

## MOTIVI IN PREFERENCE KITAJSKIH ŠTUDENTOV IN AKADEMIKOV IZ UNIVERZE V WUHANU ZA POTOVANJE V SLOVENIJO

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**Povzetek:** V raziskavi izvedeni leta 2019 na Central China Normal University v Wuhanu, ki je zajela 202 študenta, predavatelja in asistenta smo raziskovali kakšni so potencialni motivi za potovanje v Slovenijo. Anketiranci so izpolnjevali spletno anketo po predhodnem ogledu videa o Sloveniji.

Naša raziskava je pokazala, da so kitajski študenti in akademiki zelo zainteresirani za obisk Hrvaške in Slovenije, saj je 79,21 % in 77,72 % anketiranih izrazila željo po obisku teh držav. Kitajski študenti in akademiki bi raje potovali v Slovenijo poleti in spomladi, kar nakazuje potrebo po izboljšanju ponudbe v teh sezonah ter iskanju možnosti za privabljanje obiskovalcev v jeseni in pozimi. Pomembno je prilagoditi hotelske storitve za kitajske goste in izboljšati dostopnost ter gastronomsko ponudbo. Ustvarjanje turističnih paketov, ki vključujejo sosednje države, bi lahko ponudilo bolj celovito izkušnjo in povečalo privlačnost Slovenije za kitajske turiste.

**Ključne besede:** študenti, predavatelji, turisti, kitajska, motivi za potovanje v Slovenijo.

## MOTIVES AND PREFERENCES OF CHINESE STUDENTS AND ACADEMICS FROM UNIVERSITY IN WUHAN FOR TRAVELING TO SLOVENIA

**Abstract:** In a survey conducted in 2019 at the Central China Normal University in Wuhan, which included 202 students, lecturers and assistants, we investigated potential motives for traveling to Slovenia. Respondents completed the online survey after previously watching a video about Slovenia.

Our research showed that Chinese tourists are very interested in visiting Croatia and Slovenia, as 79.21 % and 77.72 % of respondents expressed a desire to visit these countries. Chinese students and academics would prefer to travel to Slovenia in summer and spring, which indicates the need to improve the offer in these seasons and to find opportunities to attract visitors in autumn and winter. It is important to adapt hotel services for Chinese guests and improve accessibility and gastronomic offers. Additionally, creating tourist packages that include neighboring countries could offer a more comprehensive experience and increase the attractiveness of Slovenia for Chinese tourists.

**Keywords:** students, lecturers, tourists, China, motives for traveling to Slovenia.

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## *Introduction*

Tourist satisfaction serves as a crucial indicator of the quality of a tourism destination's offerings. By studying tourist satisfaction, key areas for improvement in the management and marketing of tourism destinations can be identified. With insights gained from tourist feedback, it becomes easier to address the strengths and weaknesses of a destination, allowing for targeted efforts to enhance the overall tourism experience quality. Typically, weaknesses can be mitigated through well-crafted plans, while strengths can be further leveraged. Moreover, guest satisfaction often reflects the competitive edge of a tourist destination.

Tourism is a multifaceted industry that requires the collective efforts of all involved parties, both direct and indirect, to sustain or improve its market position. Therefore, keeping a close watch on regional trends is essential for steering the development of destinations and crafting compelling tourist attractions that cater to the needs of contemporary travelers. Today's tourists seek experiences that not only meet but exceed their expectations, which is vital for encouraging repeat visits. Since the tourist market is dynamic and often unpredictable. To remain competitive, destinations must not only adapt to ongoing changes but also be proactive in shaping trends and presenting them to tourists.

A significant trend in global tourism is the growing interest among Chinese tourists in visiting Western countries, particularly North America and Europe. Statistics show a rising number of arrivals and overnight stays by Chinese tourists in these regions. Consequently, as Chinese travelers increasingly explore Europe, Southeast European countries, including Slovenia, are becoming more appealing to them.

It is important to note that Southeast European countries, Slovenia included, differ significantly in economic and social development from Western European nations. For example, Slovenia's economic growth and development lag behind that of Germany or Switzerland. The key question then is whether Slovenia can meet the demands and expectations of Chinese tourists, and how it can do so. While Slovenia may not directly compete with tourism giants like Spain, France, Italy, or England, it can collaborate with other Southeast European countries to create a unique tourism product.

