AN EXAMINATION OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS' DESTINATION LOYALTY: A CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS IN BANGKOK

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Abstract- The aims of this research were to investigate international tourists' destination loyalty from the perspective of international tourists in Bangkok as well as to study the level of interest to revisit Bangkok in the near future. A probability random sampling of 200 international tourists was utilized. Half the sample group was male and the other half was female. A Likert-five-scale questionnaire was designed to collect the data and small in-depth interviews were also used to obtain their opinions. The results from the study revealed that the majority of respondents had a medium level of loyalty. When examined in detail, the destination loyalty indicators can be ranked according to the mean average from high to low as follow: to recommend the visit, to say positive things, to revisit in the next three years, to refer the information, and to plan to visit regularly. Finally, the findings from the in-depth interviews with small group of international tourists revealed that the major obstacles that prevented many international tourists who may interested in revisiting Thailand included traffic congestions, high crime rate, and political instability.

Keywords- Destination, Loyalty, International Tourists, Revisit

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is vital to Thai economy for many decades. This is because of its huge contribution to the Thai Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the employment it generated. Since 2010, the performance of Thai tourism has been severely affected by the political crises. Therefore, it is important to study how to increase the tourism revenues of Thailand. The ability to achieve sustainable growth of tourism guarantees the steady revenues in the future. The tourism revenues can be increased in two ways. First is to increase new customers or new tourists to Thailand and second is to make sure that the old customers repurchase or revisit Thailand again and again. This research study focused on the factors of destination image that can influence tourists to revisit Thailand and become loyal tourists to. Destination image is widely accepted as one of the most important factors for tourists to make a decision to revisit a particular tourist destination. Destination image is an important factor whenever its uniqueness encourages visits and revisits by international tourists. The more international tourists revisit the same tourist destination, the higher the probability will be that they will have a loyalty to that particular tourist destination.

The choice behavior has been linked with decision making process. In other words, the choice factors influence the decision to repurchase or to revisit a tourist destination in the near future. Many researchers believed that high satisfaction leads to high probability of repurchase and low satisfaction leads to low probability of repurchase. Factors influencing the decision of inbound tourists to revisit Thailand in this study did not focus on the level of satisfaction instead the focus was on the ten important factors that tourists often experience whenever they visit Bangkok Thailand. These factors included safe place to stay, friendly people, child friendly, clean country, clean food, clean water, politically safe, good hospitality, good weather, and convenient transportation. According to the literature, customer's satisfaction is an important factor but it is not sufficient to determine a repeat purchase or the revisit of inbound tourist in our case. This research was aimed to focus on the factors that inbound tourists often face during their trip in Bangkok, Thailand.

Frequent travel to the same tourist destination is good sign of tourists' destination loyalty. In the modern world of highly competitive tourism industry, it is imperative to find the factors that can increase their competitive edge.

Bangkok is the most important source of inbound tourists' revenues for Thailand. Tourism industry is vital in terms of foreign currency and has created jobs for Thailand during the past decades. There are many selling points of Bangkok as the number one source of inbound tourists' revenues such as history, culture, art, business centers, shopping malls, night entertainment, and so forth. However, the factors that can influence the decision of inbound tourists to choose to revisit Bangkok, is customer loyalty. Loyalty is a concept that many researchers believe to be closely

related to the level of satisfaction. In other words, highly satisfied tourists often revisit the same tourist destination. The next question is what are the factors that influence the level of satisfaction? Many studies state that destination image, quality of service, and perceived value are among the top three factors.

