

Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the overview of research project including research background, objectives, contributions, hypotheses and definitions of key terms used in this study.

1.1 Research Background

The tourism industry is one of the largest and most important sectors for Thailand economy. During the past decade, the tourism industry has significantly expanded and contributed to the overall economic growth of Thailand. Each year millions of international visitors come to Thailand to experience Thai culture and the beauty of the nature in Thailand. Major overseas tourists visiting Thailand come from different parts of the world. One of the important segments is the Korean travel market (i.e. South Korea). South Korea has achieved dramatic economic growth over the past decades, which has been associated with the emergence of affluent middle class (Kim, 1997). With a strengthened economy, the demand for outbound travel will also increase significantly (Kim & Prideaux, 1998). Today, South Korea is one of the major tourist generating countries in the Asia Pacific region, and most Korean tourists take trips to neighboring countries such as China, Japan and Southeast Asia (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2008). Growth in South Korea's outbound market has been so fast that many destinations, including Thailand, have not well prepared to adjust their range of tourism products and services to specially cater for this segment (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2008). During the past decade, Thailand has benefited from an increasing of the Korean outbound tourism. According to the statistical reports by the Tourism Authority of Thailand or TAT (2008), the number of Korean tourists visiting Thailand has been increasing over the past 10 years, from 411,087 tourists in 1997 to 1,075,516 tourists in 2007 (TAT, 2008). Today, South Korea becomes Thailand's the third largest inbound market (after Malaysia and Japan). In spite of its significance, when considering the recent number of Korean inbound tourists to Thailand such as the year 2006 or 2007, there were approximately 1,000,000 travelers a year (TAT, 2008). Though this figure seems to be large for Thailand, however, it represents only 8% of the overall Korean outbound market; approximately 13,000,000 Koreans travel abroad each year (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2008). This evidently shows that the number of Korean arrivals to Thailand is still small when compared to the overall Korean outbound market. In other words, it could say that there are opportunities for Thailand to actively increase market shares of the

Korean outbound market. With the competitive global and regional tourism, increasing the number of Korean travelers to Thailand seems to be the challenges for Thailand's tourism industry, and this is the focus of the research issue identified in this study.

Due to the increasing importance of the Korean travel market to the Asia Pacific region, it is essential for Thai tourism marketers to develop effective marketing strategies to attract and increase the number of Korean travelers to Thailand. According to the literature, in order to be successful in tourism, destination marketers should understand basic wants and needs as well as travel behaviors of the target tourists (Crompton, 1979; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Jang & Wu, 2006). One of the most useful approaches to examine tourist behavior is understanding 'travel motivations' (Crompton, 1979; Cha, McCleary & Uysal, 1995; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Jang & Wu, 2006). Understanding tourist motivations could be regarded as a starting point for the success of any tourism marketing program (Cha et al., 1995; Shin, 2003). This is because travel motivation helps explain why people travel (Dann, 1977, Crompton, 1979). Knowledge of tourist motivations would enable tourism marketers to better satisfy travelers' needs and wants, and then develop appropriate marketing programs for the targets (Jang & Cai, 2001; Andreu, Kozak, Avci, & Ciffrer 2006).

One of the basic and useful approaches to examine tourist motivations is based on the theory of push and pull motivations (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). A review of literature indicates that examining tourist motivations based on the theory of push and pull motivations has been widely accepted in tourism literature (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983; Yuan & McDonald, 1990). Push factors are related to travel motives (why you travel) while pull factors are concerned with tourism attractions (what attracts you to visit a destination). Thus, the theory of push and pull motivations can provide a useful framework for examining different forces that influence a person to consider taking a vacation (push factors), and the factors that attract that person to choose a particular destination (pull factors). In order to learn more about Korean tourists' related behaviors, this study thus aims to employ it to examine travel motivations of Korean travelers to Thailand. It is hoped that the findings of the study will provide a better understanding of travel motivations of Korean travelers to Thailand by assisting both policy makers and tourism businesses in formulating appropriate travel related policies and strategies to effectively target this market segment. In addition to the practical contribution, the research results will add to the tourism literature in the area of travel motivations and tourist behaviors of international tourists to Thailand, particularly the Korean travel market.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate travel motivations of Korean travelers by adopting the theory of push and pull motivations as a conceptual framework. More specifically, the study has the following objectives:

- 1) To identify the push and pull factors that influence the travel motivations of Korean travelers
- 2) To examine whether there are any significant differences in the push and pull factors among Korean travelers (based on demographic characteristics - e.g. age, gender, education, etc.)
- 3) To examine travel-related behaviors of Korean travelers (e.g. travel patterns, travel expenses, etc.)
- 4) To examine travel satisfaction of Korean travelers with Thailand's destination attributes (e.g. accommodation, tourism attractions, shopping facilities, transportation, etc.)