In this article, we investigate how Chinese students, professors and assistants from Central China Normal University in Wuhan know where Slovenia is and what kind of tourist offer it offers. We determined the hypothetical possibility of whether they would decide to come to Slovenia and what they are most interested in in Slovenia. The purpose of the research was to obtain data on the socio-demographic characteristics of potential Chinese tourists, their impressions of Slovenia, motives for coming, duration of their stay, as well as average consumption and consumption structure based on the presented video about Slovenia.

The basic research method included the use of video as a presentation tool, according to which the respondents answered the survey. This method allowed researchers to present complex concepts, scenarios, or situations to participants via video before they provided their survey responses. Thus, videos helped to better visualize and understand the topic leading to more accurate and thoughtful answers.

## *Literature review*

China's increasing presence in the Western Balkans has become a significant factor in the region's economic and political landscape. Chinese investments, primarily focused on infrastructure and industrial projects, are part of the Belt and Road Initiative (Maksakova & Cerovic, 2022) (Vukićević, 2021). While these investments offer potential economic benefits, they also raise concerns about growing debt burdens and economic dependence (Maksakova & Cerovic, 2022). China's engagement extends beyond economics, encompassing cultural and educational exchanges (Markovic Khaze & Wang, 2021). Chinese outbound tourism is seen as an opportunity for countries like Slovenia and Croatia to boost their tourism sectors, particularly during the low seasons (Raspor et al., 2012) (Agačević & Xu, 2020). However, China's increasing influence in the region may impact the European integration process of Western Balkan countries (Markovic Khaze & Wang, 2021). Some scholars argue that Chinese tourism serves as a tool for neoliberal influence, potentially strengthening Beijing's position in Europe (Parfinenko, 2021).

Consideration of the factors of satisfaction among Chinese tourists in Slovenia is based on the theoretical background of tourism satisfaction and research results about Chinese outbound tourism in relation to satisfaction key drivers. The study of consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction is now in its mature phase. Studies on consumer satisfaction were developed in the 60s and 70s in the United States through the marketing of goods and in the 80s and 90s slowly directed towards the marketing of services and thus the marketing in tourism (Bowen, 2001).

Earlier studies of tourist satisfaction of consumers were mainly focused on the subject of exchange and satisfaction being treated as the exclusive or predominant responsibility of the service provider and that the consumer in the process of serving has a less important role. Later understandings of the subject of exchanges in tourism and the role of consumers are focusing their attention on the interaction between the user and the service provider as co-producer of tourism product. Now, attention is focused on understanding why consumers

are happy rather than what is causing their satisfaction, and focus on the psychological component of consumer satisfaction in relation to the characteristics of the tourism product (perceived control and perceived sense of fairness) (Namasivayam & Mount, 2006).

Definitions of consumer satisfaction were given in the range from the focus on the cognitive component as a comparison of the perceived level of modes of execution services with benchmarking standards to focus on the emotional component where satisfaction is defined as an emotional state that reflects the assessment of personal experience or evaluation of emotions in post consuming stage (McMullan & O'Neill, 2010).

When examining the determinants of tourist satisfaction, several important factors identified in a study conducted on Langkawi Island in Malaysia (Aliman et al., 2016) stand out. These factors include social security, tourist expectations, destination image, costs and risks, perceived value, and perceived quality.

In general, the existence of economic, social and environmental factors of tourist satisfaction points that there are some actions beyond the tourist industry —such as agriculture and construction— also have a significant impact (Jarvis et al., 2016).

As indicated in the TUI AG – TUI Think Tank study ((TUI Think Tank & Company, 2012); (paraphrased in Raspor et al. 2016)), Chinese travelers' needs regarding Europe as a travel destination are expected to include:

- family happiness,
- experience,
- special interests,
- entertainment,
- self-determination,
- connectivity,
- courtesy,
- recreation,
- soft action.

There are a few topics about determinants regarding the level of satisfaction of Chinese tourists, such as the relation between expectation and reality of travel arrangement, factors generating satisfaction and dissatisfaction, perceptions and experiences with ethnic tourism, differences among Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese in post-visit satisfaction and willingness to make a recommendation, the impact of tour service performance and guide performance on satisfaction, satisfaction through functional and emotional values, aspects of tourist destination regarding satisfaction, perceived service quality, repurchase intentions and subjective well-being, elements in tourist products regarding the level of satisfaction.

