

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF CHINESE TOURISTS

Case: Santa Claus Village, Rovaniemi

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The aim of this thesis research was to discuss the travel motivations and consumer behaviour of Chinese tourists and its impacts on Santa Claus Village and Rovaniemi, Finland. This case study made an effort to understand Chinese tourists' perceptions on Santa Claus Village products and services. The theoretical framework of this paper includes three main themes, which are the tourism operating environment in Rovaniemi, Chinese market and media behaviour of Chinese tourists.

Nova Skyland Hotel is the commissioner of this thesis research. The hotel is located inside Santa Claus Village area in Rovaniemi, Finland. The role of the commissioner is to support the progress of establishing related materials about Santa Claus Village as well as conducting the survey. This thesis work introduces several concepts related to Rovaniemi and Chinese travellers such as tourism, Chinese tourism market and media behaviour of Chinese tourists. A quantitative research method was implemented during the process. Findings related to the thesis were collected through an electronic survey. The survey was handed out during February to late March 2019.

Accordingly, the results show the importance in creating unique and memorable products as well as services in Santa Claus Village. Therefore, the results can be used in obtaining Chinese tourists' perceptions through their background, what elements that drive them to travel and how they see Santa Claus Village as a tourist attraction. The study helps organizations understand and develop the destination to meet the needs and satisfaction of Chinese visitors.

Key words Rovaniemi, Santa Claus Village, Chinese tourists, consumer behaviour, travel motivation

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	ROVANIEMI AS OPERATING ENVIROMENT IN LAPLAND	5
2.1	Tourism in Rovaniemi	5
2.1.1	Definition of Tourism.....	5
2.1.2	Rovaniemi, Lapland in General	6
2.1.3	Statistics on Rovaniemi	7
2.2	Santa Claus Village	7
2.2.1	Santa Claus Village as Tourist Attraction	7
2.2.2	Main and Extra Services in Santa Claus Village.....	8
3	CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN TOURISM	10
3.1	Travel Motivations.....	10
3.2	Social Media Behavior	12
3.2.1	Social Media Behavior Concepts.....	12
3.2.2	Social Content Management	12
4	CHINESE TOURISTS IN FINLAND.....	15
4.1	Chinese Outbound Tourism Market.....	15
4.2	Statistics on Chinese Tourists	16
4.3	Chinese Tourist’s Travel Motivations	17
4.4	Trends in Using Online Platform of Chinese Tourists	18
5	CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF CHINESE TOURISTS IN SANTA CLAUS VILLAGE.....	21
5.1	Thesis Process	21
5.2	Quantitative Research Methodologies	21
5.3	Reliability and Validity	23
5.4	Results on Consumer Behavior of Chinese Tourists in Santa Claus Village	24
5.4.1	Respondent’s Background	24
5.4.2	Travel Behavior	26
5.4.3	Visiting Rovaniemi and Santa Claus Village.....	30
5.4.4	Revisit Intentions	32
6	CONCLUSION.....	35
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	37
	APPENDICES.....	41

1 INTRODUCTION

Santa Claus Village has proved its identity over the years when becoming the winter destination and the “Official Hometown of Santa Claus”. Finland, especially Rovaniemi has its tourism industry developed based on Santa Claus, attractive Nordic nature, winter activities and services. Each year, this small town welcomes more than half a million visitors (Visit Rovaniemi 2019c). Nowadays, Nordic countries are new destinations for Chinese visitors due to different elements such as the fresh environment, their tradition and culture, family trips and the strong growth in China’s economy during recent years. Chinese outbound travellers reached 62 million in the first half year 2017 being one of the reasons for the increase in numbers of tourists travelling to Rovaniemi. (Wu 2017.) It is essential to understand the overall tourism market frame in Rovaniemi and Lapland, as well as the Chinese travel motivations and their consumer behaviour in both online and offline platform to gain the most efficient accomplishment. Chinese customers were and are the notable foreign passengers that effect and modify the general tourism industry of Rovaniemi. To attract Chinese tourists, organizations have to understand and adapt to their demands and try to meet their expectations.

The commissioner of the thesis is Nova Skyland Hotel, which is located in Rovaniemi, Finland and it is a part of Santa Claus Village. Nova Skyland Hotel provides a high-quality restaurant, extensive program services and activities with outstanding amenities of the apartments guarantee. (Nova Skyland Hotel 2019.)

The main objective of the thesis is to research the travel motivations for Chinese tourists to visit Rovaniemi and analyse their customer behavior. The second goal is to understand and develop the destination to meet the needs and satisfaction of Chinese visitors. The chosen theoretical concepts concentrate on the main target customers. A survey was conducted during the thesis process to comprehend the perceptions of Chinese travellers on Santa Claus Village and its services.

2 ROVANIEMI AS OPERATING ENVIROMENT IN LAPLAND

2.1 Tourism in Rovaniemi

2.1.1 Definition of Tourism

Tourism is a complex system and mostly identified its meaning around the image of recreational travel. Generally, tourism can be defined as the combination of the processes, activities and outcomes arising from the relationships and interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities and surrounding environments that are involved in the attracting, transporting, hosting and management of tourists and other visitors. Tourism industry creates massive impacts on different levels of various elements of life as an economic, environmental and sociocultural force. An integrated global tourism network is generated due to the globalisation that involves billions of host-guest contacts. (Baum 2006, 20) Tourism may hold positive economic impacts on different dimensions, such as the balance of payments, employment, gross income and production. Tourism is seen to have a major role in creating foreign exchange earnings, as well as regional development. Tourism also brings employment opportunities, especially for the unskilled and semi-unskilled labour-force. (Salvo & Giulio 2003.)

Destinations are the amalgams of tourism products. They offer an integrated experience to consumers. On the other hand, they can be seen as well-defined geographical areas, such as a country, an island or a town. What makes a destination be recognized and developed depends mostly on the travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of the visit, educational level and past experience of the travellers. A tourism destination should aim to achieve a “status area” or “niche” orientation through differentiation to intensify consumer satisfaction, also to maximize its advantages for tourism regions. The landscapes in Rovaniemi and its surrounding areas, as much as being the official hometown of Santa Claus, offer to travellers all around the world a unique competitive destination. (Buhalis 2000.)

2.1.2 Rovaniemi, Lapland in General

Geographically, Rovaniemi is the largest town in European area with 8016 km² and the whole area is made up of 7601 km² of land and 415 km² of water. 30 villages are lying around Rovaniemi and most of them are located near Ounasjoki and Kemijoki river. Since 1938, Lapland has admitted Rovaniemi as its administrative center and it is still developing until now. (Visit Rovaniemi 2019c.) Regions lacking spectacular tourist attractions must create them by attaching signifiers to an ordinary sight like Rovaniemi. The plethora of modifiers such as “world’s largest”, “world’s only” and “world’s northernmost” are used to promote the uniqueness of the destination through marketing activities. Finland has been successful when establishing the image of its uniqueness as the home of Santa Claus. Lapland, especially Rovaniemi, has its own tourism marketing strategy for using Santa Claus beside original attractions in Lapland – landscape and local culture. (Pretes 1995.)

Lapland lies within the central and northern boreal zone except for the far north and this destination is considered as one of the few remaining wilderness areas in Europe. What it can offer for the travellers is an escape from the chaos of everyday life to find peacefulness. Tourists’ perception of the culture is extremely crucial. Overall, the tourism industry in Rovaniemi, as well as Lapland, is highly seasonal. (Pretes 1995.) Rovaniemi is famously known for its landscape, winter activities and especially Santa Claus. This city is the Official Hometown of Santa Claus and travellers can visit Santa Claus Village every day of the year. Visitor numbers to Rovaniemi as well as Santa Claus Village have been reported to increase each year. Santa Claus Village is a competitive organization when the company contains crucial sectors that might respond to what Chinese customers are seeking for. Santa Claus becomes an industry when being used as the tourism marketing tool to reflect the positive life of Finland in general and Lapland in particular. Santa Claus attracts tourists from all over the world with greater numbers through each year. The idea motivates travellers to visit other parts of Finland when inevitably passing through Helsinki. (Pretes 1995.)

2.1.3 Statistics on Rovaniemi

In December 2018, the number of overnight stays in Rovaniemi increased up to 12% for Finns and 10% for foreign residents. British travellers during December 2018 were reported to be at the highest rate with 24,700 overnight stays. In total, overnight stays in Rovaniemi escalated ten percent compared to December 2017. Based on Visit Rovaniemi, the number of registered overnight stays for domestic visitors was 664,000 in total between January and December 2018. The number of tourists visiting Rovaniemi was also in second place after Helsinki among Finnish tourism areas (Visit Rovaniemi 2018.). However, in January 2019, Chinese tourists were reported to be the highest number of foreign visitors in Rovaniemi with 11,7000 overnight stays (Visit Rovaniemi 2019b).

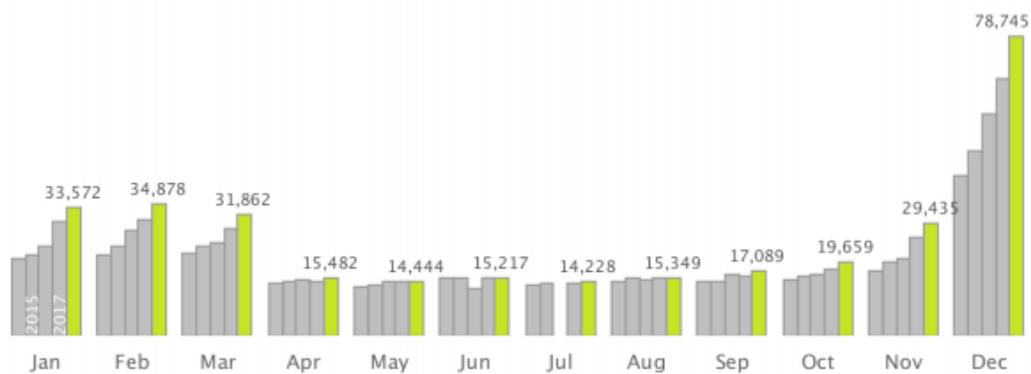


Figure 1. Passenger Arrivals at Rovaniemi Airport 2018 (Visit Rovaniemi 2018)

Rovaniemi also welcomed huge number of tourists from all over the world during high season. Passenger arrivals in December 2018 at Rovaniemi airport were reported to increase 16.8% compared to December 2017. (Visit Rovaniemi 2018.)

2.2 Santa Claus Village

2.2.1 Santa Claus Village as Tourist Attraction

In June 1950, Santa Claus Village was not developing its tourism strategies like the present. Its first efforts were to attract people who stop, enjoy a coffee-break, buy souvenirs and send postcard with Arctic Circle postmark. Therefore, when

travellers knew about this place more, Santa Claus Village was carried out the first extension. In June 1965, Santa Claus Village opened its doors to the public. Several constructions were done for better equipped to welcome the increasing numbers of tourists. (Santa Claus Village 2019a.)

