

Abstract: Seniors are a growing segment among Japanese outbound travelers. Given that Hawaii is one of the most visited destinations by Japanese travelers, it is expected that the proportion of seniors will grow in the near future in accordance with trends of aging society in Japan. The study employs an Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) to determine critical attributes of the destination. Senior travelers were mostly satisfied with the attributes tested for Hawaii as a travel destination, specifically, factors related to natural resources and a comfortable trip were viewed as major strengths of Hawaii. Interestingly, the features related to physical activities such as golfing, water sports, and outdoor activities were not viewed as important travel destination attributes for Hawaii for both seniors and the younger sample. Moreover, Hawaii still has an opportunity for improvement in local transportation and accommodations. The results provide some useful insights for developing effective marketing strategies to attract Japanese senior travelers to Hawaii, as well as the usefulness of using the importance-performance analysis methodology.

INTRODUCTION

Japanese senior travelers to Hawaii are an important growing market for Hawaii's tourism. The purpose of this study is to examine the tourism image (importance of various pull factors) that Japanese senior travelers have of Hawaii by the use of Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA). This exploratory study was conducted to examine: (1) the attributes that attract Japanese senior travelers to Hawaii; (2) Japanese senior travelers' satisfaction with Hawaii's performance in delivering identified attributes; and (3) the differences in their perception of Hawaii among Japanese senior travelers compared to other age groups.



JAPANESE SENIOR MARKET

Japan has experienced rapid growth in the number of outbound travelers in the last two decades. The figure reached 17.8 million in 2000, which is the highest number in history, up 8.9 percent from the previous year. This increase is strongly supported by the rapid growth of the senior-travelers market segment. In 2000, the number of outbound travelers over age 50 was 5.8 million, which is nearly one-third of the Japanese overseas travel market. This market segment shows a 12.6-percent rise, while those who are in their 20s shows only a 2.7-percent rise.



Applying Importance-Performance Analysis to Japanese Senior Travelers to Hawaii

Yuko Okata, Doctoral Candidate, Graduate school of Engineering, Tokyo Metropolitan Institute of Technology, Japan
 Samuel V. Lankford, Ph.D., Director, Sustainable Tourism and the Environmental Program (STEP); Professor, University of Northern Iowa, U.S.A.
 Yuka Inui, M.S., Sustainable Tourism and the Environmental Program (STEP), University of Northern Iowa, U.S.A.

Hawaii was the second most visited destination of Japanese travelers, after South Korea (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport [MLIT], 2001). In 2000, Hawaii attracted 1.8 million Japanese visitors, or 22% of the market share of all visitors to Hawaii (Hawaii State Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism [DBEDT], 2001). Although tourism by Japanese visitors has been sluggish since 1998, the Japanese market is still Hawaii's the second largest market segment, following U.S. mainland. Japanese tourists ages 20-29 comprise the largest group in 2000, it is predicted that the proportion of seniors will grow in the near future in accordance with the trends of the aging society in Japan (Fishman, 2000).

METHODS

This study adopted importance-performance analysis (IPA) to assess the Japanese senior travelers' perception of factors of Hawaii as a travel destination. Japanese senior travelers were defined as 'Japanese visitors over the age of fifty, who visited Hawaii for pleasure travel in accordance with Hawaii Tourism Authority's definition of the senior market (Fishman, 2000). Using an intercept methodology procedure, a quasi-representative sample of Japanese travelers was requested to complete the questionnaire at the departure floor of Honolulu International Airport.

Japanese speaking researchers collected data on July 25 and 28, 2001. Respondents were selected from Japanese travelers that were 20 years or older, and had visited Hawaii for pleasure travel. A total of 211 questionnaires were collected, and senior travelers age 50 or older completed 73 questionnaires (37%). The detailed age breakdown was: 14% under 29; 22% between 30 and 39; 18% between 40 and 49; 13% between 50 and 59; and 22% age 60 or over. The questionnaire was translated into Japanese, back translated into English for accuracy and then back translated to Japanese.

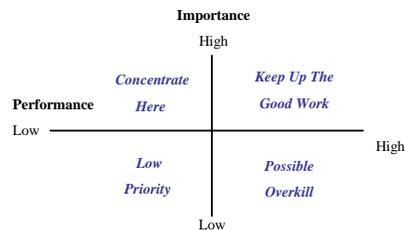
INSTRUMENTATION

The survey measured respondents' perception of importance and performance attributes to Hawaii as a travel destination. To determine the attributes for the questionnaire, the review of past studies was conducted, and 25 features were identified (Cha, McCleary, & Uysal, 1995; Oh, Uysal, & Weaver, 1995; Ahmed, Barber, & d'Astous, 1998). A focus group with industry professionals resulted in a list a 15 attributes of Hawaii (Table 1 & 2). Respondents rated the importance level of each attribute on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = not important; 2 = not very important; 3 = slightly important; 4 = important; 5 = very important; 6 = extremely important). Respondents evaluated Hawaii's performance on the same attributes on another 6-point Likert scale (1 = very poor; 2 = poor; 3 = fair; 4 = good; 5 = very good; 6 = excellent) later in the survey. Questions also included travelers' trip-related characteristics in Hawaii, and demographics.

