

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

It is generally argued that 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 the uniqueness of Thai culture and the beauty of natural resources. According to the statistical reports by the Tourism Authority of Thailand or TAT (2008), the number of international tourists visiting Thailand has been increasing over the past 10 years, from 7.76 million tourists in 1998 to 14.46 tourists in 2007 (TAT, 2008). Overseas tourists visiting Thailand come from different parts of the world. Major markets include Asia, Europe, North America and Australia (TAT, 2007). Although the tourism industry in Thailand has been growing during the past decade, however, the market competition within the region should not be overlooked. In recent years there has been an increasing market competition in the region from major competitors such as Malaysia and Singapore as well as emerging destinations like Vietnam and Cambodia. In particular, major competitors like Malaysia (with 17 million tourist arrivals a year) and Singapore (with 10 million tourist arrivals a year), they have allocated a lot of budgets for promoting tourism in their countries each year with the aim to be the tourism hub of the region (World Tourism Organization, 2007). Their aggressive marketing strategies, for example, can be evidently seen from various media coverage (e.g. TV, newspapers, magazines) aiming to promote Malaysia or Singapore as the leading tourist destination. Since the tourism industry is a major economic driver and a powerful revenue-generating activity in many countries, it is anticipated that the tourism competition is more likely to be more intensified and competitive within the region. With the expected trend and current competitive tourism market, increasing the number of international tourists to Thailand and targeting Thailand as the tourism hub of the region seem be the challenges for Thailand's tourism industry to compete with key competitors and emerging destinations. And this is the focus of the research issue (problem) identified in this study. In other words, the

concerns could be how Thailand would develop the effective tourism plans and strategies in order to compete with other countries in the region.

Given the importance of the tourism industry to the Thailand's economy and the current competitive market situation, it is essential for Thai tourism marketers to develop effective marketing strategies to attract more international tourists to the country as well as to develop tourism products responding to the needs of the target tourists. In order to be successful in global tourism, according to the literature, tourism marketers should understand travel needs and behaviors of the target markets (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Jang & Wu, 2006). One of the useful approaches to understand travel needs and why people travel is to examine 'travel motivations' (Crompton, 1979; Cha, McCleary & Uysal, 1995; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Understanding travel motivations could be regarded as a starting point for the success of the tourism marketing programs (Cha et al., 1995; Shin, 2003). This is because travel motivations help explain tourists' internal needs to travel and what motivates them to a particular destination, and they are also associated with tourists' destination choice (Dann, 1977, Compton, 1979). Thus, the knowledge of travel motivations would enable tourism marketers to better satisfy travelers' needs and wants, and then be able to develop appropriate marketing programs serving the needs of the target markets (Jang & Cai, 2001; Andreu, Kozak, Avci, & Ciffer 2006).

One of the common and useful approaches to examine travel motivations is based on the theory of push and pull motivations or often called theory of push and pull factors (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). A review of literature indicates that examining travel motivations based on the theory of push and pull motivations has been widely accepted in the tourism literature (Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983; Yuan & McDonald, 1990). This is because the theory helps explain why people travel and where they go; providing clues for holiday decisions. According to the theory, push factors are related to travel motives (why people travel) while pull factors are associated with tourism attractions (what attracts people to visit a particular destination). When considered together, push and pull factors are believed to be related to tourists' travel decision making. With this context, the theory of push and pull motivations seems to provide a useful framework to examine different forces motivating a person to take a holiday, and also help identify the factors attracting that person to choose a particular destination. In order to understand travel needs of international tourists, and to develop effective marketing programs to attract overseas travelers, **this study aims to employ the theory of push and pull motivations to investigate travel motivations of international tourists to Thailand.** More specifically, the study will also examine and compare travel motivations and their travel

behaviors based on geographical regions (e.g. Asia, Europe). Previous literature (in Thai context) indicates that most studies on tourist-related behaviors are primarily focused on one single market (one country) rather than examining or comparing tourist groups from different countries or regions. Moreover, previous research reveals that tourists from the same region such as Asia or Europe may have some similarities on travel related-behaviors such as travel motivations and/or travel preferences because they may share some commonalities with the core culture either Asian culture (Asian tourists) or Western culture (European tourists), and this may be worth for further studies such as a comparative study based on regional base or geographical area (Lee, 2000; Kim & Prideaux, 2005). In general, it is argued that a comparative study would yield more useful implications and practices to the industry than a mono-based study since the research results can provide a wider outcome and better understanding of travel needs and tourists' characteristics of different target markets (Kim & Lee, 2000; Kozak, 2002;). The results are expected to help destination marketers develop more appropriate marketing programs and strategies for each market. Moreover, in practice it seems that many Thai tourism businesses develop their marketing strategies for international markets with little or no support/usage from research-based information. Therefore, this presents a research opportunity for the current research project to examine and compare travel motivations of different target tourists as well as to make a contribution to the tourism industry by providing marketing practices or implications based on research results. It is hoped that the findings of the study will provide policy markers and tourism marketers a better understanding of travel motivations of international tourists to Thailand and assist them in formulating appropriate tourism policies and strategies to effectively target the international tourist markets.

1.2 Research Objectives

- 1) To identify push and pull factors that influence travel motivations of international tourists to Thailand
- 2) To examine and compare travel motivations (push and pull factors) and travel behaviors of international travelers to Thailand based on geographical region

1.3 Research Hypotheses

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

Hypothesis 1 – International tourists with different geographical regions may have differences in travel behaviors.

Hypothesis 2 – International tourists with different demographic characteristics may have differences in travel behaviors.

Hypothesis 3 – International tourists with different geographical regions may have differences in travel motives (push factors) and the perception of Thailand's destination attractions (pull factors).

Hypothesis 4 – International tourists with different demographic characteristics may have differences in travel motives (push factors) and the perception of Thailand's destination attractions (pull factors).

1.4 Research Scope

This study primarily aimed to examine and compare travel motivations and travel behaviors of international tourists to Thailand. The theory of push and pull motivations were employed as a conceptual framework to examine tourists' motivations. The samples were international travelers who were visiting Thailand for holiday and leisure purposes. Data collection was undertaken in major tourist cities in the central area including Bangkok, Ayutthaya, and Pattaya. In this study, tourists' geographical region (i.e. Asia, Europe), and demographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender, education, income) were determined as independent variables while travel motivations and travel behaviors were established as dependent variables.

1.5 Research Contributions

This study employed the theory of push and pull motivations to investigate the travel motivations of international tourists to Thailand. The theory of push and pull motivations is a well-respected motivational theory used to examine 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), and this will reflect the basic travel needs and wants of

the target tourists for going on holidays. Thus, 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 communications, advertising or promotional campaigns) and tourism products to attract more international tourists to Thailand. Moreover, since the study compares the travel motivations and travel behaviors of international tourists to Thailand, the research findings will help tourism marketers design more effective tourism programs to respond and better satisfy travel needs of different target markets. The study will also contribute/add to the existing tourism literature in the area of comparative studies of travel motivations and tourist behaviors of international tourists, particularly in Thai context.

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 personal need that drives an individual to travel (Dann, 1977). It has an influence on tourists' behavior and decision making (where to go). In this study, the approach examining 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 (Dann, 1977).

Push factors are mainly socio-psychological motives (personal needs) 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 attract people to a particular destination (Uysal & Hagan, 1993). They are the external factors relating to the destination attractions such as beaches, landscape, natural attractions, historical sites, and culture (Klenosky, 2002).

Tourist behavior is the behavior or the process that consumers or tourists search, select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000).

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