

## **Korea as a Future Cruise Market: Investigating Koreans' Perceptions of Cruise Ship Travel**

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**Korea as a Future Cruise Market:  
Investigating Koreans' Perceptions of Cruise Ship Travel**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examines Koreans' perceptions of cruise ship travel to ascertain the potential for future development. The purpose of the study was to investigate how Koreans perceive cruise ship travel. An understanding of Koreans' perceptions is essential for developing and determining the potential of the Korean cruise market. Using survey data, the study investigated Koreans' knowledge level, willingness, and desired travel patterns regarding cruise ship travel. Findings from the study will assist educators and practitioners in enhancing their comprehension of Koreans' perceptions and behaviors concerning cruise ship travel.*

**Keywords:** *Asian cruise ship travel, Koreans' travel patterns, Koreans' perceptions of cruise ship travel.*

**INTRODUCTION**

The cruise industry and the potential market for cruise ship travel are phenomenal (Dowling, 2006). Cruise Lines International Association (2009) stated that during the 18 year period of 1990-2008, cruise ship passengers increased by an average of 7.4% each year. In addition, cruising has become a significant vehicle for sampling destinations to which passengers may return. During the past few decades, cruise tourism has been one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry (Kester, 2003). While the global demand for international trips during 1992-2002 grew at approximately 4.3%, the cruise market grew at 7.9% during the same period (WTO, 2003). Supply and demand remain relatively concentrated in the North American (75%) and European markets (20%). The remaining 5% of demand originates mainly from Asia, with Japan, the Republic of Korea and Taiwan as the principal sources (Kester, 2003). With the growth in the Asian market, the cruise industry needs to pay attention to potential cruisers from this area. This study investigates Koreans' perceptions of cruise ship travel and ascertains the potential market for such travel. Korea has the 25th largest population in the world with 48.5 million people (CIA, 2009). The way of life of the Korean family and Korean society have been changing due to industrialization, urbanization, and western influence (Connor, 2002). Over the last thirty years, Korea has become an industrial giant and now has the fourteenth largest economy in the world with a GDP of USD \$1,338 trillion (CIA, 2009; Huntington, 2000). Changes in Korean society such as its economic growth have encouraged a dramatic increase in the demand for leisure travel, especially international travel (Ahmed & Chon, 1994). Results of recent research in the area of preferred lifestyles and the five-day workweek have shown that

40% of respondents like to travel when they have free time (Kim, 2004). As the economy of Korea has expanded, Koreans have tended to spend more money for travel and to enjoy their leisure time.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study examines Koreans' perceptions of cruise ship travel. Various studies have researched the relationship between Koreans' lifestyle and their patterns of travel (Chen & Hsu, 2000; Kim & Kim, 1996; Pizam & Jeong, 1996). Researchers also have studied Koreans' outbound travel in relation to their travel patterns and nationality (Ahmed & Chon, 1994; March, 1997). Additional research has found variations in tourist behavior and differences in the perceptions of tourists according to their nationality (Pizam & Telisman-Kosuta, 1989; Richardson & Crompton, 1988). At the present time, there is no data written about Koreans' propensities to travel on a cruise. The relative absence of scholarly literature focusing on Koreans' perceptions of cruise ship travel provides the basic rationale for this paper. The purpose of the study is to investigate how Koreans perceive cruise ship travel and how it is related to Koreans' travel patterns. A thorough understanding of Koreans' perceptions is essential for developing Korea as a new cruise market and it will help to determine if level of Korea's potential for developing the cruise ship industry.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To determine Koreans' level of knowledge regarding cruise ship travel.
2. To measure Koreans' willingness for future cruise ship travel.
3. To ascertain Koreans' desired travel patterns in relation to cruise ship travel.
4. To determine factors that affect Koreans' travel behavior toward cruise ship travel.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Growth of the cruise ship industry**

