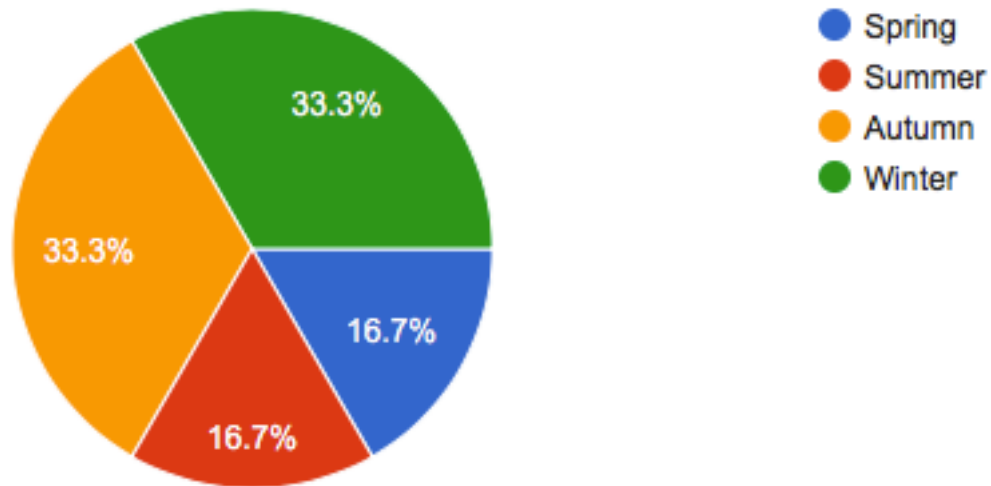
8.4   Travel Time and Duration

Figure 9. Seasonal Distributions of Travel Times

The most popular seasons to travel to Rovaniemi were autumn (33.3%) and winter (33.3%), as illustrated in figure 9. Summer comprised of 16.7% of all respondents' trips, as did Spring (16.7%), with more than half of the respondents (58.3%) spending 2 to 3 and 33.3% spending 4 to 5 days in Rovaniemi (figure 10). The preconception of Rovaniemi being a winter destination thus prevailed, though keeping in mind that the concept of seasonality may vary amongst respondents and thus fluctuate results to some extent.
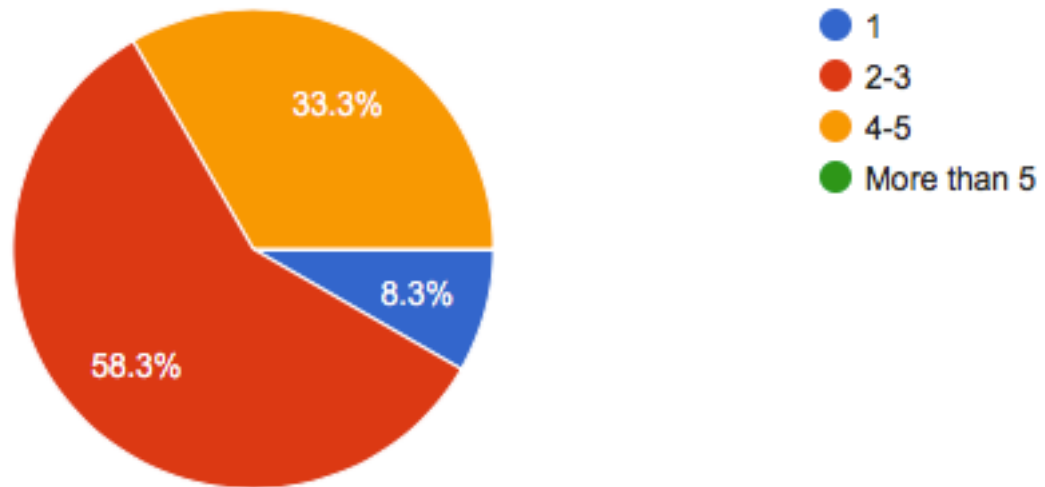
Figure 10. Duration of Stay

8.5   Destination Preferences and Expenditure

A substantial 66.7% of the respondents reported having most enjoyed sightseeing during their trip, followed by visiting Santa Claus (58.3%) and the nature (58.3%). The participants were able to select multiple responses from the options given or add their own response (figure 11).

