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Tourism in the Era of Digital Transformation

THEMATIC PROCEEDINGS II

UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM IN VRNJĄČKA BANJA
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND UNDERSTANDING
- WHY AND HOW TO ATTRACT TOURISTS FROM CHINA?

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Abstract

Having in mind the steady and rapid growth of the tourism sector and number of tourists in the world, it is especially important for Serbia to invest in this sector and to adapt its offer to the different demands of tourists coming from the local and global environment. A large number of Chinese people and middle-class growth in China are certainly some of the reasons why Chinese tourists in the world are gaining increasing importance. The benefits of those tourists have been felt by all countries that have managed to attract them, such as Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, America and several destinations in Europe, including Spain, Great Britain, Italy and France. Although in Serbia the number of tourists from China is not large, this number is growing significantly year after year. One of the reasons is a visa-free regime, but that should not have to be the only reason. Serbia must seriously engage in a race for tourists from China.

Key Words: tourism, training, China, EU, tourism sector.
JEL classification: J24, L15, M54, Z32

Introduction

We live in a period characterized by globalization. The impact of technology on our lives and businesses is significant. Multinational companies bring new cultural forms and strengthen intercultural communication. Cheaper transportation allows us to go to distant parts of the world, but also to get others to come to us. New possibilities significantly affect the tourism sector as well.

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There are various reasons why people travel. According to UNWTO, travel for holidays, recreation and other forms of leisure accounted 53% or 657 million of all international tourist arrivals in 2016. Some 13% of all international tourists traveled for business and professional purposes, and another 27% travelled for other reasons such as visiting friends and relatives (VFR), religious reasons and pilgrimages, health treatment, etc. The purpose of visit for the remaining 7% of arrivals was not specified (UNWTO Tourism Highlights, 2017).

However, tourist trips are important due to the increasing income of the sector and significant benefits for the country. Benefits are reflected in the growth of tourism revenues, but also in the increase in the number of jobs in tourism and related sectors.

According to World Travel & Tourism Council, “Travel & Tourism’s direct contribution to GDP is expected to grow at an average of 3.9% per year over the next ten years. By 2027, Travel & Tourism is expected to support more than 380 million jobs globally, which equates to 1 in 9 of all jobs in the world and the sector is expected to contribute around 23% of total global net job creation over the next decade. Meanwhile, total Travel & Tourism GDP is expected to account for 11.4% of global GDP and global visitor exports are expected to account for 7.1% of total global exports” (p. 4).

Figure 1: *The contributions of global travel and tourism*

Source: *World Travel &Tourism Council*

In Press Release, from 15 Jan 18, UNWTO highlighted that “international tourist arrivals in Europe reached 671 million in 2017, a remarkable 8% increase according to 2016. Growth was driven by the extraordinary
results in Southern and Mediterranean Europe (+13%). Western Europe (+7%), Northern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe (both +5%) also recorded robust growth”.

Special importance is given to tourists from China in recent years in the world. The large number of Chinese people and growth of the middle class in China contributed to this trend. The World Tourism Organization predicts that China will become the largest travel destination and the fourth largest source country by 2020. In that year, there will be 137.10 million international travelers to the country, taking up 8.6% of the global share, and 100 million outbound Chinese visitors, 6.2% of the worldwide outbound visitors (Travel China Guide, 2017a).

Making ready for guests from China, whose significant number is expected in 2018, as a result of an initiative launched from a partnership between the EU and China, training of hotel staff and tourist workers began in Europe. This is done in order to better understand the requirements and expectations of guests from China. It is also important to train tour operators, who need to develop new products to provide an authentic experience and attract these tourists to destinations.

Taking into account the above-mentioned certain preparations and analyzes are necessary to be done by Serbia as well.

**Why is it important to attract Chinese tourists?**

China tourism industry experienced great development in recent years due to the substantial increase in people's personal income and the further implementation of the Reform and Opening-up Policy.

According to the statistics of the China National Tourism Administration, 62.03 million outbound trips were made in the first half of 2017, which is an increase of 5% compared with the same period in 2016 and ranked the first among all countries in the world. It is predicated that the outbound tourism number will keep increasing. Notably, the Chinese outbound tourism market still has great potential, since 90% of Chinese citizens still have not applied for passports for outbound tours (Travel china guide, 2017b).

It is interesting to know that as reported in the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer: with a 12% increase in spending, China continued to lead
international outbound tourism, followed by the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and France as top five spenders.

The countries that are able to attract Chinese tourists will have the benefits such are economic growth, job creation and opportunities for development because Chinese people continue to have a strong desire to travel. This is why the enormous Chinese outbound market has drawn the attention of the world.

