

Education Tourism Market in China

An Explorative Study in Dalian

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Abstract

Educational tourism, a burgeoning section in China's tourism market, has attracted great attention from both industry and researchers, however, the focus always falls on young people, the educational demands of other tourists are largely neglected. The paper, firstly does a comprehensive analysis of situation and problems of Chinese inbound, outbound and domestic education tourism markets, and then, based on an investigation made in Dalian with common residents as subjects, attempts to identify basic characteristics of education tourists demands. In light of information obtained from both supply and demand sides, some useful conclusions are reached, from which derive some marketing policies to cultivate Chinese education tourism markets.

Keywords: Educational tour, Demands, Residents, Dalian, China

1. Introduction

Education tourism is a kind of special short-term tourism whose purpose is learning and knowledge gaining and whose major participants are students with minor participants teachers (Guo,2000,pp.4-6). The activities involved in education tours are various, ranging from getting to know a school, custom or culture, studying a language, attending a symposium or seminar to attending an academic or research project (Yuan,2003,pp.10). Anyway, the chief purpose of education tourism is about education and study. So the destinations of education tour are always set in reputed schools, institutes, universities or some historical sites and famous scholars' residence. It is expected that each participant can gain skills or knowledge in education tours. It is believed that education tour can enrich a person's knowledge and upgrade tourists products for the local tourism industry , therefore , greater attention are being given to this market nowadays in China.

Education tourism has been prevailing in developed countries. In its initial stage in foreign countries, most of its participants are students. They would take advantage of their vacation time to take tours abroad for sightseeing and knowledge gaining. In countries of Europe and America, education tourism has become a tradition and been considered to be a crucial part of modern education. On the contrary, education tourism had a relative late start in China. An early one can be dated back to 1989, in which a tour to Confucius residence was launched. And most of the tourists in that tour were foreign guests. Besides, the content of the itinerary was about cultural exchange. After that, training tourism gradually starts to take shape. In 1995, travel agencies specializing in the organization of education tours were founded while in December 1995, all these education established a syndicate, which signified the epoch of education tourism (Wen, 2005, 25-29).

2. Current situation of Chinese education tour market

In 20th century, tourism industry developed at a dramatic pace. Meanwhile it comes into the new age of diversity, with the drastically increasing number of tourists, activities and themes. Among this large tourist population, young students take up a big portion. According to the statistics, education tourism is overwhelmingly popular especially in developed countries. In 1991, totally 42 schools in Japan launched education tour in China and the student participators were 8417(Yuan, 2003, pp.10). However when it came to 2004, the number rose up to 217 schools and 38204 students, which just accounts for 24.4% of the total number of Japanese education tourists that year(Wen,2005,25-29). Though the market is big, it is now just confined within students and young tourists. Education for people with other occupations is still at its initial stage. And this probably results from the inappropriate market segregation of education tourism.

Because China is a country with vast territory and culture, a stable society and a rising status across the world, more

and more foreign education tourists choose China as their education tour destination. At the same time, outbound tour operations with study as the main purpose are also on the increase. Touring for studying languages and experiencing cultures in other countries is becoming one of the top choices for outbound tour among younger generation.

2.1 current situation of inbound education tourism in china

Take the Chinese International Travel Service (CITS) for instance. Organization of inbound education tour has been its traditional service. Each year, CITS has guests from Italy, Germany, Austria, U.K. and Japan. Last year, around 205 batches of tour parties, up to 40 thousands Japanese students, came to China for education tours. Over years, China has been the first destination choice for Japanese education tourists and Beijing hosts almost 85% of them (Dong, 2004, pp.15). It is said that there are 104 schools opening to the Japanese students for education tours in Beijing, including senior high schools, skill training schools and universities. In addition to these academic exchanges, Japanese students also participate in the so-called experiencing education tour, like technology tour, alley tour and environment protection tour. And these Japanese would prefer to live with locals during the education tours so that they may further experience the authentic culture.

