

# The Inter-Relationship between Perceived Importance, Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty

## The Case of American Tourists in Vietnam

Thuy-Huong Truong

Centre for Hospitality and Tourism Research  
Victoria University, Australia

Brian King

Centre for Hospitality and Tourism Research  
Victoria University Australia

**Abstract :** This paper identifies the attitudes and perceptions of American travellers towards Vietnam including their search, use and evaluation of destination-based products and services. With a view to identifying the extent to which Vietnam provides the destination attributes sought by American tourists, the paper uses a variety of variables including socio-demographics, travel characteristics, perceptions and behavioural intentions. It examines levels of perception and satisfaction and behavioural intentions (destination loyalty) with regards to Vietnam tourism products and services. In addition to its academic significance, the research should provide tourism service providers and destination marketers with improved insights into the behaviour and characteristics of American tourists.

**Key words:** Vietnam, American tourists, perceptions, satisfaction, destination loyalty, tourism products and services

## Introduction

### An Overview of Tourism in Vietnam

Vietnam has increasing appeal for holidaymakers seeking novelty and excitement. It is a popular destination amongst both group and independent travellers and this popularity is largely attributable to the natural scenery and exotic culture. This appeal is somewhat similar to what applies for the rest of East Asia (Millington, 2001). The steady growth of international tourist arrivals is indicative of Vietnam's appeal in diverse markets. The growth experienced over the period 2000 to 2005 is highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: International Tourist Arrivals to Vietnam by Major Countries (2000-2005)

Nationality	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
China	672,846	724,385	639,423	778,431	684,054
Japan	204,860	279,769	209,730	267,210	298,979
Taiwan	200,061	211,072	207,866	256,906	260,987
USA	230,470	259,967	218,928	272,473	299,442
France	99,700	111,546	86,791	104,025	114,779
Australia	84,085	96,624	93,292	128,661	132,398
Britain	64,673	69,682	63,348	71,016	73,828
Thailand	31,789	40,999	40,123	53,682	77,599
Total	1,588,484	1,794,044	1,559,501	1,932,404	1,942,066
Grand Total	2,330,050	2,627,988	2,073,433	2,927,876	3,140,426

Source: VNAT (2006)

Of the top six tourism generating countries for Vietnam, China was consistently ranked first and the USA ranked second. As outlined in Table 1 these were followed by Japan, Taiwan, Australia and France. The USA has strong historical and cultural links with Vietnam and over the period 1997 to 2005 arrivals almost doubled from 147,982 to 333,566 (VNAT, 2006). It is forecast that by the year 2010 the USA will maintain its position as the second largest source of international tourists to Vietnam.

### An overview of the US Market

Vietnam targeted the American market for tourism relatively late and the market remains relatively underdeveloped. Vietnam was closed to American citizens over the two decades leading up to 1993, with US - based tourism companies prohibited from any active engagement. The US led trade and investment embargo and passport restrictions acted as constraints on personal travel. The "Dealing with the Enemies Act" was finally repealed in 1994 and travel and trade sanctions were discontinued. The re-establishment of diplomatic ties prompted a new era of commercial and cultural relations and the emergence of largely positive press coverage. Overcoming some unfavourable coverage, the profile has maintained Vietnam as top of mind for American tourists. Vietnam is now open to American leisure, business and VFR (visiting friends and relatives) travellers and the travel industry is free to engage in marketing.

Recently a marked shift in preference has been evident amongst American travellers away from longer and more expensive travel to Europe towards cheaper trips to Asia including Vietnam. US travellers are constantly in search of new destinations offering the opportunity to experience a wide range of activities and attractions, often with the added appeal of encountering a new culture. The changing ethnicity of the USA, including the arrivals of Vietnamese migrants since 1970, has increased awareness amongst the US population of the diversity of Asian

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cultures. Amongst American travellers, interest in Asia appears to correlate strongly with educational attainment. A strong intellectual orientation is borne out by interest in educational trips generally and Vietnam's cultural and historical offerings in particular. Attractions for American travellers to Vietnam have included appealing history and exotic culture.

Ruppel et al. (1991) have noted that Americans seldom travel to poor, developing countries with the exception of Mexico. Vietnam is however exceptional because it reminds Americans of their past and their national heritage. Vietnam's appeal in the USA may be because an earlier generation was directly involved in aiding the colonial powers against the Vietnamese military. War memories are one of the reasons why visitors generally and war veterans in particular make pilgrimage to the erstwhile theatres of war. Alongside the veterans are urban middle class explorers who evince a keen interest of knowing about other cultures and traditions. The marketing of tourism packages amongst American veterans appears to offer potential, particularly as Americans have some familiarity with Vietnam. Hundreds of thousands of American soldiers were stationed throughout Vietnam during peacetime and many are now interested in revisiting Vietnam, motivated by nostalgia or by curiosity about how things have changed. Vietnam has a plethora of war sites which are of interest to both veterans and their families, uninvolved service personnel and to others interested in military history. Americans who are interested in exploring sites of military significance are good prospects. Those who experienced active service in the Vietnam War are anxious to return under more favorable conditions. However, the U.S. market is complex and heterogeneous. The potential market is a relatively small subset of all travelers and it is necessary for Vietnam's destination marketing organizations need to focus greater promotional effort on the market segments that offer greatest potential. Vietnam will however continue to enjoy an advantage with respect to the US leisure, business and VFR markets as the various air transport links are progressively re-established between the two countries.

The foregoing discussion suggests that limited research has been undertaken on the American outbound travel market. Despite Vietnam's ample opportunity to expand its share of the US market, no systematic investigation has been undertaken about American perceptions of Vietnam. The literature regarding the travel behaviour and holiday satisfaction American travellers to Vietnam is sparse and appears virtually non-existent. Truong and King (2005) examined the perceived attractiveness and extent of satisfaction amongst American tourists with the products consumed in Vietnam. Truong and King (2006) investigated how cultural differences impact upon American tourists and Vietnamese host perceptions of the quality of service offered or received, particularly as they apply to the attributes and performance of service providers. These differences are exam-

ined with a view to developing an understanding of cross-cultural tourist-host perceptions about service quality which are both positive and mutual. For this reason, there is a need to examine the behaviour, perception and satisfaction levels of American tourists. Identifying salient activity preferences and travel characteristics will assist the development of strategies which pursue the achievement of competitive advantage. Investigating the perceptions, satisfaction and behavioural intentions of American travellers towards tourism products and services in Vietnam will assist the development of an understanding of the needs and expectations of the American market as well as other Western markets with implications for staff training, service improvement and product development. The aims of the present paper are:

1) to provide a comprehensive overview of American tourist behaviour in Vietnam using a combination of socio-demographics, travel characteristics, perceived importance and satisfaction with tourism products and the behavioural intentions of finding out which destination attributes tourists most liked or disliked, and,

2) to examine the relationship between tourist perceptions, satisfaction and destination loyalty.