A cruise is defined as 'to make a trip by sea in a liner for pleasure, usually calling at a number of ports' (*Collins English Dictionary*). According to Dowling (2006), today ships are being viewed as floating resorts. These floating resorts mimic their land-based counterparts with restaurants, bars, sports facilities, shopping centers, entertainment venues, spas and all the other luxuries of a regular resort. The world cruise industry is one of the most dynamic segments of the tourism industry with dramatic growth that has been widely acknowledged (Hall, 2004). The expansion of the cruise industry since the 1970s has been enormous. In 1970, there were approximately 500,000 cruise ship tourists worldwide (Dickinson & Vladimir, 2007). The number of cruise ship tourists worldwide had increased to nearly 10 million by 2000 (Kester, 2003) and was up to over 13 million by 2008 (CLIA, 2009). The cruise industry has achieved a 2600 percent growth rate since 1970. The cruise industry has been growing rapidly and experiencing unprecedented annual growth rates since the start of the new millennium (Wood, 2000; Dowling, 2006). According to one cruise magazine, *Seatrade*, there will be 18.8 million cruisers in 2010 and 25 million in 2015 (Kim, 2008). The rapid growth of the cruise industry can have a significant impact upon societies, cultures, economics and environments (Dowling, 2006). In recent years, the rapid growth of the cruise industry has led many companies to construct many additional as well as more expensive and elaborate ships. The number of cruise ships worldwide that are able to accommodate more than 2000 passengers now numbers 40

(Sarna & Hannafin, 2006). Over the years, cruise lines have expanded their itineraries to include more diverse ports of call and convenient embarkation ports and have introduced innovative onboard amenities and facilities (CLIA, 2009). According to CLIA (2009), ninety percent of all cruise vacations are booked through travel agents and cruise sales account for more than half of all vacation sales among travel agents.

### **General perceptions about cruise ships**

Davidoff and Davidoff (1994) outlined five specific features of cruises that appeal to travelers: 1) Passengers have the opportunity to visit a variety of places in a short period of time without the problems of other modes of travel. 2) Ships are self-contained. 3) Cruise ships have a cruise director and staff whose sole function is to make sure passengers have an enjoyable time. 4) High-quality food is served in elegant style. 5) Everyone usually begins and ends their vacation on the same day. Past research regarding cruisers' age showed that people had perceived that cruise ship travel was for seniors, but today's cruisers are younger than before and their average age is approximately 48 years old (Dowling, 2006).

Cartwright and Baird (1999) discussed the reasons people choose to cruise or not to cruise. The three main factors which encourage people to take cruises are relaxation, safety, and social interaction. *Relaxation* is related to the idea that cruising offers the ability to lie in the sun, convenience of arriving at various destinations, unpacking once and then having the 'hotel room' move with you from place to place, along with your entertainment. *Safety* is related to the idea that cruising is seen as a safe method of seeing tourism destinations around the world. Older passengers like the ability to be entertained at night without taking risks of being out late in a strange city. Moreover, *social interaction* is related to the idea that cruising offers one of the best places to have social networking with other travelers. However, it was also quoted as a major factor for not taking a cruise by non-cruisers.

The main reasons for not cruising are expense, exclusivity, family, claustrophobia, and seasickness (Cartwright & Baird, 1999; Dickinson & Vladimir, 1997). These reasons are especially important when looking at why some individuals have never taken a cruise. Many individuals still think that the *Expense* of cruise ship travel compared with land base travel is much higher. *Exclusivity* relates to the idea that many individuals felt that cruising was for wealthier people. *Family* reasons were seen as another reason that cruising was suitable for couples but not for children since traditional and early cruise ships did not have facilities for children. Many people mentioned *Claustrophobia*, possibly because of a lack of awareness of the space on board. Last, *seasickness* appeared to be a major factor in not taking a cruise because of the fear of discomfort.

### **Koreans' travel patterns**

To develop Korea as a new cruise market, one must understand Koreans' preference for travel. Increasing income levels and five-day work weeks have contributed to Korean tourists desire to diversify their leisure life. Shorter work hours, work that is less physically demanding and increased levels of higher education have led to a higher demand for quality tourism products (Martin & Mason, 1987). The Korean population is now enjoying unparalleled improvements in lifestyle with increasing leisure time and discretionary earnings.

