CHAPTER 11

LISTENING TO CHILDREN AS A TOURISM MARKET: THE ASIAN CONTEXT

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The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Respecting children as a significant growing market for tourism industry
- Focusing on the children's influence on the family holiday satisfaction
- Evaluating the less positive experiences of families with young children
- Adopting Orchestra Model of Tourism Experience for less positive experiences
- Highlighting the main dissatisfaction issues for the family tourist market

Keywords: Children, Family tourist market, less positive holiday experiences, travel constraints, satisfaction, and loyalty.

INTRODUCTION

Children constitute a major part of the global population and influence the family tourist market. Indeed, families are nearly universal social constructions in which children and parents spend most of their leisure and entertainment time (Webster, 2012; Lehto et al., 2009; Turley, 2001). As a result, it is not surprising that family vacations are considered a significant part of excursions around the world (Obrador, 2012; Shaw et al., 2008). The United States Travel Association (2009) has stated that at least a quarter of American family holidays in 2003 involved at least one child under the age of five. Similarly, Obrador (2012) and Carr (2011) note that families represent one of the largest markets for tour operators and other tourism service providers. The importance of the family to the tourism industry is illustrated by the industry itself in the content of their marketing brochures. In fact, as Marshment (1997) points out some time ago, families are widely portrayed as the leading consumers in some tourism advertising, especially in relation to seaside tourism. The presence of children in travel advertising has become more and more popular today.

The importance of understanding the experiences of children in tourism not only relates to their presence among tourists, but also to their position as active social agents that can directly and indirectly influence their parents' shopping behaviour (Mohammadi & Pearce, 2020). The amount of personal income that many children have access to also makes them a potential and

important tourism market that is worth studying. Further, children's holiday experiences are worth investigating because their lives, interests, and needs vary with those of adults. This study explores the experiences of the families travelling with children in order to offer and market products and services to children and adults in a high quality way. The context for the work is the responses of families with children to attractions in Singapore. This setting provides a useful insight into the demands of many Asian markets since the available attractions ensure that children are common visitors.

FOUNDATION IDEAS

Vacation and tourism experiences for children and families are built on the history of holiday demand and the nature of holiday provision for children. Given the ever-changing nature of children, it should be noted that children's and families' experiences of vacations provide analytical insights into the changing demand. It is important to note that children go through different stages of their lives and this fact needs to be considered when assessing the responses of the children and the adults who look after them (Carr, 2011).

Over the past decades, marketers and promoters of children's products have developed a vast array of strategies to reach young consumers (Kerrane, Hogg, and Bettany, 2012). They are interested in the child market for three main reasons. Firstly, today's children in western and increasingly in some Asian societies have significant amounts of money to meet their needs and desires, The second reason is that children are the future market (Liu and Filimonau, 2019; Babb, Olaru, Curtis, and Robertson, 2017, Webster, 2012; Turley, 2001). It has been established that children develop a sense of loyalty to a brand at an early age, and that positive attitudes toward a brand persists until adulthood. A third reason underlying the marketing interest in children is that young family members are important influencers. They not only guide others in home based purchases such as snacks, pastries and breakfast products, but as they grow older, they also influence their parents' choice of restaurants, vacations, and new cars (Cullingford, 1995; Kang & Hsu 2005; Poria, Atzaba-Poria & Barrett, 2005; Blichfeldt et al., 2011; Carr, 2011; Radic, 2019; Mohammadi and Pearce, 2020).

