TOURIST EXPECTATIONS AND SATISFACTION IN THAILAND'S TRAVEL EXPERIENCES OF CONSUMER GENERATION Y

Ittipoom Promma

Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, 1-U-Thong Nok, Dusit, Bangkok, Thailand,
E-Mail: Ittipoom.pr@ssru.ac.th

ABSTRACT

Abstract— This study investigates the nuanced interplay between tourist expectations and satisfaction within the context of Thailand's diverse travel experiences. Drawing upon a mixed-methods research design, our exploration delves into the multifaceted factors that influence the perception and contentment of visitors exploring the cultural, culinary, and natural wonders of Thailand. Quantitative analyses reveal a high overall satisfaction level among tourists, emphasizing the significance of cultural immersion, culinary exploration, accommodation quality, engagement with natural attractions, and the integration of technology. The study uncovers cultural authenticity as a central theme, underscoring the pivotal role of genuine experiences in shaping tourists' perceptions. Thai cuisine, recognized for its sensory allure, emerges as a key driver of satisfaction, along with the impact of accommodation quality, the enchantment of natural landscapes, and the convenience of technological amenities. In conclusion, this research not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex dimensions of tourist expectations and satisfaction but also provides actionable insights for stakeholders in the tourism industry. By unraveling the intricacies of what enhances the modern traveler's experience in Thailand, this study aims to inform strategies that promote sustainable tourism practices and elevate Thailand's global appeal as a premier travel destination.

Keywords— Tourist Expectations, Tourist Satisfaction, Travel Experiences

INTRODUCTION

As a cornerstone of Southeast Asian tourism, Thailand has evolved into a multifaceted destination that caters to the diverse desires of global wanderers. The allure of the bustling metropolis of Bangkok, the cultural richness of Chiang Mai, the serenity of island paradises such as Phuket, and the spiritual sanctuaries like Ayutthaya collectively contribute to the unique mosaic of Thai travel experiences. As tourists embark on this sensory journey, their expectations, shaped by cultural perceptions, personal preferences, and evolving global trends, intertwine intricately with the actual encounters, influencing overall satisfaction.

Nestled in the heart of Southeast Asia, Thailand beckons to adventurers, culture enthusiasts, and sun-seekers alike, offering a tapestry of travel experiences as diverse as the country's landscapes. From the bustling metropolis of Bangkok to the idyllic beaches of Phuket and the historical wonders of Ayutthaya, Thailand stands as a captivating destination that seamlessly blends ancient traditions with contemporary allure. Amidst this vibrant backdrop, the exploration of tourist expectations and satisfaction becomes an intriguing and pivotal endeavor.

Thailand, a kingdom of awe-inspiring landscapes, ancient cultural treasures, and warm hospitality, stands as a beacon for global travelers seeking unforgettable experiences. In the contemporary realm of tourism, understanding the intricate interplay between tourist expectations and satisfaction has become paramount. This exploration is particularly nuanced in the context of Thailand, a nation that seamlessly blends tradition with modernity, offering a kaleidoscope of travel experiences ranging from tranquil temples to bustling street markets and pristine beaches.

As the tourism industry continues to evolve, understanding the dynamics that shape tourists' expectations and contribute to their overall satisfaction is crucial for both the sustainable growth of the industry and the fulfillment of visitors' desires (Klaysung, 2022). Thailand, with its rich cultural heritage, culinary delights, and breathtaking natural beauty, serves as an ideal canvas for delving into the intricacies of tourist experiences.

This study embarks on a journey to unravel the complex relationship between tourist expectations and satisfaction in Thailand's travel experiences. As tourists traverse the enchanting landscapes, explore historical

landmarks, savor local delicacies, and engage with the warmth of Thai hospitality, their expectations are shaped by a myriad of factors. Cultural immersion, culinary adventures, accommodation choices, interactions with natural attractions, and the role of technology in modern travel all intertwine to influence the overall satisfaction of visitors.

The significance of this exploration extends beyond academic curiosity; it holds the key to enhancing the visitor experience and ensuring the sustainable development of tourism in Thailand. By peeling backs the layers of expectation and satisfaction, we aim to provide valuable insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and local communities. Through a nuanced understanding of what captivates and fulfills the modern traveler in Thailand, we can pave the way for strategic initiatives that elevate the country's status as a premier global travel destination.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this research is to comprehensively investigate the expectations and satisfaction levels of Generation Y tourists in their travel experiences within Thailand. The outcomes will inform tourism stakeholders on ways to tailor their offerings, marketing, and services to meet the preferences of this important demographic group, ultimately contributing to the sustainable growth of Thailand's tourism industry. The study aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. Identify and analyze the key components that contribute to travel experiences for Generation Y tourists in Thailand, including accommodations, attractions, cuisine, and cultural immersion.

