

The Perceptions of Foreign Nationals Visiting Mongolia: A Tourism Satisfaction Study

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Abstract: The purpose, of this research project, is to investigate the perception that foreign citizens visiting Mongolia, and who engage in tourism related activities while in the country, have upon the conclusion of their trip. The study investigates issues pertaining to tourism, in particular, as well as the country, in general. The study was conducted in cooperation with a tour operator based in Ulaanbaatar, the nation's capital. The methodology involved an electronically administered survey to individuals who used the services of the tour operator during the five-year period from 2014-2019. Research results indicate that there are many areas in which the nation excels, but there are also areas that need improvement. The primary contribution of this study is to enable Mongolian tourism authorities to increase the number of foreign tourists, who visit the landlocked nation, in a long-term, sustainable manner.

Keywords: Mongolia; Tourism; Survey data; Local services; Foreign nationals.

Las percepciones de los ciudadanos extranjeros que visitan Mongolia: un estudio de satisfacción turística

Resumen: El objetivo de este proyecto de investigación es conocer la percepción que tienen los ciudadanos extranjeros que visitan Mongolia y realizan actividades relacionadas con el turismo al término de su viaje. El estudio investiga cuestiones relativas al turismo, en particular, así como al país, en general. El estudio se realizó en cooperación con un operador turístico con sede en Ulán Bator, la capital del país. La metodología consistió en una encuesta administrada electrónicamente a personas que utilizaron los servicios del operador turístico durante el periodo de cinco años comprendido entre 2014 y 2019. Los resultados de la investigación indican que hay muchas áreas en las que la nación sobresale, pero también hay áreas que necesitan mejorar. La principal contribución de este estudio es permitir que las autoridades turísticas de Mongolia aumenten el número de turistas extranjeros, que visitan la nación sin litoral, de manera sostenible y a largo plazo.

Palabras Clave: Mongolia; Turismo; Datos de encuestas; Servicios locales; Extranjeros.

1. Introduction

Mongolia has transformed itself into a vibrant and dynamic economy, over the past three decades, tripling its GDP per capita since 1991. Primary school enrollments are at a record 97%, coupled with a significant decline in maternal and child mortality (45 per 100,000 live births in 2017 and 15.6 per 1,000 live births in 2019). With significant agricultural, livestock and mineral resources, coupled with a relatively educated population, the nation's prospects for development, including tourism development, look promising assuming the continuation of structural reforms (the World Bank Group).

The country has a rich history and a plethora of cultural treasures (Buckley et. al., 2008). Furthermore, the country has five sites that are listed in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) World Heritage List (UNESCO World Heritage List).

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate tourist perceptions of Mongolia post-trip. The study focuses on individuals engaging in some tourist activities even if that was not their primary reason for the trip. The results of this study will enable Mongolian tourism authorities to address areas of concern, highlighted by foreign visitors to the country, and focus their marketing resources on certain key demographic segments of the tourism industry. All that being said, the research objective, of this study, can formally be stated as follows:

To investigate the perception that foreign tourists visiting Mongolia have regarding their tourism experience, in particular, and the country, in general, upon the conclusion of their trip.

This study proposes a single hypothesis. That hypothesis can formally be stated as follows:

Foreign visitors, who engage in some tourism activities while visiting Mongolia, have both positive and negative experiences while in the country.

The next section discusses the methodology that was employed in this study. The subsequent section will discuss the results of executing the study's chosen methodology. This will be followed by a section that discusses the study's results. The next two sections will discuss the study's limitations and conclusions. The concluding section will discuss the study's implications and provide avenues for future research projects on related topical areas.

2. Research design

This section, of the manuscript, is divided, into two subsections. The first subsection will discuss the sample selection process. This will be followed by a subsection that discusses the research methodology.

2.1. Sampling

The target population for this study includes all tourists who utilized the services of an internationally recognized Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia based tour operator, hereafter referred to as "the company," between 2014 and 2019 and for whom the company had a valid email address on file. This group included a total of 863 individuals.

