

Perceptions on Seaside Resort Areas' Services: A Case of Chinese Tourists in Phuket,
Samui and Krabi, Thailand

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to analyze the service management from facility, personnel, and marketing factors for Chinese tourists who visited seaside resort areas in southern part of Thailand. The researcher used survey questionnaire to collect data from 400 Chinese tourists who visited seaside resort areas in southern region of Thailand and used descriptive statistics, One-Way ANOVA and Multiple Regressions to analyze and to test the data.

The results found that Chinese tourists who visited to the seaside resorts revealed that most services they received from the resorts exceed their expectations including online bookings, the personalized service, respectfulness, polite language, smiling faces, and technical supports. However, the tourists think some services could not reach their expectations which included prices for food, accommodation, local transportation, commodity, and entertainment. The personal services that could not reach their expectation were local authorities' ability to handle emergency situations and could not provide fast services for safety of the tourists. As for the resort area management, the tourists observed that there were not enough legal safety frameworks in protecting Chinese tourists, lacking convenient of using local transportation in the seaside resort areas, low-development infrastructure, and did not have enough facilities and activities for the tourists' recreational. The results finally found significant positive relationship between service management and Chinese tourists' introducing the resort areas to others, and significant impact of resort areas' marketing management on perceptions of the Chinese tourists' service management at statistically significant level .05.

Keywords: Chinese Tourists, Seaside Resort Area, Service Management,

Introduction

Tourism is one of the pillars of the Thai economy and contributes more than 18 percent to its GDP. In 2018, Thailand's total tourism revenue was approximately THB 2.02 trillion. It promotes local economic development, increases local employment opportunities

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and increases people's income. In 2017, southern region of Thailand received 14.14 million international tourists. Among them, the number of Chinese tourists was 3.66 million, ranking first among international tourists. In 2018, the 10 most popular seaside resort areas of Chinese tourists were concentrated in southern Thailand, with believe Phuket as most popular among Chinese tourists, followed by Samui and Krabi. Thailand's seaside resort areas attract a large number of Chinese tourists to come for vacation, sightseeing, leisure, and recuperation. However, recently many Thai seaside resort areas face problems of environmental degradation that resulted in the declining of their appearances. Moreover, the authorities' disaster response capacity is inadequate creating safety risks in the resort areas, such as the ship overturning accident occurred in 2018 reflect the number of Chinese tourists going to Phuket to fell by 15 to 20 percent in the year 2019. In addition, the tourism market among the ASEAN member countries is highly competitive while Thailand faces increasing market competition among Southeast Asian countries.

The purposes of this study were to study management and marketing factors impacting service management in southern of Thailand, also to study Chinese tourists' perceptions on the seaside resorts' services in southern Thailand (Phuket, Samui, and Krabi). Finally, the results from this study could provide recommendations for Chinese tourists who plan to visit the seaside resorts in southern Thailand. And could provide recommendations for Thai government, travel agency or other related managers.

This study is a quantitative research using questionnaire. The sample group is 400 Chinese tourists who have been to or are traveling in the seaside resorts in southern Thailand by the time of doing this study. The content of the questionnaire covers the survey of the expectation and perceptions on services of Chinese tourists following three aspects; service factors, marketing factors and external Business factors. Through the data analysis of expectation and perceived service of Chinese tourists, we can understand the current service quality management in seaside resort areas in southern Thailand, find out what factors impact on tourism service management in southern of Thailand and provide some advice to southern seaside resort areas managers.