Tourism trade practitioners have suggested that tourists of different nationalities behave in different ways. For example, Koreans have been described as dissimilar to Western travelers. They have been portrayed as having implacable loyalty to their socio-cultural identity and being unwilling to accept anything that has little in common with the Korean way of living. They even insist on going to Korean restaurants while abroad. In addition, they prefer to travel in groups rather than individually as compared with Americans (Pizam & Jeong, 1996). They usually feel comfortable with cash in hand and tend to show off their cash and spend freely (Korea, 1991).

According to Pizam & Jeong (1996), overall travel patterns of Koreans are significantly different from Americans' travel patterns. For instance, Koreans were perceived to be more interested in artifacts than people, while Americans were perceived to be more interested in people than in artifacts. Americans were perceived to prefer longer trips than Koreans. Koreans also were perceived to be less adventuresome and less active than Americans. Last, Koreans were perceived to buy many souvenirs while Americans buy relatively few. Review of the few existing studies indicates national cultures affect tourist behavior.

### **The Asian market for cruise ship travel**

A massive expansion of the Asian tourist market took place in the late 1990s. Japan led the growth as the economies of South-East Asia boomed. This led to the expansion of the domestic cruising market. Star Cruises, which catered to the indigenous and US/European cruisers according to Ward (1999) rapidly became the Carnival cruises of Asia. In terms of capacity, the Asian market expanded by 46 percent between 1994 and 1997 and by a similar figure (47 percent) between 1997 and 1998. In terms of visitor arrivals, the top ten destinations in the region as of 1995 were Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, China, Indonesia, South Korea, Australia, Japan, Malaysia and Taiwan. Overall top ten destinations account for 80% of total arrivals to the Asia-Pacific region (Choy, 1998). The top ten countries generating travel to the region in 1995 were Japan, Taiwan, the United States, China, South Korea, Malaysia, United Kingdom, Singapore, Australia and Indonesia (Choy, 1998). Visitor arrivals to Asia increased from 55.6 million in 1995 to 72.7 million in the year 2000. The Asia region has the potential to become a globally sought after region for cruise ship travelers.

### **Today's Korean cruise ship industry**

Korea has the potential to develop as a new market in the cruise industry. Surrounded by the sea on three sides and boasting 11 port cities, Korea is the ideal destination. The Korean cruise ship market is in its infancy. In recent years, an increasing number of foreign cruise ships have been traveling through Asia and visiting Korea (Kim, 2008). Cruise ships first operated in April 2008 in Korea by PanStar Honey Line and had a primarily domestic itinerary (Cho, 2008). Beginning in 2010, internationally known cruise companies such as Royal Caribbean, Seabourn Cruises, and Costa Cruises, began calling at major ports in Korea. Royal Caribbean and Costa Cruises used the cities of Busan and Incheon as homeports. A homeport is where passengers embark and disembark, while a port of call is where they visit for a short time. There is a rising demand for cruise travel connecting China, Korea and Japan. Korea has emerged as a new cruise destination in the Northeast Asian region (Cruise Industry News, 2010). Royal Caribbean is introducing tourism destinations in Korea on their website and is promoting Korea (Royal Caribbean, 2010). Cruise Industry News (2010) reported an article 'Cruise Travel in Korea' and introduced tourism destinations such as Yeosu, Mokpo, Busan, Incheon and Jeju in Korea as

