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The Motivation of Thai Female Solo Tourists to Travel in Udon Thani

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Abstract

This study travel motives of female Thai tourists traveling alone to Udon Thani. Purposive sampling was employed, consisting of 20 samples of Thai female tourists traveling alone to Udon Thani. The study found that most single female tourists traveling to Udon Thani consisted of 13 Thai female tourists who were traveling alone. Among them, three were state enterprise employees, three were company employees, five were self-employed, two were personal businessmen, and two students were also included.

The interviews with all the interviewees revealed that they had at least one solo travel experience, and all of them had repeated solo travel experiences. The reason for the decision to travel is that they want to experience traveling alone, increase their self-esteem, gain a sense of self-worth, and make new friends by working outside their usual surroundings. Most of the women's reasons for their first solo travel decision were in the same direction: to study new stories and meet new people, and open up to new experiences to learn about people, places, lifestyles, and cultures that are different from their daily life environment.

Keywords: Motivation, Female solo tourist, Solo tourist, Travel in Udon Thani

1. Introduction

Today's travel has become increasingly convenient due to a variety of factors, including advances in technology for searching for information about tourist attractions before traveling.

Virtual reality travel allows travelers to prepare for their trips, plan their itineraries more accurately, and manage their own travel, including booking tickets, accommodations, restaurants, and activities online. This reduces the need to carry cash, resulting in greater safety and security for life and property. In addition, with the current trend of independent travel, tourists are increasingly opting for independent travel, opting to avoid the use of tour operators in favor of greater privacy and flexibility. This has led to the concept of solo travel. Solo travel reflects individualism, an anthropological concept that emphasizes self-reliance among individuals who prioritize their own goals and enjoy freedom of thought and creativity (Suthan Hinchiranan, 2013, p. 25). Solo travel serves this purpose, coupled with the advancement of technology that facilitates travel. Women are often perceived as the gender that prioritizes

safety and convenience, yet they also often embrace risk. Moreover, the challenge is greater for women. However, this social shift has been significant. This has resulted in changes in social values. For example, in the past, women would stay at home doing housework and raising children. However, today, women must travel outside the home to work and support themselves and their families, just like men. This has led to women now increasingly seeking self-reliance and independent living, reflecting the Second Wave of Feminism, particularly in the United States and Europe (TripAdvisor, 2015). This is consistent with data from the online hotel booking website Booking.com, which revealed that in 2017, 72% of women booked accommodations on their own, stating that they were traveling alone. Similarly, data from the tour company VBT Bicycle and Walking Vacations (2017) found that the number of women traveling alone increased by 52% between 2016 and 2017.

Due to changing tourism trends in line with changes in the macro-social context, Thailand has also been actively promoting marketing to female solo travelers. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has established its strategic business plan for the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) for 2017-2021. It has continuously organized activities to promote tourism for women, such as the "Women Travel Thai Way" project (Matichon Online, 2018) and the "Single Journey" project, based on the concept "Traveling Alone is Fun." This project, which received positive feedback in 2020, is continuing under the name "Single Journey Season 2," with a planned start date of April 2023 (TAT, 2023). Udon Thani is one of a major tourist destination in the northeastern part of Thailand, boasting a diverse range of attractions. It has also consistently been a popular destination for solo female travel, a key component of tourism promotion. Given its outstanding tourism resources and convenient transportation, researchers are interested in studying the motivations of female tourists visiting Udon Thani Province, with the aim of further enhancing Thailand's competitiveness in the tourism industry among international destinations.

1.1 Research Objective

- 1) To study travel motives of female Thai tourists traveling alone to Udon Thani.

2. Literature review

Travel Motivation

Motivation is the force that drives people to behave and determines the direction and goals of that behavior. In other words, motivation is something within an individual that causes them to act, move, or behave in a goal-directed manner (Srintip Kawanobe, 2011, p. 21). In other words, it is a need that arises from stimulation or provocation, motivating a person to move or behave towards a specified destination or goal. Motivation is the driving force that drives the behavior (Chukiatt Siriwong, 2006, p. 13). It is a clear goal that meets the specific needs of each individual in terms of tourism (Athit Saeyang, 2010, p. 7). The characteristics of motivation that influence travel decision-making behavior consist of four basic components:

1) Travel stimuli refer to various incentives associated with a tourist destination or appropriate timing.

2) Need moderators, such as reduced income, attitude changes, changes in relationships, and travel risks.

