

## INTERESTS OF KOREAN TOURISTS TRAVELING ABROAD AND ACTIONS REQUIRED IN BARCELONA

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### ABSTRACT

The number of Korean tourists has increased significantly in Barcelona, Spain. The article has two objectives: firstly, to determine the context, reasons for travelling abroad and tastes of Koreans as potential tourists so that Barcelona tourism industry may plan its activities or business lines in accordance with great continuously growing Korean demand. Secondly, to establish guidelines for actions required to adapt destination towards Korean demand. We first conducted bibliographic analysis to gather economic data on Korean tourism to fulfil these dual objectives. The data was taken from various reports compiled by different economic institutions in both countries as reflected in this study that communication is the factor that worries Korean tourists the most. Secondly, they are not sure about local food, inter-city public transport, travelling expenses, poor quality and poorly located accommodation, lack of clean public toilets, etc. in Barcelona. In contrast, Koreans love to travel to Barcelona to make luxury purchases in emblematic places by setting aside other concerning factors.

### Contribution/ Originality

Korean tourist flow increases every year to the Barcelona. However, the Catalan tourism industry does not have conscientious studies describing the profile of Korean tourists. The aim of the present study is to remedy this situation and provide reliable data on the behavior of Koreans tourists. It will allow the destination city to establish guidelines for actions required to adapt itself to the Korean demand and also serve as a first step analyzing the city marketing of Barcelona for Korean tourists.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today, tourism is being perceived as an industry that has positive impact on economic growth and development (Yiannakis, 1992; Balaguer and Cantavella, 2002; Ivanov and Webster, 2007; Such *et al.*, 2009), with economic benefits probably being the main reason why many countries are interested in developing their tourism (Brida *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, tourism undoubtedly makes an important contribution to the world economy. Currently, as the second largest industry in the world (WTTC, 2003), it generates 10% of global GDP, 7% of exports and 9% of the employed population (UNWTO, 2017). More than 1.2 billion people traveled abroad for tourism purposes in 2015 whereas, the annual increase in the number of tourists remained stable throughout 2016.

The World Tourism Organization (2011) expects the number of international tourists to surpass 1.8 billion by 2030, due to the incorporation of travelers in large numbers from emerging countries in Asia. Currently, 24% of global outbound tourism originates in countries located in the Asia-Pacific region, a very wide geographical area that places approximately 300 million tourists every year and is expected to generate by contributing an annual average of 17 million additional tourists over the next 15 years.

According to the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE), almost 341,104 South Korean tourists visited Spain in 2016, which represents a moderate annual growth rate of 5%. However, the number of Korean tourists is being expected to increase in even greater proportion in 2018 (Rovira, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, most notable statistical data in recent times comprises of the spectacular increase in Korean tourists in 2015, as compared to figures for the previous year, and also in comparison with other countries in the region, making South Korea the third largest tourist issuing country in Asia. In 2010, only 44,000 Korean tourists visited Spain, while the corresponding figure exceeded 167,000 tourists in 2014. By 2015 the figure was estimated to be at 311,000, showing an increase of 86.34% in five years (Frontur, 2017).

In 2007, the Montserrat Mountain Sanctuary in Catalonia registered its highest ever number of 2.7 million visitors, as compared to 2.5 million in 2016, which had already been a record year for tourists, according to Xavier Aparicio, Manager of its Board. Of the different nationalities that visited the mountain, the most number of Koreans' group, with 229,000 visitors stood at the top, between May 2016 and April 2017, followed by Americans and Russians, although their numbers dropped from 250,000 to 110,000 in that period (Bosch, 2018).

The statistical trend seems to be positive, when it comes to Korean tourists. To attract more Korean tourists effectively, it is obviously necessary to analyze them in an efficient and systematic manner. This indicates and means that a detailed analysis of Korean tourists should be made based on their behavior, according to economic data from official Korean sources to see whether Barcelona fulfils their preferences on the travelling aspects.

Since the present article has two main objectives, and need a thorough clarification accordingly. Firstly, we have to determine the context, reasons for travel, and taste and interests of Koreans as potential tourists to Barcelona. The Barcelona tourism industry may have to plan its activities or business lines in accordance with this great continuously growing Korean demand. And secondly, to establish the guidelines for actions required to adapt the destination of the Korean demand.

To fulfil these dual objectives, we first conducted a bibliographic analysis to gather economic data on Korean tourism. The data was taken from various reports compiled earlier by different economic institutions in Barcelona and South Korea, as had been reflected well in this study.

## 2. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF KOREAN TOURISM

Tourism in its current form began to grow rapidly as an important industry after World War II (Pack, 2013; Xing, 2016). In Korea, however, tourism developed over three distinct periods since tourists have been allowed to travel abroad, as recognized in the following stages:

1) From the 1940s to 1980s: from the late 1940s to the 1980s, Korean citizens could not easily travel outside their country, since the government imposed heavy travel restrictions due to the country's poor economic situation (Tourism Sciences Society of Korea, 2012). At that time, only official or student delegations were allowed to travel abroad and only with a special permit.