Also, passport numbers could be a key statistic in predicting overseas tourism “Right now about 120 million people have their passport," said Jane Sun, chief executive officer of Ctrip (one of the major travel agencies in China), in an interview in Davos, Switzerland, where she was attending the World Economic Forum. “By 2020 that number will be likely doubled so the market will grow tremendously in the next couple of years” (China travel news, 2017).

Countries that Chinese tourists have found attractive

The growth in outbound travel from China benefited many destinations in Asia and the Pacific, most notably Japan, the Republic of Korea and Thailand, but also long-haul destinations such as the United States and several in Europe (UNWTO, Press Release 2017).

According to Travel China Guide the hottest destinations include South Korea, Japan, Thailand, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, USA, Singapore and Maldives, while the top outbound tourism destinations in 2017 where: Thailand, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia, United States, Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines and Australia.

Results of the International Visitor Survey in Australia, released 12 Dec 2017 (Tourism Research Australia, 2017), showed that among the top five markets, China had the strongest growth of 12%, with visitors reaching 1.2 million in 2017; while growth in spend was led by Asian markets, with India, Thailand, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Japan. Chinese tourists' spending has exceeded $10 billion. More than eight million international visitors spent a record $41.2 billion which means that quarter of that spending was by Chinese tourists. According to Tourism Australia, the increase can be partly attributed to the increase of direct flights between China and Australia.
Turkey is seeking to attract as many as one million Chinese tourists in 2018, as China has declared next year Turkey Tourism Year. There are around 70 Turkish tour guides who speak Chinese in Turkey but that is not enough. This is why Turkish tour guides, returned to the classroom. They are learning more about the Chinese people, their lifestyle, eating habits and culture through the courses. The cultural association, in cooperation with the Turkish Union of Tourist Guides, launched the Chinese course in Istanbul and Cappadocia. A total of 48 tour guides are attending the course, while the association is planning to open more in the Mediterranean province of Antalya, the western coastal city of Izmir as well as the capital city of Ankara in the very near future (ECNS, 2017).

In 2016 there was a decline in Chinese travellers visiting Europe due to safety concerns. In 2017 there were growth in about 10 percent over 2016 while 2018 will be the EU-China Tourism Year, with the goals of increasing travel from China to Europe, promote lesser known destinations, improve travel and tourism experiences etc. The initiative is being supported by the European Commission and the European Tourism Association.

According to the "Chinese Tourists to Europe Trend Report 2017" the number of Chinese tourists in Europe in first quarter of 2017 was increased by 103 percent over 2016 year. Eastern Europe and Northern Europe saw the fastest growth. Rome, London, Frankfurt, Paris and Barcelona were the most popular city destinations among Chinese visitors, but Vienna, Prague, Warsaw, Amsterdam and Helsinki also saw rising numbers. Among the favorite European destinations for Chinese tourists in the first quarter of 2017 were Italy, Germany and Britain (Gbtimes, 2017).

In 2017 rapid growth seeing more ‘novel’, often smaller destinations such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Estonia and Iceland. In the cases of Morocco and Serbia, according to chinatravelnews.com, the countries’ arrivals increases are being driven by visa-free policies for Chinese people, which were the reason to find them on the map as tourist destinations for the Chinese for the first time (China travel news, 2017).

Italy is expecting 2 million Chinese travelers in 2018, but as Giancarlo Dall'Ara, president of Chinese Friendly Italy said “they are not just going for shopping and guided tours, they are looking for experiences. They want to live like the locals: tasting the wines and the local products
typically found in smaller cities and secluded villages” (Iselle, 2017). Their website is a major source of important information and they try to help hotels and tour operators in Italy to be more attractive to Chinese travelers. He said that Amalfi, Verona, Ferrara, the Liguria Region, Sicily are some of the new destinations Chinese tour operators are becoming aware of, alongside the usual destinations like Rome, Florence, Venice and Milan.

Italy has always been loved by Chinese people: long history, art cities, good food and last, but not least, luxury shopping, have been attracting people from all over China. But as Giancarlo Dall'Ara said "Chinese tourists arriving to Italy are now younger and more social than before. They come from big cities and have many interests and passions. They choose our country after they have done researches and they know what they are looking for. They travel with friends and families and not as part of big groups anymore. They have been abroad already. They are different from what we were used to see in the past” (Iselle, 2017). They are looking for an environmentally friendly and culturally rich holiday, so in order to attract more people from China - Italy should be more "Chinese". It should have a long term marketing strategies. Considering that 2018 will be the EU-China Tourism Year, Italy see this as an opportunity succeed in becoming China's favorite travel destination.