## **Literature View**

### **Destination Image and Tourist Perceptions**

Destination image involves perceptions held about an area by potential visitors. It may be viewed as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of potential tourist destinations (Calatone et al., 1989; Crompton, 1997), of a place (Phelps, 1986) or of vacation attributes (Richardson and Crompton, 1988). Destination image is also defined as how a country is perceived relative to others and is viewed as a complex combination of various products and associated attributes (Gartner, 1989). From these studies it may be concluded that destination image is often viewed as the perception or impression of a destination.

Gensch (1978) characterised "image" as an abstract concept incorporating the influences of past promotion, reputation and peer evaluation of alternatives. Image may also be viewed as connoting consumer expectations. He argued that image plays a more significant role in product situations where consumers have difficulty obtaining an objective measurement of the important product attributes. Since they are generally unsuited for testing prior to travel, tourism products require subjective judgments rather than objective measurement. Potential tourists frequently have limited knowledge about destinations which they have not previously visited (Um and Crompton, 1992). They have difficulty forming objective measures of the important attributes of the destination or vacation sites.



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In this context, the destination image takes on a holistic position in the product evaluation process. Moutinho (1987) viewed an image as "total thought" about the product derived through processing the information of things or products. He also proposed that product images are a function of the level of awareness, beliefs and attitudes developed about the product, and associated expectations about prospective benefits.

Destination image incorporates a number of functional characteristics associated with the more tangible destination traits such as scenery, attractions, accommodation, prices, transport, infrastructure and climate. It also encapsulates psychological characteristics concerning intangible aspects such as the level of friendliness, safety, atmosphere and quality of service that is expected. These characteristics may be arranged along a continuum ranging from traits which can be commonly used to compare all destinations, to those which are unique to very few destinations. In the present study, destination image is briefly examined by measuring the perceptions of functional and psychological attributes in conjunction with the interviews and observations conducted by the researcher to determine holistic impressions and to capture unique features.

In order to assess the attractiveness of Vietnam to prospective American tourists, it is useful to understand their perceptions, preferences and opinions. The attractiveness of a travel destination reflects the feelings, beliefs and opinions that an individual has about the destination's perceived ability to satisfy their special vacation needs (Hu and Richie, 1993). In the literature, the notion of destination attractiveness has been conceptualised by linking it with the decision-making process and with the specific objectives demanded by travellers (Mayo and Jarvis, 1981). Tourists typically demand a set of natural or man-made attractions or "something interesting or unusual to see or to do" (Ferrario, 1979) as attractions provide major symbols and images for the presentation of destinations to the public (Leiper, 1990). As a result, an accurate assessment of product image is a prerequisite for designing an effective marketing strategy (Reilly, 1990).

The research suggests that those destinations with strong, positive images are more likely to be considered and chosen within travel decision processes (Woodside and Lysonski, 1989). As a result, destination image has an important role in the various models of travel decision-making that have been developed (Moutinho, 1984; Woodside and Lysonski, 1989). Destination image is defined as not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination. Once at the destination, satisfaction largely depends upon a comparison of expectations based on previously held images and the realities encountered at the destination (Chon, 1990). Tourist destination

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images are important where this is the case because they influence both the decision-making behaviour of American tourists and their levels of satisfaction regarding their tourist experiences in Vietnam. Understanding the various different destination images of Vietnam held by American pleasure travellers would be valuable, enabling the salient attributes and the re-evaluated image to be incorporated into the process of marketing and planning for tourism.

## Tourist Satisfaction

Pizam, Neumann and Reichel (1978) have defined tourist satisfaction as a comparison between "a tourist's experience at the destination visited and the expectations about the destination". Pearce (1980) emphasises that tourist satisfaction is dependent on pre-travel favourability towards the destination thereby contributing to post-travel favourability. Moutinho (1987) notes that satisfaction is primarily a function of pre-travel expectations and post-travel experiences. Oliver and Desarbo (1988) indicate that an individual's expectation is confirmed when a service performs as expected and is negatively disconfirmed when the service performs worse than expected, and is positively disconfirmed when the service performs better than expected. This definition has been criticised for assuming that expectations are adequate predictors of satisfaction. In fact evidence suggests that the most satisfactory experiences may be those that are unexpected (Arnould et al, 1993). Furthermore, Weber (1996) has mentioned that consumer satisfaction is a central concept in marketing theory and practice and has a direct influence on future purchase intentions, market share and word-of-mouth communication. Consumer satisfaction can help strengthen the competitive position of products. Based on these definitions, the expectations and experiences of tourists will greatly affect their levels of holiday satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Satisfaction is a multi-faceted concept and should be assessed by referring to many individual aspects of the holiday encounter, for example products, services and facilities.

The study of tourist behaviour should include both what tourists need and the outcome of the need, namely how well tourist needs are met and how satisfied the tourists are with the services or products that are provided. Parasuraman et al (1988) have suggested that questions relating to perceptions of both need and outcome will be considered. Many studies concentrate on tourist needs but few focus on satisfaction with the attributes of a destination (Weber, 1996; Cho, 1998), or on the perceived need of tourists and their satisfaction with the outcome of the need. The present study includes an analysis of the American visitors' perceived importance of and satisfaction with regards to products and services encountered in Vietnam

## **Destination Loyalty (Behavioural Intentions)**

Past research has suggested that satisfaction is an excellent predictor of repurchase intentions (Choi and Chu 2001; Petrick 2002). The importance of repeat visitation in international tourism is widely acknowledged. Repeat visitation is important for the destination as a whole and for individual attractions. The lesser cost involved in marketing to repeat consumers has frequently been noted as a positive association (Haywood 1989; Rosenberg and Czepiel 1983). The "earning potential" of reducing consumer attrition has also been mentioned (Reicheld and Sasse, 1990). Repeat visitation has been used intuitively by operators and destination managers as an indicator of positive product perceptions.

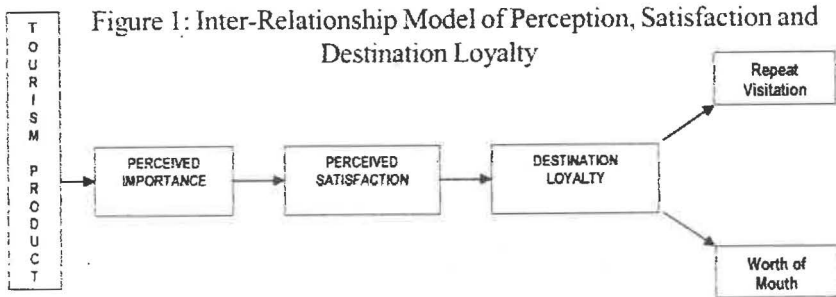
Alongside intention to revisit, word-of-mouth (WOM) communication has also been identified as a vehicle for expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with products (Murray, 1991). This form of communication is widely regarded as an important and popular marketplace phenomenon. It has been suggested that informal information from WOM has strong impacts on customer evaluations of products and sellers and on future purchase decisions (Richins, 1983; Bolcn, 1994). In tourism, the personal experiences of customers form the basis of assessments of both tangible products and intangible services.