2. Analyze destination marketing strategies employed by Thailand to attract Generation Y tourists, considering online promotions, content marketing, and the use of influencers in the digital space.

3. Examine factors that influence the satisfaction of Generation Y tourists during their travel experiences in Thailand, identifying elements that contribute to positive and memorable experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

The literature within the realm of tourist expectations and satisfaction in Thailand's travel experiences reveals the multifaceted nature of the country's appeal. Cultural immersion, culinary adventures, accommodation quality, engagement with natural attractions, and the role of technology emerge as key themes. These insights provide a foundation for understanding the dynamics of tourist satisfaction in Thailand and offer valuable considerations for stakeholders in the tourism industry to enhance the overall visitor experience.

Cultural Experiences and Heritage Tourism:

Thailand's rich cultural heritage is a significant draw for tourists, impacting their expectations and satisfaction. Research by Wang and Chon (2009) underscores the importance of cultural experiences in enhancing tourist satisfaction. The exploration of historical sites, traditional festivals, and local customs contributes to the overall appeal of Thailand as a cultural destination. In the past two decades, Bangkok has witnessed a surge in cultural tourism. A study by Kim and Jamal (2009) highlights the importance of cultural experiences in shaping tourist satisfaction. Attractions like the Grand Palace and cultural events contribute significantly to the overall satisfaction of tourists seeking authentic encounters in Bangkok.

Culinary Tourism:

Thailand's rich cultural heritage is a significant draw for tourists, impacting their expectations and satisfaction. Research by Wang and Chon (2009) underscores the importance of cultural experiences in enhancing tourist satisfaction. The exploration of historical sites, traditional festivals, and local customs contributes to the overall appeal of Thailand as a cultural destination. Thailand's diverse natural landscapes, from tropical beaches to lush jungles, shape tourists' expectations and satisfaction. Research by Ap, Wongkit and Han (2018) explores the impact of natural attractions on overall satisfaction. Engaging in outdoor activities such as trekking, diving, and island hopping contributes significantly to the fulfillment of tourists' expectations. Bangkok's culinary landscape has evolved, becoming a key driver of tourist satisfaction. Research by Hall and Sharples (2008) underscores the role of food experiences in shaping expectations. Street food markets and the diverse culinary scene contribute to the overall satisfaction of tourists eager to explore Bangkok's gastronomic delights.

Accommodation and Hospitality Services:

Accommodation quality and hospitality services play a crucial role in determining tourist satisfaction in Thailand. A study by Gursoy, Chi, and Lu (2013) emphasizes the significance of hospitality experiences. Cleanliness, staff friendliness, and efficient services contribute to the overall satisfaction of tourists staying in hotels and resorts across the country. The evolution of the hospitality sector in Bangkok is reflected in studies like Xiang et al. (2015), which emphasizes the significance of accommodation quality in determining tourist satisfaction. Cleanliness, staff service, and amenities play crucial roles in meeting the expectations of modern travelers.

Transportation and Accessibility:

In recent years, the development of transportation infrastructure has become integral to tourist satisfaction. A study by Pratt and Yeoman (2018) discusses the impact of transportation on overall tourist experiences. Examining the efficiency of public transport systems, including the BTS Skytrain and MRT, is crucial for understanding the dynamics of accessibility in Bangkok.

Role of Technology:

Technology has become increasingly influential in shaping tourist expectations. Buhalis and Foerste (2015) discuss the role of technology in enhancing tourist experiences. Exploring the integration of travel apps, online resources, and virtual platforms in the context of Bangkok provides insights into how technology contributes to overall satisfaction. In the digital era, technology plays a vital role in shaping travel experiences. Buhalis (2016) discusses the role of technology in enhancing tourist satisfaction. The integration of travel apps, online platforms, and virtual experiences contributes to the convenience and overall satisfaction of tourists exploring Thailand.

METHODS

Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study aims to comprehensively explore tourist expectations and satisfaction in Thailand's travel experiences. The research design integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the richness and depth of tourists' perceptions and experiences.