Nowadays, Santa Claus Village has developed through years to be a huge combination of different products and services in the Arctic Circle region. This tourist attraction is located nearby Rovaniemi airport, 8 kilometres from the city centre and 2 kilometres from Santa Park. There are two bus connections that transfer the tourists to Santa Claus Village and back to city centre, which are bus number 8 and Santa Express bus. This place is famously known for the Arctic Circle, Santa Claus Main Post Office and a great variety of outdoor activities offered by several companies. (Santa Claus Village 2019b.)

2.2.2 Main and Extra Services in Santa Claus Village

The main services in Santa Claus Village are Santa Claus Office, Santa Claus Gift House and Arctic Circle Info, Santa Claus Reindeer, Santa Claus Main Post Office, Info Tower and Safari Center. Santa Claus Village can be seen as the most popular reason that makes travellers desire to visit here. It has been open every single day of the year since 1992. Tourists will be able to meet Santa Claus in real life as well as taking some photos as souvenirs back to home. Santa Claus Main Post Office offers to the tourist various postcards, stamps and souvenirs. What also makes people interested in this place is the mail service. People can sit down and write a postcard to their families and Santa Claus Post Office will have their unique stamps on it and send it to the written address. Arctic Circle Info also provides the special stamp as the certificate of crossing the Arctic Circle. (Santa Claus Village 2019b.)

On the other hand, accommodation in Arctic Circle Finland attracts lots of attention because of its outstanding and distinctive construction. One of the most famous hotels in Rovaniemi as well as Europe is Santa's Igloos. Because of the unique design, tourists can see the Northern lights and Lapland's ever-changing nature while staying at a comfortable hotel room. Some new hotels, resorts as

well as restaurants have been built and opened recently such as Arctic TreeHouse Hotel, Hotel Santa Claus Village and Nova Skyland Hotel. Additionally, despite of finding other companies that offer winter activities, tourists would also choose extra services in Santa Claus Village area. Travellers can choose a wide range of activity services, safaris and excursions in Santa Claus Village such as husky park, snowmobile and reindeer riding. Especially, they just had the opening of Moomin Snowcastle in December 2019, which makes this place more attractive to tourists. (Santa Claus Village 2019.)

There are a variety of travel agencies that offer outdoor activities whole year round for both domestic and international passengers. They always provide convenient methods for the customers by booking activities online or directly from the travel agencies or at Rovaniemi Tourist Information. During the high season (December to March), tourists can choose a lot of winter activities such as Northern Lights tours, reindeer and husky sleigh rides and farm visits, Christmas and Santa Claus, snowmobiling, sauna experience, icebreaker tours. Just mentioning about the Northern Lights tours, there are 123 service providers that offer different and unique types of seeking northern lights tours. The service providers may combine the tour with reindeer or snowmobile. (Visit Rovaniemi 2019a.) Several travel agencies are outstanding in the market can be mentioned Lapland Safaries and Safartica. These organizations cooperate with a chain of suppliers, including transport services, hotels and restaurants, husky and reindeer farms while organizing outdoor programs based on individual customer profile and demands. (ENAT 2015.)

3 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN TOURISM

3.1 Travel Motivations

Motivations have long been a significant topic in tourism as well as consumer behaviours. Defining travel motivations helps organizations get a basic frame of what customers need and demands investigation. Travel motivations, which have been widely researched and applied in tourism marketing areas, forms an integral part of travel behaviour learning. The curiosity and desire to discover the unseen and the unknown drives people to spend more time travelling to new places as well as motivates them. (Vuuren & Slabbert 2011.)

Motivation is a psychological term, and motivation can be seen as the driving force within individuals and leads to action. In tourism field, travel motivation is a set of particular needs that predisposes a person towards an activity. (Zhang & Peng 2014.) Motivations in tourism state an active process of internal elements. Travel motivations are said to play the crucial role to force tourists' behaviors. Personal needs/wants contribute to creating personal psychological state of tension. When the travellers' needs are fulfilled, they will form own travel motivations, which helps them to take actions to meet their tourism needs and decrease tension. Motivations increase the overall satisfaction of the customers to the activities as well as enhancing positive word-of-mouth behaviors for the destinations. (Han & Huyn 2017.) Therefore, it can be seen essential to understand the travel behaviour, especially travel motivations of tourists to apply in product development, marketing strategies, service approach development and create a competitive market (Vuuren & Slabbert 2011).

From the experts' perspectives, Maslow's hierarchical theory of motivation has been one of the most applied in the study of tourism field to demonstrate the premise of motivation. The model comprises a 5-stage theory based on human needs and is illustrated with a pyramid. (McLeod 2017.) According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs model, every person is motivated to fulfil their basic needs before moving on to other through personal growth: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, self-esteem and self-actualisation.

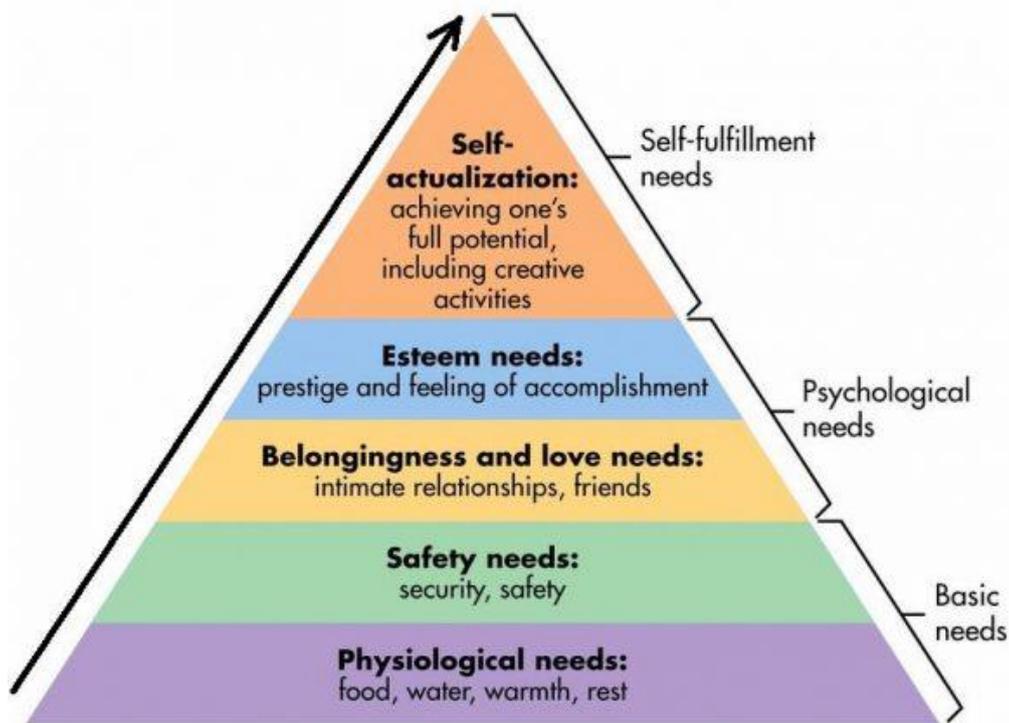


Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow 1943, as cited in Marshall 2017)

Since there is growth in China's economy, China will turn into the most important target market for destination marketing organizations worldwide. Understanding of particular segments of consumers and accommodating their needs are considered to be critical for destination managers. Various researches about travel motivations have been analysed to conclude better perspectives on travel behaviour. The knowledge of travel motivation helps organizations to create demand and assist travellers in decision-making. (Vuuren & Slabbert 2011). If a destination is able to meet the needs and motivations of customers, it will be more likely to be chosen. (Tawil & Al Tamimi 2013.) Motivations initiate the decision-making process when the customer's need and want cannot be met in everyday life. When people desire to satisfy their needs and wants, motivations occur and play a crucial role in the relation to their travel decisions together with outcome of satisfaction. (Vuuren & Slabbert 2011.)

3.2 Social Media Behavior

3.2.1 Social Media Behavior Concepts

New era of information and communication technology results from the invention of mobile phones. By learning how people spend time online, marketers are easier to approach potential customers. Social media works as a gateway to the relationship between consumers and the retailer. (Tseng & Wei 2019, 353–357.)

Social media enable people to share information and interact with each others and the content becomes more democratized. Social media channels are user-generated services, such as blogs, online review websites, social networking sites and online communities. A major information processing activity was the retrieval of product information or content, collection of factual information and sharing information and experiences. People tend to apply knowledge from user-generated media for utilitarian purposes, which results in monetart benefits and economic gain. (Heinonen 2011, 356–359.)

The development of media richness will reduce the cost of information search and therefore, increased various options that consumers consider when making choices. Complex decision-making tasks are usually carried out when consumers select channels with high media richness. Text, audio, video and face-to-face communications are four types of media along a continuum of richness in information. A classification of online products are divided into three features: low-cost, frequently-purchased goods to high-cost and rarely-purchased foods. High cost products drive the consumers to undertake more information search before purchasing in order to prevent high risk. (Tseng & Wei 2019, 353–357.)

3.2.2 Social Content Management

Social content management is considered to be the latest generation of information management themes. Basically, social content serves both individuals and business users. Social contents are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded

system. Furthermore, it articulates a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverses their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Social media is becoming popular communication tools nowadays. It is perceived as a crucial module in promoting travel destination and services provided in the destinations. (Aladwani 2014.) What drives social content management critical in all aspects of internal and external social content in a business is its deliberate and dynamic management, including data, technologies, processes, human and organizational elements. These segments generate and preserve long term value for the business. The concept of social content management is established as on-going interaction between business and social media objectives. Tourism needs to adopt societal marketing strategies if it tends to survive by producing satisfaction among interacting visitors and hosts. What the organization should concentrate on is carefully monitoring tourist satisfaction stages and utilizing them as the elements for favourable outcomes, rather than increasing numbers of tourists at the destination. Moreover, the relationship and interaction between host and tourist is an essential component of the tourist experience. (Buhalis 2000.)

Europe is a large continent and a home to around 60 states and over 100 principal cities. Obviously, destinations are easier to mark their rank or position in tourism field when they own influential and high-powered labels. They compete for attention, resources, people, jobs and money. Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), however, are limited in its contribution to the reputation race. Therefore, the consumer is said to be the crucial element to shape the brand. In our disintermediated world that dominated by social media, what most influences the reputation of a destination is the consumer. (Morgan 2012.)

