

# Towards a Classification of Cultural Tourists

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## ABSTRACT

**This paper proposes a model to segment the cultural tourism market according to two dimensions: (i) the importance of cultural motives in the decision to visit a destination and (ii) depth of experience. The model is tested empirically using Hong Kong as a case study. The test identified five discrete cultural tourism market segments that exhibited substantially different behaviour. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.**

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## INTRODUCTION

In spite of the fact that it has been recognised as a separate product category since the late 1970s (Tighe 1986), the study of cultural tourism as a tourism activity, rather than as a subset of cultural heritage management, is still largely in its infancy. In particular, the examination of business elements of cultural tourism, in general, and the cultural tourism market, in particular, is typified by descriptive and unsophisticated analysis. The majority of the research produced by public sector agencies and cultural tourism advocates is focused on documenting the size of the

consumer base, without considering that different types of cultural tourists may seek qualitatively different experiences or may be capable of engaging attractions at different levels.

This paper proposes a model to segment the cultural tourism market according to two dimensions: (i) the importance of cultural motives in the decision to visit a destination and (ii) depth of experience. The model is tested empirically using Hong Kong as a case study. The model has been proposed to advance the examination of cultural tourism as a tourism activity.

In this paper, terms such as shallow, deep, superficial and meaningful are used to describe different types of experiences engaged in by cultural tourists. The terms are used as descriptors only; they are not used in a judgmental sense to imply that one type of activity is preferable to another or that one type of tourist is a more worthy type of cultural tourist than another.

## Lessons learned from ecotourism

Cultural tourism seems to be following a similar evolutionary path as ecotourism did some 10 to 15 years ago. Early proponents of ecotourism were enthusiastic supporters of this 'new' type of tourism that ideally attracted a 'new' type of tourist who wanted a more meaningful and socially responsible tourism experience. They embarked on research that, by current standards, could best be described as unsophisticated, bordering on boosterism. The focus was on documenting the number of ecotourists, with the simplest approach being to count participation in named activities. More by hope than by empirical assessment,

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a leap of faith was then made inferring causality between participation and motivation. The presumption was made that anyone who participated in an ecotourism activity must be the deep ecotourist so desired by proponents.

As a result, fantastic numbers were promulgated about the size and implied importance of the ecotourism market. The World Tourism Organisation, for example, proclaimed that 20% of all international tourists are ecotourists (WTO, 1998). Moreover, the assumption was fostered that ecotourists represented a homogeneous group of travellers that was typified by the idealised deep ecotourist. Because these figures served a multitude of political purposes, they were endorsed widely and uncritically.

As the field of study matured and as the initial fervour about ecotourism was replaced by the realisation that commercial demand for deep ecotourism experiences was much less than the raw numbers suggested (McKercher and Robbins, 1998), some people began to take a more critical look at the ecotourism market. Their research revealed that there are different segments within the loosely defined ecotourism market (Blamey, 1997; Diamantis, 1999) and that, indeed, ecotourists came in many shades of green (Pearce and Wilson, 1996; Acott *et al.*, 1998; Dowling and Charters, 1999). Only a small number of 'deep' green, committed ecotourists exist who satisfy the utopian criteria of being highly motivated by green principles and seeking a deep, meaningful experience. The majority, on the other hand, either participate in ecotourism activities primarily for recreational or sightseeing reasons or see it as one the many ancillary activities they can pursue while at a destination. Indeed, Acott *et al.*, (1999) argue that just because someone visits an ecotourism attraction does not make that person an ecotourist, or at least not the type of ecotourist normally assumed with such a label.

### The cultural tourism market

The same can be said about cultural tourism, yet, to date, little research has been published examining the market. Instead, similarly impressive, but generic figures are being pro-

mulgated about the size and presumed importance of cultural tourism. The World Tourism Organisation, for instance, estimated that the cultural tourism currently accounts for 37% of all tourist trips and that demand is growing by 15% per annum (Richards, 1996). Antolovic (1999) indicates that 70% of all Americans travelling to Europe seek a cultural heritage experience and that about two-thirds of all visitors to the UK are seeking a cultural heritage tourism experience as part of their trip, but not necessarily as the main reason to visit the UK. Nearly half of all American domestic travellers, or almost 65 million people, participated in some type of cultural or heritage tourism activity, such as visiting a historic site or museum, or attending a musical arts or other cultural event in 1996 (Miller, 1997; Craine, 1998; Kemmerling-Clack, 1999).

