SATISFACTIONS OF THAI TOURISTS TOWARDS THE SERVICE QUALITIES OF TOURIST ATTRACTIONS AFTER DILUTED OF COVID – 19 PANDEMICS: A CASE STUDY OF SAMET ISLAND, RAYONG PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

This research objectives aims examine the satisfaction of Thai tourists towards the service quality of tourist attractions after diluted of COVID-19 situation: A Case study of Koh Samet, Rayong Province. The objective was to study the behavior and opinions of Thai tourists. who travel to Koh Samet, Rayong Province during diluted of COVID-19 situations. The data of 400 respondents were collected using questionnaire. By a non-probability sampling technique. The questionnaire was divided into 4 parts. Part 1, questionnaire on general information of the respondents. Part 2 Questionnaire on Travel Behavior. Part 3 was a questionnaire on satisfaction with the quality of service. And Part 4 was an open-ended question asking about problems and suggestions. The questionnaire created by the researcher was presented to the advisors and experts. Check Content Consistency with research objectives This was a validation study. The accuracy was 0.89 and the Reliability according to Cronbach's Alpha criteria got a confidence value of 0.79. The statistics used in the data analysis were frequency, percentage, mean and multiple regression statistical analysis.

The result shows that 53.5 percent of respondents were male, age between 30-39 years old was 39.0 percent, graduated with bachelor degree 76.0 percent, work as private employee 45.0 percent, with average salary more than 35,001 Baht was 30.5 percent. Travel from Bangkok 58.5 percent, the tourist behavior founded, 49.5 percent of respondents has been to Koh Samet Island 4-5 times, stayed on the Island 1-2 nights 85.5 percent, travel with family 36.5 percent, reason of travel was leisure 73.5 percent. The level of trust and royalty is quite high.

Keywords: Satisfactions; Service qualities; Covid – 19; Koh Samet

INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a significant role in being a major driver of global economy. The growth of revenue generated from tourist spending seems to be higher than the growth of global economy. Its growth continued in 2018. A total of 1.4 billion tourists travelled internationally, expanding by 5.6% from the previous year but the growth slowed down from 2017 in which the expansion was 7% from the recovery of Turkey and Egypt. Besides, spending by tourists all over the

world is able to generate revenue of hospitality industry from tourism as much as 1.7 trillion US dollars, expanding by 4.4% from the previous year (Office of the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020 as cited in World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2020).

Samet Island is an important tourist attraction of Rayong province. It is the number one national park in terms of huge revenue generated to the country in 2019 (Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation, 2019. During the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism was suspended but Samet Island still gained popularity from Thai tourists as a destination for a weekend getaway, noticeable from the report on the number of tourists travelling to Khao Laem Ya – Mu Koh Samet National Park in the website of Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation. Samet Island or Koh Samet is a blue zone pilot tourist destination. In this regard, it must be open under the regulation of Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health and strictly follow orders of Rayong Governor.

Therefore, the researcher would like to study satisfaction of tourists towards the service qualities of tourist attractions under COVID-19 situation to be a guideline for offering the development of service qualities of tourist attractions to the management team and persons how have decision-making power including tourism-related stakeholders on Samet Island accordingly.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study satisfaction of tourists towards service qualities of tourist attractions under COVID-19 situation.
2. To study behavior of Thai tourists travelling to Samet Island amid the spread of COVID-19.

SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The research was conducted on the basis of a mixed method design that combines data collection from documents and Thai tourists travelling to Samet Island.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study on satisfaction of tourists towards service qualities of tourist attractions under COVID-19 situation: a case study of Samet Island, Rayong province is survey research. Convenience sampling was used to select research participants.

1.Population and sample

Population in the study is Thai tourists who made their trips under COVID-19 situation. The sample consists of 400 Thai tourists travelling to Samet Island, Rayong province during 1 November 2021 to 28 February 2022. The researcher distributed the questionnaire and collected data from different places, i.e. Samet Island pier, community stores on Samet Island, Sai Kaew beach, Ao Wong Duen beach, and Ao Lung Dum viewpoint.