Today, the power and impact of children on family decisions can be justified by the political-economic changes of recent decades. Parents have higher incomes and higher levels of education; they often delay childbearing and have fewer children, and there are more families where parents are the sole guardian (Yeoman, McMahon-Beattie, Lord, and Parker-Hodds, 2012; Gunter & Furnham, 1998). In general, these factors encourage parents to be more tolerant

of their children and to take better care of them (Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, & Cheah, 2015). A key factor that justifies the growing influence of children and family decisions is the liberalization of parent-child relationships in Western societies. A few decades ago, these patterns of child-rearing were characterized by power, obedience, and respect. However, equality and agreement about some decisions are important in today's families. The child-parent relationship is no longer regulated by power and order, but is influenced by negotiation (Yeoman et al., 2012). In modern western families, children's views and their involvement in the decision-making process are important and taken seriously. In the past, children were never as powerful as they are today (Webster, 2012; Gunter & Furnham, 1998).

Three main concepts underpin this study; experience, satisfaction and loyalty. Tourism is an experience driven sector so studying the experience can be the key to access tourists' perceptions of value and by implication their future intentions. Many studies are based on the positive feelings and tourist's best holidays which are valuable when considering the intention to return to a destination (Barnes, Mattsson, & Sørensen, 2016; del Bosque and San Martin; 2008; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) Nevertheless, a kind of reverse study can be helpful by researching the less positive or negative experiences to know what are the constraints and limiting factors that shape not going to a destination or not returning to the same place.

Taking a broader view, the current interest in children's perspectives is aligned with the way tourism scholars have tried to focus on marginalized groups in society (Tribe and Liburd, 2016). Families always have been under investigation in tourism studies but from the perspective of the adults. It is time to study family tourism by better incorporating the needs and, where possible, views of the growing market segment of children. Tourists' experiences can be analyzed in three stages; before the visit, during the visit and after the visit. Families with children have growing expectations and the tourism industry needs more effort to address their anticipations of travel and expectation needs (Liu & Filimonau, 2019). Recent work has begun to address children expectation and motivations (Mohammadi and Pearce, 2020; Radic, 2019; Wu, Wall, Zu, and Ying, 2019: Rhoden, Hunter-Jones, and Miller, 2016; Kim and Lehto, 2013). If we can target accurately the motivations of the children, there are chances of fulfilling their expectations that can lead to satisfaction. Satisfaction is one of the main drivers for loyalty. In childhood, loyalty is assumed to be an enduring force when the services adequately address motivations and needs. Loyalty occurs when the destination can cover the expectations of the visitors (Aktaş, Aksu, & Çizel, 2007; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). There are two approaches to travel loyalty: one is behavioural and the other one is attitudinal (Brunner, Stöcklin, &

Opwis, 2008). The behavioural approach focuses on repeating the purchase of a brand. However, simply focus on the behaviour itself may be limited since the opportunities to observe follow up action can be limited and outlast the length of studies and research efforts. A second way to conceive of loyalty is through examining attitudes, since these predispositions to think feel and react are likely to persist over months or even years. Building on the well-known tripartite view of attitudes –cognition, affect and behaviour - Oliver (1999) suggested four different kinds of loyalty. The first stage is the cognitive loyalty where the customer determines from available information that a brand is preferable to others. Affective loyalty means the customer builds an emotional connection to the product or service or brand through previous satisfying experiences. Conative or behavioural intention-based loyalty shows the willingness to take action. The fourth component is actually behavioural loyalty, choosing the experience again, which has already been noted. Pearce and Kang (2009) added transferred loyalty to this inventory. In this approach, consumers may opt for a very similar product or experience to the one they first enjoyed but not actually return to exactly the same place or buy the identical entity.