Figure 11. Destination Preferences

The least enjoyable activity was shopping, with 0% selecting this activity and one respondent commenting, "there is no place to go shopping". On the

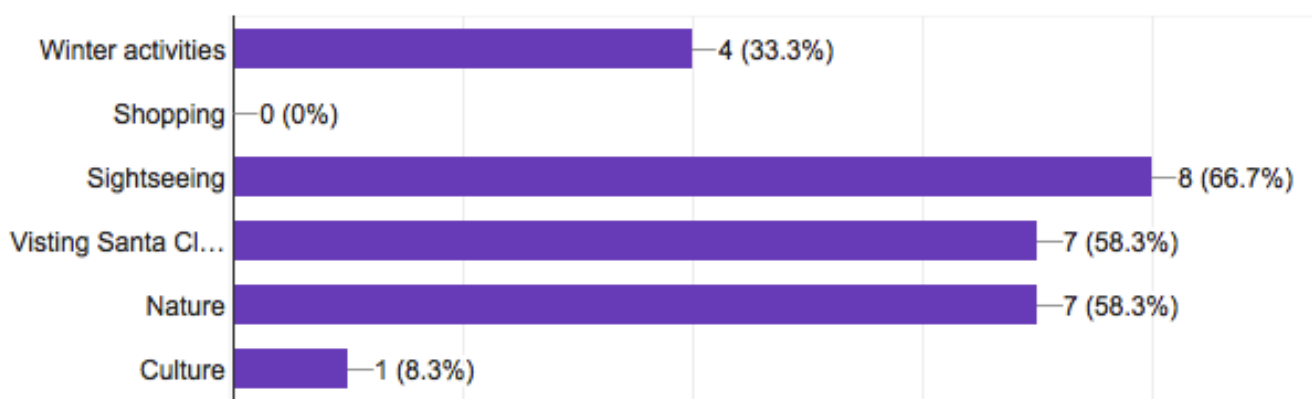contrary, one respondent was extremely pleased with their choice of accommodation, the Arctic Light Hotel, and listed this as the most enjoyable feature of their visitation.
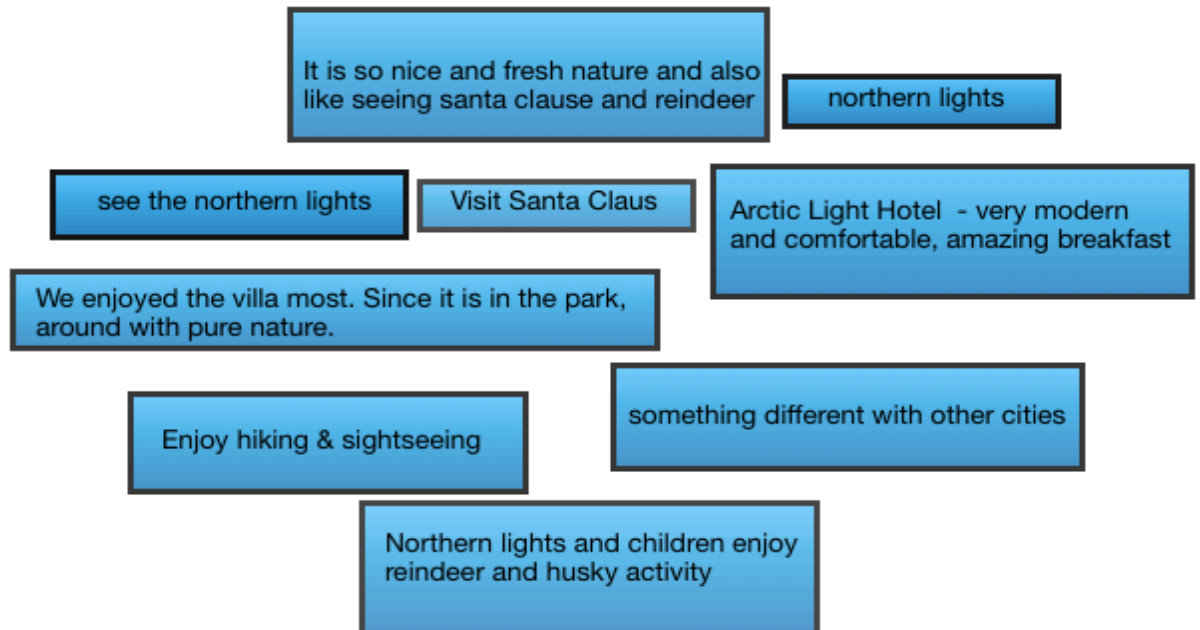