2) The 1990s: The Asian Games held in Seoul in 1986, followed by the Olympic Games in 1988, paved the way for the Korean government to abolish restrictions on international travel. It had first allowed partial trips abroad in 1981, and liberalized trips abroad for tourist purposes to people over 50 in 1983. Finally, in January 1989, foreign travel was completely liberalized and the 1990s saw the beginning of an era of mass tourism.

3) The 2000s: in December 1996, South Korea joined the World Trade Organization (WTO). In order to comply with WTO commitments, the State readjusted the rules so that citizens could travel to more destinations and have access to a simpler process for travel. Since then, the number of Korean travelers leaving South Korea has continually increased. In addition, the 2002 Korea/Japan World Cup further boosted the road to internationalization (Fernández, 2016). Another element that increased travel was Saturday being made a holiday from 2006 onwards.

According to the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), the number of Korean tourists who traveled abroad in 2017 was 26,496,447, up 18.4% on the previous year, and in 2016 the number of countries to which Koreans could travel exceeded 150. These figures allow us to consider that Korean tourism has reached maturity, as stated by Seo and Ko (2019).

## 3. PROFILE OF THE KOREAN TOURIST

### 3.1. Korean tourism abroad

South Korean exports, which totaled just US\$ 32.82 million in 1960, grew rapidly to reach US\$ 559.6 billion by 2016 (World Bank, 2017). The per capita income, which was US\$ 60 in 1948, also grew exponentially to reach US\$ 27,538 by 2016, as can be seen in the following graph.

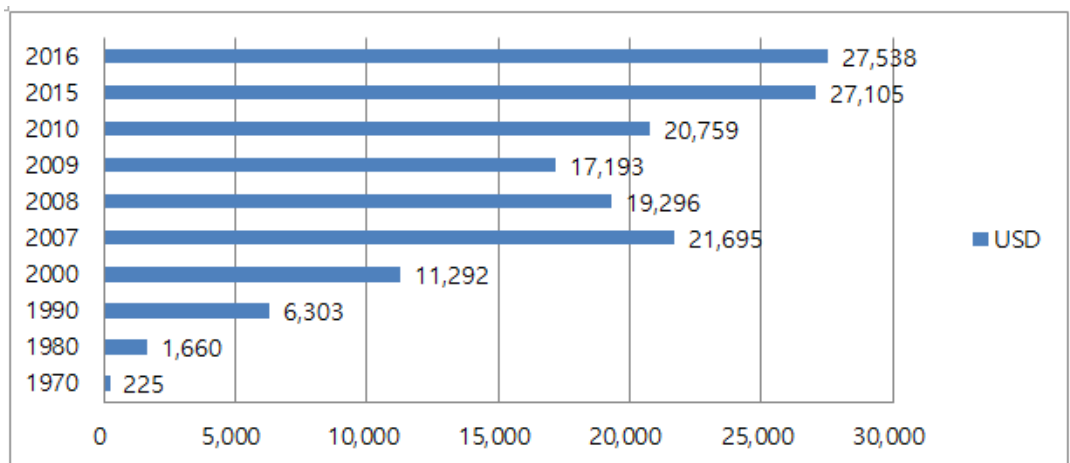


Figure 1: South Korea's per capita income

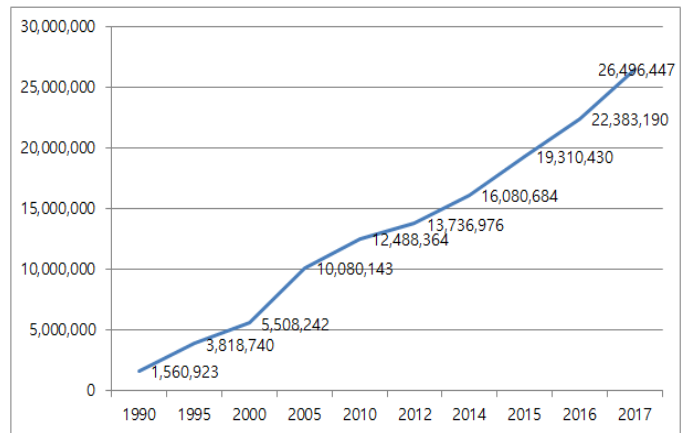
Source: World Bank (2017)

As of 1989, once the first economic reforms entered into force, the government began to make its policy more flexible by making it easier for Koreans to travel abroad and promoting the arrival of foreign tourists, as a way of obtaining foreign exchange (Ahn, 2015). However, in this first phase, trips abroad were only contemplated as a mechanism to strengthen family ties or friendship with the Korean diaspora in territories sympathetic to the country. Although tourism may have started in this way, today Koreans can visit almost any country in the world. Since 1989, the number of visits abroad by Korean citizens has grown ceaselessly and there is nothing to indicate that this trend will be reversed in the coming years (Figure 2 and Table 1).

