

# Tourism and Politics:

## The impact of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party on Australian visitor arrivals

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### **Abstract**

*Australia has been the recipient of significant negative press as a result of the politics of Pauline Hanson and Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, with the Singapore press routinely reporting stories of what are said to be One Nation's anti-Asian and racist policies. Despite this, Singapore, a key tourism origination market for Australia, has been held up by Australian tourism officials as a bright spot for Australian tourism among Asian nations. This paper presents an empirical analysis of the impact that the Australian political situation has had on Singaporean travel to Australia, and reports that, although visitor numbers have shown an increase, many tourists are choosing not to go "down under" for their holidays, specifically in reaction to the perceived racial situation.*

### **Introduction**

Tourism, it is often claimed, creates intercultural understanding while serving as the world's most significant conduit for bringing together people from different cultures, nationalities and ways of life (McIntosh, Goeldner & Ritchie, 1995). But what happens when tourism becomes intertwined with social issues and politics?

It is intuitive that war and unrest will seriously disrupt tourism flows (Hall & O'Sullivan, 1996). One has to look no further than Sri Lanka, Cambodia or even Indonesia following its 1998 riots to see how quickly and dramatically such events can cripple a nation's tourism industry.

But how about more subtle changes where the issue is not physical danger, but rather tourists' emotional comfort?

This paper looks at the impact that the rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, and its iconic leader, Pauline Hanson, has had on Australian and Queensland tourism, based upon a study of visitors and potential visitors to Australia from Singapore, Australia's fifth largest origination market (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998).

One Nation Party has been called "anti-trade" and "racist" by competing Australian political parties (Fischer, 1998). A brief history of the rise of One Nation will follow. However, as an introductory comment, it must be stated that the paper should not be construed as a commentary on Australian racial attitudes. The degree to which racism may exist in Australia is not a relevant variable to this research; only Singaporean perceptions of the Australian racial situation are considered, and whereas the author makes no claim to be historian nor political scientist, further exploration of One Nation,

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beyond its impact upon tourism, would be best left to experts in these disciplines.

Tourism is a key sector of the Australian economy, attracting over 4 million annual arrivals (Australian Tourist Commission, 1998), generating over A\$16 billion in annual foreign exchange earnings, and employing directly or indirectly over 1 million Australians (Morse, 1998).

Australian tourism, however, had a difficult 1998. *Tourism Plus*, the Australian Tourist Commission monthly report on inbound tourism (Australian Tourist Commission, 1998), reported, for the year ended June 1998, that tourism arrivals had fallen by 0.8% from 1997, led by a decline of 13.1% from Asia (not including Japan which also fell, but a more modest 0.7%), and that for calendar year 1998 the decline was projected to be 8.0%.

The primary culprit was clearly the Asian economic malaise, with declining visitorship from hard-hit Hong Kong (-13.6%), Indonesia (-15.8%), Korea (-26.4%) and Thailand (-32.1%) causing the majority of the arrivals shortfall (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998).

But Australia's tourism problems may well extend beyond the obvious economic issues. John Morse, Managing Director of the Australian Tourist Commission, in a speech to the Australian tourism industry that never used the words 'race', 'Hanson', or 'One Nation', stated that "we have been very concerned about the recent negative publicity, and this country's perception as a friendly and welcoming country". He added, however, "while we are receiving much negative publicity, and while that publicity causes us great concern, there is no evidence yet that the publicity is having an impact on our arrivals" (Morse, 1998).

It is the objective of this paper to provide, one way or the other,

such evidence; accomplished through a test of the hypothesis that Queensland politics have had a negative, and importantly, measurable, impact upon Australian tourism.

The findings are important at two distinct levels. On the micro-level, the impact upon Australian tourism from the "Hanson factor" (Grove, 1998) will be directly considered. Of perhaps greater future importance, however, is address of the broader theoretical question of how perceived social ills, such as racism, can affect a destination's image and travellers' destination selection.

### **Background of One Nation Party**

Pauline Hanson burst onto the Australian political scene in 1996, winning a seat in the Federal Parliament in her first Federal election. Placed on the Queensland ballot as a Liberal Party candidate, Ms. Hanson lost the support of her party prior to the election for questioning Aboriginal welfare spending, but won in spite of the lack of party support, taking her seat as an Independent. Shortly thereafter (April, 1997) Hanson, a former fish and chip shop proprietor, founded Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party to, per *Time* (Blair, 1997), halt Asian immigration, cut Aborigine social programmes and curb social welfare.

