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Designing high quality service experiences for Chinese golf tourists in Finland

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2014 Leppävaara

Laurea University of Applied Sciences
Leppävaara

**Designing high quality service experiences
for Chinese golf tourists in Finland**

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Degree Programme in Business Management
Bachelor's Thesis
5, 2014

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Year	2014	Pages	29
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Increasing tourist flows from China to Europe have raised new needs for planning and designing tourism services and business in European countries. Also Finland has enjoyed rapid growth of tourism in recent years. This has in part led to a dilemma of creating new attractive tourism experiences to arriving Chinese tourists. Among other unique experiences, golf tourism has become increasingly attractive form of tourism for Chinese since the opening of first golf courses in early 1990s. Nevertheless, the topic of Chinese golf tourism in Finland has not been studied deeply before.

To fill the research gap and to support managerial decision making, this study applies the service design theory to formulate a service design framework for Finnish tourism operators and Chinese tourism agencies bringing Chinese golf tourists to Finland. In addition, Chinese and Finnish golf cultures are highlighted. By analysing company websites, newspapers and social media accounts and by interviewing a number of Chinese tour operators and a marketing assistant from a Chinese golf tourism agency C.U.Golf a number of critical service quality factors are found out. These findings are then applied into a framework and potential Finnish golf leisure destinations are suggested.

Key words, service design, golf tourism, Chinese golf, Finnish golf holiday

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1 Introduction

In recent years Finland has become a popular destination among Chinese tourists. According to the official figures from VisitFinland.com, the official travel site of Finland, the major part of annual tourism growth to Finland comes from China. The number of Chinese tourists' overnights in Finland in 2013 was 143 000. This figure shows an increase of 26.4 percent comparing to the statistics in 2012. (visitfinland.com 2014)

Growing tourist numbers bring revenue growth to Finnish tourism industry. On the other hand, it requires Finnish tourism players to adapt to the changing needs and develop more unique experiences to fulfill different types of tourists' expectations.

Finnish golf courses could tap into a lucrative market of quality and in-depth experience seeking Chinese consumers.

Present study takes a closer look at the opportunities of building attractive golf tourism experiences for Chinese consumers visiting Finland. The purpose of the study is to support Chinese tour operators and Finnish golf resort managers in developing more commercially viable and consumer-centric golf service designs for Chinese tourists.

First, the theoretical background of service design and golf tourism is explained. Second, the research questions and method is presented. Then, the unique needs of Chinese golf tourists and the distinctive characteristics of the Finnish golf courses are summarized. Last, the service design framework is applied in the context of the Chinese tourists visiting Finnish golf courses to build managerial knowledge on developing better golf experiences.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Service design

“When you have two coffee shops right next to each other, and each sells the exact same coffee at the exact same price, service design is what makes you walk into one and not the other.” (31 Volts Service Design, 2008) The quote above illustrates that one of the key successful elements for a service design is to create experiences along with the tangible product to form attractiveness to potential customers.

2.1.1 Service design and its relation to service marketing

“Service design is an emerging field focused on the creation of well thought through experiences using a combination of intangible and tangible mediums.” (The Copenhagen

Institute of Interaction Design 2008) This highlights that service design is an exclusive product that is tailor made to a theme according to the topic's physical truth and real situation.

In service industry, end user benefits of the outcomes of service design while service suppliers and designers generate inspiration during the service. Which means that from the client's point of view, service interface is aimed to be useful, usable and desirable. From the supplier's point of view, service interface is meant to be effective, efficient and distinctive (Bright Mager 2009).

"There is no common definition of service design" (Stickdorn 2011, 34) Service design is not limited within one subject area. It combines knowledge backgrounds that it serves for. This thesis will draw theory from interaction design and design ethnography subdivision theories.

Interaction design and design ethnography

Interaction design helps service provider with delivering methodical service. "Services are a series of interactions between customers and service systems through many different touchpoints during the customer journey." (Clatworthy 2011, 80) A good service considers and designs interactions between customers and service providers from customer's perspective. Meanwhile, service designer involves delighting employee behaviour into the customer interface. By understanding customer and establish own brand strategy, interaction design retains current customers and gains new customers. (Clatworthy 2011, 87)

"Design ethnography is ethnographic qualitative research set within a design context." (Dijk 2011, 109) It goes deep into regular people's everyday life or experience aiming to understand the future users and gather insight materials for service design. It delivers results to foundational design processes, idea generation, concept development and implementation, to inform and inspire designers. Design ethnography is "in the middle of" a creative process, it joints designers in different discipline together within one design.

Principles of service design thinking

Although service design in different industries have different definitions, according to Marc Stickdorn's description in his book, *This Is Service Design Thinking*, there are five core principles in thinking that service design requires.

User centred Service is intangible, it is created through interaction between providers and customers, its intention is to meet customer's need, and its value is reflected by the frequency of being used or the reputation it gains.

Co-creative Since service is an interaction, service design process should include all stakeholders. Well-designed service creates employee satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Sequencing “Every service process follows a three-step transition of pre-service period (get in touch with a service), the actual service period (when the customer actually experience the service) and the subsequent post-service period.” Service rhythm influences the customer mood.

Evidencing To make intangible services to be visualized. By revealing inconspicuous backstage services, a better understanding and increased appreciation from customers can be won.

Holistic Always be aware of the wider context in which a service process takes place. Inside a service sequence, always focus on alternative customer journeys. To service provider team, organized team structure promotes the service mind-set within the organization.

To summarise, service design involves all the stakeholders aiming to deliver a flow of service in a well organized and visualized way to the central beneficiary: customer.

Relationship among marketing, service, and service design

“Service became an important topic in marketing from the 1970s onwards as researchers realized that the economic value of services was beginning to exceed that of other kinds of activities.” (Kimbell 2011, 47) As marketing moved from production oriented to marketing oriented, manufacturers are trying to estimate what customers need, what influences customers’ decision making to buy a certain product. The marketing paradigm focus has been shifted from pricing and transactions towards the interacting process between customers and business. With the “global village” idea, the context merged to international markets.