**Table 1: Outbound travel by Korean tourists (1990-2017)**

Year	Number of visits	%
1990	1.560	28.7
1995	3.818	21.1
2000	5.508	26.9
2005	10.080	14.2
2010	12.488	31.5
2012	13.736	8.2
2014	16.080	8.3
2015	19.310	20.1
2016	22.383	15.9
2017	26.496	18.4

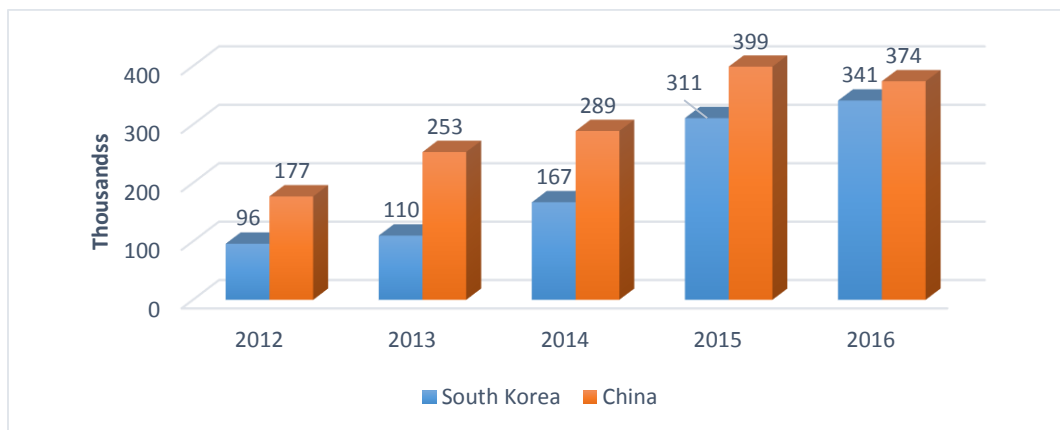
**Note:** Numbers in millions



**Figure 2: Outbound travel by Korean tourists (1990-2017)**

**Source:** Author’s own computations based on Korea Tourism Organization (2017)

Korea’s outbound tourism is the second largest in Asia after China (Chang, 2016). Japan has remained stagnant as an issuing country, with figures remaining at 15-19 million for decades, and Korea has surpassed Japan to become an important issuing market. As for percentage population, around 13% of Japanese, or 17 million people, travel abroad, whereas for Korea the figure is closer to 40% (Chang, 2016). The same parameters are seen in Spain as a receiving country for these outbound tourists. Ten years ago, just 0.7% of tourists traveling to Spain were Asian, while the number of tourists has doubled for Koreans in just 5 years, as can be seen in the following graph (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Arrivals of Korean tourists to Spain**

**Source:** Author’s own computations based on data from FRONTUR (2017)

### 3.2. Travel features

#### 3.2.1. Regions of origin of Korean tourists

Korean tourists mainly come from three regions (KTO, 2016), which coincide with the most economically prosperous areas of South Korea: Seoul, Gyeonggi and Busan. South Korea has 51,779,892 inhabitants, 40% of whom resided in the three aforementioned cities in 2018 according to the Korea National Statistics Office (KOSTAT) (Table 2). Thus, the most widely traveled Koreans come from the three most industrial areas of the country:

**Table 2: Population by region (February 2018)**

Regions	Total population*	Male population	Female population
Seoul	9.845	4.822	5.023
Gyeonggi	12.908	6.492	6.415
Busan	3.465	1.706	1.758
Gyeongnam	3.378	1.700	1.677
Total	51.779	25.855	25.924

**Source:** Author's own computations based on data from [Korea National Statistical \(2018\)](#)

\* Million persons

#### 3.2.2. Number of travelers per month

The two main festivals in South Korea are the Korean New Year (January-February) and Chuseok Day (September), also known as Thanksgiving Day. Several holidays can be linked to these, the dates of which vary each year. Other festive dates are January 1 (New Year), Buddha Day at the end of May, Memorial Day of the Fallen in June and Independence Day in August ([National Archives of Korea, 2017](#)). If we add official holidays at weekends, Korean citizens enjoy a total of 119 vacation days a year (Economy Talk News, 2018 [Bae, 2018](#)). In addition, there are other unofficial holidays linked to certain groups: Fathers' Day (May), Childhood Day (May), Teachers' Day (May) and the Foundation Day of Korea (October). As for the school and university calendar, it includes two holiday periods: winter vacations in January, which are usually linked to the Korean New Year, and summer vacations on dates between July and August.

With regard to the number of travelers per month, according to [Cha \(2019\)](#), a greater number of trips outside Korea are observed in the months of January, July and August, that is, during the holiday periods.

#### 3.2.3. Number of travelers by age

According to [Kim \(2019\)](#), the number of Korean travelers who went abroad in 2016 was 22,383,190. By age groups, those who traveled most were between 31-40 years old - 4,408 people - which was 12.7% more than in 2015 (3,910,321 people). Table 4 shows the evolution of Korean tourists, by age, according to the Korean Institute of Culture and Tourism over the last six years.

