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ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRESS OF THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN TRAVEL COMPANIES

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Abstract: *In the conditions of transformation of national economy and aggravation of competition at the travel market, companies of the Ukrainian small travel business have an important problem related to the increase of efficiency of the services quality management. One of the ways for solving this problem is to form the quality management system in travel companies for creating a competitive tourism product that can meet the needs of foreign and domestic consumers, promptly response to the market demand. This problem became particularly important after the coming into force of the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement. The aim of the article is to determine directions in improving the quality management system in travel companies for increasing the quality of services rendered to tourists and economic growth. The hypothesis of the research consists in the assumption that assessing levels of the quality management system development is a foundation for its improvement and increasing the competitiveness of travel companies. This hypothesis will be confirmed by studying 10 small travel business companies that are in Odessa Region, Ukraine. The method of expert evaluation was used for the study. The hypothesis of the research is proved. The experience in the experimental verification of a suggested approach for assessing levels of the quality management system development in 10 studied travel companies shows that the suggested customized approaches and research techniques can form modern instruments for diagnosing a current state of the corporate quality management, and are a foundation for improving the quality management system.*

Keywords*: quality management, travel companies, method of expert evaluation, competition.*

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2020 the global tourism decline could reach 25% and lead to a reduction in jobs by 12-14%. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has called on governments to support small and medium-sized enterprises in tourism, as they make up 80% of the industry. The Travel & Tourism sector is uniquely exposed, and we estimate 50 million jobs globally are at risk.

(Open letter to Governments from WTTC and the Travel & Tourism sector, 2020). Strict quarantine measures and policies of social distancing have forced the domestic tourism sector to look more actively for ways to improve the quality of services. At the same time, Ukraine uses less than one third of the available tourism and recreation potential ability now, according to the information provided by the Global Economic Forum. As estimated by the experts, revenues to the budgets of all levels may be up to 10 bln USD per a year in the full unleashing of the Ukrainian tourism potential; and similar sums are gained by countries comparable to Ukraine with their tourism-recreation potential capacity (The region's economy in 2015: new realities and opportunities in the context of the initiated reforms, 2016). This fact shows that travel business companies have a great influence on the Ukrainian economic growth and reserves for increasing the tourist traffic volumes and improving the services quality management in the conditions of the economic development. The article presents methods for determining levels of the quality management system development in travel companies. These methods are designed to increase the competitiveness of travel companies in the conditions of the tourism market globalisation and implementation of international standards ISO 9001:2015. In 2015, the ISO, International Standardization Organization, entrenched new versions of standards – ISO 9000:2015 and ISO 9001:2015. As in many other countries in the world, the National Standards Body of Ukraine entrenches such standards as identical national standards according to the National Standard of Ukraine. The basis for standards of the quality management system is formed by seven principles: orientation to customers; leadership; engagement of personnel; procedural approach; improvement; decision-making on grounds of the actual data; management of communications and relations (New versions of standards ISO 9000: 2015 and ISO 9001: 2015, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researchers think that one of the most important problems for the Ukrainian companies is formation and entrenchment of the quality management system that will make it possible to increase the level of competitiveness of travel business companies both at the domestic and international markets (Bedradina & Nezdoyminov, 2019). Presently, over 1 million of enterprises have the functioning certified quality management systems in 176 countries throughout the world. The biggest number of companies (about 250 thousands), having the certified quality management systems, function in China. However, in Ukraine this number is lower than, for example, in China – by 3.5 times, in Spain – by 30 times, in Italy – by 40 times, as calculated per a thousand of habitants according to the ISO standards, series 9000. Herewith, from the viewpoint of experts, not more than 20% of certified quality management systems actually work in Ukraine (Buryak, 2013). On 01.07.2019, the National Agency for Certification of Quality Management Systems – State Enterprise “Ukrmetrteststandard” issued circa 600 certificates for the quality management system. But, just 20 enterprises have the certified integrated management systems (The official site of the certification system of control systems of SE "Ukrmetrteststandart", 2019). This is one of the significant factors negatively affecting the integration of travel companies in the EU market. This situation is a cause for weakening the competitive positions of the Ukrainian travel companies at the domestic market.