well. Seabourn Cruise will launch its luxury services in Korea in 2010, unveiling new cruise itineraries calling at Yeosu, Mokpo, Busan, Incheon and Jeju. These companies discuss why Korea is the ideal destination. This means that cruise companies are interested in the Korean cruise market and are trying to develop Korea as a new destination.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to ascertain Koreans' perceptions of cruise ship travel, a survey was designed based on a review of literature. The survey was divided into two parts. Section 1 consisted of 8 questions which asked for Koreans' opinions and perceptions related to their knowledge of cruise ship travel. Questions related to their experience in cruising, length of time for cruising, desire for cruising, destinations they prefer, companion preferences, prior experiences of overseas travel and other important factors for cruise ship travel decisions. In this first section, all questions were composed of multiple choice and 2 or 3 ordered choice questions. Section 2 consisted of demographic questions and trip characteristics including such factors as gender, age, marital status, education level, occupation, household income, number of times they vacation away from home each year and length of vacation. The research instrument was translated and administrated in the Korean language. The preliminary questionnaire was then pilot tested through a convenience sample consisting of 30 Korean students studying at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana in the United States. The questionnaire was revised and finalized according to the results of the pilot test.

Due to frequent low response rates when doing mail surveys in Korea, on-site surveys were conducted in Seoul and Incheon, Korea from July 1 to July 31, 2009. A total of 275 Koreans participated in this study. The survey was distributed by three different methods because the researcher wanted to have a diversity of people representing different groups and ages. A local dental clinic was contacted and patients were asked to fill out the survey while they were waiting. The dental clinic had a mix of average people using its services. The researcher administered the survey in the dental clinic. Secondly, five volunteers known to the researcher in Korea were asked to distribute and collect surveys from individuals in selected locations in Seoul and Incheon. Colleagues of the researcher also were used to distribute the survey to business associates and their friends. Volunteers were trained by the researcher on the best way to present the questionnaire. Last, the researcher directly asked people on the street (in front of major department stores) in downtown Seoul and Incheon. The researcher randomly approached individuals and asked if they were willing to participate in the survey. Questionnaires were handed to individuals and collected immediately. To get descriptive results, a frequency test and crosstab test were utilized using SPSS.

## **RESULTS**

### **Socio-demographic profile of the respondents**

The final sample included a total of 275 usable surveys. Table 1 provides a demographic profile of the respondents. One hundred and seventy eight of the respondents (65%) were female. The majority of the respondents were in the 25-34 age group. Regarding marital status, the majority of the respondents (53%) were single while 45% of the respondents were married. Approximately 65% of the respondents had at least some college education, with 43% having earned a Bachelor's degree. Fifty-five percent of the respondents reported a household income between KRW ₩1000,000 (USD \$909) and KRW ₩3000,000 (USD \$2,727) per month. Income

level was relatively low by Korean economic standards given the fact that 18% of the respondents were students or unemployed.

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Characteristics (N=275)**

Characteristics	Descriptions	N	Statistics (%)
Gender	Female	178	64.7
	Male	97	35.3
Age	18-24	28	10.2
	25-34	128	46.5
	35-49	47	17.1
	50-64	65	23.6
	65 and over	7	2.5
Marital Status	Single	146	53.1
	Separate/ divorced	0	0
	Widowed	5	1.8
	Married without children	26	9.5
	Married with children	98	35.6
Education Level	High school diploma	59	21.5
	Currently attending college	30	10.9
	Some college, but no degree(s)	5	1.8
	Polytechnic/ two-year college	25	9.1
	University (Bachelor's Degree)	118	42.9
	Graduate school (Graduate Degree)	32	11.6
	Other	4	1.5
Occupation	*Unanswered	2	0.7
	Manager/Executive	35	12.7
	Farming/Fishing	0	0
	Retired	1	0.4
	Professional/Technical	42	5.5
	Educator	25	9.1
	Medical Field	8	2.9
	Homemaker	30	10.9
	Sales/ Marketing	34	12.4
	Manufacturing	5	1.8
	Military	1	0.4
	Business Owner/Self-employed	20	7.3
	Government Employee	3	1.1
	Student	42	15.3
	Unemployed	6	2.2
Other	48	17.5	
Household Income (Monthly)	*Unanswered	2	0.7
	Under ₩1000,000	29	10.5
	₩1000,000~₩2000,000	98	35.6
	₩2000,000~₩3000,000	54	19.6
	₩3000,000~₩4000,000	36	13.1
	₩4000,000~₩5000,000	21	7.6
₩5000,000~₩6000,000	8	2.9	

	Over ₩6000,000	25	9.1
	*Unanswered	4	1.5

\*Unanswered: This category indicates that this question was not answered by those respondents.

