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CULTURAL HERITAGE ATTRACTIONS IN THE CNMI: Visitor Satisfaction and Experiences of Japanese Tourists

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With over 80% market share, the Japanese dominate the tourist market in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. While the Northern Mariana Islands have a multi-layered cultural heritage to offer to the visitor, it is a challenge to interest the Japanese cohort, which is focussed on 'sun and surf.' This paper examines the extent to which Japanese tourists experienced the cultural and historical attributes and sites of the CNMI and explores whether these experiences would lead to repeat visitation. The paper demonstrates that the history of the islands, in particular the World War II sites, received a generally positive response coupled with a higher percentage of visitation. Aspects of local culture were less well received. It appears that the overall experience was marred by a perceived low quality of amenities and service.

Tourism has been seen as one of the major income sources for small Pacific Island nations devoid of exploitable natural resources and other income-generating opportunities. Given the proximity of Micronesia to East Asia the tourism market residents from the Republic of Korea ('South Korea') and from China (both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China ['Taiwan']) are providing an increasing share of the market. So far, the market provided by the Japanese has been the largest in contemporary Micronesia. For example, in 2005 (2004) Guam hosted 1,165,149 (1,120,676) visitors, of which 80.6% (80.9%) were Japanese. In the same period, the CNMI hosted 443,812 (529,557) visitors of which 63.2% (71.1%) were Japanese. (Data: Guam Visitors Bureau; Marianas Visitors Authority).

The Japanese market has particular characteristics such as being more collective and group-oriented, by and large eschewing individualistic travel (Kim & Lee 2000) and place high value on the safety of a destination and largely engaging only in low-risk activities (Pinhey & Iverson 1993; Ahmed & Krohn 1992; Reisinger & Turner 2000). The Japanese market is also particularly demanding of high levels of quality, aesthetics and service (Turcq and Usunier 1995, cited in Reisinger & Turner 2000), high standards of presentation coupled with attentive service (Polunin 1989) both in shops and in food service (Sheldon and Fox 1988).

The majority of these tourists come to Micronesia to experience 'sun and surf' and to have a relaxing holiday in an exotic setting (Sayers & Spennemann 2006b) which echoes

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the travel motivations of the same constituency to other Pacific Rim localities (eg. Reisinger & Turner 2000).

Like other Pacific Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) is interested in the development of eco-tourism and cultural tourism opportunities to diversify its offerings and to broaden its appeal to tourists, specifically targeting higher-spending niche markets. The island of Rota has been identified as a potential site for eco-tourism developments, with the island of Saipan focussing on mass tourism (Heather *et al.* 2000; Look & Spennemann 2000).

Given the large number of Japanese tourists visiting the region, there is a paucity of data on the motivations and expectations of Japanese visitors towards cultural tourism opportunities (see Sayers & Spennemann 2006b; and data in Reisinger & Turner 2000) and the attitudes Japanese visitors towards the islands' culture and history (Sayers & Spennemann 2006a).

In this paper we will examine whether and how Japanese tourists visiting the CNMI experienced and cultural and historical attractions and will examine the reasons for those who did not. In the second part we will look at whether these experiences were positive or negative, and whether the departing visitors intended to experience cultural and historic attributes of the islands on a return visit.

Studies such as these are important elements in a cultural tourism marketing strategy. The paper forms part of suite of studies looking into the Japanese visitor experience in Saipan (Sayers & Spennemann 2006a–c).

THE SAMPLE

The fieldwork period took place on Saipan (CNMI) over a four-week period during the months of July and August 2001. A structured questionnaire comprising pre-coded and open-ended questions was administered to departing visitors in the secure departure area of Saipan International Airport. Passengers sampled in this area had passed immigration and security checks and were waiting for their flight to commence boarding.¹ The questionnaire was available in both English and Japanese.

A total of 830 questionnaires were collected during the fieldwork period. 699 (84.2%) of the respondents provided their home country details, 705 (84.9%) provided gender details, 693 (83.4%) provided their age category. Of the 699 respondents who provided their home country details, an overwhelming 671 (95.9%) stated that their home country was Japan. Table 1 sets out total sample population by age and gender compared to the MVA arrival data.

