Comparison of international tourists' behavior in Thailand; a case study of inbound tourists from ASEAN, East Asia, Europe and The Americas

Pisorn Janvanichyanont, Tarntawan U-Napark and
Saengduen Ratinthorn

September 13, 2018

Comparison of international tourists' behavior in Thailand; a case study of inbound tourists from ASEAN, East Asia, Europe and The Americas

Abstract
 The aim of this research is to study travel behavior of international tourists from four regions who visited Thailand; ASEAN, East Asia, Europe and The Americas. Behaviors indicated in this survey cover behaviors from pre-visit, on-site and post-visit stages of tourists. A quantitative approach is conducted by surveying international tourists from ASEAN, East Asian, European and The American countries who visited Thailand. As researchers adopt quota sampling method, 877 sets of questionnaire were collected in Bangkok. According to data analysis, the result shows that there are significant relationships between origins of tourists and 10 out of 11 travel behaviors. Tourists from four regions travel overseas 2-3 times in 1 year, particularly European tourists. They are mostly travel for holiday lifestyle experience and plan their trip themselves. Result shows that up to 80.5 percent of European tourists plan the trip themselves. A number of tourists from four regions spend 6 – 10 days for their trip, especially East Asian tourists, The Americas and Europe respectively. In terms of trip expenditure, only ASEAN indicates expenditure at 1,001 – 2,000 USD, while other three regions share same expenditure range at 2,001 – 3,000 USD. From the result of this study, stakeholders in tourism and hospitality industry in Thailand should provide their tourism products and services to serve the specific needs of tourists from each origin that have different demographic profile and travel behaviors.

Key words: Tourist behavior, demographic characteristic, Thailand inbound tourists

Introduction
Travel and tourism industry has long been considered as one of the most significant sources of income to Thailand's economy. In 2017, it generated direct contribution 9.4 % of total GDP with an income of over THB 1,400 billion. This amount is expected to rise by 7.8% in 2018, and continuously grow in following years, with a forecast of 5.7% per available year from 2018-2028. The contribution to GPD is also estimated to reach 12.8% in 2028. Apart from the revenue, this sector also provides a high portion of employment, with direct contribution of over 2 million jobs in 2017 (Word Travel & Tourism Council, 2018). Furthermore, number of inbound international tourists also keeps increasing, from only 15 millions in 2010 to over 35 millions in 2017 (Department of Tourism, 2018). With this statistic, it is obvious that tourist from 4 main regions; East Asia, ASEAN, Europe, and The Americas are key

market for the country's industry. In 2017, tourists from East Asia (such as South Korea, Japan, and China) come the first on the list with 14.5 millions, followed by ASEAN of 9 millions, Europe of 6.5 millions, and The Americas of 1.5 millions. Altogether they play a major role in Thailand's inbound tourism accounting for 90% of total arrivals. As a result of this huge volume, the group contributed over 87% of total inbound tourism receipts.

Tourists come to Thailand for different purposes. Some enjoy their leisure time with relaxing activities such as shopping, having a good time at beautiful beaches, or eating. Others might travel for their business trip, while some have their certain goals such as medical or dental treatment. Those tourists are from different regions and cultures. Thus, because of these variances, it could be assumed that they would also have different travel behaviors since planning to visit, and while travelling in Thailand. In order to best plan and manage tourism resources, this is useful to examine. The researchers will therefore study international tourists from the four main regions by comparing their demographics and travel behavior, with 2 main objectives as follow.

1. To identify and compare the demographic characteristics of tourists from ASEAN, East Asia, Europe and The Americas countries who visit Thailand.

2. To compare the tourist travel behavior of tourists from ASEAN, East Asia, Europe and The Americas who visit Thailand.

Literature review

1. Tourists travel behavior

Van and Slabbert (2012, p.295) define travel behavior as "the way in which tourists behave according to their attitudes before, during and after travelling". There are several studies that examine the travel behavior of inbound international tourists in different dimensions. Cohen et al (2014) propose that in order to fully understand the tourists' travel behavior, it should comprise of 3 interrelated stages; pre-visit, on-site, and post-visit behavior.