“Marketing is about organizations creating and building relationships with customers to co-create value; design aims to put stakeholders at the centre of designing services and preferably co-design with them.” (Kimbell 2011, 50) Marketers define who are the customers and what are the possible relationships. This can be done through marketing research, planning and relationship analyses. Designers, on the other hand, enrich and formulate marketers’ idea by visualizations and by adding the fundamentals of aesthetic experiences.

2.1.2 Service design processes

Service design process is “an iterative process”. The four basic iterative phases to implement a process are known as exploration, creation, reflection and implementation (Stickdorn 2011, 122).

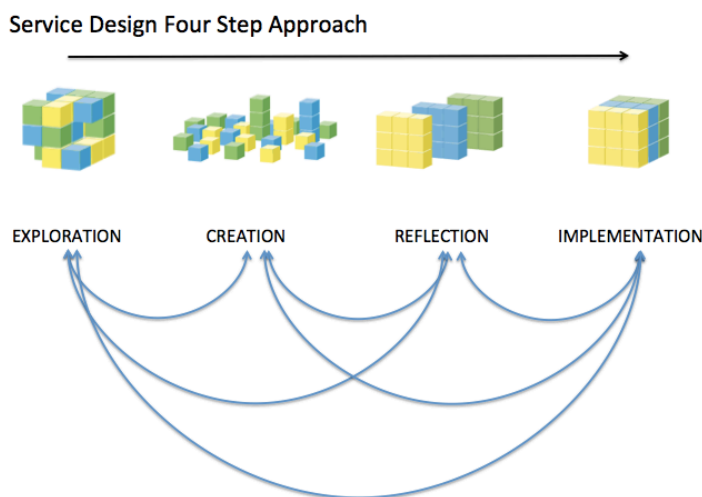


Figure 1. Service design approaches (thesisservicedesignthinking.com)

The theory below and Figure 1 is from Marc Stickdorn’s book *This Is Service Design Thinking*, it visualizes service design steps in an illustrative diagram.

Exploration Exploration could be also explained as “discover”. In exploration phase, three tasks are waiting to be completed by service designer.

First of all, “understand the culture and goals of the company providing a service” (Stickdorn 2011, 128). It requires service designer to understand the company’s point of view on certain problem, and to understand his own role on the extent of responsibility within a creative process.

Second, identify the real problem. It requires designers to “ascertain the true motivations behind customer behaviour” (Stickdorn 2011, 128) with a clear focal point. Designer will explore plentiful methods and tools from various disciplines to understand a service from customer’s perspective to find not only current problems, but also potential problems.

Thirdly, visualize findings and “the underlying structure of the previously intangible services” (Stickdorn 2011, 128). It presents simplified complex and intangible processes to the service

design team and service stakeholders, convenient for correct aspects that might not be functioning appropriately.

Creation Creation is a concept design process. Within service design iterative process, it “represents the generative stage” (Stickdorn 2011, 130). Creation idea frequently intercourses with the reflection approach. “It is all about testing and retesting ideas and concepts.” (Stickdorn 2011, 130) It is worth to spend energy to test the new concept during its design stage, with the whole touch point sequence in mind to provide evidence, rather than correct failure after its launch.

Reflection Reflection stage is to test a prototype generated from creation stage. Testing intangible products shares the same iterative approach from physical products testing. Testing methodology is gaining feedbacks from few customers or experts and improving the prototype for retest until it matches expectations. It is important to visualize the intangible service concept into scenery to give customer a good mental picture. The scenery is better to be simple and general so that it arouses participants’ increased imagination and creative response.

Implementation Implementation of a new service concept is accompanied with a process of change. Basic sequence of change management consists of planning change, implementing change and reviewing change (Cameron & Green 2009).

The new service concept presented here is formulated and tested during reflection stage. Creating desired customer experience is a prediction. “Employees should contribute to the prototyping of certain service moments and therefore have a clear vision of the concept.” (Stickdorn 2011, 134) Organizational level can keep an overview of the deliverables by utilizing service blueprints method.

“Implementation change relies on the fact that the management is convinced of the service concept and does not flinch from any resulting problems while implementing the change.” If proper consideration and resources are invested during the previous stage, less effort will be taken. Employees must be efficient and creative on solving problems.

Reviewing change means “the control of its success” (Stickdorn 2011, 135). Putting the success into another exploration stage ideally carries this out. The iterative process of service design thinking is therefore led to a review phase.

2.1.3 Service design tools and methods

“Service design is an interdisciplinary approach that combines different methods and tools from various disciplines.” (Stickdorn 2011, 29)

Tools and methods below are selections from chapter What Are The Tools of Service Design written in 2011 by Geke Van Dijk, Bas Raijmakers and Luke Kelly in book This Is Service Design Thinking. They will be utilized for this thesis topic.

Stakeholder Maps “A stakeholder map is a visual or physical representation of the various groups involved with a particular service.” (Dijk, Raijmakers & Kelly 2011, 150) The interplay between partner organizations, customers, staff and other stakeholders in a stakeholder map can be charted and analysed.

The way to make a stakeholder map includes two steps: firstly, generate a list of stakeholders. Interviews and desk research are required to list out known stakeholders and stakeholders that the service provider may not be aware of. At the same time, apply the interests and motivations of each stakeholder into the map to figure out their importance and influence to the design; secondly, indicate relations and interactions between these groups. By producing an easily accessible overview, can “both identify pain points and explore areas of potential opportunity” (Dijk, Raijmakers & Kelly 2011, 150).

Contextual Interviews Contextual Interviews is an ethnographic technique conducted in the service environment or context when service process of interest occurs. The interviewees can be customers, staff, and stakeholders. The interviewer can “use a combination of questions and observations” (Dijk, Raijmakers & Kelly 2011, 162) to visit the interviewee within the service context to generate expected insight.

Different from traditional interview, “contextual interviews allow researchers also to gain an understanding of the social and physical environment surrounding the service being examined.” (Dijk, Raijmakers & Kelly 2011, 150) This gives researchers a holistic understanding which is closer to service proceeding.