These estimates are derived using an operational definition documenting cultural tourism participation. A cultural tourist is defined as someone who visits, or intends to visit, a cultural tourism attraction, art gallery, museum or historic site, attend a performance or festival, or participate in a wide range of other activities at any time during their trip, regardless of their main reason for travelling. Like the use of an operational definition in ecotourism, this approach provides a crude estimation of participation. As any operational definition, however, it is deficient in a number of areas. The inability to distinguish between different types of cultural tourists can lead to the formation of a misleading indicator of the importance of cultural tourism in attracting tourists to an area, as using a label infers causality when no such link can be justified. Stating that  $x\%$  of tourists are 'cultural tourists' suggests that this many travellers are motivated to visit a region for cultural reasons. Further, labels such as 'cultural tourist' or 'ecotourist' have inherent inferences about an assumed depth or quality of experience that also may not be justified.

### Dimension 1—centrality of cultural tourism in the decision to visit a destination

A new approach therefore is needed to develop a stronger understanding of the cultural tourism market. This paper suggests

that a better understanding of the cultural tourism market can be derived by considering the two dimensions of centrality of trip purpose and depth of experience.

A growing body of literature is recognising that some people are more highly motivated to participate in cultural tourism than others. There is a fundamental difference, for example, between a group of people who travel to Bhutan for a month-long, in-depth cultural experience organised by the anthropology department of a university and someone visiting Hong Kong on a shopping holiday who happens to visit a temple to escape a rain storm. It is recognised, therefore, participation alone may not be sufficient to document intent. Silberberg (1995) identified four discrete types of cultural tourists in Ontario, Canada, ranging from what he described as the greatly motivated to the accidental cultural tourist. A study of heritage tourism participation in the American State of Pennsylvania (DKS, 1999) identified three types of heritage tourists, core, moderate and low, with each of the segments demonstrating different behaviour and spending patterns. The European Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) study in Europe identified strong differences between 'specific' and 'general' cultural tourists (Richards, 1996). Each of these studies shows that the desire to engage in cultural tourism activities forms the main reason to visit a destination for some tourists. For many more, however, cultural tourism plays a lesser role in the decision to visit and, for some who go to cultural tourism attractions, plays no role in the destination choice.

### Dimension 2—depth of experience

Centrality captures only one dimension of cultural tourism. The depth of experience, or level of engagement with the attraction, also must be considered when segmenting the cultural tourism market. Different people have different abilities to engage cultural and heritage attractions based on an array of factors, which include their level of education, awareness of the site prior to the visit, preconceptions of the site, interest in it, its meaning to them, time availability, the presence or absence of competing activities that vie for their time

and a host of other factors. An independent tourist who spends four hours at a cultural site probably will have a qualitatively different experience than a coach-trip tourist who spends only five minutes at the same site, simply by virtue of the amount of time invested. Thus, two people travelling for similar motives may have fundamentally different experiences based on their abilities to engage the site. McIntosh and Prentice (1999) and Kerstetter *et al.* (1998) have demonstrated this concept empirically, illustrating that different cultural tourists engage sites at different levels, some more intensely, some less so.

Stebbins (1996) uses of the concept 'serious leisure' to explain the variability of experience. To him, cultural tourists are akin to hobbyists, people with a profound interest in a topic and who exhibit a certain level of skill, knowledge, conditioning or experience in pursuit of the hobby. He identifies two quite different types of hobbyist cultural tourists. The 'generalised cultural' tourist makes a hobby visiting a variety of different sites and regions. Over time, this cultural tourist acquires a broad, general knowledge of different cultures. The 'specialised cultural tourist', on the other hand, focuses his or her efforts on one or a small number of geographical sites or cultural entities. This tourist repeatedly visits a particular city, or country in search of a deeper cultural understanding of that place or goes to different cities, regions, or countries in search of exemplars of a specific kind of art, history, festival or museum.