Conceptual Framework

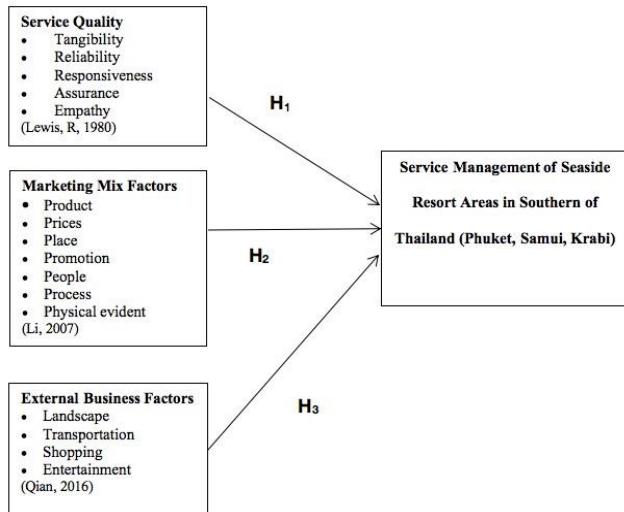


Figure 1.1 Logical relations among the research hypotheses

Research Hypothesis

H₁: There is a significant relationship between service quality factors and the service quality management of seaside resort areas in southern of Thailand for Chinese Tourists.

H₂: Marketing mix factors has a significant relationship with the service quality management of seaside resort areas in southern of Thailand for Chinese Tourists.

H₃: External business factors have a significant relationship with the service quality management of seaside resort areas in southern of Thailand for Chinese Tourists.

Literature Review

SERVQUAL is a multi-item scale with good reliability and validity, which helps companies better understand the assessment of service expectations and customer perceptions, and improve services. Zeithaml et al. (1990) stated that SERVQUAL provides a basic framework through its expectation / perception format, which contains statements for five quality of service dimensions. The framework can be adjusted or supplemented as necessary to suit the characteristics of a particular organization or specific research needs. SERVQUAL shows its best valuation when it is used to track service quality trends as well as in combination with other forms of service quality measurement. Moreover, SERVQUAL is used to evaluate the firm's quality according to the five services dimensions by averaging the difference scores on items making up the dimensions (Parasuraman et al., 1994).

SERVQUAL is a popular model for service quality research and is most common in market research and other industries such as hotels and the economy (Sureshchandar et al., 2001). The origin of the SERVQUAL model is derived from research based on Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry based on the expectation-perception gap model, and ten dimensions of

service quality are reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, reputation, security, understanding / knowing customers, tangibles. Later, Zeithaml et al. (1990) tested the variables and reduced them to five dimensions, including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Tangibility refers to the impact of physical facilities, equipment, people and communication materials on customers. This atmosphere, also known as the service capes, directly affects employees and customers in ways that are physical, psychological, social, cognitive, and emotional. Reliability demonstrates the ability to provide services accurately, timely, and reliably. This requires consistency in the implementation of services, respect for commitments, and commitments to customers. Responsiveness measures the ability to resolve problems quickly, effectively handle customer complaints, and the willingness to help and meet customer requirements. Assurance can create credibility for customers, which is considered through good services, technical knowledge, courtesy and communication skills, so that customers can trust the company's service quality. Empathy is best preparation for customers, so they can feel like "guests" of the company and are welcome anytime, anywhere.

There are some criticisms of SERVQUAL. Theoretically, first, SERVQUAL has been widely criticized for inappropriately based on an expectation confirmation model rather than an attitude model of service quality. Second, it is not built on existing knowledge in economics, statistics, and psychology (Saleh and Ryan, 1991).

For tourists, the importance of the hotel is self-evident. Often tourists spend most of their time in hotels, so the hotel's perfect facilities and service are the most important factors in attracting tourists. Phuket's hotel facilities and service are perfect, comfortable room and hearty meals, as well as an open-air pool, spa, and gym. These have improved the living experience of tourists. Fu (2013) mentioned in her paper that due to the characteristics of the island, most of the goods on Phuket are closely related to the geographical environment. Whether it is colorful beachwear and diving equipment, or special souvenirs and decorations. In general, there are many types of goods in Phuket, but the quality is generally poor, and there is a lack of delicate shops with distinctive features. This is also an important part of the future development of tourism.

Wang (2008) mentioned that the tourism authority of Thailand has a strict management system. Traveling on Phuket, you can often see a tourist policeman in uniform, which is one of the characteristics of Thailand. If the rights are violated, tourists can complain directly to them and they will get justice for you. The Phuket government has taken many other steps to protect the interests of tourists. For example, tourist places such as restaurants and hotels are required to be clearly priced. If there is a bully or a price hike, it will be severely punished. At the same time, the management of tour guides is also very strict. If the tour guide complained for the first time, he will be suspended for 3 months, the second time he will be

suspended for half a year, and the third time he will be disqualified from the tour guide. A perfect tourism management system is the key to determining the level of tourism development and the greatest respect for tourists. It is also the best way to cater to the psychological needs of tourists and to eliminate worries for travel.