As reported by the *Asian Wall Street Journal* (Witcher, 1998), in her first speech to the Australian Parliament she warned that Australia is "in danger of being swamped by Asians" and called for at least a temporary halt to immigration, cuts in special welfare benefits to Aborigines, and questioned Australia's United Nation's membership.

In June 1998, One Nation Party contested the Queensland State election, garnering 23% of the popular vote, winning eleven seats in the Queensland Parliament and effectively

placing the party in the position of power-broker in her home state.

Many political analysts felt that support of Mrs. Hanson and One Nation was a statement of protest of both the long-term ruling Labor Party and the one-term incumbent Liberal Party (Horsburgh, 1998). Australian academic M. Bhatia (1998), though calling Mrs. Hanson "explicitly racist" and "the product of gross ignorance", attributed the rise of One Nation to the following:

*It is important to understand that most followers of the One Nation Party are primarily energised not by racism, but by their dislike of other changes, especially the economic changes inevitable as Australia embraces the global economy and competition makes jobs less secure (p. 8).*

In what may or may not prove to be a short story, a snap election was called for October 3, 1998, by Prime Minister John Howard. His Liberal Party coalition successfully maintained its slim position of power, and with all parties encouraging voters to place One Nation candidates last on their preferential ballots, One Nation, despite collecting one million votes (8.4% of the national popular vote) in what they had hoped to be a springboard election to national prominence, won but one Senate seat, from Queensland, and none in the Lower House. Ms. Hanson, running for a seat in a new district following a redistributing, failed to be returned to Parliament.

For those readers, perhaps not from the Asian Pacific region, who find the above short background only familiar, but do not recall being immersed with news about Pauline Hanson and One Nation, the following will help to place the story in perspective. A *Lexis/Nexis* Boolean search that combined three key words, "racist",

"Hanson" and "Australia" from 1996 to the present, resulted in 71 "hits" from the Singapore *Straits Times* and 73 "hits" from the Hong Kong *South China Morning Post*, while only yielding eleven "hits" from the London *Times* and eight from the *New York Times*.

It is not surprising that the story, and the racist slant specifically looked for in the search, would receive heavier coverage in Asia than in the West. It is important, however, that readers understand the magnitude of the story within Australia's Asian tourism catchment area. As one can see, from the extent of the coverage in the region's major newspapers, Hanson and One Nation has been big news.

There is some question whether such Asian coverage has been slanted, if not in tone, then in quantity. Prithpal Singh, a well respected hotelier in Singapore, stated "that Pauline Hanson is a mad woman doing a major disservice to Asians and Australians is putting it very mildly, and she should be debunked, rebuked and better still, totally ignored", but continued that "it is however an even greater travesty when these stories of her, which receive little attention in Australia, are presented in a larger than life manner and exaggerated to Godzillian proportions in our various newspapers" (Singh, 1998, p. 2).

## Method

### Sample

Survey forms were administered to adult attendees at a travel fair in Singapore. Singapore was determined to be an appropriate study location because of its significant travel generation to Australia and its Asian ethnicity. The Republic of Singapore is a modern, affluent nation ("Asia goes on holiday," 1995) boasting, as reported by the Singapore "Buying power" (1995), the

world's ninth highest GNP per capita (second in Asia to Japan) and the world's highest ratio of international travellers with 3.7 million international trips taken last year by her 3.1 million population (Yap, 1998).

The travel fair, NATAS Holidays '98, was hosted by the national travel agency association, attracting over 26,000 attendees during its three day run at the Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre (National Association of Travel Agents Singapore, 1998).

The travel fair was selected as the test site as it would attract people with a serious interest in travel, a fact validated by the fact that of the 225 respondents, 134

**The racist slant was covered more heavily in Asia.**

(59.6%) had visited Australia before, 97 of whom (43.1% of the total surveyed) had done so within the past three years.