Timothy (1998) examines this issue from the perspective of the site. He argues that people will have different experiences based on their differing levels of connectivity to a site. Timothy identifies four levels of heritage tourism attractions: world, national, local and personal. World heritage attractions that invoke feelings of awe may draw large masses of tourists, but they probably do not invoke feelings of personal attachment. By contrast national, local and personal sites engender progressively stronger feelings of personal connectivity and probably facilitate different depths of experiences by the visitor. Others (Waller and Lea, 1999; McIntosh and Prentice, 1999) suggest that authenticity or the perception of the pursuit of authenticity may influ-

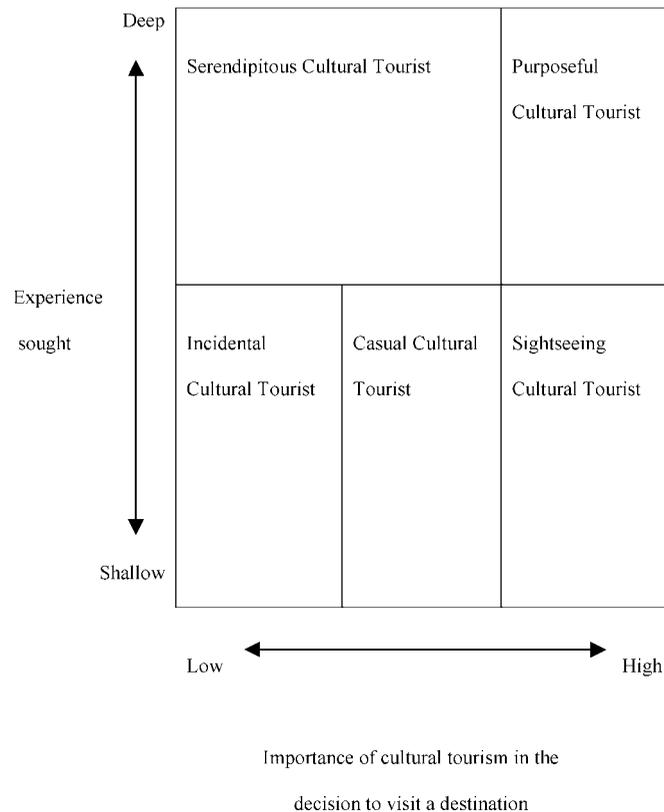


Figure 1. Classification of cultural tourists

ence the depth of experience felt. Macintosh and Prentice (1999), in particular, explored the relationship between perceived authenticity gained by tourists and their emotive processes with attractions' settings.

#### A TWO-DIMENSIONAL MODEL TO EXAMINE CULTURAL TOURISTS

Integrating the two dimensions produces a conceptual model of cultural tourists (Figure 1). Both elements, centrality and depth of experience, exist along a continuum. The importance (or centrality) of cultural tourism can be the main reason someone chooses a destination, but it also can play a lesser role. In some cases it may be a secondary reason to visit, whereas in others, it may play no discernible role in destination choice, even though the tourist will participate in cultural tourism activities while on-site. Likewise, the

depth of experience will be variable, ranging from a shallow, superficial or sightseeing experience to a much deeper, learning orientated experience.

Five different types of cultural tourists can be identified. They are:

- (1) the *purposeful cultural tourist* (high centrality/deep experience)—learning about the other's culture or heritage is a major reason for visiting a destination and this type of cultural tourist has a deep cultural experience;
- (2) the *sightseeing cultural tourist* (high centrality/shallow experience)—learning about the other's culture or heritage is a major reason for visiting a destination, but this type of tourist has a more shallow, entertainment-orientated experience;
- (3) the *casual cultural tourist* (modest centrality/shallow experience)—cultural tourism reasons play a limited role in the decision to

visit a destination and this type of cultural tourist engages the destination in a shallow manner;

- (4) the *incidental cultural tourist* (low centrality/shallow experience)—cultural tourism plays little or no meaningful role in the destination decision-making process, but while at the destination, the person will participate in cultural tourism activities, having a shallow experience;
- (5) the *serendipitous cultural tourist* (low centrality/deep experience)—cultural tourism plays little or no role in the decision to visit a destination, but while there this type of cultural tourist visits cultural attractions and ends up having a deep experience.