Table 1. Age/gender data of the Japanese sample population compared to the MVA arrival data

Age	Fieldwork		MVA Arrival Data		
	M	F	Age	M	F
18-25	9.4	25.1	18-24	6.1	15.4
26-30	16.6	21.7	25-29	15.9	22.2
31-40	40.4	36.6	30-39	33.6	32.0
41-50	23.8	12.6	40-49	25.3	17.2
51-60	6.3	3.1	50-59	12.5	7.5
60+	3.4	0.9	60+	6.7	5.8
N	319	350	N	23,893	26,021

Overall, the gender and age profile of the respondent population is similar to the MVA statistics for July and August (Table 1). Some differences can be observed: Younger people were more likely to respond to the questionnaire compared to older people, particularly so among 17–25 year old women. Few people over the age of 50 years responded, particularly very few over the age of 60 years. The lack of representation of older people can partly be attributed to the fact that people in this age group were more likely to refuse to participate when they were approached.

TOURIST EXPERIENCES

Participants were asked to comment whether they had planned to experience a cultural or historical attribute of the CNMI and whether they did so.² Of the 830 participants 94% provided a response. However, not very one who responded to this question gave a response to each sub-question. Thus the response rate ranged from 84.9% to 88.3% (Table 2).

The data show that an overwhelming proportion of respondents did not participate in the attributes and attractions that were listed. The attributes that most respondents participated in were 'World War Two relics' (56.4%)

and ‘the natural environment’ (56.4%). The attractions that were most frequented were ‘Sui-

cide Cliff’ (54.2%) and ‘The Last Japanese Command Post’ (49.9%).

Table 2. Level of Participation in each experience/ visited an attraction

Attributes	Experienced an Attribute (%)?		Response N	Rate	Reason for not experiencing (%)		
	Yes	No			Time	Cost	Other
Chamorro culture	30.7	70.2	733	88.3	80.2	4.4	15.4
Chamorro history	29.8	70.1	713	85.9	80.8	3.1	16.2
Carolinian culture	17.6	82.2	715	86.1	78.2	3.0	18.8
Carolinian history	16.3	83.7	723	87.1	78.5	3.1	18.5
Island culture/lifestyle	35.5	63.9	719	86.6	82.3	2.2	15.5
Traditional local food	45.2	55.6	716	86.3	75.0	6.5	18.5
History of the islands	39.0	61.1	716	86.3	82.3	3.3	14.5
Colonial history	33.1	66.4	718	86.5	81.6	3.2	15.2
Spanish Buildings	20.5	79.0	709	85.4	81.6	2.4	16.0
Religious buildings	22.3	77.9	714	86.0	80.8	3.3	15.9
Spanish artefacts	20.9	79.2	717	86.4	80.3	3.4	16.3
World War Two relics	58.8	39.8	720	86.7	80.9	4.3	14.9
Endangered birds	20.5	78.1	705	84.9	79.3	2.2	18.5
Natural environment	56.4	42.6	711	85.7	79.5	3.7	16.8
<i>Attractions</i>							
Sugar King Park	25.6	74.0	721	86.9	83.4	2.5	14.1
Museum	20.8	78.4	710	85.5	85.0	2.2	12.8
Japanese Hospital	22.9	75.7	708	85.3	83.4	1.7	14.9
Micro Beach	43.4	54.9	713	85.9	81.9	2.1	16.0
Japanese Jail	24.6	74.5	705	84.9	83.6	1.9	14.5
Suicide Cliff	54.2	44.0	714	86.0	84.2	2.3	13.5
Last Jap Command Post	49.9	48.5	714	86.0	83.3	2.6	14.0
House of Taga	23.4	75.0	708	85.3	81.9	1.5	16.6

Japanese men were more likely to experience World War II heritage than women, but the difference is indicative of a trend only and statistically not significant. When considering the age breakdown of the Japanese visitors’ experiences with respect to their experiences of World War II sites there is a clear tendency: the older the respondents, the more likely they are to make the time to experience World War II heritage (Table 3). It is understandable that the older generation is more interested in World War II as they are closer to the events, as for some of them their parents could have been active participants.