### Findings of perceptions

As Table 2 illustrates, fifty-eight percent of the respondents indicated that they were familiar with cruise ship travel. However, only 5% of the respondents had ever taken a cruise. The vast majority (95%) had never been on a cruise. Among the respondents who had taken a cruise, most of them (78%) had taken just one cruise with a two or three day duration (Table 3). Most of them (57%) had booked their cruise ship travel through a travel agency. Most experienced cruisers were satisfied with their experience and they wanted to take a cruise again. Last, entertainment and activities on the cruise were the factors that they liked best. The major reason for respondents having not taken a cruise was that they thought cruising would be too expensive (Table 4). The majority of individuals who had not taken a cruise indicated that they do so if they had an opportunity in the future. In regards to the length of cruises, 43% of the total respondents would like to take a one-week cruise. Sixty four percent of the total respondents were actually considering cruises in the near future. The top two places they wanted to go were the Mediterranean and Northern Europe (Table 2). In addition, they wanted to go on a cruise ship with their partner (46%: husband/wife, boy/girl friend) and family (27%). Last, the most important two factors that affected a respondent's decision for cruise ship travel were total cost (36%) and itinerary (27%) of the cruise.



**Table 2**  
**Koreans' General Perceptions of Cruise Ship Travel (N=275)**

Perception Variables	N	%	Perception Variables	%
<b>Knowledge about the cruise ship travel</b>			<b>Top two destinations</b>	
Very familiar	30	10.9	Mediterranean	36.8
Familiar	130	47.3	Northern Europe	24.1
Neutral	62	22.5	Caribbean	3.7
Unfamiliar	47	17.1	Australia	9.8
Very unfamiliar	5	1.8	Japan	6.2
Unanswered	1	0.4	United States	3.3
<b>Experience of cruise ship travel</b>			Southeastern Asia	2.9
Yes	14	5.1	Other	2.6
No	260	94.5	China	1.3
Unanswered	1	0.4	<b>People with whom you want to travel</b>	
<b>Length of time people would like to take a cruise</b>			Partner (husband, wife, boy/girl friend)	46.4
3~4 days	32	11.6	Family	27.4
About a week	118	42.9	Friends	21.6
About 10 days	46	16.7	Alone	4.5
Longer than 2 weeks	65	23.6	Business colleague	0.14
Unanswered	14	5.1	<b>The two most important factors you consider in your decision to go on a cruise ship</b>	
<b>Considering cruise in the future</b>			Total cost of the cruise	36.4
Definitely	113	42.1	Itinerary of the cruise ship	26.9
Yes, Maybe	60	21.8	Duration of the cruise	15.3
Not sure	79	28.7	Cruise ship facilities and amenities	9.7
Possibly No	7	2.5	Gaming and other activities	6.7
No	11	4.0	Accommodations	3.9
Unanswered	5	1.8	Direct air flights to departure city	0.76
			Food & beverage	0.38