Timing of the data collection was gratuitously favourable. The travel fair was held in early September, just before Australian Prime Minister John Howard called the snap election of 03 October which saw One Nation lose badly, and Hanson lose her seat in Parliament. Clearly news of her defeat would have been a very significant intervening variable had the election occurred prior to data collection. As it is, future tourism arrivals may be impacted by the election results, but the data in this study are free of impact from this exogenous event.

Three undergraduate students distributed self-administered questionnaires to visitors, who agreed to participate. Utilising

the mall-intercept method, the students were instructed to approach each fifth person as the attendee exited the exhibition hall. No respondent under the age of sixteen was asked to complete the survey form, as Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert and Wanhill (1993) indicate that this is the age when one first takes some responsibility for travel decision making. When encountering refusals, the data collectors were told to simply approach the very next available person.

Undergraduate students were specifically selected to administer the surveys so as to avoid a testing bias that likely would have been created had the researcher personally collected the data. Though not Australian, the author is Caucasian, and it was felt that his presence would cause, if not bias, certainly discomfort, on the part of the Asian respondents. Utilising student helpers, each Chinese, eliminated this concern. (Rubin and Babbie (1993) recommended the use of minority interviewers when testing minority respondents so as to avoid cultural bias. In this research, this advice was accepted and turned around.)

Of 230 questionnaires distributed, five were eliminated owing to missing values. (Each research assistant was able to collect approximately 75 completed forms during their four-hour shift at the travel fair.) The final sample of 225 respondents consisted of 117 men and 108 women ranging in age from 16 to 68, with a mean of 31 years (SD =8.6). Twenty-one percent of the sample reported having attained a secondary education, and a further 76 percent said that they had a tertiary or higher qualification. Seventy-four percent reported monthly household incomes of S\$6000 (US\$3600) or less. Most of the sample was Chinese (81.6%), with Malays (11.7%), Indians (4.9%), and others (1.8%); a diversification that

represents a close reflection of multi-cultural Singapore's ethnic mix (Dobbs-Higginson, 1995). See Table 3 for a detailed analysis of the sample demographics.

Singapore is a multi-lingual state, with English the common unifying language. As such, the survey was easy to administer in English only, avoiding translation difficulties and linguistic bias (Smith & Bond, 1993).

### *Questionnaire*

A two page, 26 item questionnaire was drafted, pre-tested on a small student population to check for question ambiguity, and modified slightly to reflect the

### **Questions addressed issues of Australians' changing attitudes towards Asians.**

pre-test feedback. In addition to the demographic questions, the questionnaire asked a series of questions relating to the respondent's past travel to Australia and future travel plans for visiting Australia. The questionnaire also included questions relating to the respondent's views towards Australia and Australians, by asking such direct questions as "Do you think Australians are racists in their views towards Asians?" and "Do you believe you have to worry about your safety when you travel to Australia?" using a six-point response format ranging from 1 = definitely yes to 6 = definitely no.

Additional questions asked the trend of Australian racism towards Asians (response options were "more racist", "less racist", and "no change in attitude"), and the source of the respondent's information regarding the

Australian racial situation. The questionnaire also included a measure of perceived travel product knowledge, utilising a three-question set previously utilised by Goldsmith, Flynn, and Bonn (1994). One item read: "Among my circle of friends, I'm one of the 'experts' on tours or where to travel." A five-point agree-disagree response format was used. See Table 4 for a summary of key responses.

### Results and analysis

Travel to Australia was determined not only to be popular, as 60% had previously visited the nation (the mean response of these respondents was 1.5 trips, with a range of 1-10 visits), but also earned a high rating for satisfaction, as when asked to rate their last trip to Australia on a scale ranging from Extremely Satisfied = 1 to Extremely Dissatisfied = 5, the mean response was a very positive 2.0, with less than 4% rating their trip a four or a five.

When asked, however, if they considered Australians' to be racist towards Asians, the answers were not so flattering. As corollary questions, the respondents were also asked the same question about New Zealanders and Americans. On a six point scale (1 = Definitely Racist and 6 = Definitely Not Racist) the results were as shown in Table 1.

Though each of the three nations had numbers lower than one would like, it is clear that Singaporeans generally find Australians, as a stereotype, to have racist tendencies, while

finding New Zealanders and Americans less so. The importance of the question to this research is to provide reassurance that the respondents considered the question of Australian racism thoughtfully, and did not simply lump together all non-Asians when responding.