An automated, system-generated email was sent to each of the 863 individuals approximately two weeks upon conclusion of all tourism services with the company. The email contained a link to an anonymous survey instrument regarding their trip to Mongolia and related issues. This research used 138 completed surveys for a response rate of approximately 16%.

In concluding this subsection, the authors would like to comment on the rationale for the time period used in this study. The company only saves survey data for five years and no survey data was collected since the onset of the pandemic; hence, the company did not collect any survey data in 2020 and 2021. As a result, the most recent five-year period for which data was available was 2014-2019.

2.2. Research Methodology

2.2.1. Study Site

Mongolia is a landlocked country in East Asia. It is bordered by the Russian Federation to the North and the People's Republic of China to the South. The Russian side of the border includes portions of Siberia; the Chinese side of the border includes the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. Covering 603,900 square miles, Mongolia is the largest landlocked country on Earth. Furthermore, with a population of approximately 3.3 million, it is the most sparsely populated sovereign nation on the planet. Geographically, much of the country is covered by mountains to the North and West and the Gobi Desert to the South. Approximately half the nation's population lives in Ulaanbaatar, the capital and largest city. In tourist brochures, Mongolia is often nicknamed "Land of the Eternal Blue Sky" since, on average, it receives over 250 days of sunshine per year. The nation has mild to hot summers and bitterly cold winters. Statistically, Ulaanbaatar is officially classified as the coldest national capital

city on Earth with nighttime temperatures during the winter months often times dropping below zero degrees Fahrenheit (Wikipedia).

Mongolia reported 469,000, 529,000 and 577,000 foreign visitors in 2017, 2018 and 2019, respectively. On average, 85% of foreign nationals cited tourism as their primary reason for the visit. These numbers show a steady growth in tourism between 2017 and 2019. The top nationalities of tourists visiting Mongolia are Chinese, Russian, South Korean, Japanese and American. Nature, witnessing the nomadic lifestyle, culture, history and adventure activities, such as horseback riding, were all cited as motivating factors for foreign nationals visiting the landlocked nation (Gantemur 2020).

As discussed in the previous subsection, this study used a survey methodology. The survey instrument, used by the company, had two parts. Part I, which is noted in Table 1 below, was labeled “The Trip and Local Services.” This portion, of the survey instrument, consisted of 12 closed-end questions followed by one open-ended question.

Table 1: The Trip and Local Services survey questions (n = 13)

| Question number | Survey questions |
|-----------------|--|
| 1 | What was your primary reason for visiting Mongolia? |
| 2 | Satisfied with level of security while on tour |
| 3 | Satisfied with availability of restaurants and menu options in Mongolia |
| 4 | Mongolian people are friendly and receptive to foreigners |
| 5 | Satisfied with overall quality of available accommodations in Mongolia |
| 6 | Satisfied with quality of food provided while on tours |
| 7 | Satisfied with quality of local tours |
| 8 | Transport vehicles used on tours were comfortable |
| 9 | Road conditions were satisfactory |
| 10 | Local tour guides are knowledgeable |
| 11 | Overall the tour provided value for the money |
| 12 | Would recommend Mongolia as a tourist destination to others |
| 13 | Use the space below to mention other issues related to the trip and local services |

Question 1 had the following answer choices: Tourism; Business; Visiting Family; and Other. Respondents who selected “Other” were given the opportunity to add some specificity to their chosen answer.

Questions 2-12 were answered using a 5-point Likert scale. The answer choices for this set of questions were as follows: Strongly Disagree (answer choice 1); Disagree (answer choice 2); Neutral (answer choice 3); Agree (answer choice 4); and Strongly Agree (answer choice 5).

As is commonplace in survey design, the last question was open-ended and allowed the respondent to provide any additional comments not covered by the closed-end questions. In the survey instrument, that was sent out to the target population via email, there was a blank space beneath question 13 which was reserved for responses to this question.