The modern approach for entrenching the quality management is a concept “Total Quality Management” (TQM) or complex quality management requiring to have the

self-assessment for setting goals for improving the activity of producers of goods and services (Ozarovska, 2018). The researchers think that the last decade is characterised with the implementation of integrated quality management systems as main international quality standards. It allows getting certain external and internal advantages (Hlyebova & Karchevs'kyy, 2015; Psomas & Antony, 2015; Gomez et al., 2017). The Polish scientists pay attention to the dynamic progress of ecological manufacturing decisions and quality management systems regarding the environment, which enable managers of companies to increase the efficient use of resources, plan actions for reducing emissions, actions i.r.t. social responsibility (Zaremba-Warnke, 2015; Żemigała, 2017) and necessary monitoring of quality of the tourism product under the procedure for assessing its components (Johann & Anastassova, 2014). The important case for the corporate quality management is criteria and methods for measuring the management efficacy, appraising the quality management systems. These problems were studied in 72 Spanish service companies by using the questionnaire method (Jaca & Psomas, 2015). The researchers study problems of using the model "EQFM" for managing the business productiveness in companies associated with the tourism in Slovakia, and accentuate the fact that entrepreneurs should response to the market demand and have an opportunity to adapt to such changes. The travel business should not be focused just on the financial side of the business, but on more flexible factors, such as non-financial indices. These aspects include, in particular, the ability to study, innovative thinking of employees, use of the available information, ability to constantly improve relations with clients or suppliers (Dobrovič et al., 2019). The positive impact of tourism is demonstrated by the need for state policies that support the initiative of tourism enterprises and increase the demand for domestic and international travel (Suhel & Bashir, 2018). The scientists presented a systematic overview of multiple-criteria decision-making (MCDM) used in assessing the quality of services and marketing (Mardani, Jusoh, Zavadskas, Khalifah, & Nor, 2015; Câmara & Maracajá, 2020). Thus, the scientific paradigm of the quality management covers the policy formation in the sphere of quality in order to set goals and processes for reaching these goals in the sphere of quality by planning, assuring, controlling and improving the quality.

METHODS

The methodical and organisational approaches to the process of assessment of the quality management system are provided in the international standard "ISO 9001" and envisaged in the EFQM (EFQM Excellence Model, 2013). It is considered that the model is a scheme of self-assessment of a current organisational quality management system for determining its aptness level in achieving goals set (Sternad et al., 2017, Edgerman, 2018). We assume that the main problem in assessing the quality management system in the travel business consists in the fact that it is impossible to assess specific components of the system qualitatively; and in this case one uses the method of expert evaluation that is based on subjective ideas of experts and not accompanied with traditional estimations. The expert procedure is based on the method of evaluation of compared objects. The comparison method makes it possible to determine the most importation selection priorities (Naveh & Marcus, 2005; Baitsar & Skolozdra, 2013; De Nisco, Riviezzo & Napolitano, 2015; Farajian & Hadi, 2019). In terms of our research, we therefore have intention to carry out the analysis of the quality management system in travel companies, which is based on the expert assessment of the level of basic components of the quality management system: quality planning, assurance, control and

improvement (ISO 9000:2015.Quality management systems — Requirements, 2015). For setting the consistency of experts` opinions about ranks of *n* components of the quality management system: quality planning, assurance, control and improvement, Kendall's coefficient of concordance was used (Rita, Brochado, & Dimova, 2019; Danjumbo Comfort, 2019; Vera, Alfonso, & Reinoso, 2019). It was calculated under the formula (1):

$$W = \frac{12S}{m^2(n^3 - n)}, \quad (1)$$

where:

$$S = \sum_{i=1}^{n}(\sum_{j=1}^{m} x_{ij} - \frac{1}{2}m(n+1))^2.$$

For further study, an expert commission was created for the employees of the investigated travel agencies and evaluation components were identified (number of components n = 4, number of experts m = 3). Experts' opinion was collected through a questionnaire. Experts made an assessment of the degree of significance of parameters by assigning them a ranking number. The 1st rank is assigned to the highest-rated component. If an expert recognizes several components as equivalent, they are assigned the same rank number. Is based on the survey data, a summary rank matrix (Table 1) and a matrix by rank sum (Table 2) were compiled.