When asked if they felt Australians were more racist today, less racist today, or no change versus the past, again the answer was heavily weighted to the negative, as 36.3% indicated growing racist tendencies, 51.6% saw no change, and only 12.1% saw an improvement.

Where did this belief come from? Those who based their opinion on their personal experience generally found Australians becoming more racist (21.9%) versus less racist (12.3%, with the balance seeing no change), while those who based their opinion on the media had an even more highly skewed image, with 53.3% seeing increased racism, versus only 7.6% indicating a decline. In addition, a disconcertingly high 23.8% of the respondents who had actually visited Australia indicated that they personally had been the victims of racist acts, and an additional 35.8% stated that they knew someone who had been such a victim, statistics that can not be positive for the country's tourism prospects.

Two questions were used to determine the key dependent variable, i.e. the respondent's travel plans as they related to Australia. These were identical, except for tense, relatively complex questions that required

the respondent to select one of six mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive statements re their past twelve month's and next twelve month's travel. The statements relating to the next twelve-month's travel read as follows:

1. I will not consider a trip to Australia due to the racial situation.
2. I have booked a trip to Australia, but may cancel or postpone it due to the racial situation.
3. I will visit Australia next year, and plan on visiting Queensland.
4. I will visit Australia next year, but will make sure that my itinerary does not include Queensland.
5. I will visit Australia next year, but have no plans to visit Queensland anyway.
6. I really have no plans to visit Australia next year. The racial situation is not a factor one way or the other.

Appreciating the complexity of the two questions, the student helpers guided each respondent through these questions to ensure understanding and accurate responses.

Those respondents who selected responses 1 and 2 are clearly problems for Australian tourism, while those selecting response 4 compound the situation for Queensland tourism. Respondents selecting number 3 have chosen not to allow the situation to impact their travel plans. Respondents selecting 5 are positive for Australia in general, and neutral for Queensland. Those responding number 6 simply had no interest in a current trip to Australia. The results were as shown in Table 2.

The negative implications of these numbers are important. A

Table 1: Perceived Degree of Racism Towards Asians.

	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Std Dev.	% answering 1 or 2
Australians	3.3	1.3	25.9%
New Zealanders	4.1	1.0	3.6%
Americans	3.8	1.2	10.7%

<sup>a</sup> Mean score based on a six-point rating scale, 1=Definitely Racist and 6=Definitely Not Racist.



*Table 2: Respondents' Past and Future Travel Plans as Related to Australia.*

	<b>Last 12 Months</b>	<b>Next 12 Months</b>
1 – avoid Australia	9.1%	10.2%
2 – cancel Australia	2.7%	3.6%
<b>Total 1 and 2</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>13.8%</b>
3 – visit Queensland	13.2%	17.3%
4 – visit Australia, avoid Queensland	4.5 %	7.6%
5 – visit Australia, no interest Queensland	13.2%	16.9 %
<b>Total 1 – 5</b>	<b>42.7%</b>	<b>55.6%</b>
6 – no interest Australia	57.3%	44.4%

conservative reading is that Australian tourism has been impacted negatively by the 11.8% and 13.8% of respondents indicating that Australia was specifically eliminated from their travel plans in response to the racial situation. Queensland tourism would lose their share of these arrivals, plus the 4.5% and 7.6% who specifically eliminated a stop in Queensland from their itinerary. These are dramatic, even alarming, numbers.

An even more pessimistic, but fair analysis, would be to consider the percentage of lost business based only upon those respondents having expressed an interest in visiting Australia, i.e. recalculating the percentages net of those responding to number 6. This means, that for the past twelve months, that of the 42.7% of the respondents that had an interest in visiting Australia, that 27.6% (11.8%/42.7%) made a conscious decision to change their travel plans as a specific response to the perceived racial situation. For the coming year, the percentage is 24.8% (13.8%/55.6%). And again, for Queensland tourism, though the responses do not lend themselves to calculation, the number is worse still as it is compounded by those who specifically indicated that they would avoid the state as a result of the racial situation (response #4).