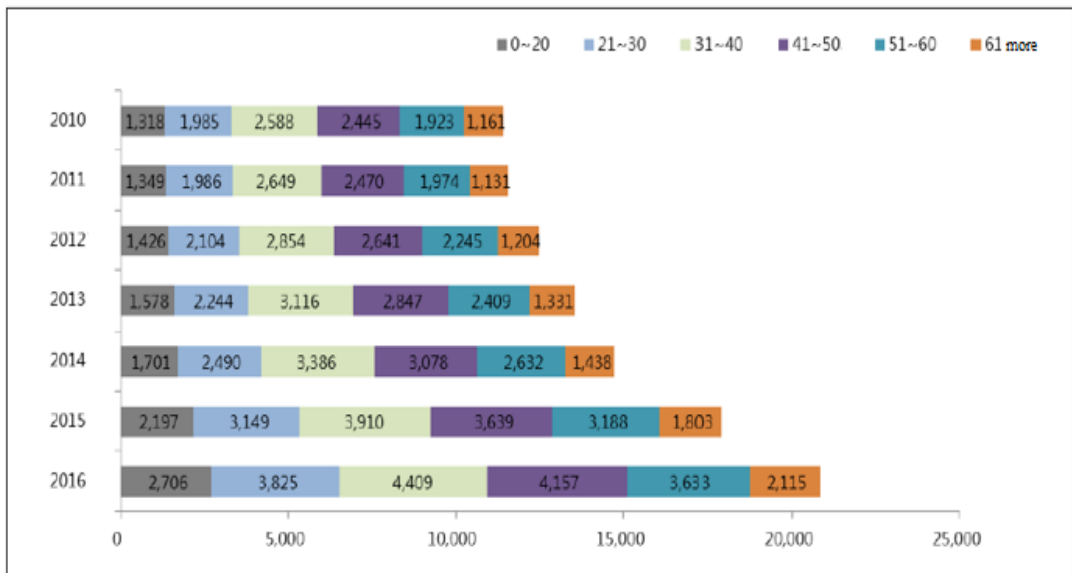


Figure 4: Age wise number of travelers (Unit: people)

Source: Author’s own computations based on data from Korea culture and tourism institute (2017)

### 3.2.4. Average stay

According to Korea culture and tourism institute (KCTI), more than half of Korean tourists have an average stay abroad of 3 to 5 days, 28.0% 6 to 10 days and 11.6% 11 to 15 days. Naturally, the further away the destination, the longer the average stay tends to be. According to 2017 data (KTO), the average stay by Korean tourists was 10.35 days. In addition, the average number of accumulated days of travel abroad among Koreans in their twenties has increased exponentially and now stands at over a year.

### 3.2.5. Purpose of and reasons for travel

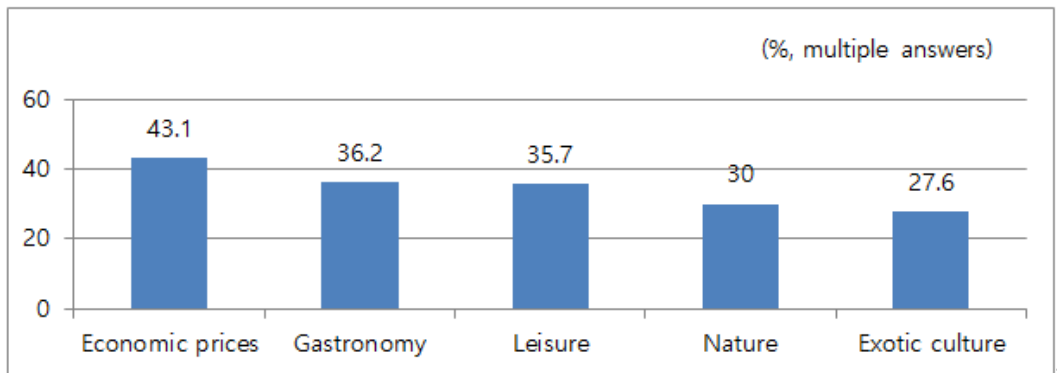
The three main reasons for travel are as follows: Visiting vacation / leisure locations (83.4%), business and work (6.7%) and visiting family and friends (3.9%). If the data are observed per year, “interest / leisure” also occupies a prominent position. Table 3 shows the main reasons for Korean tourists traveling abroad according to KTO (2017).

Table 3: Purpose of travel abroad (percentage)

Years	Holidays, Leisure	Health, Therapy	Religion	Visit to family and friends	Education, Training	Shopping	Business, Jobs	Other
2014	79.1	1.4	2.0	5.4	3.2	8.2	0.6	0.1
2015	84.5	1.1	1.0	3.4	3.2	-	6.4	0.3
2016	83.4	0.2	1.9	3.9	3.5	0.1	6.7	0.4

Source: Author’s own data, based on data from KCTI (2017)

According to the data consulted from KTO (2017), Korean tourists are now traveling more than ever because travel prices have dropped (KCTI, 2017), encouraging more people to go on vacation.



**Figure 5: Reasons to choose a destination**

**Source:** Author’s own computations based on data from [KTO \(2017\)](#)

**3.2.6. Source of information about the destination**

The majority of Korean tourists are informed about the destination through blogs and specialized websites (40.5%), as [Lee \(2017\)](#) states, which are progressively increasing in importance compared to traditional media. Friends and acquaintances represent 16.7% of the search for information before making a decision and travel agency websites (11.0%) are the third most popular source used to decide a destination.