Importance and performance mean scores of each attribute were calculated, then plotted into a two-dimensional grid with a vertical axis of importance values and a horizontal axis of performance values. For positioning the crosshairs of the grid, the overall means of the importance and performance score were used. Using the mean scores for crosshair positioning is a more critical approach than using the middle point of the scale or some arbitrary point (Hollenhorst, Olson, & Fortney, 1992). The two-dimensional grid displayed the following four quadrants: 'Keep up the Good Work' with high on importance scale and high on performance scale; 'Concentrate Here' with high on importance scale and low on performance scale; 'Possible Overkill' with low on importance scale and high on performance scale; and 'Low Priority' with low on importance scale and low on performance scale.



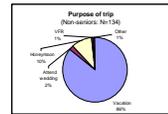
IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE MATRIX



FINDINGS

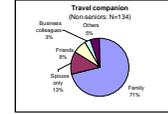
Travel Behavior

Non-Senior Travelers (Age <49)

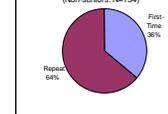


Average length of stay = 5.2 nights

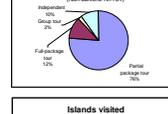
Average party size = 4.2 people



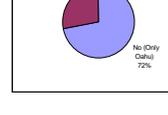
Visit status (Non-seniors: N=134)



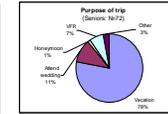
Trip type (Non-seniors: N=134)



Islands visited (Non-seniors: N=134)

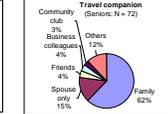


Senior Travelers (Age 50<)

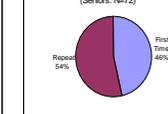


Average length of stay = 5.9 nights

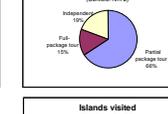
Average party size = 4.4 people



Visit status (Seniors: N=72)



Trip type (Seniors: N=72)



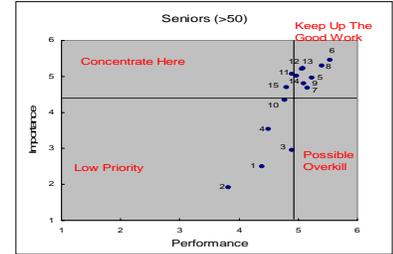
Islands visited (Seniors: N=72)



The results indicated that Japanese senior travelers were mostly satisfied with Hawaii as a travel destination. The features related to natural resources and a comfortable stay were high in priority for seniors in determining their trip to Hawaii, while the features related to physical activities did not have significant influences on their travel decisions. The results also showed that Japanese senior and non-senior travelers had mostly similar perceptions toward Hawaii as a travel destination.

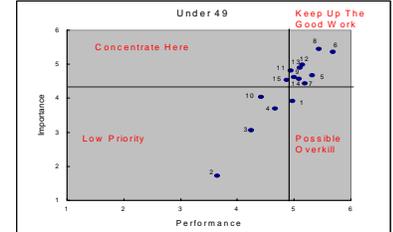


Figure 1. Importance-Performance grid: Seniors (>50, N=72)



- Water activities
- Golfing
- Outdoor activity
- Cultural attraction
- Nature attraction
- Scenic beauty
- Friendliness
- Relaxing atmosphere
- Shopping
- Restaurant
- Accommodations
- Safety
- Cleanliness
- Japanese
- Transportation

Figure 2. Importance-Performance grid: Non-Seniors (<49, N=138)



- Water activities
- Golfing
- Outdoor activity
- Cultural attraction
- Nature attraction
- Scenic beauty
- Friendliness
- Relaxing atmosphere
- Shopping
- Restaurant
- Accommodations
- Safety
- Cleanliness
- Japanese
- Transportation

This study provides some useful insights for evaluating current market and developing effective marketing strategies to attract Japanese senior travelers to Hawaii. Japanese seniors were attracted to Hawaii mainly because of its natural resources, such as scenic beauty, relaxing atmosphere, and nature attractions. In addition, factors that encourage a comfortable trip—such as safety, cleanliness, pleasant attitude of local people, service in Japanese, and shopping opportunity—also appealed to Japanese senior travelers. Despite such overall favorable perceptions of Japanese seniors toward Hawaii, Hawaii still has an opportunity for improvement in local transportation and accommodations. Since these features can be regarded as major weaknesses for Hawaii as a travel destination, priority attention should be directed to improve these features. The features related to physical activities—such as golfing, water sports, and outdoor activities—did not have significant influence on Japanese seniors' travel to Hawaii. Owing to their lower importance, these attributes may require less marketing and management attention. At the same time, it may be the attributes which travelers to Hawaii take it for granted. The IPA results also showed that both senior and non-senior travelers had similar perceptions toward the importance and performance attributes for traveling to Hawaii. From non-senior travelers' point of view, not physical activities but nature-related features are the major strength of Hawaii as a travel destination. These findings can be used to evaluate current marketing programs targeting Japanese travelers to Hawaii.