It seems safe to conclude that Australian tourism as a whole, and Queensland tourism specifically, have suffered greatly from the perceived racial situation.

Further analysis also yields interesting findings.

It was assumed that if the respondent had personally experienced, or knew of someone who had experienced an incident of racism while visiting Australia, that he/she would be more likely to avoid Australia as a travel destination. Contrarily, another reasonable assumption seemed to be that a high satisfaction level from a previous visit would make tourists more immune to the current situation. However, neither of these relationships proved true. One may have expected that those that perceived themselves as being more knowledgeable about travel would be less likely to be influenced. Again, this did not prove true, but neither did it prove true that the less knowledgeable were more or less influenced.

Further, when correlating the decision to visit or not visit Australia with the various demographic variables no statistically significant correlations were found to exist for education level, age, income or race.

The only variables that showed significant correlation to the respondent's likelihood to travel or avoid travel to Australia related to his/her subjective view of Australian racism, i.e. those whom felt Australians to be racists, and those seeing Australians becoming more racist, were those respondents most likely to opt out of an Australian vacation (See Table 4).

These findings would seem to compound the problem for Australian tourism. The results of this study show that many Singaporeans have chosen to exclude Australia from their travel plans as a result of the perceived racial situation. But as Australia looks for ways to counter the negativity, they are left with no specific segments of the market to target, so where to begin? Many educated Singaporeans have chosen to eliminate Australia from their travel plans, but others have not, while at the same time the less educated Singaporeans have similarly split their vote. For those who have visited and enjoyed Australia before, as well as those who have never visited, there is also a spread of responses. Had the results focused the issue by identifying problem groups, it would seem that the public relations issue facing Australia would be somewhat more manageable. As it is, they face only a generalised problem, with no core groups to target in trying to win back support.

## Discussion

The Australian Tourist Commission has held Singapore up as the bright light for Asian tourism based upon an 8.6% growth in arrivals. The results of this study, however, indicate that this statistic is illusory. Yes, Singapore arrivals have increased, but tourism officials should not ignore the other half of the equation, those potential Singapore tourists that have and/or will avoid travel to Australia as a result of the perceived racism of Australians.

Singapore has been hurt by the Asian economic crisis, but less so than its neighbours. Today, as Singaporeans shop for travel values they find many discount airfares and promotional tour packages to Australia being heavily promoted in the market. Australia, it seems, has never been a better value destination.

One measure of destination attractiveness is the relationship of the currency values of the source and destination markets (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, Shepherd & Wanhill, 1998). Local Asian destinations have become exceptional values as the Singapore dollar has gained significant strength versus most regional currencies, making such countries as Thailand and Korea approximately 25% less expensive, in Singapore Dollars, than a year ago. However, for the tourist looking for a developed or "western" vacation destination, it is more relevant to contrast Australia with similar destinations such as the USA and Europe, and one sees that over the past year Australia has become a comparatively increasingly attractive destination for Singaporeans. Comparing June 30, 1997, currency conversion rates with those of June 30, 1998, the Singapore Dollar has strengthened by 1.9% versus the Australian Dollar, while depreciating in value 19.0% versus the US Dollar, 20.7% against the UK Pound, and 14.7% versus the German Mark (Oanda, 1998).

Australia should be pleased that their arrivals from the Republic have increased. However, the fact that so many Singaporeans have chosen not to visit Australia, despite its current competitive price advantage and long term reputation for attractiveness and high visitor satisfaction, leads one to believe that Australia is "leaving lots of business on the table". Yes, arrivals are up 8.6%, but this study indicates that in the absence of the racial issue, the increase would have been at least double that number.

Some in Australia, however, seem to be hiding their heads in the sand. It is not surprising that One Nation Party leader Bill Feldman stated that in his opinion Pauline Hanson had no impact on Queensland tourism numbers (Day, 1998). It is

surprising, however, to read Tourism Minister of Western Australia Norman Moore state that "I can only base my understanding on the figures" (Moore, 1998), while adding that, while he did not agree with Hanson's immigration policy, he did not believe the "Hanson factor" had affected tourism, a claim he also supported by the rise in Singapore arrivals to his state (Grove, 1998).

