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SUMMARY. Lebanon's tourism industry has suffered severe blows resulting from the civil war and political unrest that took place in the country. Despite the increase in the number of arrivals to Lebanon, the industry is experiencing several weaknesses that are directly affecting its advancement. The study identified factors that are hindering tourism advancement in Lebanon. Identified factors serve as a tool to develop future strategies leading to tourism advancement and improved satisfaction. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2004 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Lebanon, tourism, tourism satisfaction, Middle East

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that are hindering the advancement of the Lebanese tourism industry. Specifically, the

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study identified tourists' reasons for visiting Lebanon, travel related behavior, destination attributes, and country resources and services as affecting overall satisfaction with Lebanon.

Before the 16 years of civil war (1975-1991), Lebanon was perceived as the ideal tourist destination in the Middle East. Lebanon's scenic beauty, sunny climate, and historical sites attracted more than 2.4 million visitors annually (Ladki & Dah, 1997). Nevertheless, the damaging effect of war and political unrest that took place in the country has negatively affected Lebanon's tourism industry. Civil war and military invasion has robbed Lebanon of its prized reputation as the Middle East's international marketplace and premier financial center, as the region's educational hotbed and ideal vacation spot, and perhaps most painfully as an inspiring example of the peaceful coexistence of people from differing religions and national origins (Meadows, 1994).

Before the civil war, tourism was regarded as the backbone of the Lebanese economy. This role quickly diminished as Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Cyprus captured Lebanon's market share and developed plans to attract tourists while fiercely competing with Lebanon. During the prewar years, tourism contributed 20 percent to Lebanon's Gross Domestic Product. At present, statistics estimate that tourism generates between 5 and 7 percent of the total GDP (Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, 2001). Though the war brought tourism to a standstill, the constant increase in the number of visitors demonstrates Lebanon's resilience; attracting only 180,000 visitors in 1992, one year after the end of the civil war, and around 1 million visitors in 2001 (Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, 2001).

According to the World Trade Organization there were 70 million international travelers in the year 2000 out of which 18 million visited the Middle East, up from 14 million in 1995 (www.wto.org). Arrivals have increased at an annual average of 6.3 percent since 1983, yet most of the tourists to the Middle East are from the Middle East (IPR, 2000a). As a destination, Lebanon is most favored by Arab and especially Kuwaiti tourists (IPR, 2000b). Despite terrorism and threat of war, it is clear that the growth potential for tourism in Lebanon and the Middle East is enormous.

With its scenic beauty, its combination of eastern and western cultural values, as well as its rich history, Lebanon has the foundations to be an ideal tourist destination. However, terrorism and civil war have severely affected Lebanon's tourism industry. Although serious negative outcomes have resulted from the actual political instability in Lebanon, it is the negative images created in the wake of these prior events

that have deterred tourists from revisiting (Ladki & Dah, 1997). As has been demonstrated many times in the past few years, the tourism sector is the first to suffer from violence and war, and the first to benefit from peace (Aboukhalil, 2002). In 1991, Lebanon began to witness the entry of many international chains, thus increasing competition, exposure, and tourist inflow. By 1998, six years after the end of the civil conflict, Lebanese and international hospitality investors embarked on a \$1.2 billion restoration project (Schellen, 2002). The restoration project unavoidably faced many challenges.

Despite the lingering political instability that Lebanon has been witnessing since the end of war, the number of arrivals into the country continues to increase. However, the increase in the number of arrivals has not been paralleled with an increase in investment in hospitality projects. Moreover, issues directly affecting tourists were brought to light and needed the collaboration of key government agencies and the private sector. After all, it is destination offerings and services that drive the tourism industry and nothing will shatter tourists' perceptions of a destination more than inferior, unprofessional service (Gartner, 1996).

Incoming tourists to Lebanon deal with various government agencies, as well as hospitality and service providers, such as airlines, hotels, car rentals, taxi drivers, restaurants, and many others. According to Troels (1995) most incoming tourists leave Lebanon dissatisfied with the service encounters generated from different experiences. To ensure customer satisfaction, Luchars (1996) stated that host countries must provide the benefits that are considered critical to meet expectations.