In addition to government management, some institutions are also involved in management. Angkasubana (2005) observed that Six Senses Samui, it is continually developing new initiatives and procedures to minimize our impact on the environment. Six Senses is an acknowledged industry leader in sustainability practices through careful consideration of the effects that operating systems, materials and purchasing policies have on the environment. They are therefore continually developing new initiatives and procedures to minimize the impact on the environment. At Six Senses Samui is constantly updating Environmental Management System to incorporate the best practices of the industry and numerous sustainability schemes. This approach helps them develop an Environmental Management System that represents the best of the best. In their recycling center located at the heart of the hotel, recyclables are collected and processed. Materials that they collect and send out for recycling include aluminum, plastic, glass and paper and other common household items. Their vision is to become a community-based, self-contained recycling center. Day to day, their operations are constantly reviewed in order to lessen the environmental impact. They are constantly looking for ways to save resources and improve our local environment. With the appointment of a corporate-level executive solely responsible for promoting environmental issues, they have raised their commitment to the highest level and looking for even more ways to improve their environmental performance.

The management system of Krabi is inadequate as well as laws and regulations. Occasionally, criminal cases occurred in Krabi, and the relevant departments failed to use legal means to restrict or punish the offenders. The government departments are difficult to solve the problem comprehensively. This has caused the image of Krabi tourism to be damaged. Since joining ASEAN, Krabi has attracted more tourists, and there are countless tourists and investors who are pouring into Krabi. The market has added new tourists from Russia, China, India, and the Middle East. In addition, Krabi seized the opportunity to develop eco-tourism.

With the economic recession around the world and the frequent accidents in seaside resorts, people are less likely to travel. It also affected the number of tourists to Krabi. Foreign resorts attract tourists with price cuts and better services. Competition within the industry is fierce. However, the development of new tourist attractions and tourism products in Krabi is slow. In addition, the process of implementing development planning by various departments is not really aware of the consequences of destroying natural resources and the environment. These factors have hindered the development of tourism in Krabi Province (Yani,Y., 2014).

Research Methodology

This study is a quantitative research. Firstly, on the basis of the literature review, summarize the main contributions and shortcomings of previous research, and construct the focus of this research. Second, a sample survey of Chinese tourists is conducted to verify the rationality of the theoretical model and assumptions. Finally, the researcher used a survey questionnaire to obtain the primary data from 400 Chinese tourists who were visiting the Thai southern seaside resort areas. The questionnaire was tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha which the result was 0.937 presenting highly reliable.

Research Findings

The research findings find that majority of the Chinese tourists visiting to Thailand's southern seaside resort areas are female, ages are between 18 - 24 years old, unmarried, hold bachelor degrees, students, monthly incomes are between 3,000-5,999 Yuan. Most of the tourists who visit southern seaside resort areas come from East China and North China; they choose to stay in southern seaside resort areas for 2 - 4 days. Before coming to southern seaside resort areas, the Chinese tourists got information about southern seaside resort areas tourism from the websites and other social medias, followed by introduction by friends. Finally, the tourists choose to come to southern seaside resort areas with friends, and they never been to southern seaside resort areas before.

Summary Descriptive Statistic of Three Factors

Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistic of Service Quality Factors

	Mean	S.D.	Level	Rank
Tangibility	3.79	.695	High	5
Reliability	3.85	.676	High	3
Responsiveness	3.89	.714	High	2
Assurance	3.80	.744	High	4
Empathy	4.07	.670	High	1

The results from Table 4.1 illustrated that from the service quality factors, Empathy at high level ($\bar{X}=4.06$, S.D. =.669), followed by Responsiveness at high level (mean=3.89, SD =.714), followed by Reliability at high level ($\bar{X}=3.85$, S.D. =.676), followed by Assurance at high level ($\bar{X}=3.79$, S.D. =.743), followed by Tangibility at high level ($\bar{X}=3.78$, S.D. =.694) respectively.