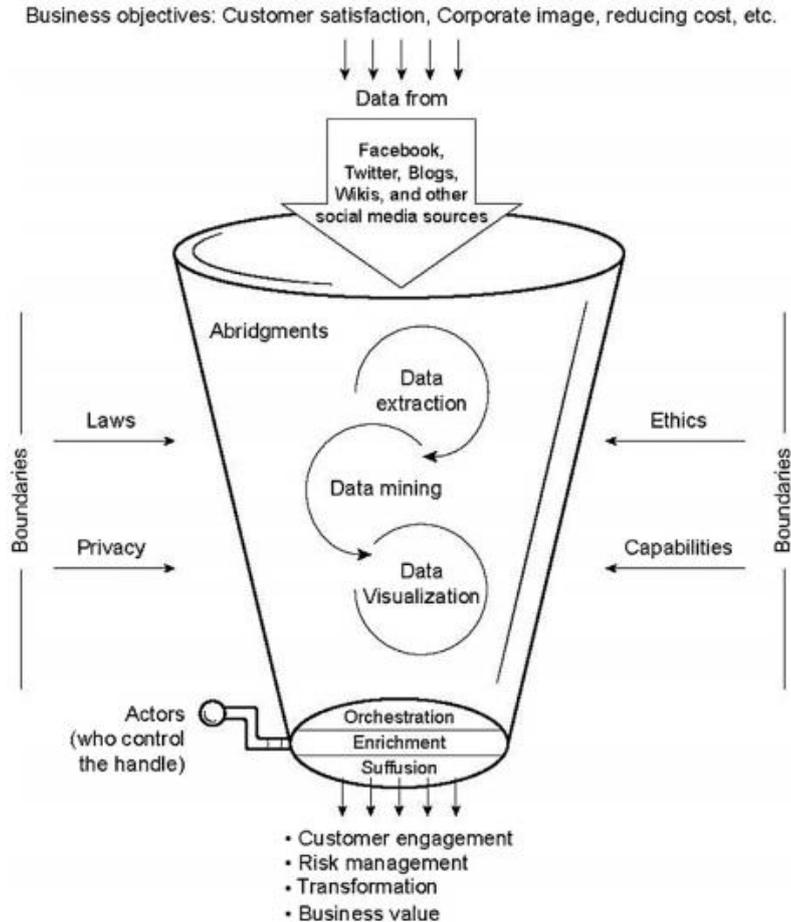


Figure 3. The 6As Model of Social Content Management (Aladwani 2014)

In order to carry out organizational activities, business managers need a social content management model. The reason why this content management model is essential in business system is the way it handles information management issues and deal with decisional biases. Business managers will clearly perceive their information needs within the social media context. Therefore, the 6As model of social management is considered as a new tool to support the business performance in social media. (Aladwani 2014.)

4 CHINESE TOURISTS IN FINLAND

4.1 Chinese Outbound Tourism Market

Since ancient times, Chinese people have valued travel with their saying “traveling one thousand miles equals reading ten thousand books”. The development of outbound travel market in China is demonstrated in three stages. In 1983, package tours were designed for visiting relatives and friends in Hong Kong. In stage two, during the 1990s, packaged tours to neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand were bought widely. After 2000, Chinese tourists began to reach destinations beyond Asia. Nearly 100 million Chinese visitors travelled to foreign countries in 2013 and became the “world’s biggest-spending” travellers. (Ma, Liu, Li & Shen 2015.) The Chinese government has removed the restrictions through the agreed Approved Destination Scheme (ADS). China’s economy and national income have seen the growth, outbound tourism developed rapidly. The number of outbound tourists expanded from 2,988,700 to 70,250,000 between 1992 and 2001 after the Approved Destination Scheme. (Dai, Jiang, Yang & Ma 2016, 253–258.)

According to UNWTO, Chinese outbound tourists contributed 23.2% of the world’s tourism growth in 2016. Moreover, it was predicted to reach over 0.5 billion between 2014 and 2018. (Huang & Lu 2017.) China’s outbound tourism can be reclassified with various types such as containing business and private tours overseas such as sightseeing, holiday making, visiting friends and relatives, health purposes, shopping, conferences and other activities concerning economy, culture, sport and religion. Traveller behaviors are critically affected by their motivations. (Dai, Jiang, Yang & Ma 2016, 253–258.) Based on Visit Finland’s statistic, top three Chinese outbound destinations by number of arrivals 2017 are Hong Kong, Macau and Thailand (Visit Finland 2018).

Chinese authority gives permission for their citizens to travel to Nordic region in ADS package groups. On the other hand, it is mandatory for Chinese citizens to acquire an approved Schengen visas issued by other Schengen member states before travelling to Schengen areas. Chinese tourists are allowed to explore

within the Schengen zone for maximum three months. Nordic destinations give the opportunities for this crucial customer target group by established four visa application centres by the end of 2017. The activity of these Nordic countries has eased the accessibility of visa for Chinese visitors. Therefore, the attainment of visas became easier for Chinese people. (Visit Finland 2018.)

4.2 Statistics on Chinese Tourists

The tourism industry in Finland has seen a rapid increase in the number of overnight stays by foreigners. According to the statistics, the most visited areas for tourists are the Helsinki metropolitan area and Finnish Lapland. In 2016, Finland welcomed 7.7 million international customers who brought 2.5 billion euros to the country. (Wakonen 2018.) According to Statistics Finland (Figure 2), the number of nights spent by foreign tourists in Finland remained the same with 2017 in November 2018. Totally, there were approximately 1.5 million overnight stays in Finland, which was 1.5 per cent more than in 2017. (Statistics Finland 2019.)

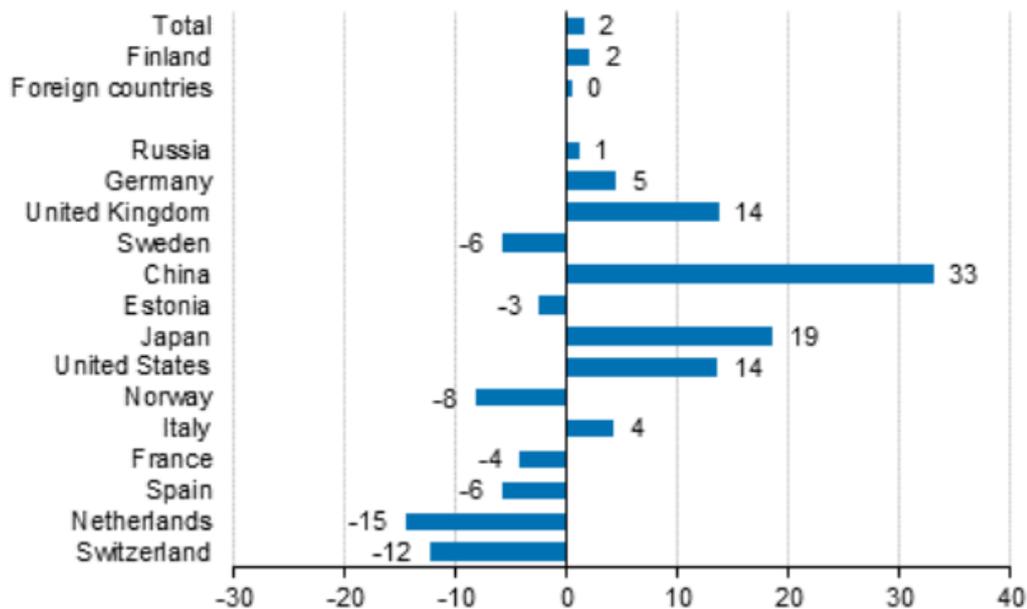


Figure 4. Change in Overnight Stays in November 2018/2017, % (Statistics Finland 2019)

As Figure 2 shows, there was a big change in the number of overnight stays of Chinese tourists in November 2018 compared to 2017. The percentage has risen

to 33% and remains the highest percentages comparing to other countries. (Statistics Finland 2019) Consequently, Chinese tourists have contributed largely to the tourism industry of Finland these recent years and the number of Chinese tourists keeps growing since Rovaniemi is now offering more services and products for Chinese customers. Significantly, the increase of Chinese overnight stay creates substantial advantages for Finland in terms of tourism industry. In January 2019, Chinese tourists were reported to be the highest number of foreign visitors in Rovaniemi with 11,7000 overnight stays (Visit Rovaniemi 2019b).

4.3 Chinese Tourist's Travel Motivations

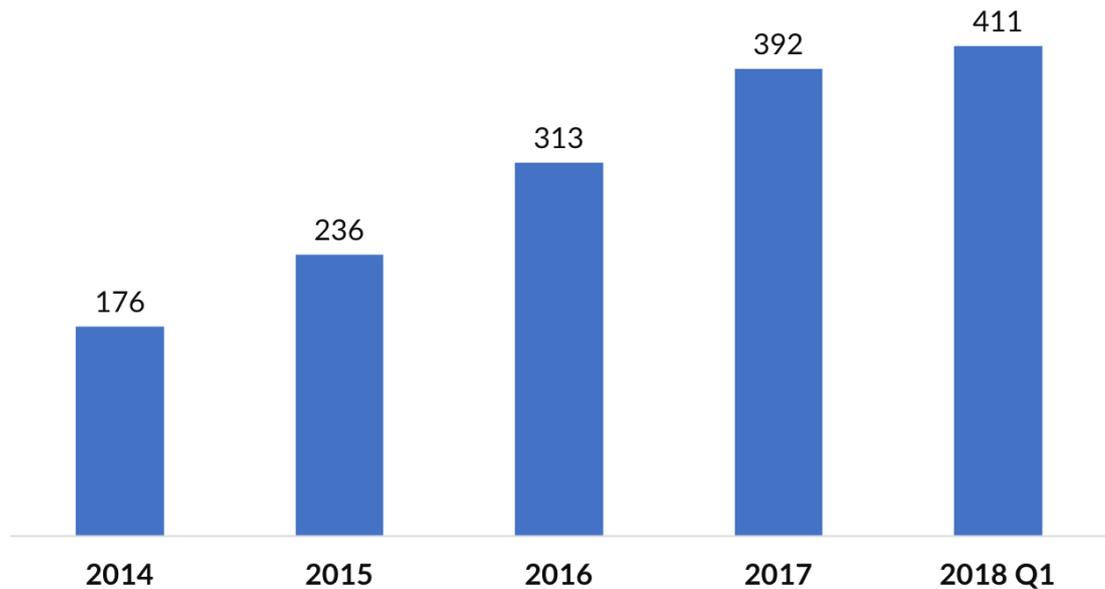
Three different Chinese customer segmentations were demonstrated when mentioning about their travel behaviour. Chinese visitors tend to spend time seeing and going at a destination rather than traveling from one place to another. They are "entertainment/ adventure seekers" who have strong aspiration to enjoy adventurous and stimulating experiences. Significantly, the elements are considered to attract them most are concentrated activities and attractions. Chinese customers can also be recognized as the life-seeing experience or culture explorers. In this customer segment, Chinese tourists wish to "have-it-all" when choosing an overseas destination. The uniqueness in experience and culture is the factor that these travellers are searching for. People in this segment are motivated with observing local people, feeling the atmosphere and trying new experiences both socially and culturally. (Li, Meng, Uysal & Mihalik 2011.)