3) Impacts refer to the various impacts that tourists experience, both direct and indirect. From various sources, this influences tourists' learning behavior, attitudes, and perceptions of tourist destinations.

4) The role of tourists refers to the different status of tourists in different situations or periods of time, resulting in different decision-making behaviors or travel styles.

Furthermore, Chalongsri Phimonsompong (2005, 22) stated that travel and tourism are driven by individual needs and feelings, coupled with various economic and social factors that drive travel. Many other motivations attract and motivate people to travel more. Important

Motivations for travel and those that stimulate more people to travel include:

1) Physical and psychological motivations, including the need for physical and mental relaxation.

2) Cultural and educational motivations, which are motivations stemming from curiosity, a desire to know people and places, as well as arts, culture, and history.

3) Social and interpersonal motivations include meeting, visiting relatives or friends, or making new friends.

4) Work and business motivations include attending business negotiations in both the public and private sectors, meetings, and seminars.

5) Entertainment and entertainment motivations represent individual pursuits of enjoyment, each with its own unique interests.

The researcher found that the influence of push and pull factors is quite significant in motivating tourists and leading to their travel decisions. Push factors are primarily internal to the individual and influence various feelings that may lead to the desire to travel. Pull factors, on the other hand, are external factors that evoke attraction from various tourist attractions, leading to the decision to visit and experience them. The two factors, therefore, interact, and the pull factor, emanating from the tourist attractions, provides a clearer picture than the push factor, which arises from within the individual. In a study on the motivations behind solo travel behavior among Thai women visiting Udon Thani, the researcher summarized both internal and external factors that drive this behavior. The new categories are divided into six dimensions: 1) Personal, 2) Social, 3) Political, 4) Cultural, 5) Economic, and 6) Information.

Solo Travel

Solo travel offers a sense of freedom that gradually increases with each trip, adapting to Individual needs and building confidence. It also challenges oneself, as during the trip, one

encounters new people, makes new friendships, and has the opportunity to pursue one's own desires, even discovering one's own identity (BootsnAll Travel, 2010). In other words, solo travel is a journey in which one travels according to one's own plans and makes decisions independently. Solo travel is not limited to single people; it can also include couples or families. However, many people choose to travel alone because they desire freedom during their travels (Prichal Wimonmuang, 2017, p. 22).

Solo travel is a relatively new form of travel that has emerged in recent years. It shares similarities with independent travel (FIT) (Foreign Individual Tourism). This type of travel involves planning your own itinerary or using a travel agency to facilitate certain aspects, such as booking flights and accommodations. Planning when to visit a destination and how long to spend is the responsibility of the traveler or the company, depending on the agreement. The main reasons for choosing independent travel include:

(1) High privacy and flexibility. When traveling in a group with a travel agency, tourists must strictly adhere to the scheduled itinerary, which limits their opportunity to explore attractions of interest in detail.

(2) The desire for quality over quantity. Group travel often involves visiting numerous destinations, but lacks the opportunity to study them thoroughly, learn about their culture, or fully connect with the locals. Consequently, tourists only experience the destinations superficially. Independent travelers, on the other hand, have the opportunity to deeply explore their destinations, tailored to their needs, due to the greater time available and the ability to plan their own itinerary.

The Concept of Solo Women Traveling

A phenomenological study of solo female backpacking reveals that women who travel solo can develop the courage to free themselves from fear, overcome their fear of traveling alone, and combat sexualized confrontation or scrutiny due to their gender identity. They also discover the truth about self-reliance while traveling alone (Obenour, 2005, p. 213). Safety is a crucial issue, and for female solo travelers, it can provide increased self-confidence, freedom, and the value of learning things independently. Solo travelers who plan their own itineraries are on the rise, both from European and Asian countries, as they enjoy new experiences, meeting new people, and making new friends while traveling. However, data on the number of women traveling alone in Thailand is still lacking. Therefore, a study of solo female travelers requires a method focused on experiences that may be similar or different. For a sufficiently diverse group of solo female travelers to share their diverse experiences, a sufficient number of solo female travelers must be able to share their experiences, but not in overwhelming numbers. Solo travel is a popular form of travel among women who are increasingly seeking to travel independently to build confidence and learn from new experiences. The most important thing to consider is planning, and safety considerations are important factors for solo female travelers.