Table 1. Summary rank matrix

№	Components of ranking	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3
1	Quality planning	1	2	1
2	Quality assurance	2	1	2
3	Quality control	4	4	4
4	Quality improvement	3	3	3

Table 2. Rank matrix

Composition	Expert			Sum of ranks	d	d^2
	1	2	3			
x_1	1	2	1	4	-3.5	12.25
x_2	2	1	2	5	-2.5	6.25
x_3	3	3	3	12	4.5	20.25
x_4	4	4	4	9	1.5	2.25
∑	10	10	10	30		41

where: $d = \sum x_{ij} - \frac{\sum\sum x_{ij}}{n} = \sum x_{ij} - 7.5$ (2)

Checking the correctness of the matrix composition based on the calculation of the checksum:

$$\sum x_{ij} = \frac{(1+n)^n}{2} = \frac{(1+4)^4}{2} = 10 \quad (3)$$

The sum of the columns of the matrix is equal to each other and the checksum, therefore, the matrix is made correctly. The analysis of the significance of the studied components is given, which are distributed as follows in significance (see Table 3).

Table 3. Location of factors by importance

Composition	Sum of ranks
x_1	4
x_2	5
x_4	9
x_3	12

The following is an estimate of the average degree of agreement of the opinions of all experts on the calculation of the coefficient of concordance according to the formula:

$$W = \frac{12S}{m^2(n^3-n)} \quad (4)$$

where: S = 41, n = 4, m = 3

$$W = \frac{12 \times 41}{3^2(4^3-4)} = 0.911$$

The coefficient of concordance equals (W = 0.911) indicates that there is a high degree of consistency of the experts' opinions. We estimate the significance of the coefficient of concordance. For this purpose, we calculate the Pearson matching criterion by the formula:

$$x^2 = \frac{12S}{mn(n+1)} = n(m-1)W \quad (5)$$

$\chi^2 = 3(4\text{-}1)0.911 = 8.2$

The calculated χ2 is comparable to the table value for the number of degrees of freedom K = n-1 = 4-1 = 3 and at a given level of significance α = 0.05. Since χ2 is a calculated 8.2 ≥ table (7.81473), then W = 0.911 - the value is not accidental, and therefore the results obtained are meaningful and can be used in further studies. On the basis of obtaining the sum of ranks (Table 4), it is possible to calculate the indicators of weight of the considered parameters. We transform the poll matrix into a transformed rank matrix (see Table 4) by the formula:

$$S_{ij} = X_{max} - X_{ij} \quad (6)$$

where: Xmax = 4

Table 4. The matrix of transformed ranks

Composition	Expert			Σ	Value λ
	1	2	3		
1	3	2	3	8	0.4444
2	2	3	2	7	0.3889
3	0	0	0	0	0
4	1	1	1	3	0.1667
Total				18	1

Evaluations of indicators of relative importance of the components of the ranking contained in table 4, indicate that the group of experts preferred the importance of the first, second and fourth studied components, and the calculation of the coefficient of

concordance indicates that there is a high level of expert coherence. Estimating levels of development of the quality management system in the travel business specifies the study of four mentioned components of the quality management, which are estimative criteria respectively. Each of four criteria has five sub-criteria. The highest rate for each of twenty estimative criteria is 5 points. The maximum result for each management system component is 25 points. The functional assessment model combines twenty estimative factors. The quality management system was assessed in ten travel companies. For collecting the requisite information, the inquiry was held with the help of questionnaires for heads, managers of travel companies and independent experts. The average point for each of twenty assessment sub-criteria was calculated according to the formula (7):

$$J_{c.} = \frac{J_{к.} + J_{м.} + J_{н.е.}}{3} \quad (7)$$

where:

$J_{c.}$ – average point of each question given in the questionnaire;
$J_{к.}$ – average rate for the head of the company;
$J_{м.}$ – average rate for managers;
$J_{н.е.}$ – average rate of independent experts.

