

Parent-child Family Travel in Macau

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Abstract. In recent years, parent-child tourism has emerged as a key component of modern travel culture, emphasizing family bonding, experiential learning, and quality leisure time. This paper explores the development potential of parent-child tourism in Macau by analyzing its cultural, infrastructural, and economic advantages. This paper highlights Macau's unique position in the Greater Bay Area, supported by its rich cultural heritage and family-friendly facilities. Through a SWOT analysis, the paper identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by Macau's parent-child tourism sector. It concludes that, especially in the post-pandemic era, short-duration family travel, including emerging trends like parent-child camping, offers significant growth potential for Macau's tourism industry. The paper further suggests that enhancing infrastructure, diversifying offerings, and fostering local hospitality behavior can position Macau as a leading destination for family-oriented travel.

Keywords: Parent-child tourism, Macau, family travel, SWOT analysis.

1. Introduction

In a broad sense, parent-child tourism refers to travel activities in which parents and children travel together. From the perspective of tourism studies, parent-child tourism is an educational form of travel based on kinship, with planned purposes to promote interaction and emotional bonding within the family. This type of tourism includes various formats such as one adult traveling with one child, both parents traveling with their children, or customized family tours. Typically, it is an immersive experience that combines cognition, education, interaction, emotional bonding, and leisure. Most parent-child trips focus on children's needs and involve both parents and children participating together ^[1].

Shanghai Disneyland is an ideal destination for parent-child tourism. As a dreamland, the classic Disney characters are familiar not only to children but also resonate with many parents' childhood memories. Now, parents can accompany their children to experience these characters together, deepening emotional resonance. Both children and adults are generally familiar with Disney princess stories. From the characters and costumes to the plot, these elements fulfill young girls' dreams of being princesses. At Disneyland, children can immerse themselves in this dreamlike environment. Every corner is filled with magic, and the entire experience supports children's imaginations. Additionally, Disney staff members playing characters follow strict conduct codes: they must not reveal their job roles or portray their characters outside the park to preserve the magical illusion for children.

Of course, Disneyland is only part of the parent-child tourism picture. Though Universal Studios Beijing may offer more thrilling rides, many attractions are still child-friendly. The park includes popular themes like Minions, Transformers, Kung Fu Panda, and The Wizarding World of Harry Potter, which appeal to all ages. Moreover, it integrates Chinese cultural elements to offer a fresh and enjoyable experience. Facilities such as dryers and water stations are installed throughout the park to enhance convenience, especially for families with children ^[2].

2. Overview of Macau's Tourism Industry Background

2.1. Casino-Driven Tourism Model

Since the 1990s, Macau's tourism industry has rapidly developed under the influence of the casino sector. It has gradually formed a comprehensive tourism system centered on gambling, tourism, dining, and lodging, supplemented by retail, jewelry, transportation, and entertainment. In 2011, tourism accounted for over 60% of Macau's GDP (gambling alone accounted for 44.7%, and retail and lodging accounted for 15.6%). This reflects Macau's long-standing development model: Gambling drives tourism, and tourism drives other sectors ^[3].

2.2. Contribution to Macau's Economy and Employment

The impact of tourism on transportation is increasingly evident. The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (construction started in 2009) and the Macau Light Rail (construction started in 2008) have greatly improved Macau's transport capacity. Tourism has created over 30% more jobs. According to government statistics, Macau's unemployment rate remains low (1.0%–2.0%) thanks to high employment in the gaming, accommodation, and food service sectors. Tourism generates substantial foreign exchange revenue, attracting visitors from Asia, Brazil, the U.S., Canada, France, and Germany. A diverse visitor base has ensured stable foreign reserves and reduced financial risk. Leveraging its "East meets West" image, Macau has become a global tourism destination with rich cultural resources and a strong international reputation, enhancing its overall image. There is no doubt that tourism is the largest contributor to Macau's GDP and has also brought positive social impacts. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decline in tourist numbers ^[4].

3. Development Trends and Market Drivers of Parent-Child Travel

3.1. Changing Leisure Perspectives in the Post-Pandemic Era

With rapid economic and cultural development and the acceleration of life's pace, tourism and leisure have become societal norms. In this context, parent-child tourism, especially child-centered travel, has grown rapidly as a key part of modern tourism. Parents now widely believe that travel offers valuable experiential learning, creates family memories, and provides high-quality bonding time. Providing children with travel opportunities has become an important indicator of competent parenting.

The industry has recognized the child segment as a crucial market, launching diverse products and services. Research in environmental psychology and tourism indicates that place attachment (such as place identity and place dependence) significantly influences local residents' tourism behavior ^[5].

3.2. Market Segmentation: Age Group and Travel Behavior

Parent-child destination choices are largely shaped by personal preference, which can stem from cultural resonance or a child's anticipation. Overall, family travel holds strong development potential in Macau. Post-pandemic, many travelers prefer half-day or one-day trips—needs that parent-child travel fits well. With its many theme parks, Macau is well-equipped to provide quality parent-child experiences. As the pandemic improves, Macau's parent-child travel will likely flourish and become a new hallmark of its tourism.