Tourists' destination loyalty is one of the most important topics frequently studies by many scholars. Why? This is because destination loyalty is often linked to the issues of tourist satisfaction. Many scholars in the past often stated that high customers' satisfaction leads to customers' loyalty [1]. The high rate of tourists' destination loyalty has many benefits such as a sustainable demand of tourists to visit a particular tourist destination, a positive image from satisfied tourists, and steady tourists' revenue for the particular tourist destination. This research focused on a survey of international tourists who visit Thailand in order to measure if there were any sign of destination loyalty. Chen and Gursoy (2001) stated destination loyalty can be measured by three different indicators: continue to visit the same destination, an intention to visit more of the particular destination, and a willingness to recommend others to visit the particular tourist destination [2]. However, Chen (1998) had studied the tourists' decision making process and found that past trip experiences often directly and indirectly influence the future decision whether to revisit a particular tourist destination or not [3]. In other words, the tourist satisfaction level from the past trip is the key to revisit a particular destination. Since there is limited research about this topic, this study is aimed to investigate the tourists' destination loyalty from the perspective of international tourists in the Bangkok, Thailand in order to find the best possible way to understand what international tourists think about Bangkok as a tourist destination and to provide suggestions to build a positive image as well as to increase knowledge of the topic of loyalty.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of tourists' destination loyalty was based on an adaptation of business loyalty theory. Philip Kotler (2000) the guru of marketing, explained loyalty as positive feedback, willing to repurchase, and willing to recommend the product or service to others [4]. Some researchers suggested that there are three techniques to elicit destination loyalty information from international tourists; these include interview tourists directly, use questionnaires with target international tourists, and observe international tourists on sites [4].

In terms of loyalty, some researchers have argued that intent to revisit is the best indicator of loyalty while other researchers stated that recommendation to other tourists is the most important key of loyalty. Moreover, many researchers have suggested three important indicators to measure tourists' destination loyalty: to revisit a particular tourist destination within three years, to recommend a visit to this particular tourist destination to other, to refer information of a particular tourist destination to other, to say positive things about this particular tourist destination to others, and to have a plan to visit this particular tourist destination regularly. The study of factors influencing the decision of inbound tourists to revisit Bangkok, Thailand was based on the ideas that there are some factors that can influence and increase the level of loyalty from inbound tourists. The loyalty can be defined as the way that consumers continue to repurchase the same brand and are willing to recommend the brand to other consumers. The same idea can be applied for tourism. In bound tourists' loyalty is the way that tourists continue to visit the same destination and are willing to recommend this particular tourist destination to other inbound tourists. Many researchers have argued that tourists' loyalty include both behavior and attitude dimensions. In terms of the behavior dimension, tourists must frequently visit the particular tourist destination and in terms of the attitude dimension, tourists must have positive attitude and they are willing to say positive things about their experience to other tourists. Moreover, Shoemaker and Lewis (1999) stated that loyal consumers often spread positive word of mouth advertising with no extra cost. Jago and Shaw (1998) argued that it was difficult to measure loyalty in tourism since the purchase of tourism did not occur on a continuous basis but rather infrequently. Many research studies in the past have documented satisfaction as an important determinant of future loyalty. Tourist will choose to revisit when they were highly satisfied with the service quality, the destination image, the perceived value, and the physical attributions of the tourist destination. This research study did not focus on the satisfaction factor directly, but rather put the focus on ten different factors that tourists often face during their trip and be able to identify with these factors as important to their decision to revisit a particular tourist destination in the near future. Moreover, to ascertain which factor is the most important and which one is the least important.

III. METHODOLOGY

A Likert-five-scale questionnaire was designed specifically to investigate the destination loyalty from the perspectives of international tourists in Bangkok and to evaluate their level of interest in revisiting Thailand in the near future. The population included all international tourists in Bangkok, Thailand. The probability sampling technique was performed to get a sample group that included 200 students from the departure lounge of Suvannabhumi international airport. Taro Yamane Technique was utilized to get a

proper sample group [5]. Descriptive statistics utilized in this research including percentage, mean, and standard deviation. In addition, 30 pilot questionnaires were performed so that each question would pass the Cronbach Alpha criteria with at least 0.7.