Traditional Chinese culture features the relationship between human beings and nature. Both human beings and nature should make development harmoniously according to Confucianism. (Wei & Si 2016.) Therefore, Chinese tourists tend to discover wild nature to escape the surrounding environment. According to Verot (2014), Chinese people usually travel together within a group and tend to be more conscious about local culture and food. Chinese tourists want to try local specialities when visiting to countries which are famous for cuisine such as France or Italy. Though they have tended to seek for Chinese and Asian restaurants while traveling abroad, this may reflect a shift in Chinese tourist's attitude and mentality. (Verot 2014.)

4.4 Trends in Using Online Platform of Chinese Tourists

Nowadays, with the development of technologies, especially in one of the most populated countries in the world – China, there are no reasons to see young people communicate with each other by using social media and different channels. WeChat, Weibo are the most common channels where different events, experiences and issues are discussed. It can be considered as eWOM – electronic word-of-mouth communication. All over the world, there has been a massive rise in the growth of online social networks. From the assumption about media behavior of Chinese tourists on Visit Finland report, it can be seen that WeChat and Weibo are the most used and searched social communication tools in China. (Visit Finland 2017)

Weibo is a system, a microblogging network that made for Chinese people and it contains millions of users. Online social networks such as WeChat, Weibo have turned into a major platform for young people to search for information, to make friends or even to transfer money. Social influence is the concept of people modifying their behavior to bring them closer to the behavior of their friends. It can be affected by the interests and personal habits. One of the biggest online social networks are Sina Weibo. This network is under management of Sina cooperation and was first launched in August 2009. However, during that period, Chinese government decided to block the access to Twitter. Therefore, organizations like Sina and Tencent caught the opportunities and started to create and offer microblog services to millions of users in mainland China. (Yu, Asur & Huberman 2011.)



Source: Tech.sina.com, Walkthechat Analysis

Figure 5. Weibo Monthly Active Users in Million (Wun 2018)

What Weibo has is the well-established ecosystem, therefore, it is deeply embedded in Chinese internet users' habits. According to the statistics, Weibo's monthly active user reached 340 million users in March 2017, became one of the biggest online platforms in the world. (Wun 2018.) However, on November 2018, with an update from The New York Times, the site has gained to 430 million active users a month. Being launched as a public platform, it becomes a tool for viral contents and also becomes the place where Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) turn their popularity into brand ambassador roles. In the other hand, one of the trends while using social media is live streaming and it plays as a crucial component of Weibo's offerings, a tool for K.O.L. to communicate with their followers. Weibo seems to be a lot like Facebook and Instagram combination win Mainland China. (Ren 2018.) Therefore, it is considered as a smart way to promote tourism products and services through K.O.L.s and especially using the online platform such as Weibo in Chinese market.

It would be a shortcoming if WeChat does not appear the list of famous online platform in China. WeChat is a combination of all phone applications. WeChat was first introduced on January 2011 by Tencent. This platform owns a big number of monthly active users – approximately one billion and becomes the most popular application for message in China. From year to year, WeChat has

grown up and integrates different platforms such as payments, bookings. Brands can actually communicate with their subscribers on a personalized level. WeChat is said to be “the first and foremost platform for your direct presence as a brand in China” by José Neves, founder of the e-tailer at The New York Times International Luxury Conference. (Ren 2018.) Consequently, based on the popularity of those online platforms in Mainland China, it can be seen as marketing strategies for Santa Claus Village and Rovaniemi at the moment. Potential Chinese travellers will be easily motivated by surfing Weibo or WeChat and glance at some posts or photos of a travel blogger who is spending his/her vacation in Rovaniemi. Visit Rovaniemi also posted an update on their website about launching their verified Weibo account of Santa Claus. Weibo is seen as an advantageous social media channel that can be used to promote the image of Santa Claus Village in general. It is a modern platform which allows the companies to introduce different types of extra services and products such as accommodation. On November 2019, Santa Claus account on Weibo has reached 21.000 followers (Weibo 2019).

5 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF CHINESE TOURISTS IN SANTA CLAUS VILLAGE

5.1 Thesis Process

The purpose of this paper is to develop a comprehensive list of travel motivations of Chinese travellers in Santa Claus Village, Rovaniemi through conducting the survey. The data was collected through poll, questionnaires and survey. The aim of this method is to gather numerical data and generalize it across groups of people in order to explain a particular phenomenon. A survey produces a profile of cultural tourists and their behaviour and can be used to operationalized a wide range of theoretical concepts.

The survey, which refers to the appendix (Appendix 1), consists of 25 questions related to Chinese tourists' consumer behavior. It includes 5 main parts that are general information, travel behavior, media behavior, visiting Rovaniemi and Santa Claus Village, revisit intentions. The survey was conducted between February 2019 and March 2019. The targeted participants are Chinese travellers. The survey was conducted at Santa Claus Village area due to the author's internship schedule in Nova Skyland Hotel. The author has used own mobile phone and tablet while organizing the survey. Different types of questions were used to obtain satisfactory answers from the respondents. Generally, most of the questions used are single/ multiple choices, others are grid and open-ended questions.

5.2 Quantitative Research Methodologies

Quantitative methods have been used since the early 1990s, which worked as an economic development tool and it was mainly based on surveys. There has been a concentration on quantitative methods to analyse what cultural tourism is and what cultural tourists do. Therefore, conducting the survey was chosen to provide a practical means of monitoring trends over time, which is essential in a fast-moving consumer marketplace. Quantitative approach helps the author relatively easy to work with large groups of Chinese tourists to collect, process and analyse

the data. Essentially, surveys can be conducted in a variety of locations and contexts, allowing comparisons among different countries and attractions. Quantitative research obtains a relatively small amount of information on a large number of respondents. Additionally, quantitative methods allow the author to limit the number of questions and be able to sharpen the focus on the research. (Richards & Munsters 2010, 5–20)

Quantitative research is either descriptive or experimental. What quantitative research deals with are numbers, logic and objective stance. Characteristics concerning quantitative research are illustrated mainly in the form of numbers and statistics. The quantitative methodology was chosen during the thesis process. Quantitative methods concentrate on objective measurements as well as the statistical, mathematical or numerical analysis of data. (USCLibraries 2018.) This method was chosen in order to acquire personal information about Chinese customers' consumer behaviour and travel motivation towards Santa Claus Village, Rovaniemi. Additionally, the data using for this method is collected by using structures research instruments, which is considered appropriately for the research question about Chinese tourists' travel motivations.

The survey includes several aspects related to travel motivations of Chinese customers and will be done in Santa Claus Village. The questionnaires will be made to gain the basic perceptions of Rovaniemi and the tourist attraction through of Chinese travellers. The questionnaires will be in online version as the survey will be used in Google Form. Furthermore, there are some other questions related to the social media habits of Chinese customers. The purpose of the survey is to comprehend their personal perspectives about Santa Claus Village such as their customer services and products during their visiting to Rovaniemi. A survey was formulated on Google Form as Google Form is one of the perceptive tools to achieve the general framework and generalize the results.

The whole questionnaire requires approximately five to eight minutes each person to complete. The research was suitable for travellers in Santa Claus Village and Nova Skyland Hotel. The survey was conducted between February and March, almost off-season in the area. After considering and selecting,

quantitative was chosen as it might give more general numeric form based on the opinions of travellers.

5.3 Reliability and Validity

Reliability reflects how consistently a method measures something. Validity refers to how accurately a method measures what it is intended to measure. If a research has high validity, it means that the research can provide results that correlate highly with real properties, characteristics and variations in the physical or social world. (Middleton 2019.) Qualitative method is more difficult to generalize the findings due to the language barriers of the Chinese tourists. Studying Chinese tourists in Rovaniemi by using quantitative method helps the firms in understanding the overall frame of Chinese customers' perceptions though not every tourist responds to the questionnaire. The selecting respondents for the survey was those who are Chinese speaking travellers and travelling to Santa Claus Village. Participants who answer the survey were chosen with those who were available in the area, both in Nova Skyland Hotel and different spots in Santa Claus Village. The survey was formulated to obtain more details about the pre-, onsite- and post-travel stages. The results of this research will provide the customer's point of view on some aspects regarded to their background, travel preferences, purpose of travel and their feedback on Santa Claus Village. Some responses were obtained from guests who stayed at Nova Skyland Hotel and the entire participants completed the survey when they were visiting tourist attractions or buying souvenirs in Santa Claus Village. The results obtained through an online version – Google Form with the support of tablets in order to collect and analyse the results more effectively.

The customer experiences hospitality at each interaction they go through with the hosts – urban service providers or local residents. Hospitality can be said as the experience of being received as a customer. There are five features that generate the concept of hospitality: satisfaction of needs, unselfishness towards the guest, sincere friendly approach towards, gaining trust of the guests and giving a feeling of safety to the guest. The experience with the questionnaire indicated that no respondent missed any elements in the definition of hospitality. The respondents

were provided with a manual, own interpretation of questions by the respondents is excluded because the respondents are able to explain and answer the survey. “Urban service providers” are divided and made in order to help the customers able to gain specific conclusions per type of service providers. All in this order to increase the validity of the research. (Richards & Munsters 2010, 5–20)

5.4 Results on Consumer Behavior of Chinese Tourists in Santa Claus Village

5.4.1 Respondent’s Background

This chapter discusses the demographic of the respondents based on the results that were taken by the survey. The first part will demonstrate the general background of the respondents such as age, gender, country of residence and their travel companions. The survey received 100 responses.

Most of the respondents were female with 71%, which is the majority of the respondents. Following up, the number of male is 23% and 6% is prefer not to say. Figure 6 shows the proportion of respondents’ age distribution. This pie chart represents how age distributed amongst the respondents and the results of the biggest age group is less than 20 years old (56%) and the smallest age groups are both from 51 to 60 years old (2%) and more than 60 years old (2%). Older people are less prone to travel abroad due to health and language barriers. On the other hand, the two big groups between 21 and 40 ages are more stable in financial issues and able to afford overseas holiday trips.