2. Pre-visit travel behavior

Pre-visit travel behavior refers to activities or plans occurred before tourists physically arrive at a tourism destination. Sparks and Pan (2009) reveal the travel behavior of potential Chinese outbound tourists to Australia. The majority of Chinese tourists travels aboard less than once a year, stays for about 1 week oversea, and prefers fully packaged tour. Looking at their use of information sources for their destination choice, the top-five sources are television programs, friends, fashion magazines, travel books, and newspapers respectively. The finding also reports the 5 key destination attributes when travelling aboard; natural beauty and icons of a destination, quality

infrastructure (such as an accommodation), autonomy (such as plenty of time to take photos), inspirational motives (such as change from daily routine), and social self-enhancement (such as a new experience that can be talked with friends). Knowing these attributes is advantageous in providing types of holiday experiences that match tourists' needs. Chinese tourists, as a big group of inbound tourists to Thailand could be an example representing the East Asia tourists. However, it could possibly give a different result when changing their destination from Australia to Thailand. The two countries are similar in natural resources (such as beaches) but also different in other aspects such as culture and flight duration, which could somewhat affect tourists behavior.

3. On-site travel behavior

On-site travel behavior refers to all activities that take place during tourists' stay at a destination. At this stage, it could also engage other facets of behaviors such as tourists' total trip expenditure, types of holidays and destinations, activities, accommodation, that could be different from what they previously planned. Trip expenditure, for instance, is found to be associated with many factors such as length of stay, group size, nationality, profession, income, package services, and inclusion or not of children (Alegre and Sard, 2011). In this study, German and British are found to be high spenders of the popular tourist destination in Spain (the island of Mallorca).

4. Post-visit travel behavior

Post-visit travel behavior refers to activities occurred after tourists trip. This could involve tourists' motivations to revisit the destination, and factors that could affect these stimuli. Rittichainuwat et al (2008) conducted a survey of international tourists who visited Thailand and found out some significant factors that could drive those travellers to revisit the country; seeing people from different cultures, interesting cultural and historical attractions, value for money, overall affordability, friendliness of Thai people, and natural attractions.

As suggested by Cohen et al (2014), this three-stage model should be put in place to understand a holistic view of the tourists' travel behavior. However, most of the past studies only focus on one or two phases, overlooking a whole comprehension of the visitors. This research therefore fills this gap by integrating the three-phase concept into one.

Research Methodology

Quantitative approach was chosen to find out the result of this research. Survey investigation was conducted to gather a data from inbound tourists who visited Thailand from ASEAN countries, East Asia, Europe and The America. Quota sampling approach was adopted in collecting the data.

1. Research instrument

The questionnaire is printed in English, comprises of two main sections. The first section asked the demographic information of respondents. The first question of the first section asked the nationality of the respondents. This question was a filter question, helps the researcher to divide the tourists into four origins; ASEAN countries, East Asia, Europe and The America. The respondents from the countries that do not locate in the four regions were excluded in the data analysis. Other questions in the first section include the information regarding gender, marital status, age, level of education, occupation and monthly income of the respondents.

The second section of the questionnaire comprises of 11 questions about travel behavior of the respondents. The travel behavior indicated in this questionnaire includes frequency of overseas travelling per year, how to plan the trip, length of stay, expenditures of the trip, types of intended holiday experience in Thailand, intended tourist activities, type of accommodation, source of tourist information, recommendation about Thailand to others, important reason to return to Thailand, and important factor attracting the respondent to Thailand. Each question is in the form of multiple choices but respondents must choose only 1 answer.

2. Data collection and data analysis

Questionnaire survey was conducted at major tourist spots in Bangkok such as Suvarnabhumi Airport, China town, area around the Grand Palace, Khaosan Road and nearby province such as Ayutthaya. Quota sampling was adopted as population proportion was taken into account. The minimum of desired amount of data was 200 sets each from all the regions. After data collection, total of 877 sets of questionnaire were collected, comprising of 200 sets from ASEAN tourists, 200 sets from East Asian tourists, 257 sets from European tourists and 220 sets from tourists of The American continent.