Having reconciled the experts' opinions regarding the components of the quality management system, we have a methodological basis for evaluating the quality management system in place in the tourism companies and further ranking of the studied enterprises.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the recommendations of International Standard ISO 9004 for assessing the current quality management system of the organization (ISO 9004:2018. Quality management. Quality of an organization. Guidance to achieve sustained success, 2018), we set 5 assessment levels of the quality management system in travel business companies according to the 100-point scale (Table 5).

Table 5. Scale of assessment of progress levels of the quality management system in the travel companies

Levels	Scale of assessment, points	Description of the quality management status
1	0-20	No activities
2	21-40	Not constant activities, from time to time
3	41-60	Activities not in all the aspects
4	61-80	Constant and systematic activities
5	81-100	Highly efficient activities

Source: the author's own research on the basis of the survey of the experts.

This survey was carried out on the model of ten travel operators in Odessa Region, Ukraine. They are small companies, and have been implementing their quality management systems for more than 2 years already. All the information about companies included to the selection is given in a disembodied form. So, they got two-digit numbers, under which they would be named in the process of presentation of results of our research. The expert surveying results regarding the first component of the quality management system, “quality

planning", are given in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of the survey according to the component "quality planning"

Name of a component of the quality management system	Highest rate	Actual rates of companies									
		01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
1. Quality planning											
1.1. Setting goals and strategic tasks	5	5	4	4	3,5	3,5	3	3	3,5	3	3
1.2. Setting ways and methods for achieving goals	5	4	3,5	4	4	3	3,5	3	4	4	3,5
1.3. Details of business processes	5	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,5	2,5	2,5	2	2,5	2	2,5
1.4. Collection and analysis of the information about the business environment	5	5	4,5	5	2,5	2,5	3	3	3	4	2,5
1.5. Planning of financial resources for increasing the quality	5	4,5	2,5	3,5	2,5	2,5	3	2	3	2	2,5
Total points	25	22	18	20	16	14	15	13	16	15	14

Source: the author's own research on the basis of the survey of the experts.

By analysing this data about the results of the comparative assessment according to the component "quality planning", we should note that the absolute leader is company 01, which is behind just by three points from the maximum result according to this index. One can also note this great pull away of the pair of leaders, companies 03 and 02, from other travel companies. Then, there are "mediocre" companies – companies 04 and 08. Company 07 should be classified as a complete outsider: according to the index level, the said company is behind the leader`s maximum result by 9 points. As assessed by the experts, the quality planning in all the companies meets the market requirements and business goals. Then, we would like to review the expert survey results according to the component "quality assurance". The final results are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Results of the survey according to the component "quality assurance"

Name of a component of the quality management system	Highest rate	Actual rates of companies									
		01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
2. Quality assurance											
2.1. Assurance of the quality of services in compliance with the provisions of the current laws	5	4	3,5	4	3,5	3	3	2,5	3	2,5	2,5
2.2. Correction of non-conformances in compliance with the provisions of the current laws	5	4,5	3,5	3,5	3	3,5	3,5	3	3	3	3
2.3. Provision of the personnel with requisite quality documents	5	3,5	3	3,5	2,5	2,5	3,5	2	3	2,5	2,5
2.4. Updating of instructions for the quality of services	5	4	4	4	3	4	3,5	3	4	3	3
2.5. Prevention of reclamations about the quality of services	5	4	4	4	3	2	2,5	1,5	3	3	2
Total points	25	20	18	19	16	15	16	12	16	14	13

Source: the author's own research on the basis of the survey of the experts.

As in the first case, the absolute leader is company 01 according to the component "quality assurance". This company is behind the basic value jut by 5 points. As opposed to the first case, not one, but two travel companies 10 and 07 should be classified as complete outsiders, as these companies are behind by 12 and 13 points according to this

index. Further, we should analyse the survey results according to the component "quality control" with the help of Table 8.