Related Research

Achira Tiwasingh, Siriporn Tiwasingh, and Suraporn Onputtha (2022) conducted a study on the dimensions of solo travel among women in Thai society. The results revealed that Thai women travel solo both domestically and internationally. The purpose of these trips is to gain new experiences and challenge themselves. They also seek inspiration, and the destinations they travel to are safe and easily accessible. A motivational analysis revealed that travel motivations can be divided into five dimensions: 1) social, 2) political, 3) cultural, 4) economic, and 5) informational. While problems and obstacles to solo travel among Thai women primarily involve safety concerns, inconvenience in transportation, cost, and personal issues, these do not impact their travel but rather require increased caution. Furthermore, the results of this study can be used to develop tourism development guidelines and inform itineraries for solo women traveling alone.

Seow and Brown (2018) conducted a qualitative study on solo travel among Asian women. This study examined the motivations and experiences of Asian female travelers. Ten in-depth interviews revealed that conflict is a significant factor in solo travel. Participants contend with socio-cultural expectations of Asian women's behavior, and gender is also a significant constraint. Harassment from men in their destinations has led these women to fear assault or harassment, limiting their use of leisure space there. They feel that being Asian further increases their vulnerability. These factors do not deter women from planning future solo travel.

Yanipat Apornsangwijit (2017) conducted a study on factors influencing female solo travel decisions in Bangkok and its vicinity. The results revealed that positive factors influencing female solo travel decisions include experience-seeking objectives, business/work-related objectives, budget, time spent researching information, and online information searches (e.g., travel pages/pantip/blogs, travel recommendation websites, and reviews from specific groups). Service processes, moderate and reasonable foreign language communication skills, and negative factors include an average income of less than 15,000 baht, and purchasing activities. Future trends in female solo travel will become more specific and continue to grow. This study identifies variables influencing decision-making, enabling strategies for improving and developing businesses in the tourism sector.

Thuangthong Soraprasert and Sukanya Sompai boon (2017) conducted a study on the process of constructing and communicating the identity of women traveling alone. They found that before traveling, women who traveled alone communicated their identity as independent and used travel as a means of escaping their daily lives. During the trip, women traveling alone communicated their identity as resourceful and intelligent, possessing high economic and cultural capital. After the trip, the sample group constructed and communicated their identity differently based on their background. Therefore, the construction and communication of women's identities when traveling alone differ according to their economic and cultural capital.

Nawaporn Boonprasom (2016) researched the new dimension of tourism to accommodate single female tourists. They found that the majority of single female tourists are women. In the

new dimension of tourism, this segment is a niche market with growing potential both now and in the future, as it possesses high purchasing power. They have the power to make purchasing decisions. However, to ensure business success, it is essential to study the behavior and needs of tourists, enabling informed decision-making. This article presents a fascinating compilation of data from various sources regarding the travel behavior of single women as a guideline for preparing the country to become a potential destination for this high-potential tourist group, aligning with the target market. The data can also be used for further development.

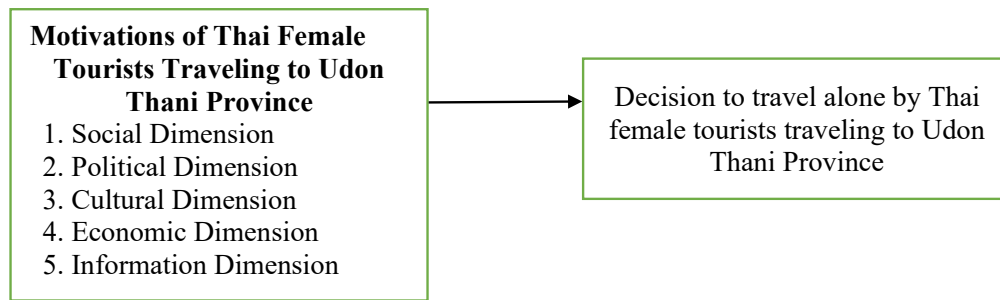
William L. Obenour (2005) conducted a study on "journeys" toward independence for female backpackers. This study employed an interpretive phenomenological approach to analyze the experiences of 27 women who backpacked alone. The analysis was based on four analytical frameworks: travel-related concepts, travel constraints or fears, transitional zones, and the concept of housework.