While the trend is clear, the ample sizes per age class vary widely, influencing the statistical comparison. Significant differences in the per-

centage of respondents experiencing World War II heritage could only be observed between the age group 18-25 and the age groups 41-50 (Fisher’s Exact Test; $P=0.033$) and 51-60 ($P=0.024$); as well as between the groups 31-40 and 60+ ($P=0.033$).

Table 3. Level of Participation in World War II heritage aspects

	Experienced Attribute (%)			Reason for not experiencing (%)		
	Yes	No	N	Time	Cost	Other
18-25	55.4	44.6	101	77.8	6.7	15.6
26-30	50.4	49.6	115	87.7	3.5	8.8
31-40	57.3	42.7	239	76.5	3.9	19.6
41-50	70.0	30.0	110	84.8	3.0	12.1
51-60	76.9	23.1	26	66.7	16.7	16.7
60+	78.1	21.9	32	71.4	0.0	28.6
Men	62.5	37.5	301	84.1	2.7	13.3
Women	57.3	42.7	328	76.4	5.7	17.9

Table 4. Level of Participation in visiting the Suicide Cliff site

	Experienced Attribute (%)			Reason for not experiencing (%)		
	Yes	No	N	Time	Cost	Other
18-25	50.5	49.5	101	92.0	4.0	4.0
26-30	47.4	52.6	116	90.2	3.3	6.6
31-40	54.4	45.6	237	77.8	0.9	21.3
41-50	65.8	34.2	111	86.8	0.0	13.2
51-60	79.3	20.7	29	50.0	16.7	33.3
60+	56.3	43.8	32	78.6	0.0	21.4
Men	56.1	43.9	305	86.6	0.7	12.7
Women	54.7	45.3	327	81.1	3.4	15.5

Table 5. Level of Participation in visiting the 'Last' Japanese Command Post

	Experienced Attribute (%)			Reason for not experiencing (%)		
	Yes	No	N	Time	Cost	Other
18-25	48.0	52.0	100	84.6	7.7	7.7
26-30	37.4	62.6	115	88.9	2.8	8.3
31-40	49.2	50.8	238	80.2	0.8	19.0
41-50	60.7	39.3	112	88.6	0.0	11.4
51-60	79.3	20.7	29	50.0	16.7	33.3
60+	51.6	48.4	31	80.0	0.0	20.0
Men	53.6	46.4	306	85.9	1.4	12.7
Women	47.4	52.6	325	80.7	3.5	15.8

Table 6. Level of Participation in Chamorro culture aspects

	Experienced Attribute (%)			Reason for not experiencing (%)		
	Yes	No	N	Time	Cost	Other
18-25	20.2	79.8	99	77.2	7.6	15.2
26-30	32.5	67.5	117	87.3	2.5	10.1
31-40	26.0	74.0	231	79.5	4.7	15.8
41-50	27.6	72.4	105	78.9	2.6	18.4
51-60	34.8	65.2	23	60.0	0.0	40.0
60+	23.1	76.9	26	75.0	5.0	20.0
Men	25.9	74.1	297	80.5	3.2	16.4
Women	27.4	72.6	310	78.7	5.3	16.0

Intriguingly, the age cohort 60+ showed less interest in the two ‘premier’ World War II sites, the ‘Suicide Cliff’ (Table 4) and the ‘Last Japanese Command Post’ (Table 5). It can be surmised that this age cohort, born during the Pacific War, would have been more shaped by the events than the first post-War generation (now the 51-60 cohort). The percentage of visitation to both sites was less among women, particularly in the case of the Japanese command post, which is essentially a collection of Japanese military hardware in front of a defence system carved into a limestone cliff.



Figure 1. The ruins of the 'Last Japanese Command Post,' Saipan, with a display of moved Japanese artillery as it appeared in 2001 (Photo D. Spennemann)

The age differences observed for the World War II heritage element does not apply in the case of Chamorro culture (Table 6), but are observable Chamorro history (Table 7) as well as local and traditional foods (Table 8).

Those attributes which were experienced the least were Carolinian culture and history (17.6% and 16.3%), followed by elements associated with the Spanish colonial period (20.5% to 22.3%). This is related to observations made elsewhere about the level of awareness of Japanese tourists with respect to these cultural and historical attributes (Sayers & Spennemann 2006a).