This chapter considers the experiences of families with children during their visits to different sets of Singaporean activities and attractions. The research undertaken provides evidence of how families experience and perceive travelling with children in an Asian context.. Singapore is chosen as a well-developed tourism destination in the Asian context. The statistics about visitor arrivals support the focus on this country. In 2018 more than 70 percent of tourist arrivals to Singapore are from Asian countries. Considering the last 10 year statistics trend line on arrival tourism to Singapore (STB, 2018), the percentage of families with children under 18 year old has been decreasing slightly (STB, 2018). These statistics reveal that Singapore has not been expanding the family market at the same rate as growth as in its other markets. Importantly this does not mean that the children are not a new market of interest in the context of this volume. Instead, it suggest that perhaps some greater attention to children per se as a market is warranted. Opportunities to enhance loyalty and the attractiveness of Singapore as a family market do therefore exist. In particular, finding out specific reason for dissatisfaction amongst families is the prevailing concern of the chapter. The focus of the study is on less studied tourism related sectors rather accommodation. It can be suggested that children are perhaps less concerned with where they stay as opposed to what they can do (Mohammadi and Pearce, 2020). Further, by considering tourism receipts by major components during last 10 years (STB, 2018), the receipt for Sightseeing, Entertainment and Gaming has been a key part

of the national tourism income; undoubtedly a development fueled by the integrated resorts (Lee, 2016). By focusing on the attractions and the family reactions to these sites, the research in this chapter seeks to add to the understanding of the family market issues in this part of Asia.

METHODOLOGY

A systematic stratified sampling was used for collecting cases due to the potential diversity of relevant tourism sites and experiences (Yin, 2017). The selection was based on (1) varied types tourism activities, (2) leading tourism places and attraction in Singapore, (3) availability of less positive comments and complaints due to children, (4) families with children under 12. It is hypothesized that the constraint for families with children in Singapore may vary based on different activities. Six different main activities in Singapore are recognized based on the TripAdvisor category of top things to do in Singapore; they are shopping, outdoor activity and nature and parks, museums, fun and games, sites and landmarks, food and drinks. For each activity three top ranking attraction and places based on the TripAdvisor ranking were chosen. Based on selection criteria number three, if an attraction did not have negative comments pertaining to children, it was not considered and another one was replaced. The attractions and places were as follow: Singapore Zoo, Singapore River Cruise, East Coast Park for the outdoor activities; Gardens by the Bay, Jurong Bird Park, S.E.A Aquarium for nature and parks; Vivo City, Orchard Road, Jewel Changi Airport for shopping; Art science Museum, National Gallery Singapore, Science Center for museums; Universal studios Singapore, KidZania Singapore, Mega Adventure Park for fun and game; Singapore Flyer, China town, Marina Bay Sands Skypark for sights and landmarks; and Satay by the Bay, Zam Zam, Makansutra Glutton's Bay as the winners of 2018 and 2019 and having certificate of excellence. For food and drinks, hawker centres were chosen as they are well recognized features of dining in Singapore. The accommodation and restaurant sector was not considered both because it was not the concern of the study and previous research has directed attention to these issues. Children's age is a major determinant for children's needs germane to tourism activities. For this study, children under 12 were chosen (Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, & Cheah, 2015; Liu and Filimonau, 2019). For each attraction, the five most recent less positive comments focused on challenges for children were collected. Total number of 105 comments were collected in November 2019 covering data from 2016.

Data was inserted in Excel and coded manually. Deductive thematic analysis was used based on the Orchestra Model of Tourism Experience (Pearce, 2011), whereby the experiences of the families with children were classified according to five sensory factors, and affective,

cognitive, behavioural, and relationship levels. To assess affective experience, the Plutchik Emotion Wheel (1980) was used and eight types of emotion including anticipation, surprise, joy, sadness, trust, disgust, fear, and anger were examined. Cognitive experience was related to perception of the experience, thinking about the experience, choosing the experience, and learning from the experience. The behavioural or activity element was assessed as using technology, movement in space and over time, and sustainability related responses. Finally, the assessment of relationships was examined in terms of tourist- companions, tourist- providers, tourists with other tourists, and tourists interacting with local people.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The coding of the results is portrayed in two Figures. Figure 11.1 shows the Orchestra Model of Tourism Experience based on the less positive experience of families with children travelling to Singapore. The highlights of the less positive comments show families with children in Singapore were influenced more by the affective and cognitive elements than by the other experiential components. As the comments were related to less positive and unsatisfactory experiences, positive feelings were not anticipated. The highest affective response experienced by those families was sadness and the second one, anger. Tourists compare their less positive experiences with their perception of the visiting place or activity and later their inconvenience and dissatisfaction make them think of the place and its challenges based on the children's needs and requirements. This cognitive process of thinking of the challenges and finding solutions to make the situation better defines the learning component. In addition, tourists face some difficulties in their relationship that was mostly with their children as their main companions but also with the service providers. The dissatisfaction with the sensory experience was less significant for the families.