The first four types (purposeful, sightseeing, casual and incidental) capture the vast majority of cultural tourists at any destination and reflect the expected relationship between centrality of purpose and depth of experience. People who are highly motivated to travel for cultural tourism reasons also would be expected to be the group most likely to have deep experiences. As discussed above, however, it is overly simplistic to assume that high motivation automatically equates to a deep experience. Many people who express a strong desire to travel to learn something about another's culture or heritage may only seek or be capable of experiencing a shallow experience—hence the sightseeing cultural tourist. In fact, the sightseeing cultural tourist is likely to be more common than the purposeful cultural tourist given that de Kadt's (1979) maxim that most tourists are pleasure seekers and not anthropologists who travel to seek an escape, still holds true. As the importance of cultural tourism as a motivator declines, there should be a concomitant decline in depth of experience. As cultural tourism becomes an increasingly discretionary activity, people will participate more for fun and entertainment, rather than for a deep learning experience. The serendipitous cultural tourist represents an anomaly. Cultural tourism factors play little or no role in the decision to visit a destination for this person, yet, when participating in cultural tourism, he or she has a deep experience.

The mix of cultural tourists will vary from destination to destination and, indeed, from

attraction to attraction within a destination. It will be influenced by a number of factors, including the destination's position in the marketplace, its reputation as a cultural or heritage tourism destination, and the type of tourist attracted. Places known for their cultural or heritage assets would be expected to attract a relatively greater share of purposeful and sightseeing cultural tourists, whereas those without a strong reputation in these areas probably would draw more incidental and casual cultural tourists.

#### TESTING THE MODEL—THE CASE OF HONG KONG

This model was tested empirically using Hong Kong as a case study. The Department of Hotel and Tourism Management at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University operated an international visitor survey from October to December 1999. Departure interviews were conducted with a total of 2066 tourists from six countries (Chinese Taipei, Mainland China, Singapore, the USA, Australia and the UK) at the Hong Kong International Airport. Data were collected on a number of projects nominated by staff of Hong Kong Polytechnic University, who combined them with generic trip profile and demographic data. (For more information on this study and the method used see Hui and McKercher, 2001). One module examined cultural tourism in Hong Kong.

The section began with a filtering question to separate cultural tourists from the rest of the tourism population. A question applying the standard operational definition of participation in any one of a number of named activities at any time during the visit was applied. Successful respondents were then asked to identify which activities they participated in, which places they visited or what tours they joined. A five-point Likert scaled question (1 unimportant/did not influence the decision to visit to 5 the only/main reason we came to Hong Kong) was used to test centrality of cultural tourism in the decision to visit Hong Kong. Respondents were asked how important the opportunity to learn something about Hong Kong's culture or heritage was in their decision to visit. Likewise, a four-point scaled

Table 1. Participation rates in cultural tourism activities by country of origin

		Mainland Chinese	Chinese Taipei	Singapore	USA	UK	Australia	Total
Participated	<i>n</i>	60	58	101	240	71	157	687
	%	26.2	21.1	26.5	41.3	37.0	38.5	33.3
Did not participate	<i>n</i>	169	217	280	341	121	251	1379
	%	73.8	78.9	73.5	58.7	63.0	61.5	66.7
	<i>n</i>	229	275	381	581	192	408	2066

question was used to test depth of experience. The possible answers ranged from 'mostly sightseeing/photography' through to a chance 'to develop a deep understanding of Hong Kong's culture and heritage'.

The limitations of using single variables to test both motive and depth of experience are recognised. The exploratory nature of the study, however, combined with space limitations on the survey instrument, justified use of single variables. Further, the author wished to test whether such a format could be applied to local tourism surveys, where both space on surveys and the analytic ability of local government tourism staff are limited. It is recognised that future refinement of the model must involve using a more sophisticated set of variables to define both centrality and depth of experience.