But some insights suggest that Serbia could play an important role in attracting tourists from China. Christopher A. Hartwell and Katarzyna W. Sidlo from Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE) in research report "Balancing the European gateway open", wrote that visa liberalization between the China and Serbia, from November 2016, when China approved Serbia’s proposal to abolish the need for visas between the two countries for short-term stays (under 30 days), may help to increase tourism in the Balkans from China. They mentioned that additionally, “as the agreement if first one of this kind between China and a European country, it does underscore the importance that China places on Serbia as a gateway to the European continent” (Hartwell & Sidlo, 2018).

Some characteristics of Chinese travelers

The two main segments of Chinese travellers are tour travellers and independent travellers: (Pfundt & Schuller, 2017)
- To attract tour travellers from China it would be necessary to set up a network with Chinese tour companies, to understand who they are and how to get listed by them. Ctrip and Huayuan International Travel are two major travel agencies in China.
- To attract independent travellers, it would be necessary to become visible for Chinese travelers by providing information about company (service) via various communication channels in China (webpages – internet and mobile internet users, social media-Wechat, Baidu, Youku etc.).

According to Kow (2017) and some further researches, some of the characteristics of Chinese tourists are the following:

1. Chinese travellers want to experience authenticity. Travelling became a lifestyle of more and more Chinese travelers. The Chinese market shows more interest in "living as local residents." This means tour and activity operators need to start developing more sophisticated offerings. To attract millennial travellers it is important to offer a mix of adventure and relaxation.

2. Spending habits of Chinese travellers are slowing down. In the previous period Chinese travellers shopped a lot during their trips abroad due to significant price differences, better product quality and design but know Chinese travellers are becoming more interested in spending money on local food, wine and other unique cultural experiences, rather than on things. One of the reasons for slowing down could be the rising costs in housing and education as well. It is not enough just to develop new products to satisfy the Chinese market and to attract them to destinations, how much each visitor spends is also important.

3. There is a growth of independent Chinese travellers. More travellers want to go independently avoiding massive bus tours that bring Chinese travellers to "top-sights" and shopping malls. They want to explore a destination in small groups, with family or friends.

4. Family travels to Chinese tourists are becoming important. More and more families are going on self-organized trips. From one side there are young and affluent professionals living abroad who are flying their relatives out to spend the holidays; while on the other side there are travellers older than 55 years who are taking their families on holidays abroad. During Chinese New Year 2016, 56% of young luxury travelers
traveled abroad, 90% of those traveling was with family or friends (Hallanan, 2017).

5. Chinese travellers (70% of Chinese) search for information online. They use search engines or social media. Bloggers have a big impact and help inform consumers about destinations, so destinations can cooperate with bloggers as well. According to The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, China has 731 million Internet users as of December 2016, 53.2% of Chinese population has access to Internet and 659 million Chinese accesses Internet via mobile phones. Internet can help Chinese travellers to plan, book and share their experience.

6. Chinese travellers like “Chinese friendly” surrounding. “Taking this into consideration famous hotel chain Hilton developed a specific hospitality program customized for Chinese tourists, Hilton "Huanying" ("welcome") and Emirates Airline increased their luggage allowance because they recognized when Chinese travelers go abroad, they come home with more than when they left (due to they won tremendous market share of the Chinese travellers)” (Cvetkovski at al., 2016). For young couples because they will have to take care of both their parents and their children, they want to choose places connected with direct flights and with family friendly accommodations and activities. For hotels and resorts looking to attract Chinese family travelers, there are several things to keep in mind. They need to have a Chinese menu or just do have some Chinese breakfast options available. It is important to provide families adjacent rooms with connecting doors or a suite with multiple bedrooms and it is important to provide wide variety of activities for all ages, as well. Chinese travelers often prefer local cuisine and new food experiences, but children as well as elderly Chinese travelers are more conservative with their food choices. Lacking of Chinese service and lacking Chinese-language TV programs or menus were some of the most unsatisfying factors of Chinese travellers. “Mutual respect and understanding will help enable the tourists to have good time, meet new people and meet all those goals that are motivation for travel” (Langović Milićević, Cvetkovski, 2016, p. 475).

7. Chinese tourists mainly travel during three periods of the year: Chinese New Year (January/February), summer holidays (Julay/August) and Chinese public holidays (beginning of October). In the past, Chinese families stayed home during the New Year holiday but now they use the long holiday to travel both domestically and abroad.
With 6.15 million Chinese people traveling abroad during the holiday in 2017, Chinese New Year has become a golden opportunity for tourism providers who can meet the needs of multi-generational travelers (Hallanan, 2017).