Figure 12. Positive Destination Attributes

When asked for reasons behind selecting the aforementioned activities, 25% reported having been fortunate enough to see the Northern Lights and thus enjoyed the nature the most, whereas others were intrigued by sightseeing and the pure and fresh nature. One respondent said there is "something different with other cities" and another was pleased that their children enjoyed the reindeer and husky activities (figure 12).

When exploring the least enjoyable features of Rovaniemi, 20% were displeased with the local transportation system and similarly 20% were not satisfied with the shopping opportunities. It was mentioned that shops close too early, which signifies the slow mentality of tourism in Rovaniemi, but also highlights cultural differences. One respondent mentioned a lack of variety in food and was not pleased with the options, whereas another found the city too small and a third was disappointed with the weather. Dissatisfaction was also found in "city walks and snowmobiles", but the answer was not further

elucidated, making it difficult to determine what exactly was indicated by this comment. It could be that the respondent did not have a valid driving license in Finland, but this is based on speculation with no extended information on the particular event.

All of the respondents chose a hotel as their form of accommodation, which conflicts with the theory of an increased sharing culture amongst Chinese tourists. On the other hand, it is unknown to the author whether platforms such as AirBnB are banned in parts of China or whether there is popular knowledge of their existence.
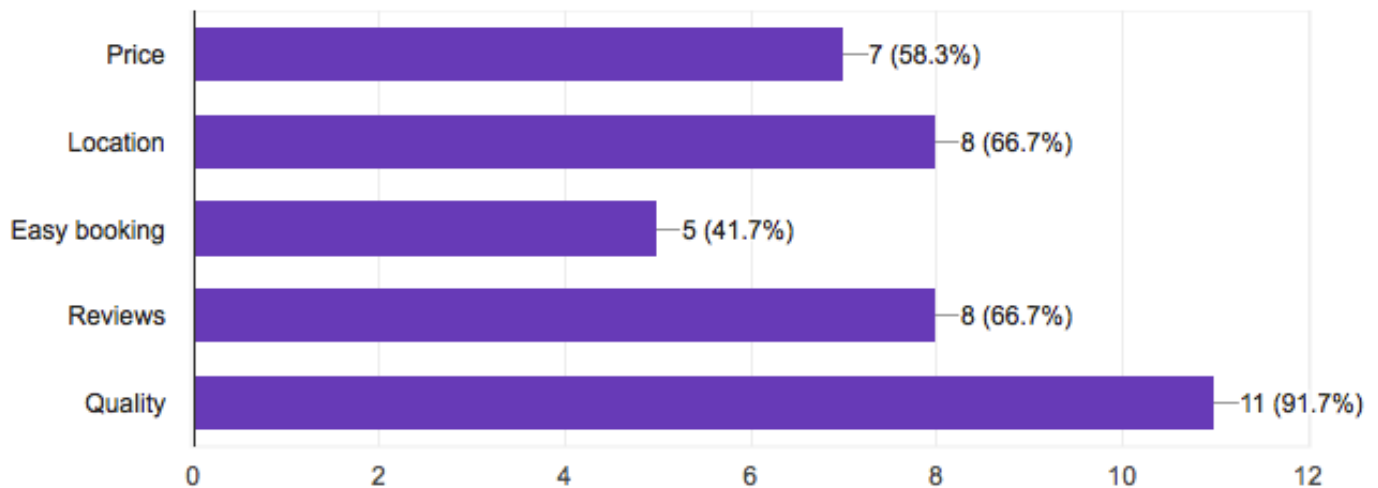
Figure 13. Determinants for Accommodation Preferences

The respondents were able to select multiple determinants explaining their choice of accommodation (figure 13). The most popular determinant for selecting a hotel as accommodation, was the quality of the property (91.7%), followed by the location and reviews, both selected by 66.7% of respondents. Over half (58.3%) of the respondents also considered the price of the accommodation and the least concern (41.7%) was put on the ease of booking. As the Chinese are still the number one spenders amongst tourists in Rovaniemi, it was anticipatable that quality and location are valued over price. Similarly, in a culture with profound amounts of propaganda and high trust amongst peers, reviews easily affect the decision-making process. On another note, having placed the least concern on ease of booking may suggest that the

Chinese are experienced online users and do not find difficulty in booking accommodation through online platforms. It may also indicate the development of online booking websites, having made the booking process effortless, also considering the existing opportunity to select different languages on websites to further ease the process.