There exists a general feeling among tourists visiting Lebanon that satisfaction with overall visit is not highly rated (Aboukhalil, 2002). Tourists believe that Lebanon needs to develop a comprehensive approach to tourism development rather than the existing individualistic approach where tourists are required to interact with various service providers in order to achieve satisfaction (Fattoush, 1998). Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to create a better understanding of the forces that hinder tourism advancement in Lebanon. Ultimately, the information provided in this study will help tourism planners develop better offerings that meet the needs of travelers coming to Lebanon.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes inferential and descriptive research techniques to investigate the relationship between the variables. The study design em-

employs one dependent variable and four independent variables. The dependent variable is tourists' satisfaction with the visit to Lebanon. The independent variables are (1) tourists' perceived benefits, (2) destination attributes, (3) travel-related behavior, and (4) Lebanon's resources and services.

SAMPLE DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

Sample selection is a very important step in conducting research. Gay (1987) stated that the sample's merit determines the generalizability of the results. Therefore, the most important criterion in this study's sample selection was the ability to increase the validity of the study's conclusions. The random sampling procedure was employed in this study. In simple random sampling, every individual has the same probability of being selected, and the selection of one individual in no way affects the selection of another individual. In other words, all individuals in the defined population had an equal and independent chance of being selected in the sample.

The sample of this study represented a group of ($n = 675$) tourists who visited Lebanon. Data for the study was collected by responses to a questionnaire designed to measure tourists' benefits, travel related behavior, country resources and services, and destination attributes as affecting satisfaction when visiting Lebanon.

Tourists who participated in the study had their instrument administered by research associates at Beirut International Airport. The instrument was administered at the departure gate for tourists who have concluded their trip to Lebanon. Consideration was given to departing morning and afternoon flights. Most morning flights depart for Europe and North America, while most afternoon flights depart for Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Tourists received their instruments and answered their questions while waiting in line to be checked-in at the luggage counter. Each tourist who visited Lebanon in the spring of 2002 had an equal chance of being selected in the sample. There was no follow-up contact with tourists who refused to take part in this study.

INSTRUMENT

A structured questionnaire was used to conduct this survey. Utilizing reviewed literature, a 51-item instrument consisting of five parts was

developed. The instrument was designed to measure: (1) tourists benefits in visiting Lebanon, (2) travel-related behavior that tourists engage in while in Lebanon, (3) evaluation of destination attributes, (4) country resources and services, and (5) demographics.

Part one, benefit statements, consisted of eight statements that described reasons for visiting Lebanon, which were mainly developed by McCool and Martin (1994). Answering this section of the instrument required consumers to rate their extent of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree). The scale items included statements such as "You came to Lebanon to engage in social nightlife" or "You came to Lebanon to visit religious sites."

Part two, travel-related behavior, consisted of eight statements which were used to test respondents' behavior. The travel-related behavior items were selected from a study by Pizam and Sussman (1995). Tourists were asked to rate their extent of agreement or disagreement. Responses were answered on a five-point Likert type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree). Such statements included "When you came to Lebanon, you planned your own trip" or "While in Lebanon, you participated in structured tours."

Parts three and four gathered information about country resources and services as well as destination attributes. Items were answered using a five point Likert type scale anchored by the bi-polar adjectives (1 = Very Dissatisfied and 5 = Very Satisfied). The variables of interest in this section of the survey included items such as road safety standards, environmental factors, and services. The items in this section were based on attributes and service quality dimensions developed by Pizam and Sussman (1995), Pizam and Jeong (1996), and Pizam and Reichel (1996). Part five was used to collect demographic information such as age, gender, education, and travel patterns.