2.Research instrument

The researcher-made questionnaire was used as the research instrument. It is divided into 4 parts.

Part 1 – general information of respondents in the form of 7 checklist questions, i.e. gender, age, marital status, income, career, and the region where the respondent came from.

Part 2 – questions about travel behavior in the form of 4 checklist questions, i.e. frequency of travelling to Samet Island, the latest number of overnight stay, whom the respondent travels with, and the purpose of travelling.

Part 3 – questions about satisfaction towards service qualities. R.A.T.E.R model of service quality by Parasuraman and others is applied. There are 19 questions in the form of 5 points rating scale ranging from very satisfied, satisfied, moderately satisfied, slightly satisfied, and least satisfied.

Part 4 – open-ended questions about problems and suggestions. All 4 parts of the questions are used for collect primary data while secondary data are collected from documents from various sources. The researcher-made questionnaire is submitted to the thesis advisor and 2 experts outside to examine the congruence of the content with research objectives (content validity). The content validity measured is 0.89. Cronbach Alpha coefficient is used to measure reliability and the reliability measured is 0.79. Statistics for data analysis are frequency, percentage, mean, and descriptive statistics.

3. Data collection

Data from various sources and relevant research studies are studied before on site data are collected. Research objectives are explained to the participants before 400 copies of the questionnaire are distributed. The data obtained are collected and processed using computer software.

4. Data analysis and statistics used

The data obtained from the questionnaire are processed using computer software for statistical analysis according to the following: 1) general information of respondents is analyzed using distribution of frequency and percentage, 2) travel behavior of respondents is analyzed using distribution of frequency and percentage, 3) satisfaction towards service qualities is analyzed using mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (S.D.), 4) suggestions from the open-ended questions are analyzed using descriptive analysis, percentage (%), mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The research results on satisfaction of tourists towards service qualities of tourist attractions under COVID-19 situation: a case study of Samet Island, Rayong province can be divided into 4 parts as follow:

Part 1 – general information of the respondents.

Part 2 – travel behavior of the respondents.

Part 3 – satisfaction towards service qualities of tourist attractions and

Part 4- other suggestions.

Part 1- general information of the respondents.

Table 4.1 shows the number and percentage of research participants classified by demographic characteristics.

Personal factors	Number	%
1. Gender		
Male	214	53.50
Female	186	46.50
Total	**400**	**100.00**
2. Age		
Under 20 years	14	3.50
21-29 years	127	31.75
30-39 years	168	42.00
40-49 years	52	13.00
50 years +	39	9.75
Total	**400**	**100.00**
3. Marital status		
Single	292	73.00
Married	87	21.75
Divorced/Separated	21	5.25
Total	**400**	**100.00**
4. Education level		
Below or equivalent to junior high school	11	2.75
Senior high school or equivalent	61	15.25
Bachelor's degree	246	61.50
Higher than a bachelor's degree	82	20.50
Total	**400**	**100.00**
4. Education level		
Below or equivalent to junior high school	11	2.75
Senior high school or equivalent	61	15.25
Bachelor's degree	246	61.50
Higher than a bachelor's degree	82	20.50
Total	**400**	**100.00**
5. Career		
Student/University student	38	9.50
Civil servant/State enterprise employee	63	15.75
Private company employee	247	61.75
Businessman/Merchant	52	13.00
Total	**400**	**100.00**

6. Income level		
Below or equivalent to 10, 000baht	24	6.00
10,001 – 20,000 baht	113	28.25
20,001 – 30,000 baht	186	46.50
Above 30,000 baht	77	19.25
Total	**400**	**100.00**
7. Region		
North	23	5.75
Northeast	75	18.75
Central	225	56.25
East	68	17.00
South	9	2.25
Total	**400**	**100.00**

Study results according to Table 4. 1: Demographic data of the participants (the respondents) comprise age, gender, marital status, education level, income, and domicile, which can be classified into the following:

Gender – most of the participants were men, 214 persons (53.50%), followed by women, 186 persons (46.50%).