Statistical Package for the Social Science software (SPSS) was used in analyzing the collected data as follows;

1. Descriptive statistic including Frequency and Percentage was used to identify the characteristics of demographic profile of inbound tourists from the four regions.
2. Pearson Chi-Square tests were performed to compare each travel behavior of tourists from the four regions and find out whether there is significance in each behavior.
3. Pearson Chi-Square tests were performed again to find out whether there is a relationship between two travel behaviors of the tourists from four regions.

Result and discussion
1. Demographic profile of tourists from the four regions
      The demographic profile of tourists from ASEAN countries from the data analysis shows that 58% are female tourists and 42% are male. 47.5% of the tourists have an age between 26 – 35 years old, which is the biggest group followed by the age between 17 – 25 years old accounting for 34%. The majority of ASEAN tourists are single (66%) and 60.5% of them are graduated from Bachelor's degree. 42.5% are company employees and 20.5% are business owner. Their average income is between 1,501 – 3,000 USD (38%).

      For the demographic profile of tourists from East Asian countries, most of the tourists are male (51.3%) with age between 17 – 25 years old (47%). The most frequent responds for marital status is single (74.5%). Most of them have an education level of Bachelor's degree at 66.5%. They mostly work as a company employee (37.5%) or are studying (33.5%). Their average income is between 1,501 – 3,000 USD (35%).

      From the descriptive statistical analysis, the tourists from European countries are mostly male (61.5%). The majority of this group of tourists is 26 – 35 years old (40.5%), still single (59.1) and have education level of Bachelor's degree (48.2%).

      The tourists from The American countries are mostly male (60%), female tourists are accounted for 40%. Half of them are between 26 – 35 years old (49.5%). Majority of the tourists are single, accounted for 56.8%. They have an education level of Bachelor's degree, accounted for 62.3%. Their occupation is mostly business owner (32.7%) and company employee (27.7%). The majority of the tourists have yearly income between 3,001 – 4,500 USD, accounting for 32.3%.

      Comparing the demographic profile of tourists from four regions, ASEAN countries are the only group which generates more female tourists to Thailand, while data shows that there are more male tourists from other three regions. In terms of age, East Asia is the only region which majority of tourists are younger than other regions as 47% are between 17 – 25 years old. Most of tourists from the other regions are between 26 – 35 years old. For marital status, all regions show a common characteristic that tourists who are single are majority. Single tourists tend to travel more frequently than tourists with other marital statuses.

      Moreover, In terms of Educational level of the tourists, majority from all regions are Bachelor's degree level. Most of tourists from The Americas are business owners while tourists from other three regions are company employees. They also have more income than others, ranging between 3,001 – 4,500 USD, while most of tourists from other regions have income between 1,501 – 3,000 USD.

2. Relationship between travel behavior and origins of tourists

Pearson Chi-Square tests were adopted to find out if there is a relationship between the origins of tourists, as selected in this study as ASEAN countries, East Asian countries, The Americas and European countries, and travel behaviors. The result shows that there are significant relationships which level of significance is below 0.05 in certain behavior.

Travel behavior	Significant level	Result
Frequency of overseas travelling per year	.003	Sig.
How to plan the trip	.025	Sig.
Length of stay	.000	Sig.
Expenditures of the trip	.000	Sig.
Types of intended holiday experience	.000	Sig.
Intended tourist activities	.000	Sig.
Type of accommodation	.000	Sig.
Source of tourist information	.111	Not sig.
Recommendation about Thailand to others	.000	Sig.
Important reason to return to Thailand	.008	Sig.
Important factor attracting the respondent to Thailand	.000	Sig.

Table 1 Result of Pearson Chi-square test of travel behavior

Out of 11 travel behaviors investigates in this study, there are 10 behaviors which have a significant relationship with origins of tourists. These behaviors include frequency of overseas travelling per year, how to plan the trip, length of stay, expenditures of the trip, types of intended holiday experience in Thailand, intended tourist activities, type of accommodation, recommendation about Thailand to others, important reason to return to Thailand, and important factor attracting the respondent to Thailand. The only behavior which does not show significant relationship with origins of tourists is source of tourist information motivating the tourists to come to Thailand. It can be said that origins of tourists which can reflect varied cultural background and geographical difference influence the travel behavior of the tourists.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Tourism and hospitality industry has been one of the most important industries of Thailand. It has been generating income to the country and maintaining the competitiveness of the economy. It has also been a focus point

in national strategic plan of the country for over a decade. There are needs to study the way to enhance the industry to attract more international tourists, both new faces and the repeaters.