Idea Generation “Idea generation techniques are what service designers use to structure and inspire group brainstorming sessions.” (Dijk, Raijmakers & Kelly 2011, 150) They can be used as “provide prompts to imagination or simple pointers around which the discussion can be organized” (Dijk, Raijmakers & Kelly 2011, 150), to stimulate concept creation. Ideation techniques that will be used in this thesis are Flowchart, Mind-mapping, and S.W.O.T. analysis.

Service Blueprints “Service blueprints are a way to specify and detail each individual aspect of a service.” The main action is to create a visual schematic that customers, service providers and relevant stakeholders are incorporated. In service blueprints, from initial customer contact to background preparation, every service movement are presented.

Creating a service blueprint is usually a collaborative procedure. Service blueprints allow the most considerable aspects to be ascertained, at the same time, reveal overlapping and burdensome aspects. Such a document helps service provider coordinate own people and resources, whilst it promotes cooperation and teamwork. At the beginning of a service design project, a draft service blueprint is always produced. Through exploration, creation and reflection steps, ideas and innovations are gradually matured, finally at implementation stage, service blueprint is detailed and expended. “This helps to provide a clear roadmap for the actual service delivery.” (Dijk, Raijmakers & Kelly 2011, 205).

2.2 Golf tourism

Golf tourism has been defined in different ways since tourism is a flexible and developing industry. A very simple definition of Golf Tourism is “travel away from home to participate in or observe the sport of golf, or to visit attractions associated with golf”. (Hudson 2009,3)

A research result from a Mintel’s research, which has been broadly used in golf tourism industry, golf tourists can be divided into three basic categories:

- Tourists who go on holiday principally to play golf
- Tourists who play some golf as a secondary activity whilst in a holiday or business trip
- Those who attend tournaments as spectators

Since golf trips may encompass well with other activities like conventions, corporate meetings, incentives, or leisure activities, “it is hard to isolate the full extent and impact of golf tourism”. (Travel & Tourism Analyst 2006, 5)

Golf tourism does not exist independently. It is supported by many business sectors. Figure 2 is a visualized description of golf tourism business. Golf tourism is served not only by golf course/resort itself, but also by suppliers like tour operators, transportations, accommodations, and so on. These suppliers have to plan and develop with consideration about marketing, financing and human recourse. In a broader view, golf tourism as a business impacts economics, society, and environment. This thesis will discuss and analyse how tour operators can cooperate with golf course/resort and other supplying businesses to attract tourists.

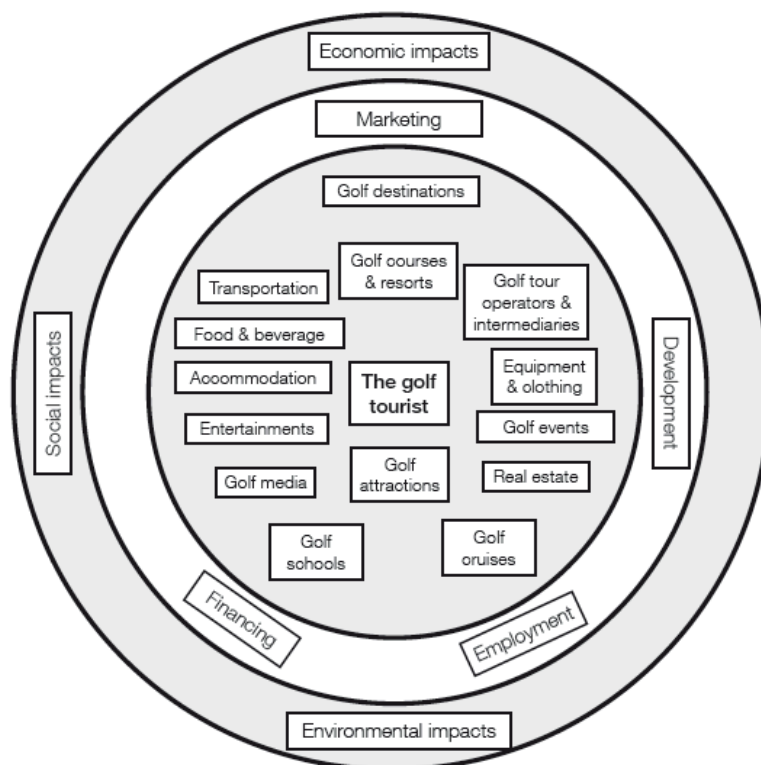


Figure 2. The business of golf tourism (Hudson 2009,6)

3 Service design step 1: Exploration

This chapter will apply the business theories of service design steps onto a insight of golf tourism service provider, customer, and tour destination attraction. Target is to discover and visualize the way in which the service company has been serving their customers.

3.1 Design proposition

One of the marketing assistants (who prefers to be anonymous) from C.U.GOLF has mentioned their business is to arrange golf tours around the world. Finland as a world famous tourist destination certainly can arise C.U.GOLF client's interests. Writer is requested to design a practical summer Finnish golf trip since is experienced at operating Chinese tourists Nordic trips.

3.1.1 Company culture and goals of providing service

C.U.GOLF is a Chinese high-end golf tourism company founded in 2012 in Beijing. It is an integrate of industry leaders in Chinese tourism and Chinese golf media. (Official C.U.GOLF Sina Weibo account, 2014) Their goal is to create a top Chinese sports tourism service brand.

Business sectors are covering golf travel, event planning, sports marketing and public relations activities under a service brand "C.U.GOLF".

Their golf leisure products focus on arranging tailor-made trips for business clients and family clients, which means they offer service to all types of golf tourists: tourists who go on holiday principally to play golf, tourists who play some golf as a secondary activity whilst in a holiday or business trip and those who attend tournaments as spectators.

According to both C.U.GOLF's official Sina Weibo (popular China-based microblog, popular business advertising platform) account and their official Wechat (popular multimedia communication tool, popular business advertising platform) account, their service products include domestic golf tour, international golf and culture experience tour, children golf summer campe, etc. International tour destinations include Ireland, France, Korea, Thailand, U.S.A., Australia to begin with.