The segments were defined based on the logical break points of the two scaled questions. Purposeful cultural tourists were identified as those people who indicated that cultural reasons played a strong role in their decision to visit (4, 5) and who also had a deep experience (3, 4). Sightseeing cultural tourists indicated that cultural reasons played an important role in the decision to visit (4, 5), but who indicated that their experiences were fairly shallow (1, 2). Casual cultural tourists identified the mid-point in the motivation scale (3) and reported a shallow experience (1, 2). Incidental cultural tourists indicated that cultural tourism played little or no role in their decision to visit Hong Kong (1, 2) and, concomitantly reported a shallow experience (1, 2). Serendipitous cultural tourists stated that cultural tourism played little or no role in their decision to visit (1, 2, 3) but had a deep

experience (3, 4).

### Participation rates

Table 1 illustrates that one-third of visitors surveyed participated in cultural tourism activities at some time during their stay in Hong Kong. This figure is consistent with the participation rates suggested by the World Tourism Organisation. However, participation rates varied widely among residents of the six countries studied. Visitors from Western countries were one and a half to two times more likely to participate in cultural tourism than those from Asian countries.

### Importance of cultural tourism in the decision to visit Hong Kong

Table 2 shows the importance of cultural tourism in the decision to visit Hong Kong among those who participated in cultural tourism activities. The five-point Likert scaled question has been condensed into three categories combining the two lowest and the two highest possible scores, respectively. Overall, only about four in ten cultural tourists indicated that the desire to learn something about Hong Kong's culture or heritage played an important role in their decision to visit. Again, substantial differences were noted by country of origin. Visitors from the West were far more likely to travel to Hong Kong for cultural reasons than visitors from Asian source markets. American cultural tourists, in particular, were between five and six times more likely than visitors from Mainland China and Chinese Taipei to state that cultural tourism played a very important role or was

Table 2. Importance of cultural tourism in the decision to visit Hong Kong by country of origin (among people who participated in cultural tourism activities)

		Mainland China	Chinese Taipei	Singapore	USA	UK	Australia	Total
Unimportant/not very important	<i>n</i>	29	31	52	46	16	39	213
	%	50.0	54.4	52.5	19.6	22.9	25.0	31.6
Neither important nor unimportant	<i>n</i>	22	20	24	51	20	43	180
	%	37.9	35.1	24.2	21.7	28.6	27.6	26.7
Very important/main reason to visit	<i>n</i>	7	6	23	138	34	74	282
	%	12.1	10.5	23.2	58.7	48.6	47.4	41.8
	Total	58	57	99	235	70	156	675

the major reason in their decision to visit.

### Depth of experience

Table 3 summarises the depth of experience enjoyed by cultural tourists. By and large, most cultural tourists had fairly superficial experiences in Hong Kong. The vast majority (82%) stated that their experiences were mostly sightseeing or photography orientated or provided them with an opportunity to learn only a little about Hong Kong's culture and heritage. By contrast, only about 5% of the cultural tourists surveyed stated that they had the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of Hong Kong's culture and heritage. Again, differences in depth of experience are noted by country of origin.

### Application of the model

Figure 2 classifies Hong Kong's cultural tourists according to the model. Cultural tourism in Hong Kong, at any rate, is an ancillary activity for the majority of cultural tourists. Over half the cultural tourists surveyed said cultural tourism played little or no role in their decision to visit and they had a fairly shallow experience. Interestingly, sightseeing cultural tourists outnumbered purposeful cultural tourists by almost three to one, raising questions about the quality of experience sought by those who, ostensibly, travel for cultural tourism reasons. Indeed, the purposeful cultural tourism market, that market often implied by other visitor studies examining cultural tourism, represents less than 12% of all cultural tourists in Hong Kong or less than 4% of all tourists surveyed. Instead

Table 3. Depth of experience by country of origin (among people who participated in cultural tourism activities)