Figure 11.1. Dissatisfaction coded according to the five components of the Orchestra Model of Tourism experience for families travelling with children. (Percentages for the elements constituting each component are provided in the outer ring of the Figure.)

Source: Author's data (after Pearce and Zare, 2017)

Figure 11.1. Orchestra Model of Tourism Experience concepts with frequency percentage for families travelling with children.

Figure 11.2 presents the same data more descriptively. The data related to each theme based on the Orchestra Model of Experience are categorized into some sub-themes. For better understanding of the finding, a tree chart is used to convey the importance of each level of experience for the families travelling with children.

Figure 11.2 here

Sensory experience: Families reported unpleasant sights such as dirty and polluted beaches, closed or malfunctioning exhibits, not removing the dead birds in cages, unclear glass at the scenic spots, lack of variety of animals at the zoo, poorly maintained children's areas, run down facilities and orientation problems. Families with children suffered from the high Singaporean

tropical temperature and humidity as well as being sometimes exposed to rain with the associated main challenge of finding sheltered areas for children. Further difficulties at some attractions included locating child-friendly restaurants to provide healthy, suitable and non-spicy food for their children. No negative experiences about smell or hearing unpleasant sounds were reported.

Cognitive experience: At the cognitive level of experience, some families had a kind of positive perception from their first visit of the same place or an alternative attraction that prompted comparisons. Mainly the first experience was reported as positive and their expectation was not fulfilled during their visit with their children. They found lack of variety for the interactive and stimulating activities for children. In addition, working out how to use maps at some sites added more challenges in terms of finding the best and shortest routes. These less positive cognitive experiences led to some learning outcomes that can be classified in three ways. One category can be identified as aggregated dissatisfied remarks: "*Everything is costly including food & souvenirs. Insufficient toilets (dirty) and baby changing room and seats for those elderly/tired. Personally this is first and last experience and definitely not worth it as everything is expensive*"; some are regretful, with the view that if they had more information before going to the site they could have made better decisions and ended up with a better experience "*I would have bought the Express ticket if I had known of the option*"; and finally the third group were more constructive and useful with suggestions about redesigning places to be more child–friendly "*KidZania Singapore - Get your act together and actually look at your operations and how you can reduce the queuing time, retrain your staff so they actually smile and make the children happy. Treat your customers with some respect. If they are unhappy listen to them and respond. Don't offer them a discount for a 2nd return if they had an awful time initially*".

Behavioral experience: Key behaviors were sometimes identified in the negative complaints and comments. Difficulties in navigation and the use of maps to establish directions and routes while accompanied by children was a notable issue as was finding pleasant settings for children to look at scenery. Both these issues made families unhappy. In addition, time management can be a problem in general for tourists and in particular for families with impatient children. In this study, time-related issues were identified as long queues with no interactive entertainment and no information or explanation about the waiting time. Sustainability was not a basic concern for families, only appearing as an adjunct to the presentation of aesthetically pleasing, safe and clean environments for their children. In addition, families recognized a

number of other concerns. The following issues were noted: run down facilities, lack of changing and nursing areas, lack of interactive and stimulating activities for children, not having special fees for children, no variety of shops attractive to children, lack of shows and exhibitions, stroller problems, limited availability of the lifts and therefore having to use stairs with children, lack of information about the activities/rules and regulations for children, and limited options for learning and educational benefits. One comment from a family with two children, one three years old and one aged six is indicative of the issues.