RESULTS

The questionnaire was distributed to 675 tourists who agreed to participate in the study. The number of usable questionnaires was 213. Thus, the study had a response rate of 31 percent. Of the arrivals to Lebanon, 62 percent reported traveling with two or more companions, and findings revealed that 45 percent of those who visit Lebanon usually travel with friends or family members. The survey revealed that before visiting Lebanon, 37 percent of respondents had visited Europe, and 32 percent had visited other places in the Middle East. Additionally, data

showed that 65 percent of the respondents were younger than 35 years. Sixty-two percent of the respondents were male and 44 percent were married. The most popular reason for visiting Lebanon is to engage in social nightlife as reported by 74 percent of respondents. Sixty-one percent of arrivals expressed a desire to know more about available attractions and tourist sites prior to visitation. Of those who visited Lebanon, 32 percent were interested in touring religious sites, and 24 percent were interested in sports-related activities. Brochures, fliers, and guidebooks were used by 49 percent of arrivals, whereas organized structured tours were used by 35 percent of arrivals.

Table 1 summarizes destination attributes and country resources and services available in Lebanon. Respondents were mostly dissatisfied with pollution levels and noise levels, 81 percent and 79 percent respectively. Forty-two percent were mostly dissatisfied with the absence of recycling programs in the country. In terms of services, 75 percent of the respondents were most satisfied with banking services, and 37 percent were least satisfied with the country's price-value relationship. The absence of public restrooms, 67 percent, and public phones, 49 percent, was a big dissatisfier. Sixty-four percent of respondents rated souvenir and gift shops as satisfactory.

Stepwise regression analysis revealed that tourists who travel in groups ($r^2 = 0.37$, $t = 3.74$, $P < 0.001$) and those who get the chance to socialize with other tourists while in Lebanon ($r^2 = 0.41$, $t = 2.10$, $P < 0.001$) were highly satisfied with their visit. Further, tourists were very dissatisfied with local transportation services ($r^2 = 0.15$, $t = 5.98$, $P < 0.001$), road safety and traffic standards ($r^2 = 0.19$, $t = 3.56$, $P < 0.001$), and the abundance of billboards and banners that are cluttering the cities ($r^2 = 0.22$, $t = 2.38$, $P < 0.01$). Lebanon's active nightlife ($r^2 = 0.12$, $t = 2.12$, $P < 0.01$) and accommodation services ($r^2 = 0.16$, $t = 4.05$, $P < 0.001$) are important satisfiers that seem to significantly affect the overall satisfaction with the visits to Lebanon.

Further, the researchers used factor analysis as a data reduction tool and as a technique to establish the construct validity of the instrument. Table 2 shows fourteen items that measure five different dimensions, out of which four are consistent with the findings of previous research. The first dimension measured the travel-related behavior which consists of five items such as travel in groups, socialize with other tourists, participate in structured tours, use brochures, and receive expected levels of service. The reason the research measured the dimension via five items instead of eight as in the instrument is due to cultural differences as well as the way respondents conceive the items in English. Based on previous research, it is found that environmental factors were measured

TABLE 1. Destination Attributes and Country Resources and Services

Destination Attributes	Very Dissatisfied (1) %	Dissatisfied (2) %	Indifferent (3) %	Satisfied (4) %	Very Satisfied (5) %	Mean	Standard Deviation
Road safety standards:							
Local transportation services	23.9	22.1	21.6	27.2	3.8	2.61	1.26
Road signs	27.7	28.6	22.5	17.4	2.3	2.34	1.16
Traffic signs	25.8	36.6	22.5	12.7	0.9	2.22	1.04
Traffic	31.9	37.1	12.2	11.3	0.9	1.92	1.11
Noise	44.6	34.3	12.7	7.0	0.0	1.79	0.93
Pollution	46.5	33.8	12.2	5.2	0.9	1.76	0.94
Environmental factors:							
Abundance of public billboards, banners, etc.	13.6	16.9	20.7	35.7	10.8	3.06	1.31
Cleanliness of public properties	18.8	22.5	19.2	31.5	4.7	2.71	1.30
Overall development of coastal areas	16.4	23.9	26.3	27.2	3.8	2.71	1.21
Maintenance of coastal areas	16.0	25.8	35.7	14.6	5.2	2.59	1.16
Deforestation and fire prevention	16.0	26.8	38.5	14.1	2.3	2.53	1.07
Recycling programs	21.6	20.7	39.9	13.6	1.4	2.44	1.10
Resources and Services							
Services:							
Banking	1.9	5.2	17.8	38.5	35.7	3.98	1.03
Hotel check-in/check-out	2.8	4.7	20.2	39.4	31.9	3.90	1.05
Airport services	5.6	6.6	20.2	44.1	22.5	3.69	1.12
Service providers' mastery of foreign languages	4.7	9.9	18.0	42.3	23.0	3.65	1.16
Accommodation services	3.8	5.6	20.2	43.2	16.4	3.31	1.48
Mobile phone rentals	8.0	17.8	28.2	26.8	18.3	3.27	1.23
Price-value relationship	16.9	20.2	29.1	30.0	0.9	2.69	1.18
Availability of facilities and activities:							
Souvenir and gift shops	5.2	9.9	19.7	40.8	23.0	3.62	1.17
Healthcare services	11.7	8.0	35.7	31.0	12.2	3.20	1.20
Public phones	25.8	23.0	20.2	21.6	5.6	2.53	1.35
Handicap facilities	29.1	27.2	25.4	14.1	2.3	2.28	1.15
Public restrooms	39.4	26.8	18.8	10.3	1.9	2.00	1.13

