

Appeal factors of the worlds top receiving countries



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Introduction

Tourism is the short-term movement of people from their normal places of residence or work to other places for any non-earning activity (Theobald, 1998). The United Nations recognizes three forms of tourism: Domestic, which involves citizens of a country travelling within their country, outbound, which occurs when citizens travel outside their country and Inbound, where non-residents travel in a certain country. The world tourism organization (UNWTO) reported the world tourism statistics and listed the world's top tourist generating countries and tourist receiving countries. European countries continue to be the most visited countries between 2006 and 2008 with the top ten receiving countries being from the European continent. However, United States of America and China were among the top four countries, the other two being France and Spain. France had the highest international tourist arrivals followed by United States of America, Spain and China respectively (UNWTO, 2010).

These countries have continued to appeal to tourists over the years and it is important to understand their tourist appeal factors. Do they have anything in common that attracts the large number of international tourists or do they offer individually unique tourist attraction factors. It is important to note that the listing of the countries according to international tourism receipts show the United States of America to be the top recipient. France and Spain follow it closely but Italy displaces China from the fourth position (UNWTO, 2010).

This may indicate that tourists have different levels of expenditure in the four countries. The expenditures are different probably due to the different activities the tourists undertake in the different countries. This already
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indicates that different factors in each country attract the tourists. The following is a comparison of the tourist appeal factors in France, United States of America, Spain and China.

Culture and Heritage

All these countries have rich and interesting cultures and heritage that attract and amaze travelers from all over the world. Culture and heritage incorporates tangible and intangible attributes given or owned by a given society. They make a given society different from another. These attributes are inherited from the older generations of the society and are preserved in the current generation for its benefit as well as to benefit the future generations.

The culture of the United States of America is diverse compared to the other three countries because of the diverse ethnicity of its population. They include many elements such as fashion, pop culture, entertainment, unique sports, military and scientific innovations and widely discussed politics. In general, all the four countries have different cultures, which are discussed below.

Entertainment

Entertainment presents a key tourist appeal factor in the United States with destinations such as Hollywood and the Las Vegas strip attracting huge numbers of tourists (Tours to United States, n. d.). Amusement parks like Disney land also attract a substantial number of tourists. The entertainment industry in this country attracts high expenditure tourists and due to this reason, the tourist receipts are higher than in other countries.

The entertainment industry is not a key tourist appeal in France but Disneyland Paris receives quite a notable number of tourists seeking leisure. Other entertainment activities like gambling, music concerts and cinemas do not attract such a large number of tourists.

Cultural Events

Spain is known for its colorful cultural events and they act as major visitor attractions (Holloway & Taylor, 2009). Because of this, the term 'fiesta country' is sometimes used to refer to Spain. One of the cultural events is the carnivals that are celebrated throughout the country with major parties in Cadiz and Santa Cruz. The April Fair has become very popular all over the world due to its flamenco dancers and its bullfighting. The attention it generates means that more and more people desire to witness the event. This leads to a high number of inbound tourists. All the Spanish cities are so popular for their rich cultural events that United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared thirteen of them as world heritage cities (CNTO, 2010).

China also has a number of popular cultural events such as Shaolin International Martial Arts Festival and the Spring Festival. The festivals attract many international tourists but not as many as other tourist attractions like the historical features. Apart from the cultural events, the Chinese people have a unique way of life that people from other regions desire to see. Their way of life and beliefs distinguish the Chinese people from the rest of the world. Uniqueness is one factor that increases the number of inbound tourists. France and the USA do not have cultural events that are very

popular outside of their countries. Cultural events therefore cannot be considered as key tourist appeals for these two countries.

Sports

The four countries all have received substantial number of visitors because of sports or sporting activities. Football is popular in Spain and France and the countries receive many visitors especially during sporting occasions. China hosted the 2008 summer Olympics and received many visitors then. It is expected to receive even more during the Expo 2010 Shanghai China

Historic features

China and the United States of America have the most popular historic features among the four countries. The Great Wall of China has become a major tourist attraction in the world (CNTO, 2010). It is a symbol of the Chinese nation and millions of people from other countries travel to China to see it . It is one of the most important tourist attraction sites for China (Holloway & Taylor, 2009). Other historic landmarks that bring large numbers of inbound tourists into China are historic cities like Pingyao, the Forbidden City in Beijing and terracotta army. The historic cities and famous sites are the main tourist appeals in China unlike in Spain, France and USA. The features signify the long history of the Chinese people and their rich culture. They show the historic way of life of the Chinese people. This is the source of their huge attention from resident of other countries

USA also has some historic features that receive many local and international tourists. They are mainly historic buildings and landmarks.

Unlike those in China, these ones in the USA are memorial parks like Lincoln

and Jefferson memorials. They do not reveal the way of life of the ancient Americans. By 2007, the United States Government recognized 2, 462 National Historic Landmarks (NHL). The NHLs are also popular with tourists but do not receive a large numbers of tourists as those in China. France and Spain do not have very popular historic landmarks. Museums also form received notable numbers of tourists in USA and France.

Nature

Another key attraction factor in the United States of America that is not common for the other three countries is the untamed wilderness and huge national parks that attract millions of visitors. America is rich in natural beauty with a wide rage of flora and fauna that act as a major tourist attraction unlike Spain, France and China. The national parks hold animals, which are unique to the American region and not common to other regions. Spain, China and France are lacking in terms of rich wildlife.

USA also has widely known wonders of nature like the Grand Canyon of Arizona, Niagara Falls and Rocky Mountains (Hall & Page, 2006). Grand Canyon alone attracts over 4. 5 million visitors per year (UNWTO, 2009). The five sacred mountains of china and its many waterfalls also receive a large number of tourists

Countries with beautiful beaches generally receive many tourists. This is applies to Spain where summer resorts and beaches form major tourist appeals. The Spanish coasts are suitable for vacations during summer. Examples of the coasts include Costa Brava and Costa Calida. This is not the case with the other three countries in the top four receiving countries.

Man made structures and Scientific Achievements

Man made structures like buildings and bridges act as major tourist appeal factors in developed countries (Hall & Page, 2006). Paris, the capital city of France is currently the most visited city in the world due to attractions such as Arc de Triomphe, Eiffel tower and the cathedral of Notre-Dame. The Golden Gate Bridge in the USA is one of the most famous bridges in the world and causes The Golden Gate National Recreation area to receive millions of visitors per year (UNWTO, 2009).

Conclusion

France is the top tourist receiving country in the world. The major tourist appeals are museums and the amazing buildings in the city of Paris. USA is the second with a wide range of tourist appeals. They include gambling and entertainment, natural features, memorials and man made structures. Spain is the third receiving country with its major appeals being cultural events and beaches. The fourth country is China and its key tourist appeals are historic sites and cultural events.