

# **REPRESENTATIONS OF AUSTRALIA'S TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE: REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN NARRATION THEMES AND TOPICS BY KOREAN TRAVEL AGENTS IN AUSTRALIA**

## **ABSTRACT**

Representational narration can represent a useful tool in the interpretation of destination image formation. The purpose of this study is to examine regional differences in expressions of key themes and topics regarding images of Australia as a tourism destination represented by Korean travel agents in Australia. This study employed content analysis using NVivo in exploring the destination image of Australia through representational narrations by Korean travel agents in three major Australian cities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 32 travel agents in 32 travel agencies in Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide specialising in inbound travel from Korea to Australia. Representational narrations by Korean travel agents in Australia are used to reflect the views of Korean tourists visiting Australia. Significant differences were found regarding image features. Firstly, agents in Sydney commonly described the natural environment and native animals whereas Brisbane agents discussed adventure and outdoor activities and Adelaide agents were strongly reminiscent of study, comfort and relaxing. Secondly, there were significant differences in motivation for visiting these three cities: new experiences and learning (Sydney), exploration and activities for pleasure (Brisbane), and visiting friends and relatives (Adelaide). Thirdly, different age groups preferred different cities: Sydney is inclusive of all age groups while Brisbane attracts relatively young age groups and Adelaide has mainly older visitors. Lastly, the use of the internet varied among the visitors to the three cities, with the internet used most often for travel to Brisbane. The findings may be useful to destination marketers to understand how Korean visitors perceive differences between Australian destinations.

Keywords: Tourism destination image, in-depth interviews, Korean travellers, Australia, regional differences

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since destination image affects tourists' perceptions, feelings, travel behaviour and destination choice and these emotions are subjective towards even the same destination, the importance and awareness of the tourism destination image is commonly acknowledged (Chon, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Kim & Richardson, 2003). In addition, tourists' images of a destination are unique, constructed from their memories and imagination of that destination (Jenkins & McArthur, 1996). Due to the importance of this information, it is necessary to research destination image and is also beneficial to determine characteristics in order to evaluate destination images.

In recent decades, various tourism researchers (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Bigne, Sanchez, & Sanchez, 2001; Castelltort & Mader, 2009; Frias, Rodriguez & Castaneda, 2007; Govers, Go & Kumar, 2007) have emphasised that tourism destination image is a valuable concept, because a good understanding of tourists' perceived image enables destination marketers to attract potential tourists. Destination image has been created by providing tourists with available information, such as communication channels (e.g. TV,