The natural environment ranked highly, with 56.4% having some experience, and 43.4% visiting Micro Beach. Only few experienced endangered bird species (20.5%).

Overall, several of the remaining attributes show weak trends indicating that the older generation was more interested in sightseeing and experiencing the cultural and historical attributes of the CNMI than the younger age cohorts.



Figure 2. Micro Beach, Beach Road, Saipan (Photo: E. Sayers 2001).

In response to the reason for not experiencing an attribute or not visiting a site, the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that lack of time was the main reason. Given a short average duration of stay (3-4 days), and the generally low attitude of the Japanese visitors to cultural and historical attributes of the CNM (Sayers & Spennemann 2006a) it is not surprising that time factors are cited as the main reason. Cost, on the other hand, did not figure a reason behind the non-participation in certain activities/elements. The only attribute where the cost factor exceeds 5% of responses is in the area of traditional food.

On the other hand it can be argued that had visitors felt particularly strong about the need

to visit or experience some of the attributes and attractions, they would have made sure they had the time and money necessary. Thus, the lack of participation confirms previous observations of a lower interest in these areas.

OPEN ENDED RESPONSES

To gauge the visitors’ experiences, the survey instrument included five open-ended questions that were located near the end of the questionnaire. The questions solicited information on experiences that the respondents were exposed to that they did not expect to be, along with the best and worst aspects of their time on the islands. Also sought were those elements that the respondents’ hoped to experience during this visit, but did not, and those which they wish to experience should they return.

Table 7. Level of Participation in Chamorro history aspects

	Experienced Attribute (%)			Reason for not experiencing (%)		
	Yes	No	N	Time	Cost	Other
18-25	25.5	74.5	102	84.2	5.3	10.5
26-30	27.4	72.6	117	85.9	3.5	10.6
31-40	29.6	70.4	240	81.1	2.4	16.6
41-50	31.8	68.2	110	76.0	2.7	21.3
51-60	41.7	58.3	24	57.1	0.0	42.9
60+	24.1	75.9	29	72.7	4.5	22.7
Men	29.5	70.5	302	79.8	2.8	17.4
Women	28.4	71.6	327	81.2	3.4	15.4

Table 8. Level of Participation in local and traditional foods

	Experienced Attribute (%)			Reason for not experiencing (%)		
	Yes	No	N	Time	Cost	Other
18-25	39.6	60.4	101	78.7	6.6	14.8
26-30	42.9	57.1	119	77.9	11.8	10.3
31-40	45.8	54.2	240	74.6	5.4	20.0
41-50	47.0	53.0	117	72.6	4.8	22.6
51-60	54.2	45.8	24	45.5	0.0	54.5
60+	45.8	54.2	24	61.5	7.7	30.8
Men	45.5	54.5	308	73.8	6.5	19.6
Women	43.3	56.7	323	74.9	6.6	18.6

As the free form responses were written in Japanese, any analysis is based on the transla-

tions provided. This implies that semantic nuances are likely to have become lost in the process. The answers for this section of the data were both diverse and on occasion quite extensive. For the purpose of this discussion, major themes were identified and the answers categorised accordingly: i) sightseeing; ii) history; iii) culture; iv) environment; v) amenities; vi) organised activities; and vii) people. Table 9 sets out by major theme and collates the information of all five sub-questions.

Sightseeing

The nature of 'sites' is very non-descript and does not allow us to allocate them to either the cultural/historical or the environmental themes, even though they are clearly part of it. The low self-nomination to 'sightseeing' can be explained by the fact that most respondents would have made more specific comments that allowed a classification into cultural, historical or environmental aspects (which are addressed below). Comments by the respondents included here were made along the lines of "Tour the islands and see the sites" and "learn about the sites and see them."

History

The elements with the highest number of comments for this theme are shown in the unexpected chance to experience the history of the islands, and the World War Two elements in particular. The experiences were both positive and negative. For example, one of the comments stated "Banzai Cliff made me sad."—which is not surprising as Banzai Cliff is a site where many Japanese died.