Other researchers such as Pizam, Neumann and Reichel (1978) and Danaher and Arweiler (1996) have demonstrated that satisfaction is a valuable concept in understanding destination performance. A number of studies have investigated the impact of destination attributes on intentions to revisit and to recommend (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Ross, 1993). An investigation of each attribute's impact on future intentions could demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of destinations by assessing their individual performance levels and the feedback received from their customers. Nevertheless, an investigation of the influence of overall tourist satisfaction and the level of satisfaction with specific attributes and their impact on repeat visitation to Vietnam has remained limited beside the Truong's (2002) study. The objectives of the present study are to examine any relationship between tourist perceptions, satisfaction with their intention to repeat visits and recommendations to others.

## **Hypothesis**

The literature review has shown that there is a relationship between perception, satisfaction and behavioural intention (destination loyalty). As outlined in Figure 1 it is a hypothesis of the present paper that:

1. the perceived importance of tourists will assist the prediction of satisfaction and behavioural intentions,
2. behavioural intentions (including 'intention to return to the destination' & the willingness to recommend it) have been used as indicators of travel behaviour,



Source: Developed by Researchers

## Methodology

The current study sought to identify the socio-demographics and travel characteristics of American tourists. It also sought to investigate how respondents rate the relative importance of tourism product attributes in Vietnam and how satisfied they are with these attributes. The survey was administered to respondents at the end of their tour and is therefore focused on satisfaction as determined by attributes experiences and importance but not on expectations. Although expectations are thought to contribute to satisfaction, they are by no means the only determinant of satisfaction, and the strength of this study is to investigate the relationship between perceived importance and satisfaction as well as the behavioural intention of American visitors towards products and services experienced in Vietnam.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data was used to elaborate the findings of the study for a number of reasons:

A quantitative approach was selected because it encompasses structural design and focuses on statistical procedures. Survey questionnaire constitute one form of quantitative research and involve asking a large number of prospective respondents the same set of questions and then examining their answers. The advantages of this approach include the use of large sample sizes representing the population under consideration and the measurement of means, attitudes and opinions using scores and ratings. The results when summarized and analyzed allow for generalizations to be formulated with a degree of confidence. Quantitative approaches also have some shortcomings. In-depth information about the subjects may not be forthcoming and large samples are required to facilitate statistical analysis (Brunt, 1997).

A qualitative approach was also used because this allowed the researchers to understand both what happened and how and why it happens (Kraus and Allen, 1997: 99). Qualitative data is more personal and easily understandable (Brunt, 1997; Veal, 1998; Henderson, 1991). It is based on an inductive approach and allows theory to emerge rather than to construct it preordinately. Furthermore,

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researchers have a better opportunity to get closer to the informants and grasp their point of view and vision. Qualitative methods can therefore provide meaningful data from a limited number of individuals regarding their expectations, experiences, behaviour, needs and aspirations.

Though both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this study, the stronger emphasis was on the quantitative approach. Primary data were gathered mainly by a questionnaire survey of tourists. Qualitative data from the interviews and researchers' participant observations were also collected to supplement and help to interpret the survey results. There were some delicate matters from a respondent perspective that were worthy of exploration because of the special relationship between Vietnam and the USA in terms of history, politic and culture. Thanks to the direct interaction between researchers and respondents in the form of participant observations and interviews, rich information and greater insights into respondent feelings could be obtained.

Therefore, a combination of survey-based interviews and participant observations was viewed as the most suitable data collection for the current study. This approach enabled the researchers a) to achieve a high total response rate; b) to reveal information about feelings and emotions regarding different subjects; c) to provide greater sensitivity to any misunderstanding by respondents; and d) to provide information on non-verbal behaviour of respondents. This is reconfirmed by Henderson (1991), Newman (1997) and Veal (1998) who indicated that understanding both qualitative and quantitative approaches will enable researchers to know a broader range of research and can be used in complementary ways in order to achieve better outcomes.

For analysis purposes, frequency distributions were used to analyse respondent socio-demographic profiles and travel characteristics. Paired sample t test were used to identify levels of importance and satisfaction in respondent assessments of Vietnam. These assessments were applied to the attractiveness of the country, the price and quality of products and service and destination safety and security. Interviews and observations were also used to provide a clearer picture of respondent perceptions of tourism products and services in Vietnam.

#### **Instrument**

A five-part questionnaire was prepared containing a series of closed questions. The first and second parts aimed at investigating respondent socio-demographic profiles and travel characteristics. The third part aimed at examining respondent behavioural intentions. The fourth and fifth parts attempted to capture tourist perceptions and satisfaction with products and services encountered in Vietnam. The questions included in these sections referred to respondent perceptions of Vietnam and satisfaction in terms of destination attractiveness, products and services and destination uncertainty. This section consisted of thirty-one at-

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tributes as described below. It comprised the key variables from the literature review developed by Truong (2002) regarding tourism products and services:

- ❖ Perceived destination attractiveness was measured using variables reflecting overall visitor perceptions of Vietnam in terms of attractions, activities, accommodation, amenities and accessibility offered by Vietnamese hosts.

- ❖ Perceived value was measured with variables reflecting visitor perceptions of the price, quality and variety of products and services received, e.g. the value of goods & services for the prices charged such as price of souvenirs, gifts, food and beverages & the overall value for money for their holiday in Vietnam.

- ❖ Perceived uncertainty was measured with variables reflecting visitors' perceptions of the political stability and the overall safety and security of Vietnam as holiday destination.

Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of these holiday attributes on a six point Likert-type scale format with 1 indicating "Completely Unimportant" and 6 meaning "Extremely Important". Respondents were then asked to indicate their satisfaction with the same holiday attributes on a 6-point Likert-type scale format with 1 indicating "Completely unsatisfied" and 6 meaning "Extremely satisfied".