TABLE 2. Factor Analysis of Tourists' Perceived Satisfaction with Visit to Lebanon

Factor	Loading	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)
Factor 1: Travel-related behavior		3.342	23.874
Travel in groups	0.708		
Socialize with other tourists	0.704		
Participate in structured tours	0.703		
Use brochures or other means to identify places to visit	0.692		
Receive the service that you expected from tourist provider	0.663		
Factor 2: Environmental factors		1.897	13.546
Stocking rivers with fresh water fish for sport purposes	0.798		
Maintenance of coastal areas	0.750		
Abundance of public billboards, banners, etc.	0.526		
Factor 3: Availability of modern technology		1.648	11.768
Hotel check-in/check-out	0.858		
Electronic banking	0.848		
Factor 4: Facilities and activities		1.154	8.242
Engage in social nightlife	0.826		
Healthcare services	0.554		
Factor 5: Public services		1.063	7.593
Public restrooms	0.849		
Handicap facilities	0.801		
Total			65.024

via nine different statements. However, the researchers used three items to extract the same information using data reduction techniques. The third dimension, availability of modern technology, was measured by two items instead of four. The items are: hotel check-in/check-out and electronic banking. The fifth dimension, public services, was measured by two items: availability of public restrooms and handicap facilities.

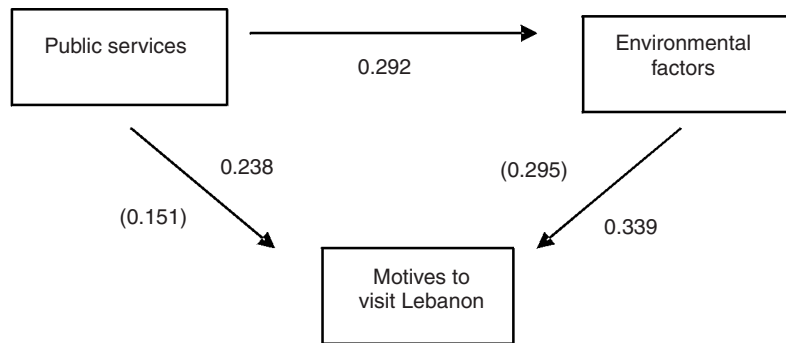
The fourth dimension was rather interesting. It proved to be the only dimension that is inconsistent with previous research. This is because the dimension emerged out of the benefits that tourists received as well as the availability of facilities and activities in a destination. It is reasoned that this dimension measures the activities as shown by the items engage in social nightlife and healthcare services. According to previous research, the two items for this dimension belonged to benefits and activities. However, both measure activities and facilities. The activities such as active nightlife, and facilities such as availability of advanced healthcare, were used as a dependent variable measuring motives for people to visit Lebanon, which was taken as a function of the other four dimensions. Table 3 shows that two dimensions out of four are significant in explaining the variations in reasons for visiting Lebanon.