C.U.GOLF Market Development aims to form more and more projects to meet different customer needs.

3.1.2 Service designer's task within the creative process

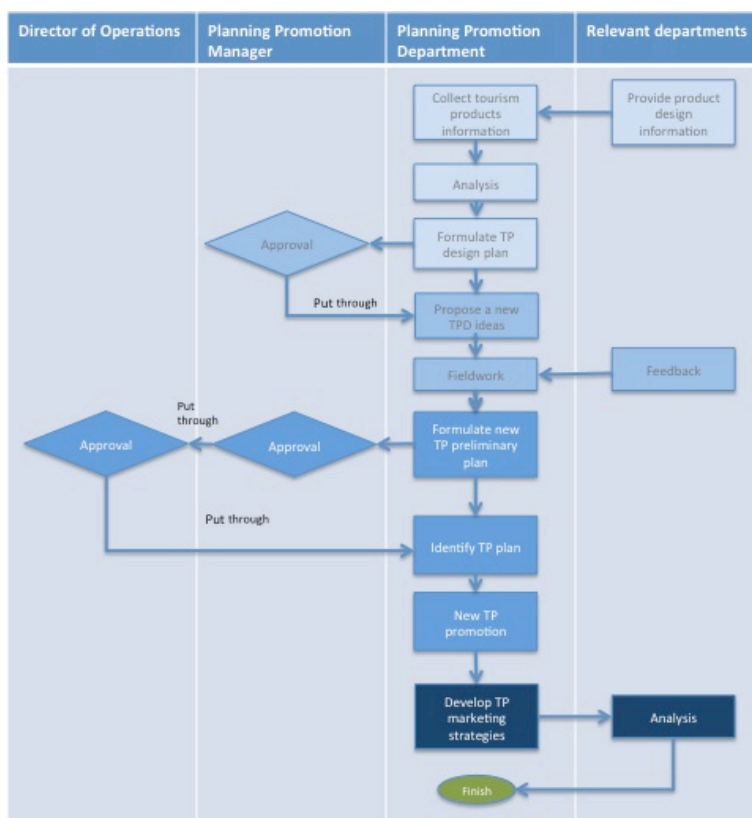


Figure 3. Tourism products design workflow
(TP: tourism products, TPD: tourism products design)

Service designer's task is the local tour program design. Most important part is tourism activities, which in the case of C.U.GOLF means arranging a golf tour in Finland with local characteristics. Along with suggestions or a whole arrangement for accommodation, dining, tour guide, language support, and local transportation.

A standard Chinese tourism product design workflow is presented as Figure 3 (Chinese Travel Agency Business Information Systems, 2009). Design process is bound forward as blue colour darkens gradually. Mainly four phases is taken in progress:

- Tourism products design plan formulation
- Tourism products design
- Product plan determination
- New tourism products project promotion.

Writer is involved in the first two steps. In the first step, writer's task is to formulate product ideas through collecting and analysing tourism products and market information in Finland by keeping Chinese customer needs in mind. Information source can be a professional website, periodicals, magazines, competitors' advisement, etc.; in the second step, writer's task is to assist analyse new concept's operability. This will be implemented by taking budget control, on-site inspection, and relevant departments feedback into consideration, formulate a practical and profitable concept.

3.2 Marketing research for service design exploration

Since marketing is customer focused, while service design is stakeholder centered, writer applied marketing research methods to intensify the service design process. The content within 3.2 is set to describe and analyse service designer's findings (writer's findings) from a marketer's perspective (C.U.GOLF's perspective). It is a supplement of the writer's service design exploration part. The main areas of the service design exploration are narrated under titles 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5.

The purpose of the research was to identify the needs of Chinese golf tourists, the key characteristics of Finnish golf courses and to find opportunities to lower the barrier for Chinese tourism agencies to bring their customers to Finland. The research was carried out between May 2013 and May 2014.

3.2.1 Research definition

According to the sixth edition of Marketing Research by Naresh K. Malhotra, this research is designed as problem-solving research, which is implemented by "exploring the issues, understanding the phenomena, and answering questions by analyzing and making sense of unstructured data". The research was aimed to study tourist demand and travel destination features to format an attractive service product.

- Research problem and method

The objective of the the research is to generate findings and propose a service design to attract Chinese golf tourists to Finland. Main research questions are: 1) what are the driving needs of Chinese golf tourists, 2) what unique opportunities Finnish golf courses can offer, and 3) in which ways Finnish culture can be blended into a golf holiday.

Research data was collected by using both primary and secondary data. For primary data a methods of specialist in-depth interviews and direct consumer questionnaires were chosen to gain insights from both sides of the value chain. The first interview was used as a starting guide to study Finnish golf courses. The second interview was used as understand the outline of a service product that C.U.GOLF would like author to design. The consumer questionnaire collects customer requirement directly from Chinese tourists who have played golf in Finland.

Secondary data used was gathered from golf course and tourism agency websites and social media platforms. The research was also supported by comprehensive analysis of industry magazines and literature. Tour destination characteristics were studied by using secondary data sources. The key information that was utilized in the suggested service design included climate, geography, tourist facilities, food culture, and celebration activities.

Considerable study of golf course websites was carried out to gain deep understanding on the offerings of Finnish golf operators. Both Chinese golf course websites and Finnish golf course websites were browsed. Information from Chinese courses was used as a reference of Chinese golfer experience needs for the service design. Finnish courses under focus were selected by their capability to arouse Chinese golf traveler's interest.

Related Chinese golf tourism industry insight were gathered. Traveler's expectations to tour destination, competitors' products, and C.U.GOLF products standard are evaluated.

- Research sources

The first interviewee from whom writer obtained general insights about Finnish golf courses is a Finnish Swedish golf player who has been playing golf more than ten years. He is 35 years

old. With a strong interest to golf, he has spend most of his leisure time on playing golf around Finland and other European countries. He has the experience of having played to almost every Finnish golf course. From the first interview very detailed information about Finnish golf leisure life was obtained. Appendix 1 concludes the interview.