IV.FINDINGS

The findings of this research revealed that male and female respondents were collected in almost the same proportion, or 50.5:49.5 respectively. The majority had the age between 21-30 years old. About 69.5 percent of the respondents were single, 17.5 percent were married, and the rest were either divorced or widowed. Only 61.5 percent of the respondents had a college degree or high school diploma. The majority of respondents or about 81.5 percent would be considered to be middle class with an average income between 30,000-50,000 US dollars per year. In terms of their traveling, 49.5 percent chose to travel in small groups of 2-3 persons. In terms of their motivation to travel in Thailand, the finding showed that the majority of respondents reported that a special vacation in a different place was their major reason.

TABLE I
DESTINATION LOYALTY INDICATORS

	Mean	S.D.	Rank
Indicators			
To revisit in three years	4.31	0.907	3
To recommend the visit	4.45	0.904	1
To refer the information	4.28	0.721	4
To say positive things	4.36	0.679	2
To plan to visit regularly	4.11	0.926	5
Overall	4.24	0.708	

The findings from TABLE I revealed five different levels of importance from the perspectives of international tourists as follows: 1) the respondents rated the ability to recommend others to visit Thailand as the number one indicator of loyalty with a mean of 4.45 and 0.904 SD. 2) the respondents rated the ability to say positive things about Thailand as the number two indicator of loyalty with a mean of 4.36 and 0.679 SD. 3) the respondents rated the ability to revisit Thailand in the next three years as the number three indicator of loyalty with a mean of 4.31 and 0.907 SD. 4) the respondents rated the ability to refer information about Thailand as the number four indicator of loyalty with a mean of 4.28 and 0.721 SD. 5) the respondents rated the ability to make plans to visit Thailand regularly as the number five indicator of loyalty with a mean of 4.11 and 0.926 SD. The overall mean was 4.25 with 0.708 SD.

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the majority of majority of international tourists in Bangkok had only a medium level of loyalty since the overall mean was less than 4.5. When examined in detail, the destination loyalty indicators can be ranked according to the mean average from high to low as follow: to recommend the visit, to say positive things, to revisit in the next three years, to refer the information, and to plan to visit regularly. Finally, the findings from the in-depth interviews with a small group of international tourists revealed that the major obstacles that prevented many international tourists who may have been interested in revisiting Thailand included traffic congestions, high crime rate, and political instability.

TABLE II
LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE

	Mean	S.D.	Rank
Level of importance			
1. Safe place to stay	4.36	0.746	1
2. Friendly people	4.33	0.704	2
3. Clean food	4.28	0.814	3
4. Good hospitality	4.26	0.802	4
5. Clean water	4.21	1.029	5
6. Politically safe	4.12	0.814	6
7. Good weather	4.03	0.865	7
8.Convenient transportation	3.95	0.700	8
9. Clean country	3.65	0.971	9
10. Child friendly	3.25	1.261	10

The findings from TABLE II revealed the ranking of ten different factors to influence the decision of international tourists to revisit Thailand in the near future. This ranking was done according to their mean and standard deviation. The ranking shows that the first three important factors are safe place to stay, friendly people, and clean food. The three least important factors are convenient transportation, clean country, and child friendly.

V. FUTURE STUDIES

In order to get more specific results, the future research should survey international tourists based on their country of residence to obtain representative opinions from a variety of international tourists in Bangkok, Thailand. Then, the findings may be able to generalize to find more specific and meaningful tourist marketing strategies. Therefore, future research should use a proportion sampling technique with a diverse group of international tourists. Moreover, future studies should use more in-depth interviews to find the reasons behind their decision making to revisit Bangkok, Thailand. One limitation of this research paper was that this study was conducted in the one dimension of loyalty which was the attitude dimension, and did not include the behavior dimension. Therefore, future research should cover both behavior and attitude dimensions. Also, a proportion sampling technique with a diverse group of

inbound tourists should be sampled. Moreover, future studies should use more in-depth interviews to find the reasons behind their decision to evaluate each factor of influencing the decision to revisit Bangkok, Thailand.

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