8.6   Post-Travel Experience and Additional Thoughts

The questions in the survey regarding the post-travel phase were aimed at understanding how Chinese consumers share experiences from their holidays (figure 14) and to determine their revisit intentions. The respondents were also given a space for free thoughts on their holiday or on Rovaniemi as a tourism destination after having completed the survey.
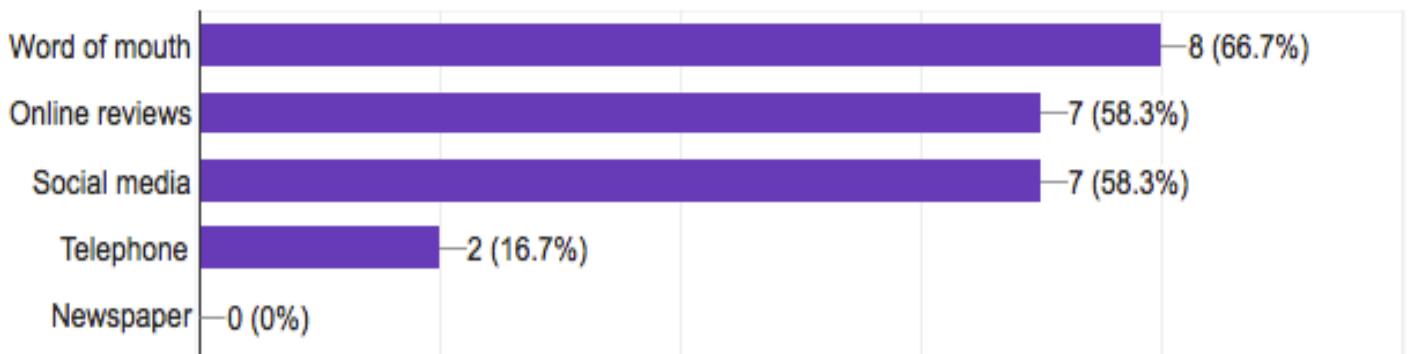
Figure 14. Sharing Post-Travel Experiences

The respondents were given the opportunity to select multiple answers regarding their preference of sharing experiences after their travel phase. 66.7% of respondents resorted to sharing experiences from their trip by word of mouth, whereas 58.3% selected online reviews and social media as their preference. In reality, the percentage may be higher as two respondents reported "We will share many pictures on WeChat" and another similarly stated, "We always share photo on WeChat", which corresponds to social media. Only 16.7% shared experiences by telephone and no respondents selected a newspaper for this purpose. The results may have been different with a more

even age group representation amongst the respondents, as older people may have selected more traditional methods of sharing experiences. On the other hand, the results further support the theory of trusting peers and reviews written by other people with real life experiences and the popularity of social media amongst the Chinese. Additionally, the mentions of WeChat should be seen as an opportunity for service providers to familiarize with the app and cater to the needs of consumers for an enhanced destination experience, during all phases of the travel experience.
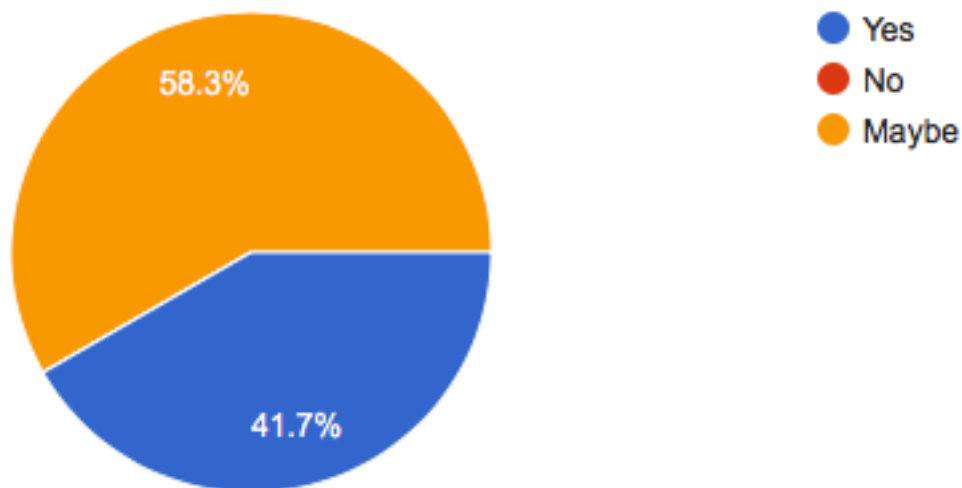
Figure 15. Revisit Intentions

