

## DETERMINANTS OF KOREAN SENIORS' TRAVEL DESTINATION CHOICE ATTITUDES

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*This study examines the factors that determine where Korean seniors choose to travel. Using iterated principal factor analysis with a varimax rotation analysis technique, five preference factors in choice of travel destination were revealed: tourism environment, events, feeling, differentiation, and culture. Duncan's multiple range test was then applied to examine the relative preference level of each of these factors in determining destination choice. The results indicate that Korean seniors' choice of travel destination varies between different sets of sociodemographic and travel characteristics. This information can be used by the tourist industry as a tool to aid decision making about tourism policy and marketing activities and to help determine priority of assignments aimed at improving tourist supply.*

*Korean senior travelers, destination choice attitudes, policy and marketing strategy*

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### INTRODUCTION

The senior sector of society is clearly becoming a factor that will change the structure of the future's travel market. The United Nations (2003) predicts that the world's over-70 population, which was 600 million in 2000, will increase to 1,100 million (or 25% of the world population) by 2025. The WTO (2003) forecasts that the 65-and-over age group will be beneficial to holiday operators because retirees are increasingly well-off, reaping the benefits of inflation-protected state and corporate retirement schemes.

In Korea, an estimated 7.8 million people will be aged 65 and over by the year 2020, which will represent 15.7% of the total population (up from 3.9% in 1980 and 5.0% in 1990) (Korea National Statistical Office, 2005). This office reported that the average life span of Koreans was 77.46 years in the year 2003, up from 66 years in 1980. Under these circumstances, more ways for seniors to effectively spend their large amount of leisure time should be developed. Despite the increasing demand of the senior sector of the population and the importance of their travel market size, this issue has been little studied.

The aim of this study is to provide direction for the development of adequate and competent travel destinations for seniors. The information presented herein may be helpful to marketers, tourism developers, and other parties interested in formulating policy programs aimed at senior tourism.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Attitudes about choosing a destination**

Understanding how people perceive the attributes of various destinations is an important first step in facilitating market segmentation. The segmentation can be used as the starting point and stimulus for marketing activities directed toward specific tourist markets. As Mok and Armstrong (1995) commented, effective tourism resource management depends on understanding destination choice. Most marketing activity associated with a tourist destination revolves around developing the destination and persuading tourists to choose that destination. A destination's image is the result of a complex set of perceptions and impressions that consumers have about it compared with other destinations. For this reason, McKim (1996) posited that a reputable product with a good image is an important determinant of product viability, and frequent and repeat customers have the highest likelihood of repurchasing the same product again.

The attractions that a destination offers are a primary motive for tourist visits, and their success or failure in providing satisfactory products has implications for perceptions about the destination and whether or not people will choose to travel there. This is why information about how tourists perceive and choose destinations is useful for establishing a strategy and managerial direction for development of tourism. Some studies have researched the reasons why people choose a certain destination or purchase a type of holiday (Ross, 1993). Beaman & Vaske's (1995) study incorporated psychological measures of attitudes, and Tinsley & Johnson (1984) treated the psychological benefits of a given destination. Chang & Mahoney (1997) and Jung (1997) investigated motivations and preferences for choosing destinations. Pearce 1993; Butler & Mao 1996 mentioned that the actual behavior pattern will be influenced by the surrounding circumstances between and among them. The difference of choice phenomenon occurs in different genders (Moscado and Moncrief, 1978; Jung, 1995), different destinations (Moscado, 1992), and different influential factors (Mayers and Moncrief, 1978). The evidence of difference was also verified in the studies of Smith (1979), Jung (1995; 1996), and Ross (1993). These studies have addressed the differences in travel behavior patterns according to different sets of sociodemographic and travel characteristics. Based on the theoretical background and information from these studies, it was expected that the choice of travel destination would vary among different sets of sociodemographic and travel characteristics.

One of the most important components of marketing and management strategy is to have an approach that is oriented to the customer's needs. Successful marketing and management require that the product be tailored to accurately identified patterns of demand. Following this strategy, tourism suppliers try to develop a competitive advantage as an attractive travel destination and attempt to adapt to the needs of tourists. From this point of view, an increased understanding of the multi-faceted needs of tourists is required before commitment to product development. In the same vein, developing a destination that is oriented to the customer's needs is the benchmark for providing the required satisfaction.

To increase its share of the overall travel market, the senior travel market should be advised about the development of potential products that focus on the attitudes and interests of seniors. Thus, travel marketing strategies and policies aimed at seniors should focus on fulfilling their travel needs while also respecting the long term interests of the destination. Information about the perceptions and preferences of seniors can provide insights into the competitiveness of a given tourism product. It can provide the information necessary to confer an advantage in marketing of existing products and in planning for the development strategy for future tourism.