**3.2.7. Types of visits**

According to KTO data for 2017, self-prepared trips represented the majority (59.7%) of those made by Koreans. In addition, organized group trips also remained an important means of traveling abroad (25.3%). The preference for these trips was even greater among those without previous experience of trips abroad. Also, it was the preferred formula for overcoming the culture gap and language barrier. Other types of travel that Korean tourists use are semi-organized trips (group travel, but with greater freedom), representing 7%, and Airtel<sup>1</sup> (freer trip type with only airline –air- and hotel –tel-included) representing 8%. In the coming years, it is foreseeable that individual trips will register significant growth, especially among more experienced travelers ([KCTI, 2017](#)).

For Koreans, self-travel is frequent in Asian destinations and is also beginning to increase for further-off destinations ([ETC, 2011](#)). Travelers usually now have greater purchasing power, a greater command of foreign languages, a higher educational level and are aged between 25 and 35 years old ([Tourism Australia, 2008](#)).

**3.2.8. Accommodation**

According to data from [KTO \(2017\)](#), Korean tourists mostly stay in cheap hotels (35.1%). This is due to the fact that the majority traditionally travels in organized groups, which negotiate the price of tourist packs, reducing the quality of accommodation. However, it is also due to one of the unique characteristics of this market: they spend little on accommodation and a lot on shopping, as shown below.

**3.2.9. Expenditure structure**

Europe is the leading destination for luxury tourism worldwide, due to the global positioning of brands in the sector, as can be seen from [Europa Press \(2017\)](#). [Page \(2007\)](#) defined luxury tourism as “the consumption of an expensive and high quality experience” and stated that “luxury is a very

<sup>1</sup> [Kwak \(2018\)](#). This term is only used in South Korea. “It is not a package organized as a group, but for those who want to travel freely because there is no mandatory option to travel. The travel agency hires only the airline and the hotel.” February 26, 2018. Tourtips. February 26, 2018 [online]. [http://www.tourtips.com/ap/tboard/tour\\_talk/?aid=154597&m=y](http://www.tourtips.com/ap/tboard/tour_talk/?aid=154597&m=y) [see: May 2, 2018].



profitable market segment for the tourism sector and high quality, due to the high margins that luxury products have, where price is not the only factor of discrimination. More important are the elements of added value, the exclusivity of the experience and, above all, the unique character for the consumer” (Page, 2007).

Madrid and Barcelona stand out among the best positioned European cities for tourists looking for exclusive purchases, according to international consumers, tying for second place on the Global Shopper Index published by the Economist Intelligence Unit (Casa Asia, 2017). This is confirmed by the figures for international tourist spending in Spain in 2015. That year saw a record figure of €67.385 million, which represented an increase of 6.8% on 2014 according to the Survey Tourism Expenditure (EGATUR, 2015), published by the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Energy and Tourism. In addition, the issuing markets that play a leading role in purchases in Spain are China and Russia.

Tourism leaving South Korea increased dramatically in the years 2014 and 2015, meaning it is necessary to pay special attention to the data collected during those years. It is particularly striking that South Korea saw an annual growth of 114%, as can be seen from the following table:

**Table 4: Main issuing markets for expenditure on tax-free purchases in Spain**

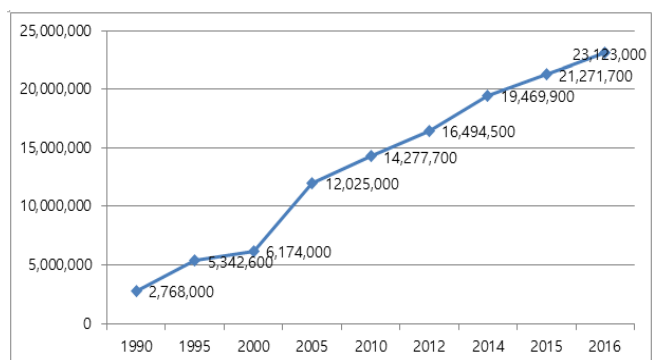
Rank	Country	Share Market (%)	Evol. June 2014/2015 (%)
1	China	32.05	85
2	Russia	12.92	-14
3	Morocco	3.74	49
4	U.S.A	3.37	45
5	Mexico	2.97	41
6	Argentina	2.93	21
7	Brazil	2.45	16
8	Hong Kong	2.07	52
9	South Korea	1.96	114
10	Venezuela	1.90	-17

**Source:** Author’s own computations based on data from the EY study center (June 2014-June 2015)

In Table 5, we observe that spending on purchases (114%) increased faster than the number of Korean tourists (46%) who traveled internationally in 2015<sup>2</sup>. Below, we see the total travel expenses by Korean tourists.

