

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

This is the final chapter of the research report. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize research findings, provide recommendations, and address research limitations and future research opportunities.

5.1 Conclusions

Using the theory of push and pull factors as a conceptual framework, this study has the objectives to examine and compare travel motivations and travel behaviors of international tourists to Thailand based on geographical regions (i.e. between Asian and European tourists). The study was done on the assumption and previous studies' support in that tourists from the same region (Asia or Europe) may share some similarities or commonalities on travel related-behaviors such as travel motivations and travel preferences as indicated from previous literature (Lee, 2000; Kim & Prideaux, 2005).

According to the current study, the results indicated that travel motives (push factors) and the perception of Thailand's destination attractions (pull factors) differed among international tourists to Thailand, particularly between Asian and European tourists. For Asian tourists, the study identified three push and three pull factor dimensions associated with Asian tourists' travel motivations. The three push factors were named as (1) 'novelty seeking', (2) 'escape', and (3) 'socialization', while the three pull factors included: (1) 'a variety of tourists' attractions & activities', (2) 'travel costs', and (3) 'safety & cleanliness'. Among them, 'novelty seeking' and 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' were viewed as the most important push and pull factors for Asian tourists. With regard to European tourists, the study identified three push and two pull factor dimensions related to European tourists' travel motivations. The three push factors were name as (1) 'novelty seeking', (2) 'escape & relaxation', and (3) 'socialization', while the two pull factors included: (1) 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' and (2) 'cultural & historical attractions'. Among them, 'novelty seeking' and 'cultural & historical attractions' were regarded as the most important push and pull factors for European tourists. In terms of examining the differences of push and pull factors across demographic variables (i.e. gender, age, education, income) both Asian and European subgroups, the results indicated some differences of push and pull factors in each group. For example, among Asian tourists, male respondents were more likely to be motivated by 'novelty seeking' when traveling abroad than females respondents. The respondents with higher education level (bachelor degree or higher)

were more likely to be motivated by 'escape' to travel to a foreign country than those with lower education (high school). Further, the respondents with higher education (bachelor degree or lower) appeared to be attracted to Thailand by travel costs than those with lower education (high school). In relation to European tourists, some differences of push and pull factors were also observed among European tourists. For instance, male respondents were more likely to be motivated by 'escape & relaxation' when traveling abroad than females respondents. The respondents with higher income seemed to be more likely to be motivated by 'escape & relaxation' to travel to a foreign country than those with lower income. And the respondents with higher income were more likely to be attracted to Thailand by a variety of tourist attractions and activities than those with lower income.

In relation to travel behaviors, the current study has revealed some differences of travel behaviors between Asian and European tourists in some aspects. The study showed interesting results about these two markets. For example, Asian and European tourists differed in trip arrangement. The study found that most European tourists were independent travelers and they seemed to arrange their own trips to Thailand while many Asian tourists bought package tour and traveled with tour companies, though some arranged their own trips. Another observation is that most European tourists were first-time travelers to Thailand whereas Asian tourists were repeat visitors. Although most Europeans were first-time travelers to Thailand, they were more likely to stay longer than Asian tourists, particularly the trip of 11-15 days and 16 days or more. Asian tourists also differed from European tourists in terms of preferred leisure activities such as sightseeing and shopping as well as spending behaviors for shopping and sources of travel information such as travel agents, tour companies, and travel books. When considered in details, some differences of travel behaviors within each group were found. For example, Asian tourists (subgroups), most respondents with higher education (bachelor degree or higher) tended to traveled abroad more frequently than those with lower education (high school). Furthermore, they also were likely to spend more on accommodation than those with lower education. In case of European tourists (subgroups), it was found that most of male tourists were more likely to make their own decision to travel to Thailand compared to females. Male and female respondents differed regarding the factors motivating repeat visit Thailand. Many female respondents indicated that Thai culture was the major factor motivating them to come back to Thailand while some male respondents said so. Almost half of male respondents indicated that nature and beautiful environment was the important factor for them to return to Thailand, however, female respondents seemed to appreciate Thai culture as the key factor motivating them for repeat visit.

With regard to research hypotheses, the study revealed that international tourists with different geographical regions (i.e. Asia and Europe) and demographic characteristics (i.e. gender, education and income) may have differences in travel motivations (push and pull factors) and travel behaviors. Based on research hypotheses, they may provide a better understanding of international tourists' travel related behaviors and may be useful for further applications on marketing purposes.