## **Sample and Procedure**

This paper forms part of a larger investigation of the perceptions and satisfaction levels of international tourists towards Vietnam. The sample population for the present study was drawn from American residents visiting Vietnam on an escorted tour or as free independent travellers and whose purpose of journey was holiday, business, education, conference or visiting friends and relatives. The fieldwork component of the study was conducted in Vietnam between February 2003 and February 2004. The researchers approached respondents randomly at major attractions, restaurants, shops, hotels and bars in selected major cities in Vietnam. It was anticipated that travellers would complete the instrument upon their return home from Vietnam or else at the completion of their holiday within Vietnam. Of four hundred and twenty questionnaires distributed, one hundred and ninety completed questionnaires were collected. The sample size obtained met the minimum suggested by Salant and Dillman (1994). There are 20 cases were deleted because of some incomplete and missing data points. Therefore, 170 remaining and fully completed questionnaires were used for the study, indicative of a 41% response rate. Version 12 of SPSS was used for data input.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Socio-Demographic Characteristics**

As outlined in Table 2, respondents consisted of 54.1% of females and 45.9% males. In term of age, 19.5% of respondents were between 18 to 31 years old

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and 27.7% between 32 to 45 years of age. The majority were older with more than 52% being between 46 and 60 years of age. A high proportion had a university degree (51.7%) with undergraduate holders (28.2%) and post-graduate degree holders (23.5%). The largest groups of respondents were professionals (31.8%), followed by manager or administrator (20.6%) and retired (13.5%). This finding is in line with the PATA study (1999) which indicated that Americans who travel internationally tend to be better educated, wealthier, and older than average. Travellers to the Asia-Pacific region in particular come from the economic and educational elite, a status that few reach until later in life. Most have considerable prior experience as international tourists.

Table 2: A Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

American Tourists (N=170)	Number	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	78	45.9
Female	92	54.1
<b>Age</b>		
18 - 24	21	12.4
25 - 31	12	7.1
32 - 38	18	10.6
39 - 45	29	17.1
46 - 52	34	20.0
53 - 59	15	8.8
More than 60	41	24.1
<b>Education</b>		
High school	38	22.4
College (Non Degree)	44	25.9
University Degree	48	28.2
Postgraduate	40	23.5
<b>Occupation</b>		
Manager / Administrator	35	20.6
Professional	54	31.8
Student	13	7.6
Tradesperson	16	9.4
Technician	19	11.2
Laborer / Worker	10	5.9
Retired	23	13.5

Source: Survey Results 2004

### Travel Characteristics

The following section outlines respondent travel characteristics such as travel purpose, travel mode, travel companion, length of stay, number of trips to Vietnam and the use of different information sources for preparing their holiday. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the responses.

Table 3: Travel Characteristics of American Tourists

American Tourists (N=170)	Number	Percentage
<b>Purpose of Trip To Vietnam</b>		
Holiday	127	74.7
Education	14	8.2
Conference	4	2.4
Business	9	5.3
Visiting Friends and Relatives	16	9.4
<b>Sources of Information about Vietnam</b>		
Family/ Relatives/ Friends	74	42.3
Media	66	38.8
Previous experience	67	39.4
Guide books	115	67.6
Travel agents	83	48.8
Newspaper	74	43.5
Internet	123	72.4
<b>Number of Trips to Vietnam</b>		
First time	100	58.8
Second time	36	21.2
Third time	19	11.2
Fourth time	6	3.5
Fifth time	4	2.4
Six time and more	5	2.9
<b>Length of Holiday in Vietnam</b>		
Less than one week	6	3.5
From one week to two weeks	55	32.4
More than two weeks	62	36.5
From two weeks to three weeks	15	8.8
From three weeks to four weeks	13	7.6
More than four weeks	19	11.2
<b>Travel Mode to Vietnam</b>		
Escorted Tour	100	58.8
Independently	70	41.2
<b>Travel Companion</b>		
Alone	98	57.6
Two Person	60	35.3
Three Persons	12	7.1

Source: Survey Results 2004



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Regarding travel purpose, 74.7% of respondents travelled to Vietnam for pleasure purposes. Among this number, 15.9% also travel for education, conference and business purposes and 9.4% also travel for visiting friends and relatives (as they had connection through marriage or cultural interest with Vietnam). A majority (58.8%) were visiting Vietnam for the first time, 21.2% for the second time and around 20% for between three to six times.

A relatively large percentage of respondents were undertaking an escorted tour (58.8%) while 41.2% were travelling as free and independent travelers. Given the sampling frame, it is not surprising that respondents demonstrated a strong preference for escorted tours. A similar trend is evident in the case of other Western outbound travel markets to Vietnam with a tendency for group rather than for individual travel (VNAT, 1999). A desire for fewer hassles, convenience and reasonable prices may be reasons for choosing escorted tours. When selling package tours to Americans tour operators may be well advised to emphasize the benefits of fewer problems, greater convenience and reasonable prices. In addition, they might promote values such as quality service and variety of tour options to increase their market share.

A relatively high proportion of American tourists (41.2%) traveled to Vietnam as free independent travelers. The opening up of Vietnam to individual travelers in the early 1990s offered a rare opportunity to witness both the speed and adaptation processes of development of low-budget accommodation infrastructure. A significant proportion of American backpackers discovered Vietnam as a newly accessible area of South East Asia. The relatively high percentage of independent travel has been the result of visa relaxation over the last few years, especially during the promotion of "Vietnam as a destination for the New Millennium". Such features may guide the Vietnamese tourism industry when marketing or promoting their products. It may be worth emphasizing the backpacker segment which allows tourists to explore, sightsee and undertake a variety of activities independently.

With regard to party composition, 57.6% of respondents travelled alone while more than 35.3% travelled with two persons as couple and 7.1% with three persons as with friends. The interpersonal relationships that respondents enjoy with family and friends during their trip and the friendly relationship created with others whilst on holiday were also another interesting experience reported by many respondents. Escorted tours would usefully feature activities that allow American tourists the opportunity to enjoy the company of fellow travellers and families.

The typical duration of American vacations to Vietnam was two to three weeks. Some 36.5% of respondents holidayed in Vietnam more than two weeks,

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32.4% for one to two weeks, 11.2% for more than four weeks, 8.8% for between two to three weeks, 7.6% for between three weeks to four weeks and 3.5% for less than one week. The duration of trip seems to be longer than expected relative to other medium haul destinations.

Approximately 59% of respondents were traveling to Vietnam for the first time, 21.2% for the second time and 20% as from the third to over six time. These results suggest that many respondents were experienced Vietnam travellers. With the sharp fall in the price of travel and accommodation in the last few years in Vietnam, the pattern is beginning to change as American have more opportunities to shift away from longer and more expensive trips to Europe towards shorter and relatively cheaper trips to Vietnam. American travellers are considering Vietnam as a potential holiday destination for a number of reasons: they have a strong historical connection and they are curious of coming to return after so many years of war. These results imply that the Vietnamese tourism industry can build a distinct image in the American market with a view to attracting more tourists. A high percentage of respondents are very experienced travellers having previously holidayed in Vietnam with a high percentage on their second trip (21.2%) and 20.0% on third, fourth and even sixths trip to Vietnam. Targeting the repeat American visitors could also be considered as one of the important components of Vietnam's tourism marketing strategy. According to Oppermann (1998), it is five or six times more effective to attract previous customers than it is to gain a new one, and the expected positive word-of-mouth generated by satisfied customers could serve as a further marketing incentive.

With reference to information used, Table 4 outlines the most important sources of information used by respondents in preparing for their holiday to Vietnam.