Other comments that were made regarding the War history range from the reflective "Visiting the historical elements made me realise that world peace is important," "I was able to see the problems of the war again" and inquisitive "I wish to learn about the Japanese history of the islands" to the banal: "There was a World War Two tank in the ocean."

The next highest number of comments refers to the intention, yet inability, to experience the War Two elements. These elements are again mentioned in the desire to experience the War history during a future visit. The interest

that is shown in the history of the islands mainly refers to the elements of World War Two and Japanese history. This is to be expected given that the majority of the respondents were from Japan and therefore have a connection with some of the historical elements. These findings also reinforce the findings that have been discussed throughout the dissertation that show a high level of interest in the World War Two and Japanese history of the islands.

Culture

The comments that were made regarding the theme of 'culture' show that the elements of cultural exchange and the opportunity to learn about the culture and history of the islands were experiences that the respondents were exposed to that they had not anticipated. The most frequent comments were made towards the unexpected opportunity to experience cultural exchange and to try traditional food. At the same time there was quite a high level of dissatisfaction, where people commented that they had less opportunity than they expected. The highest number of comments that were made regarding 'culture' refer to the lack of ability to actually experience the various elements of culture and the even stronger intention to experience them during future visits.

Overall, the comments that were made toward the culture of the islands reflect the lack of opportunity to experience cultural exchange and learn about the traditions of the islands. Perhaps some of the high level of interest that is expressed by the respondents to partake in cultural elements during future visits can be attributed to the exposure and insight into the cultural elements that they had as a result of the participation in the fieldwork. This is certainly a strong possibility, as some of the comments that were made within the questionnaire referred to the fact that until the respondents' had completed the survey, they were unaware of the Carolinian history and culture of the islands.

Table 9. Frequency of coded free-form responses by theme and sub-theme

Theme	Experienced –			Hoped to			Wanted to			Best and			Total		
	Neg	Pos	All	Neg	Pos	All	Neg	Pos	All	Worst	Best	All	Neg	Pos	All
Sightseeing	25	21	25	3	3	3	15	18	33	1	22	23	41	43	84
<i>History</i>															
History unspecified															
History, Japanese		5	5		1	1		4	4		2	3		1	2
History, WWII	3	16	19		7	8	2	7	9		2	2		6	32
History, US								1	1					0	1
<i>Culture</i>															
Total	3	21	24	2	7	9	2	12	14	1	5	6	8	45	53
Culture unspecified	1	1	1				2		2					3	1
cultural exchange	2	15	17		2	16	6	13	19		5	14	19	27	44
cultural performance	1	1	1		2	2	1	1	2		1	2		5	2
culture and history, learn	2	2	2		7	7	4	8	12		3	4		16	12
Food, local		15	15		10	10		6	6		12	12		10	33
Museum	2	2	2		3	3	1	3	4					6	3
Total	7	30	37	36	2	38	12	31	43	9	31	40	64	94	158
<i>Environment</i>															
Environment unspecified	5	15	20		3	3	2	10	12		7	91	17	116	133
Beaches	2	10	12		7	8		16	16		10	114	13	147	160
Birds								3	3		8	8		0	11
Not see enough											1			1	0
Pollution	2	3	5		2	2		1	1		5	1		7	1
Sea	2	3	5		2	2		1	1		1	7		5	11
Weather	10	14	24								31	11	41	25	66
Total	21	42	63	6	7	13	2	30	32	55	232	286	84	311	394