5.2 Recommendations

This parts aims to present the recommendations which may be useful for destination tourism marketers and travel business to develop appropriate marketing strategies, policies and products corresponding to the needs of the target markets. Since this study examines and compares travel motivations and travel behaviors between Asian and European tourists, the recommendations will be proposed based on the results of each group.

5.2.1) Asian Tourists

According to the literature, knowing the importance of push and pull factors perceived by the tourists/travelers can help destination marketers develop the marketing programs to meet the desired needs of target market (Hanqin & Lam, 1999). This implication could be applied to the current study to develop the products and services to attract the international tourists to Thailand. Based on the current findings, 'novelty seeking' was found to be the most important motive stimulating Asian respondents to travel abroad, and 'a variety tourist attractions & activities' was regarded as the major destination attraction drawing them to Thailand. Based on these results, tourism marketers should realize the importance of push factor 'novelty seeking' which are related to the needs to see something new, exciting or different from travelers' usual environment. These motives are perceived as driving forces for Asian tourists to travel abroad. At the same time, destination marketers should realize that 'a variety of tourist attractions & activities' is perceived as the major destination attraction (pull factor) drawing them to Thailand. According to You et al. (2000), tourism marketers need to tie the motivational drives (motives) with the activities that the destination can offer (attractions) and then package them to better satisfy the targets' needs. This suggestion could be applied to the case of Asian tourists who are mainly motivated to travel abroad by 'novelty seeking' and attracted to Thailand by 'a variety of tourist attraction & activities'. Thus, it is important for destination marketers to develop marketing programs (e.g. advertising, communications) by stimulating the needs of the targets (novelty seeking) and satisfy those needs with Thailand's destination attractions (a variety of

tourist attractions & activities). This can be done by designing appropriate marketing programs or advertisements (e.g. TV ads, travel guides/books, brochures) by matching what they need and what we can offer. One of the possible ways is to create a marketing or tourism theme, for example, “Explore Thailand: Discover and Experience the Land of Exotic and Variety”. The theme might help stimulate the needs of novelty seeking (something new, different or exciting), at the same time, attract or persuade them to discover those things in Thailand by offering a unique and a variety of tourism products reflecting the theme. It should be noted that, this is the suggested idea for destination marketers to develop further marketing plans and strategies based on their decisions. It is hoped that at least the study could provide some useful ideas contributing to the industry in some ways.

In addition to the above suggestions, the study has revealed interesting results regarding Asian travelers’ behaviors. Some observations have been made and this would be useful for destination marketers to develop appropriate marketing strategies for this market. For example, many Asian tourists traveled abroad quite often each year (more than once a year). This may provide marketing opportunities for destination marketers to develop appropriate marketing programs to attract more Asian tourists to Thailand by creating attractive and interesting package tours. It is also interesting to note that many Asian tourists were repeat visitors; implying that Thailand is one of the popular destinations for Asian travelers. Destination marketers may design different marketing strategies and a variety of tourism products for repeat visitors. The programs may include, for example, health tourism, nature-based/beach tourism, cultural tourism, and/or night life/entertainment. In addition to Bangkok as the major destination, many Asian travelers preferred to travel to different parts of Thailand. In particular, the north such as Chiang Mai and the south such as Phuket or Samui seemed to be a preferred place for many Asian travelers. This suggests that travel information and marketing campaigns should also focus other places such as the northern and southern regions. Based on the results of travel expenses (e.g. accommodation, food & beverage, shopping), the findings might be useful for destination marketers in several aspects. For instance, many Asian tourists mostly spent on medium-priced products and services, thus the travel information given to the targets (e.g. accommodation prices, food, shopping places) should reflect their needs and wants. One interesting observation is the source of travel information motivating the Asian travelers to Thailand which was primarily based on the Internet. This suggests that the Internet should be used as the major channel to promote tourism activities in Thailand. Travel business targeting at Asian travelers may provide various Asian languages (based on their target markets) on their websites. Furthermore, they should develop

interesting and attractive tourism products through the Internet and should use it as the main media to reach the targets.