The second interview was carried out with a marketing assistant at C.U.GOLF. The interviewee is involved in product design, local supplier communication, and client program operation. Writer was in contact with the interviewee also after the initial interview throughout the research to adapt to the changing needs of Chinese tourism agencies. Content under title 3.3.2. has combined suggestions drawn from the second interview and Nordic tourism industry experiences. To follow research ethics the full interview of the business representative was not disclosed in appendix due to company secrets.

The consumer questionnaires (appendix 2) were conducted with two tourist groups in total of 14 tourist. The purpose was to figure out customer's real needs by letting them answer prepared questions and at the same time by having discussions with tourists when they have something more to say. Tourists were encouraged to raise any thoughts that were relevant to the topic. The analysed outcome is combined with specialist interviews written under title 3.3.2.

Sources for analysing tour destination characteristics were Visit Finland official website, general knowledge and author's Nordic tourism industry experiences, Finnish style restaurant menus and Finnish life style by observation and casual chat with Finns.

Online the research focused on study three types of key sources: the website of leading Chinese golf course Mission Hills, the Finnish Golf Union's official website and the official websites of selected Finnish golf courses.

Related Chinese golf tourism industry insights were collected from Chinese Travel Agency Business Information Systems, business competitors' products, and C.U.GOLF products from their official Wechat and Weibo accounts.

3.2.2 Research result analysis

The gathered data was analysed with a bottom up approach. First the needs of Chinese tourism agencies and in particular their clients were analysed. The information gathered from the second interview and the data from the secondary Chinese golf sources were in the core in the first part of the analysis.

Second, the insights from the Chinese golf tourist needs were compared to the findings from the first interview and the Finnish golf travel sources. The purpose of this phase was to identify unique characteristics and opportunities of Finnish golf courses that could arouse the interest of the Chinese golfers and that would match the level of service required by the Chinese agencies.

As an outcome of the second phase a number of service design options were combined and these findings are concluded in the latter part of the study.

3.2.3 Research validity

The main purpose of the research was to explore and identify unique characteristics of Finnish golf courses that could match the needs of Chinese tourism agencies and their clients. Validity of the research is considered to be high as the analysis has combined the insights from a variety of sources and from industry experts. The findings were also compared to existing golf tourism concepts that had proven to be successful amongst Chinese visitors to Finland. However, due to the nature of qualitative research, conclusions are drawn by the writer and can always leave some space for alternative outcomes. The interview outlines were saved to minimise researcher bias and to make it possible to continue the analysis in case a wider scope of the research would become viable.

Limitations of the research are mainly linked to the limited scope and budget of the research. More extensive study could be carried out with comprehensive consumer surveys and focus groups. Due to the feasibility of the study, specialist interviews were used to gather maximal insight on the issues under interest.

3.3 Chinese customer needs

3.3.1 Golf circumstances in China

“Golf in China is still in its infancy” (Ken Chu, 2013), it used to be considered by the general public as “prohibitively expensive sport for businesspeople and officials”, and that is even more so in China. Golf sports have existed as a business language and a social networking tool. By having the advantage of China has the world’s largest population, one of Chinese golf business opportunities is to design golf services to be close to the majority of regular people’s life.

Golf is a fast growing industry in China. “There were only a handful of golf courses 20 years ago and now there are 698 golf courses in China”, says Ken Chu, the chief executive of Mission Hills, which is the leading brand in Chinese golf (Sports Pro, 2013). Golf population is

around 1 million. This figure is estimated to grow to about 20 million by 2020 (Golf Tourism Report 2013—IAGTO Golf Tour Operator Survey Analysis, 2013).

Chinese golf courses' commercialization started forming 1992 when Mission Hills built their first golf course near the city of Shenzhen. (Sports Pro, 2013) Appendix 3 Picture 1 shows Mission Hills Shenzhen course which was accredited as the "World's Largest Golf Facility" by the Guinness World Records in 2004. World famous golf course design team Schmidt-Curley designed it (www.missionhillsgroup.com, 2014). Same course hosted 2012 WGC-HSBC Champions event, one of the four annual World Golf Championship (WGC) tournaments (Sports Pro, 2013).

Besides golf courses, Mission Hills also features wellness tourism like the world's largest spa, resort and country club that has the largest tennis centre in Asia with 51 courts as well as recreation facilities like the only golf club in the world with its own Imax cinema, and golf academies. Appendix 3 Picture 2 shows an evening view of Mission Hills Dongguan. Appendix 3 Picture 3 is part of photo collections from CNN Golf Living. CNN recommend Mission Hills golf resorts as creasy fantasy experiencing destination.

Currently, Chinese focus on developing the service sector, Chinese golf industry is following by merging from traditional golf service and tournament business to create public golf resorts. "That means there is no barriers, no financial barrier, no need to invest in a membership, to have the right to play golf "(Sports Pro, 2013). Still take Mission Hills as example, by adding variety of features as listed they have created a theme park concept that suits different age and gender so that even non-golfer will enjoy his stay.

3.3.2 Chinese tourist overseas travel expectations

Writer applied the service design idea generation concept and contextual interviews with ethnographic thinking to explore potential clients' preferences. Contextual interviews were carried out among C.U.GOLF marketing assistant, Chinese business tourists in Nordic countries and Chinese tour operators in Nordic countries who had experiences of Chinese golfers' Finland trip assistance. Furthermore, the consumer questionnaires (appendix 10) answered by 14 Chinese tourists who have played golf in Finland are a core reference.

This far no travel agency has arranged golf themed holidays to Finland for Chinese tourists. Since there is no previous Chinese Nordic golf holiday experiences to study, individual customer responses are a key source to complete the suggested service design. Writer has studied two business tourist groups which requested a golf day arrangement because many of them are golfers. This real experience provided a foundation of understanding Chinese golf tourist

intentions. A service questionnaire with specific questions answered by those 14 tourists and further discussions about playing golf overseas were analysed and utilized for this thesis.

In the analysis phase a qualitative content analysis method was chosen. In qualitative content analysis the author browses through questionnaire responses in a themed order to draw conclusions. These conclusions were also compared to the results of the specialist interviews. To formalise the questionnaire content analysis service design references were applied. The theoretical framework of a successful service design method was applied to find key needs expressed by respondents.