Figure 1 depicts a path analytical presentation which decomposes the relation between motives (reasons for visiting Lebanon), availability of

TABLE 3. Results of Path Analysis on Tourists' Satisfaction Factors

Factor	Coefficients	t-value	Sig.
Environment	0.262	3.763	0.000
Facilities	0.145	2.137	0.034
Travel-related behavior	0.087	1.309	0.192
Technology	0.073	1.094	0.275
Environment	0.280	4.129	0.000
Facilities	0.138	2.037	0.043
Travel-related behavior	0.096	1.449	0.149
Environment	0.295	4.394	0.000
Facilities	0.151	2.257	0.025

FIGURE 1. Path Diagram of Public Services and Environmental Factors as Affecting Motives



public services such as restrooms and handicap accessibility, and environmental factors into direct and indirect relations as follows. The relation between services and motives is (0.238) broken into (0.151) as direct effect, in addition to the indirect effect via environmental factors (0.086). This implies that 64 percent of the relation is direct, as seen in Table 4.

By the same token, the environmental factors affect reasons for visiting Lebanon, implying that 87 percent of the effect is direct. As shown in Figure 1, the direct effect of environmental factors plays a greater role in motivating people to visit Lebanon than the direct effect of having public services.

TABLE 4. Decomposition of Causal Effects in the Path Model

Factor	Indirect Effect	Direct Effect	Total Effect
Public services	0.086	0.151	0.238
Environmental factors	0.044	0.295	0.339

DISCUSSION

Tourism is a rather complicated activity that encompasses several different economic and social sectors. In terms of tourism impact, most researchers investigate the positive contribution of tourism and its added value (Chen, 2000; Jurowski et al., 1997; Lui et al., 1987; Perdue et al., 1990; Perdue et al., 1995). However, the authors of this study felt the need to identify the factors that negatively affect the advancement of the Lebanese tourism industry. Thus, allowing tourism planners to draft a strategy of change that converts negative forces into positive ones which brings added value and satisfaction to the overall experience in Lebanon.

Destination Attributes

Tourists appreciate the beauty of sites and monuments as much as they seek a clean and healthy environment (Allen et al., 1994). The overall aesthetic appeal of Lebanon lacks attractiveness. Poor urban planning, unclean coastal areas, and bulky billboards and banners of all kinds generate a poor and unsatisfactory “look” of the country. The inadequate government attention to environmental issues such as garbage collection and disposal, nature protection, and fumes emitted from cars and factories resulted in air and water pollution, causing health problems for Lebanese and visitors alike. Lebanon’s endangered forests now cover only 7 percent of the country’s surface (Unknown, 2002). Of those remaining forests, the majority are sparse and unhealthy. Lebanon’s environmental groups cite a long list of problems, including those associated with quarries, pesticides, sea reclamation and industrial pollution.

As far as infrastructure is concerned, transportation is an essential element to the tourism sector where infrastructure should be improved in order to attract tourists and to ensure satisfaction. The Lebanese land transport system has reached a critical state. Despite some positive developments during the last decade such as the installation of road signs, safety rules, and development of an extensive network of roads around Lebanon, land transportation in Lebanon continues to be a complex prob-

lem. Beirut is the heart of the country's transport system and therefore is prone to suffer the most from major traffic congestion due to a poorly developed, ill-planned transport network. This translates into serious economic losses and deteriorating air quality. Greater awareness of the country's traffic problems has contributed to the formation of several civil-society projects. Road signs and traffic lights should be present everywhere and the most important is citizens' strict compliance with driving codes. Although plans to protect Lebanon's environment have been drafted, no implementation strategy has been executed to save the environment and maintain the aesthetic appeal of the country.

Country Resources and Services

One of the most frequently mentioned issues was the poor quality of services offered by the telecommunications sector as reflected in the lack of telephone booths for local and international calls, lack of reduced Internet fees, and the absence of multilingual phone operators. Lebanon's open skies policy which took effect in 2001 have increased the number of arrivals to the country. The increased number of arrivals should compel telecommunication companies to make available public phone booths, phone cards, and other communication technologies available throughout the country.

Power outages, water shortage, and poor infrastructure are all pitfalls in the service sector in Lebanon. Since Lebanon is no longer in a state of war, the Lebanese government should be actively involved in transforming the negative impact of war against the country's infrastructure.