Table 4: Sources of Information about Vietnam

Category label	Count	Percent of Responses	Percent of Cases
Internet	123	20.5	72.4
Guide Books	115	19.1	67.6
Travel agents	82	13.6	48.2
News paper	74	12.3	43.5
Family/ Relatives/ Friends	74	12.3	43.5
Previous Experiences	67	11.1	39.4
Media	66	11.0	38.8
Total Responses	601	100	353

Source: Survey Results 2004

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Some respondents used more than one information source. Consequently, the results are presented with the "Percentage of Responses" column used to indicate the proportion of the total number of information sources used in each category. Internet emerges as the most popular source of information. The "Percentages of Cases" column indicates the proportion of respondents that had used Internet as the particular source of information for their trip to Vietnam.

As can be seen on Table 4, the majority of respondents (72.4%) cited Internet as the most important source of information, though most had also used other sources. Some 67.6% had used Guidebooks while 48.2% used Travel Agents. Other sources included 43.5% who obtained information from their families and relatives, 39.4% from with previous travel experience to Vietnam, 43.5% from newspaper and 15% from the media. These results show that American travellers access a wide range of sources of information when preparing for a holiday in Vietnam. These findings indicate that tourists who plan their travel well in advance usually search for detailed information. The sources of information and types of promotional tools have an influence over destinations images (Telisman-Kosuta, 1989; Butler, 1990; Bojanic, 1991; Gartner, 1993). The outcomes of the present research have also confirmed that the Internet, guidebooks and travel agents were the most prominent means of forming the perceptions of American tourists towards Vietnam. Word-of-mouth from friends, family and relatives also played a vital role in the decision-making process. According to Biles et al (1999), overseas promotion by Vietnam's tourism industry remains very limited. Vietnam's tourism industry may need develop a distinct strategy rather than relying on traditional approach of advertising overseas. Building a strategy around the full range of travel information sources including the Internet, guidebooks and promotional publications may be more effective. Enhancing the knowledge and skills of travel agents may also help to provide a better product and service to their customers. Positive reports from satisfied clients can play an important role in the success of tourism businesses.

### **Destination Loyalty**

With regard to behavioural intentions, of the 170 visitors surveyed on a scale from 1 (Definitely Not) to 6 (Definitely Yes), 60.6% stated that they would definitely return to Vietnam, whilst only 2.4% would not. Concerning recommendation of Vietnam as a holiday destination to others, the vast majority of respondents (63.5%) stated that they would definitely recommend Vietnam whilst only 4.1% of respondents replied that they would not (see Table 5). Based on these results, it appears that there is and will continue to be an American holiday market for Vietnam. According to Cho (1998), "the opinions on intention of repeat visit and recommending the tour to others also represent the overall satisfaction" of respondents.

Table 5: Destination Loyalty (Behavioural Intention)

<b>Consideration Repeat Visitation to Vietnam</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Definitely Not	4	2.4
Two	2	1.2
Three	4	2.4
Four	27	15.9
Five	30	17.6
Definitely Yes	103	60.6
Total	170	100
<b>Recommendation of Vietnam Holiday to Others</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Definitely Not	7	4.1
Two	7	4.1
Three	10	5.9
Four	15	8.8
Five	23	13.5
Definitely Yes	108	63.5
Total	170	100

Source: Survey Results 2004

## Comparison of Perceived Importance and Satisfaction

This section consists of the Paired samples t test results. Interviews and observations were also used to provide a clearer picture of respondent perceptions of Vietnam's attractiveness in terms of price and quality of products and services offered as well as the level safety and security.

### Findings from the Survey Questionnaire

Each of the 31 variables indicated a single destination attribute and respondents were asked to indicate the importance and satisfaction of each. These findings were supplemented with participant observations on the part of the researchers.

The following section focuses on Paired samples t test of destination attributes sought by American travellers. This type of analysis is viewed as the best means of ranking the perceived importance and levels of satisfaction of respondents towards the tourism products and services offered by providers in Vietnam.

As can be seen in Table 6 and based on mean scores the 31 destination attributes are ranked in order of importance from high to low, with only two items having low scores. There are "Availability of Shopping Facilities" (4.49) and "Value of Goods and Services for Prices Charged" (4.38). Similarly, respondent

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levels of satisfaction were also ranked from high to low. Only two items had low means scores, namely "Services levels in Retail Shops" (4.20) and "Availability of shopping facilities" (3.75). There are no attributes is rated low (less than 3 on a 5-point scale) in both in the perceived importance and levels of satisfaction.

In Table 6, an association is drawn between the top ten attributes in either the importance column or the satisfaction column. The relationships are highlighted with arrows. The top rated item overall is "Friendliness and Hospitality of Local People". This is ranked one for importance and two for satisfaction.

Table 6: Results of Paired Samples T Test of Importance (I) and Satisfaction (S) with Destination Attributes in Vietnam

Table 6: Results of Paired Samples T Test of Importance (I) and Satisfaction (S) with Destination Attributes in Vietnam