5.2.2) European Tourists

The recommendations for European tourists apply the same concept of those discussed in Asian tourists (matching the results of push and pull factors). However, the strategies need to be modified to cater to the needs of European tourists. The findings derived from European respondents indicated that ‘novelty seeking’ and ‘cultural & historical attractions’ were regarded as the major push and pull factors. Thus, destination marketers need to tie the motives (push factor) with the activities that the destination can offer (pull factor) and then package them to better satisfy the targets’ needs. Like the Asian tourists, destination marketers may develop marketing programs (e.g. advertising, communications) by stimulating the needs of novelty seeking and satisfy those needs with Thailand’s cultural and historical attractions. This can be done by designing appropriate marketing programs or advertisements (e.g. TV ads, travel guides/books, brochures). One of the possible marketing or tourism themes for this market could be, for example, “Explore Thailand: Discover and Experience the Treasure of Southeast Asia” or “Discover the Kingdom of Thailand: the Land of Exotic and Unique Culture”. The themes might help stimulate the needs of novelty seeking (something new, different or exciting), at the same time, attract or persuade them to discover and experience the cultural heritage of Thailand. It is hoped that the suggestions here could be helpful for the industry practitioners to get some ideas of how to develop or design the marketing plans/strategies.

Like the Asian tourists, some observations have been made from European tourists’ behaviors, and this might be useful for destination marketers to develop appropriate marketing strategies for European market. For example, many European tourists traveled abroad frequently each year (more than once a year). This may provide marketing opportunities for destination marketers to develop appropriate marketing programs to attract more European tourists to Thailand by designing attractive packages corresponding to their needs and expectations. It is also interesting to note that most European tourists planned to stay in Thailand longer than Asian tourists (e.g. 16 days or longer). This information may be important for destination marketers to prepare and provide all necessary travel information about Thailand to the European travelers. Due to their long stay, travel information is vital for European travelers in terms of accessibility (where they can get the information) and availability (sufficient distribution). Although it seems that many European travelers are interested in cultural tourism, the information given should include all types of tourism activities in Thailand such as nature-based tourism/ecotourism,

beach tourism, health tourism, cultural tourism and other leisure activities to present other tourism activities among European tourists. Information of other regions such as the north and the south should be the highlights since many of them preferred to travel to those regions. Based on the results of travel expenses (e.g. accommodation, food & beverage, shopping), the findings revealed similar results with Asian tourists focusing on medium-priced products and services. Thus, the travel information given to the targets should reflect their needs and wants. Similarly to Asian tourists, many European travelers searched the information on the Internet. Hence, the Internet should be used as the major channel to promote tourism activities in Thailand. Travel business targeting at European travelers may provide various European languages (based on their target markets) on their websites to reach their targets.

5.2.3) Other Recommendations

Although major marketing theme for attracting international tourists to Thailand has been provided, it could be useful to address some other recommendations based on the current findings. According to the factor analysis of push factors (travel motives), it seemed that ‘rest & relaxation’ was emerged as the second important motives among international tourists both Asian and European tourists. Besides focusing on the major motive like ‘novelty seeking’, the second motive such as ‘rest & relaxation’ could provide tourism marketers another marketing implication or option for doing marketing programs to attract both Asian and European travelers. Since the current results indicated differences of travel motives (push factors) among international traveler subgroups, thus, ‘rest & relaxation’ could be the major motive for many international tourists when traveling overseas (despite the major one is novelty seeking). Thus, the second marketing campaign could be designed in the way that conveys the message promoting or marketing Thailand as the land of holiday vacation for rest and relaxation purposes with a variety of leisure activities. Similarly to the major recommendation above, the marketing or tourism theme for the second campaign, could be, for example, “Enjoy Your Holidays in Thailand - the Heaven/Paradise on Earth” or “Thailand – the Land Where You Experience Endless Happiness”. As this theme serves rest and relaxation travelers, destination marketers should design the products and services corresponding to the needs of the target tourists. The second theme might be used for various targets such as repeat visitors, leisure tourists, long-stay travelers, senior travelers, honeymooners or those who seek for rest and relaxation purposes (e.g. natural attractions, beach tourism).

In addition to the above recommendations, the study has revealed some differences of travel motivations and travel behaviors among demographic subgroups both Asian and European tourists (e.g. gender, education, income) as discussed in chapter 4. The findings may help tourism marketers realize travel differences among international tourists based on these demographic variables. Heung et al. (2001) suggested that in order to create effective marketing strategies for products and services in the tourism market, a better understanding of customers is necessary. Since this study has indicated differences of travel motivations and travel behaviors among Asian and European travelers based on demographic characteristics, tourism marketers need to understand these differences in order to effectively satisfy the diversified needs of each subgroup (either Asian or European subgroups). It could be useful for tourism marketers to note that Asian and European travelers with different demographic characteristics may have differences in tourism activities, travel preferences, accommodation type, travel costs, and other related activities as reported in chapter 4. Thus, the current findings could help tourism marketers design appropriate tourism products and programs catered for a particular target group if they wish (e.g. higher income travelers or niche market/segment) as well as to meet customers' needs and expectations.