Though there is no doubt that inbound education tourism contains tremendous potential, doubt should really be cast onto the discrepancy between the product supply and the demand, because there is indeed a misconception. For example, there are totally 900 thousand Japanese tourists taking tour in Shanghai while there are only 10 thousand education tourists. The figures indicate that such a potential market each travel agency should have competed for is not attractive to Chinese travel services. It is mainly because travel services in Shanghai suppose that since most of the education tourists are students whose purchasing power is not strong, the profits travel agencies could make may be limited. As a matter of fact, though the expenditure per day by students is relatively low, the periods of the education tours are significantly longer. In turn, the total net profits travel services can make through education tours are actually larger than expected. Besides, here are some in-depth relevant effects to enable the inbound education tourists' consumption to grow. Most of the time, students in inbound education tours are always accompanied by their parents or teachers, and the consuming capacity of this group of people should never be ignored. What is more important is that those young students are the potential consumers in the future, so over the long pull, an excellent organization of student education tour can be conducive to the future. In addition, Olympics and World Expo in China are approaching. Tens of thousands foreigners are going to swarm into China. Then we may expect another wave of growth in tourism industry. And an appropriate product and itinerary design would lead to a rise in education tourism in China, too.

2.2 Current situation of outbound education tourism

The living standard in China has been changed drastically since the open and reform. More and more parents prefer to have their children study abroad, because they believe competent people in 21 century should have a broad perspective and global view. And all these attributes can be obtained through overseas study. Propelled by this upsurge of overseas study, Chinese outbound education tourism also takes shape.

Travel agencies doing business on the outbound education tourism specially target on students. Generally, students need to get to know the universities or schools they are going to before they actually study abroad. In 2005, which is the hottest year for education tourism, this kind of "school tour" is popular. However tons of problems jumped out of these school tours: time is too short and limited for students to improve their foreign languages or to have a complete idea about the school; price of the tours is at large high and unacceptable; it is not guaranteed to secure the visa. That means sometimes tourists can't travel abroad though they've got enough money. All these risks made the outbound education tourism shrink a lot after 2005. Yet now the market seems to revivify gradually. Travel services are not only now thinking about making a cut on the price of each tour but also adding something new and informative activity items into the tour itinerary so that students can really benefit or gain some useful knowledge in the tours. There is an advertisement reading "8088 ¥ for 5-day education tour in Japan". The price listed is just the half of that a few months ago (Wang, 2005, pp16.). And there are also some scenic cities included into education tours as tourist attraction. In this trend, we may expect revitalization in the Chinese outbound education tourism.

2.3 Current situation of domestic education tourism

The number of university, middle school and primary school students is between 0.2 billion to 0.3 billion. Yet compared with this figure, the number of student tourists in education tour is nothing. It is not because students are not willing to take education tour or because they are short of money to take tours. Generally it is because none of the travel services has now a large-scale exploration of this market and tour products virtually specializing in student education are rare. In other words, there is a great imbalance of supply and demand in education tourism market.

3. An investigation into educational tourism market in dalian city

Dalian, one of Chinese 10 best tourism cities, have attracted tourists from all over the world for its mild coastal climate, spectacular seascape, fascinating theme parks and festivities. Owing to its desirable location neighbored with Japan and Korean and proximity to Beijing, capital of China, It has been attracting overseas students from Japan, Korean, Russia and other countries to study Chinese or pursue degrees in its many notable universities and high schools.

Compared with strong demands, supply of domestic education tourism in Dalian lags far behind, mainly because the product and itinerary are not as various as expected and most of them are intended for students. Travel agencies now don't care about other education groups, like teachers or scholars. As for the contents of the itinerary, it is still far from satisfaction of tourists. Most of the time, travel agencies only base their domestic education tourism on historical and natural sites touring, which essentially is not that much "knowledge gaining". Yet there is still something new about domestic education tourism. In recent years, travel agencies are aware of the demand for prospective university tours. They organize several tour parties with the chief purpose visiting the reputed universities in Beijing and Shanghai, which prove to be welcomed. Yet domestic supply still has a long way to go to catch up with the up-to-date demands. Travel agencies need not only more detailed market segmentation but also an innovative itinerary with a fair price.