Discussing the expectations of Chinese tourists and the creation of travel packages to the United Kingdom by UK tour operators ((de Sausmarez et al., 2012); in: (Raspor et al., 2016)), it was found that there is dissatisfaction with the quality of the accommodation and food, due to a mismatch between the mentioned expectations and reality of the accommodation. The survey also indicates that a large number of Chinese tourists obtain information from the internet and have a clear understanding of what they want from their travel experience.

In examining the level of satisfaction among Chinese tourists visiting North Korea, L. Fangxuan and C. Ryan (Li & Ryan, 2015) identified several factors contributing to satisfaction in their research. These include: "natural environment", "natural scenery", "friendly to Chinese", "a sense of national pride", "a reasonable travel price" and "a unique experience satisfying curiosity". Conversely, factors contributing to dissatisfaction were noted as restrictions on tourist freedom, model families, limited tourist attractions, flexible travel schedules, high goods prices and low food standards.

Discussing the perceptions of ethnic tourism and satisfaction with their experiences, L. Yang (L. Yang, 2012) concluded that tourists were concerned regarding cultural change and "loss of traditional customs" meaning that "diverse and high-quality ethnic products" have to be developed in order to satisfy the various needs of cultural tourists.

By identifying differences between Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese during a visit to North Korea, S. Seongseop Kim, K. Y. Wan Penny and S. Pan (Kim et al., 2015) discovered that Mainland Chinese had higher levels of "overall post-visit satisfaction" and "willingness to make a recommendation" compared to Taiwanese. Also, Mainland Chinese preferred more group tours to individual travel, showed a higher level of preference for taking photographs, reported being more impatient when waiting for food to be delivered, making more complaints, showed higher interest in making friends with other foreign tourists and buying more postcards in comparison to Taiwanese. Taiwanese trust more in vendors selling gifts than Mainland Chinese.

Another research (Songsan Huang et al., 2010) was dealing with questions about differences between Chinese and foreign tourists in Hong Kong regarding satisfaction with tour guide performance through three aspects: satisfaction with guiding service, satisfaction with tour services and satisfaction with the overall tours experience. Chinese tourists rated tour guide performance significantly lower in relation to foreign tourists probably due to less knowledge or skills.

In the study about tourists from Hong Kong and Taiwan and Non-Asian tourists in Japan (Kohsaka et al., 2015) were revealed significant differences regarding communication between tourists and staff (i.e., the language barrier), but there was no difference in the level of satisfaction with Wi-Fi Internet access (low level of satisfaction in both groups).

A. Chan, C. H. Hsu and T. Baum (A. Chan et al., 2015) explored the impact of tour service performance on the satisfaction of Chinese tourists in Hong Kong and obtained a few interesting results. First, the effects of leisure activities, shopping and tour guiding services had significant influence on satisfaction, whereas transportation, accommodation and food were insignificant. Second, leisure activities played a more significant role in achieving satisfaction with the tour experience. Third, customer satisfaction with tour service had a statistically significant positive influence on satisfaction with tour experience. Fourth, satisfaction with tour services and tour experience had a significant impact on behavioral intentions. Finally, there was a key finding that satisfaction with tour service differs from satisfaction with the tour experience.

It was found two factors guide performance concerning Chinese tourists: intrapersonal solvability (which includes knowledge, personality, empathy, passion and health condition) and interpersonal solvability (interpersonal skills and their presentation and expression).

Four factors were generated for foreign tourists: professional competence, empathy, interpersonal skills and organization and problem-solving.

For Chinese tourists, 57 % of satisfaction with guide performance was determined by tour guide performance whereas for foreign tourists 70 %.

Research study (Song et al., 2015) concerning the influence of entertainment, educational, escape and aesthetic experiences on satisfaction among Chinese tourists during temple stays through functional (financial vs. utilitarian benefits and costs) and emotional (sentiment and feeling) values, revealed that aesthetic, escape and entertainment experiences impact the emotional value and escape, entertainment and educational experience impact on functional value. The results indicate that tourist satisfaction was generated by both emotional and functional values.

C. Ryan, Y. S. Shuo and T. C. Huan (Ryan et al., 2010) suggest in their research on the determinants of visitor satisfaction in theme parks that the main factors contributing to satisfaction are: the park's atmosphere, the presence of thrill rides, the level of crowding experienced, the availability of resting areas, perceived reasonable entry prices and the provision of information.

C. Lee (Lee, 2015) found in his research on experiences at forest recreation sites that satisfaction depends on three aspects of destination: "information services," "recreation facilities," and "safety and sustainability", highlighting socio-demographic characteristics as an important value in profiling satisfaction segments of Mainland Chinese tourists.