IMPORTANCE (I)	Mean	Rank	Comparison between Importance and Satisfaction		Rank	Mean	SATISFACTION (S)
			←	→			
Friendliness and Hospitality of Local People	5.56	1	→	←	1	5.46	Overall Rating of Safety and Security
Variety of Natural, Cultural and Historical Attractions	5.54	2	→	←	2	5.38	Friendliness and Hospitality of Local People
Spiritual and Educational Value of Tour	5.46	3	→	←	3	5.28	Safety at Tourist Sites/ Accommodations/ Restaurants
Efficiency of Services at Tourist Facilities	5.44	4	→	←	4	5.28	Overall Value for Money
Perception about Variety of Beautiful Natural Scenery	5.43	5	→	←	5	5.27	Quality and Variety of Restaurants
Variety of Cultural Events and Festivals	5.40	6	→	←	6	5.26	Political Stability of Destination
Availability of Health and Entertainment Facilities (e.g. Karaoke)	5.38	7	→	←	7	5.24	Variety of Natural, Cultural and Historical Attractions
Overall Rating of Health and Security	5.25	8	→	←	8	5.19	Value of Goods and Services for Prices Charged
Quality and Variety of Restaurants	5.25	9	→	←	9	5.18	Spiritual and Educational Value of Tour
Quality Standard of Accommodation/ Resort	5.20	10	→	←	10	5.13	Services Levels and Competence of Tour Guides
Services Levels of Banking Facilities	5.19	11	→	←	11	5.12	English, French, Chinese, Language spoken at Destination
Value of Activities (Outing, Shopping or Excursion)	5.17	12	→	←	12	5.06	Availability of Health and Entertainment Facilities (e.g. Karaoke)
Safety at Tourist Sites/ Accommodations/ Restaurants	5.14	13	→	←	13	5.05	Prices of Popular Souvenirs
Services Levels and Competence of Tour Guides	5.13	14	→	←	14	5.05	Variety of Activities (Outing, Shopping or Excursion)
Availability of Products in my Own Language	5.11	15	→	←	15	5.01	Prices of Souvenirs and Gifts
English, French, Chinese, Language spoken at Destination	5.06	16	→	←	16	5.01	Quality Standard of Accommodation/ Resort
Services Levels of Front-line Employees (e.g. Hotel and Restaurant)	5.04	17	→	←	17	5.01	Services Levels of Banking Facilities
Overall Rating and Satisfaction at Destination	5.01	18	→	←	18	4.99	Services Levels of Local Drivers
Services Levels of Airport	5.00	19	→	←	19	4.94	Spiritual and Educational Value of Tour
Services Levels of Local Drivers	4.98	20	→	←	20	4.87	Variety of Cultural Events and Festivals
Services Levels of Immigration and Customs Clearance	4.88	21	→	←	21	4.77	Services Levels of Airport
Political Stability of Destination	4.94	22	→	←	22	4.75	Availability of Health and Entertainment Facilities (e.g. Karaoke)
Signposting to Attractions and Facilities in my Own Language	4.94	23	→	←	23	4.74	Services Levels of Front-line Employees (e.g. Hotel and Restaurant)
Overall Value for Money	4.87	24	→	←	24	4.71	Overall Rating and Satisfaction at Destination
Accessibility and Comfort of Local Transport Services	4.87	25	→	←	25	4.63	Services Levels of Immigration and Customs Clearance
Availability of Facilities at Tourist Sites and Resorts	4.78	26	→	←	26	4.54	Availability of Opportunity Car Language
Services Levels in Retail Shops	4.71	27	→	←	27	4.54	Efficiency of Services at Tourist Facilities
Prices of Food and Beverages	4.68	28	→	←	28	4.46	Availability of Shopping Facilities
Prices of Souvenirs and Gifts	4.55	29	→	←	29	4.46	Accessibility and Comfort of Local Transport Services
Availability of Shopping Facilities	4.49	30	→	←	30	4.20	Services Levels in Retail Shops
Value of Goods and Services for Prices Charged	4.38	31	→	←	31	3.75	Availability of Facilities at Tourist Sites and Resorts

Source: Survey Results 2004

### Destination Attributes - Degree of Perceived Importance

The respondents determined the mean scores for each attribute in terms of importance. They were asked to assess the importance of each attribute from the list of 31 variables with one being least important and six being most important. An analysis of the means allows for the identification of the most important attributes. Of the 31 variables, the 10 which scored highest in terms of importance are Friendliness and Hospitality of Local People; Variety of Natural, Cultural

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and Historical Attractions; Social and Educational Value of Tour; Efficiency of Services at Tourist Facilities; Variety of Beautiful Natural Scenery; Variety of Cultural Events and Festivals; Availability of Nightlife and Entertainment Facilities; Overall feeling of Safety and Security; Quality and Variety of Restaurants; Quality Standard of Accommodation / Resort. The 10 most important attributes and their means are listed on Table 7.

### Destination Attributes - Degree of Satisfaction

The mean satisfaction score was then obtained in terms of for each attribute. One was least satisfied and six was very satisfied on a scale of one to six. An analysis of the means allows for the identification of the destination attributes recognised as most satisfactory by American tourists. Of the 31 variables, the 10 which scored highest for satisfaction are Overall feeling of Safety and Security; Friendliness and Hospitality of Local People; Safety at Tourist Sites/ Accommodations/ Restaurants; Overall Value for Money; Quality and Variety of Restaurants; Political Stability of Destination; Quality and Variety of Restaurants; Variety of Natural, Cultural and Historical Attractions; Value of Goods and Services for Prices Charged; Social and Educational Value of Tour and Services levels and Competency of Tour Guides. The 10 most satisfied attributes and their means are listed on Table 7.

Table 7 compares the top 10 Destination Attributes for importance and for satisfaction with the most important Destination Attributes being listed on the left. The Destination Attributes that scored most satisfaction are listed on the right with the mean is reported in each case. These results indicate that there is a high match between importance and satisfaction in the case of variables including Friendliness and Hospitality of Local People; Overall feeling of Safety and Security; Quality and Variety of Restaurants Variety of Natural, Cultural and Historical

It is noted that there are some attributes which are ranked very low in importance but very high in satisfaction. This indicates that respondents were very satisfied with these attributes. These attributes are Value of Goods and Services for Prices Charged, Overall Value for Money, Political Stability of Destination and Safety at Tourist Sites/ Accommodations/ Restaurants. Similarly, there are some attributes ranked very highly in importance but very low in satisfaction. This indicates that respondents have obtained a low level of satisfaction or they were unsatisfied. These attributes are Availability of Nightlife and Entertainment Facilities (e.g. Karaoke), Availability of Facilities at Tourist Sites and Airports.

Table 7: Results of Paired Samples T Test for the

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Importance (I) and Satisfaction (S) of Top 10 Most Important  
Destination Attributes

Rank	IMPORTANCE	Mean	SATISFACTION	Mean
1	Friendliness and Hospitality of Local People	5.56	Overall feeling of Safety and Security	5.48
2	Variety of Natural, Cultural and Historical Attractions	5.54	Friendliness and Hospitality of Local People	5.36
3	Social and Educational Value of Tour	5.45	Safety at Tourist Sites/ Accommodations/ Restaurants	5.28
4	Efficiency of Services at Tourist Facilities	5.44	Overall Value for Money	5.28
5	Variety of Beautiful Natural Scenery	5.4	Quality and Variety of Restaurants	5.27
6	Variety of Cultural Events and Festivals	5.4	Political Stability of Destination	5.26
7	Availability of Nightlife and Entertainment Facilities	5.36	Variety of Natural, Cultural and Historical Attractions	5.24
8	Overall feeling of Safety and Security	5.25	Value of Goods and Services for Prices Charged	5.19
9	Quality and Variety of Restaurants	5.25	Social and Educational Value of Tour	5.16
10	Quality Standard of Accommodation / Resort	5.2	Services levels and Competency of Tour Guides	5.14

Source: Survey Results 2004

## Interview and Observation Outcomes

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis was used as data and method triangulation approaches. Based on the survey results, we may conclude that American tourists were generally happy with their holidays in Vietnam. As a result, the interviews and observations also provided insights into respondent feelings and evaluation. Highlights included overall safety and political stability, friendliness of the local people, scenery, culture, value for money, local cuisine, cultural and historical attractions. Lowlights included hygiene and sanitation; poor facilities at some airports and retail shops; poor sign posting and the shortage of information centres; inadequate service facilities offered at some banks; a deficiency of nightlife and entertainment facilities, the high charge of telecommunication services and the overall quality of service provided by some tourism providers and customs clearance. Some of these aspects were analysed as follows:

**Safety and Security:** Personal safety, natural disasters, political instability and other forms of disturbance are causing concern for travellers. This is particularly so in the case of American tourists. Due to the recent experience with 11 September and to the perception that they may be targets of terrorist attacks, they exhibit great concern with their own safety when travelling abroad. Though they feel safe when holidaying in a politically stable destination such as Vietnam, respondents were however very concerned about the recent outbreaks of SARs and bird flu. An image based on health and safety is likely to become increasingly important as the number of economies tied to tourism increases. Vietnamese tourist providers may need to improve the destination image by improving perceptions about health factors which may be perceived as risky.