The survey was set-up in a manner whereby questions 1-12 could not be skipped. If a respondent attempted to submit the survey without answering the first 12 questions, a message would popup on the screen informing him or her that questions X, Y, Z, etc. had not been completed. The respondent would then be prompted to return to the survey instrument and answer the missing questions. This was meant to ensure that all the respondents fully completed the closed-end questions, on Part I, of the survey instrument. Question 13 was optional and only 14 out of the 138 respondents provided a response to this question.

Part II, of the survey instrument, was labeled “Personal Data.” This portion consisted of three closed-end questions. Part II, of the survey instrument, is noted below, in Table 2, with the answer choices, for each question, noted in parenthesis next to the question:

Table 2: Personal Data, demographic measures

| Questions | Measure |
|-------------------|--|
| Age | < 20; 20-30; 31-40; 41-50; 51-60; and 60+ |
| Gender | Male or Female |
| Race or Ethnicity | Asian; White; Black; Latin American; and Other |

As with Part I of the survey instrument, Part II also contained a “mandatory response clause.” Hence, respondents could not submit the survey without answering all three questions that constituted Part II. This was meant to ensure that the company had sufficient demographic data for marketing purposes and all related activities.

2.3. Data Analysis

Question 1 was tallied for total number of responses to the four variables of Tourism; Business; Visiting Family; and Other. Questions 2-12 were 5-point Likert scale items and are reported as the average score for each of the statements. Question 13 was an open-ended question and analyzed through iterative coding (Babbie, 2020). Generally, in large qualitative data sets coding is facilitated by a software such as NVivo (Johnston, 2006). The small sample, however, in this study allowed for one author to code the data by hand without software to identify themes among the participants’ responses.

3. Results

This section, of the manuscript, will present the results of executing the methodology described in the preceding section. This section is divided into three subsections. In the first subsection, the results for the first 12 questions of Part I are presented. In the second subsection, the results for Part II are presented. The final subsection will present the results for the open-ended question, question #13, in Part I.

3.1. The Trip and Local Services

The first question asked respondents to list their primary reason for visiting Mongolia (Table 3). Respondents had three options: Tourism, business or visiting family. Interestingly, nobody selected “Visiting Family” as their primary motivation for the visit.

Table 3: Responses to the primary reason for visiting Mongolia (n = 138)

| Item | Number and percentage of responses |
|----------|------------------------------------|
| Tourism | 121 (88%) |
| Business | 17 (12%) |

Table 4: Likert scale data for responses (n = 138) to agreement with items on survey. 5-point Likert Scale where Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2 and Strongly Disagree = 1

| Item | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Mean Score |
|--|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| The level of security while on the trip was satisfactory | 121 | 13 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 4.82 |
| Restaurants and menu options while in the country were satisfactory | 19 | 53 | 12 | 48 | 6 | 3.22 |
| Mongolian people are friendly | 51 | 61 | 9 | 14 | 3 | 4.04 |
| The quality of accommodation options while in the country was satisfactory | 27 | 42 | 23 | 37 | 9 | 3.30 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|------|
| The quality of food provided while on tour was satisfactory | 19 | 50 | 27 | 34 | 8 | 3.28 |
| The quality of the tour was satisfactory | 33 | 67 | 17 | 18 | 3 | 3.80 |
| The tour vehicles were comfortable | 15 | 82 | 8 | 27 | 6 | 3.53 |
| The road conditions in Mongolia were comfortable | 14 | 31 | 23 | 41 | 29 | 2.71 |
| Local tour guides were knowledgeable | 45 | 70 | 12 | 9 | 2 | 4.07 |
| The tour provided adequate value relative to the cost | 32 | 42 | 14 | 31 | 19 | 3.27 |
| I would recommend Mongolia as a tourist destination | 37 | 40 | 36 | 19 | 6 | 3.60 |

3.2. Personal Data

Part II, of the survey instrument, consisted of three questions that asked respondents to provide some demographic data. Hence, all 138 survey respondents answered all three questions.