**Table 5: Travelling expenses for Korean tourists**

Years	Travel expenses USD(thousand)	%
1990	2,768,000	17.5
1995	5,342,600	49.7
2000	6,174,000	55.3
2005	12,025,000	22.0
2010	14,277,700	29.4
2012	16,494,500	6.2
2014	19,469,900	12.3
2015	21,271,700	9.3
2016	23,123,000	8.0



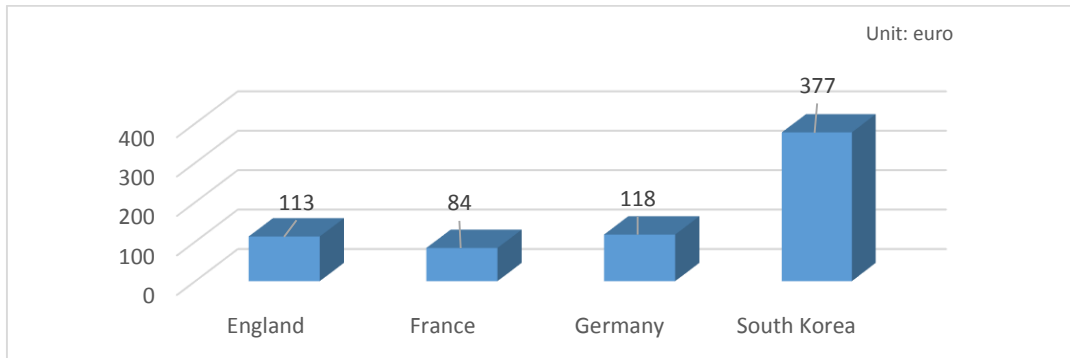
**Figure 6: Travel expenses for Korean tourists**

**Source:** Author’s own computations based on data from KCTI (2017)

<sup>2</sup> Figure 4, from 2014 to 2015 with an annual growth of 46%



As already mentioned, the average daily tourist expenditure per capita of South Koreans (€377) is much higher than that of European tourists. According to data analyzed by The Shopping and Quality Tourism Institute - INE (2017), the average total expenditure per tourist from outside the EU rises to €2,186 and is also more than double the world average (€1,027). The leaders in tourism expenditure are from the Philippines (€2,782), China (€2,593) and Korea (€2,229) (Europa press, 2017), as can be seen in the following figure.

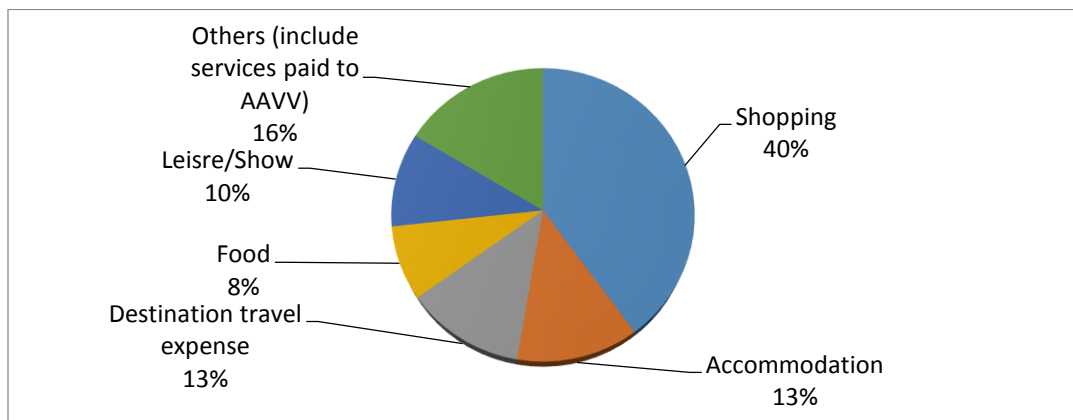


**Figure 7: Per capita average daily tourist expenditures**

Source: Author’s own computations based on data from The Shopping and Quality Tourism Institute, 2017

**3.2.10. Distribution of travel expenses**

It should be noted that the term “travel expenses” can be understood very broadly, but the basic classification would be the one shown in the following graph (Figure 8).



**Figure 8: Distribution of Korean tourist travel expenses**

Source: Author’s own computations based on data from KCTI (2017)

The above figure shows the effort Koreans make to save money on travel, food and the stay so that they can spend a lot of money in the section referred to as “shopping”. Purchases include all kinds of luxury items, due to Koreans’ interest in internationally popular branded products such as handbags. Also tax-free shopping makes it cheaper than if they bought them in South Korea.

The size of the Korean luxury handbag market grew every year from 2012 to 2017, and in the latter year was ranked fourth in the world after the United States, China and Japan, as reported by Sung (2018). According to Euromonitor International (2019), in 2019 South Korea would surpass the whole of Europe as a region in the purchase of luxury bags and draw closer to third position.

**Table 6: Size of the Korean luxury handbag market (2012-2017)**

Year	Market size US dollars (thousand)
2012	1,735,573
2013	1,940,685
2014	2,139,068
2015	2,333,136
2016	2,557,406
2017	2,734,428

**Source:** Author’s own computations based on data from [Sung \(2018\)](#)

It is not only the handbag market that is important in South Korea, however, but also those of other luxury products. According to the survey conducted by [Gallup Korea \(2017\)](#), as the following table shows (Table 7), the Koreans’ favorite luxury products were Chanel, Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Prada.