It is alarming that 23.8% of respondents who had visited Australia felt that they had experienced incidents of racism, and 35.8% indicated that they knew someone who had. Australian Deputy Minister for State Development and Trade, James Peter Elder, during a visit to Singapore, stated "What people have to focus on is the bulk of the Australian population, and that is about 90 per cent, is multi-cultural, believes in equity and fairness, is very open, very warm...and I would suggest that rather than

focus on the negative, which is what's happened in a lot of South-east Asian countries, the quickest thing is to come and visit and you'd find out that nothing has changed in Queensland" (Elder, 1998, p.4). Unfortunately, for Elder and Australian tourism, the other 10% of the population seems responsible for generating quite a negative impact on Singaporeans.

It is possible that the Singaporean responses are exaggerated, with some experience of racism a function of self-fulfilling prophecy. With Singaporeans reading so much negative publicity about the situation, they may today visit Australia with some trepidation and the expectation of experiencing of racism, which may therefore result in a greater likelihood of finding it. In any case, officials are clearly faced with what seems to be a significant dual problem; the reduction of incidents against Singaporeans and undoubtedly

Table 3: Demographic Data (n=225).

Variable	Number (%)	Range	Mean	SD
<b>Demographics:</b>				
Gender				
Female	108 (48)			
Male	117 (52)			
<b>Age</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>16 - 68</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>8.7</b>
Marital Status				
Single	124 (55)			
Married	100 (45)			
<b>Race</b>				
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>182 (81)</b>			
<b>Malay</b>	<b>26 (12)</b>			
<b>Indian</b>	<b>11 (5)</b>			
<b>Other</b>	<b>4 (2)</b>			
Nationality				
Singaporean	184 (82)			
Malaysian	14 (6)			
Others	27 (12)			
<b>Income<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>221</b>	<b>1 - 6</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Education <sup>b</sup>	225 -	1 - 6	4.2	1.0

a. The income scale offered the following monthly household income ranges: Less than S\$2,000 (per month), S\$2-4k, S\$4-6k, S\$6-8k, S\$8-10k and above S\$10K. The mean score of 2.8 extrapolates to approximately S\$5,600 per month, which is approximately US\$37,000 annually.

b. The education scale had six categories, from no formal education to post-university. The modal and median respondents had earned their 'A' levels or a Polytechnic diploma, each one step short of undergraduate studies, represented by a response of 4 on the six point scale.

Table 4: Differences Between Those Avoiding Australia and Those Travelling to Australia.

Variable	Avoiders		Travellers <sup>a</sup>		z <sup>b</sup>	p <sup>c</sup>	
	M	SD	M	SD			
Consider Australians racists (1=yes, 6=no)	2.9	1.3	3.6	1.5	-2.27	.023 <sup>d</sup>	
Australians becoming more racist (1=yes, 6=no)	2.4	.7	2.1	.6	-2.50	.012 <sup>d</sup>	
Worried about safety (1=yes, 6=no)	3.3	1.6	4.2	1.6	-2.78	.006 <sup>d</sup>	
Satisfaction of prior visits (1=Ext. Sat., 5=Ext. Dis.)	2.2	.8	2.1	.8	-0.88	.381	
Travel knowledge (range of 4 –15, higher # greater knowledge)	9.9	2.1	9.8	2.6	-0.09	.930	
Age (range of 16 – 68)	30.8	9.0	32.0	9.6	-0.49	.622	
Income (range 1 – 6) <sup>e</sup>	2.9	1.7	2.6	1.3	-0.81	.416	
Education (range 1 - 6) <sup>e</sup>	4.2	1.0	4.3	1.1	-0.43	.669	
Other Variables	Avoiders		Travellers <sup>a</sup>		X <sup>2f</sup>	df	p
	%		%				
Visited Prior					.573	1	.449 <sup>g</sup>
Yes	54.2		45.8				
No	63.9		36.1				
Personally experienced racism					.105	1	.746 <sup>g</sup>
Yes	50.0		50.0				
No	57.7		42.3				
Know others who experienced racism					1.221	1	.269 <sup>g</sup>
Yes	65.9		34.1				
No	53.0		47.0				
Gender					.036	1	.850 <sup>g</sup>
Male	59.0		41.0				
Female	55.3		44.7				
Race					3.92	1	.822 <sup>g</sup>
Chinese	58.9		41.1				
Others	50.0		50.0				

<sup>a</sup> The number of respondents were segmented as follows:

Those who avoid(ed) travel to Australia/Queensland

62 – 27.6%

Those who travel(led) to Australia/Queensland

46 – 20.4%

Those who indicated that they had no interest in visiting Australia, the remaining 52%, have been excluded from the above calculations.