4. Parent-Child Travel Resources and Supporting Services in Macau

Parent-child travel is becoming increasingly prominent in Macau. As economic and cultural standards improve, family travel is taking a more central role in modern tourism. Parents view it as a way to build emotional bonds and lasting memories. Macau offers several key advantages. For example, StarWorld Plaza includes children's play areas so kids can enjoy themselves while parents

shop. Attractions like the 1,800m² children's park at the Parisian and themed zones at the Venetian (like "Dimension Zone") further enhance Macau's appeal to families.

Macau's buses are clean and comfortable. Some are decorated with cartoon stickers to engage children. Spacious seats improve the travel experience. Taxis are similarly designed to accommodate families comfortably.

Macau's restaurants feature distinctive flavors and child-attracting visuals. Many offer parent-child combo meals and promotional packages.

Hotels offer attractive services for families, including child meal coupons and other amenities. Whether grandparents are included also impacts parent-child tourism. Seniors often assist with childcare, giving parents more freedom. Children's age also matters: younger children crave curiosity-driven experiences; kids aged 7–12 prefer playful attractions over cultural sites; teenagers tend to enjoy immersive and cultural destinations.

The rise of the Greater Bay Area's family tourism is also notable. After the implementation of China's "double reduction" education policy, children have more free time. The region has responded by developing "learn-through-play" themed parent-child routes, supported by variety shows and media exposure. This underscores that parent-child tourism is gaining strategic significance—but this is only the beginning ^[6,7].

5. SWOT Analysis of Parent-Child Tourism in Macau

Using the SWOT method, we analyze the strategic environment of Macau's parent-child tourism sector by identifying internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors, then cross-evaluating them. Specifically, the advantages and opportunities of Macau Parent-Child Tourism are analyzed through SO analysis, and the disadvantages and challenges are determined through WT analysis.

5.1. Strengths

On one hand, government support serves as a catalyst for industrial development. The Macau government champions tourism as a leading industry, implementing numerous policies and allocating substantial resources to encourage its growth. On the other hand, Macau boasts rich cultural tourism resources ideal for family trips. As a major hub of the 16th-century Maritime Silk Road and a model of Sino-Portuguese cultural fusion, it cultivates children's cross-cultural perspectives while offering immersive experiences of diverse cultural landscapes.

5.2. Weaknesses

Macau's tourism structure is overly reliant on gambling and lacks diversity. Visitors tend to stay in Macau for relatively short periods. Data from 1998 shows that the average stay for port visitors was only 1.1 days, while overnight visitors averaged 1.7 days and same-day visitors stayed for just 0.2 days. At the same time, Macau's industrial development—particularly its tourism sector—is highly susceptible to external influences, making it vulnerable to economic fluctuations in Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and Western economies. Regional competition further undermines Macau's tourism growth; for instance, Hong Kong's low-cost hotel strategy directly challenges Macau's appeal.

5.3. Opportunities

Overall, Macau presents significant opportunities for tourism development. With rising incomes and growing travel awareness among residents, more people are increasingly willing to take family trips. Ctrip data shows that over 80% of users belong to high-spending groups, with parents from the 95s and 80s generations accounting for 77.7%. In 2021, searches related to Macau surged by 216%, with searches for "Macau Tower" soaring over 100%. Bookings increased by 244%, while flight and hotel reservations jumped 445%, with hotel bookings returning to pre-pandemic levels.

In the future, Macau must seize opportunities to actively renovate tourist areas such as Rua da Felicidade and the Ruins of St. Paul's, effectively blending history and culture with culinary and sightseeing experiences to enhance its appeal to family travelers.

COVID-19 has restricted indoor and crowd-based activities, reduced income, and heightened tourists' sensitivity to sanitation and spending. This has fueled the rise of a new tourism mode—parent-child camping. Mainland data shows parent-child camping accounts for nearly half of all camping travel. Most spending remains below RMB 1,000, making it broadly accessible. Camping is short in duration, ideal for trips of fewer than seven days—matching Macau's tourism characteristics. Locations like Hac Sa Beach offer natural, open environments ideal for outdoor family camping that balances cost, hygiene, and enjoyment [8,9].

5.4. Threats

The tourism industry is vulnerable to global disease outbreaks, as evidenced by how COVID-19 policies severely restricted family travel in recent years. Meanwhile, Macau's family tourism market continues to lack a clear and effective development strategy. In 2020, Macau welcomed only 5.9 million visitors (a year-on-year decrease of 85%), and in July 2022, it received just 9,759 visitors (a 98.8% decline). From January to July 2022, inbound visitor numbers fell by 26.3%.

6. Conclusion

This paper explores the development potential of parent-child tourism in Macau. By defining the concept, comparing it with major parks like Disneyland and Universal Studios, and analyzing Macau's tourism environment using SWOT, we conclude that Macau holds great potential for this sector. Survey data shows that most tourists prefer short-duration family trips, which aligns well with Macau's compact travel offerings. The study's significance lies in offering a new development perspective for Macau, reducing reliance on gambling, and advising the government to support family travel infrastructure and services to improve the tourist experience.

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