A study with domestic Chinese hotel guests (Su et al., 2016) confirms a strong relationship between perceived service quality and repurchase intentions, as well as between subjective well-being and overall satisfaction, with customer identification with hospitality providers playing a key role.

A. Raspor, T. Kobal and B. Rodič (Raspor et al., 2012), in their discussion on attracting Chinese tourists, identified several elements in tourist products in Slovenia and Croatia that could positively influence the level of satisfaction. They mentioned a rich shopping experience, a shared historical connection (the era of socialism as a socio-political order), special tourist packages such as "Following the footsteps of Josip Broz Tito" and several well-known Yugoslavian films translated into Chinese, such as "The battle of Neretva", "Valter brani Sarajevo" and "Ne joči Kekec".

Based on a review of the stated research studies, it is possible to formulate variables that have a significant impact on the total satisfaction of Chinese tourists, using a general theoretical framework (Songsan Huang et al., 2010). These variables include flexible timetables, tourist guiding, the price and value of tourism products, the characteristics of employees in the tourism industry, the reliability of tourist services, the physical attributes of tourist facilities, creativity in producing tourism products, unexpected travel services, guest reception, internal attributes (such as self-enhancement), natural beauty and climate, shopping experiences, local culture and social characteristics, and infrastructure. In addition, some preconditions or components of customer satisfaction in tourism ((Bowen & Clarke, 2002); (Lacmanović & Bulatović, 2014)) could be applied to Chinese tourists. These include expectations, the manner of service execution; the gap between expectations and actual service delivery, satisfaction attributes (which relate to the possible causes of feelings of satisfaction

/ dissatisfaction, such as consumer perception), emotions, a sense of fairness (reflecting the equality of completed transactions as well as paid and received tourist services).

### *From theory to hypothesis derivation*

Chinese outbound tourism has grown significantly, with tourists increasingly preferring economically developed destinations. Studies show that Chinese travelers are particularly attracted to large, wealthy countries (Lau & Tol, 2000) and regions with high GDP per capita (Xue-feng, 2012). Factors influencing destination choice include relative income, population size, travel costs and tourism infrastructure (C. H. Yang et al., 2010). Chinese tourists value safety, beautiful scenery (Kim et al., 2005) and accessibility by road and rail (Lau & Tol, 2006). They are also drawn to cultural attractions and World Heritage Sites (C. H. Yang et al., 2010). Demographic characteristics such as age, education and income significantly impact destination preferences, with Europe and the USA being more attractive to younger, better-educated and higher-income individuals (Wei et al., 2017). As China's economy continues to develop, outbound tourism is expected to continue growing, which will positively impact economic growth in both developed and developing countries (Paramati et al., 2016).

**H1: The more economically developed a country is, the more Chinese tourists are likely to prefer to visit it.**

Chinese tourists exhibit a strong fascination with natural beauty and unspoiled nature, a preference influenced by traditional cultural values like the "oneness of nature with humans" (Gao et al., 2018). They prefer destinations with sea views, photo opportunities and minimal artificial elements (C. S. Chan et al., 2017). However, they also appreciate a mix of natural scenery with basic infrastructure, rather than pure wilderness (Yan et al., 2007). Chinese tourists' nature experiences are often interpreted through cultural lenses, with high culture influencing some and popular culture affecting others (Cui et al., 2017). Environmental concerns positively impact their motivation for nature-based tourism (Chen & Peng, 2016). Many seek environmental beauty in China's periphery, combining it with ethnic tourism experiences (Walsh & Swain, 2004). While natural landscapes strongly influence travel decisions, there's a growing interest in cultural attractions (Fountain et al., 2010). Notably, an aesthetic approach to environmental interpretation, employing stories, art and poetry, appears more effective than scientific approaches in engaging Chinese tourists with natural landscapes (Xu et al., 2013).

**H2: Chinese tourists are fascinated by natural beauty and unspoiled nature**

### *Materials and methods*

Video-enhanced surveys have emerged as a promising alternative to traditional survey methods, offering potential benefits in data quality and respondent experience. Studies have shown that video-enhanced surveys can produce responses less influenced by social desirability compared to face-to-face interviews (Gerich, 2008) (Conrad et al., 2023). Despite their advantages, video-enhanced surveys also present trade-offs in terms of respondent motivation, time pressure and social presence (Conrad et al., 2023).