"We visit Singapore every year but went to KidsZania for the first time, and were unfortunately very disappointed…Many attractions were closed for the day, some opened only in later afternoon, others were open only at a few concrete times, and the remaining ones had queues of approx. 30 min. (And we were there on a Tuesday, which is supposedly one of the quietest days and indeed there were not that many people inside but the queues were still long). All activities are fully organized for groups of 6-10 children more or less according to the same scheme: photos, short intro of the topic, a cartoon, and a short activity. There is no free play, discovery or creativity involved. While parents have to pay a full entry fee, they cannot participate in any activities. Most of the staff seemed very unenthusiastic about their job and in fact annoyed when our 3 year old could not follow as quickly as the other children in the group could. Finally, most are sponsored (sort of brainwashing) attractions presenting and advertising products to children through their activities. This ranges from unhealthy high street food outlets (pizza, burgers, ice cream) to some totally random companies that no child would normally be interested in (e.g. a flooring company, a mattress shop, a powder milk shop). We ended up doing the only neutral ones, like the police, fire station, hospital, but there were very few of those."

Relationship experience: Children tend to be the focus in family travel. They influence the whole travel experience. Parents reported that they had some challenges and concern to make their children happy, entertained, engaged, excited and keep them safe. In general, the main challenge was related to the providers of tourism services. Families in this study found serious problems with the staff that can be categorized into five themes as impoliteness such as "… *A staff member came over to us and told us pretty rudely that food wasn't allowed. /gives us a bad look and makes a racist statement while walking away. He was rude to us again while we were getting off the boat at the end of the cruise…*"; not being informative as one family

commented *"…Staff did not inform our family about the baby not being able to enter river quest during our purchase. We were not informed that no refunds were given except for an exchange at the gift shop in credits…";* unfriendly behavior with children *"Staff operating the section where they allow visitors to touch some star fish were unfriendly and unaccommodating. My 6yo child did not understand the instructions (maybe because of the difference in accent and intonation) and were touching the fish in a different way but not in a harmful way. The staff frowned and made faces. Many young children go there and I was expecting that they would know how to better handle such situations"*; lack of information on rules and regulation and the inflexibility of the staff as an example one family with a 12 year old daughter reported"*When we bought tickets (box office is nowhere near the entrance...) We got this major argument from the ticket person who insisted we pay full price for our 12 year old. They actually wanted an ID …like we carry around a passport for purposes of showing her age. Really? Also seniors get NO discount unless they are from Singapore. Seems greedy. Attendants were off putting and rude, which is unusual here"*; and finally a fifth concern was a lack of enough staff at some sites.

Table 11.1 shows the comparative data of the experiences by the type of the activities based on the frequency percentage.

Table 11.1 here

Importantly, the data show that negative visual experiences are observed more often in outdoor/nature and parks related activities. In addition, in the same category, the perception and expectation of the tourist are reported more frequently with attendant higher levels of dissatisfaction compared to other settings. Dissatisfaction related to time and queuing was more influential in games and entertainment. Taste related concerns were seen more in food and drink activities and rarely reported in others contexts. The highest less positive feelings were reported for outdoor activities, fun and entertainment locations and shopping.

