

## Chinese tourists' attitude towards road safety in New Zealand

### Abstract

Road safety is a global issue that has been given more attention in many countries. In tourist destinations, a high rate of car accidents could negatively influence the market image in tourism. Self-drive tourism has become popular in China in the past decade. Along with the rise of the self-drive travelling trend, New Zealand has become a popular destination that attracts thousands of Chinese self-drive tourists. However, the number of car crashes of Chinese self-drive tourists has gradually increased, which not only endangers tourists and locals but also impacts New Zealand's image in the Chinese market. New Zealand official reports show that the international drivers who come from right-side driving countries is the main at-fault group in international car accidents due to driving on the wrong side of the road and not obeying the 'Give Way' rules (Ministry of Transport, 2017). China is the second-largest inbound tourism market in New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2018), which brings huge economic benefit and promotes the development of tourism. However, the number of Chinese visitors in fatal or injury crashes in New Zealand ranked third with over 100 drivers in 2016 (Ministry of Transport, 2017), which negatively affects word-of-mouth advertising of New Zealand tourism in China. Therefore, understanding Chinese self-drive tourists' attitudes towards road safety in New Zealand is important. Ethnography is employed in this study to identify the themes and patterns of online reviews posted by the Chinese self-drive tourists who have been to New Zealand. The results showed most self-drive tourists were young and middle aged who travelled with their friends. Lacking tourist infrastructure, poor car condition, and the weather were found the main reasons for road accident. The findings of this qualitative study have provided implications for New Zealand tourism industry and the government in managing road safety of international tourists.

### INTRODUCTION

Based on pervious researches, the factors leading to international tourists' crashes could be divided into two types: personal reasons and external reasons. Unfamiliarity with local traffic rules and incorrect driving operation were the main contributing factors for international self-drive tourists. Furthermore, driving while fatigued and focusing too much on roadside scenery were potential safety problems for international drivers. Self-drive tourists need to learn and understand destinations' traffic rules and signs in advance, and they also could be become familiar with vehicle and vehicle operation before they start the journey (Wu, 2015). Moreover gathering information about the location of rest stops when planning routes could prevent self-drive tourists from driving while fatigued (Wilks, Watson, & Faulks, 1999). Self-drive tourists should pay more attention to road conditions and driving operation rather than roadside scenery, in order to reduce the risk of road accidents (Hallo & Manning, 2009). The review of literature has shown that Chinese drivers have a different understanding of driving, and their driving habits are different from those of other countries. Furthermore, language is a key element that influences Chinese self-drive tourists' driving in a foreign country. In brief, cultural background could affect driving behaviours when Chinese self-drive tourists are driving in overseas destinations.

The three objectives of this research are examining what Chinese tourists know about traffic regulations and road conditions before driving in New Zealand; identifying what safety problems Chinese self-drive tourists might face when driving in New Zealand; and finding out where Chinese tourists ask for help when they encounter problems during self-drive tours in New Zealand. All information was collected from Qyer.com and Mafengwo.cn. 50 online posts are selected dated from 2017-2019 in this study to explore Chinese self-drive tourists' attitudes towards road safety in New Zealand.

Qyer.com and Mafengwo.cn are popular travel websites in China. On both websites, there is an online forum about travel in New Zealand, and many Chinese self-drive tourists have shared their own driving experiences through online posting. There are more than 1,000 results about self-drive tours in New Zealand on both websites, and each popular post has millions of page views and dozens of comments. Furthermore, Qyer.com is an older network about travel in China, having existed since 2004. The original posts about the experience of New Zealand self-drivers on Qyer.com were first published in 2011. The content of most posts is related to

drive safety in conducting New Zealand self-drive tours. Each popular post has many comments published by online users who have had New Zealand self-drive experience. Therefore, the posts on these websites have a high research value that helps researchers to explore the experience of Chinese self-drive tourists in New Zealand.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, online postings and discussions from Chinese tourists in these forums were collected. Netnography is employed to identify the themes and patterns of online reviews posted by the Chinese self-drive tourists who have been to New Zealand. Due to this research project mainly being focused on the perspective of Chinese self-drive tourists towards road safety in New Zealand, 'New Zealand self-drive tour' and 'road safety' were key words used to identify the posts that accord with the purpose of the research. The homepages of Qyer.com and Mafengwo.cn have a search engine which helps with extracting information. The information such as travel notes and comment posts were then sorted by publication time, and 50 posts published in 2017-2019 on each website were selected. At the end of September in 2019, by entering the keywords of 'New Zealand Self-drive tour' and 'road safety' into the search engines, the researcher found 223 results (travel notes and answer posts) on Qyer.com, and 65 results (travel notes) on Mafengwo.cn.

Demographic information about online posters was also found on both websites. Personal information of each poster such as gender, age, home address and previous overseas travel experiences was available on their personal home page. Furthermore, traveller types, travel time, rental car type, travel days and travel routes in New Zealand could be identified on the web pages. This information could be accessed in their posts which shared the participants' New Zealand self-drive travelling experiences. The researcher read each post and selected the contents that were relevant to the research questions and summarized the posts one by one. The summarised information was then categorised according to different themes. All information obtained from the online posts was in Chinese. The researcher translated the themes after data analysis. Thematic analysis was used to help researchers to identify themes around Chinese tourists' attitudes towards road safety in New Zealand from the online forum.

The researcher looks for the answers for each question from the postings before copying information to a Word document. According to the content of the answers, the researcher set key words as the initial codes for each answer. For example, many posters mentioned different safety problems caused by being unfamiliar with roads in New Zealand, such as driving the wrong way down a highway or around a roundabout; therefore, the initial code could be "unfamiliar with road". The next step is searching for potential themes. Once every piece of information is assigned an initial code, it requires the researcher to categorise the data, and put them into different potential themes (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013).

14 posts were taken from Mafengwo.cn and 37 posts were obtained from Qyer.com. These posts consisted of text with photographs. Most online users shared their experiences from travel preparation to actual experiences during the tours. Also, most posters included their fellow travellers and the schedule that they travelled in New Zealand in their posts. Furthermore, some information could be found in posters' personal pages, such as gender, age, present home address and overseas experiences, which were also included in demographic information.

## **RESULTS**

Most of the posters were young or middle-aged tourists. Only five posters were submitted by retired people. Most posters (33/50) travelled with their partner or family who came to New Zealand during November and December. More than half of posters travelled for 7-13 days, and 22 posters stayed in New Zealand for more than 14 days. There were three major sources that Chinese self-drive tourists learned about traffic rules and road conditions before driving in New Zealand: 1) from the official websites, for example the official website of Tourism New Zealand, Driving Test; 2) from the agency, such as Zuzuche app; 3) from the rental companies, such as Hertz and Apex. Difficulty in finding gas stations was considered as a potential risk for Chinese self-drive tourists. The self-drive travellers needed to give more time when they design their schedule, because the road conditions were difficult, meaning that there were many unpredictable matters which might happen on

the way. Most posters observed New Zealand traffic regulations and drove with great care. Undeveloped tourist infrastructures and extreme weather influenced tourists' driving experiences, which caused sudden accidents in some situations. Due to language barrier, a rental car company such as Zuzuche has become the main place that tourists asked for help. The results showed that underdeveloped tourist infrastructure, poor car condition, and the weather were the main reasons for road accident.

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