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### **Senior tourists' attitudes about choosing a travel destination**

When examining the factors that positively affect senior tourism demand, some theoretical and empirical works are available on characteristics of the market segment in terms of behavior (Tongren, 1980; Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982; Delphi Consultores Internacional, 1990; Jung, 1995) and motivational and psychological approaches (Capella & Greco, 1987; Romsa & Blenman, 1989; Hagen & Uysal, 1991; Kim, 1996). Tongren (1980), Anderson and Langmeyer (1982), Delphi Consultores Internacional (1990), and Jung (1995) concluded that senior travelers differ from their non-senior counterparts in consumer behavior. Tongren's (1980) investigation of the pre- and post-retirement (or "under and over 65) market revealed that the planning, information searching, and travel execution were executed in distinct phases. Anderson and Langmeyer (1982) reported that members of the younger group were more likely to participate in outdoor recreational activities or to visit man-made amusement facilities. In contrast, non-hectic, preplanned, pleasure trips for rest and relaxation or for visiting relatives were preferred by the over-50 travelers. Similarly, the choice of travel mode also differed between older and younger travelers. The choice of travel mode made by the older group was influenced by comfort, safety, schedule, and health. According to Jung's study (1995), the over-65 group paid more attention to comfort and safety than the younger group. When choosing a vacation destination, the climate and friendliness were the most important attributes for the elderly (Delphi Consultores Internacionales, 1990; Vincent & de los Santos, 1990). Javalgi, Thomas, and Rao (1992) reported in their study of an over- and under-55 age group that seniors were more likely to have taken a trip to visit friends and/or relatives compared to the younger group and they tended to make both transportation and accommodation arrangements with a travel agent as a part of package tour. Capella and Greco (1987) reported that the elderly's most important sources of information for making vacation decision were personal sources, primarily family and friends, while magazines and newspapers played a secondary role in the information acquisition process. In Romsa and Blenman's (1989) study, travel motivations were found to be similar across age cohorts, but spatial patterns varied as the result of the interaction between the aging process and environmental forces. The elderly tended to seek less stressful modes of transportation and vacation habitats. Hagen and Uysal (1991) reported that pre-retirees desired activities promoting family togetherness, whereas post-retirees were more price and security sensitive. Both groups had preferences for passive and relaxing activities. Kim (1996) presented a profile of the differences between the older and younger group.

Evidence suggests that seniors generally tend to spend more money, take tours more often, and stay longer than other age groups (Shoemaker, 1989). Retirees in small communities are reported to be more active than their counterparts in more urbanized areas (Romsa & Blenman, 1989). Repeat visitors are more likely to be elderly individuals seeking reflection and visiting a friend and/or relative on their vacation (Gittelsohn & Crompton, 1984). Bammel & Bammel (1982) pointed out that retirement, like other periods of life, has its own cycle or potential behavioral pattern. In terms of travel characteristics, Norvell (1985) reported that the length of the trip, lodging, distance traveled, and mode of transportation differed between the younger age group and the older age group. Retirees were significantly more likely to be constrained by health conditions, physical energy, perception of age, and disability. Blazey (1992) found that shopping, touring a city, going to a beach, swimming, attending a convention, and bicycling were all occurred more frequently among the retirees in the sample and that the retirees preferred package tours. Walmsley & Jenkins' (1992) study on cognitive distance showed that accuracy tends to improve as individuals grow older. Teare and Williams (1989) verified that older consumers (51–64, 65+ age groups) perceive benefits like milder climate and closeness to places of interest as the most important determinants for off-peak season holidays.

Other case studies indicate that climate and friendliness (Vincent de los Santos, 1990) and the use of commercial accommodations in the form of hotels and motels are important factors in travel decisions