However, in China as a whole, educational tours conducted nowadays basically cater to teenagers, while those programs designed for other groups of people are largely neglected(Wang, 2005, pp16.). In fact, educational tour, as a style of traveling with the aim of enlarging knowledge and mastering skills, should be a popular traveling style suitable for all ages. Thus, it would be enormously meaningful for practitioners and researchers to examine the educational tour intentions of common people. To fulfill this objective, between September and October, 2007, a convenience survey was conducted among Dalian residents of all ages to gain an insight into their demands for educational tours.600 questionnaires were administered to residents randomly selected in public places such as parks, squares and campuses, during which 564 valid questionnaires were collected with a valid rate of 94%.

3.1 The Relationship between profiles of urban residents and their demands for educational tour

62.1% of the interviewees express liking of educational tours and are willing to make an educational tours in near future which indicates ordinary urban residents have strong intentions for educational tour.

3.1.1 Residents gender and age and their demands of educational tour

Totally 564 people's survey information is valid. Among these 564, 350 are willing to participate in an education tour, with the proportion of 62.1%. And among 285 male interviewees and 279 female interviewees, male tourists who'd like to take education tours are up to 202, taking up the proportion of 70.9%; female tourists who'd like to take education tours are up to 148, taking up the proportion of 53%. In terms of different age groups, among all the interviewees who are willing to take education tours, 6.6% of the interviewees are younger than 12; 10.5% are between 12 and 18 years old; 16.7% are between 19 and 25; 28% are between 25-40;21.5% are between 40-55; 16.8% are older than 55 years old. Based on the data, we can obviously reach a conclusion that male tourists like education tourism more and the major education tourists' age is from 12 to 40, which can be well demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Relation between residents' age and their intentions for educational tour

Age	<12	12-18	19-25	26-40	41-55	>56
A (%)	6.6	10.5	16.7	28.0	21.5	16.8
B (%)	86.5	89.8	79.8	44.3	51.2	25.1
C (%)	9.1	19.1	21.5	20	17.7	12.8

A: represents proportion of samples based on age

B: represents percentage of those who have intentions for educational tour within each age group

C: represents proportion of people with intentions for educational tour based on age

3.1.2 Occupation and demands

People with different occupation are in favor of education tours in different extents. Here is a list on ratios of number of potential education tourists with different jobs to the total amount of the interviewees with the correspondent occupation: students 89%; scholars 65%; teachers 73%; government officials 42%; corporation managers 34%; enterprise owners 30%; soldiers 32%; workers 21%; mechanics 45%; sales clerks 33%; pension takers 25%. So we may conclude that students, scholars and teachers are more likely to take education tours.

3.1.4 Level of education and demands

Among the interviewees who had working experiences (excluding those who are still at schools), 39% interviewees

with primary school education are willing to take educational tour, while 46% of those with secondary school education, 92% with college education and 89% with graduate education are intent to take educational tour, which clearly indicates that people with higher education are prone to make educational tour.

3.2 Interviewees demands characteristics

3.2.1 Traveling style

60.6% of interviewees prefer package tour over individual tour when making educational tour for they would benefit from sharing and communicating, thus optimizing their traveling experience.

3.2.2 Expected expenditure on education tours

In the survey of expenditure of a five-day education tour, we've got the expected expenditure of tourists in different gender, age and occupation. Table2 well demonstrate the differences.

From the Table2, we may tell that people at the age from 26 to 55 have the strongest purchasing power and teachers, scholars and students are the education tourists with the biggest consuming capacity. Generally, it is estimated that since teachers, scholars and students have more access to culture and splendor of history and think highly of those, they would prefer to spend more on education tours so as to gain more knowledge than education tourists with other occupations do. In the meantime, residents with higher education are willing to spend more on education tour programs and those with college education or higher have the stronger purchasing power in touring for education.