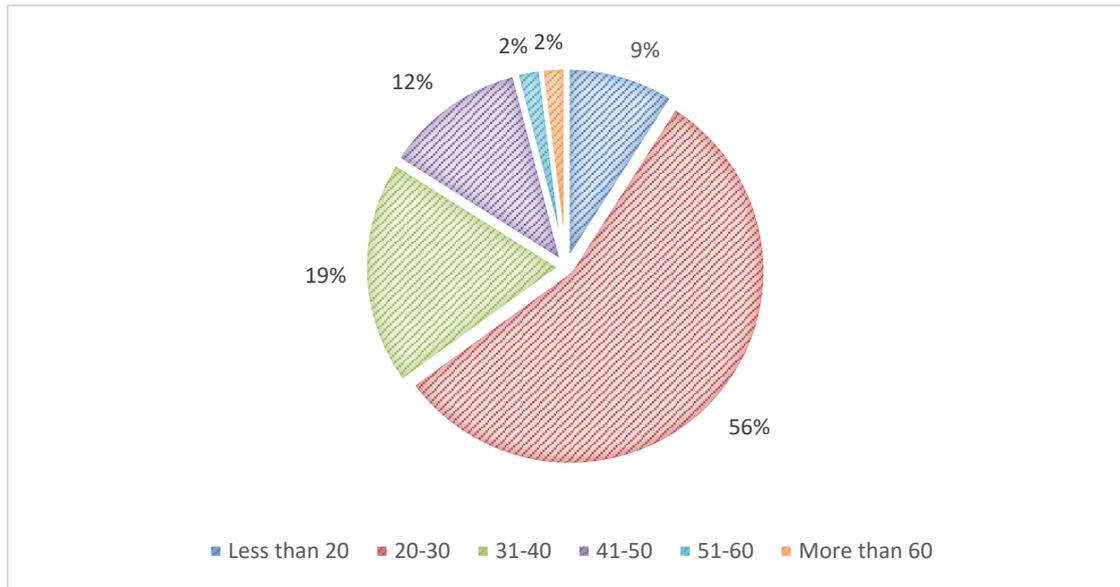


Figure 6. Age Distribution (N=100)

The author desired to investigate whether the country of residence has an impact on consumer behavior of Chinese tourists. Though Rovaniemi has concentrated on attracting tourists all over the world, former statistics still show that the majority is placed mostly in Asian countries. The results based on current survey were demonstrated as following: more than half of the respondents are from Mainland China (61%) as they are the main customer target of Santa Claus Village. Subsequently, the two other big groups are from Singapore (20%) and Taiwan (12%). Rest of the respondents were divided to Malaysia (4%) and Europe (3%). The graph below displays the country of residence of 100 respondents.

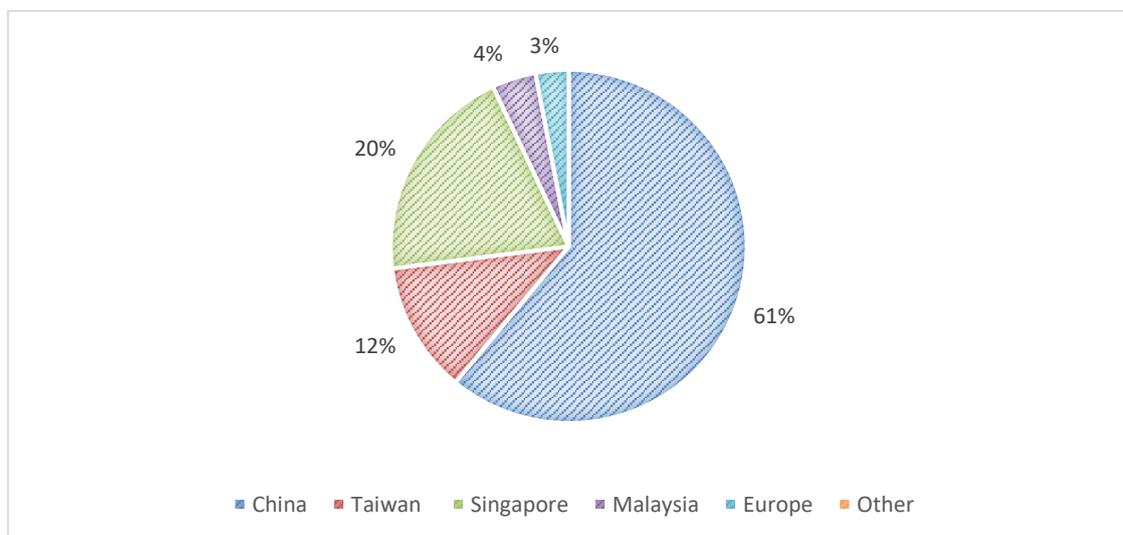


Figure 7. Country of Residence (N=100)

5.4.2 Travel Behavior

Chinese customers' preferred travel styles are divided into three main aspects, which are illustrated in figure 8 above. To be in details, 33 respondents prefer to organize the trips themselves for convenience and to gain initiative. The other big groups include partially packaged tour and fully packaged tour, which consists of 31% and 30% in that order.

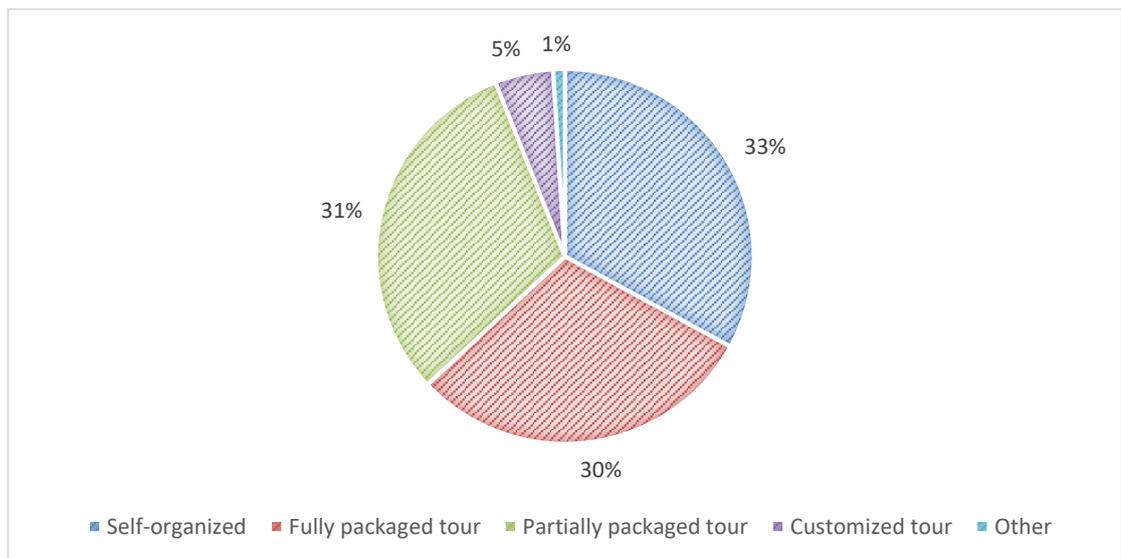


Figure 8. Preferred Travel Style (N=100)

Based on the results, it can be considered that large amounts of Chinese tourists still choose travel companies which provide different fully and partially packaged tour to Rovaniemi instead of travelling themselves. Nowadays, travellers are conscious of their trip by seeking for information and directly booking to the local service providers. Therefore, it is essential in business strategies to have more interactions with the tourists to gain more customers and profits for the firm.

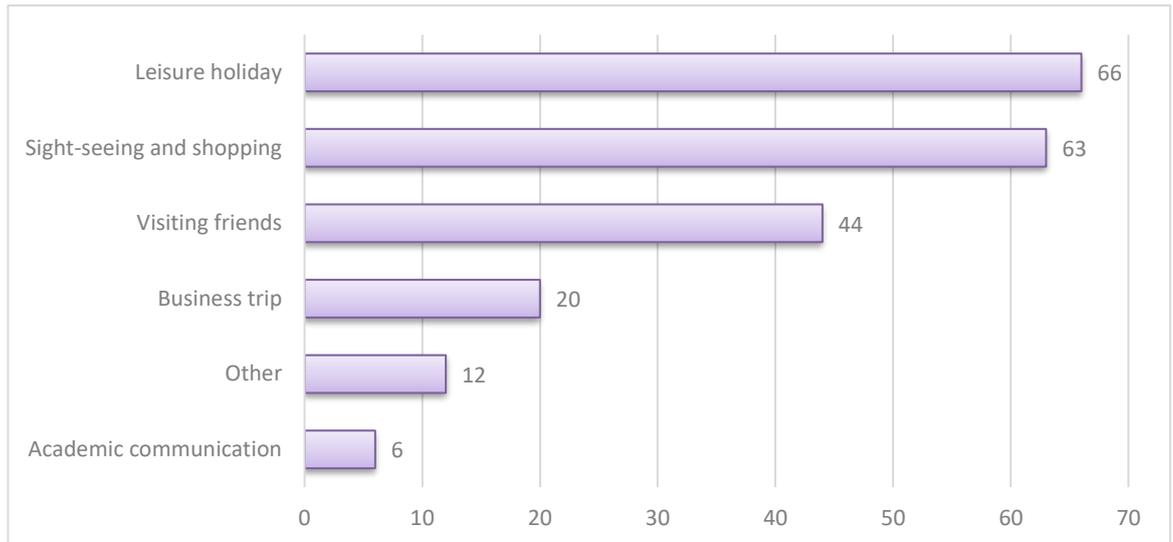


Figure 9. Travel Motivations of Chinese Tourists (N=100)

As stated in the topic, the main purpose of this thesis paper is to observe the consumer behaviour and travel motivations of Chinese tourists at Santa Claus Village. Through the survey, 100 respondents were asked to answer some questions related to their travel motivations, their barriers constraining trip to Finland. As shown in figure 9, leisure holiday is the most chosen by 66 respondents, while sight-seeing and shopping is on the second position. Rovaniemi, as well as Santa Claus Village is famous for its tourist attraction and winter services provided such as reindeer and husky riding, visiting snow castle and snowmobiling. Undoubtedly, most of the tourists come to Rovaniemi and Santa Claus Village for leisure holiday. Beside tourism, Chinese travellers also visit their friends or have a business trip to Rovaniemi, which consists of 44% and 20% consequently.

Figure 10 represents the most challenging elements that influences travel considerations in making decisions to visit Rovaniemi. Language barriers and long flight are the most chosen with 49% and 44% in that order. Those are also the main factors influencing decision making, which is needed for travel organizations to pay attention. It should be a variety in language choices at Santa Claus Village to support the Chinese customers and attract them to choose the products or services which are illustrated in their language. Additionally, high travel cost is one noted elements that firm needs to balance between the price and quality that they offer to customers.