		Mainland China	Chinese Taipei	Singapore	USA	UK	Australia	Total
Mostly sightseeing/ photography or seeing interesting and unusual sites	<i>n</i>	29	22	38	58	25	45	217
	%	50.9	44.9	40.4	25.3	37.3	29.0	33.3
A chance to learn a little about Hong Kong culture and heritage	<i>n</i>	24	20	38	107	38	91	318
	%	42.1	40.8	40.4	46.7	56.7	58.7	48.8
A chance to learn a lot about Hong Kong culture and heritage	<i>n</i>	2	4	14	43	3	16	82
	%	3.5	8.2	14.9	18.8	4.5	10.3	12.6
To develop a deep understanding of Hong Kong culture and heritage	<i>n</i>	2	3	4	21	1	3	34
	%	3.5	6.1	4.3	9.2	1.5	1.9	5.2
Total	<i>n</i>	57	49	94	229	67	155	651

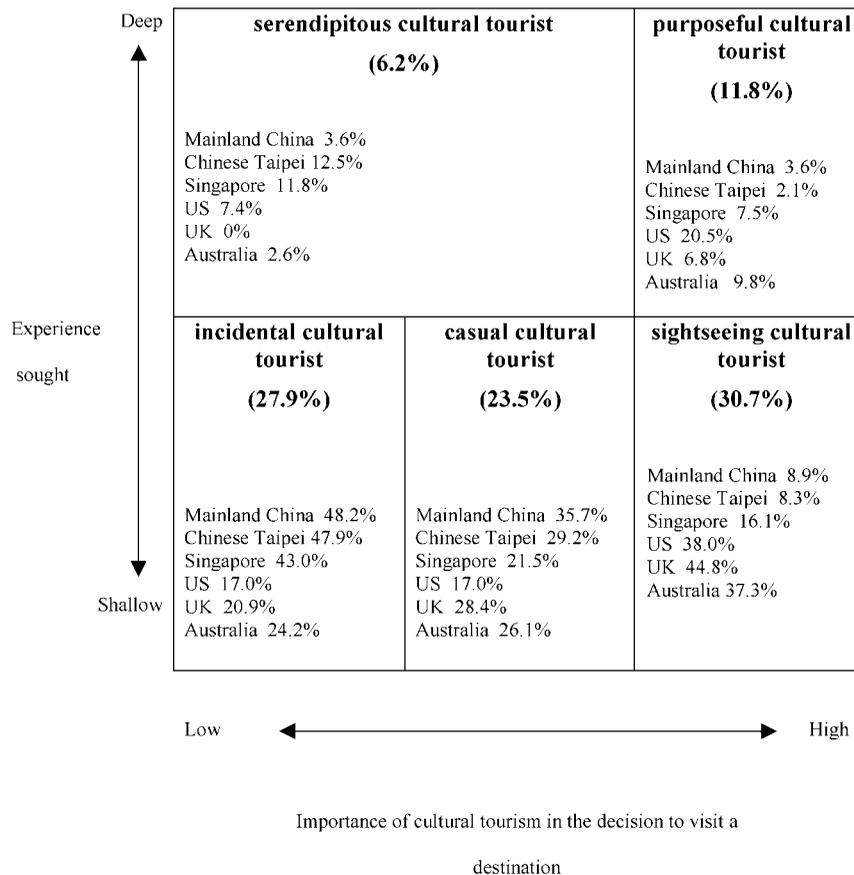


Figure 2. A cultural tourist typology

of being a mainstream market, the purposeful cultural tourist represents a small, niche market.

Few differences in trip profile or demographic characteristics were noted among the five types of cultural tourists, supporting the findings of others who say that these factors are not useful in segmenting this market (McIntosh and Prentice, 1998). The only major differences noted were that purposeful and sightseeing cultural tourists were more likely to be first time visitors and members of tour groups. In addition, casual, incidental and serendipitous cultural tourists were more likely to be visiting Hong Kong on business. Substantial differences were noted according to the country of origin. Few visitors from Asian countries appear interested in Hong Kong as a cultural tourism destination. Indeed, fewer than 1% of all Mainland Chinese and Chinese Taipei visitors could be classified as

purposeful cultural tourists, even though overall participation rates of 26% and 21% respectively were recorded.