Table 9. Frequency of coded free-form responses by theme and sub-theme

Theme	Experienced –			Hoped to			Want to			Best and			Total		
	Neg	Pos	All	Neg	Pos	All	Neg	Pos	All	Worst	Best	All	Neg	Pos	All
<i>Organised Activities</i>															
Car Rental				6		6	1	1	2				7	1	8
Casino	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	5	5
Cycling				1	1	1	1	1	1				0	2	2
Diving	1	4	5	10	25	35	2	75	77	1	17	18	14	121	135
Fishing				1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	5
Golf				1	1	2	1	4	4	1	1	1	1	6	7
Hiking + Jungle Walks	2	1	3	4	4	4	1	11	12				7	12	19
Nightlife				2	2	2	1	1	1				2	1	3
Skydiving/Flight	5	5	5	10	1	11	3	10	13	2	2	2	13	18	31
Watersports	1	13	14	8	24	32	57	57	57	1	26	27	10	120	130
Total	4	24	28	42	54	96	7	163	170	4	47	51	57	288	345
<i>Amenities</i>															
Accommodation	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	3				5	0	5
Food	4	2	6	1	1	1				17	4	21	21	7	28
Services	1	1	2	4	4	4				13	1	14	18	2	20
Shopping	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	4	2	6	6	6	12
Traffic	2	1	3	2	2	2				7	7	7	9	1	10
Transport				2	2	2				10	10	10	12	0	12
Total	8	6	14	8	1	9	4	2	6	51	7	58	71	16	87
<i>People</i>															
People unspecified	4	8	12	1	1	1				12	27	39	16	36	52
Bangladeshi	1	1	1										1	0	1
Filipinos	1	1	1							1	1	1	1	1	2
Japanese Visitors	5	5	5							12	12	12	5	12	17
Korean Visitors	1	1	1										1	0	1
Total	12	8	20	0	1	1	0	0	0	12	40	52	24	49	73

Environment

The environment theme reflects both positive and negative comments. The positive comments mainly refer to the beauty of the islands whereas the negative comments refer to pollution and rubbish. The positive elements that were commented on the most with regard to an unexpected experience relate to the elements of the climate and the environment in general. Comments include the expected “*beautiful sunset*,” “*beautiful nature*,” “*beautiful islands*,” and “*beautiful scenery*.”

The negative comments regarding the elements of nature not anticipated refer mainly to the climate and weather. It was the rainy season during the research period and the comments made often refer to this: “*the constant rain - I did not realise that it was the rainy season*,” “*rained all the time*,” but also “*hot weather, humid*,” and “*too hot*”.

The comments also highlight pollution and include “*pollution, damage to the reef*” and “*rubbish in the water*.” Interestingly, one visitor reflected that it may not be the local community’s fault: “*much trash is there at the Rota swimming hole – may have been Japanese tourists who dropped it there*”

Pollution and rubbish were singled out as the worst experience by a few visitors who commented on “*dirty beach*,” “*pollution/damage to reef*,” “*trash in the water*” and “*trash on the roadside*.” The negative comments include one that was made by the same respondent whose comments have been discussed previously. This comment states that the worst aspect of the visit was the “*disappointing natural beauty/environment*”

The issue of pollution is one that has recently been identified as one of the elements contributing to the decline in visitors from Japan to the CNMI. These issues were highlighted in a report that was presented by the JAL sales Network Company to the MVA. The report findings were based on the issues that have been identified by Japanese tourists who have recently visited the islands (Alejandro 2001). The polluted beaches and the rubbish heap that is located on the island of Saipan are some of areas of concern that are discussed (Alejandro 2001) and the comments that have

been recorded for this dissertation raise similar issues.

Comments relating to the inability to experience the environment and the desire to experience it during future visits are fairly low.

Organised Activities

The first theme created specifically from the comments that were made and which does not relate to the themes that had been queried in the survey instrument, is ‘organised activities’. This theme is one of the most referred to and reflects a strong desire to experience the various components of the islands that are offered in the form of water sports, activities and touring the islands.

Table 4 shows the high number of responses pertaining to the inability to experience the elements and the desire to experience them during future visits. The comments for these elements include a range of elements such as car rental, water activities, nightlife and hiking. The comments for the organised activities that refer to the best and worst aspects refer to the inability to experience certain tours due to lack of time and the fact that the tours and activities were unavailable to be carried out due to a tropical storm.

The activities theme has the highest number of comments attributed to it, in many cases suggesting that the respondents are either unaware of the organised activities that are available or that other restraints such as ‘lack of time’ are contributory factors in the reasons behind non-participation in the activities.

The desire to experience the many organised activities that are offered also relates to the fact that the primary travel motivation of the respondents was ‘to experience the beaches’ and ‘to have a holiday.’ The short length of time that the respondents stay on the island(s) also contributes to this as the respondents who sought to have a holiday, would not necessarily have spent their time participating in the activities.