<sup>b</sup> Mann-Whitney U, corrected for ties

<sup>c</sup> Two-tailed probability

<sup>d</sup> Significant at 0.05

<sup>e</sup> See categories per Table 3

<sup>f</sup> Pearson's Chi-square

<sup>g</sup> 2x2 table, Yates correction applied

other Asians, and the reduction of the negative publicity that may be causing the perception to have a life of its own.

## Conclusion

The perception of anti-Asian racism is impacting, and impacting dramatically on Australian tourism, a fact it is frankly hard to believe that Australian tourism officials are not aware of. Perhaps their public announcements do not mirror their true private concerns.

Subjectively, It would seem that the lack of public acknowledgment may be contributing to the problem. As pointed out by Cooper, *et al.* (1998, p. 39)

"whether or nor an image is in fact a true representation,...what is important is the image that exists in the mind of the vacationer." Politically, tourism officials may have no choice but to dance around the issue, but from a public relations perspective, with Singaporean and other Asians being fed a steady diet of news about the situation, their quiet has not been an effective counter to an increasingly negative view.

Whether the current situation will have long-term effects upon the industry is a topic that only future study can determine, and from the time that this research was begun to its completion and ultimate publication, the October 1998 defeat of Pauline Hanson

and One Nation may have already begun to swing the tide. An obvious parallel would be South African tourism, though without any implication that the magnitude of the situations are in any way comparable.

Before 1990, and the nation's transition to democracy, apartheid South Africa was barely on the international tourism map, with foreign tourism revenue of \$0.8 billion (Bloom, 1996). By the year 2000, Ryan (1992) predicts this number to reach \$8.0 billion, though crime issues are likely to make this target difficult to reach. Matthews (1994) in a detailed analysis of South African tourism claims that the statistics grossly overstate the true picture (as a



result of the inclusion of visitors from four 'homelands' given nominal independence, and now counted as international arrivals) but does find that the true statistics show a very strong annual growth rate of approximately 16% since the dismantling of apartheid.

The growth of South African tourism is an indication that travellers are responsive to changes in the social values of a nation. When South Africa was branded as a racist nation, tourists tended to stay away. When that stigma lifted, tourists discovered the destination. Why, one must wonder, would Australian tourism officials have any doubt that the converse would hold true in Australia? If the improvement of a social image can be expected to result in increased tourism arrivals, it seems intuitive that a deterioration would likely lead to decline.

A lesson from South Africa, and from this research is that destinations must be constantly aware of their image within source markets, recognising that internal politics, once externally newsworthy, have the potential to directly impact first traveller perceptions and subsequently tourism arrivals.

Tourism officials must understand that they cannot view their product in a vacuum. Australia has a marvellous tourism product, which Singaporeans have long enjoyed. But destination selection is very transient (Burns & Holden, 1995) and this study has shown that a situation such as the "Hanson factor" can be all the motivation a tourist may need to say, "maybe not this year" when considering Australia as a holiday destination.

Finally, it would seem that those who claim that tourism can lead to understanding (for example McIntosh, Goeldner, and Ritchie (1995), Var, Ap and Van Doren

(1994), Singh (1993), D'Amore (1988)), may have their cause and effect mixed up. With a positive view towards a destination, tourists visit, while those with a negative view are more likely to stay away in the first place. Which leads to the conclusion that it is tourism that benefits from understanding more so than understanding being the beneficiary of tourism.

Postscript, December 1998: Very quickly following the decline of One Nation in the October

election, Pauline Hanson and Australian racism very quickly became non-stories in the Asian press. With the news reporting now gone, though Australians will not have changed, it is inevitable that perceptions of Australians will improve, few people will be swayed from visiting Australia due to the issue, and the "Hanson factor" will be a soon forgotten phenomenon. Just how quickly they forget would seem a valid topic for future research.

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