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JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY AUSTRALIA

International Students in English Language Programs: Their Images of Australia and Their Travel Behaviour

Thesis submitted by

Aram Son

In December 2004

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in School of Business
at James Cook University

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ABSTRACT

The overall goal of this thesis was to examine international English language students' image of Australia as a tourist destination and their travel behaviour while in Australia. From a theoretical point of view, this research has sought to develop an enhanced conceptual framework of destination image based on multi-faceted image components. It also attempted to measure each of the image components in the most relevant and efficient way by using both structured and unstructured methods.

In all, three studies were conducted to achieve the principal objective of this thesis. The first study was conducted to understand international English language students' images of Australian cities. To identify the mental map of cities in Australia (Sydney and Melbourne) a sketch map methodology supplemented by a range of question types and styles was applied. The results of the sketch maps of the two cities indicated that Sydney is perceived as a spatially dominated city, while Melbourne is seen as a path oriented city. In terms of appraisive images as assessed by the rating scales, both cities were perceived positively. The results indicated that in spite of some limitations of the sketch map technique it could be an appropriate method to investigate tourists' orientation components of destination image.

Study 2 was conducted to investigate international students' image of Australia as a tourist destination and their travel behaviour while in Australia. A self-administered questionnaire consisted of both structured and unstructured methodologies was used in this study. The detailed findings in the study reinforced the value of creative multi-faceted image appraisals and the relevance of regional cultural analysis as an explanatory variable affecting the results. Motivation was also established as an important background variable but it was subsumed and linked to a consideration of regional cultural background. Another aim of this study was to understand international

student's travel behaviour by assessing differences and similarities in travel behaviours for international students and backpacker travellers. Both groups were likely to emphasise experiencing the Australian natural environment and they wanted to understand Australian culture and its lifestyle. It was also found that there were substantial differences between the travel patterns and preferences of the two groups. International students were more likely to travel with a group and had a strong tendency to use public transportation and motel accommodation. The results of the study also indicated that compared to backpackers, international students were more likely to be interested in city-based travel activities.

Study 3 was conducted to identify international students' images of Australian people and culture. The results of the questionnaire based from 359 respondents study indicated that the majority of the students held positive images of Australian people. The study also found that since international students were willing to learn and experience Australian culture they had no serious difficulty in adapting to the new environment. The cultural differences identified in the study appeared to be consistent with the general Eastern/Western differences discussed in the literature review.

It is hoped that this thesis will assist the development of the youth market in Australia by providing information on both the images of Australia as a tourist destination and Australian culture held by international students in English language programs. It is also to be hoped that this research showcases innovative approaches and alternative methods embedded in a conceptual framework in the area of destination image study. The framework developed in the present study could be used to identify images of other tourist destinations held by many other types of tourists.