

# UNDERSTANDING THE ONSHORE EXPERIENCE OF CHINESE CRUISE PASSENGERS

## BASIC RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the experiences of Chinese cruise passengers at ports of call?

## KEY PAPER(S)

Andriotis, K., & Agiomirgianakis, G. (2010). Cruise visitors' experience in a Mediterranean port of call. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 12(4), 390-404.

Sun, X. D., Feng, X. G., & Gauri, D. K. (2014). The cruise industry in China: Efforts, progress and challenges. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 42, 71-84.

## MOTIVATION/ PUZZLE

The emergence of the experience economy has forced many operators in the tourism industry to rethink how they manage their business operations. It is now the experience, and not the facility or scheduled program of activities, which has become of principal importance for a growing number of consumers. The Chinese cruise tourism market, as a niche market of the experience economy has grown exponentially over the last five years. Yet, despite the size of this emerging market very little is actually known about the Chinese cruise tourism, including that related particularly to the onshore component of the overall cruise experience. This being despite the fact that industry sources reveal that 45% of Chinese cruise tourists had reported that the destinations visited, and the on-shore excursions experienced, were key determinants for their cruise choice (Mango.com, 2014). In fact, a review of the pertinent literature reveals that little research has been undertaken to date that either validates the current cruise offerings or offers any substantial insight into the motivations and experiences of Chinese passengers traveling on an international cruise.

## THREE CORE ASPECTS OF ANY EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

### THE IDEA

The Chinese market has become the largest outbound tourism market in the world – equating to approximately 120 million travelers in 2015 (Wu & Yuan, 2016). Nearly one million Chinese have taken an international cruise in 2015 alone (Cruise Lines International Association, 2016). While the Chinese cruise tourism market has grown rapidly, the paucity of research that has been undertaken to explore the different aspects of it is notable with the vast majority of research on cruise tourism being focused solely on the profiles, motivations, and expenditure of western travelers. Yet mainland Chinese travelers are very different culturally with the onshore experience considered a key component of the overall cruise experience. Therefore, this research seeks to add to the body of knowledge by understanding the onshore experience of Chinese cruise passengers which may, in turn, provide a greater insight into the preferences they have and the reasons for the choices they make.

### THE DATA

- 17,000-word field note which recorded participant observation and casual conversations;
- 53 semi-structured in-depth interviews with mainland Chinese cruise passengers, each of approximately 35 minutes duration

### THE TOOLS

Given the limited research undertaken to date with respect to the experiences of Chinese cruise passengers, constructivism was chosen as the overarching paradigm to serve as the philosophical foundation for the study. A qualitative research design was used by the researcher to achieve a rich and deep understanding of Chinese cruise passengers' experiences. Given the aims of the study and the paradigm chosen, a grounded theory approach that leads to the development of a related substantive theory from data was adopted for the study. Data collection tools in the form of semi-structured, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and casual conversations were used to gather data. Data collection was conducted from Mar 2016 to Jun 2016 on three international cruise ships departing from Shanghai, China to Japan/South Korea.

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## TWO KEY QUESTIONS

### WHAT'S NEW

Cruise tourism is a relatively new form of tourism for mainland Chinese passengers (Beijing Business Today, 2014). Their motivations and preferences may not be the same as passengers from western countries (Fan & Hsu, 2014). Given little is known about the onshore experience of mainland Chinese cruise passengers, this study will represent one of the first studies that explore the experience of mainland Chinese cruise passengers at ports of call.

### SO WHAT

This research will address the gap in the cruise literature within the Chinese context. Understanding what experiences mainland Chinese passengers have at ports of call is critical for travel agencies and cruise lines to develop appropriate experiences and marketing strategies to improve Chinese cruise passengers' satisfaction.

## ONE BOTTOM LINE

### THE CONTRIBUTION

- By using a grounded theory approach, a substantive theory will be developed that formulates the relationships between concepts and categories derived from the raw data to help explain the phenomenon. It is expected that the present study will make a valued contribution to the current body of knowledge with respect to cruise tourism in China.
- This research will provide implications for international cruise companies through providing a deep understanding of Chinese cruise passengers. Correspondingly, marketing recommendations will be discussed.

### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Target journals: *Tourism Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, or other A or A\* tourism journals.
- Risk: Ethical approval was obtained in Nov 2015. This study involves no added risk above the risks of everyday living. Participants only answered questions about their cruise motivations and experiences at a time and location on board that was convenient for participants.
- Scope: The scope of the research is appropriate and has been scaled to ensure it is completed in the desired PhD time frame for candidates at UQ.