Cultural Tourism:

Academicians define cultural tourism as tourism that emphasizes activities that showcase the unique arts, culture, traditions, and lifestyles of community members, or their livelihoods. This includes presentations of historical sites, artifacts, and religious sites revered by the community. These include art, customs, traditions, and ways of life that reflect the prosperity and development of the community and the environment of each era. These traditions are passed down to tourists, allowing them to learn about the history, beliefs, and perspectives of people in the past, allowing them to learn and appreciate them (Somkiat Chaiphibun, 2008; Siriporn Thawornwisit and Seri Wongmontha, 2021). Cultural tourism in each area has distinct historical and cultural characteristics, influenced by traditional culture and social values. Consequently, each area has distinct cultural attractions. Howell, D. W. (1993) stated that cultural tourism is a form of tourism in which tourists immerse themselves in and observe the way of life of past societies, including architecture, handicrafts, and tools used for occupations. and the dress of people in that community from the researcher's concept has been used as a guideline for writing a conceptual framework regarding the decision to travel for cultural tourism according to the identity of Udon Thani Province in terms of perception of cultural tourism in Udon Thani Province, especially cultural tourist attractions such as temples, churches, ancient sites, architecture, handicrafts, etc.

3. Methodology

Based on a review of the literature on the motivations for solo travel among Thai women traveling to Udon Thani , the research conceptual framework can be presented as follows.



The scope of this study is as follows:

1. Spatial Scope: This study investigates the motivations for solo travel among Thai women traveling to Udon Thani Province only.

2. Population Scope: This study collected data from Thai female tourists who are not resident, working, or studying in Udon Thani Province. These tourists were either solo travelers or experienced solo travelers in Udon Thani.

Population and Sample: This qualitative research utilized a phenomenological methodology. The study examined the motivations for solo travel among Thai women traveling to Udon Thani Province. This involved in-depth interviews with key informants.

The population consisted of Thai female tourists traveling alone in Udon Thani Province or experienced solo travelers in the Udon Thani Province area.

Sample: The researcher determined the sample size by using intensity sampling. Twenty samples of in-depth interviews with key informants were selected, including Thai female tourists traveling alone in Udon Thani Province, as shown in Table 1. The researcher considered the saturation of the data obtained.

Table 1. Sample consideration table for qualitative research methodology.

Research methodology	Principle
Biography	Select 1 person or 1 case.
Case Study	Approximately 10 individuals are required, but if sufficient data is obtained, fewer individuals may be used.
Phenomenology Grounded Theory Ethnography Action research	Approximately 20 - 30 individuals, taking into account data saturation. A smaller sample size than the principle can be used if the data has reached saturation.

Source: Nastasi, 2005, cited in Prapaipim Suthiwasinnon and Prasopchai Pasunon (2016, p. 43).

Data Collection

For this study, the researcher relied on a combination of primary and secondary data, collected from two sources: primary data and secondary data collected from various documents.

Following this, the researcher developed and validated the semi-structured interview instruments. The researcher defined the instruments used for this research and verified their content validity with experts.

Before the field visit, the researcher explained the objectives, research design, data collection processes, and methods to ensure comprehensive data collection to the research assistants. The field visit then involved the researcher identifying a lodging location (with prior coordination with relevant parties upon request). The researcher also collected data from tourists with direct experience traveling to Udon Thani. From observing experiences shared by solo travelers in online social groups "Go Alone+" and "Travel Alone", the researcher selected data collection from those who had shared their solo travel experiences in Udon Thani Province. This was achieved by conducting online interviews through direct contact channels that were convenient for the informants, as well as using semi-structured online interviews. After that, the data were collected and organized into a comprehensive system for further analysis.

Travel Purpose

From interviews with 13 interviewees, two common themes emerged: 10 individuals traveled solely for relaxation, while the other three individuals combined their travel with work. Two individuals traveled for work and leisure before returning home, while one combined work and leisure during their trip (a workation). In-depth interviews revealed that most respondents expressed a desire to travel to their favorite destinations. They were motivated by the desire to explore solo travel, which offered a challenge. They also appreciated the freedom and flexibility to make decisions, which made it easier to manage their travel and allowed them to utilize their time to learn or explore their interests fully.

Individuals Influenced by Solo Travel

The majority of key informants, 50% or more, perceived themselves as their own influencers, or that there were no outsiders who could influence their desire to travel if they did not wish to. A similar group also gained information or inspiration from searching for information on various travel-related websites online.

Information Acquisition

Regarding information access for solo female tourists traveling to Udon Thani, the top methods of obtaining travel information were internet access (10 respondents) and word of mouth from acquaintances (3 respondents). All of these individuals spent at least a month planning their trip prior to departure. The key criteria were sufficient information to support their decision-making, the location must be reliable, and the safety of the destination must be adequate.