**Table 3**  
**Perceptions of Cruise Ship Travel: Koreans Who Have Cruise Experience (N=14)**

Perception Variables	N	%	Perception Variables	N	%
<b>Cruise destinations they have visited</b>					
Europe (Northern)	5	35.7	<b>Purpose of cruise ship travel</b>		
Australia	2	14.3		Taking a rest away from home	30.0
Caribbean	2	14.3		Spending time with family	23.3
United States (Hawaii)	1	7.1		Visiting new places and countries	33.3
China	1	7.1		Business or conference	13.3
New Zealand	1	7.1			
Korea	1	7.1		<b>Satisfaction level</b>	
Russia	1	7.1		Very satisfied	4 28.6
				Satisfied	7 50.0
<b>Duration of the cruise</b>			Neutral (so so)	2 14.3	
2~3 days	8	57.1	Dissatisfied	1 7.1	
4~5 days	1	7.1	Very dissatisfied	0 0.0	
About 1 week	3	21.4	<b>Future plans to go on a cruise</b>		
About 10 days	2	14.3	Yes	12 85.7	
Longer than 2 weeks	0	0.0	No	2 14.3	
<b>Number of times having taken a cruise</b>			<b>Top 2 preferences while on a cruise</b>		
Once	11	78.6	<b>(if you have a plan to go on a cruise again)</b>		
Twice	2	14.3	Entertainment/ Activities	52.5	
Three times	1	7.1	Food & Beverage/ Restaurant Facilities	15.0	
More than three times	0	0.0	Destinations and Itinerary	15.0	
<b>Reservation method</b>			Others	10.0	
Through travel agency	8	57.1	Service of Employees	5.0	
Friend or family member booked	4	28.6	Accommodations	2.5	
Through Internet (On-line)	1	7.1			
Other	1	7.1			

**Table 4**  
**Major Reasons Why Koreans Have Not Taken a Cruise (N=161)**

Ranking	Reasons
1	I think that it is too expensive
2	I have never thought about it
3	I am not familiar with cruise ship travel
4	Distance of departure city (far from where I live)
5	I think that there is no cruise in Korea
6	Cruise ships go to limited destinations
7	I don't like water (sea)/ I get sea sickness
8	I prefer land based travel
9	I have young children

## **CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The findings ascertain that there is great potential for the cruise ship market in Korea. There remains an enormous untapped market because only approximately 5 percent of respondents have ever taken a cruise and most of the non-cruisers indicated a desire for cruise ship travel in the future. The main reason that most Koreans were non-cruisers seemed to revolve around their perceptions of the total cost of cruising. Koreans' perceptions relate to the idea that this type of tourism is suitable only for higher status people. When compared with Koreans' expenditure patterns for other types of travel, cruise ship travel is similar in nature especially considering that the total cost of a cruise includes accommodations, various types of facilities, amenities and food and beverage. Another reason that Koreans are not familiar with cruise ship travel is because they do not have sufficient knowledge about cruising. Thus, travel agencies or cruise operators should more aggressively promote and educate Koreans about cruising. A good understanding of Koreans' perceptions and desire for cruise ship travel would enable marketers of the cruise industry to entice potential customers.

Based on the results of the survey, most Koreans would prefer to take cruises if they had the opportunity. Developing Korea as a new destination would be a good approach and potentially very successful. Most travel packages have been "fly and cruise" for Koreans. It means that cruises leave ports in Europe, the Mediterranean Sea or the Caribbean so Koreans need to fly to the countries first, making it more difficult for them to spend so much time and money. Taking Korea as a homeport is a good marketing idea since Koreans have had a problem with getting to the departure city for cruises outside of Korea. If there were more homeports for cruising in Korea, more Koreans would be able to take cruises since it would be easier to get to departure ports.

Therefore, the present research suggests that cruise ship operators should do more to understand Koreans' perceptions of cruising. This would enable them to make plans related to a variety of travel characteristics and preferences of Koreans. For example, operators who wanted to cater to more of the Korean market would be wise to stress their one-week Mediterranean or Northern Europe cruises. It should be emphasized to Koreans that the price of a cruise includes comfortable accommodations, food and fun for the family. It is hoped that this study will assist scholars and practitioners in enhancing their understanding of Koreans' perceptions and behaviors toward cruise ship travel.

## **LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The findings of this study may not be generalized. Data from the current study was collected from only two cities in Korea, Seoul and Incheon. Second, the study only shows 5% of the people who had taken a cruise, therefore, no conclusions could be drawn about Koreans who have taken cruises. Third, only descriptive results were studied. Future research could expand the sample to include more cities and a higher percentage of experienced cruisers. An additional study could investigate the relationship between Koreans' perceptions of cruise ship travel and various socio-demographic characteristics.

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