**Table 7: Koreans’ favorite luxury products**

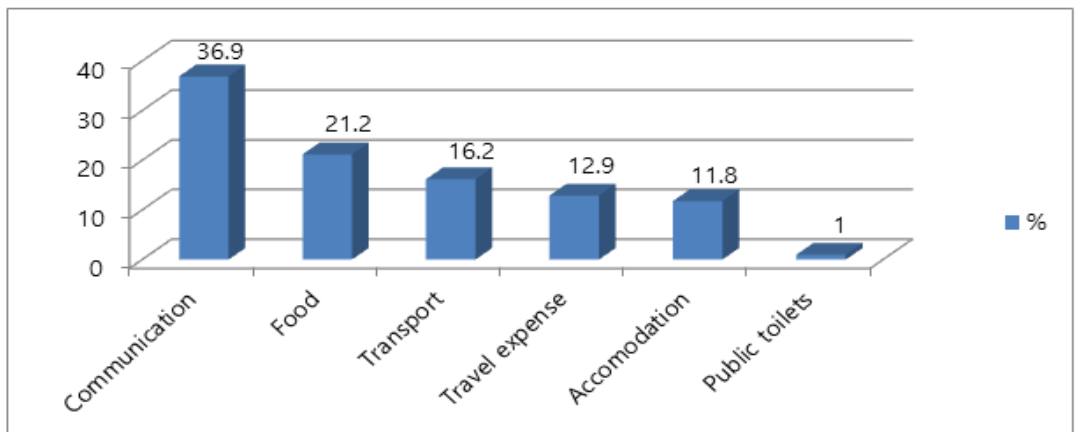
Rank	Luxury brands
1	Chanel
2	Gucci
3	Louis vuitton
4	Prada

**Source:** Author’s own computations based on data from [Gallup Korea \(2017\)](#)

Now we will discuss why Korean tourists may feel uncomfortable when traveling.

**3.3. Problems encountered by Korean tourists when traveling to Barcelona**

Tourists’ degree of satisfaction with the destination influences not only the possibility of their repeating the trip but also the positive diffusion of said destination when they communicate with companions or post comments on different personal communication channels. In order to improve tourism services and better serve Korean tourists, it is necessary to ascertain their desires and interests, their opinion about the quality of the services encountered and whether their preferences or expectations are met. According to [Lee’s \(2017\)](#) data on Korean tourists, the areas in which destinations should improve are communication, food, transportation, travel expenses, accommodation and public toilets.



**Figure 9: Problems of Korean tourists when traveling to Barcelona**

**Source:** Author’s own computations based on [Lee’s data \(2017\)](#)

As we see from the graph, communication is usually a major problem, since most Koreans are adults who do not have a solid command of English. Also, despite their interest in Mediterranean food, Korean tourists do not easily adapt to Western food. A further problem that worries a significant number of Korean tourists is transportation, not only due to the communication barrier but also a lack of signs, which makes it difficult for them to move around the city using the train, bus or subway.

What is more, Koreans usually find the accommodation uncomfortable since, when coming in groups, they usually opt for the cheapest available and low-budget hotels do not usually match their minimum expectations before starting the trip, summarized by [Parode \(2018\)](#) thus: “There is no control over hotel and restaurant options when traveling with a tourist group. Although tour operators do everything possible to find quality accommodation and adapt to dietary preferences, you cannot change your hotel if it does not meet your expectations.”

Another particular grievance is access to public toilets, although this is not the most critical problem, but rather an inconvenience for Korean tourists in the city, when they try to use one and it does not work or is dirty.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Since Barcelona is marked to a greater extent and in larger parts with its tourism activities, which makes the city a very successful urban tourism model ([Jiménez and Prats, 2006](#); [Font and Sánchez, 2014](#); [Serrano and Figueroa, 2014](#); [Palomeque, 2015](#)) and the Korean tourism market has consequently grown, year by year to gradually become the second largest tourist issuer in Asia after China. In addition, the statistical trend in their perspective is quite positive, as apparently visible from the various data gathered for this research.

From the documentary analysis of our findings, it could be concluded that Koreans, who travel to Barcelona as tourists, mostly come from three Korean urban areas: viz., Seoul, Gyeonggi and Busan, which are considered to be the most industrial regions therein. It is amazing to find that Korean tourists travel on different dates than chosen by European tourists. Since the dates of their visits coincide with periods of low tourist occupation in Barcelona, so the management has ample time to represent great opportunities to seasonally adjust the adequate products and appropriate services available for the tourists in the city. A greater number of trips are made outside Korea for tourism in the months of January, July and August, being their holiday periods, whereas The month of January had to be especially noted as key period in terms of seasonality.

The Koreans who travel most are aged between 31-40 years. According to the KCTI, more than half of the Korean tourists have an average stay of 3 to 5 days at their destination, although the studies undertaken and consulted show that travelers in their twenties stay for longer period. The main motivational attractions for Koreans to travel abroad are leisure and business, besides visiting their families and friends.

Although Blogs, specialized websites and personal recommendations are some of the main sources of choosing any destination, still we found that the majority of trips made by Koreans are self-prepared, but those trips organized by group travel sources also remain an important means of traveling abroad.

According to the data acquired from [KTO \(2017\)](#), Korean tourists mostly stay in cheaper hotels. However, the distribution of Koreans' travel expenses are categorized in the following order: first purchases, then accommodation and finally for food. As far as the spending is concerned, Koreans tend to spend €2,186 on a trip, which is more than double the world average (€1,027), as estimated according to the available data.