The overall satisfaction level towards Rovaniemi as a destination was evidently high, considering that 58.3% of all respondents said they might visit Rovaniemi again and 41.7% stated they would definitely visit again (figure 15). This may imply that the participants are also likely to recommend the destination to their friends and family. Arlt (2014) proclaims "There has been some good research done by a project called 'Chinavia' from Copenhagen which clearly shows that for Scandinavian countries the majority of Chinese visitors are repeat visitors to Europe…clearly smaller destinations like Scandinavia and Finland should concentrate on repeat visitor". Contrastingly, the expensive prices for flights and

accommodation may be one slowing factor on revisiting the destination, as well as the long flights due to lengthy distances between Finland and China.

> Relax, Comfortable

> It was nice day to be there although the transportation is not convince, hope transportation can be improved to attract more tourists, thx!

> If I travel with my friends, we will not spend so much money and will have more local activities and to experience more local things.

> It's a family tour. We stayed 26 days in the Northern Europe. We chose a leisure way, each place stay 2 to 5 nights. So we used the traditional way to travel and stay in the fantastic hotels and order driver guide everywhere.

> I love to travel again also see summer sun and sauna. So romantic also for couple in winter

> Very nice see snow and northern lights. Also enjoy all local kind service but not speak Chinese
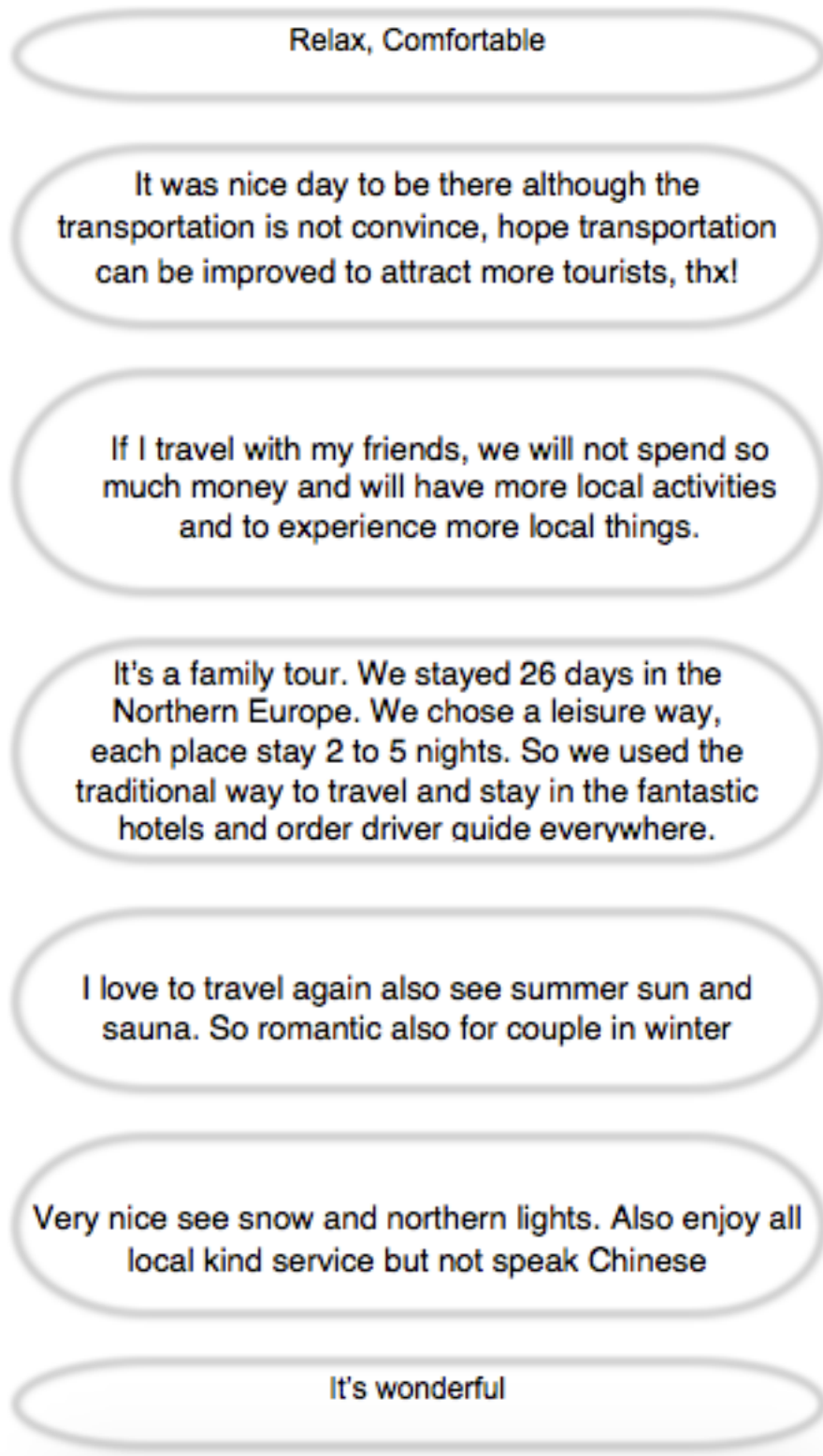
> It's wonderful