Age – most of the participants were 30-39 years old, 168 persons (42.00%), followed by 21-29 years old, 127 persons (31.75%), 40-49 years old, 52 persons (13.00%), 50 years old and above, 39 persons (13.00%), the youngest ones were below 20 years old, 14 persons (3.50%).

Marital status – most of the participants were single, 292 persons (73.00%), followed by married, 87 persons (21.75%), divorced/separated, 21 persons (5.25%).

Education level – most of the participants graduated with a bachelor's degree, 246 persons (61.50%), higher than a bachelor's degree, 82 persons (20.50%), senior high school or equivalent, 61 persons (15.25%), and below or equivalent to junior high school, 11 persons (2.75%).

Career – most of the participants were private company employee, 247 persons (61.75%), followed by civil servant/ state enterprise employee, 63 persons (15. 75%) , businessman/merchant, 52 persons(13.00),student/university student, 38 persons (9.50%). Income – most of the participants had monthly income 20,001 – 30,000 baht, 186 persons (46.50%), followed by 10,001 – 20,000 baht, 113 persons (28.25%), higher than 30,000 baht, 77 persons (19.25%), and below or equivalent to 10,000 baht, 24 persons (6.00%).

Domicile – most of the participants came from the central region, 225 persons (56.25%), followed by the northeast region, 75 persons (18.75%), the east region, 68 persons (17.00%), the north region, 23 persons (5.75%), and the south region, 9 persons (2.25%).

Part 2 – travel behavior of the respondents.

Table 4.2 shows the number and percentage of the participants (respondents) classified by travel behavior.

Variable	Number	%
1. Frequency of travelling to Samet Island		
First time	34	8.50
2 – 3 times	77	19.25
4 – 5 times	162	40.50
6 times or more	127	31.75
Total	**400**	**100.00**
2. The latest number of overnight stay		
Day trip	22	5.50
1 – 2 nights	329	82.25
3 – 4 nights	49	12.25
5 nights or more	-	-
Total	**400**	**100.00**
3. Whom the respondent travels with		
Alone	102	25.50
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	42	10.50
Friend	221	55.25
Family member	35	8.75
Total	**400**	**100.00**
4. Purpose of travelling this time		
Relaxation	243	60.75
To visit places	94	23.50
Party	55	13.75
Working	8	2.00
Total	**400**	**100.00**

Study results according to Table 4.2: Travel behavior of the participants (respondents) consists of travel experience, the number of overnight stay, whom they travel with, and the purpose of travelling which can be summarized as follow:

Travel experience – most of the participants have been to Samet Island 4-5 times, 162 persons (40.50%), followed by 6 times or more, 127 persons (31.75%), 2-3 times, 77 persons (19.25%), and first time, 34 persons (8.50%).

The number of overnight stay, most of the participants stayed 1-2 nights, 329 persons (82.25%), 3-4 nights, 49 persons (12.25%), day trip, 22 persons (5.50%).

Whom the participants travel with, most of them travelled with friends, 221 persons (55.25%), followed by travelling alone, 102 persons (25.50%), with boyfriend/girlfriend, 42 persons (10.50%), with family members, 35 persons (8.75%).

Purpose of travelling – most of them travelled for relaxation, 243 persons (60.75%), followed by to visit places and enjoy atmosphere, 94 persons (23.50%), party, 55 persons (13.75%), and working, 8 persons (2.00%).