Amenities

This theme also had quite a few free-form comments, the majority of which were negative and referred to the lack of quality service pro-

vided. The highest number of comments for this theme was made towards the ‘worst’ aspect of the visit, particularly the ‘food’ and ‘services.’ The comments for these elements include complaints such as “*water was salty,*” “*food was awful and expensive,*” and “*food/drinks too sweet.*”

The comments specifically relating to services include the “bad attitude of waiters,” a “lack of places to eat” and that “airport [is] very small.” One business traveller commented on “very poor business support facilities in the hotels. Hotels apparently only wish to attract tourists. If they want businessmen they need to make some effort to cater for business requirements.” The last comment is of interest, as the business market is an important element of the economy of the islands and many business people travel to the islands on a regular basis. The other comments that were made about the amenities include the inability to access transport services and the lack of extended hours in which to shop.

Given that the questionnaire did not contain any other area for the respondents to comment on the amenities and level of service of the islands, these comments are somewhat expected, especially if the respondents felt strongly about particular elements of the service that they were exposed to.

The level of satisfaction that people gain from certain elements can directly influence their decision to experience such elements again. Although the number of responses is not high, the dissatisfaction that is expressed by these respondents can still affect the tourism industry of the CNMI. A poor level of service that is perceived to be provided can result in the person who receives such (perceived) poor treatment never returning to the destination. The person who receives such treatment is also likely to inform other people about such poor service, thereby influencing their choices to travel to the same destination. This issue is a serious one when it comes to ensuring that the visitors are provided with quality service at all times (Gomez-Fort 1999).

People

The elements that are included in this theme mainly refer to the high number of non-local people that live on the islands as employees and to other overseas tourists/visitors. Most comments for theme stem from the question on best and worst aspects. Comments for the best aspects include “*Japanese can be understood everywhere*” and “*I was able to communicate with the local people,*” as well as that “*the local people were kind*” and “*very friendly and helpful locals.*”

In contrast, this view was not shared by all, as “hotel staff couldn’t speak Japanese well” and “there are too many Japanese people” and “there were many Korean tourists,” as well as “there were too many Japanese tourists.” The latter comments are interesting given that the majority of respondents who made them are Japanese. The fact that a large number of guest workers from other countries, particularly the Philippines and Bangladesh, work on Saipan also irked the visitors: “too many Filipino people” and “Bangladeshi security guards” were noted in the worst aspect section.

The comments that are made regarding the unexpected experiences refer to a range of elements. The majority reflect positive aspects, whilst the negative aspects refer to the number of non-local people on the islands. The positive comments include “*very friendly and helpful locals*” and that “*local people were nice.*”

The negative aspects echo the worst experiences spelt out above: “*most tourists were Japanese and Korean and this surprised me,*” “*many Korean tourists*” and “*lots of tourists*” as a general complaint. The retail community was also criticised: “*local sales people had bad manners and a bad attitude.*”

Other themes

The remaining themes that were identified have not been referred to, as the number of comments that were made was relatively low. These themes are the ‘unspecified’ and ‘personal’ aspects. The one area that was referred to quite a few times in the theme ‘personal’ was the high cost of the items on the islands. These comments include “*everything expensive,*” and “*food expensive.*” One visitor complained about the costs, but showed awareness of some of

the underlying problems by highlighting the “low Japanese currency.”

Beyond Saipan

The one low rating theme that is a major issue, however is the theme ‘other islands’. The relatively low number of comments that expressed a desire to experience the islands of Rota and Tinian were below 5%. This lack of interest is no doubt due to the fact that the islands are not as heavily promoted as the island of Saipan. Saipan is marketed as a resort location to the Japanese visitor market and no reference to the islands of Rota and Tinian is made. This promotion incorporates the islands of Hawaii and Guam along with Saipan as resort locations and such promotion occurs on the flight to Japan from Saipan. The promotion includes the use of cartoon style characters that appear on the headrests in the aeroplane and the promotional prizes that are given out during the flight (pers obs.). Although the islands of Rota and Tinian are part of the Northern Mariana Islands, visitation to them is considerably lower compared to the island of Saipan (based on MVA data and fieldwork findings). This is also due to the fact that the main flights to the CNMI arrive and depart on the island of Saipan, resulting in the fact that all visitors are automatically exposed to this island regardless of their primary destination.

