

# Leisure-based tourist behavior: a case study of Changchun

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## Abstract

Leisure-based tourism constitutes an important part in China's domestic tourist market. This article reports the findings of a case study of leisure-based tourist behavior conducted in Changchun, the capital city of Northeast China's Jilin Province. The composition and demographic profile of the leisure-based tourist market are presented. Leisure-based tourists' preference with regard to destination choice, leisure facilities used, and accommodation is analyzed. It is concluded that in-depth understanding of leisure-based tourist behavior will contribute significantly to the enhancement of tourist city images, modification of urban tourist attraction systems, effective exploitation of urban tourism resources and destination management and marketing.

**This paper is essentially a report of a field research. Nevertheless, socioculturally contextualized findings as such may contribute significantly to the existing empirical knowledge of tourism behavior.**

## Introduction

Tourist behavior has been a major topic for decades under academic scrutiny in tourism research literature. Contributions have been made from various aspects to the understanding of tourist behavior. Tourists' spatial and temporal behavior was empirically investigated in a number of studies (Pearce, 1988; Fennell, 1996; Huang and Wu, 1997). Behavior frameworks were also developed to account for the differences between tourists' home-based behavior and their vacation behavior (Burch, 1969; Graburn, 1983; Nash, 1996; Turner, 1969; Pearce, 1982; Currie, 1997) conceptualizing such differentiations as the compensatory the spill-over/familiarity the liminal and the liminoid. Additionally researches on segmentational differences in tourist behavior are often found in cross-cultural studies with a tourism context (Pizam and Jeong, 1996). Furthermore it is also not uncommon for tourist behavior to be examined in comparison to residents' leisure behavior (Xiao, 1997).

Despite the many research endeavors and multidimensional findings in tourist behavior, destination-based comprehensive investigations into tourist behavior need to be further conducted in order to come to an overall understanding of tourist behavior in distinct sociocultural contexts. Researches to this end are theoretically as well as practically significant in that they may extend the breadth of knowledge of tourism behavior on the one hand and contribute to destination management and planning on the other.

The objective of this research is to reveal the findings of a case study of leisure-based tourist behavior conducted in Changchun, the capital city of north-east China's Jilin Province. The results of the present research will shed light on the enhancement of city

images, the modification of urban tourist attraction systems, effective exploitation of tourism resources and destination management or marketing.

## Backgrounds and methodology

Changchun, meaning "eternal spring" in Chinese, is the capital of Jilin Province. Located in the center of the north-east plain, Changchun was first settled more than 1,000 years ago. However, the town did not develop until the Russians pushed through the trans-Siberian railway to the banks of the Yitong River at the turn of this century. The town grew enormously in the 1930s after it was made the capital of the Japanese puppet state (Manchukuo). During Japan's military occupation of the area (1933-1945), wide avenues were constructed, tall buildings erected, and electricity lines were laid underground for strategic reasons.

The town was further developed after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. China's first automobile factory was built. Factories were set up to produce railway cars, electric motors, machine tools, textiles and processed foodstuffs. Major feature films were produced at the Changchun film studios.

As a consequence of its relatively short history there are no historical sites or ancient monuments in the city. Nevertheless, there are some places of interest for visitors, such as: Laodong Park; Nanhu Park; People's Park; Shengli Park; Changchun Movie Studio; Cinema Palace; and the Imperial Palace of the Japanese Puppet State. With a population of 1.9 million people and an area of 210 square kilometers, Changchun is also known for its "three treasures of the northeast (ginseng, sable furs and antler horn)", which become reserved purchase items in tourist commodities.

Tourism development in Changchun has been remarkable in the past few years. According to statistics of Changchun Tourism Bureau, the city has received overseas tourists of 34,000 people and earned



foreign currency of US\$15.65 million in 1997 alone, a 4.3 per cent increase compared to 1996. In the strategic tourism development plan of Changchun municipal government, the city aims at an overseas tourist arrival of 265,000 visitors and a domestic tourist arrival of 9.2 million visitors by the year 2010, with touristic revenue added up to US\$127 million for inbound tourism and RMB 2,300 million (yuan) for domestic travel. Additionally, a tourist infrastructure and urban tourism attraction system have been further implemented, and the tourist image of the city has been improved by means of catering better to tourists' needs.