Video elicitation is a qualitative research method that uses visual stimuli to enhance interviews and explore topics that may be challenging to discuss otherwise (Henry & Fetters, 2012) (Barton, 2015). This technique has been applied across various fields, including healthcare (Vieira et al., 2014) (Miller, 2004), education (Ruto-Korir & Lubbe-De Beer, 2012) and sensitive research topics (Sayre, 2006) (Levell, 2019). Video elicitation allows for the integration of data from video recordings with participants' thoughts and emotions, facilitating the investigation of specific moments during interactions (Henry & Fetters, 2012). The method can help reduce power imbalances between researchers and participants, enhance participants' ability to elaborate on their ideas and provide greater control over the interview process (Barton, 2015) (Levell, 2019). In a survey conducted in 2019 at Central China Normal University in Wuhan, which included 202 students, lecturers and assistants, we explored potential motives for traveling to Slovenia. Respondents completed an online survey after previously watching a video about Slovenia. The majority of respondents are young adults (18-29 years old) and reside in urban areas. Most households consist of approximately 4.3 members. The income distribution is varied, with a notable proportion of respondents earning between 5,000 to 20,000 RMB per month. Moreover, Central China is the most represented region in the sample.

Table 1: Demographic data

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	88	43.6
Female	114	56.4
Total	202	100.0
Age	Frequency	Percent
18-29	149	73.8
30-39	24	11.9
40-49	16	7.9
50-59	7	3.5
60-69	2	1.0
70 or more	4	2.0
Total	202	100.0
Region of China	Frequency	Percent
East China	5	2.5
North China	7	3.5
Northeast China	1	.5
Northwest China	1	.5
Southcentral China	11	5.4
Southwest China	5	2.5
Central China	172	85.1
Total	202	100.0
Area	Frequency	Percent
Urban	189	93.6
Rural	13	6.4
Total	202	100.0
Household monthly income (RMB)	Frequency	Percent
3,000 to 5,000	19	9.4
5,000-10,000	59	29.2
10,001-15,000	47	23.3
15,001 - 20,000	42	20.8
20,000 or above 20,000	35	17.3
Total	202	100.0

## Results and findings

### Travel to the Western Balkan region

Table 2 presents the percentage of respondents who have visited countries that were part of the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia). The data shows that Croatia and Slovenia are the most frequently visited countries from the former Yugoslavia, with 5.94 % and 5.45 % of respondents having visited them, respectively. In contrast, Kosovo has the highest percentage of respondents (7.92 %) who have never heard of it. Other countries, like Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are less frequently visited, with around 4-5 % of respondents reporting visits, while a small percentage of respondents are unfamiliar with them. Overall, there is significant variation in both travel patterns and awareness across these countries.

Table 2: A visit to Former Yugoslavia

	Yes	NO	Never heard of it
Slovenia	11		2
Croatia	12		4
Kosovo	3		16
Montenegro	4	1	7
Serbia	9	2	11
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5	6	11
Macedonia	3		7

The data (Table 3) reflects interest in visiting the countries of the former Yugoslavia:

- Croatia is the most desired destination, with 79.21 % of respondents interested in visiting it.
- Slovenia follows closely, with 77.72 % expressing interest.
- Serbia also has significant appeal, with 73.27 % wanting to visit it.



- Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro have similar levels of interest, with 64-67 % of respondents wanting to visit.
- Kosovo has the lowest interest, with 63.37 % expressing a desire to visit it.
- Overall, all these countries attract a substantial amount of interest, though Croatia and Slovenia are the top choices.

**Table 3: Which countries of former Yugoslavia would you like to visit**

	Yes	NO
Slovenia	157	45
Croatia	160	42
Kosovo	128	74
Montenegro	130	72
Serbia	148	54
Bosnia and Herzegovina	131	71
Macedonia	135	67

Based on the survey results, after respondents watched a video about Slovenia, they rated various aspects of the country. The mean ratings reflect what impressed them the most.

Respondents (table 4) were particularly impressed by Slovenia's natural landscapes, particularly its rivers, lakes and sea, which received the highest mean rating of 4.46. The country's flowers and blue skies also left a strong impression, with mean ratings of 4.24 and 4.28, respectively. Local attractions, especially buildings, were highly appreciated, with a mean score of 4.40. Slovenia's food also garnered positive feedback, receiving a mean rating of 4.12. While still positive, the native people category received the lowest mean score of 4.03, indicating that while respondents appreciated the friendliness and hospitality of the locals, they were more captivated by Slovenia's natural and architectural features.