The first question pertained to the age of the survey respondent. Out of 138 respondents, 13 indicated that they were younger than 20 years old. 43 indicated that they were in the 20-30 age range, 34 stated that their age was in the 31-40 range, 28 stated that their age was in the 41-50 range and 11 respondents stated that their age was in the 51-60 range. Nine respondents stated they were older than 60.

The second question asked respondents to state their gender. 71 respondents stated that their gender was female and 67 respondents stated that their gender was male.

The third, and final, question asked respondents about their race/ethnicity. 64 respondents stated that they identified themselves as Asian and 47 respondents stated that they were Caucasian. Nine, 13 and five respondents selected "Black," "Latin American," and "Other," respectively. The five respondents who selected "Other" for this question did not elaborate on their selection. Based on information provided by the company, the "Other" option, for this question, was optional and so respondents could opt out of filling in the blank space reserved for this purpose.

3.3. Close-ended "Additional Comments" item

The last question, on Part I, asked respondents to provide additional comments regarding their Mongolian travel experience (Table 5). This question was optional and as a result only 14 out of the 138 respondents provided a response to this question.

Table 5: Summary of topics and themes from respondents (n = 14)

| Topic | Theme |
|----------------------|---|
| The tour | 1. Accolades 2. Return trip 3. Make recommendations 4. Satisfied |
| The Mongolian people | 1. Friendly 2. Knowledgeable 3. Quality tour guides |
| Trip dissatisfaction | 1. Road conditions 2. Cuisine 3. Language barriers |

3.4. *The tour itself*

Respondents focused in part on the quality of the tour. As one respondent said, *“Everything was great. Wouldn’t change a thing.”* There were also thoughts on recommending Mongolia as a destination. One respondent said, *“Great country. Loved it. Will recommend to others.”* Finally, respondents considered a return trip—*“I will come back again, hopefully soon”*—and expressed satisfaction—*“It is a fascinating country with a lot to offer tourists.”*

3.5. *Mongolian people*

There were comments about the Mongolian people. One respondent said, *“Some of the friendliest people I ever met.”* Respondents also noted that the tour guides were knowledgeable and professional. One respondent said, *“[our guide] was extremely knowledgeable. It is obvious that he loves his country and loves sharing the country’s rich history, culture and tourist sites to visitors. I would definitely recommend his services to anyone visiting Mongolia.”* Another respondent said, *“[my guide] is truly one of a kind. She was an outstanding tour guide.”*

3.6. *Trip dissatisfaction*

Trip dissatisfaction resolved around road infrastructure, local cuisine and English language communication barriers. One respondent said, *“The tour bus was comfortable, but many of the roads were not once you get outside the city. I have a bad back and these roads are not good for my back.”* Another said, *“There are far too many potholes especially in the countryside.”* With regard to local food, one respondent said, *“I don’t really care for Mongolian cuisine, but that’s my problem and I don’t blame the country. International menu options out in the countryside would have been nice.”* Finally, one respondent said, *“Language options are needed on tours catering to foreigners. I can speak English and so I did the English tour, but most people in my country don’t speak English.”*

4. Discussion

As stated earlier, the purpose of this section is to analyze and interpret the research results. The primary focus of this section is to highlight areas in which Mongolia “shines” as well as those that need improvement. This section has the same three subsections as the preceding section.

4.1. *The Trip and Local Services*

According to the research results, an overwhelming majority of foreigners who visit Mongolia do so for the purposes of tourism. Only 17 out of the 138 survey respondents cited a reason other than tourism as the primary motivation for their visit. This is consistent with the findings of Gantemur (2020) who stated that approximately 85% of foreigners who visit Mongolia do so for the express purpose of tourism and have no other connection to the country.

According to the research results, the strongest level of agreement is with the questions pertaining to safety/security on tours, friendliness of the Mongolian people and the knowledge level of local guides. 134, 115 and 112 respondents, respectively selected “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” for these three questions. Hence, according to foreign tourists, Mongolia has done an outstanding job in these three areas.