Part 3- satisfaction towards service qualities of tourist attractions.
Table 4.3 shows mean, standard deviation and levels of satisfaction towards service qualities of Samet Island in terms of Tangibility factors:

Tangibility	Level of satisfaction		
	Mean	S.D.	Interpret
Samet Island is well organized with suitable location	4.31	0.594	high
Hotels and accommodations are nicely and appropriately decorated	4.00	0.807	high
Staff or employees dress appropriate to the place	4.11	0.695	high

Study results according to Table 4.3 found most of the participants were satisfied with tangibility factors (perceived environment) at a high level in every aspect. The aspect with the highest mean was Samet Island is well organized with suitable location ($\bar{x}$ = 4.31, S.D. = 0.594), followed by staff or employees dress appropriately to the place ($\bar{x}$ = 4.11, S.D. = 0.695), and hotels and accommodations are nicely and appropriately decorated ($\bar{x}$ = 4.00, S.D. = 0.807).

Table 4.4 shows mean, standard deviation and levels of satisfaction towards service qualities of Samet Island in terms of Reliability factors:

Reliability	Level of satisfaction		
	Mean	S.D.	Interpret
Samet Island is as beautiful as it has been publicized	4.23	0.633	high
Accommodations and restaurant meet standards as they have been publicized	4.03	0.714	high
Staff or employees have knowledge and provide services as agreed	4.30	0.528	high

Study results according to Table 4.4 found most of the participants were satisfied with reliability factors at a high level in every aspect. The aspect with the highest mean was staff or employees have knowledge and provide services as agreed ($\bar{x}$ = 4.30, S.D. = 0.528), followed by Samet Island is as beautiful as it has been publicized ($\bar{x}$ = 4.23, S.D. = 0.633), and accommodations and restaurants meet standards as they have been publicized ($\bar{x}$ = 4.03, S.D. = 0.714).

Table 4.5 shows mean, standard deviation and levels of satisfaction towards service qualities of Samet Island in terms of Responsiveness factors:

Responsiveness	Level of satisfaction		
	Mean	S.D.	Interpret
There are a lot of tourism activities that meet tourists' purposes of travelling	4.22	0.559	high
There is adequate number of workplaces ready for services	4.00	0.683	high
Services are provided in fast and on a timely basis that meet tourists' demands	4.22	0.556	high

Study results according to Table 4.5 found most of the participants were satisfied with responsiveness factors at a high level in every aspect. The aspect with the highest mean was there are a lot of tourism activities that meet tourists' purposes of travelling ($\bar{x}$ = 4.22, S.D. = 0.559), followed by services are provided in fast and on a timely basis that meet tourists' demands ($\bar{x}$ = 4.22, S.D. = 0.556), and three is adequat4 number of workplaces ready for services ($\bar{x}$ = 4.00, S.D. = 0.683).

Table 4.6 shows mean, standard deviation and levels of satisfaction towards service qualities of Samet Island in terms of Assurance factors:

Assurance	Level of satisfaction		
	Mean	S.D.	Interpret
Stores display signs, licenses, certificates of quality clearly	4.10	0.712	high
Workplaces are honest and do not raise the prices	3.87	0.703	high
Products and services have better quality than other places	3.85	0.748	high

Study results according to Table 4.6 found most of the participants were satisfied with assurance factors at a high level in every aspect. The aspect with the highest mean was stores display signs, license, certificates of quality clearly ($\bar{x}$ = 4.10, S.D. = 0.712), followed by workplaces are honest and do not raise the prices ($\bar{x}$ = 3.87, S.D. = 0.703), and products and quality are better than other places ($\bar{x}$ = 3.85, S.D. = 0.748).

Table 4.7 shows mean, standard deviation and levels of satisfaction towards service qualities of Samet Island in terms of Empathy factors:

Empathy	Level of satisfaction		
	Mean	S.D.	Interpret
Service providers are attentive and willing to provide services	4.18	0.599	high

Empathy	Level of satisfaction		
	Mean	**S.D.**	**Interpret**
Services are delivered with a smile and impression	4.23	0.623	high
There is consistency in service delivery	4.09	0.716	high

Study results according to Table 4.7 found the participants were satisfied with empathy factors at a high level in every aspect. The aspect with the highest mean was services are delivered with a smile and impression ($\bar{x}$ = 4.23, S.D. = 0.623), followed by service providers are attentive and willing to provide services ($\bar{x}$ = 4.18, S.D. = 0.599), and there is consistency in service delivery ($\bar{x}$ = 4.09, S.D. = 0.716).