To accurately collect data concerning leisure-based tourist behavior in Changchun and to guarantee a high response rate, a postage-paid mail survey and field survey were used in the data collection process. Due to the cold weather and the off season of tourist visitation in winter, the timing of the survey was planned for June, August and November of 1996. A total of 1,000 questionnaires were distributed and/or mailed intermittently in three major tourist sites of the city (namely, the Imperial Palace of the Japanese Puppet State, Changchun Movie Studio and Cinema Palace), and 720 valid questionnaires were collected either on the spot or by the postage-paid and address-provided envelopes, a response rate of 72 per cent. Data processing was subsequently conducted in a prespecified computer-aided formula.

## Results and findings

Data processing based on simple random sampling at three major tourist sites generates the origins of leisure-based tourists to Changchun (see Table I). Due to geographic proximity, north-east China's Jilin, Liaolin and Heilongjiang provinces form the most significant domestic tourist market to Changchun, covering 56.94 per cent of leisure-based tourists to the city. Each of the three provinces is within a linear distance of 700 kilometers to Changchun. North China's Beijing, Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Shanxi, Shandong and Henan provinces or regions become domestic tourist generating origins of secondary importance, sharing 29.27 per cent. Shanghai is also a potential market of leisure-based tourism to Changchun, which cannot be readily interpreted in terms of spatial distance. Nevertheless, south China's Jiangsu, Guangdong and Hainan provinces, as the figure in Table I indicates, are insignificant in generating leisure-based tourists to Changchun.

As highlighted by Table I, leisure-based tourists to Changchun demonstrate distance discrimination in their destination choice.

**Table I**

Origins of leisure-based tourists to Changchun (sample 720)

Origin	Number of respondents	Percentage
Jilin Province	180	25
Liaolin Province	140	19.44
Heilongjiang Province	90	12.5
Beijing	50	6.94
Hebei Province	60	8.33
Inner Mongolia	20	2.78
Shanxi Province	20	2.78
Shandong Province	20	2.78
Henan Province	40	5.56
Shanghai	50	6.94
Jiangsu Province	10	1.39
Guangdong Province	20	2.78
Hainan Province	10	1.39
Other	10	1.39

The longer the distance between the tourists' origins and destinations, the lower the tourist arrivals. With regard to domestic leisure tourism in Changchun, the most attractive linear distance is within 350 kilometers, which generates about 54 per cent of leisure-based domestic tourists. However, effective attraction distance may extend to as far as 1,500 kilometers, depending on rail and/or air transportation. Results from this survey confirm the findings that accessibility and distance serve as the most influential factors in tourists' destination choice decisions. In this sense, Changchun as a domestic tourist city suffers from a low attraction or popularity index to leisure-based tourists from south China, south-west China and north-west China. This partly accounts for the slow development of Changchun's domestic tourism.

The composition and demographic profiles of leisure-based domestic tourists to Changchun are shown in Table II. The gender composition of leisure-based tourists to this city, as the survey results indicate, is 61.1 per cent male against 38.83 per cent female. In terms of the respondents' occupation, cadres, technical personnel and factory workers add up to 68.06 per cent, forming the primary base, with students (8.33 per cent), private businesspeople (5.56 per cent) and teachers (5.56 per cent) following as the secondary segments.

Gender differentiation and occupational composition exert significant influence on the behavior patterns and attraction preferences of leisure-based tourists to Changchun. The relatively higher education that cadres and technical personnel received (52.78 per cent above college and 36.11 per cent at the level of senior high school) partly accounts for the greater preference for

**Table II**

Composition and demographic profiles of  
leisure-based tourists to Changchun (sample  
720)

Composition	Number of	
	respondents	Percentage
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	440	61.17
Female	280	38.83
<b>Occupation</b>		
Peasant	10	1.39
Factory worker	120	16.67
Cadre	220	30.56
Service worker	60	8.33
Private businesspeople	40	5.56
Student	60	8.33
Teacher	40	5.56
Technical personnel	150	20.83
The retired	20	2.78
<b>Age</b>		
11-20	40	5.56
21-30	200	27.78
31-40	170	23.61
41-50	160	22.22
51-60	140	19.44
61 and above	10	1.39
<b>Education</b>		
Junior high school	80	11.11
Senior high school	260	36.11
College and above	380	52.78
<b>Monthly income (RMB yuan)</b>		
100	50	6.94
101-200	50	6.94
201-300	120	16.67
301-400	170	23.61
401-500	110	15.28
501-600	50	6.94
601-800	60	8.33
801-1000	40	5.56
1,000 and above	70	9.72

culturally loaded tourist attractions of the surveyed respondents.