8. During the Chinese New Year, packages and promotions are important. During the winter, especially Chinese New Year many people will look for warmer locations and Australia and the United States are very popular choices. In recent years, countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, lately Serbia, as well, have received a growing number of Chinese travelers due to relaxed visa requirements.

Destinations all over the globe are trying to capitalize on Chinese New Year, offering specially designed packages and discounts (Hallanan, 2017): The Chinese New Year (2016) Travel San Francisco ran a campaign through Chinese online travel agency Ctrip. They inspired consumers to visit by live streaming interesting neighborhoods, cafes, and sites throughout the city. World-famous hotels including the Burj Al Arab in Dubai offered Chinese travelers exclusive holiday rates. For the 2017 New Year, as part of the Beverly Hills Chinese New Year celebration, several hotels such as The Beverly Hilton, Luxe Rodeo Drive Hotel, Montage Beverly Hills, The Peninsula Beverly Hills and Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills offered special packages throughout the month of February which included discounted rates and customized amenities such as a hot water kettle with Chinese tea and in-room Chinese breakfast dining options.

9. For Chinese travellers skiing is becoming more popular as Beijing was selected as host city of the 2022 Winter Olympics. Chinese government is encouraging more of its citizens to get involved in winter sports. This is an opportunity for some European and North American countries to attract more winter sports fans.

In the future, as number of traveler increases, the Chinese market will become more segmented market, with lot diversity in type of tourists and their travel habits. It will up to destinations, tour or activity operators to decide who they want to attract.

It is important do not stereotype the Chinese market. Translate marketing materials into Mandarin and hire a Mandarin-speaking guides would be a good move for sure.
Chinese tourists in Serbia

The number of arrivals and overnights of foreign tourists in Serbia is constantly increasing.

The largest number of foreign tourists who visited the Republic of Serbia in 2016 were tourists from Bosnia and Herzegovina (101 thousand arrivals, 223 thousand nights), Montenegro (77 thousand arrivals, 196 thousand nights), Bulgaria (88 thousand arrivals, 146 thousand nights), Croatia (76 thousand arrivals, 142 thousand nights) and Turkey (84 thousand arrivals, 142 thousand nights) (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia 2017). A similar trend continued in 2017. According to Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia - catering and tourism statistics, the most number of overnight stays in 2017, from foreign countries, were again realized by tourists from Bosnia and Herzegovina (234,758 nights), followed by tourists from Montenegro (198,119 nights), Turkey, Croatia, Russia, etc. We can see that the large majority of international travel takes place within travellers’ own regions - it is intraregional tourism.

In the period January-December 2017, the trend of growth in the number of tourists continued, so that 12% (3,085,866 tourists) more tourists stayed in Serbia compared to the same period in 2016. Of the total number of tourists, domestic tourists amounted to 1,588,693, or 8% more than in 2016, and foreign 1,497,173 tourists, which is by almost 17% more (Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia, catering and tourism statistics, number 18).

According to the Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia - catering and tourism statistics, in the past year, overnight stays were 11% higher than in 2016, of which domestic tourists accounted for 7% more and foreign 16% more. Domestic tourists were recorded the highest number of overnight stays in spas (mostly in Vrnjačka Banja), and in mountain resorts (Zlatibor, Kopaonik), while most foreign guests were staying in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Zlatibor, Kopaonik, Vrnjačka Banja.
Figure 2: Tourists’ arrivals and nights 2012-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
<th>Nights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>207,964</td>
<td>66,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>219,035</td>
<td>71,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>219,028</td>
<td>71,949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>256,786</td>
<td>80,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>253,209</td>
<td>91,059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia 2017

Although the number of tourists in Serbia (the number of arrivals as well as the number of overnight stays) has been steadily increasing, the number of Chinese tourists in Serbia by 2012 was not significant. In 2012, only 4,812 Chinese tourists visited Serbia. However, since 2012 the number of arrivals of these tourists has been steadily increasing between 120% and 170% per year. In 2017 this growth was as high as 240%, compared to 2016. Last year, 51,691 Chinese tourists visited Serbia. That is, compared to 2012 an increase of 1074%. Obviously, Serbia is attractive to Chinese tourists, but there is a need to find ways to increase that number further, taking into account the number of Chinese tourists in the world and their spending.