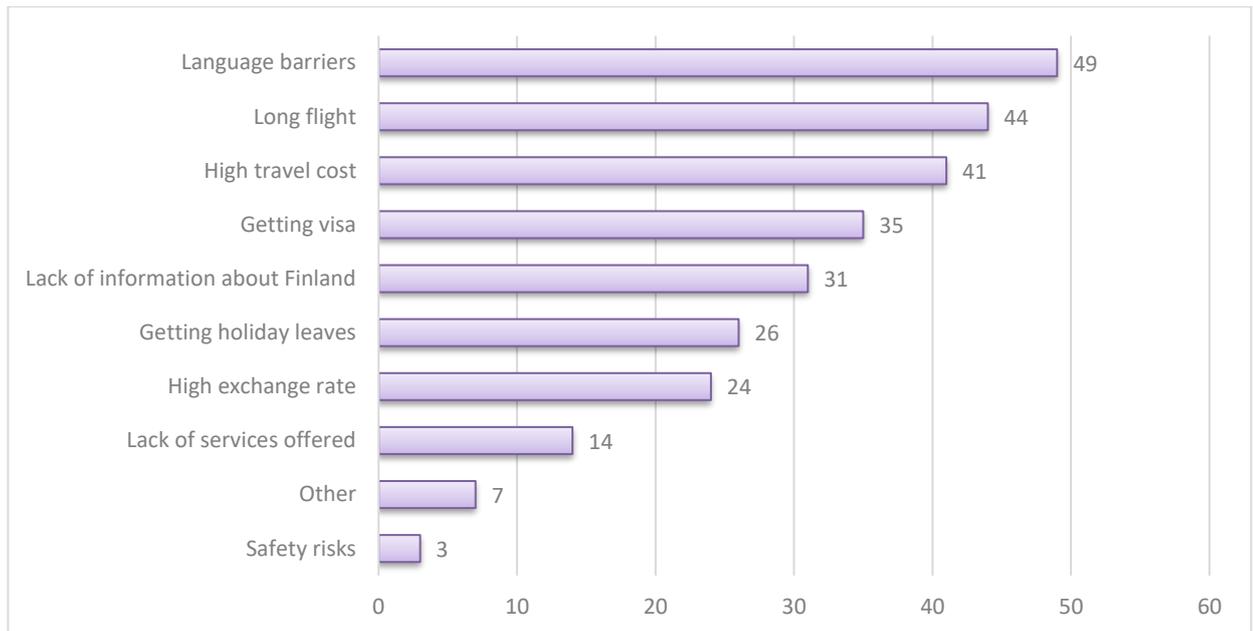


Figure 10. Barriers Constraining Trip to Finland (N=100)

Word-of-mouth seems to be the essential information source that influences the travel findings and purchase decisions of Chinese tourists when considering Santa Claus Village as the destination (Figure 11). Half of the respondents admit to receive the information about Santa Claus Village and Rovaniemi by hearing their friends and relatives sharing about their previous trips to this place. Official website and online travel experience or review are also shown as major elements that Chinese customers are used to search for tourism information. Beside word-of-mouth, people tend to seek for more related and detailed data about one destination. Due to the fact that the internet is developing, people habitually rely on social media and review pages to observe other people's point of view about one aspect. TV program, radio and outdoor brochures do not reach effectively to the information finding area of Chinese customers since there are only 8 responds.

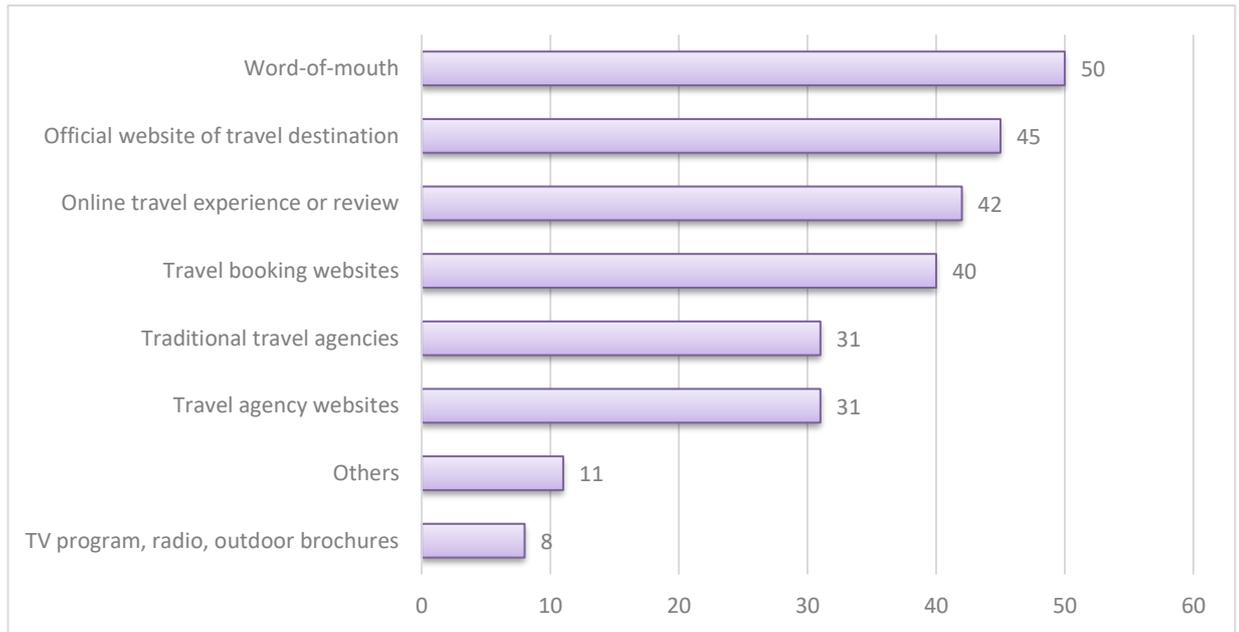


Figure 11. Information Source (N=100)

Figure 12 shows mostly used social media channels of Chinese Tourists. Undoubtedly, Facebook occupied top one as the widely-spread communication tool for people though China government has put restrictions on Facebook and YouTube. It is undeniable the popularity of Facebook while over half of the respondents are spending times on this platform. Weibo, WeChat, Youku and iQiYi are Chinese's own social media network platforms and mainly used in Mainland China.

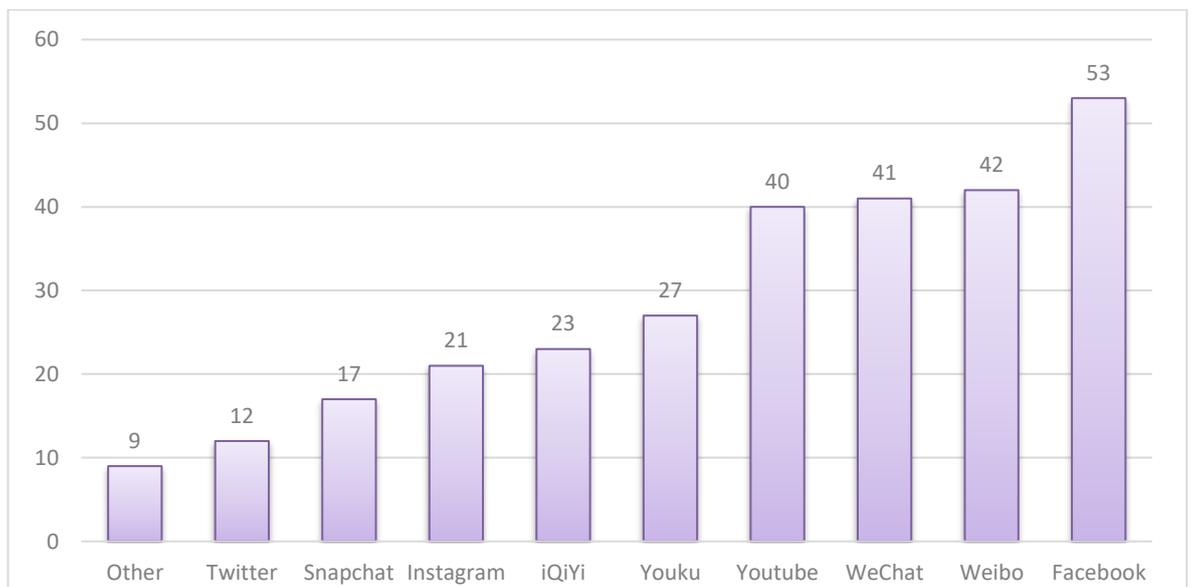


Figure 12. Mostly Used Social Media Channels of Chinese Tourists (N=100)

5.4.3 Visiting Rovaniemi and Santa Claus Village

In this section, the author will analyse the results based on the products and services offering in Santa Claus Village as well as Rovaniemi. Figure 13 below illustrates most important factors affecting tourists' decision while considering trip to Rovaniemi and is listed from the most affecting elements. Culinary experiences and Northern Lights are what bring Chinese tourists most to Rovaniemi. Both the factors accounted for the average grade of 4.57. Obviously, visiting Santa Claus also hold high average grade with 4.52 over 5.

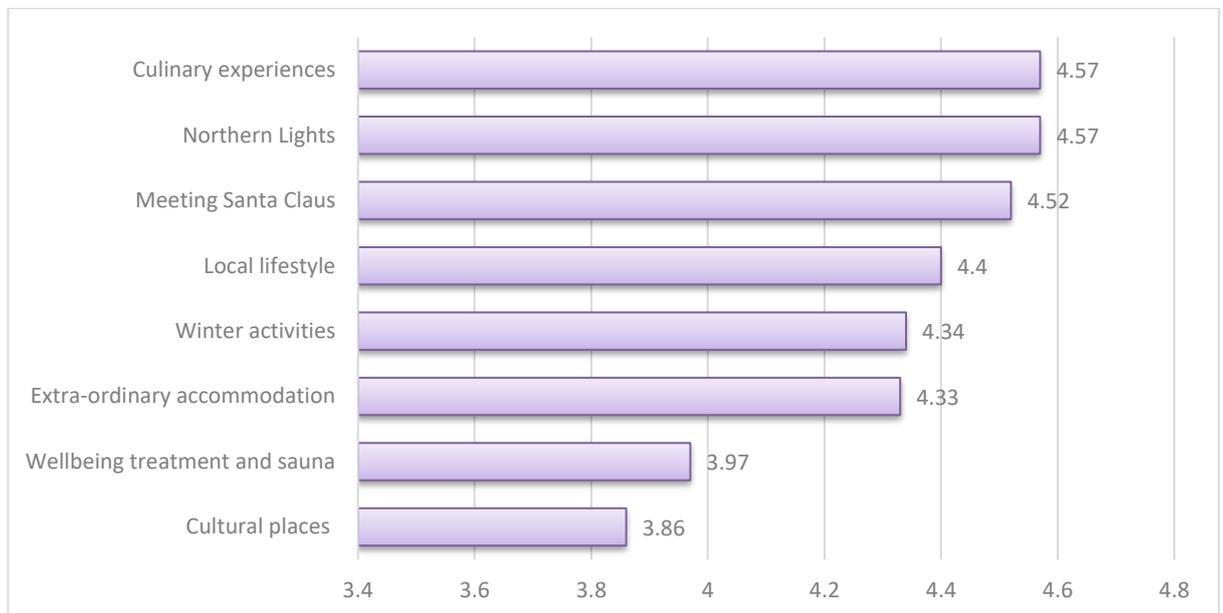


Figure 13. Chinese Visitors' Interest about Rovaniemi (N=100)

Mentioning about the accommodation interests of Chinese tourists, the results were divided into three main majors, which are extra-ordinary accommodation in 31%, luxury hotel/ resort and hotel in 28%. As stated above, Chinese customers are broad-minded in spending huge amount of money on extra-ordinary and luxury products and services. Therefore, the accommodation in Santa Claus Village is always fully-booked before Christmas season. The rest of them choose Airbnb and hostel during their stay in Rovaniemi.