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**Friendliness of Local People:** Respondents were particularly satisfied with this aspect of their Vietnam experience. The hospitality of the people appeared to make their trip to Vietnam a truly memorable experience. Pizam et al emphasised the vital role of the psychological determinants of satisfaction such as the hospitality of the host community, which they defined as a willingness to help tourists, friendliness and courtesy towards tourists (1978). Pizam, Jafari and Milman also confirmed that tourist experiences affect the attitudes and opinions that tourists have of their hosts (1991). In the present study, interviewees indicated that tourism has positively affected the attitudes and opinions that Americans have of Vietnamese hosts and that this can reduce the negative attitudes in the past between the two nations.

**Culture Seekers:** Vietnamese culture and history are considered to be the most attractive drawcards for American tourists. This includes a mix of old customs and habits. Tourists enjoyed meeting with and talking to local residents, tasting local cuisine, visiting minority ethnic people, witnessing traditional music and dance and purchasing the local artefacts. To experience different cultures and life-styles and broaden their knowledge of history are important benefits sought by American tourists during their visits to Vietnam. The major personal gains that Americans achieve through tourism include understanding other cultures and histories. Coming from a highly individualistic culture, Americans focus on understanding other cultures through scientific observation. They seem to perceive hosts as equals and not just part of the tourist industry. By developing these friendships, American tourists reported as gaining a greater understanding of the Vietnamese host culture. Tour operators may benefit from taking the "culture seeker" features of American travellers into account when developing the itineraries.

Vietnamese cuisine is another cultural aspect of the country enjoyed by American tourists. Culinary experiences were a highlight of many holidays and generally exceeded expectations. The results suggest that instead of arranging for all meals in the hotel, tour operators might organise opportunities for tourists to try some cheap specialities in the local food stores. Confirmation that standards of hygiene are high is important for respondents.

**Attractions:** Respondents showed considerable interest in the diversity of Vietnam's attractions. The primary areas of interest were cultural sightseeing (temples, archaeological ruins, war sites, markets and festivals) and natural sightseeing (coastal regions, national parks, and mountains). This is supported by research undertaken by Jansen-Verbeke (1995), which indicated that the combination of natural and cultural resources in Vietnam forms a strong basis for developing a unique tourist product. This could appeal to visitors seeking beach type holidays and those who are interested in visiting natural and scenic locations,



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historic places and cultural attractions. Many respondents did however express disappointment about the inadequate of maintenance evident in many tourist sites, the shortage of information centre and the poor signposting. It is clear that more work is needed by the Vietnamese authorities to preserve these attractions, as well as to erect more information centres and English language signs.

**War Sites:** For many war veterans, Vietnam represents a site of personal sacrifice. Travel becomes a type of pilgrimage including the search for meaning in a place of war and a place associated with youth. In commenting on the desire for authentic experiences, MacCannell has noted that the tourist is the modern embodiment of the religious pilgrim (1976). The long and complex histories of Vietnam with so many historical sites and war relics have also been a highlight for many American tourists, particularly for War Veterans and their families. However, some respondents were disappointed by the one-sided approach to history shown in some museums. Vietnam might benefit from marketing its war-time heritage in a more effective, appropriate and consistent manner. A balanced and sensitive interpretation is important to provide appropriate experience for visitors who arrive with diverse needs and expectations. On the other hand, the findings have shown that Vietnam appeals to American travellers more as a pleasure destination than as a country of war or destitution. Promoting and maintaining a positive image of Vietnam is needed if more tourists and foreign investment are to be attracted.

**Activities:** Activities are another important holiday experience for respondents. Most enjoyed river cruising, boating on the bay, visiting minority ethnic groups in the hill regions or riding by cyclo, a popular form of local transport. A number of respondents also enjoyed cycling in ancient towns like Hoi An and Hue or along quiet country lanes. Trekking, backpacking and cycling tours were preferred activities for some fit and adventurous respondents. Activities and attractions are key attributes of a specific destination such as Vietnam and should be successfully exploited by tour operators to deliver effective travel products and services to American holidaymakers.

**Value for Money:** Qualitative factors such as different culture, beautiful scenery and quality of accommodation were more important than price during the initial stage of selecting a holiday. However, tourists from different countries value the various attributes differently. Respondents do not view the value and price of goods and services as very important (Table 5), but they expressed satisfaction with these attributes. They were highly satisfied with the purchase of Vietnamese handicrafts such as Zippos; a replica of helicopters as toys made from soft-drink cans. With the prevailing exchange rate between the US and Vietnamese currencies, respondents viewed Vietnam as a very reasonable and affordable destination. There was a perception that bargains were available when

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purchasing holiday goods, services and products. Some respondents were however displeased with Vietnam's officially sanctioned dual pricing policy. According to this scheme, Westerners pay more for goods and services than locals, especially in the case of transportation and accommodation. A revision of this policy might be desirable with a view to making the travel fares and accommodation rates in Vietnam more competitive and more attractive to potential American tourists.

**Accommodation:** Since 1986, restrictions on private investment have gradually been lifted and foreign investment and ownership has been encouraged. The number of joint-venture hotels and private hotels has increased significantly since the open door policy was introduced by the Vietnamese government in 1990. An oversupply of hotel rooms has led to a significant decrease in room rates but the amenities have been substantially developed. According to respondents, rooms were well equipped with facilities such as mini-bar and IDD telephone and many provided complimentary extras such as exotic fruit trays and fresh flowers. Respondents placed considerable importance on the quality of facilities in their rooms and were generally satisfied with the quality of their accommodation in Vietnam. However, they did mention that the quality of staff service needed improvement in the case of a number of hotels. As the attribute and performance of hotel service providers contribute significantly to guest satisfaction beside the amenities provided, room quality standards may need to better meet customer expectations. Meeting or exceeding customer expectations generally results in a positive attitude towards a hotel's service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

**Tourists Service Providers:** The production and distribution of services in international tourism involves a substantial amount of cross-cultural experience on the part of both tourists and service providers. Despite the friendliness and courteousness of Vietnamese service providers, staff appear to lack of experience in dealing with Western customers and the ability to speak the language. In order to satisfy customer needs, it would be advisable for service providers to devote greater effort to human resources training. In-house training programs should be arranged to improve employee helpfulness, cross-cultural communication and understandability, language skills, appearance and the efficiency of check-in or check-out. The staff also need to be involved in setting quality and should realise that maintaining service quality is part of their job because service quality is likely to lead to customer satisfaction and repurchase intention (Bitner, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Teas, 1993).