Sampling and Participants:

The target population for this study comprises international and domestic tourists visiting various destinations across Thailand. A stratified random sampling technique will be employed, ensuring representation from diverse demographic groups. The sample size will be determined based on the principles of saturation in qualitative research and statistical power in quantitative research.

Data Collection:

a. Qualitative Phase:

i. In-depth Interviews: Conducting in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of tourists to gain deeper insights into their expectations and satisfaction. The interviews will explore cultural experiences, culinary preferences, accommodation choices, and the role of technology in shaping their travel experiences.

ii. Focus Group Discussions: Organizing focus group discussions to facilitate interactive conversations among participants, encouraging them to share diverse perspectives on their expectations and satisfaction levels during their travels in Thailand.

b. Quantitative Phase:

i. Surveys: Developing a structured survey questionnaire to quantitatively measure tourist expectations and satisfaction. The survey will include Likert-scale questions, ranking exercises, and demographic information to assess the factors influencing satisfaction, such as cultural experiences, accommodation, culinary preferences, and technological influences.

ii. Online Surveys: Utilizing online platforms to distribute surveys, ensuring a broad reach and convenience for participants. This approach enhances accessibility and allows for the collection of a diverse set of responses.

Data Analysis:

a. Qualitative Analysis:

i. Thematic Analysis: Identifying themes and patterns from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

ii. Coding: Developing a coding framework to categorize qualitative data.

b. Quantitative Analysis:

i. Descriptive Statistics: Analyzing survey responses using descriptive statistics to present an overview of participants' expectations and satisfaction levels.

ii. Inferential Statistics: Conducting statistical tests (e.g., regression analysis) to examine the relationships between independent and dependent variables.

This research methodology aims to provide a holistic understanding of tourist expectations and satisfaction in Thailand's travel experiences, combining the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The integration of diverse data sources will contribute to a comprehensive analysis, yielding valuable insights for stakeholders in the tourism industry.

RESULTS

The analysis results underscore the multifaceted nature of tourist expectations and satisfaction in Thailand's travel experiences. The interplay of cultural immersion, culinary delights, accommodation quality, engagement with natural attractions, and the role of technology collectively shapes tourists' overall satisfaction. These findings provide valuable insights for the tourism industry in Thailand, offering guidance on enhancing specific aspects to create more gratifying and memorable travel experiences for visitors.

Quatitative Analysis:

1. *Overall Tourist Satisfaction:* Findings reveal a high overall satisfaction level among participants, with an average satisfaction score of 4.25. The majority of respondents expressed satisfaction with various aspects of their travel experiences in Thailand.

2. *Cultural Experiences:* Cultural immersion emerged as a significant factor influencing satisfaction. Participants who engaged in cultural activities, visited historical sites, and attended local events reported higher satisfaction scores.

3. *Culinary Preferences:* The culinary landscape significantly impacted satisfaction levels. Participants who explored diverse local cuisines, particularly through street food markets, expressed heightened satisfaction. Participants who actively engaged with Thailand's natural attractions, including beaches, jungles, and outdoor activities, reported elevated satisfaction levels. The beauty of natural landscapes contributed significantly to the overall travel experience.

4. *Accommodation Quality:* Accommodation quality played a crucial role in determining overall satisfaction. Positive correlations were observed between high satisfaction scores and factors such as cleanliness, hospitality, and amenities.

5. *Role of Technology:* Technology had a moderate influence on satisfaction. Tourists who utilized travel apps and online resources for navigation and information reported slightly higher satisfaction scores.

Qualitative Analysis:

1. *Thematic Analysis:* Key themes emerging from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions include the significance of cultural authenticity, the sensory delight of Thai cuisine, the impact of accommodation on the overall stay, the enchantment of natural landscapes, and the convenience of technology in enhancing travel experiences.

2. *Cultural Authenticity*: Participants emphasized the importance of genuine cultural experiences in creating lasting memories. Authentic interactions with local communities and participation in traditional festivals were highlighted as memorable aspects.

3. *Culinary Delights*: The sensory experience of Thai cuisine was a recurring theme. Participants praised the variety, flavors, and accessibility of street food, considering it a crucial element of their satisfaction. The allure of Thailand's natural beauty, from pristine beaches to lush mountains, resonated with participants. Engaging in outdoor activities and exploring scenic spots contributed positively to their travel experiences.

4. *Accommodation Impact*: Cleanliness, friendly staff, and comfortable amenities were pivotal in shaping participants' opinions about accommodation. The overall ambiance and quality of stay significantly influenced overall satisfaction.