We have further found in this study that communication is the factor that causes the most worries to Korean tourists, since their low and inadequate command over English and other Western languages hinders their understanding of the local culture. Secondly, they are not sure about the local foods because it is absolutely very different from their own foods. Moreover, inter and intra city public transport, travel expenses, their poor quality and poorly located accommodation (usually staying outside the city center) and lack of clean public toilets in Barcelona, are other factors that they find of greater concerns. In contrast, and according to what we have described in the previous year, the Koreans love to travel to Barcelona to make luxury purchases in emblematic places such as, Paseo de Gracia. According to [Naranjo \(2019\)](#), in Spain during the first quarter of 2019, more than 70% of tax-free sales took place in Barcelona (51%) and then in Madrid (22%), with an undisputed prominence of buyers from China, Russia and Korea.

## 5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Although Koreans are not yet valued as an important group of tourists to receive in a brand city, they should be taken into account in accordance with the results obtained when crossing data from the different studies consulted here, as these provide the following accurate analysis of how Koreans travel: they usually have high purchasing power, so they buy luxury items, mostly garments and accessories from internationally known brands, while saving on accommodation and travel expenses.

In summary, the basic guidelines for Catalan or Barcelona tourism actors to follow are: improve the quality of service by increasing friendliness and attention given to tourists, take the cultural gap in gastronomy into account by offering more familiar options for Koreans, as well as translating menus into Korean and improving basic signage for moving around Barcelona, making it clearer and more visual.

Here are some future recommendations for removing the barriers and making Barcelona a prime destination for Korean tourists.

### 5.1. Communication

Communication is an important factor in tourism ([Garrido, 2005](#)). The same applies to Korean tourists. To improve this area, a website translated into Korean and informative brochures in Korean would be valued. The Internet is fast and economical in comparison with traditional means of delivering tourist information, such as brochures, newspapers, or magazines, and is increasing in importance as a means of tourism information because the world can be connected 24 hours a day. Especially in developed countries where the information rate is high, the Internet is expected to be used as a means of delivering tourist information to replace the role of traditional media. Efforts must be made to connect Barcelona with Korean websites. Additionally, it would be advisable to provide a phone number with different options so that Korean tourists know who to contact in an emergency. The first of these options should be for emergencies (passport theft, medical assistance), and the second for other types of services, such as taxis and store assistance (which can also increase the cost of travel).

### 5.2. Food

Gastronomy has increased in importance among the main motivations for travel to numerous destinations in recent years, including Barcelona ([Orgaz and López-Guzmán, 2015](#)). Food is an important factor in tourism ([Mauricio and Wilmer, 2017](#)). In this sense, it is important to project a good image of restaurants and food. To achieve this, it is necessary to have a Korean translation of menus in restaurants. In Barcelona restaurants, the menus are usually translated into other European languages, but not Asian ones. Another aspect that would make Korean tourists use restaurants more would be training waiters to break the cultural barrier that now separates them from these customers.

### 5.3. Transportation

It is necessary to strengthen the support provided on public transport. Signage must be clear and visual to overcome the language barrier. For example, if we look at a map of the subway exit, we must immediately see the point from which we started and the different directions that can be taken, together with the best known sites. Some Korean tourists use rental cars, so it would be a good idea to have information about this in Korean. Similarly, a Korean translation is needed for the city tour bus audio in Barcelona.

### 5.4. Travel expenses

Purchases and consumption define the product of the Barcelona brand (Lojo and Cànoves, 2015). Purchases had the highest percentage (33.2%) in the distribution of travel expenses (Figure 8). Increasing the visibility of tax-free shopping would have a positive impact among Korean tourists. Tax-free means saving on purchases made when traveling to certain countries abroad, since the fees or taxes levied on some products are reimbursed (Rubio, 2018). It should be taken into account that travelers from outside the EU are exempt from paying VAT on purchases for an amount above €90.15 (Global Blue, 2017). This is widely known among Korean tourists, which is why many will ask for a tax-free receipt or invoice when shopping, although if they do not, it is advisable to offer it. Many will look for establishments that offer this type of facility, so having this service and advertising it is a clear competitive advantage. The invoice, together with the product, is shown to Customs upon leaving the EU and the amount is refunded by means of the tourist's preferred method. Many Koreans then try to spend that money again in duty-free stores at the airport.

### 5.5. Accommodation

As we have already mentioned, Korean tourists prefer low-cost and high-quality facilities (Figure 5). Thus, if Barcelona wishes to increase the number of Korean tourists it receives, it must have a wide range of accommodation options at average prices. The fact that Koreans travel in a group can be attributed to the fact that the cost of the trip is reduced to a minimum. Therefore, the expansion of low-cost accommodation would be an effective tool for attracting Korean tourists in general.

### 5.6. Public toilets

One of the disadvantages of destinations such as Barcelona, especially in the more attractive areas, is the shortage of public toilets. This contrasts sharply with South Korea, where public toilets are very numerous and clean. Building more facilities of this type would be beneficial in areas where there are high numbers of tourists.

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