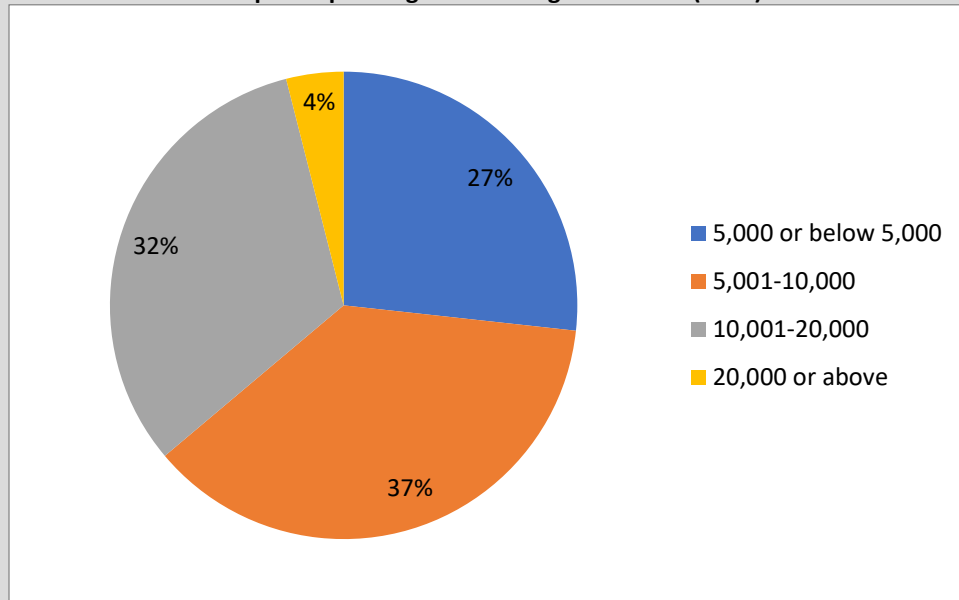
All aspects reviewed received mean ratings above 4, demonstrating that respondents were generally very impressed by Slovenia's natural, cultural and social elements after watching the video.

**Table 4: Interesting facts about Slovenia**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Blue sky	202	1	5	4,28	,917
Local attractions food	202	1	5	4,12	1,015
Local attractions buildings	202	1	5	4,40	,865
Nature flowers	202	1	5	4,24	,980
Nature rivers lakes sea	202	1	5	4,46	,805
Native people	202	1	5	4,03	1,046

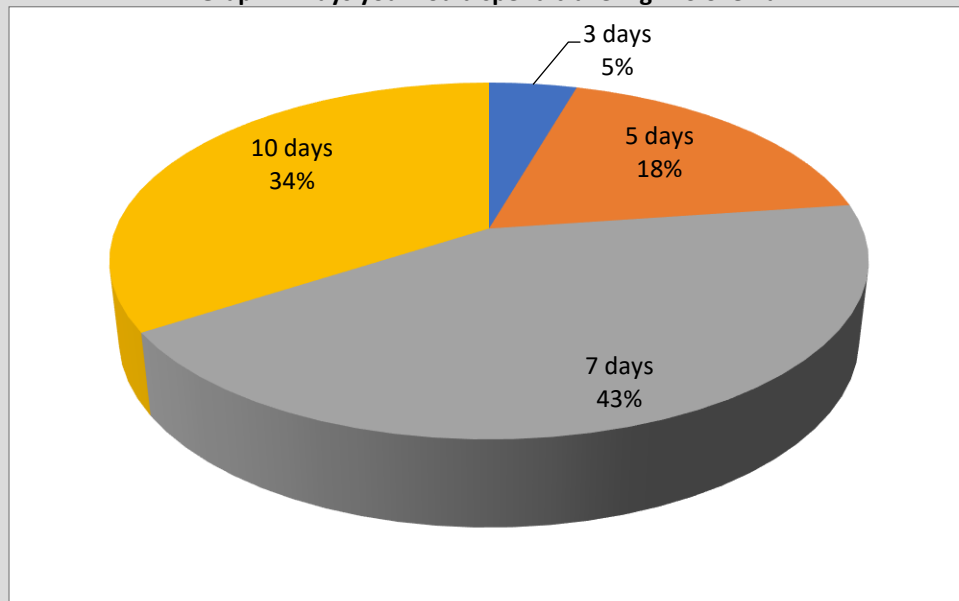
The majority of travelers to Slovenia spend between 5,001 and 20,000 RMB, suggesting that travel to the country is relatively affordable for most respondents. About one-quarter of travelers spend 5,000 RMB or less, indicating that there's still a significant group that manages travel on a tight budget. In contrast, only a small percentage of travelers spend 20,000 RMB or more, reflecting that high-end or luxury travel to Slovenia is less common.