Results are illustrated briefly as below:

Time and length Around half a month in July or August is ideal. Chinese working age people can seldom have long holidays while most Chinese golfers who come overseas are people around the age of 30 to 50.

Travel companion Majorities are with business partners, colleagues, or friends who have common hobbies. Chinese family travels prefer sight seeing more.

Golf courses Well-known courses, with locals' nice service is preferred. Exotic atmosphere, good facilities and clubhouse and flexible service would be pleasant because Chinese tourists sometimes come up with improvisational requests. If there are beginners, coach service is expected.

Sight seeing World famous sights or place with great nature attractions are a high priority. They want to experience the comfort of a developed country. They are curious to know Nordic countries about education system, business strength, social welfare and lifestyle.

Accommodation Chinese golf tourist tend to choose hotels located in city centre with enjoyable environment. Safe and secure is important consideration. Also, WIFI is a requisite.

Meals and beverage Local food and Chinese food. Chinese would like to have famous local food as dinner once or twice and a seafood dinner once during a trip. Most of the meals they prefer Chinese dishes. Most of Chinese do not easily adjust to have other cuisines everyday. Breakfasts that hotels serve are fine.

Warm water or tea is a must have. It is a dietary habit. Wines, beers and other local alcohol drinks are preferred with dinner.

Transportation Mercedes minibus and western driver in suits. Chinese tourist travel in Nordic countries always expect transportation to be decent looking. Internal environment must be clean and with proper air-conditioning. Every one to two hours break during a long trip.

Entertainment Finnish traditional sauna is most welcomed. They would also like to go for a show, concert, yacht sailing or join a local event.

Local assistance Highly relied on local assistance. Most of the Chinese do not speak English, language support is very important for them. Also, Chinese way to be a “customer” is known as everything to be well arranged and served by local guide rather than self-service.

3.4 Finnish golf courses and attractions around

There are 132 golf clubs distributed at different regions in Finland. 144 000 people are registered members. This number is growing by 15% during the last 5 years.

In accordance with the service design thinking, writer has explored Finnish Golf Union website and almost all of the Finnish golf clubs’ website, interviewed a frequent Finnish Swedish player, referred to updated Visit Finland official website, and combined own Chinese tourist Finland trip operating experience to formulate a prototype of Finnish golf tour with four golf clubs involved.

Green Zone Golf that belongs to Tornio Golf Oy can be the biggest attraction for Chinese golf tourists to come. There are two elements that are unique and incomparable to other courses in the world. First, the midnight sun. Tourists can play unlimitedly under 24 hours sunshine. Secondly, it is a full-scale course located right at the Finnish-Swedish border. Because of different time zones, ”the world’s longest HOLE IN ONE is a possibility on hole 6”. “The shot will take about one hour and 5 seconds as national border runs across the putting green”. (www.torniogolf.fi) From Tornio can easily reach Rovaniemi, where tourists can go step onto polar circle, meet with Santa Claus, and ride water motorcycles or do other summer sports.

The oldest golf club Helsinki Golf Club (also called Tali) was founded in 1932 (Appendix 3 Picture 4 shows the first rounds of golf was played in Tali), and it still exists as a famous championship standard club. “The course itself is laid out in the grounds of protected Tali Manor”(Helsingin Sanomat) (Appendix 3 Picture 5 is the Tali Manor) Helsinki is a must come for a tourist who visit Finland. Alongside with attractions such as Helsinki Cathedral, Uspensiki Cathedral, market square, Suomenlinna, Rock Church and so on, different happenings, concerts, sports games during summer intoxicate tourists fairly.

Linna Golf in Hämeenlinna is a famous popular golf resort. Linna Golf club house is a castle (Appendix 3 Picture 6), which creates exotic feeling for Chinese golf tourist. Their vintage golf suites, spacious club house and restaurant, and Spa are suitable for an opening of a golf holiday in Finland. Tourist can also visit Hämeenlinna Castle, Hämeenlinna Military Museum, and Hämeenlinna National Park.

In Finland's former capital, Turku, there is Aura Golf club, which has hosted 2013 Women's European Championship Tournament. If tourists would like to have an old capital tour, Aura Golf could be one of the golf trips. Aura Golf official site offers course map in detail for tourists' reference. Combining the golf round with a sight-seeing at Turunlinna, Turku Cathedral, Handicraft Open-air Museum, and Aura River in the middle of the city, as well as Naantali tour, creates pleasant golf tourism experience.

All the courses above are convenient to communicate with. Non-member can pay green fees to enter. Chinese tourist will be impressive to see polar days. Enjoy golf playing without rush, crowded or waiting for tee-off.

3.5 Findings and C.U.GOLF service underlining

Chinese tourists are curious to experience Finnish life style as well as communicate with Finns, which can hardly be realized. Regular Chinese itinerary does not involve cultural activities. Therefore, when tourists arrive Finland, they ask about possibilities to walk into Finnish street happenings, or watch rock concerts. However, these programs do not always match with the date tourists arrive.

A pleasant service experience is to create a sauna party program. Ideally arranging a chance to have sauna with Finns, for example with a Finnish tour guide. Representative food and beverage will be prepared and the facilities should be nicely decorated. Tourists will find how Finns enjoy nature and the openness side of Finnish stereotype. Food table will be valued as classy which caters to Chinese consumer psychology of enjoying the western developed life.

3.5.1 C.U.GOLF service underlining

One of the C.U.GOLF Ireland golf tour services, which their official pages have promoted with effort, is good evidence for European tour design. The theme is to play golf at the area of golf origin. A warm up for the play is designed as Irish beer, whisky and Irish coffee tasting party with host introducing stories about the origin of those drinks. It is a decent Chinese way of starting a pleasant activity. As well as they have blended "feel like at Ireland" thinking subtly.

Connecting a Finnish golf course trip to a Finnish sauna experience would offer the tour operators in Finland a similar opportunity to create a memorable service design.