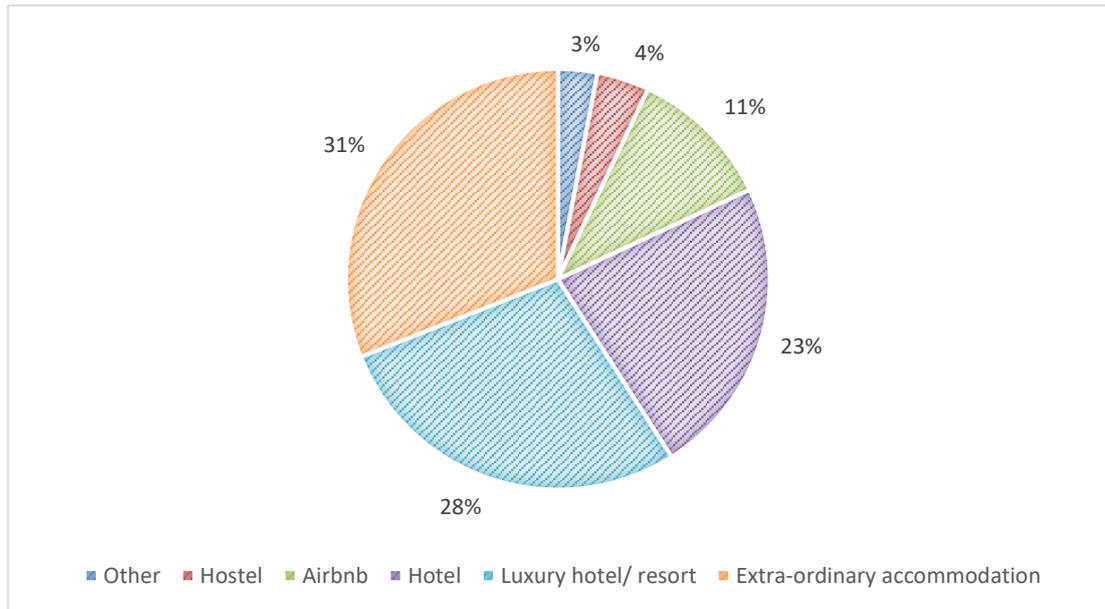


Figure 14. Accommodation Interests (N=100)

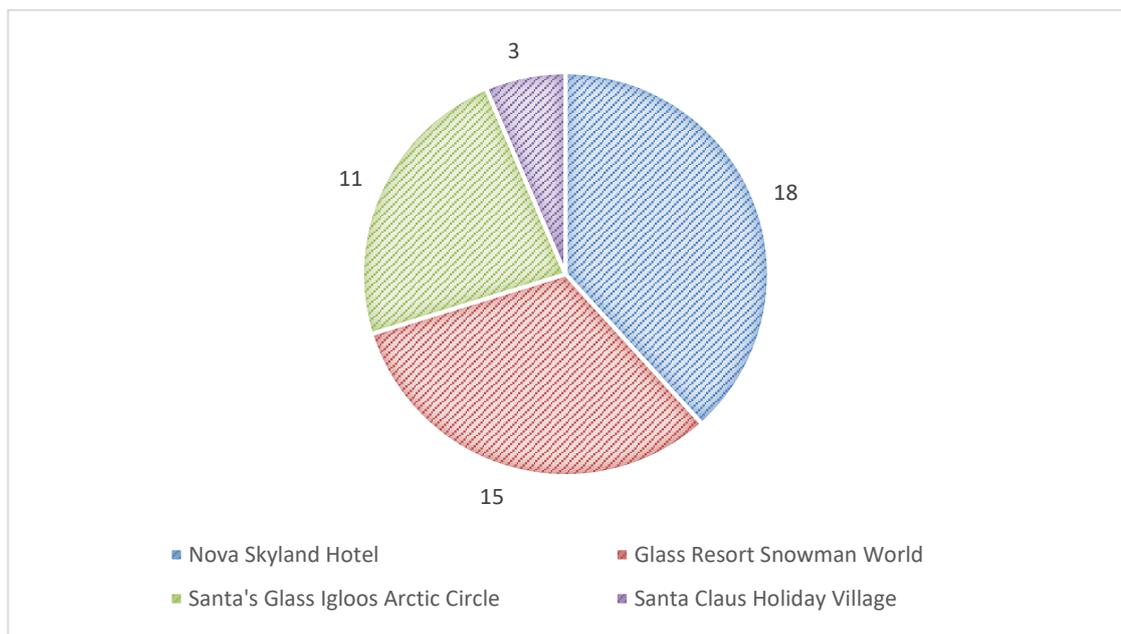


Figure 15. Chosen Accommodation in Santa Claus Village (N=47)

In 100 respondents, there are 47 respondents that was staying in Santa Claus Village. The results in the pie chart shown in figure 15 consist 4 accommodation companies in this area, which are Nova Skyland Hotel, Glass Resort Snowman World, Santa's Glass Igloos Arctic Circle and Santa Claus Holiday Village. Most of the respondents stay in Nova Skyland, which represents 38.3% of the results. More than half of the 100 respondents choose to live outside the area and just

visit Santa Claus Village as a tourist attraction. Obviously, the price range is different in places and usually the price per night in these accommodations are highest in town.

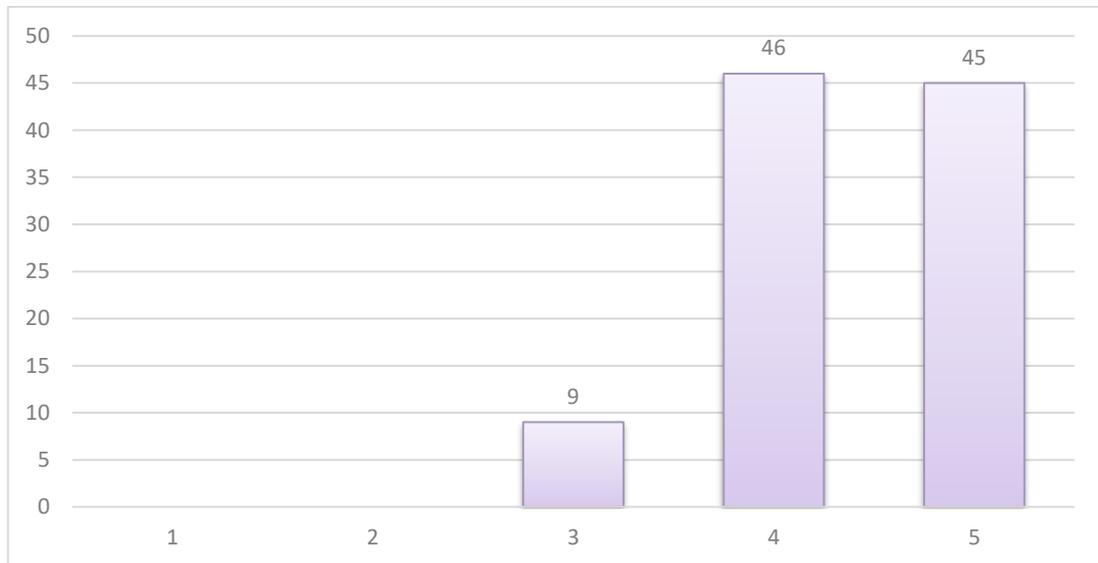


Figure 16. Interest in Santa Claus Village as an Attraction (N=100)

Through figure 16, visitors interest in viewing Santa Claus Village as a tourist attraction is graded from 1 to 5. Most of the respondents are satisfied with the destination. With the average interesting point of 4.36, Chinese visitors have graded Santa Claus Village and its products/ services at high quality standard.

5.4.4 Revisit Intentions

When asking the respondents about their revisit intentions to Rovaniemi and Santa Claus Village, 80% of them said would like to return to the destination ~~again~~ in the future. The entire respondents might be affected by the barriers below, that influence their consideration for returning to Santa Claus Village. Figure 15 together with figure 16 have clearly reflects the assessment of Chinese tourists about the place after going through different touchpoints here. However, most of the respondents chose to recommend Santa Claus Village to other people, accounted 93%.

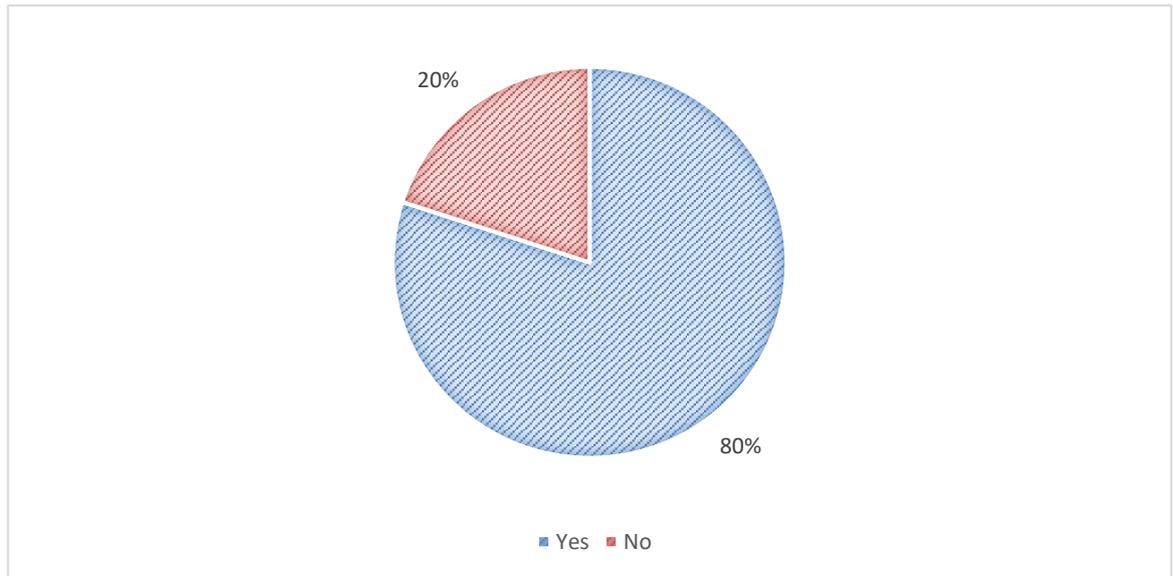


Figure 17. Revisit Intentions of Chinese Tourists (N=100)