Graph 1: Spending for traveling in Slovenia (RMB)



The data (Graph 3) show a large deviation from the typical travel habits of Chinese tourists, suggesting that respondents may have been considering study trips rather than leisure travel. The travel habits of Chinese tourists, as reflected in their preferences for longer stays and moderate to high spending, align well with their planned trips to Slovenia. This data suggests that Chinese tourists see Slovenia as a destination worth exploring in depth, consistent with their broader travel behavior that emphasizes immersive experiences and value. Furthermore, tourism planners and businesses in Slovenia can leverage these insights by offering extended stay packages and promoting the country's diverse attractions to appeal to this growing market segment.

Graph 2: Days you would spend traveling in Slovenia



Summer (57 %) is a popular travel season for Chinese tourists, as it coincides with school holidays and is generally the peak season for international travel. The high preference for summer travel to Slovenia aligns with this trend, as families and individuals often have more time to travel during this period.

Implications: The strong preference for summer suggests that Chinese tourists are likely to visit Slovenia during the warmest months when they can fully enjoy outdoor activities, nature and festivals.

Spring (24 %) is also a favored season for Chinese travelers, particularly due to the pleasant weather and the blooming of flowers, which is often considered a beautiful time to visit Europe. The moderate interest in traveling to Slovenia during spring reflects this general trend.

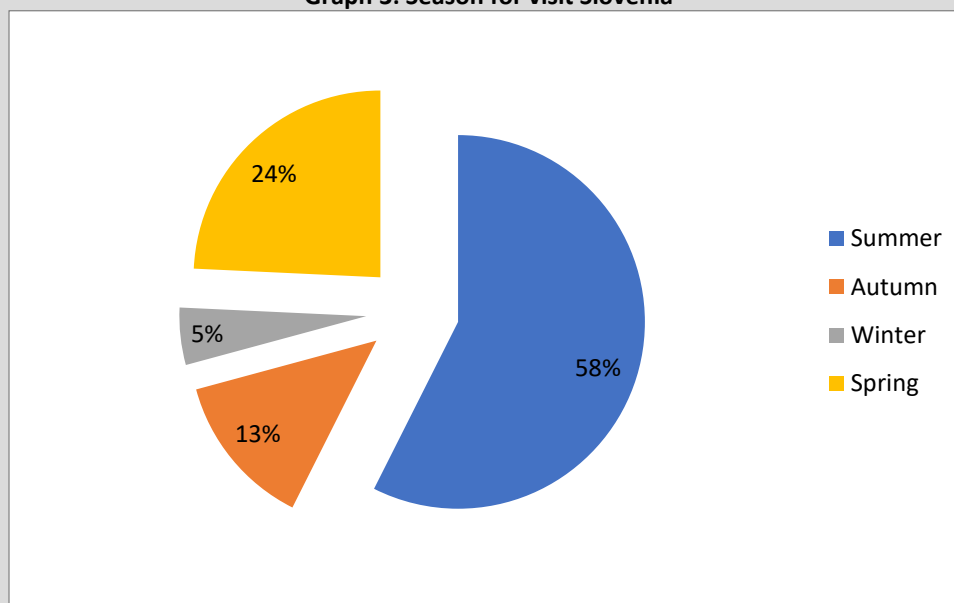


Implications: Slovenia's appeal in spring could be leveraged by promoting its natural beauty, such as lakes, rivers and flower fields, to attract more Chinese tourists during this season.

Lower Preference for autumn (13 %) and winter (5 %): While autumn can be a popular travel season due to its milder weather and fewer crowds, the lower preference among Chinese tourists suggests they prefer visiting Slovenia when the weather is warmer and more conducive to outdoor activities. Winter, with only 5 % preference, aligns with the general trend of Chinese tourists favoring destinations known for winter sports or festive activities, which might not be as strongly associated with Slovenia.

Implications: Autumn and winter could be considered off-peak seasons for Chinese tourists visiting Slovenia. However, promoting cultural experiences, off-season discounts, or special winter activities might help attract more visitors during these times.