Table 10. Coded free-form responses by theme (n=1194)

	Posi- tive	Nega- tive	N	%
History	84.9	15.1	53	4.4
Organised Activities	83.5	16.5	345	28.9
Environment	78.7	21.3	394	33.0
People	67.1	32.9	73	6.1
Culture	59.5	40.5	158	13.2
Sightseeing	51.2	48.8	84	7.0
Amenities	18.4	81.6	87	7.3

Lack of time and cost are certainly factors that prevent many tourists from visiting Tinian and especially Rota.

IMPLICATIONS

The overall low level of participation in various attributes and sites of the culture and history of

the CNMI is of concern for the cultural heritage management agencies of the Northern Marianas, as well as the tourism development agencies trying to diversify the offerings. While the Japanese tourist market is interested in World War II relics and sites, time constraints notwithstanding, there seems to be less interest in Chamorro culture and heritage and even less in Spanish period sites, with Carolinian heritage ranking lowest.

The relative ranking, which the Japanese visitors ascribe to the sites, runs contrary to the views of the local population of the CNMI. The priorities of the local population rank Chamorro and Carolinian heritage well above Spanish and especially above World War II attributes (Spennemann 2003). The differential between the high level of interest shown by the Japanese in World War II sites echoes the generally high level of interest shown by heritage managers (see O’Neill and Spennemann in prep.), but is at odds with the perceptions of many of the Micronesian communities as outlined by Spennemann (1992) and confirmed by research into the perceptions of the CNMI education sector (Spennemann 2003). This has policy implications that the CNMI authorities may wish to address.

In addition, the high frequency of free-form answers related to aspects that were not queried throughout the survey instrument demonstrates that other issues were much more important to the visitor experience of the respondent than cultural and historical attributes. This is not surprising given that the main motivation of Japanese visitors to the CNMI is to visit the beaches while having a holiday/pleasure (Sayers & Spennemann 2006b). Environmental factors (33%), especially climatic conditions, and issues relating to organised activities (28%) make up over 60% of the free-form comments raised. The issues raised with respect to organised activities and amenities are in keeping with published observations on the expectations of Japanese visitors (Polunin 1989; Reisinger & Turner 2000).

The short time Japanese visitors have available during their visit is perceived by these visitors as a major factor that mitigates against experiencing a range of attributes of the

CNMI's culture and history. Given that the majority of visitors do not venture beyond Saipan, and given that the every destination on the island can be reached in less than an hour, time is no real impediment—rather, it is a perception borne by competing interests. Given that some interest has been expressed by the respondents to experience culture and history on a return trip, it is up to the heritage and tourism management authorities of the CNMI to demonstrate to future Japanese tourists that the Northern Mariana Islands have a multi-layered cultural heritage to offer to the visitor.

ENDNOTES

¹ The amenities that are available to the passengers whilst they are waiting to board their flight, include a Duty Free shop and three eating areas, one of which is a VIP area. Data collection entailed the distribution of the questionnaires to people in the seating area of the departure lounge of Saipan International Airport. The researcher deliberately did not approach people who were sitting in the eating area so as not to disturb them whilst they were eating

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2. This question focused on the respondents' intention to participate in certain experiences and attractions. The layout of the question, however was confusing. The structure was designed to comprise of three levels: i) whether the respondent had planned to experience an attraction or not; ii) whether they did actually experience the attraction, and iii) if he did, what was the reason for not doing so. The in-the-field pre-testing did not adequately address the issue. As a result, the respondents chose *one* of the options making the interpretation more complex. While the reasons for not visiting can be combined into a value of 'non participation,' and can be compared with the responses to 'actually experienced' the responses of 'did not plan (to experience)' and 'planned (to experience)' are difficult to interpret (Sayers 2001). For the purposes of this reanalysis of the data we have combined the answers for 'planned (to experience)' with those of actual experience. The responses for 'did not plan (to experience)' have been omitted altogether (in totality not exceeding 3% of the actual responses).
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