According to UNWTO Tourism Highlights for 2017, China continues to lead global outbound travel, following ten years of double-digit growth in spending, after rising to the top of the ranking in 2012. Expenditure by Chinese travellers grew by 12% in 2016 to reach US$ 261 billion. The number of outbound travellers rose by 6% to reach 135 million in 2016.
### Figure 3: Tourists’ arrivals by country of origin, 2012-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>1163536</td>
<td>1364944</td>
<td>1427165</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Foreign</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>2876635</td>
<td>2719039</td>
<td>2192998</td>
<td>2637966</td>
<td>2834091</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** 3146341

**Source:** Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia 2017
Figure 4: Tourists’ nights by country of origin, 2012-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Croatia</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Spain</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Turkey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>6454700</td>
<td>6607460</td>
<td>6608276</td>
<td>6601652</td>
<td>7333739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>4680480</td>
<td>4570679</td>
<td>3932531</td>
<td>4243172</td>
<td>4794741</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Minister of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, Rasim Ljajić, in 2017 said that Chinese tourists during the trip usually visit at least two, and usually three countries, and the best-selling arrangement in China is the one that offers a package of visits to Italy, France and Switzerland. So in order to attract more tourists, we need to offer regional tourism products. He said “As an independent tourist destination, in terms of attracting a large number of Chinese tourists, Serbia does not really have a great chance, it is necessary to bring together potentials and Serbia, with Montenegro already offers package tour "Put Valtera (Valter’s road)" to Chinese tourists, with Bosnia and Herzegovina Serbia also talks about joint tourism products, with Hungary already has set up a clear plan of action towards the Chinese market (Mondo portal, 2017).

Hotel business operations are also faced with a number of changes, the advantage of which should be used by management. “A change may act as a source of innovative activities. By changing demands of service consumers and the nature of competition, arises a need for a change in the competitive strategy” (Langović Milićević, Ognjanović, 2017, p.28).

Jelena Despotović, an associate at the Confucius Institute in Belgrade, told in an interview for the magazine “Tursitički Svet” that hotels with Chinese tourists should be adjusted to their needs and habits. Guests from China insist that in a hotel room, there is two glasses, a bottle of water and possibly tea bags and a water cooker, as the Chinese have the habit of drinking a glass of hot water or tea before bedtime. Never place them in room number 4, because this figure in Chinese is pronounced the same as the word death. On the other hand, the positive symbolism is connected with number 8 - the happiest number, or numbers 9 and 6. "It is important to them that the accommodation is clean and tidy, that the rooms are spacious, and that in the bathroom, besides clean towels, hotel slippers,
baths and shampoos, there are toothpaste and a toothbrush. That is some standard in all Chinese hotels" (Turistički svet, 2017).

It is interesting that Chinese tourists are beginning to stay longer in our country and to visit the Serbia only, which has been unusual for them so far. Chinese tourists like nature, traditions and our hospitality. Given the earlier ties between China and Yugoslavia, older generations like to listen to stories about Tito and Yugoslavia, while new generations are interested in Novak Đoković and nightlife in Belgrade.

**Conclusion**

“Considering what tourists mostly visit in Serbia, it is obvious that Serbia could develop in the first place city tourism (City Breaks). Most of the tourists visit Belgrade primarily because of the various events (e.g. Belgrade Beer Fest) and good fun. Novi Sad became recognizable by Exit (EXIT) and Leskovac by Leskovac Barbecue. In Serbia, people are prone to party, hospitable but also energetic, proud and open, which leads to the fact that foreign tourists in Serbia feel comfortable. This could only be an initial step in the development of other tourist products of Serbia. Mountains and lakes are currently a poorly developed tourist product but a product of great potential as well as rural tourism” (Cvetkovski et al., 2014, p.69)

Chinese tourists like to travel through Serbia. Although the biggest visits are primarily related to cities, especially Belgrade, they are interested in mountain resorts and Vojvodina's farms. “The world of symbols, visual and mental images, as a sign, stamp or ambiguous reality, is related to the most receptive human sense – eyesight” (Cvetkovska Ocololjic, Cvetkovski, 2012, p. 1903). However, these tourists are increasingly showing the desire for participation and inclusion of all senses in order to fully experience the destination and the life of the local population.

The whole Europe is working to attract Chinese tourists. This is the path that Serbia should go to. To tailor a tourist product according to the needs of Chinese tourists while retaining authenticity is the key to success. The country has a certain role, then tourist organizations, tour operators, hotels and others. When talking about the quality of the service, the service providers, employees, are especially important. “Employees value the feeling that their involvement contributes substantially to the success of business, as well as the ability of managers to recognize this and be
interested in their personal circumstances” (Langović Milićević et al., p. 298).

Obviously, in attracting domestic tourists as well as those from around the world (the same is in attracting Chinese tourists) certain roles has the country, tourist organizations, travel agencies, hotel operators, restaurants, culture organizations, etc. because the tourist product is complex and the tourist experience is multi-layered. It is determined by many elements, as well as the expectations with which tourists come.

References


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