Figure 16. Additional Responses

Figure 16 demonstrates some of the comments given by respondents when asked to describe any other ideas on their holiday or on Rovaniemi as a destination. The destination was found "relaxing", "comfortable" and "wonderful". One respondent was also interested in seeing Rovaniemi in the summer time for the sauna and midnight sun, but also found Rovaniemi a romantic winter destination for couples. Interestingly, corresponding to Verot's (2014) theory, one respondent mentioned how travelling would be different with friends compared to family, as less money would be spent and more contact would be made with the locals. Additionally, one respondent mentioned using the "traditional way to travel", pertaining to the earlier mentioned factor that behavioural patterns differ amongst generations vastly. On the other hand, dissatisfaction was found in the lack of Chinese-speaking service providers and the local transportation.

9 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS, VALIDITY AND CREDIBILITY

Identifying limitations are an integral part of doing research, as they help to recognize the aspects that reduce the validity and credibility of the research whilst simultaneously providing the researchers with ideas for further improvement (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi & Cheraghi 2014). According to USCLibraries (2015) "The limitations of a study are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from your research". Limitations can include, but are not limited to, constraints, such as biased answers or insufficiencies in sample size or diversity. These factors can prevent the results from being applicable to a larger population, therefore lacking validity.

One of the major limitations of this thesis was a non-representative sample size, as the number of respondents was only 12. The survey was sent to 53 possible respondents, which results to a response rate of 22.6%. This could imply that the results are not representative of the target group and a larger sample size should be used to gain more credibility. The main reason for the small sample size was the difficulty in finding English-speaking participants that also fit the criteria – being a Chinese national and having visited Rovaniemi. More extensive information could also have been gathered using face-to-face interviews as opposed to a survey, but with limited time, the survey was selected as the most convenient method.

Another limitation found based on the data collected was the formation of questions in the survey. Due to evident language barriers, not all of the respondents understood each question and some questions were left blank. Some additional questions could also have been utilised, such as how the consumers prefer to receive information on holiday destinations, how the tourism services in Rovaniemi could be improved as well as rating different attractions and the level of services.

The fact that many respondents did not answer to their least favourite activity experienced during their visit could also be considered a limitation. Crane and

Hannibal (2012, 15) argue "People often adjust their responses to what they *think* is appropriate for the interviewer…Most people want to present a positive picture of themselves, so they may not always tell the truth when asked personal questions". These factors are referred to as participant bias and social desirability bias, having an effect on the credibility of the results and making it difficult to determine which aspects could be enhanced to better the destination experience. However, it is difficult to determine whether some questions were left blank because of this, because of language barriers, or because some participants had no negative experiences during their trip.