The differentiation of the respondents in monthly income also affects leisure-based tourists' behavior, especially in their vacation duration and accommodation services used.

Table III indicates leisure-based tourist motivation and their behavior preference in attraction or tourist facility decisions. Among leisure-based tourists to Changchun, cadres, factory workers, technical personnel and businesspeople are the most important segments, which correspond to a high of 77.77 per cent, in stating business and convention as their primary motivation of travel. This highlights significant implications for tourism management in Changchun to

implement domestic tourism development plans, to adjust urban tourism product and service provision, and to better promote urban tourism of the city to its intended target markets. As indicated by the survey results, sightseeing tourism and tourism related to vacation and holiday, which are currently specified as a major increase margin in the city's strategic tourism development plan, are proved at best in their infancy.

Behavior preferences in relation to site and facility selection are closely related to the education, age, occupation and family structure of the surveyed respondents. Changchun has long been known as "town of movies" and "town of the automobile". Changchun Movie Production Studio, the first since the establishment of PR China, and the First Automobile Works (FAW) of Changchun, China's largest automobile industry base, have been of great appeal to the leisure-based domestic tourists. Changchun Movie Studio, the Imperial Palace and Cinema Palace can be regarded as key attractions in its urban tourism image, covering a high percentage of respondents' site selection, 70.83 per cent, 62.5 per cent and 51.38 per cent respectively. Based on the spatial and temporal patterns of tourist behavior (Chen and Bao, 1988), leisure-based tourists tend to select scenic sites of greater renown. On this basis, the probability of selecting the Imperial Palace and the Movie Studio, as indicated in the survey results, is greater, although there is still much potential for the Cinema Palace to be developed as an attraction. Though Changchun is also known as "town of the automobile", the corresponding percentage of selection is relatively lower. This partly accounts for the poor accessibility of the site itself and the low public acceptance of auto tourism. In addition, although Bright Moon Pond is regarded as a scenic site of national standing and preserved by the state government, its place as an attraction and the suburban location of the site lead to a low percentage of choice (19.44 per cent). Southlake Park, Zoological and Botanical Garden, and Xiyuji (pilgrimage to the west) Palace are moderately chosen in the survey respondents' site selection because of their high accessibility, good location and the proximity of one to the other.

Leisure-based tourists in this survey demonstrate a regional and occupational differentiation in accommodation facilities used (see Table IV). In the overall selection of hotel types, 77.61 per cent of the respondents chose state-owned accommodation facilities, 6.74 per cent of the respondents stayed in private hotels, and a modest 15.65 per cent of the respondents used houses of friends and relatives as their places of lodging. This finding is a remarkable reflection of leisure-

**Table III**

Leisure-based tourist motivation and site selection (sample 720)

Motivation	Number of respondents	Percentage	Site selection	Number of respondents	Percentage
<b>Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)</b>	70	9.72	<b>Imperial Palace of Japanese Puppet State</b>	450	62.5
<b>Sightseeing</b>	50	6.94	<b>Movie Studio</b>	510	70.83
<b>Vacation/holiday</b>	20	2.78	<b>Cinema Palace</b>	370	51.38
<b>Business/convention</b>	560	77.77	<b>South Lake Park</b>	220	30.56
<b>Learning/investigation</b>	10	1.39	<b>Automobile Town</b>	160	22.22
			<b>Zoological/Botanical Garden</b>	170	23.61
<b>Other</b>			<b>Bright Moon Pond</b>	140	19.44
			<b>Shengli Park</b>	145	20.83
			<b>Xiyuji (pilgrimage to the west) Palace</b>	180	25.0

based tourists' behavior in Changchun. First, even though economic reform in the city has been carried out to a considerable extent, hotel business is primarily operated in a centrally planned economy. Moreover, the results reveal the psychological state of business and convention tourists in accommodation choice. They seek greater comfort, cleanliness and security, which are more likely guaranteed in state-owned hotels. In addition, for the majority of business and convention tourists, their travel and/or accommodation expenses are covered by their organizations back at home; therefore, high room rates of such hotels hardly become discouraging factors in their hotel choice.

Tourist origins are proved in this survey to be a determinant factor resulting in a regional differentiation of accommodation expenses standards. Respondents from economically developed areas or regions tend to allocate more on lodging expenditure, while tourists from economically-less-developed provinces or regions spend correspondingly less on this aspect.