Although not rated as strongly as the three issues mentioned in the preceding paragraph, quality of local tours as well as the quality of vehicles used on tours also polled well among foreigners. 100 and 97 respondents, respectively selected “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to these two questions.

Research results, pertaining to the nation’s strengths, are supported by the published literature as well as reputable Internet sites. For example, Jargalsaikhan (2018) as well as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (unodc.org) stated that Mongolia is a relatively safe country by international standards and security should not be a major concern for foreigners visiting the country. Furthermore, the Asian travel website, tripsatasia.com, states that “Mongolia is probably one of the safest places on Earth.”

Yu et al. (2006) attested to the friendliness of the Mongolian people towards foreigners. This is supplemented by the website onceuponajrny.com in which the authors state that “Mongolians are arguably the most friendly & warmhearted people in the world.”

Finally, Shircliff (2018) discussed the rigorous and extensive training needed to become a licensed tour guide in Mongolia. He stated that the process involves intensive training and a lengthy interview process. This information is supplemented by the Mongolian travel website, discovermongolia.mn.

Although the country is exceling in some areas, there are also areas in which Mongolian authorities need to make improvement if they want to increase their share of foreign tourists. Research results indicate that there is strong dissatisfaction among foreign tourists on issues pertaining to menu options and quality of local accommodations. Foreigners also expressed unhappiness with the road conditions in the country, especially outside the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Respondents were somewhat split on the “bang for the buck” that the tour provided, but a majority of research participants stated that they would recommend Mongolia as a tourist destination to others.

As with the nation’s strengths, many of its weaknesses are also supported by the published literature and/or credible Internet sites. For instance, Eldev-Ochir (2019) stated that many of the nation’s roadways are badly in need of repair and major investment in the nation’s infrastructure, from both private and public sources, is needed within the next decade. Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State’s Internet website (travel.state.gov) states the following: “Outside of Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia has few paved roads and even fewer street lights. Most roads have only two lanes and no shoulders and most sealed roads need resurfacing.”

Although the nation’s physical infrastructure, which includes roads and bridges, was a source of dissatisfaction among foreign visitors, research results indicate that dining and accommodation options are also areas that need improvement. Both Kumatsu (2008) and Shircliff (2018) addressed the Mongolian diet and the fact that it may not be to the liking of foreigners visiting the country. Shircliff (2018) also stated that although Ulaanbaatar has numerous international restaurants, rural parts of the country predominantly serve only local cuisine which in many cases may not be suitable for foreigners or may not be to their liking.

Chen (2010) addressed accommodations in Mongolia. The article stated that Ulaanbaatar has numerous international hotel chains, including many 5 star brands, but accommodations outside the capital city are primitive and not up to international standards. This is supplemented by Gantemur (2020) who stated that many remote areas, of the country, do not offer any other accommodation options other than Gers that lack indoor plumbing. The article described Gers, which are also known as Yurts, as portable, round tents made of skin or felt which are commonly used as a dwelling by nomadic groups in rural parts of the country.

As stated in the introductory section, one of the objectives of this study is to enable Mongolian authorities to increase foreign tourism in a sustainable manner. In keeping with that objective, Mongolians should commend themselves on their friendliness towards foreigners as well as on maintaining security and allowing foreigners to travel safely in their country. However, Mongolian authorities should commit resources to improving the nation’s physical infrastructure. Attention should also be given to improving accommodation options as well as the quality and variety of eateries outside the capital city. Research results, as well as the existing literature, have indicated that a wide variety of accommodations and dining options are available in the capital city; however, that is not the case once tourists leave Ulaanbaatar.

4.2. Personal Data

Research results indicate that a majority of foreign visitors to Mongolia are relatively young. 90 out of 138 respondents stated that they were 40 years old or younger; only nine respondents stated that they were older than 60. Although statistics on the age range of foreign visitors was not publicly available, both Yu et. al. (2006) and Shircliff (2018) cited “nature” and “adventure” as two primary motivators for tourism to Mongolia. It makes intuitive sense that individuals seeking adventure would be younger as opposed to older. Furthermore, Liew et. al. (2021) stated that senior citizens tend to require more “creature comforts” while on vacation; their study defined seniors as anybody over the age of 55.