This study has shown that tourists from different origins have different demographic characteristics and different travel behavior. ASEAN countries are the only group that generates more female tourists to Thailand. Therefore, there could be more female products and services responding to the market that really focus on this group, such as spa products at a hotel or in a destination where a lot of this female tourists are staying. Most tourists from four regions are young, and are working people who can fulfill their travel desire. ASEAN tourists mostly stay less than 5 days for their trip while tourists from Europe plan for longer length of stay, mostly plan for more than 16 days. While tourists from The Americas and Europe decide the destination themselves, tourists ASEAN and East Asia have their friends or relatives helping them in making the decision. For trip expenditures, ASEAN tourists spend around 1,001 – 2,000 USD for a trip while other three regions spend more at 2,001 – 3,000 USD. The American and European tourists prefer to stay in the first class hotel (4 stars) while East Asian tourists prefer budget hotel and ASEAN tourists tend to opt for guesthouse. Currencies of western countries have higher values when spent in Thailand compared to currencies of Asian countries. Most tourists have indicated that Thai culture is the most important reason, except tourists from ASEAN as Thailand is also a part of ASEAN. Cultures of ASEAN countries may be similar to one another. Finally, most important factor that attracts tourists to Thailand reveals that the American and European tourists commonly chose Thai culture while tourists from ASEAN countries and East Asia chose Thai food. Marketing campaign of tourism sectors in Thailand should consider these differences and direct the right campaign to the right target group to make the investment most paid-off.

Limitations and Future Direction

There are a handful of limitations in this study that leave a room for future research. First, this study is conducted by quantitative method, mainly questionnaire survey. To gain deeper insight of tourists' behaviors, qualitative method by using in-depth interview or focus group can be performed. Further result might suggest other travel behaviors that lead to more understanding and richer application to government and private sectors in tourism industry of Thailand to attract more international tourists. Moreover, though researchers attempt to study the travel behavior of tourists who visit Thailand, the data collection was conducted only in Bangkok. If survey is to be conducted in other tourist destinations apart from Bangkok, there may lead to a new result that can better represent the whole international tourists.

Reference

Alegre, J., Cladera, M., & Sard, M. (2011). Analysing the influence of tourist motivations on tourist expenditure at a sun-and-sand destination. Tourism economics, 17(4), 813-832. Retrieved February 22, 2018, from http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.5367/te.2011.0063

Dann, G. M. (1977). Anomie, ego-enhancement and tourism. Annals of tourism research, 4(4), 184-194. Retrieved 22 April, 2017, from http://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu

Department of Tourism (2018). International Tourist Arrivals to Thailand. Retrieved April 11, 2018, from https://www.mots.go.th/more_news.php?cid=420&filename=index

Cohen, S. A., Prayag, G., & Moital, M. (2014). Consumer behaviour in tourism: Concepts, influences and opportunities. Current Issues in Tourism, 17(10), 872-909. Retrieved November 21, 2017, from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13683500.2013.850064

Esichaikul, R. (2012). Travel motivations, behavior and requirements of European senior tourists to Thailand. PASOS, Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural, 10(2), 47-58. Retrieved February 13, 2017, from http://www.pasosonline.org/Publicados/10212special/PASOS28_Special_Issue.pdf#page=55

Sparks, B., & Pan, G. W. (2009). Chinese outbound tourists: Understanding their attitudes, constraints and use of information sources. Tourism Management, 30(4), 483-494. Retrieved December 17, 2017, from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261517708001532

Van Vuuren, C., & Slabbert, E. (2012). Travel motivations and behaviour of tourists to a South African resort. Tourism & Management Studies, 295-304. Retrieved March 25, 2018, from http://tmstudies.net/index.php/ectms/article/viewFile/196/253

Word Travel & Tourism Council (2018). Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Thailand, 2018 Edition. Retrieved March 23, 2018, from https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2018/thailand2018.pdf