It can be concluded that expenditure people are willing to pay for education tours is relatively low compared to expenditures on other tourism products. Although younger people constitute the main body of educational tourists, their purchasing power is rather limited. On the other hand, people at other ages also like educational tour and they have larger consuming capacity, but their demands are basically neglected in practical tour operations nowadays. Moreover, scholars and teachers, though having strong desire and purchasing power for education tour, are given little attention from tour operators. In short, people aged from 19 to 55, scholars and teachers formed vast potential market for educational tourism.

Table 2. Expected expenditure of different groups on Educational Tour

Variables	Items	Price (RMB)	Variables	Items	Price (RMB)
Age	<12	213.2	Occupation	Students	392.5
	13-18	439.5		Scholars	425.8
	19-25	552.2		Teachers	543.9
	26-40	674		Government officials	294.4
	41-55	703		Corporation managers	281.9
	>56	663.8		Enterprise owners	220.8
Education	Primary	344.5		Soldiers	118.7
	Secondary	426.4		Workers	50.8
	College	698		Mechanics	114.3
	Postgraduate	675		Sales clerks	91.7
				Pensioners	169.3

3.2.3 Traveling motivations on education tour

Generally speaking, people take education tours for knowledge gaining and skills improving. However we can divide them into small categories, like scenic sites seeing, historical sites seeing, scientific exploration, language learning, folk arts and crafts making, seminar attending, culture exchange, custom learning and prospective school touring. As a form of cultural tourism, people's main purposes (seen from Table3) on an education tour include visiting historical sites, attending seminars, visiting prospective schools and experiencing local custom, which demonstrate people have diversified motivations when making educational tours.

Table 3. Residents' motivations for educational tour

Traveling motivations	Natural sites	Historical sites	Scientific exploration	Language learning	Arts & crafts	Seminar& symposium	Custom learning	Culture exchange	Schools touring
percentage%	8	30	9	3	1	17	12	5	15

Besides, education tourists can not be content with mere one purpose or monotonous itinerary of an education tour. They prefer an education tour meeting their requirements that they may increase knowledge as well as get themselves relaxed. So an innovative education tour with other supplementary activities is significantly welcomed. In today's high-pace lifestyle, people need this multi-functional education tours. And among all the interviewees, 14% prefer to combine education tours with VFR (visiting friends and relative) tours; 46% prefer to have education

tours combined with sightseeing tours; 27% prefer to combine it with vacation tours; 7% prefer to have it combined with shopping tours.

3.2.4 Accommodations choices

According to the survey, students prefer to stay at friends' places or budget hotels; scholars and teachers would like to stay at economical hotels or star hotels; as for government officials, corporation managers and owners, and professionals, their first choices are star hotels possibly due to their high income or coverage of expenditure by government or their employers; one surprise is that pensioners would choose to stay at star hotels considering their economical living style back home; service clerks, workers and soldiers intend to stay at budget accommodations mainly because of their limited income or simple living style.

3.2.5 Tourism commodities preferences

Souvenirs and local commodities reminiscent of the traveling experiences are highly welcomed by education tourists. For those who have strong desire for education tour, their favorite tourism commodities include souvenirs with locality such as T-shirts and back bags bearing local logos or features (92% interviewees like such commodities), relish cuisine(78%), crafts and arts(62%), books(47%), local products(43%), stationary(wool pens, drawing paper, ink and stones for grinding ink powders,36%), paintings(31%) and relics(29%). Anyway, commodities with local characteristics are among the most favorites.

3.2.6 Information source for education tourists

For a travel agency, it is crucial to have a good command over the education tourists' information source, and that is where they got their knowledge about education tour routes and price, so that they may later intentionally give publicity to their own travel experiences. According to the investigation, 33% of the information comes from travelers' friends and relatives; 27% is from magazines and newspapers; 21% is from schools or universities; 11% is from internet; 6% is from other kinds of books and materials; 2% is from the travel agencies promotion activities. Therefore, it is importation to cultivate a good image and reputation among travelers for a travel service. In addition, travel agencies should take advantage of advertisements put up on magazines and newspapers, which are another imperative information sources for potential tourists.