Table 8. Results of the survey according to the component "quality control"

Name of a component of the quality management system	Highest rate	Actual rates of companies									
		01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
3. Quality control											
3.1. Quality control at each stage of the business process	5	5	4	5	4	3	3	2,5	4	3	2,5
3.2. Setting criteria of assessment of results about the quality	5	5	4	4	3,5	3,5	3,5	2,5	3	2,5	2
3.3. Determination of a consumers` satisfaction level	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	3	4	3	3
3.4. Engagement of managers and experts in the quality control procedure	5	5	3	3,5	3,5	2,5	3	2	2,5	3	2,5
3.5. Conformance of gained results to the set goals of the quality policy	5	4	3	3,5	3	2	2,5	2	3,5	2,5	2
Total points	25	23	19	21	18	15	16	12	17	14	12

Source: the author's own research on the basis of the survey of the experts.

As in the previous case, the absolute leader is company 01, according to the component "quality assurance". According to the value, this company does not get the maximum results, just 2 points. One can also note this great pull away of three leaders, the same companies, from other travel enterprises. Not one, but two travel companies, 07 and 10, can be classified as complete outsiders as they are behind the leader by 11 points according to the level of their values. Thus, the heads of these companies should also follow the principle of continuousness for improving the mechanism of quality control. The quality control system shall assure the control at every stage of the technological cycle and according to all the parameters of the tourism product. The task of control should be set concurrently with formation of goals for improving the quality in the business. We provide the expert survey results according to the component "quality improvement" in travel companies in Table 9.

Table 9. Results of the survey according to the component "quality improvement"

Name of a component of the quality management system	Highest rate	Actual rate of companies									
		01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
4. Quality improvement											
4.1. Setting goals for improving the quality at every organisation level	5	4	3,5	4	3,5	3	3	2,5	3,5	3	2,5
4.2. Assurance of the personnel`s competence for a successful promotion and completion of actions for improving the quality	5	3	4	4	3	2,5	2	2	3	2,5	2
4.3. Designing and entrenchment of processes to implement actions for improving the quality of services for tourists	5	4	3,5	3,5	3,5	3	3,5	3,5	3,5	3	3,5
4.4. Integrated review of improvements in the designing of new or modified services as well as processes	5	5	3	4	3	3,5	2,5	2,5	4	2,5	3
4.5. Acknowledgment and rewarding of the personnel for improvements	5	4	3	3,5	3	3	3	2,5	3	3	3
Total points	25	20	17	19	16	15	14	13	17	14	14

Source: the author's own research on the basis of the survey of the experts.

By analysing the information in Table 9, the focus should be placed on this certain dynamics of the comparative assessment results according to the component "quality improvement" in travel companies-leaders. As in the previous case, the absolute leader is company 01, according to the component "quality improvement". Company 03 is close to it and falls behind the leader just by 1 point. One can also observe a significant conversion of the top three that includes company 08. We may classify travel company 07 as complete outsider. It is behind the absolute leader by 7 points according to the index level. It is recommended for this company to design and to implement business processes for executing projects about improvements in the whole organisation, to monitor, to analyse and to audit the tourism production planning, to motivate and to recompense the personnel for improving the quality of services. After collecting and estimating all the necessary expert rates, there is an opportunity to assess the general quality management system in the studied travel companies. Table 10 gives a general expert assessment of levels of the development of the quality management system in 10 companies.

Table 10. General expert assessment of components of the quality management system in travel companies

Name of a component of the quality management system	Highest rate	Actual rates of companies									
		01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
1. Quality planning	25	22	18	20	16	14	15	13	16	15	14
2. Quality assurance	25	20	18	19	16	15	16	12	16	14	13
3. Quality control	25	23	19	21	18	15	16	12	17	14	12
4. Quality improvement	25	20	17	19	16	15	14	13	17	14	14
General rate, points	100	85	72	79	66	59	61	50	66	57	53

Source: the author's own research on the basis of the survey of the experts.

For clarity of the results of the survey of the quality management system, we present a graphic of the profile of travel companies (Fig. 1).