McKercher and Chow (2001) discuss the role that cultural distance, a concept identified by McIntosh and Goeldner (1990) can play in influencing both motivation and depth of experience. The authors observed that visitors from more culturally distant regions tended to seek deeper experiences, whereas those cultural tourists from culturally proximate regions were seeking a more entertainment orientated experience. They concluded that the greater the cultural distance the greater the role that cultural tourism can play in attracting international visitors.

### Significant differences in behaviour

Although the overall profile of the different groups of cultural tourists was similar, sig-

nificant differences were noted in the behaviour of different types of cultural tourists. All showed a strong desire to visit Hong Kong's well known, icon cultural tourism attractions, such as the Peak, the Big Buddha and the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. The purposeful cultural tourist, however, was the greatest consumer of intellectually challenging learning experiences. This visitor showed a predilection for museum experiences in general, and was also the greatest consumer of fine arts museums, art galleries and pottery museums. The purposeful cultural tourist also visited lesser known temples and heritage sites. In addition this person sought to immerse him or herself in the local culture by going to the many markets scattered throughout Hong Kong.

The sightseeing cultural tourist collected a wide array of experiences rather than pursuing any one activity in any depth. This tourist was most likely to travel widely throughout the region, visiting Hong Kong's outer islands, the New Territories and remote communities. Sightseeing and absorbing the streetscape were reported as popular activities. They are akin to Stebbins' (1996) general cultural tourists or cultural generalists identified in Europe (Richards, 1996).

Incidental cultural tourists, those for whom cultural tourism plays no role in the destination decision, visited convenience-based attractions that were located in inner city tourism nodes, were easy to consume and not particularly emotionally or intellectually challenging. For example, the incidental cultural tourist went to the Hong Kong Space Museum to see the IMAX cinema or visited heritage theme parks. This person avoided visiting temples and other religious sites.

The casual cultural tourist, who was slightly motivated to travel for cultural reasons, exhibited behaviour that reflected the mix of activities pursued by sightseeing and incidental cultural tourists. Like the incidental cultural tourist, the casual cultural tourist visited convenience-based attractions. However, this person was more amenable to visiting temples and exploring more widely throughout the region. The casual cultural tourist also appeared willing to engage sights more intensely than the incidental cultural tourist, but less intensely than the sightseeing cultural tourist.

The serendipitous cultural tourist presents an interesting case. This traveller is much harder to define by his or her actions, for cultural tourism played no stated role in the decision to visit Hong Kong, yet the person had a deep experience while here. No one activity stood out among this relatively small group of respondents, suggesting that the activity, site, experience or event that triggered the deep experience was highly personal and individualised.

#### IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The literature on the cultural tourism market is still largely in its infancy, with most studies still interested in documenting the size of the alleged cultural market, rather than examining the differences that exist within this market. This paper, hopefully, will advance the examination of cultural tourism by attempting to segment the market according to the importance of cultural tourism in the decision to visit a destination and the depth of experience sought by the cultural tourist. The model has industry applicability because it can be applied by asking two simple questions and documenting activities. Destination marketers and cultural heritage managers can, therefore, accurately segment the cultural tourism market visiting a region. The author tested the model using Hong Kong as a case study and demonstrated that the different types of cultural tourists exhibited substantially different behaviour, even though their demographic and trip profile patterns were largely similar.

Five types of cultural tourist are identified, ranging from the purposeful cultural tourist who is highly motivated to travel for cultural reasons and who seeks a deep experience, to the incidental cultural tourist who visits cultural or heritage attractions, but who is not motivated to travel for this reason and who has a shallow experience. Each of these segments displays different behaviour at a destination and visits different types of attractions.

Further development and testing of this and other models is recommended. The development of a more comprehensive set of variables to test both centrality of purpose and depth of

experience is recommended. In addition, the model could be tested in other jurisdictions to determine if similar segments can be identified that exhibit similar behaviours. Finally, the effect of cultural distance also can be tested in other jurisdictions. As cultural tourism continues to grow in popularity, site managers and destination marketers will face the strategic challenge of developing a better understanding of this market and of developing products to best match the needs of the consumer. The use of an operational definition does not provide the needed dexterity needed to do so. This model provides one means of understanding the cultural tourism market.

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