According to the service quality factors, Chinese tourists pay more attention to Empathy, followed by Responsiveness, followed by Reliability, followed by Assurance, followed by Tangibility.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistic of Marketing Mix Factors

	<i>X</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Product	4.06	.709	High	1
Price	3.47	.771	High	7
Place	3.86	.681	High	5
Promotion	3.92	.765	High	3
People	3.89	.658	High	4
Process	3.67	.746	High	6
Physical Evident	3.96	.736	High	2

The results from Table 4.2 illustrated that from the marketing mix factors, Product at high level (mean=4.06, SD=.709), followed by Physical Evident at high level (mean=3.96, SD=.736), followed by Promotion at high level (mean=3.92, SD=.765), followed by People at high level (mean=3.89, SD=.658), followed by Place at high level (mean=3.86, SD=.681), followed by Process at high level (mean=3.67, SD=.746), followed by Price at high level (mean=3.47, SD=.771) respectively.

According to the marketing mix factors, Chinese tourists pay more attention to Product, followed by Physical Evidence, followed by Promotion, followed by People, followed by Place, followed by Process, followed by Price.

Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistic of External Business Factors

	<i>X</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Landscape	4.20	.700	High	1
Traffic	3.52	.732	High	4
Shopping	3.67	.752	High	2
Entertainment	3.65	.750	High	3

The results from Table 4.3 illustrated that from the external business factors, Landscape at high level (mean=4.20, SD=.700), followed by Shopping at high level (mean=3.67, SD=.752), followed by Entertainment at high level (mean=3.65, SD=.750), followed by Traffic at high level (mean=3.52, SD=.732) respectively.

According to the external business factors, Chinese tourists pay more attention to Landscape, followed by Shopping, followed by Entertainment, followed by Traffic.

Table 4.4 Descriptive Statistic of Willingness

Willingness	<i>X</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Level</i>
Would you like to introduce this seaside resort to people you know?	3.79	.500	High
In general, would you like to re-visit this seaside resort again?	3.78	.518	High
What is your overall satisfaction on this seaside resort area?	3.84	.483	High
Average	3.803	.500	High

The results from Table 4.4 illustrated that the willingness of Chinese tourists to introduce others to come to this seaside resort at a high level (mean=3.79, SD=.500), the willingness of Chinese tourists to re-visit this seaside resort again at high level (mean=3.78, SD=.518), the overall satisfaction on this seaside resort areas at high level (mean=3.84, SD=.483) respectively. The average willingness is at a high level (mean=3.803, SD=.500).

Comparison of Chinese Tourists' Expectations and Perception

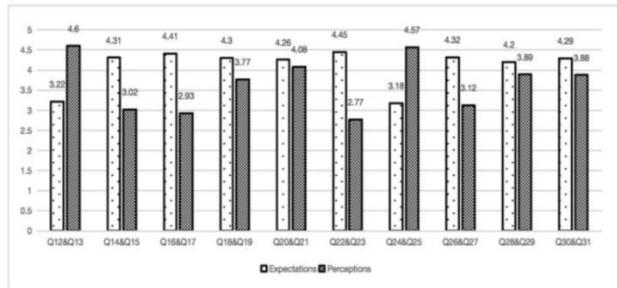


Figure 4.1 Comparison of Chinese Tourists' Expectations and Perceptions of Service Quality Factors

The result from Figure 4.1 illustrated that from the service quality factors, having first-class ability to handle emergency situations is the biggest gap between expectations and perceptions ($gap=1.68$, rank 1), followed by having a legal framework in protecting Chinese tourists ($gap=1.48$, rank 2), followed by being respectful, use polite language, smile service towards Chinese tourists ($gap=1.39$, rank 3), followed by having technical support, such as getting information on travel Apps, using online payment, etc. ($gap=1.38$, rank 4), followed by having a well-developed infrastructure ($gap=1.29$, rank 5), followed by having sufficient funds to support the development of local tourism ($gap=1.20$, rank 6), followed by having excellent public security situation ($gap=0.53$, rank 7), followed by having friendly staffs ($gap=0.41$, rank 8), followed by paying attention to the expectations of Chinese tourists. Such as actively developing tourism projects suitable for Chinese tourists ($gap=0.31$, rank 9), followed by being friendly towards Chinese tourists and welcome Chinese tourists to travel ($gap=0.18$, rank 10).