Research results suggest that there is a fairly even gender distribution among foreign nationals who visit Mongolia. However, at this time, the researchers are unable to either corroborate or refute the research results, with respect to gender distribution, using published statistics, the academic literature or credible Internet sites. Hence, the distribution of male vs. female foreign tourists, who visit Mongolia, is an issue that deserves further exploration.

According to the research results, approximately 80% of foreign nationals visiting Mongolia identify themselves as either Asian or Caucasian. This statistic is supported by both the academic literature and a credible Internet resource. Gantemur (2020) stated that the top two nations, with respect to foreigners visiting Mongolia, are China and Russia. This makes intuitive sense since these are the two nations

that share a border with Mongolia. Furthermore, Amicus Mongolian Travel Company (amicusmongolia.com) provided tourism statistics for Mongolia from 2008 to 2019. It is noteworthy that for the entire 12-year period, the top five nationalities that visited Mongolia are as follows: China, Russia, South Korea, Japan and USA. Hence, this supports the demographic data, with respect to nationality, provided by the research participants. It is to be expected that the visitors from China, South Korea and Japan would select “Asian” for their race/ethnicity; likewise, it is to be expected that a majority of visitors from Russia and USA selected “White” for their race/ethnicity given the demographic makeup of these two countries.

Only five respondents identified their race and/or ethnicity as “Other.” Although these five respondents did not elaborate on their selection, one can make an “educated guess” regarding their background. It is possible, and perhaps even probable, that the five respondents who selected “Other” for their race/ethnicity are mixed-race individuals; for example, one parent might be Caucasian while the other parent is Asian.

4.3. Additional Comments

Most of the comments mirrored issues addressed earlier. Respondents commented on issues such as the lack of dining options, especially outside Ulaanbaatar, the need for improvement of the nation’s physical infrastructure, the friendliness of the Mongolian people and the knowledge base of professional tour guides.

It is, however, noteworthy that one new issue came to light as a result of the open-ended question on Part I of the survey instrument: The need for additional language options on tours. A quick review of the travel websites, cited in this manuscript, confirmed that websites targeting foreign tourists are only in English. Furthermore, Cohen (2014) stated that Mongolians primarily learn English as their second language and Chinese is practically non-existent in the country. The article stated that some older Mongolians can speak Russian, but that is not the case among the younger generation.

If the Mongolian government wishes to increase foreign tourism, and make foreign tourism a larger proportion of the nation’s GDP, the issue alluded to in the preceding paragraph needs to be addressed. According to Amicus Mongolian Travel Company (amicusmongolia.com), the number of foreign nationals visiting Mongolia has not topped 600,000 in data collected over a 12-year period. Needless to say, this number falls far short of many other countries including China and Russia, the two nations that border Mongolia. According to World Data (worlddata.info), approximately 31 million and 7 million foreign tourists visited China and Russia, respectively in 2019.

As can be seen by the statistics presented in the preceding paragraph, tourism in Mongolia falls far short of both China and Russia, among other nations on the planet. Addressing the language issue might help improve foreign tourism numbers. The researchers recommend having external facing websites in other languages besides English. At a bare minimum, Chinese and Russian are appropriate since they account for the largest proportion of foreign tourists visiting the country. It is also recommended to utilize the services of tour guides who are bilingual or even multilingual. Once again, at a bare minimum, Chinese and Russian are recommended.

5. Limitations

All research projects have limitations and this study is no exception. One key limitation, of this study, is the fact that the researchers did not develop and administer the survey. As such, the researchers had no influence over the data collection process. The survey was developed, deployed and, as a result, the data was collected by the company.

This study focused on foreign tourists, that utilized the services of a professional tour operator for sightseeing purposes, but did not study independent travelers such as backpackers. Furthermore, this study focused only on foreigners traveling in Mongolia, but excluded Mongolians traveling locally. As in any country, it is to be expected that native Mongolians would also engage in some tourism within the borders of their country.

