Exploring Travel Interests and Constraints Among MN Hmong

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Background
As Minnesotans comprise about half of Minnesota’s traveler market (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2015), understanding the in-state population is important to attract & retain consumers and, subsequently, support communities & economies. While the state’s population continues to diversify (89.4% White in 2000, 85.3% White in 2010; U.S. Census), a rather unique Minnesota market is Hmong. In fact, Minnesota has the second highest Hmong population in the United States.

Although little research Hmong travel exists, related leisure and travel research on other immigrant groups in Minnesota reports challenges and opportunities related to leisure-related activities, including travel (Metropolitan Council, 2014; Wilhelm Stanis, Schneider, Chavez, & Shinew, 2008). The purpose of this project was to explore travel preferences & constraints among MN Hmong. Results will inform planning, marketing, and product development for Hmong tourists as a niche group in the United States and Minnesota.

Results
Travel motivations
Hmong travel for similar reasons as non-Hmong: to get away, relax, and visit attractions or appealing destinations.

Generational differences
Elders were unaccustomed to the leisure travel concept and indicated resources were better spent elsewhere.

“For Hmong parents, the vacation always has to involve family. Visiting family.”

“Our parents and the older generation, their idea of vacation is not going to work. Like my dad, two Fridays ago, he took a vacation day on Friday and didn’t go to work and he wanted to take that day to go farming. So that was his idea of vacation.” (Young Generation)

Implications
Hmong ideas to attract their travel groups
1. Build word of mouth - promote travel from within Hmong community by partnering with Hmong groups; connect to social media where Hmong are active.
2. Assess & improve infrastructure to accommodate large, multi-generational groups.
3. Highlight package deals that cater to families.
4. Organize festivals, events, and tours catering to Hmong groups & introduce population to new areas

Marketing & planning
Similarities exist in travel motivations between Hmong and non-Hmong travelers, so broad efforts to attract leisure travelers will be at least somewhat effective for traveling Hmong.

Addressing Hmong constraints
1. Perceived discrimination & safety concerns - While fear is not easily overcome, efforts to welcome and support non-White travelers will likely be noticed, shared, and lead to travel opportunities.
2. Group capacity – Improvements can be made in every phase of travel, from parking to room size and onsite accommodations

Methods

Approach: Focus groups, Fall 2014, in socially valued spaces
Language: Group preference: Hmong, English, or combination
Sample: Convenience; 57 Hmong MN’s ($50/incentive)
Young: Unmarried ages 19-31 (n=20)
Middle: age 28-50 married w/ children (n=25)
Elders: age 58-59 (n=12)