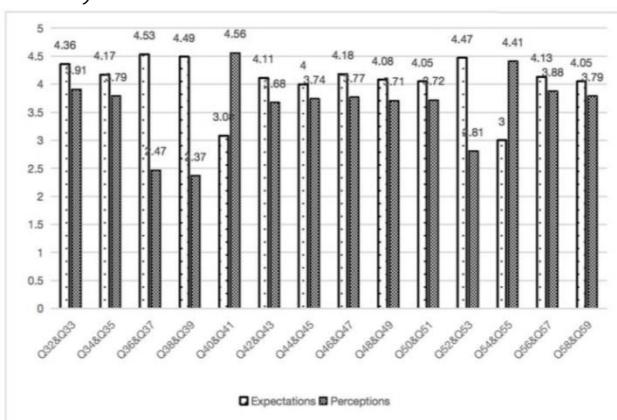


Figure 4.2 Comparison of Chinese Tourists' Expectations and Perceptions of Marketing Mix Factors

The result from Figure 4.2 illustrated that from the marketing mix factors, having a reasonable price for food items is the biggest gap between expectations and perceptions ($gap=2.12$, rank 1), followed by having reasonable accommodation price ($gap=2.02$, rank 2), followed by being staffs who provide fast services ($gap=1.66$, rank 3), followed by supporting online bookings ($gap=1.48$, rank 4), followed by being able to provide personalized service to

Chinese tourists ($gap=-1.41$, rank 5), followed by being clean and sanitary in hotel ($gap=0.45$, rank 6), followed by setting up pre-sale tickets point ($gap=0.43$, rank 7), followed by providing services as advertised to Chinese ($gap=0.41$, rank 8), followed by having a first-class tour guide service team ($gap=0.38$, rank 9), followed by having trustworthy staffs ($gap=0.37$, rank 10), followed by providing professional service towards Chinese tourists ($gap=0.37$, rank 11), followed by having special promotions for Chinese tourists and having a brochure for major tourism attractions and around the district ($gap=0.26$, rank 12), followed by having staffs with healthy image, be well-dressed, and have excellent service skills ($gap=0.25$, rank 14).

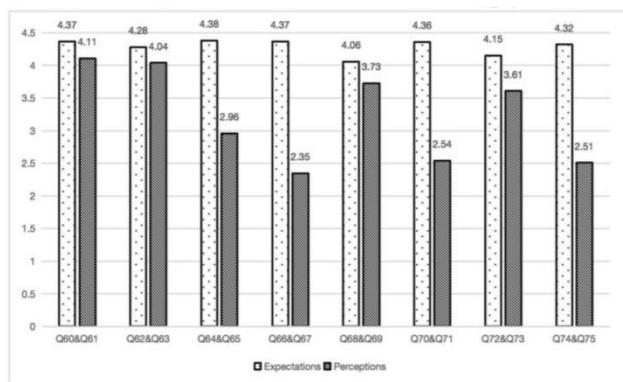


Figure 4.3 Comparison of Chinese Tourists' Expectations and Perceptions of External Business Factor

The result from Figure 4.3 illustrated that from the External Business Factor, having reasonable traffic cost is the biggest gap between expectations and perceptions ($gap=2.02$, rank 1), followed by having reasonable commodity prices ($gap=1.82$, rank 2), followed by having provided reasonable price at entertainment ($gap=1.81$, rank 3), followed by having convenient and easy access to transportation in the area ($gap=1.42$, rank 4), followed by having facilities for Chinese tourists recreational ($gap=0.54$, rank 5), followed by having stores that sell souvenirs and special local products ($gap=0.33$, rank 6), followed by having unique natural tourism landscape ($gap=0.26$, rank 7), followed by keeping a good memory for tourists ($gap=0.24$, rank 8).

Hypothesis Test

To facilitate recording, service quality management is represented by W. The author reduced the of service quality factors with 5 items into 1 new factor and named as SQF; reduced the marketing mix factors with 7 item into 1 new factor that named as MMF; reduced the external business factors with 4 items each into 1 new factor named as EBF.