**Graph 3: Season for visit Slovenia**



### *Discussion with consideration of hypotheses*

#### ***Hypothesis: H1: The more economically developed a country is, the more Chinese tourists prefer to visit it.***

The data presented in Tables 2 and 3 strongly supports the hypothesis that Chinese tourists prefer to visit more economically developed countries. The higher visitation rates and expressed interest in Croatia and Slovenia, compared to other countries in the former Yugoslavia, align with the notion that economic development is a significant factor influencing destination choice.

Moreover, the findings are consistent with existing theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. Lau and Tol (2006) have observed that Chinese travelers are attracted to large, wealthy countries. Xue-Feng (2012) has identified high GDP per capita as a key factor influencing destination choice. Additionally, Yang et al. (2010) have highlighted the importance of relative income, population, travel costs, and tourism infrastructure in shaping destination preferences.

Thus, the data from Tables 2 and 3, combined with existing research, provides strong evidence to support the hypothesis that Chinese tourists prefer to visit more economically developed countries. This understanding is crucial for destination management organizations seeking to attract Chinese travelers. By focusing on economic development and improving tourism infrastructure, countries can enhance their appeal to this important tourist market.

#### ***Hypothesis: H2: Chinese tourists are fascinated by natural beauty and unspoiled nature.***

The data presented in Table 4 strongly supports the hypothesis that Chinese tourists are fascinated by natural beauty and unspoiled nature. The high ratings given to Slovenia's natural landscapes and flowers, combined with the positive feedback for local attractions and food, demonstrate a strong preference for destinations with natural elements.

The findings are consistent with existing theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. Gao et al. (2018) have highlighted the influence of traditional cultural values, such as the "oneness of nature with humans," on Chinese tourists' preferences. Dai et al., (2016) have observed a preference for destinations with sea views, photo opportunities, and less artificial elements. While Yan et al. (2007) have noted a desire for a mix of naturalness and basic infrastructure, Cui et al. (2017) have emphasized the role of cultural lenses in mediating Chinese tourists' nature experiences.

The data from Table 4, combined with existing research, provides strong evidence to support the hypothesis that Chinese tourists are fascinated by natural beauty and unspoiled nature. This understanding is crucial for destination management organizations seeking to attract Chinese travelers. By focusing on natural landscapes, cultural attractions and a balanced approach to infrastructure development, destinations can enhance their appeal to this important tourist market.

### *Conclusion*

Our data highlights a strong interest among Chinese tourists in visiting Croatia and Slovenia, with 79.21 % and 77.72 % of respondents expressing a desire to explore these countries, respectively. These destinations are particularly appealing among former Yugoslavian countries, indicating their significant allure.

Chinese tourists generally prefer traveling to Slovenia during the summer, followed by spring, aligning with their broader tendency to visit destinations in warmer seasons. To capitalize on this, Slovenian travel businesses should focus on enhancing offerings during these peak times. Additionally, exploring niche marketing strategies could help attract visitors during the less popular autumn and winter months.

Our analysis indicates that the primary factors contributing to Chinese tourists' satisfaction in Slovenia are natural resources and cultural and historical heritage. Despite positive average ratings, there is room for improvement to stand out in a competitive market. Slovenia needs to better valorize its natural and cultural resources to create a unique tourist product.

Adapting hotel facilities to better suit Chinese tourists is crucial. For instance, considering the differences in average height between Chinese and European guests, adjustments in hotel amenities could enhance comfort. Chinese tourists also value supporting facilities and activities, so there is a need to develop more options for entertainment, sports, and wellness, beyond cultural and natural attractions.

While Slovenian hospitality is well-regarded, there is a need for additional staff training in Chinese culture and language. Improving accessibility for Chinese tourists through Chinese-language menus, price lists, and signposts is essential. Enhancing the gastronomic offer to cater to Chinese dining preferences would also be beneficial.

Given Slovenia's relatively small size, creating integrated tourist packages that connect multiple destinations, including neighboring countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, and Greece, could offer a more comprehensive experience. Such packages should consider Chinese tourists' social and cultural characteristics, travel habits and motivations to exceed their expectations.

This analysis sets the stage for future research to develop an unparalleled tourism product specifically tailored for Chinese tourists. It provides strategic guidelines for marketing and destination management. As the Chinese market becomes increasingly significant, it is vital for Slovenia and Southeast Europe to cater to Chinese tourists' preferences and avoid losing market share to competitors.

By addressing these areas, Slovenia can better meet the demands of Chinese tourists and enhance its appeal as a travel destination.

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