made by seniors. Javalgi, Thomas, and Rao (1992) suggested that appeals to the senior group should probably emphasize the low cost and higher security of packages versus more independent travel. According to Jung's (1996) comparison between reality and interest dimensions, shopping facilities, accessibility, and hospitality in the reality dimension and variety of food and convenient accommodations in the interest dimension were more significant to the older group than the younger age group. A change in one's personal environment may have great psychological effect on body image, self-concept, and perception of life status (Lakin 1996). In elderly travel, there is a tendency to select domestic vacations (Delphi Consultores Internacional 1990; Romsa & Blenman, 1989), and important constraints on travel were found to be distance and transportation opportunities (Jung, 1995). In summary, previous studies are helpful in determining attributes that are important variables in senior travelers' choice of travel destination.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data was used in this study were collected from seniors, aged 55 in Korea. The questionnaire used in this study was developed based on theoretical and empirical background gained through the literature review and from the results of related studies. It was designed to determine the respondents' attitudes towards statements made about tourism attractions and why they would make a certain choice. The questionnaires contained 27 elements related to the following different aspects of a destination's attractions: quiet; kindness; popularity; fun; shopping; amusement; accessibility; price; food; something special; climate; safety; remembrance; culture; sightseeing; visiting relatives & friends; event; recreation & leisure; intimacy; differentiation; resort; relaxation; sports; traveling with family; amenities; change from daily routine and novelty. These variables were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale, on which respondents indicated their evaluation of importance. Responses, which pertained to the importance of the variable on making a travel destination choice, ranged from "not at all important" (1) to "extremely important" (5)."

The information from the questionnaire on the sociodemographic and travel characteristics of the sample group was used to determine the preference level of places to be visited on intended future trips. Data were gathered from 315 Korean people over the age of 55. Lazer (1990) reported that mature consumers (those 55 and over) are often divided into four age groups: the olders (55–64); the elders (65–74); the aged (75–84); and the very old (85 and over). In this study, the 55-and-older age group was classified as senior tourists. The official retirement age in Korea is 55.

An iterated principal factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to determine the groupings for mentioned 27 destination attractions. The emergent factors were treated as independent variables in subsequent analyses, with each respondent receiving a score for each factor. To understand the relationship between the factors and dependent variables, Duncan's multiple range test was used. The frequency tabulation provided information about five sociodemographic and travel characteristics of respondents (Table 1). The age distribution patterns provided some clues to explain these sociodemographic and travel characteristics.

## **RESULTS**

### **Factor analysis**

The questionnaire contained 27 statements about the attributes of travel destinations. For the purpose of creating variables, these statements were factor-analyzed to determine whether underlying dimensions existed that would reveal relationships between correlated variables in terms of a few conceptually meaningful independent factors (Loker and Perdue, 1992). Iterated principal factor analysis with varimax rotation was used rather than the more common principal components technique



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**Table 1.**  
**Respondent's characteristics**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	58.2
Female	41.8
<b>Family Type</b>	
Large family	23.0
Small Family	69.8
Single	7.2
<b>Travel Experience</b>	
Homeland	75.3
Asia	15.8
America	4.0
Europe	2.5
Oceania	1,7
Africa	0.7
<b>Travel Purpose</b>	
Pleasure	75.5
Business	10.4
Others	14.1
<b>Travel Type</b>	
Group	47.2
Individual	31.3
Family	21.2

(n = 315)

because there was no theoretical basis for assuming that the error variance represented a relatively small proportion of the total variance (Crompton, Fakeye, & Lue, 1992). Item-to-total correlations were examined to determine which scale items should be dropped. In general, item-to-total values below 0.5 were deemed unacceptable and were dismissed. To determine how the factor distribution was related between variables, extraction and rotation was performed.

Table 2 presents the results of a Varimax rotated factor analysis of the 26 statements used to identify the travel destination preferences of respondents. The dimensions of preference were the composite of variables whose factor loadings were higher than 0.5. The five emergent factors, which were reduced by distinction of the level of loadings, were arbitrarily named as: (1) *tourism environment*; (2) *events*; (3) *feelings*; (4) *differentiation*; and (5) *culture*. Table 2 shows the results of the factor analysis in terms of the (1) variables of the loading on each factor, (2) the factor name, (3) the variance explained by each factor, and (4) the cumulative variance explained by the factor solution. The heavy loadings of factor 1 were concentrated in tourism environments that provide accessibility, safety, price, climate, and food. The events associated with factor 2 were amusement, shopping, and something special. The third factor was related to feelings, and the heavy loadings were grouped with kindness, fun, and popularity. The fourth and fifth factors each were strongly represented by only one preference statement—something different and culture, respectively.

### **Segment profiles**

The comparison of difference was based on the sociodemographic and travel characteristics categorized according to the frameworks of gender, family type, travel type, travel experience, and

**Table 2.**  
**Iterated principle factor loadings**

Preference statement	Factor loading	Factor name	% of Var.	Cumul. var. exp
Accessibility	0.79	F1 Tourism Environment	52.9	52.9
Price	0.79			
Safety	0.79			
Climate	0.76			
Food	0.74			
Amusement	0.81	F2 Events	28.7	81.4
Shopping	0.78			
Event	0.78			
Something special	0.73			
Fun	0.66	F3 Feelings	5.9	87
Popularity	0.64			
Kindness	0.63			
Differentiation	-0.57	F4 Differentiation	5.4	93
Culture	0.62	F5 Culture	4.0	97

travel purpose. To determine the relationship between dependent and independent variables, the five factors were compared to each other on the basis of five dependent sociodemographic and travel characteristic variables using a t-test and Duncan's multiple range test.