Table 4.8 shows mean, standard deviation and levels of satisfaction towards service qualities of Samet Island in terms of Safety factors:

Safety	Level of satisfaction		
	Mean	**S.D.**	**Interpret**
Samet Island offers financial and property safety, payment can be made by credit cards	3.97	0.735	high
CCTV system is available to enhance public security thoroughly	3.98	0.765	high
Security guards are available to provide safety and maintain peace and order	3.92	0.754	high
COVID-19 measures have been strictly and regularly followed	3.92	0.875	high

Study results according to Table 4.8 found the participants were satisfied with safety factors at a high level in every aspect. The aspect with the highest mean was CCTV system is available to enhance public security thoroughly ($\bar{x}$ = 3.98, S.D. = 0.765), followed by Samet Island offers financial and property safety, payment can be made by credit cards ($\bar{x}$ = 3.97, S.D. = 0.735), security guards are available to provide safety and maintain peace and order ($\bar{x}$ = 3.92, S.D. = 0.754), and COVID-19 measures have been strictly and regularly followed ($\bar{x}$ = 3.92, S.D. = 0.875).

Part 4 – other suggestions.
Table 4.9: Suggestions from the respondents for the improvement and development of tourist attractions in Samet Island.

No.	Suggestions for improving/developing tourist attractions
1	Adequate lighting should be provided thoroughly.
2	The number of seafood restaurants should be higher.
3	In the past, Samet Island was more beautiful but currently it is full of garbage.
4	A road to the beach should be improved. The red earth road looks terrifying, especially when riding on a bike which accidents may occur.

Figure 1: Atmosphere of Sai Kaew beach during holidays, Friday and Saturday.

Figure 2: Atmosphere of tourists waiting for going back home on Sunday.

Figure 3: Atmosphere of tourists entering Samet Island at Samet pier.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1: To study satisfaction of Thai tourists towards service qualities of tourist attractions under COVID-19 situation: a case study of Samet Island, Rayong province.

According to the study results, satisfaction of Thai tourists towards service qualities of tourist attractions under COVID-19 situation was at a high level. Consideration of each aspect found they were very satisfied with reliability with the mean of 4.01, followed by tangibility with the mean of 4.00, empathy with the mean of 3.00, responsiveness with the mean of 3.98,

assurance with the mean of 3.72. The aspect with the least satisfaction was safety with the mean of 3.70.

The reason Thai tourists were very satisfied with reliability since Samet Island has been supported from several agencies, inside and outside its area, such as the Tourism Association of Koh Samet, Pae Sub- district Administrative Organization, Rayong Provincial Administrative Organization, Khao Laem Ya – Mu Koh Samet National Park, Rayong Provincial Office of Tourism and Sport, Tourism Authority of Thailand, Rayong Provincial Office and all channels of mass media who play a role in integrating, promoting, and publicizing Samet Island, making the island gain reliability. This is consistent with the revenue's annual report of Department of National Park, Wild Life and Plant Conservation for the fiscal year 2019 as Khao Laem Ya – Mu Kho Samet National Park had revenue as much as 374 million baht, the number one national park in terms of huge revenue generated to the country in 2019 among 153 national parks. consistent with the study result of Supasak Ngaoprasertwong. (2020)

Objective 2: 1. To study behavior of Thai tourists travelling to Samet Island amid the spread of COVID-19: a case study of Samet Island, Rayong province.