**Tour Guides:** Respondents reported that their tour guides were of high quality. The majority of Vietnamese tour guides were commended for their mastery of English. Tour guides were regarded as playing an important role in transmitting local knowledge and in helping them to avoid uncomfortable contacts with

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Vietnam hosts. Good tour guides have the ability to interpret and to give visitors useful information about tourist sites. This was found to have an influence on their satisfaction with their learning, especially with their cross-cultural experiences. However, a number of respondents did comment that some tour guides seemed to be reciting scripts or trying to be politically correct and lacked their "personal touch". Such actions created doubt and distrust in the minds of visitors among the visitors. According to Schmidt, a good guide can provide tourists with authentic tourist experiences and psychological satisfaction. In addition to language skills and the knowledge required for their jobs, tour guides should have good cross-cultural understanding and have enthusiastic and pleasant personalities (1979). Regular training should be given to tour guides to enhance their knowledge and improve their interpretation skills and become familiar with the peculiarities of their customers, in this case, Americans.

**Immigration and Customs Clearance:** Respondents reported that these procedures were quite fast and efficient but in need of some improvement. They in particular recommended that staff should be friendlier and more courteous rather than appearing intimidating to tourists. Immigration and customs clearance is one of the first service procedures that tourists encounter on entering or leaving a particular destination. As first impressions always count, this service could significantly influence the overall satisfaction of travellers. Therefore, conducting appropriate training programs for these "frontline" personnel is considered essential in providing more efficient and courteous services and to encourage more user-friendly procedures with tourists.

However, there are also some aspects that respondents were dissatisfied. These are described below:

**Hygiene and Sanitation:** American tourists are greatly concerned about hygiene and sanitation including the lack of clean public toilet facilities. Many expressed disappointment when witnessing inadequate maintenance of such facilities in some hotels and public buildings. They also criticised the maintenance of these facilities and stressed the need to improve the level of hygiene and sanitation available to the public.

**Banking Services:** respondents complained that many ATM facilities did not operate properly, creating difficulties for the withdrawal of money. Others were very disappointed that credit card payments were rejected in many places. Credit card payment facilities are considered important by American travellers because of security issues associated with carrying cash and the overall convenience. This service is not yet popular in Vietnam. In order to avoid such inconvenience, tour operators need conduct an induction program to their customers before travel to Vietnam and local government should provide more banking facilities to satisfy the needs and wants of growing numbers of tourists.

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**Nightlife and Entertainment Facilities:** Respondents very much enjoyed Vietnamese traditional music and folk songs. However they reported that there is a lack of entertainment facilities for them to enjoy at night, particularly in some small towns. Therefore, instead of equipping site with only karaoke facilities as a popular form of distraction, more variety of entertainment facilities such as bars or nightclubs would be appreciated by American tourists.

In summary, the results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative have indicated that there is a strong link between perceived importance, satisfaction and behavioural intention. According to the calculated mean scores of importance and satisfaction (paired samples t test), it is clear that respondents are generally satisfied with tourism products consumed in Vietnam. Findings from the interviews and personal observations also indicate that respondents are generally satisfied with their holiday experiences. Furthermore, the results also reveal a high percentage of respondents having a favourable opinion of the destination. A high proportion of respondents would recommend their holiday to friends and relatives and would like to return to Vietnam for a deeper exploration of the areas which particularly appealed to them. Though the percentage of people recommending their holiday to others is higher than the percentage of repeat visitors, it is certain that the overall satisfaction of American travellers is high. Crossley and Xu (1996) indicate that "It is logical that tourists who are satisfied will probably recommend tour to others, yet may seek different destinations for their next vacation" (p.7). These results indicate that the level of overall satisfaction of American tourists to Vietnam is very high.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The current paper has addressed an under-researched aspect of tourism, namely American views of Vietnam's tourism products. Through its incorporation of several groups of variables it should provide academics with an enhanced understanding of the factors determining tourist behaviour. These variables include the affect of personal cultural characteristics (such as socio-demographic, travel characteristics and behavioural intention profiles) on tourist holiday perception and satisfaction.

As is the case with other forms of leisure and consumer behaviour, tourism is a product of cultural variables and processes. It is often treated as a generic experience or product by those involved in planning and/or marketing. The outcomes of the present paper will be relevant in the context of increasing participation in tourism by members of diverse cultural groups. It may also help to enhance the appreciation of Western cultural differences amongst Asian and Vietnamese tourist marketers, in order to make appropriate adjustment to their marketing strategies. Moreover, as Asia emerges as the world's fastest growing tour-

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ism region, the paper will extend knowledge about Vietnam as a destination.

From a managerial perspective, the findings should assist Vietnam's tourism industry to develop more focused marketing activities and to guide the development of products targeted at the American market. The socio-demographic and travel characteristics of American tourists that have been identified will provide a useful guide for marketing. A number of key benefits sought by respondents have been indicated and are worth emphasizing. These include scenic beauty, interesting history and culture, friendliness of local people, food, famous cultural and natural attractions and value for money. Providing a satisfactory experience for American tourists is however equally important as projecting a positive image. Vietnamese tourism service providers would be well advised to ensure that Americans have satisfactory travel experiences in Vietnam. They should also consider how to provide added value with a view to securing market share in this emerging and high potential market.

While this research has added to the current literature on American travel behaviour in Asia and particularly in Vietnam, there are a number of limitations and the results should be treated cautiously. The current research is exploratory and involves a relatively small sample. This limits the generalisation of the findings. However, as "tastes and styles of travellers are still of an emerging nature" (Mok et al., 1995); longitudinal research on American pleasure travellers should be conducted to obtain patterns of travel to, and monitor attitudinal changes towards different types of activities and services. It might be worthwhile comparing the expectations and the perceptions of American who have not visited Vietnam with those who have been previously. Although beyond the scope of the present study, an evaluation of this comparative aspect would be valuable for future purposes. There is also a need to research American outbound travel to different destinations. It is hoped that this study will provide guidance for Vietnam which has much to offer for American tourists in terms of diversity, culture, affordability and historical significance and further research is needed into tourism in South East Asia to place this potential in wider context.

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4.20 Services levels in Retail Shops Value of Goods and Services for Prices Charged  
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## About the Authors



Thuy-Huong Truong is currently a Doctoral Scholar associated with the Centre for Hospitality and Tourism Research at Victoria University, Australia. Her PhD research is titled "Holiday satisfaction in Vietnam\_Cultural Perspectives\_". Her teaching and research interests lie in the fields of cross-cultural study, consumer behaviour, tourism marketing and management, and destination products.



Brian King is Professor and Head of the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Marketing and a Research Fellow with the Centre for Hospitality and Tourism Research at, Victoria University. His teaching and research interests lie in the fields of Asia-Pacific tourism, tourism-migration relationships and tourism, and hospitality marketing.