Something to take into consideration is also the time period when the visitation took place. Tourism is very different in Rovaniemi during summer and during winter, considering not only the climate, but also available activities and attractions. The respondents represented travellers from each season, bringing credibility to the research. Golafshani (2003) indicate that "Reliability is the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to". As different age groups, hometowns and genders were also represented, implications of a representative sample of the target group exist, although the distribution of male (25%) and female (75%) respondents were not equal and no respondents were represented from the age group 50+. For more reliable results the distribution of each category should be more even and a larger sample size should be obtained.

10 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The intention of this thesis was to gather sufficient information on the modern Chinese consumer market to gain a holistic view of the behavioural patterns of Chinese tourists visiting Rovaniemi, from the pre-travel phase to the post-travel phase. Using the gathered data, the purpose was to suggest how the destination experience could be improved for the target market. In this section, the results will be presented and analysed and reasonable suggestions for improving the destination experience will be provided, with reference to the research results.

The results outlined that a majority of the Chinese visiting Rovaniemi are 21-30 year old females travelling with their family or friends in an independent manner. Most of the respondents spent 2-3 days in the destination and travelled during autumn or winter. The primary motivation for the visit was to see the Northern Lights or Santa Claus, but winter activities, the pure nature and learning a new culture were also mentioned. The main information retrieval sources were online platforms, as were the preferred booking methods. The most enjoyable features of Rovaniemi were sightseeing, the nature and visiting Santa Claus, whereas the least enjoyable were shopping, the local transportation and not having seen the Northern Lights due to poor weather conditions. All of the respondents chose to stay in a hotel, with the primary determinant for the selection being the quality, and spent a majority of their money on either accommodation or transportation. Experiences were primarily shared by word of mouth, through online reviews or social media. The younger generation was found to be more adventurous, interested in the local lifestyle and to favour cheaper services, whereas the older generation preferred the traditional method of travelling with guided groups and using tour operators to fully plan their itinerary. They were also more focused on quality as opposed to costs.

One of the main ideas for improvement stemmed from the results of the survey, as not all questions were fully comprehended and it was mentioned that more information in Chinese should be provided. In order to create a more user-

friendly tourism environment, service providers should seek to provide information in Chinese. This could also be utilised in the form of public signs, restaurant menus and activity descriptions, both online and offline. Even English-speaking Chinese travellers value being provided information in Chinese or seeing a Chinese flag outside local companies whilst abroad, suggesting they are valued customers. Similarly, the use of the Chinese language in marketing Rovaniemi as a destination will not only exhibit a sense of security for the traveller, but also enlarge the potential consumer market and allow the customer to fully understand what is on offer.

Moreover, the Chinese are drawn to visuals. As seen in the results of the research, a majority of Chinese tourists travelled to Rovaniemi in search of the Northern Lights, a very visual feature of the destination, which they were most likely drawn to through photographs or videos. In connection with this, staying online, making use of Chinese apps and propelling user-generated content are crucial to reaching the Chinese. The important factor is to familiarize with the channels frequently used by the Chinese and to integrate services to these channels.

On the other hand, the generational differences between Chinese travellers should be noted both in the marketing of the destination and within the services provided. Where the older generation favours guided tours and ready planned itineraries, along with luxury package tours, the younger emerging generation is more independent in their travel habits and seeks adventure. The modern Chinese traveller is in search of knowledge and increasingly intrigued by the local culture and lifestyle of the destination. They want to know how locals eat, study, work and what they do for fun, especially the younger generation. They also tend to spend less money, which should encourage service providers to offer alternative tourism services in addition to the luxurious solutions, which could be as simple as swimming in a natural lake, picking berries and mushrooms, or hiking in fresh nature. These activities would also incorporate the pure nature of Rovaniemi, which remains one of the major attractions amongst Chinese visitors.

As mentioned earlier, the Chinese are typically big spenders on luxury goods and remain the biggest spender in Finland. However, shopping opportunities in Rovaniemi did not satisfy the respondents of the research and opening hours were limited compared to their cultures. In comparison to the activities suggested for the younger, adventure-seeking travellers, selling luxury brands would attract more attention and offer a heightened destination experience for the more wealthy population of Chinese travellers. The Chinese still value quality and are more confident in purchasing luxury products abroad with a bigger reliance on their authenticity.