3.5.2 Finnish sauna culture in a golf holiday

To create an atmosphere that tourists are playing golf in a country that is unique from other countries in the world, a brief introduction about Finnish sauna culture guides Chinese tourists thinking about how to enjoy the entire experience.

Finland is known as the Saunas birth country worldwide. It is an important part of Finnish daily life. Chinese appreciate the traditional Finnish smoke sauna that is heated by heating a pile of rocks by burning large amount of wood pieces for over 6 hours. Self-service activities like throwing water over hot stones to raise sauna temperature helps tourist to adjust. Birch branches with fresh leaves are used to gently slap the skin meets traditional Chinese medical thinking of health. Appendix 3 Picture 7 is an external look of the world's biggest smoke sauna located at Kuopio.

Sauna party is a popular social activity. Tourists will bring beers into sauna to have long stay and cheerful chat like Finns do. If the sauna is built nearby a lake, people will experience swimming in the lake immediately from sauna to have a rapid cooling, then go back to warm up completely. Picnic experience could follow after the enjoyed sauna. Reindeer dish would be recommended as a representable Finnish food. Since reindeer grazing is known as part of Sami traditional lifestyle (Appendix 3 Picture 8). Reindeer meat is considered as tonic, it is rarely sold in China.

4 Service design step 2 and 3: Creation and Reflection

There was no precedent case of a stereotyped Finnish golf tourism product to Chinese, but the general process can be figured out by analysing how Chinese travel agencies operate regular tourism groups to Finland. Figure 4 is a stakeholder map that illustrates service provider who will take part in the local service inside Finland. Mainly three types of stakeholders provide service to the central participator: golf tourist. *Local assistance stakeholders* deliver and connect every service that is involved in tourism itinerary. Golf activities rely on golf professionals at golf course. Stakeholder involved in destination programs might serve the experience creation only once during tourists' trip, but their good services create an image of the service level of the entire product.



Figure 4. Stakeholder Map



Figure 5. S.W.O.T. Analysis

Figure 5 is a SWOT analysis to evaluate the strategy in the service prototype discussed in Chapter 3. The major weaknesses of the Finnish golf tourism destinations are clearly illustrated. The listed three thoughts represent the majority of Chinese golfer's driving values about a golf activity and these can be found as an area where there is room for improvement for Finnish destinations. These weaknesses are also caused by a prominent contrast against Chinese golf resorts. Thus, Finnish destinations have to attract Chinese golf tourists with a concept of experience that highlights unique beautiful creations what nature creates. For example a midsummer golf competition, would be a highly memorable event for Chinese. The effects from Threats part are hard to manage. Increasing competition and economical challenges require creativity and spot on promotional activities to be mitigated. It challenges service marketer skills among a big Chinese population.

5 Service design step 4: Implementation

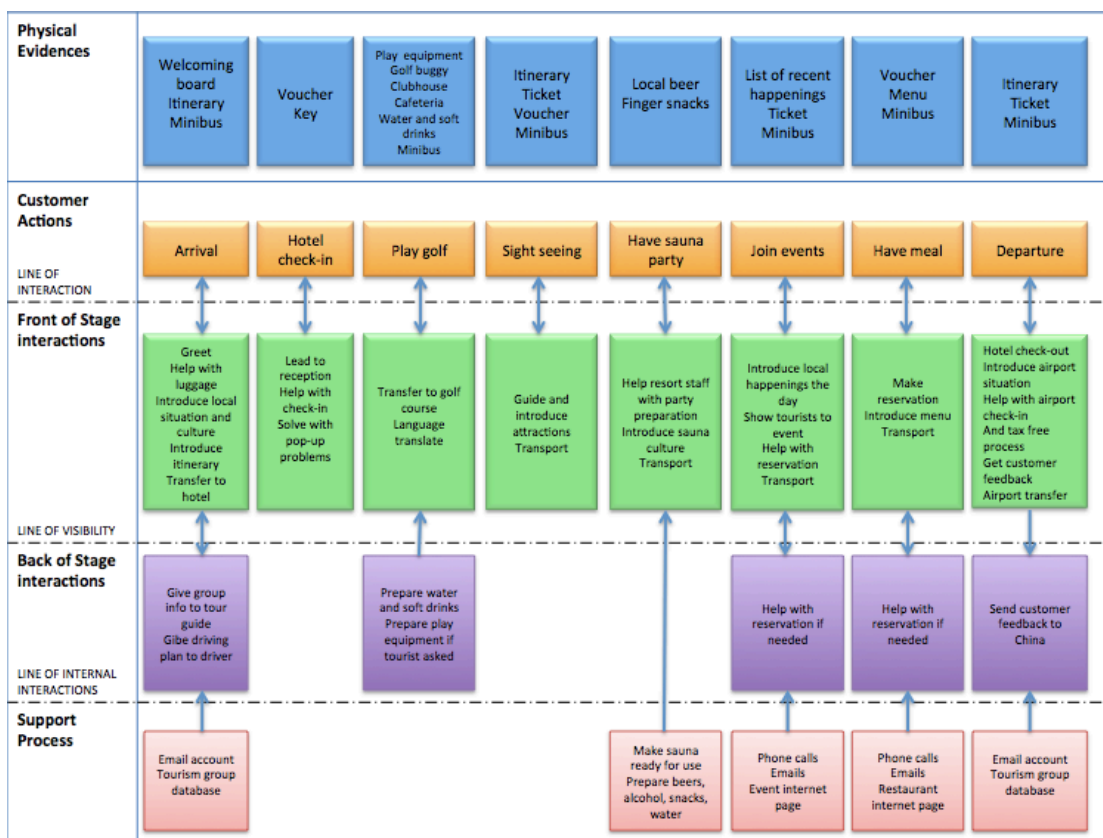


Figure 6. Service Blueprint

Figure 6 is a service blueprint for the actual service that takes place in Finland. A typical Chinese way to implement service is presented: itinerary is pre-planned before tourists' arrival, and a tour guide who at the sometime is a translator assists customer actions along the entire service. Service attitude and patience highly impact customer image. All the service interactions and physical evidences represent service quality visually.

