THE INVESTIGATION OF TRAVEL BEHAVIOR AND LEVEL OF SATISFACTION OF THAI VISITORS TOWARDS TOURISM MANAGEMENT

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Abstract- This paper aimed to investigate travel behavior and level of satisfaction of Thai visitors towards tourism management. The case study was Koh Kred, a tourist destination of Nonthaburi Province located near Bangkok. The study also compared difference of satisfaction level among different personal backgrounds and travel behavior of visitors. The study employed questionnaire as the mean of collecting the data, with a total of 385 samples. The findings revealed high level of satisfaction in all factors including the services, safety and facilities of the destination. The hypotheses were also proved by the findings confirming that visitors with different gender, age, education level, income per month and marital status had different level of satisfaction towards the places visited, services and safety, and facilities.

Index Terms- Koh Kred, Satisfaction, Travel Behavior, Tourism Management

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been one of the strategies the Thai Government put it as the national policy, due to its huge benefits to the national economy ranging from generating high revenue, distributing income, creating more businesses, to increasing more employments to various businesses and to local areas. The national tourism development plan has been indicated as the national strategies since the 4th National Economic and Social Development Plan (B.E. 2520- 2524). In the 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan (B.E. 2550- 2554), the strategies are focused more the economic restructuring, and thereafter restructuring in the service sector is one of the measures. The Thai tourism strategic direction indicates Thailand to be the regional center of natural and cultural tourism and to be of its path to developing and increasing its capacities for more competitive advantage in tourism and service businesses. A report of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), in 2009, the Thai tourism industry produced revenue of 938,700 million Baht to the country; the number was from the expenditure of both Thai and international tourists.

A trend during the past few years has revealed through various media both in print- out and electronic channels countryside living, local festival and culture scenes from different provinces of the country. The classification of tourist attractions on the TAT website covers village and community attractions, which can be counted of 179 places throughout the country. This content has been provided to respond to the new travel trend, in which people are getting bored of same attractions and conventional travelThailand has become the world travel destination with its variety and uniqueness of tourism resources. The Thai Government has put many efforts in promoting the country to be more attractive to the world tourism market due to the fact that the tourism has become one of the national outstanding industries from which high proportion of revenues are generated. Moreover, recently more promotions have been done to motivate Thai residents to travel within the country. There have been more diverse travel activities at natural destinations such as sea, islands and mountains. Agricultural sector has also become one of the alternative ways of travel for visitors to learn rural lifestyle and culture.

Koh Kred is one of the famous tourist destinations near Bangkok. It is located in Nonthaburi Province. The place is well- known for its unique arts and culture of Mon people, with a diversity of travel activities to offer visitors. These include for instance making merit at temples, learning Mon art and culture and shopping for local souvenirs. Koh Kred is recommended for both Thai and international tourists for a visit due to its location in proximity to Bangkok and availability of convenient transportation from Bangkok. During September and December in 2011, Koh Kred had been affected by the big flood crisis that damaged the place and local products for example the vegetable plantations and household pottery factories. Consequently the place had faced a dramatic drop of visitor number.

This paper, in this regards, aimed to examine level of satisfaction of Thai people for their visit to Koh Kred and their travel behavior after the place had been recovered from the flood. The findings were expected to contribute useful information for further improvement and recovery of the place for tourism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study by Nichisa (2010) about expectation and satisfaction level of consumers towards the tourism

management of Koh Kred, Nonthaburi Province found that the visitors had high level of expectation in all factors, with the highest score given to food shops. It also reported medium level of satisfaction among the visitors and the residents of Nonthaburi Province, with the highest score in transportation. Furthermore, the difference between the visitors and the residents of Nonthaburi regarding the level of expectation and satisfaction towards visiting Koh Kred was reported significant, at the statistics significance of 0.05.

Sirikul (2007) investigated determinants factors that influenced Thai people to make a decision to visit Koh Kred. The study presented that they traveled to Koh Kred for leisure purpose during long weekend with friends. They received the information of Koh Kred from travel magazines. It found that the popular activities completed during the visit included buying pottery souvenir product, and buying and eating local foods sold by local vendors for example the famous 'Tod Mun Noh Kala' (spicy deep- fried fish cake with the shoots of local ginger variety). It found that an average expense spent for the visit was less than 1,000 Baht, and most of visitors walked to explore the place. Furthermore, the most preferred travel attributes of Koh Kred was its souvenirs. Most visitors had the highest level of satisfaction towards the atmosphere of restaurants, good service of local people who supplied transportation and quality souvenir products. It also found that the most attractive elements of boat sightseeing program were temples, traditional houses and archeological remains along the river. In respect of determinant destination factors that influenced a visit to Koh Kred, the study discovered that arts and culture of Mon people and the way they applied their arts in making local souvenirs were the most important factors, whereas the visitors expected Koh Kred to have more cultural events and festivals. Their high level of satisfaction agreed with the result that they would revisit the place. Some problems and limitations of the management concerned the travel information and price of products. The study also contributed some suggestions regarding the management of the place. These covered the conservation of river and canals, old temples and archeological remains, standard pricing of products, more public relation and promotion by the tourism authorities, trainings for local people in terms of service process, and management of safety, regulation and physical environment.