Table 4.5 Correlation Analysis among Service Quality Factor, Marketing Mix Factor, External Business Factor and Service Quality Management.

		Correlations		
		SQF	MMF	EBF
SQF	Pearson Correlation	1		
MMF	Pearson Correlation	.810**	1	
EBF	Pearson Correlation	.702**	.760**	1
W	Pearson Correlation	.832**	.887**	.807**
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 4.5 shows the results of the two-tailed test between service quality factor, marketing mix factor, external business factor and service quality management are all less than 0.01, which means they correlate each other at the significance level of one percent. Among them, there is significant between service quality factor and service quality management; there is significant between marketing mix factor and service quality management; there is significant between external business factor and service quality management. Therefore, H₁, H₂ and H₃ can be accepted.

Regression Analysis

Table 4.6 Regression Analysis

	Adjusted R ²	Sig.	Standardized Coefficients	Test Result
			Beta	
H ₁	.692	.000***	.832	Accepted
H ₂	.786	.000***	.887	Accepted
H ₃	.650	.000***	.807	Accepted

Table 4.6 shows relationship between Service Quality Factors and Service Quality Management at the level of significance is .000. The relationship between Marketing Mix Factors and Service Quality Management at the level of significance is .000. The relationship between External Business Factors and Service Quality Management at the level of significance is .000. It supports that H₁ can be accepted with positive correlation, H₂ can be accepted with positive correlation, and H₃ can be accepted with positive correlation.

Discussion

The results regarding that the staffs provide personalized service to Chinese tourists, the staffs are respectful, use polite language, smile service towards Chinese tourists similarly to results presented by Turenqisuo (2014) who stated tourists spend most of their time in hotels, so the hotel's high standard facilities and service are the most important factors in attracting tourists. The results from this study revealed that hotel facilities and services the tourists received from the hotel in Phuket were high standard. The results regarding that the seaside resorts areas in southern Thailand which reveal that the local authorities' lack of ability to handle emergency situations and do not have safety framework in protecting Chinese tourists disagrees with Wang (2012) who mentioned that the Tourism Authority of Thailand has a strict management system. When traveling to Phuket, tourists can often see tourist policemen in uniform, which is one of the characteristics of Thailand. If the rights are violated,

tourists can complain directly to them and they will get justice for you. The Phuket government has taken many other steps to protect the interests of tourists. Even though what Wang (2012) found was nothing related to the safety from natural disaster and operational disaster that happened before.

Conclusion and Research Implication

This study achieved objectives that there is a significant relationship between service quality provided by the seaside resort facility operators and the Chinese tourists' expectation for service quality management of seaside resort areas in southern Thailand. The findings also reveal the seaside resort management in term of marketing mix factors impact on the service quality management of the seaside resort areas for Chinese Tourists. And the findings also show that external business factors also impact on service quality management of seaside resort areas in southern Thailand for the tourists. The findings reveal that the service quality of the seaside resort areas management in southern Thailand are exceed the Chinese tourists' expectations including the resorts' supports on online bookings is the highest level, the staffs' personalized service to Chinese tourists, the staffs are respectful, use polite language, smile while service, have technical support, and have online payment service respectively. However, there are some comments from the tourists on their expectation which most concern about pricings including from high to low, food prices are not reasonable, accommodation price, local transportation fare, commodity, and entertainments. Regarding to the personnel, the findings reveal that the operators do not have expertise in handling emergency situations. Other comments from the tourists is that the resorts do not provide legal frameworks in protecting Chinese tourists, do not provide convenient access to transportation in the seaside resort areas, and do not have enough facilities for the tourists' recreation.

The findings from this research contribute to the knowledge that for the Chinese tourists, their needs for the service quality is different from the tourists of western countries. It represents that the services that the seaside resort facilities used to provide the western tourists may not be suitable for the Chinese. The research findings of this issue could be added to the teaching or training for students in tourism business management and people who their work related to the seaside resort area management to improve the skills in services particularly for the Chinese tourists who visit the southern seaside resorts. The findings also contribute operators and government agencies that their works related to the services in the seaside resort facilities in order to improve the services to the Chinese tourists in the future.

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