The time period for this study spanned a five-year period from 2014-2019. However, the researchers have no way of knowing when a specific survey respondent took the trip since there was no time limit for completion of the survey. The email, containing the link to complete the survey, was sent out two weeks upon completion of services with the company; however, the respondent might have taken several weeks or months, or possibly even years, to return the completed survey. The survey should have included

a question asking the respondent to state the month and year in which they took the trip to see if the time period, of the trip, impacted research results. However, as stated earlier, these issues are beyond the researcher's control since they did not control the survey development and deployment process.

As mentioned earlier, the survey was set up in such a manner that all the questions, in both Parts I and II, had to be answered. In other words, the system would not let the respondent submit the survey instrument if any question was left blank; the sole exception was the unstructured question, in Part I, where respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional feedback. Although the demographic data provided useful information, for marketing purposes, the response rate might have been higher if the "Personal Data" questions were optional. It is entirely possible, and perhaps even probable, that many potential respondents chose not to complete the survey since they didn't feel comfortable providing demographic information about themselves. This issue was addressed by one of the respondents in the "Additional Comments" portion of the survey instrument.

There is an inconsistency between some of the areas of concern raised by the respondents, such as dining options and accommodations, and the demographics of the typical foreigner who travels to Mongolia and engages in tourism. The demographic data, supported by the literature, suggests that foreigners traveling to Mongolia are relatively young and are more adventurous than the average "run of the mill" tourist. One would expect that such travelers would enjoy, and perhaps even relish, staying in a Ger tent and eating traditional food. However, research results indicate that quality of accommodations and menu options, especially outside Ulaanbaatar, are areas that need improvement. This inconsistency is worthy of further exploration.

Finally, as stated earlier, the researchers were unable to corroborate the research results with respect to gender distribution. The results, of this study, indicate that the distribution between the two genders is relatively equal; however, the researchers were unable to find anything in the literature, or on Internet sites, to validate the research results with respect to this issue. Hence, as stated in the preceding section, this is an area that deserves further exploration.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of foreign nationals who visit the landlocked nation of Mongolia and engage in tourism activities while in the country. The study also examined the key demographics of this group. The research methodology involved an electronically administered survey to a sample of the target population and was administered by a tour operator based in Ulaanbaatar, the nation's capital. Research results indicate Mongolia deserves a "gold star" for the friendliness of its people and the high level of security it provides visitors to the country. However, the nation's physical infrastructure, in particular the condition of roadways outside Ulaanbaatar, is in need of improvement. Furthermore, research results indicate that more language options are needed on tours. This is especially important since, according to the research results, a significant percentage of foreigners who visit Mongolia are not native English speakers. Research results are consistent with the study's hypothesis.

In addition to the issues highlighted above, research results indicate that foreign tourists, who visit Mongolia, are relatively young and a majority of them visit from neighboring countries, such as China and Russia. South Korea, Japan and the United States also account for a significant percentage of foreign tourists to the landlocked nation.

The primary contribution of this study is to enable Mongolian tourism authorities to take the steps necessary to increase foreign tourism, to the country, in a long-term, sustainable manner. In doing so, the nation should capitalize on its strengths, but also take active steps to address areas of concern as highlighted by the research results. Mongolian tourism authorities should also allocate marketing resources to targeting key demographic segments of the travel industry. It is the hope of the researchers that taking some of the steps suggested in this manuscript will result in increased foreign tourism to the nation in the years, and decades, to come.

There are several avenues for future research projects based on the results of this study. One avenue is to explore the inconsistency pertaining to accommodations and dining options, discussed in the preceding section, further. Another potential avenue for a future research project is to replicate this study with respect to another nation. International tourism is a multibillion dollar industry and many, if not most, nations would like to increase their share of the tourism pie. A study, of this nature, would provide tourism authorities with valuable information that they can use to increase their country's share of foreign visitors.

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