1.3 Research Hypotheses

Based on the literature review (chapter 2), the following hypotheses have been formulated:

Hypothesis 1 - Korean travelers with different demographic characteristics may have differences in the push factors (travel motives) and pull factors (Thailand's tourism attractions).

Hypothesis 2 - Travel motives (push factors) of the Korean travelers are related to the destination attractions of Thailand (pull factors).

Hypothesis 3 - Korean travelers with different demographic characteristics may have different travel behaviors and trip characteristics.

Hypothesis 4 - Korean travelers with different demographic characteristics may have different levels of satisfaction with Thailand's destination attributes.

1.4 Research Scope

This study primarily aimed to examine travel motivations of Korean travelers as well as to investigate travel behaviors and tourist satisfaction. The theory of push and pull motivations were employed as a conceptual framework to examine travel motivations of Korean travelers. The samples were Korean travelers who were visiting Thailand for holiday and leisure purposes. Data collection was undertaken in Bangkok and major tourist cities (i.e. Ayutthaya and Pattaya). In this study, demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, education, income) were determined

as independent variables while travel motivations, travel behaviors and tourist satisfaction were established as dependent variables.

1.5 Research Contributions

This study employs the theory of push and pull motivations to investigate the travel motivations of Korean travelers. The theory of push and pull motivations is a well-respected motivational theory which has been argued as a useful theory in examining travel motivations of various traveler groups (Dann, 1977; Klenosky, 2002). The theory is useful for explaining why people travel (push factors) and where they go (pull factors). The results of the study are expected to provide useful implications for policy makers and tourism marketers to develop effective marketing strategies (e.g. marketing programs, product development, marketing communications) to attract more Korean travelers to Thailand. In addition, the research findings will contribute/add to the existing tourism literature in the area of travel motivations and tourist behaviors of international tourists to Thailand, especially one of the important markets for Thailand's tourism industry - Korean travelers.

In addition to identifying travel motivations of Korean travelers, this study also examines travel satisfaction of Korean travelers toward Thailand's destination attributes. Tourist satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of goods and services, and the decisions to return (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). It is generally argued that developing marketing programs to attract repeat visitors with destination satisfaction seems to be more effective than attract new customers (Rittichainuwat, Qu & Mongknonvanit, 2002). In this regard, understanding tourist satisfaction is necessary for destination marketers to design promotional campaigns and tour packages to attract and retain tourists (Rittichainuwat et al., 2002). The results of examining Korean tourists' satisfaction with Thailand's destination attributes would help concerned parties (i.e. government agencies and tourism operators) develop appropriate tourism policies for the improvement of tourism goods/services and related tourism infrastructure/facilities to meet the needs and expectation of the target market as well as enhance their repeat visit to Thailand.

Finally, according to the literature, tourists from different backgrounds/cultures may have different travel motivations and travel-related behaviors (Pizam & Sussmann, 1995; March, 1997; Kozak, 2002). Several tourism scholars argue that nationality can affect tourist behavior and suggest an investigation of individual market for successful tourism (Pizam & Sussmann, 1995; Kozak, 2002). With limited literature (research work) regarding Korean travelers to

Thailand as well as the importance of this market to Thailand's tourism industry, this presents a research opportunity to be worth for investigating the Korean inbound travel market. The examination of its travel motivations, behaviors, and satisfaction should provide useful contributions to the Thailand industry practitioners (government and private sectors) who target this segment for developing appropriate tourism policies and products.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Several technical terms are used in this study. In order to better understand the context of travel motivations which is primarily related to psychology, the definition of key terms used in this study are provided as follows:

Travel motivation is a meaningful state of mind that drives an individual to travel (Dann, 1977). In this study, the approach to examine travel motivation is based on the push and pull motivations theory. This theory is basically assumed that people travel because they are pushed by their own internal forces (called push factors), and pulled by the external forces of destination attributes/attractions (called pull factors). These two factors, when considered together, provide the clues as to why people travel.

Push factors are mainly socio-psychological motives that make people want to travel (Crompton, 1979). They are related to the internal needs and wants of a traveler such as a desire for escaping from a busy environment, a need to rest, relax or seek adventure (Klenosky, 2002).

Pull factors are destination attractions/attributes that respond to and reinforce the push factors (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). They are the external forces relating to the destination attractions such as beaches, landscape, historical sites, and culture (Klenosky, 2002).

Customer (tourist) satisfaction is the result of the evaluation and comparison the perceived performance of goods/service with expectation (Heung & Cheng, 2000). If performance exceeds expectations, the result is customer satisfaction, however, when expectations exceed performance, the result is customer dissatisfaction.