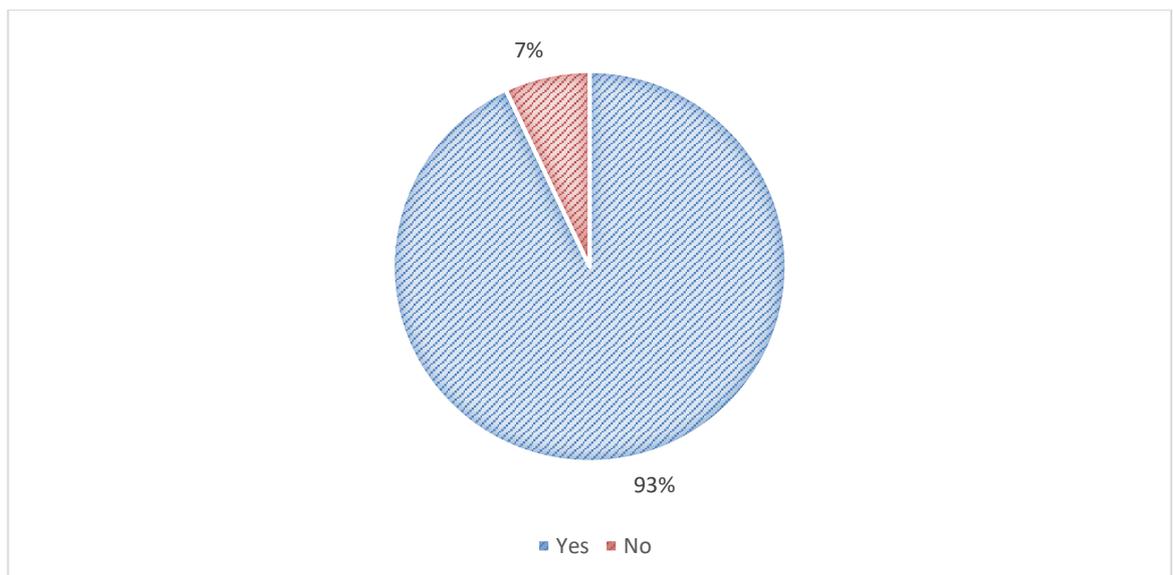


Figure 18. Recommendation to Other People (N=100)

There were only 6 responses when asking about any recommendations for improvements at Santa Claus Village.

The post office should be bigger because it is very crowded.

I planned to visit the Moomin Snowcastle but they closed sooner than expected. A little bit disappointed. Santa Claus Village should have more things to see.

It is very slippery and I almost fell down. Maybe they should put rocks to everywhere these days.

Should have more restaurants with Asian food.

Maybe they should have more shops beside souvenirs.

Regarding 100 respondents' perspectives about Santa Claus Village, its products and services, the tourism in Rovaniemi still seems attractive to lots of Chinese tourists who came here for leisure holiday, especially on winter season. The consumers' background such as age, gender, nationality and consumer's preference on their choices may work as crucial elements to influence their consumer behavior both offline and online site. Though in high season, the companies need to improve at some points. Overall, the answers appear to be mostly positive when asking about Chinese customer's viewpoint on some main products and services in Santa Claus Village.

6 CONCLUSION

The conclusion of the thesis paper summarizes the objectives and results which were accomplished throughout the progress of finding information regarded to travel motivations and customer behaviour of Chinese tourists in Santa Claus Village, Rovaniemi. Also with the help of survey, there are several segments that can be acquired to gain more perceptions. Therefore, travel organizations are able to come up with the solutions on how to modify their current services and products, as well as developing their resources to meet the demands of both Chinese and international travellers.

Apparently, Chinese tourists are identified as the life-seeing experience or culture explorers. Especially, when coming to a purchasing progress, Chinese tourists will seek for the overseas destination and travel agencies which is suitable for their wish to “have-it-all”. What attracts them is the uniqueness of the destination and what can the products and services will provide to them. Chinese tourists would like to observe local people, feel the atmosphere and try new experiences both socially and culturally. That can be explained why Chinese people travel all around the world, even to rural areas. Rovaniemi is famous for its label as the Hometown of Santa Claus Village – which is a symbol of Christmas holiday.

After analysing the surveys with Chinese travellers in Santa Claus Village, an overall frame related to travel motivations of Chinese tourists were perceived. Furthermore, the concentration to each factor will be strengthened. The thesis paper will also provide understandings about Chinese customer behaviour for the company to easily utilize future destination developments based on customer satisfaction and experiences. It can be seen that nowadays, with the terrific development of Internet and online platforms, Chinese tourists more and more rely on social media to seek for information related to the destination they intend to visit. Facebook, Weibo and WeChat are the top three online platforms which Chinese people spent time most. Therefore, one of the best method for the firms is not to miss the potential of Chinese customers: improve one’s visibility on Chinese websites. Chinese tourists are more influenced by the Internet and tend to plan the whole trip based on what they found. Social media is an excellent tool

and platform to know the expectations and requirements of Chinese customers. Social content management, therefore, plays as a critical role in business strategies when it contains lots of major elements, which contribute to the success of firms. Social content management helps organizations to deal with information management issues and helps business managers clearly perceive their information needs within the social media context. Moreover, word-of-mouth is the most effective way to influence people and it works as an impulse to formulate the travel motivation of Chinese tourists. On the other hand, Santa Claus Village has successfully in creating a trustworthy image and an extraordinary international destination for Chinese tourism market.

Tourist players must research carefully about Chinese tourism market as well as understanding their consumer behaviour and adapt to their needs in order to meet their expectations. It might be difficult as the tourism market is constantly evolving. On the other hand, quantitative surveys have their limitations. However, it is undeniable that surveys have a crucial role in collecting empirical data in tourism research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Customer Questionnaire about Santa Claus Village

Appendix 1. Survey on Consumer Behavior of Chinese Tourists in Santa Claus Village

Survey on Experiences at Santa Claus Village

On behalf of Nova Skyland Hotel we kindly ask You to spend approximately 5 minutes to this online survey. I aim to listen to your opinions on Santa Claus Village and your travel habits to support new development for Santa Claus Village and external services in Rovaniemi area in the future.

All your response will be kept confidential and will be used only for the author and the commissioner of this thesis work. Please fill in this quick survey and let us know your viewpoint.

* Required

General Information

1. 1. Your gender *

Mark only one oval.

- Male
 Female
 Prefer not to say

2. 2. Age *

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 20
 20-30
 31-40
 41-50
 51-60
 More than 60

3. 3. Country of residence *

Mark only one oval.

- China
 Taiwan
 Singapore
 Malaysia
 Europe
 Other

4. 4. Who did you travel with? *

Mark only one oval.

- Alone
- With family/ relatives
- With friends/ acquaintances
- I am on a group tour

Travel Behaviors**5. 5. Earlier outbound travel experience ***

Mark only one oval.

- Travelled abroad but never to European countries
- Travelled to European countries but never to Finland
- Travelled to Finland
- Never travelled abroad
- Other

6. 6. Preferred travel style *

Mark only one oval.

- Self-organized
- Fully packaged tour
- Partially packaged tour
- Customized tour
- Other

7. 7. How long is your visit to Finland? *

Mark only one oval.

- 1-2 days
- 3-4 days
- 5 days or longer

8. 8. What are your purposes/ achievements when travelling to Finland? *

Check all that apply.

- Leisure holiday
- Sight-seeing and shopping
- Visiting friends
- Business trip
- Academic communication
- Other

9. 9. What are your barriers/ difficulties constraining trip to Finland? (Please, choose 1 - 3 difficulties) *

Check all that apply.

- Language barriers
- Getting visa
- High travel cost
- High exchange rate from Chinese Yuan to Euro
- Long travel time by flight
- Difficulties in getting holiday leaves
- Lack of information sources about Finland
- Lack of travel services offered for travelling to Finland
- Safety risks
- Other

10. 10. What type of accommodation would you prefer when travelling? *

Mark only one oval.

- Luxury hotel/ resort
- Extra-ordinary accommodation (i.g Igloo, Snowhotel)
- Hotel
- Airbnb
- Hostel
- Other

Media Behavior

11. 11. Where have you found information about Santa Claus Village? (Please, choose 1-3 the most important sources) *

Check all that apply.

- Online travel experience or review
- Travel booking websites
- Travel agency websites
- Official website of travel destination
- Traditional travel agencies
- Word-of-mouth
- TV program, radio, outdoor brochures
- Others

12. 12. Which social media channels do you use to find travel information? (Please, choose 1-3 the most important channels) *

Check all that apply.

- WeChat
- Weibo
- Youku
- iQIYI
- Youtube
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Other

13. 13. Did you find useful information about Santa Claus Village in Chinese? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

Visiting Rovaniemi and Santa Claus Village

14. 14. What are your top interests in Rovaniemi? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1 = Not interesting at all	2	3	4	5 = Very interesting
Historic attractions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural places and design districts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Museums displaying local culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Culinary experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Northern lights	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Natural parks and forests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meeting Santa Claus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Winter activities (i.g. skiing)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Husky/ reindeer ride	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Snowmobiling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experiencing local lifestyle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Extra-ordinary accommodation (i.g. igloo)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wellbeing treatment and sauna	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. 15. Have you visited Santa Claus Village before? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

16. 16. How would you rate your customer experiences in the following attractions in Santa Claus Village? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	No experience	Very poor	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Meeting Santa Claus	<input type="radio"/>					
Santa Claus Post Office	<input type="radio"/>					
Bearhill Husky Park	<input type="radio"/>					
Arctic Circle Husky Park	<input type="radio"/>					
Moomin Snowcastle	<input type="radio"/>					
Arctic Circle Snowmobile Park	<input type="radio"/>					
Snowman World	<input type="radio"/>					
Shopping	<input type="radio"/>					
Restaurant and Cafe	<input type="radio"/>					

17. 17. How would you rate the quality of the staff in Santa Claus Village? *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The staff can communicate in Chinese well	<input type="radio"/>				
The staff is willing to help/support	<input type="radio"/>				
The staff is friendly	<input type="radio"/>				
The staff can solve problems quickly	<input type="radio"/>				

18. 18. Are you an overnight visitor at Santa Claus Village?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No (please continue to question 21)

19. 19. Which accommodation did you choose in Santa Claus Village?

Mark only one oval.

- Nova Skyland Hotel
- Glass Resort Snowman World
- Santa's Glass Igloos Arctic Circle
- Santa Claus Holiday Village
- Other

20. 20. How would you rate the accommodation services in Santa Claus Village?

Mark only one oval per row.

	No experience	Very poor	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Check-in and check-out	<input type="radio"/>					
Facilities (i.g. cleanliness)	<input type="radio"/>					
Price-quality ratio	<input type="radio"/>					
Professionality of staff	<input type="radio"/>					

21. 21. How would you rate Santa Claus Village as an attraction? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent				

Revisit Intentions

22. 22. Would you like to return to Santa Claus Village? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

23. 23. Would you recommend Santa Claus Village to other people? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

24. 24. Would you like to visit Finland again?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

25. 25. Do you have any recommendations for improvements at Santa Claus Village?

26. If you wish to participate the raffle of Lappish souvenirs, please enter your email address here.

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING THIS SURVEY!

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