5.3 Theoretical/Literature Contributions

In addition to the practical contributions, the results of the current study have added to the theoretical/literature contribution in the area of comparative studies of international tourists' motivations and travel behaviors, particularly in Thai context. Despite there are a number of empirical studies examining international tourists in Thai context, little effort has been attempted to investigate and compare travel motivations and behaviors of international tourists to Thailand. The current study is one of the few studies that employed the push and pull motivations theory to examine and compare travel motivation of overseas inbound travelers by focusing on Asian and European tourists. With little literature (research work) on comparative studies of international tourists, the current study has contributed to the tourism literature by providing a new empirical study in the area of travel motivations and travel behaviors of international tourists to Thailand. According to the current results, travel motives (reasons to travel) of international tourists to Thailand are generally similar. The motives are mainly related to the need to see something new, exciting or different from their usual environment (novelty seeking). In addition to the novelty motives, the study has revealed that international tourists also travel for other reasons (other motives) such as rest and relaxation or an escape from ordinary or usual surroundings to the new destinations that they can see something different and also may take a rest or relaxation while

traveling. These findings would help better understand about international tourists' travel motivations (why they take a holiday or why they travel).

Regarding the results of pull factors (destination attractions), this study has revealed similar results with other international studies in that different groups of tourists may perceive the same destination differently. This could be because the perception of one destination may depend on several factors such as tourists' cultural backgrounds, marketing perceptions/influences, country's image, and tourists' travel preferences. The current findings could help industry practitioners realize that different groups of tourists may perceive one destination in terms of destination attractions differently, and they should be able to develop different plans or programs to respond to different targets' needs and expectations.

Finally, the push and pull motivations theory is argued to be the useful motivational theory used to examine tourists' travel motivations. It was employed in this study to investigate the travel motivations of international travelers to Thailand. Based on the findings, it can be argued and substantiated that the push and pull motivations theory is a useful theory in which one can understand why people travel or take a holiday, and why they decide to visit a particular destination. This suggests that future research may employ it to better understand travel motivations of the target markets. Travel motivation is one of the important areas of tourism research that can help researchers and marketers better understand a complex issue of tourist behaviors. Knowledge of travel motivation is important to predict travel patterns of international tourists, and then should help industry practitioners develop appropriate products and services to meet customers' needs and wants. It is hoped that the current study would be useful for future research investigating international tourists to Thailand.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

Although the researcher attempts to ensure that the results of the current study are reliable and valid, there are some limitations associated with the study that need to be addressed. Also, the information for future research opportunities is provided.

Firstly, this study used a convenience sampling method (non-probability sampling), thus the results may not confidently generalize to the whole population (international tourists to Thailand). In addition, due to the limitations associated with the convenience sampling method, a small number of North American and Australian tourists were collected during the surveys, and they were not included in the final data analysis. Thus, this study aimed to compare travel motivations and travel behaviors between two groups only which were Asian and European tourists (not cover other markets such as North America and Australia). Future research may

examine a larger sample size to obtain sufficient number of international samples representing major markets (regions) including Asia, Europe, North America and Australia. This may help industry practitioners get a greater benefit from the research.

Secondly, this study compared travel motivations and travel behaviors between Asian and European tourists by focusing on a regional base. This was done on the assumption that tourists from the same region (either Asia or Europe) may share some similarities or commonalities on travel related-behaviors such as travel motivations and travel preference as indicated from the literature. However, it should be kept in mind that the travel differences of international tourists (country by country) might exist, and they could be varied from one market to another (despite the same region).

Thirdly, this study collected data on site where the respondents were already in Thailand. The results may not truly reflect their actual motivations to visit Thailand because some factors such as trip experience, perceptions, and attitudes may influence the assessments of travel motivations while they were on the site locations. If possible, it would be more interesting for future research to assess tourist motivations prior to their actual journey.

Fourthly, this study collected data from some major cities (Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Pattaya), all located in the central area. This is because of the limitation of researcher team, budget and time constraint. Future research may be undertaken to cover all parts of the country covering major cities of each region (e.g. north, central, east and south).

Finally, since this is a quantitative study, the research that is based on qualitative methods examining international visitors in Thailand is still limited. Thus, qualitative research methods such as interviews, observations or focus groups should be encouraged in order to get a more refined and a better understanding of international tourists' travel motivations by sharing and exchanging real experiences with the international tourists.

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