3.2.7 Destination choices for education tour

Destinations are where education tour are conducted. Generally, a destination suitable for education tour may features rich historical relics, or cultural heritages, or ancient culture centers, or places which cultural celebrities born or once lived or studied, or cities having many prestigious research institutions or universities(Li, 2006, pp.78). When interviewed about their most desirable destinations for education tour, the respondents gave highly scattering answers, which means China abounds in educational resources and have huge potential for developing education tourism. The following 12 cities are the most favorites, including Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, Kunming, Shenzhen, Xi'an, Chengdu, Nanjing, Dalian, Hangzhou, Chongqing, Guilin, and Hong Kong. Table4 is the final ranking in the popularity of education tourists.

Table 4. Rankings of cities in terms of attractiveness for educational tour

City	H.K.	S.H.	B.J.	N.J.	X.A.	C.D.	W.H.	K.M.	D.L.	H.Z.	S.Z.	G.L.
Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Percentage	14.8	13.9	13.4	10.8	10.5	9.8	8.1	8.0	7.2	6.9	6.8	6.6

We can divide 12 cities into three subcategories, namely cosmopolitans, ancient cities and famous tourist cities. The first category is composed of Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai, and all of them are international municipalities enjoying complete infrastructures, many universities and academic conferences and a developed tourism, which are perfect combinations for education tourists. The second category consists of Chinese most ancient cities which have long history and highly developed civilization, many universities and fast-developing tourism. Owing to their relatively remote location from the developed areas in China or smaller in size, they ranked behind the first category. Cities in the third category are among Chinese best tourists destination for their appealing environment, beautiful scenery or unique custom. We can conclude from this assessment that the common features of destination for education tour are culture oriented and that education tourism is closely related to local culture and development stage of local tourism industry.

4. Conclusions and Marketing implications

In China, both inbound and outbound education tourism markets are proliferating, while domestic market is just taking off. However, the supply of education tourism still lags far behind demands. Current efforts are primarily made to attract and organize students to participate in education tours, this study finds that people at all ages and

with different occupations show a common preference of education tours and intend to take such tours in near future. Basically, people aged from 18 to 40, students, teachers and scholars, people with high education are the major body of education tourists. Education tourists prefer combine education with other activities in the collective form such as package tour. They like cosmopolitans, ancient cities and famous tourism cities with culture environment and developed tourism industry and economy. On their trip, they prefer to buy souvenirs with local personality and stay at economical accommodations such as budget hotels or friends' places. Though they have a strong intention to make education tour, their prospective expenditure on it is not high.

In general, we should develop education tours with varieties of activities. Products should no longer be confined into the mere purpose of "knowledge gaining". Travel services should place some of its emphasis on the innovation of education tours. It is preferable to develop the multi-functional education tours, like the combination of education tour and vacation tours, education tour with shopping tours, education tours with resort holiday tours. As for its destination, we should base our decision on the city popularity table. So travel agencies are supposed to set their education tour in cities like Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai. What is more, the design of the product should cater more for teachers, scholars and students, because of their overwhelming purchasing power in education tours.

Education tourism in China is still in its initial stage. No travel agency has a stable income from this market (Wang, 2002, pp.21-24). So it is important for each travel service to cultivate a good image and reputation. First of all, we should control the current quality of education tour so that they can be thought highly of among education tourists; Besides, travel agencies should take advantages of magazines, newspapers and internet to throw their names into each far-flung corner of China, because according to the previous survey advertisements on magazines and newspapers are the education tourists' crucial information source.

In today's epoch of mass tourism, education tourism has become indispensable. Though it has substantial progress in Dalian City, there is still a significant discrepancy between the market demand and supply. If travel agencies want to clinch this big chance and potential, they need to improve their products in aspects such as price, functions and promotions so that they may catch up with the constantly renewable demands from the prospective tourists.

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