Another major feature that should be considered for development of the destination experience is the visibility of the Christmas brand in other parts of Rovaniemi than just the Santa Claus Village. Although this was not directly mentioned within the results, this complies with the satisfaction of expectations of a destination, affecting the destination image, post-travel experiences and sharing of them, as well as future buying behaviour. Such a strong Christmas brand fails to fulfil its full potential without utilizing it in the street view of the city, although this is very much dependant on external decision makers. Similarly, the city should take initiative to improve the local transportation for an enhanced destination experience.

The suggestions given are based on the empirical findings of the research as well as the existing theory explored. The results indicate the common features of travel-related behaviour amongst Chinese tourists visiting Rovaniemi and how service providers can exploit these travel preferences to refine the destination experience. Although the sample size was insufficient to the author, the nature of the questions, the inclusion of open-ended questions and the opportunity for free thoughts gave valuable insights to the research in question and can potentially help service providers to develop their exposure and the consumers' experiences.

Based on the findings of the research and the limitations identified, the primary improvement for further research is the design of the survey. To be able to gain a holistic understanding of the subject studied and to avoid misinterpretations,

the questionnaire should be done in Chinese. With adequate Chinese spoken and written skills, the researcher would have fewer limitations on finding suitable participants for the study and could utilise Chinese channels to reach them, enabling a larger sample size. To further enhance the study, a more profound research method, such as interviews, would allow yet more elaborate results and the possibility to ask participants to further elucidate their answers or for new topics to emerge during the interviews.

On another note, the subject area of study could be approached from the service providers' point of view to have an alternative perspective. For further research, both consumers and service providers should be heard to determine differences in their thinking and how this affects the destination experience or how it could be bettered. This method could also incorporate the study of targeted marketing more profoundly to indicate how to reach Chinese consumers, what attracts them to certain destinations and how they perform their information search.

Overall, the data collected conveyed valuable insights on modern Chinese travel behaviour and rational and practical development needs were undermined. Hopefully the results provide valuable information to the commissioner and other service providers in the tourism industry in Rovaniemi and administer a sense of direction towards an enhanced destination experience.

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APPENDIX

This questionnaire is used for my bachelor's thesis exploring Chinese travel behaviour in Rovaniemi and is completely anonymous when analyzing the results. I would be very grateful for your help in answering!

1. Gender?

    ☐ Female

    ☐ Male

    ☐ Other

2. Age?

    ☐ 18-20

    ☐ 21-30

    ☐ 31-40

    ☐ 41-50

    ☐ +50

3. Hometown?

4. With whom did you travel to Rovaniemi?

    ☐ Alone

☐ With my partner

☐ With family

☐ With friends

☐ Other

5. How did you travel?

☐ Independently

☐ With a guided group

☐ Other

6. What was the purpose for your trip to Rovaniemi?

7. Where did you receive information about Rovaniemi?

8. What booking methods did you use to purchase your holiday?

9. When did you travel to Rovaniemi?

☐ Spring

☐ Summer

☐ Autumn

☐ Winter

10. How many days did you spend in Rovaniemi?

☐ 1

☐ 2-3

☐ 4-5

☐ More than 5

11. What did you most enjoy in Rovaniemi?

☐ Winter activities

☐ Shopping

☐ Sightseeing

☐ Visiting Santa Claus

☐ Nature

☐ Culture

12. Why did you most enjoy the selected activity

13. What did you least enjoy about Rovaniemi? Why?

14. Which form of accommodation did you use?

☐ Hotel

☐ Hostel

☐ AirBnB

☐ Other

15. Why did you select this form of accommodation?

☐ Price

☐ Location

☐ Easy booking

☐ Reviews

☐ Quality

☐ Other, what?

16. What did you spend the most money on during your trip?

☐ Accommodation

☐ Souvenirs

☐ Activities

☐ Food

☐ Transportation

☐ Other, what?

17. How did you share experiences from your trip?

☐ Word of mouth

☐ Online reviews

☐ Social media

☐ Telephone

☐ Newspaper

☐ Other, what?

18. Would you like to travel to Rovaniemi again?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Maybe

19. Please describe any other thoughts about your holiday or Rovaniemi

Thank you for your participation!