Service within the hospitality sector was rated as satisfactory, whereas the price value relationship was found to be problematic. As for service providers' skill levels, a study prepared by Awad (2000) reported that the tourist sector needs to add 27,000 trained staff by 2010 to adequately serve the country's visitors. Schools with hospitality programs graduate about 1,400 each year, half of what the market needs. The number of tourists in Lebanon is projected to reach 1.5 million a year over the next decade (Saab, 2000). This means that the hotels must prepare their staff properly to receive the new tourists. In Lebanon, the tourism sector is expected to create 2,700 new jobs every year. Thus there is a need to develop human resources and vocational training programs in the country (IPR, 2000b).

Travel Related Behavior

Gartner (1996) stated that in order to gain a larger market share and to develop a positive tourism image, destinations need to advertise. He also added that the image formation process is critical to tourism marketing, promotion, and development. The focus should be on countries whose citizens tend to travel abroad, as well as places with large Lebanese expatriate communities. One way to overcome the country's negative public image is to professionally promote Lebanon abroad. Before the civil war, Lebanese tourism offices were found in seven cities around the world (Frankfurt, London, New York, Baghdad, Brussels, Cairo, and Jeddah). Today, except for Cairo and Paris, there are no Lebanese tourism offices anywhere in the world so information on touring Lebanon is not available (Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, 2002).

Embassies abroad must also play an active role in the dissemination of tourism-related information. Visa application procedures should be simplified or totally lifted, thus taking away one of the first obstacles a visitor may encounter while planning a trip to Lebanon. One of the impractical laws that the government has passed is barring female Russian nationals who are under the age of twenty-nine into the country. Being a family destination, Lebanon cannot afford such a law. A Russian family's travel decision and destination selection will be affected when certain family members are prevented from joining the family's vacation.

Perceived Benefits

Luchars and Hinkin (1996) stated that tourists chose affordable destinations with the most attractive benefits. To ensure customer satisfaction, destinations must provide benefits that customers consider as critical to meet expectations. If benefits are not present, customers will not be satisfied, regardless of the extras that are provided.

The economic hardships of Lebanon led the government to impose high taxes on hospitality and tourism products and services, thus negatively impacting tourists' spending and capital investment. A 1998 study which compared the cost of hospitality services among eight Middle Eastern countries found Lebanon's room rates, car rental rates, taxes, and food prices to among the highest priced in the region. According to the World Tourism Organization, Lebanon is situated in a region that is shaped by fierce competition dollars where costs of

hospitality services in Lebanon are quite expensive (Younis, 1996; Fattoush, 1998; Jaber, 1998).

Although Lebanon has attracted considerable capital and investment from Arab states following the September 11 events in the United States, establishing general trust in the country is the first step towards rescuing the economy. In December 2001 alone, 100,000 tourists visited Lebanon (Lebanese Ministry of Tourism, 2002). The majority originating from Arab countries. Also, the number of visitors coming into Lebanon has increased by 25 percent in the last quarter of 2001. Overall, the number of Arab visitors coming into Lebanon post-September 11, 2001 reflected a positive spirit for the country's tourism potential.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The factors that hinder tourism advancement in Lebanon are quite clear, but the question remains: what should government and tourism planners do to overcome such complexities? Government should work closely with all tourism-related stakeholders to set up rules and regulations that help both public and private sectors improve Lebanon's image and overall customer satisfaction. Measures should be taken to preserve the environment and the eco-system. Otherwise, if not protected, our tourism industry will deteriorate. Serious studies should be conducted to come up with an aggressive marketing plan for Lebanon.

The Lebanese Ministry of Tourism (2001) has identified a set of measures in order to boost tourism:

- Establish an active promotional campaign for the country.
- Speed formalities in entering the country.
- Facilitate formalities in obtaining a visa and extend its validation.
- Activate embassies abroad to promote tourism assets.
- Improve the archeological sites in Lebanon.

It is true that during the 1980s the image of Lebanon was one of war and violence; however, the war is over, and Lebanon is in the midst of its recovery journey. Data generated from this study will help Lebanon's tourism planners preserve resources, promote confidence in the country, and maximize satisfaction.

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