Arunee (2007) studied the travel management of Koh Kred in terms of visitors' satisfaction. The findings revealed female respondents as the majority with age between 30- 50 years old, with bachelor degree graduation and higher. Most were company employees with an average income per month between 10,000- 20,000 Baht. Approximately they visited Koh Kred twice a year. The study investigated level of satisfaction towards the visit in 5 factors: the management of the place, facilitation of traveling within, travel services, safety service and service provided by shops. It discovered that the level of satisfaction was averagely medium. By use of the respondents' background to investigate any difference across the factors, it found that (1) gender determined different level of satisfaction towards the management of the place in terms of facilitation of traveling within; (2) age determined different level of satisfaction towards the management of the place in terms of facilitation of traveling within, travel services, safety service and service provided by shops; (3) the respondents with different travel experiences had different level of satisfaction towards the management of the place in terms of facilitation of traveling within and safety service; (4) the respondents with different level of education, occupation and income showed no difference in terms of the level of satisfaction in all factors.

III.DETAILS EXPERIMENTAL

3.1. Research Methodology

This paper aimed to examine behavior of Thai visitors visiting Koh Kred in Nonthaburi Province and their satisfaction towards the visitation; and to compare level of satisfaction by their demographic background and behavior. Fig 1 was the conceptual framework, showing independent and dependent variables. There were 2 sets of independent variables. The first set was demographic background of the respondents including gender, age, education level, occupation, income per month and marital status; the second set was behavior of the respondents covering sources from which they knew Koh Kred, purposes and places to visit as planned, travel party, planning of expense, spending behavior and sources from which they received the information about Koh Kred. The dependent variable was satisfaction of the respondents towards the destination, services and safety and facilities. The study established 2 hypotheses: (1) Visitors with different demographic background had different level of satisfaction towards the visitation to Koh Kred; and (2) Visitors with different travel behavior had different level of satisfaction towards the visitation to Koh Kred.

The fieldwork collected a total of 385 samples by use of the accidental sampling technique (Thanin Silpjaru, 2005, p. 66). The questionnaire used in this study was divided into 4 parts. The first 2 parts were close ended questions for respondent's personal background and respondent's travel behavior at Koh Kred. Part 4 used five- point Likert scale to evaluate respondent's level of satisfaction in terms of the destination, services and safety and facilities. The last part was open- ended questions to collect additional opinions.

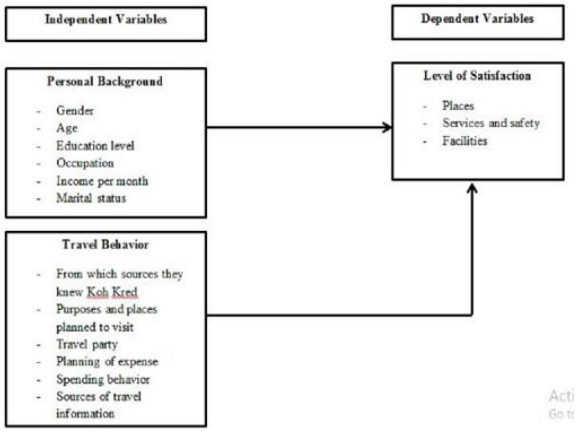


Fig.1. The Conceptual Framework

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of travel behavior of visitors visiting Koh Kred were presented in the following paragraphs.

The findings provided the level of satisfaction of the respondents visiting Koh Kred. The study found that an average level of satisfaction was high, with a mean score of 3.91, in which the item receiving the highest mean score was the places visited, 4.11, followed by the facilities and the services and safety, with a mean score of 3.89 and 3.72, respectively.

To prove the hypotheses of this study, the findings confirmed that the respondents with different gender, age, education level, income per month and marital status had different level of satisfaction towards the places visited, services and safety and facilities. Moreover, the respondents with different planning of expense, spending behavior had different level of satisfaction towards the places visited, and services and safety. The respondents with different purposes and places to visit as planned, travel party, planning of expense and spending behavior were found to have different level of satisfaction towards the facilities provided at the destination.

Gender was found to be a factor that influenced visitors to have different level of satisfaction toward the tourism management of Koh Kred, which concurred to the previous finding studied by Arunee (2007). Moreover, the finding concerning age factor also agreed with the study of Sirijitra (2007) about Koh Kred tourism management and visitors' satisfaction. For instance, the visitors with age between 36- 40 years old usually travel to seek for more meaningful experience whereas teenagers rather travel for fun, which result in different level of satisfaction.

Visitors with different level of education were proved in this study to have different level of satisfaction towards different aspects, in this case study, the services, safety and facilities, due to their higher level of expectation as a result of higher level of needs in the pyramid of the hierarchy of needs. Those with more income were also found to have different level of satisfaction from those with lower income. This could be stated that visitors with better financial support would be more affordable to travel and thus would have more travel experiences. As a result, more travel experiences influence the fact that it is more difficult that they will feel fulfilled with general or normal travel experiences, and thus would seek for something more diverse and unique.

Visitors with different marital status were found to have different level of satisfaction. In this case, visitors who came with couple or family were reported to have different satisfaction from those who came alone towards the place, due to different travel activities. Family visitors or tourists usually seek to have activities that family members can do together for example boat sightseeing and making merit, and buying souvenirs back home. In regards to the comparison of the satisfaction level by visitors' behavior, it was found that those who visited Koh Kred for learning arts and culture were more satisfied with facilities than those who came to the place for eating.

CONCLUSIONS

There were some recommendations from the findings of this paper that addressed the strategic management. Koh Kred should be managed in terms of its physical environment for instance cleanliness, stall management and pathways. Another issue involves the conservation of traditional arts and culture of Mon people for next generations. This involves how to safeguard uniqueness of souvenirs that represent its traditions and identity as well. Moreover, stakeholders for example local people and local authorities should also take into account the standardization of services and facilities on Koh Kred. For example, boat transportation should be equipped with adequate rescue equipment, first- aid supplies and other emergency supports for visitors.

Future studies should cover an investigation of satisfaction of local people and other stakeholders towards the tourism management of Koh Kred, as well as of international tourists.

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