6 Conclusion

Present report assessed service design thinking with an evidence of designing a high quality experience for Chinese golfers who come to Finland. During the writing process a considerable amount of information sources was studied. Responsible person at C.U.GOLF, experienced Nordic tour operators and local golfers were interviewed; Service design literature and methodology were studied; Golf journals, media recourses, and formal experiences were analysed; Chinese golf courses and Finnish golf courses were compared; Cultural characteristics were screened.

For managerial application, as an outcome a highly potential service concept was formulated by applying all the research findings into a service design framework. A fruitful competitive opportunity to attract Chinese golf tourists was found and to tap in to the market a suitable leisure destination and operational approach were suggested. For academic marketing field, a foundation for studies gaining understanding of “Chinese customer in Finland” was further supplied. The present study also gave a contextual application of the service design theory in the context of Chinese tourists in Nordic countries.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview With A Finnish Golf Player

1. Q: From where can I gather as much as possible general Finnish golf course information?

A: Finnish Golf Union website. Search "Suomen Golfliitto Ry" in Google.

2. Q: When is the best time to play golf in Finland?

A: May to July is the golf season in Finland. June is the best time to play. Because people can play during night, and grass is perfect.

3. Q: How many hours do you usually play?

A: 5 hours.

4. Q: What is the popular time to play?

A: Weekend is always popular. Especially from 8am to lunch time.

5. Q: What can be the time period that would be easy to make a reservation for play?

A: Weekend after 14:00. Middle of the week from 16:00 to 19:00.

6. Q: How to make a reservation with golf courses?

A: By calling or through golf course websites 3-5 days in advance.

7. Q: Do you normally see foreigners play in Finnish courses?

A: Not really.

8. Q: By which way do you think foreigners can play together with Finns?

A: Joining open competitions.

9. Q: From where can I get open competition information?

A: Golf club websites.

10. Q: What is the main consideration when you choose at which course to play?

A: Nature. I prefer the courses to be green and in good shape. I always ask courses before booking.

11. Q: How early do you arrive at the golf course before playing?

A: One hour before starting. During the one hour I warm up, check out area, and drink coffee.

12. Q: What type of food and catering services are normally served at the golf courses?

A: Mostly sandwich. I prefer dinner at big better places than most of the cafeterias at golf courses. But of course, if golf tourists are willing to pay more, there are many golf courses can arrange very good dinners.

13. Q: What are the regular golf course facilities?

A: Club house, cafeteria, golf shop, and some quality courses have a sauna.

14. Q: Where do you buy golf equipment?

A: Usually not from golf course shops. I prefer Lauttasaari Golf Centre, and Golf Balance at Olari. The shop at Olari is cheaper.

15. Q: What courses do you recommend around Helsinki?

A: 1) Tali. It is the oldest club in Helsinki. With a regular reservation you will be put into waiting list. If you are willing to pay a green fee, you can play sooner after booking.

2) Master Golf. It is a high end club. They have an old club house. Serve good meal.

3) Paloheinä Golf. It is for beginners. Players can enter without a green card. Located near the Ring 1; there is one course near Espoo ringside which is good and broad, suits for beginners.

4) Pickala. Maybe this club is open for tourists; Hirsala and Club Sarfvik are also good places to go.

16. Q: What courses do you recommend around Finland?

A: 1) Hameenlinna golf course is very nice. The castle and the nature make it something special.

2) Naantali golf course

3) Golf courses near Lapland. Maybe Levi is a good place to go.

Appendix 2. A translation of the Chinese tourist Nordic holiday satisfaction questionnaire

1. Please write down your gender, age, and where from China are you from?
2. How long would you prefer your holiday in Nordic countries to be? How long would you like to stay in Finland?
3. In which months do you prefer to arrive?
4. With whom would you like to spend a holiday in Nordic countries?
5. What kind of famous places would you like to see?
6. Your expectation for any specific program? *(with the 14 golf tourists, their golf holiday expectations in Finland were discussed.)*
7. Your expectations for accomodation?
8. Your opinion on food and drinks we have arranged?
9. How do you like the transportation we have arranged?
10. How important a tour guide or a translator is to you?
11. Please leave your open feedback and suggestions.

Appendix 3. Pictures

Picture 1. Mission Hills Shenzhen course



Picture 2. Mission Hills Dongguan Clubhouse, Hotel & Apartment



Picture 3. China's Crazy Fantasy Golf Course



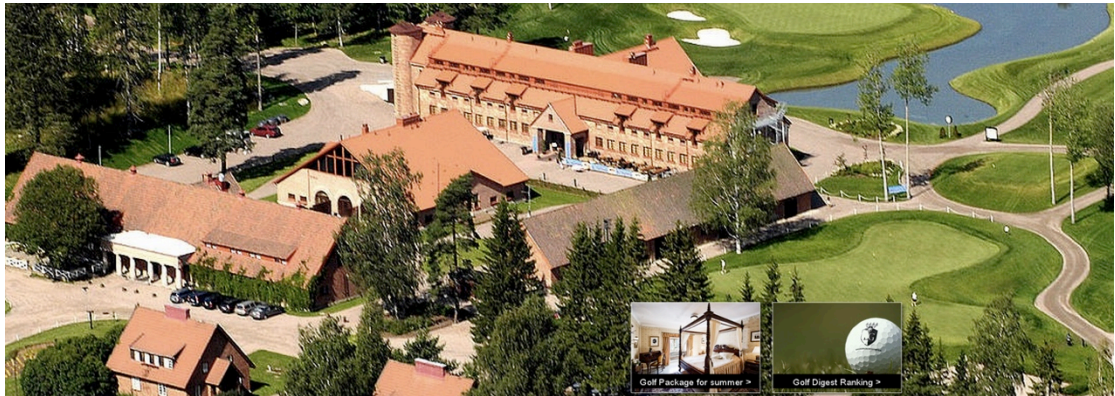
Picture 4. First rounds of golf at Tali in 1932



Picture 5. Tali Manor



Picture 6. Linna Golf Resort



Picture 7. Smoke Sauna External Look



Picture 8. Sami and Reindeer