Table 3 finding is interpreted as meaning that senior male travelers perceived "events" as more preferable than senior female travelers. Mean factor scores for each factor across different variables using Duncan's multiple range test are presented in Table 4.

**Table 3.**  
**Gender differences**

Factor	Male			Female			Probability
	Mean	T	Std. Dev	Mean	T	Std. Dev	
Factor 1	3.56	(-1.33)	0.84	3.73	(-1.35)	0.92	0.17
Factor 2	3.01	(3.51)	0.80	2.55	(3.64)	0.96	0.00
Factor 3	3.51	(-0.88)	0.89	3.63	(-0.89)	0.94	0.37
Factor 4	3.23	(0.55)	1.16	3.12	(0.58)	1.45	0.56
Factor 5	3.22	(0.91)	1.14	3.07	(0.92)	1.14	1.14

As can be seen in Table 4, only variables that were identified as having significantly different means (marked by different letters) by Duncan's multiple range test were extracted. Means with the same letter are not significantly different. Table 4 presents the results of the perceived preference level of variables in order of their importance based on mean scores: The higher the mean, the more the factor contributes to explaining the preference.

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**Table 4.**  
**Mean scores using Duncan's multiple test**

Factor	Variables	Mean	F	Probability
Factor 1	Family type	Large family(4.10A) Small family(3.37B)	16.76	0.0001
	Travel Type	Group(4.15A) Family(3.34B) Individual(3.16B)	22.24	0.0001
	Travel Experience	Homeland(3.96A) Oceania(3.04B) Africa(3.00B) America(2.96B)	8.62	0.0001
	Travel Purpose	Pleasure(3.94A) Business(2.59C) Others(3.02B)	54.73	0.0001
Factor 2	Family type	Large family(2.50B) Small family(3.05A)	8.66	0.0001
	Travel Type	Group(2.56B) Family(3.11A) Individual(3.16B)	5.54	0.0001
	Travel Experience	ns	0.93	0.4717
	Travel Purpose	ns	2.73	0.0677
Factor 3	Family type	Large family(3.90A) Small family(3.42B)	8.24	0.0001
	Travel Type	Group(3.83A) Family(3.34B) Individual(3.25B)	5.07	0.0021
	Travel Experience	Homeland(3.96A) Oceania(4.19A) Asia(3.13B) America(2.96B)	3.81	0.0013
	Travel Purpose	Pleasure(3.94A) Business(2.59C)	5.07	0.0015
Factor 4	Family type	Large family(3.71A) Small family(2.44B)	10.74	0.0001
	Travel Type	ns	1.01	0.3912
	Travel Experience	ns	2.79	0.0126
	Travel Purpose	Pleasure(3.43A) Business(2.59B)	10.60	0.0001
Factor 5	Family type	Large family(2.63B) Small family(3.30AB)	3.05	0.0499
	Travel Type	ns	1.10	0.3505
	Travel Experience	Homeland(3.96A) Oceania(4.19A) Asia(3.13B) America(2.96B)	1.10	0.3505
	Travel Purpose	Pleasure(3.37A) Business(2.53B)	9.74	0.0001

The extraction of emergent factors is summarized as follows:

### *Factor 1: Tourism environment*

Higher mean scores appeared for the following independent variables: (1) large family; (2) homeland travelers; (3) pleasure travelers; and (4) group travelers. Lower mean scores existed for (1) small family; (2) people who have traveled to Africa; (3) business travelers; and (4) individual travelers.

### *Factor 2: Events*

Important interactions were observed for the following dependent variables: (1) small family; (2) family travelers; (3) travelers who have traveled to Europe and Oceania; and (4) individual travelers. Large family travelers (1) and group travelers (2) had lower means for this factor.

### *Factor 3: Feelings*

Significantly higher mean scores for this factor occurred for (1) family travelers; (2) travelers who have traveled to Oceania; (3) pleasure travelers; and (4) group travelers. In contrast, (1) small family travelers; (2) travelers who have traveled to Asia; (3) business travelers; and (4) individual travelers were less likely to perceive this factor as important to their choice.

*Factor 4: Differentiation*

Differentiation was linked with (1) group family travelers and (2) pleasure travelers. Meanwhile, lower dimensions of mean scores for this factor were associated with (1) small family; (2) business travelers; and (3) family travelers.