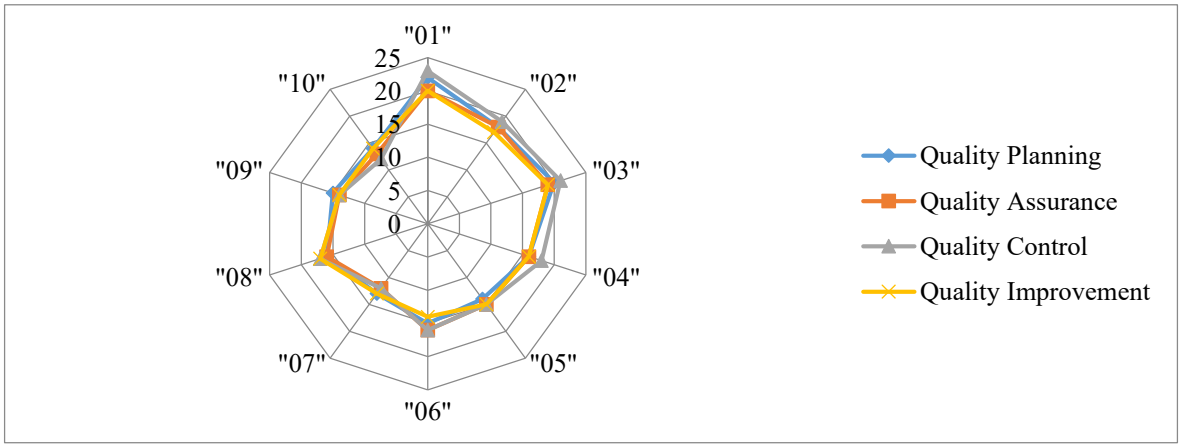

Figure 1. Profile of travel companies according to the components of the quality management system (Source: the author's own research on the basis of the survey of the experts).

Within the methods used in our approach, we set 5 levels of progress (maturity) of the quality management system in the studied companies. The implementation of the study results about the levels of progress of the quality management system in the selected travel companies is shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Levels of progress of the quality management system in travel companies

Level	Rate (points)	Travel companies	Description of the state of management
1	2	3	4
I	0 – 20	–	The quality management is non-systematic, goals are not set. For a further progress, it is necessary to substantially reconsider the business principles.
II	21 – 40	–	The quality management has a potential capacity for the progress, but these opportunities are low implemented. The heads need to clearly set goals and design a development strategy for the quality management system on the basis of the quality.
III	41 – 60	05,07,09,10	The company has a formed quality management system. It is necessary to focus on the business process optimization and quality control at every stage of the business process. In improving the quality management system, one should consider the personnel and consumer`s satisfaction.
IV	61 – 80	02,03,04,06,08	Most of aspects of the quality management system are constantly improved. It is necessary to keep the dynamics for improvements and start converting remained problematic spheres of the activity through benchmarking and other quality improvement strategies.
V	81 – 100	01	The maximum results are gained in all aspects of the managerial activities. The quality management system is benchmarking.

Source: the author's own research on the basis of the survey of the experts.

As we can see, the business managerial profile shows which studied companies have problems in “quality control” and “quality improvement”. These very aspects of the quality management system require some corporate improvements. The grouped expert assessment results make it possible for managers to get a more literal picture of the quality management status and aspects for its improvement. We do not need this system to be highly complex. It should only present needs of organisations (ISO 9000:2015. Quality management systems. Fundamentals and vocabulary, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Hence, the experience in the experimental verification of the suggested approach in assessing progress levels of the quality management system in 10 studied travel companies shows that the special designed approaches and study methods can create modern instruments for diagnosing a current state of the business quality management. By analysing the results of the survey of 10 travel companies, we can make the following conclusions: company 01 is at V level of progress of the quality management system; companies 02, 03, 04, 06, 08 are at IV level; companies 05, 07, 09 and 10 are at III level. The gained results of studying the quality management system of the companies correspond to the study results of Psomas & Antony (2015). According to them, entrenchment of the quality management system, self-assessment methods will actually assist companies in avoiding non-conformances, constantly improving the quality of products and processes, and focusing on the satisfaction of clients. Thus, the carried out researches give this foundation for implementing the provisions of international standards ISO 9000:2015 and ISO 9001:2015 in the Ukrainian travel companies so to

increase their competitive ability, goals of the economic development and quality of services for consumers. The authors believe that the article can serve as an incentive for further research and discussion of methods for assessing the quality of service of travel companies, quality management systems. Our future research will focus on a comparison of service factors which determine consumer loyalty to the tourist product.

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