Another equally influential factor contributing to tourists' differentiation of accommodation expenses is the occupation of the respondents. Table IV shows the varying degree to which tourists of different occupations allocate expenditure on lodging,

with an average expenditure of 20 to 25 RMB yuan per night on renting hotel rooms.

## Conclusion

Based on the above analysis and interpretation of the collected data, several conclusions concerning urban tourism management and marketing can be reached.

First, the current development of domestic tourism, as manifested in this city, is still at a premature stage. Because of the financial restrictions of potential travellers, domestic tourism primarily takes the form of business or convention travel in which travel expenditures rely on sponsors. To expand the scope of urban tourism development, greater promotional efforts should be made to enhance the overall image of Changchun as a domestic tourist city. In response to some survey items concerning tourism attractions of the city, a considerable number of respondents are unaware of the key attractions before their actual visit. In essence, the present leisure-based tourism is developing as a subsidiary or alternative activity to the major purposes of the respondents' visit, rather than tourism for tourism's sake. In light of the practice of a five-workday week and the changing leisure behavior of the general domestic market, sightseeing and vacation-oriented tourism should be further promoted as the primary component of domestic tourism, and urban tourist attractions should be better adjusted to this effect.

Second, this survey reveals some issues of customer dissatisfaction with destination management and marketing (see Table V). Among the various dissatisfaction variables, some are related to the construction of tourist infrastructure, others have something to do with residents' perception of and attitude towards tourists; nevertheless, most of the dissatisfaction variables are concerned with tourism management and

**Table IV**

Differentiation in accommodation facilities used (sample 720)

Tourist origin	Room rate/night (RMB yuan)	Tourist occupation	Room rate/night (RMB yuan)
Shanghai	60	Cadre	38.21
Henan	25	Technical personnel	23.21
Shenzhen	75	Worker	15.11
Shandong	33.5	Teacher	20
Inner Mongolia	20	Private businesspeople	12
Heilongjiang	8		
Liaolin	24.5		
Jilin	21.6		
Hebei	32.5		

**Table V**

Dissatisfaction of leisure-based tourists to Changchun (sample 720)

Dissatisfaction variable	Percentage of response
Food/beverage (poor quality of foodstuff, high price, cleanliness, etc.)	25.3
Accommodation (high room rate)	32.7
Transportation (unavailability of tickets, crowdedness, poor standards of travel comfort, etc.)	59.0
Sightseeing (high price of entrance tickets to tourist sites)	58.0
Entertainment (not enough economical facilities to satisfy entertainment and recreational needs)	25.6
Shopping (overcharging tourists)	17.1
Security (excessive courtesies, robbing and tourist crime)	22.4

marketing. In particular, findings of customer dissatisfaction may help destination management to improve product, service and environmental quality, to effectively modify urban tourism product and service provision, and to realistically formulate pricing strategies for leisure-based domestic tourists who are price sensitive in their purchase decisions.

Third, findings of leisure-based tourist behavior can also assist destination management to effectively exploit urban tourism resources so as to avoid seasonality in domestic tourist reception. Changchun is located about 44 degrees north and 125 degrees east; winter lasts five months, the lowest temperature averaging 20°C below zero. Domestic tourism in the past has witnessed a marked seasonal development, with late spring, summer and early fall as the peak season and winter as an off season for domestic tourism. Results of leisure-based tourists' motivation and preferences may become important guidelines to develop packages and programs related to winter recreation and skiing so that seasonality can be partly reduced.

In addition to implications for tourism development, findings of differentiation in accommodation facility decisions provide some implications for hotel development. First, the majority of leisure-based tourists in this study spend an average of 20 to 25 yuan per night on renting rooms. This may help hotel management in this city to better adjust their pricing strategies. Second, most leisure-based tourists to Changchun face a dilemma in accommodation decisions. On the one hand, state-owned hotels offer a higher price with greater security and cleanliness. On the other hand, private hotels, though with a more favorable price offering, are less competitive in terms of cleanliness and security. This highlights the importance of operating economical hotels with more acceptable product/service provisions. In catering to leisure-based domestic tourists, operations of luxury hotels are at present unrealistic practices. Besides, in hotel promotion, attention should be paid to the characteristics

of leisure-based touristic behavior. For the majority of leisure-based tourists, their hotel purchase decisions are inseparably related to their overall touristic budget. Therefore, joint promotion and business co-operation between and/or among hotels, tourist transportation companies, travel trade intermediaries, and destination management are effective ways to the success of hotel operation in catering to leisure-based tourists.

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