*Factor 5: Culture*

Factor 5 involved dimensions related to (1) small family travelers; (2) travelers who have traveled to Oceania; and (3) pleasure travelers. Lower interest in this factor was found for (1) homeland travelers and (2) business travelers.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study identified factors that help determine why seniors in Korea choose various travel destinations. The five factors extracted were: (1) tourism environments characterized by accessibility, safety, and food; (2) events that provide amusement and something special in intimate atmospheres; (3) places that reflect feelings such as kindness, fun, and popularity; (4) places that provide something different; and (5) places that feel social and offer cultural differences. Duncan's multiple range test was employed to examine the relationships between these factors and explanatory variables including gender, family type, travel type, travel experience, and travel purpose. The results showed that Korean seniors' destination choices varied according to different sets of sociodemographic and travel characteristics.

These results indicate that tourism developers should consider factors such as accessibility, climate, and price along with the provision of safety and food and events that include different atmospheres, differentiation, and culture. This study suggests that the tourism industry's efforts to develop and improve destination quality are crucially important to senior tourism, and it emphasizes the need for a deeper approach, new strategies, and specific tourism products based on the diversity in the characteristics of senior tourism. As the WTO (1993) mentioned, one of the tourism market segments that is expected to grow is the mature market, and holidays for this market should be tailored to it with respect to both the content and facilities available. The managerial staff's role should be focused on understanding senior tourists' needs and having the patience to listen to their preferences.

According to the report on population by the Korean National Statistical Office (2005), the median age of the Korean population will increase significantly and steadily from 31.2 years in 1995 to 36.3 years in 2010. Because retirement age is officially 55 years in Korea and because the aging population will have a lifestyle dictated by social, economic, and cultural changes, the relationship between this lifestyle and tourism will increasingly become an influential factor in the structure of tourism demand. When choosing a destination, a traveler must decide between any number of possible destination alternatives. Thus, he/she must compare alternatives. Such comparisons are made on the basis of the perceptions the individual has of each alternative in terms of any number of decision criteria. Based on the growing numbers of older aged cohorts and their increasing demands, tourist destinations that adequately fulfill the needs of seniors will be marketable and preferable to senior clients.

The results of this study describe not only the attractions that interest older tourists but also suggest a guide to developing travel destinations. The tourist destination preferences described herein may be helpful in establishing future tourist policies and better tourist products.

## IMPLICATIONS

Because tourists are becoming more sophisticated in their requirements, the tourism industry must learn to cater to a market that is no longer product led but that is becoming ever more consumer led

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(Hodgson, 1990). Tourism suppliers should always take into account possible differentiating characteristics of the traveling public and determine the level of importance that travelers attach to their motivations and to the activities offered at given destinations. In addition, marketing planners and promoters in the tourism industry should stay in closer touch with minority travelers through adaptive and ethnically sensitive tourism marketing strategies. To increase the effectiveness of destination marketing for senior-based tourism, marketing effort should remain constant throughout the year.

Although not as prosperous as middle-aged people, seniors (on average) tend to be in comfortable economic circumstances. In recent years, part-time employment to supplement retiree income has increased, which in turn has increased the affluence of many in this group. In addition, by the age of mandatory retirement, most are still employed and are at the highest income they have had in their lifetimes (Powers, 1989). Based on these circumstances, the future demographic makeup of world tourism is expected to change dramatically over the next few decades. The senior tourism market of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond will differ greatly from that of the immediate past. This change will reshape marketing opportunities and force marketing managers to rethink some of their basic precepts (Lazer, 1996). Destinations that offer the more highly valued attractions for senior consumers should be planned and organized by emphasizing the benefits that attract seniors. The competitive advantages as perceived by senior consumers should be emphasized in marketing and management activities.

Based on the findings of this study, senior travelers view attractive destinations as those that offer a practical, comfortable, tourism environment, for example a relaxed family resort and a place to enjoy amusement and events; a place to feel kindness and fun; and a place to see and feel social and cultural differences. These factors should be emphasized in marketing and planning of senior travel destinations. Furthermore, the significant differences in destination choice found in the comparison between important choice factors and explanatory variables should be considered to provide a solid basis for developing a meaningful marketing strategy. This managerial guideline can contribute to framing market segmentation and to enhancing efforts for the development of strategic marketing plans for destination areas. This study reveals that the tourism business's efforts to develop and improve destination quality are crucially important to senior tourism, and it emphasizes the need for a deeper approach, new strategies, and specific tourism products aimed specifically at seniors.

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