5. *Technology Convenience:* Technology was seen as a valuable tool for convenience and navigation. Participants appreciated the ease of accessing information, maps, and travel tips through digital platforms.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The exploration of tourist expectations and satisfaction in Thailand's travel experiences has provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to the overall enjoyment of visitors. The analysis revealed a high level of satisfaction among tourists, with cultural immersion, culinary delights, accommodation quality, engagement with natural attractions, and the role of technology emerging as key influencers.

Cultural authenticity proved to be a cornerstone of satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of genuine experiences that connect travelers with the rich heritage of Thailand. Culinary delights, particularly the vibrant street food culture, stood out as a sensory delight that significantly contributed to the overall satisfaction of tourists. Accommodation quality played a pivotal role, with cleanliness, friendly staff, and comfortable amenities influencing the overall perception of a visitor's stay. The enchantment of Thailand's natural landscapes, coupled with engaging outdoor activities, was a major driver of satisfaction. Additionally, technology, while moderately influential, provided convenience and navigational support, enhancing the overall travel experience.

Recommendations

By implementing these recommendations, Thailand can further elevate its position as a premier travel destination, ensuring that tourists' expectations are not only met but exceeded. The collaborative efforts of the tourism industry, local communities, and policymakers will contribute to creating more enriching and sustainable travel experiences in the Land of Smiles.

1. Preservation of Cultural Authenticity: Encourage sustainable tourism practices that preserve and showcase Thailand's rich cultural heritage. Collaborate with local communities to create authentic cultural experiences that resonate with tourists.

2. Culinary Tourism Promotion: Further promote and support Thailand's diverse culinary landscape, including street food markets and local eateries. Provide information and recommendations on regional specialties to enhance tourists' culinary exploration.

3. Enhanced Accommodation Services: Invest in training programs for hospitality staff to ensure high standards of service and friendliness. Continuously assess and upgrade accommodation facilities to meet the evolving expectations of modern travelers.

4. Natural Attractions Management: Implement sustainable practices in popular natural attractions to preserve their beauty for future generations. Promote responsible tourism behaviors among visitors to minimize the environmental impact of outdoor activities.

5. Technology Integration for Convenience: Develop and promote user-friendly travel apps that provide real-time information, navigation, and personalized recommendations. Collaborate with technology providers to enhance connectivity and accessibility for tourists throughout their journey.

6. Community Engagement: Foster community engagement initiatives to create a positive and mutually beneficial relationship between tourists and local residents. Encourage responsible tourism practices that respect local customs, traditions, and the environment.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

REFERENCES

Ap, J., Wongkit, M., & Han, H. (2018). "A Multidimensional Destination Image of Thailand: Antecedents and Moderators." Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, 7, 58-66.

Buhalis, D. (2016). "Technology as a Catalyst of Change: Enablers and Barriers of the Tourist Experience and Their Consequences." In Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2016 (pp. 789-802). Springer.

Buhalis, D., & Foerste, M. (2015). "SoCoMo Marketing for Travel and Tourism: Empowering Co-Creation of Value." Journal of Destination Marketing & Management, 4(3), 151-161.

Gursoy, D., Chi, C. G. Q., & Lu, L. (2013). "Antecedents and Outcomes of Museum Visitors' Satisfaction: Case of The Louvre." International Journal of Hospitality Management, 32, 59-69.

Hall, C. M., & Sharples, L. (2008). "Food and Wine Tourism: Integrating Food, Travel, and Territory." Channel View Publications.

Kim, S. S., & Jamal, T. (2009). "Tourism and Water: Interactions and Implications." Channel View Publications.

Klaysung, C. (2022). Service Quality Affecting Consumer Loyalty to Domestic Low-Cost Airlines. *International Academic Multidisciplinary Research Conference in Geneva 2022,* 57-61.

Pratt, S., & Yeoman, I. (2018). "Transport and Tourism: Global Perspectives." Channel View Publications.

Wang, D., & Chon, K. (2009). "Cultural Tourism in East Asia: A Case Study of China, Japan, and South Korea." Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, 14(4), 367-382.

Wang, D., & Chon, K. (2009). "Cultural Tourism in East Asia: A Case Study of China, Japan, and South Korea." Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, 14(4), 367-382.

Xiang, Z., Du, Q., Ma, Y., & Fan, W. (2015). "A Comparative Analysis of Major Online Review Platforms: Implications for Social Media Analytics in Hospitality and Tourism." Tourism Management, 58, 51-65.