Problems and Obstacles

Those 13 key informants from in-depth interviews varied in their opinions on the problems and obstacles, which can be summarized as follows:

1) Concerns about the safety of life and property. Traveling alone could be dangerous if a perpetrator or a business owner discovers that they are alone. Therefore, they seek sufficient information to support their decision-making. They choose accommodations in communities, away from the crowds, and during peak travel times. Some individuals prefer to minimize cash and use e-commerce systems, credit cards, or debit cards instead. Furthermore, transportation is inconvenient. Some individuals rent motorcycles or cars to travel within Udon Thani instead of using public transportation, which can be more dangerous and inconvenient for traveling to tourist attractions outside the city.

2) Concerns about costs and personal issues. Some interviewees reported being scammed while traveling alone, resulting in price gouging. Therefore, they needed to gain as much information as possible before traveling to each destination, especially when traveling abroad, as they needed to be extra cautious. Key informant 10 stated, "Traveling alone poses life-threatening risks. Many dangers can occur. We cannot trust anyone or rely on anyone. We must take good care of ourselves." This echoes the statement of key informant 3, who stated, "We must always be cautious and avoid dangerous situations that could endanger life and property."

4. Results

The baseline data for solo female tourists traveling to Udon Thani Province revealed that there were 13 Thai female tourists traveling alone in the province. This aligns with the research of Tuangthong Soraprasert and Sukanya Sompai boon (2017, p. 53). Before traveling, solo female travelers communicated their identity as independent and used travel as a means of escaping from their daily lives. During their travels, solo female travelers communicated their identity as resourceful and intelligent, possessing high economic and cultural capital. After traveling, they expressed their identity as resourceful and intelligent, possessing high economic and cultural capital. The sample groups constructed and communicated identities in different ways, reflecting their diverse backgrounds. The construction and communication of women's identities as solo travelers differed according to their economic and cultural capital.

The study found that the primary purpose and motivation for solo travel among women were to gain new experiences, build self-identity and confidence, and foster a sense of independence. This was despite some female solo travelers being married or married without children. These opinions were consistent with those of single women. This aligns with both Thai and international studies, particularly the emphasis on female identity and roles, which are often viewed as a hindrance (Tuangthong Soraprasert & Sukanya Sompai boon, 2017, p. 54). However, both Thai and international research found that the findings of solo travel identity research demonstrate that women possess the resourcefulness and intelligence to survive independently, based on the foundations of self-identity, confidence, pride, and sound management.

In terms of travel management or design, solo travel highlighted convenience, flexibility, and the ability to customize travel plans. However, the most significant factors perceived as barriers to women traveling solo to Udon Thani were identified as the most important, which is the safety of life and property. Various studies have found that the safety of life and property

can stem from crime, gender beliefs, and social and cultural differences. Seow and Brown (2018, 1187) studied solo travel among Asian women, finding that Asian women are particularly fearful of sexual harassment and other socially discriminatory behaviors. Consequently, they are particularly cautious in tourist destinations. However, this does not deter these women from traveling alone in the future.

The most common concern faced by solo female travelers is safety. This finding is consistent with the research by Atchira Tiwasingh et al. (2022, p. 169), which suggests that this will not affect their travel plans, but rather requires increased caution.

Recommendations

A study of the motivations for solo travel among Thai female tourists in Udon Thani found that communication, language proficiency, analytical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills contribute to a safe and innovative solo travel experience for women. Furthermore, access to information and the ability to analyze and select accurate information from quality sources are also important factors. This research demonstrates that most interviewees hold a bachelor's degree, which is consistent with the findings of Yanipat. Aporn Saengwichit (2017, p. 66) found that female solo travelers typically have a bachelor's degree and at least a moderate level of foreign language communication skills. The researcher also found that online media is a source of information, consistent with their findings. Currently, online information retrieval yields a variety of information; however, tourists must be cautious when finding reliable and high-quality sources. Furthermore, communication technology, blogs, and websites written by women who have traveled alone can help women overcome their fears, enhance their capabilities, and build connections with others (Harris & Wilson, 2007, p. 235). This information provides tourists with sufficient details to plan their trips, including transportation, various travel plans, accommodations, popular tourist attractions, local culture, currency, airfare, local cuisine, temperature, weather forecasts, and immigration requirements. Furthermore, news, festivals, and promotions are also included in all relevant sectors. Therefore, all relevant sectors should prioritize communication and information provision for this group of tourists.

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