Study results of behavior of Thai tourists travelling amid the spread of COVID 19: a case study of Samet Island, Rayong province, classified by aspect found most of tourists travelled to Samet Island 4-5 times, accounted for 40.50%. The latest overnight stay indicated that most tourists stayed 1-2 nights, accounted for 82.25%, travelled with friends (55.25%), the purpose of travelling was for relaxation (60.75%).

With regard to experience in travelling to Samet Island, if the mean number of tourists having 4- 5 times and 6 times experience in travelling Samet Island is gathered, the total mean will be 72.25%. It can indicate that Thai tourists travelling to Samet Island under the spread of COVID- 19 were tourists who have been to Samet Island and they were confident to travel under such situation. This is consistent with the study result of Wichian Jantalun (2021) on service quality of hotels during the spread of COVID-19: a case study of Samet Island, Rayong province as the study result showed that hotel business operators gave an interview in the same direction that tourist travelling during the COVID-19 situation were those who used to receive services.

In terms of the latest overnight stay, most tourists stayed 1-2 nights (82.25%). During the spread of COVID- 19, most tourists travelling to Samet Island were Thai tourists who have holidays on Saturday and Sunday or weekend holidays. It is consistent with the research conducted by Thawanrat Yantossilp (2021) on factors affecting decision making to travel in Thailand of private company employees in Bangkok after the first pandemic of COVID- 19 as the study found most of them travelled on Saturday – Sunday.

With regard to whom they travel with, most Thai tourists travelled to Samet Island with their friend (55.25%) since expenses spent on travelling to Samet Island is quite high in terms of accommodation, food, drink, etc. Therefore, Thai tourists were more likely to travel as a group to reduce an expense burden. Thus, it can be seen that tourists travelling to Samet Island will bring food and drink to the island as well. This is consistent with the final report of Office of the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2020) on the survey on attitude

and satisfaction of Thai and foreign tourists travelling in Thailand as it was found that overall Thai tourists are more likely travel with their families/relatives/friends (90.39%).

As for the purpose of travelling, most Thai tourists travelled for relaxation (60.75%) since Samet Island is a relaxing destination. It is a national park with beautiful natural scenery. It is well known for its outstanding beaches like Sai Kaew beach, especially the recovery of nature during the spread of COVID-19. Water-based activities like jetski, speed boat, banana boat were not allowed to dock near the beaches, making the beaches more beautiful. This is consistent with the final report of Office of the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2020) on the survey on attitude and satisfaction of Thai and foreign tourists travelling in Thailand as it was found that the main purpose of travelling on holidays was for relaxation (83.78%).

SUGGESTIONS

1. Suggestions for application

1.1 Since the report result show a very small number of family tourists and tourists aged 50 years and above compared to the number of other groups of tourists, Samet Island should carry out marketing strategies to attract those tourists to make a trip during weekdays so that Samet Island should generate revenue to compensate for the revenue generated form the missing number of foreign tourists.

1.2 Tourists were less satisfied with safety than other factors; therefore, Samet Island should improve the quality of this aspect, especially the number of security guards that should be increase to ensure safety, peace and order, including COVID-19 measures that should be strictly followed intensely and consistently.

1.3 Additional lighting should be added to public spaces and roads as tourists suggest that it is not adequate.

1.4 There is a small number of seafood restaurants with affordable prices. Support should be given to have such restaurants open for services.

1.5 Tourists gave their opinions that there is a lot of waste on the island. Therefore, waste management should be improved, such as an increase in frequency of waste collection in community areas and public spaces, etc.

1.6 Roads or ways leading to beaches should be improved to ensure they are strong and meet standards for tourists' safety.

2. Suggestions for future research

2.1 Researches should add focus group discussion to study tourists' demands so as to improve service qualities of tourist attractions, to find out information supporting the presentation of policies for the development of service qualities accordingly.

2.2 Researchers should conduct marketing research for tourism industry and tourists' behavior after the government has a policy to cancel face mask-wearing regulations for pilot areas for tourism (Blue zone areas) to find out if there is any change in tourists' behavior.

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