CONCLUSION

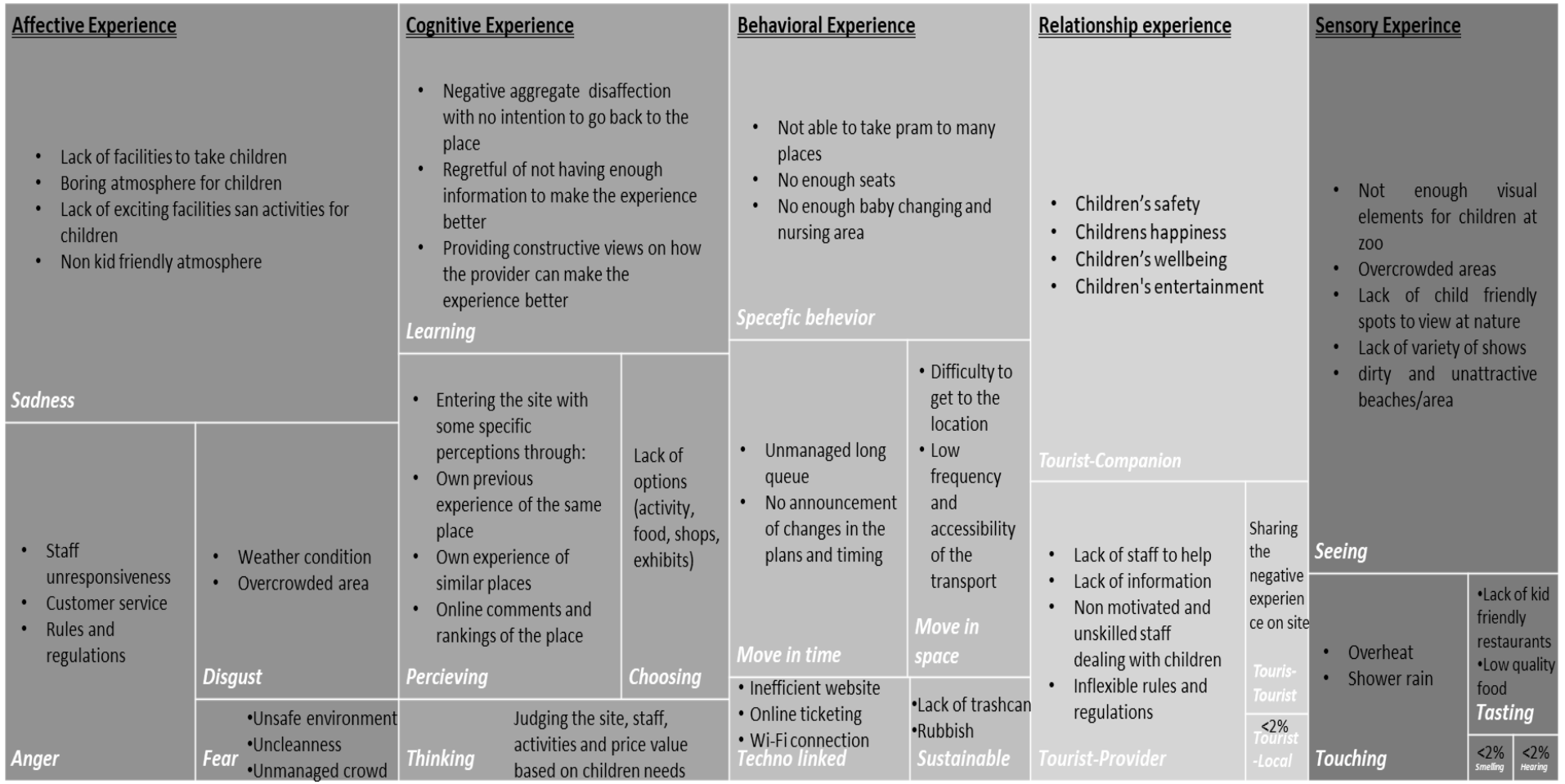
Children are receiving attention in tourism research as an increasingly well recognized market segment. Singapore is a potential destination for many Asian children based on its location, as

well as a reputation for offering a hygienic atmosphere and safety. China is a major source of the new comers from Asia and this group in particular may boost Singapore tourist arrivals. This chapter has investigated what are the less positive features for families when visiting Singaporean attractions. The work provides material for the industry to self-evaluate its current acceptability to the market. The less positive comments could act as a rubric to evaluate Singapore's overall performance for child related tourism activities and services. Studying families from varies backgrounds with both western and oriental perspectives enriches the results so that operators and managers and their service personnel can to try to improve the experience of travel for children globally. The results provides some managerial implications to offer tourism services.

Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag, and Cheah (2015) studied Asian families with children in hotels and the results in this study parallel those results. The common issues and challenges that frustrate and annoy families with children are long travel and waiting times, poor guidance for orientation, and service interactions that ignore children and focus almost exclusively on adults. A number of simple recommendations to re-orient service providers can be suggested. For example, when a family is checking into the hotel or arriving at an attraction, staff can greet children and offer balloons, healthy snacks, or a welcome kit to make them feel comfortable and important. Providing child-friendly amenities at many travel destinations are important. For example offering children's meals with smaller size cutlery and a healthy variety of food such as fruit slices, muesli bars, fun vegetables rather than unhealthy offerings such chicken nuggets and fries would please more customers, both adults and their younger family members. A key factor is safety. This has a high priority and can be a challenge for parents so it influences their choice of a destination; a lack of safe facilities appears to be a major deterrent to being positive about a setting./Lack of learning opportunities in the activities and lack of family-oriented programs should also be considered, as the children's programs usually tend to exclude the parents. The results of the present study reinforces the findings about environmental constraints mentioned in the work of Freund et al. (2019).

In family tourism, the overall satisfaction of the families and willingness to return is dependent on the children's satisfaction and fulfilling their needs (Liu & Filimonau, 2019). That study revealed that parents who are not satisfied with the services are not willing to get back to the place or introducing the destination to others. There are some clear points of conclusion for this Singapore based chapter. The work has identified a suite of aggravating issues for families with children in the Asian context. These complaints, which can be addressed as operators learn

more about the children's needs and the family market, highlight the need to manage queues and time, provide clear orientation, clarify activities with better family–friendly instructions, offer better food, and build a staff culture that attends to children. By adopting the Orchestra Model of experience, the researcher has been able to reveal a diversity of challenges and constraints through a systematic appraisal of concerns across a diversity of sites. The internal relationships within the family is a further important, but yet little explored internal issue. Additional and future work could also explore satisfaction with corrective or remedial action as well as partition the results into responses from specific source markets.



Source: Author's data (after Pearce and Zare, 2017)

Table 11.1. Comparative experience analysis of different tourism activities (N=105, numbers in the Table refer to percentages)

	seeing	smelling	touching	hearing	tasting	sadness	disgust	fear	anger	perceiving	thinking	choosing	learning	techno linked	move in space	move in time	sustainable	specefic	tourist-provider	tourist-companion	touris-tourist	tourist -local
Food and drinks	6.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7	9.5	6.7	0.0	5.7	2.9	1.0	1.9	7.6	0.0	2.9	3.8	0.0	6.7	4.8	3.8	0.0	0.0
Sights and landmarks	3.8	0.0	3.8	0.0	1.0	11.4	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.9	1.0	1.9	10.5	0.0	0.0	1.9	1.0	2.9	1.9	9.5	1.0	0.0
Fun and games	5.7	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	8.6	1.0	0.0	3.8	3.8	3.8	1.9	8.6	1.0	0.0	8.6	0.0	1.9	6.7	6.7	0.0	0.0
Museums	5.7	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	10.5	0.0	1.0	1.9	4.8	2.9	1.0	6.7	2.9	2.9	1.9	0.0	7.6	2.9	8.6	0.0	0.0
Shopping	2.9	0.0	2.9	0.0	1.0	11.4	1.0	1.9	3.8	1.0	1.0	1.0	6.7	1.0	3.8	0.0	0.0	9.5	4.8	7.6	0.0	0.0
Outdoor/Nature and parks	16.2	0.5	3.3	0.5	0.0	12.4	8.6	2.4	7.6	10.5	1.4	4.8	6.7	1.9	5.2	5.7	2.4	10.0	6.7	12.4	2.9	1.0

Source: Author's data

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