



Factors Influencing the Decision of Thai Visitors to Travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic from the end of 2019 to the end of 2021 resulted in the tourism industry of Thailand being negatively affected. Almost every province in the northeastern region has been severely impacted, with Nakhon Ratchasima Province experiencing a reduction in Thai visitors of up to 38%. Consequently, entrepreneurs and other people in Nakhon Ratchasima Province relying on tourism for a living have experienced income loss and a deterioration in their quality of life. Therefore, this study aims to determine the factors influencing the decision of Thai visitors to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, to identify the important factors for tourism development in the area using primary data collected via a questionnaire. A sample of 400 Thai visitors were asked to complete the questionnaire between March and December 2021, with the collected data then analysed using the following statistical values: frequency, percentage, standard deviation, mean, and a logistic model (or binary logistic regression) according to the statistical significance level of 0.01. The suitability of the logistic model was determined based on the statistical values of a -2log likelihood (Cox and Snell R^2 ; Nagelkerke R^2 ; Hosmer and Lemeshow), with 87.30% accuracy. The results indicated that the following factors influenced the decision of Thai visitors to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 epidemic: 1) Gender; 2) Average income per month; 3) The safety of the province in terms of health and protecting life, including property; 4) There are many tourist attractions within a short distance which are easy to travel to; 5) Accommodation prices are reasonable; 6) Goods and souvenir prices are reasonable; 7) The prices for visiting attractions are reasonable; 8) Tourist attractions have an effective and suitable infrastructure; 9) Tourist attractions are safe in terms of health and protecting life; 10) Tourist attractions have strict and effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19; 11) Tourist attractions have appropriate goods and souvenirs; 12) The promotion of price reduction for accommodation; and 13) The promotion of various privileges for visitors.

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Introduction

The tourism industry is regarded as having an important role in the economic and social development of Thailand. Tourism is the main industry in Thailand, generating significant Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as well as being the primary source of income for the country. The tourism industry brings a substantial amount of foreign investment into Thailand, benefiting the economy through business products and services as well as infrastructure development. Moreover, the tourism industry drives economic competitiveness between Thailand and other countries, benefiting the economic, social, cultural, and environment of the country (Wannathanom, 2009). However, in 2021, the tourism industry in many provinces of Thailand was significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. From January to December 2021, the number of cumulative infected people in Thailand was 2,217,640. The highest number of infections occurred in three time periods: August, September, and July 2021, with 607,686, 398,746, and 337,986 people affected, respectively, according to the information available as of 31 October 2021 (Ministry of Public Health, 2021), as presented in Figure 1.

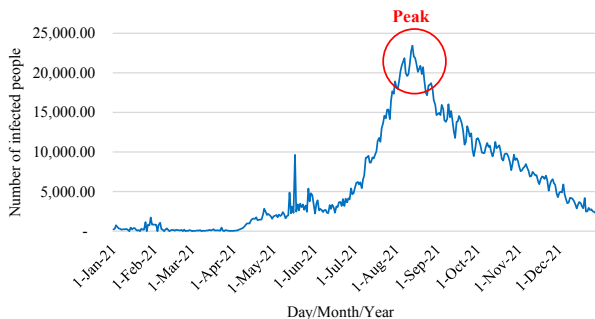


Figure 1: Trend of COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand between January and December 2021

Source: Ministry of Public Health, 2021

Accordingly, Thailand's government has deemed it necessary to implement emergency measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infection in the country by issuing regulations under Section 9 of the emergency decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations B.E. 2548 (2005). These regulations aim to prevent people from entering areas of risk and requiring places at risk of spreading COVID-19 to close. Other regulations include social distancing, working from home, and

closing the channels of entry for foreigners into Thailand (Office of the Council of State, 2021). Furthermore, Thailand's government-imposed restrictions on each province in the form of dark red and red areas to vary the level of measures in each area. The change in colour intensity depends on the number of infected people in each province (Thai Quarantine Monitor, 2021). These measures have had a direct effect on the tourism industry since 2020, with the number of foreigners and Thai visitors decreasing continuously in every province. Foreign visitors are unable to travel across borders in Thailand, except those who have received two vaccinations, but they still have to stay in state quarantine for at least 14 days. However, Thai visitors are able to travel across provinces. Therefore, the tourism industry has turned its focus to Thai visitors and domestic tourism. The third-largest number of Thai visitors, excluding Bangkok, came from three provinces in 2021 (January to December), namely Kanchanaburi, Chiang Mai, and Nakhon Ratchasima, respectively (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2022). Further details are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Thai visitors and rate of change in 2021 (January to December) for the first three provinces excluding Bangkok

Provinces	2021 (January to December)		
	Number of Thai visitors (2021)	Number of Thai visitors (2020)	Rate of change (%)
Bangkok	11,946,480	18,795,401	-36.44
1) Kanchanaburi	4,112,075	5,989,625	-31.35
2) Chiang Mai	3,703,008	5,443,027	-31.97
3) Nakhon Ratchasima	3,454,694	5,637,594	-38.72

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2022

According to Table 1 and Figure 2, excluding Bangkok, it can be observed that all other provinces of Thailand still experienced a large number of Thai visitors amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the first three provinces with the highest number of tourists were Kanchanaburi, Chiang Mai, and Nakhon Ratchasima, with 4,112,075, 3,703,008, and 3,454,694 Thai visitors, respectively. However, of these three provinces, Nakhon Ratchasima was found to experience the largest decrease in Thai visitors of 38.72%, followed by Chiang Mai (31.97%) and Kanchanaburi (31.35%), respectively (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2022). Since Nakhon Ratchasima Province had a total of 29,985 infected cases of COVID-19 during the third wave of the outbreak (April to October 2021), it was classified in the red area by Thailand's government

according to the information available as of 31 October 2021 (Office of Nakhon Ratchasima Province, 2021), and the province has not recovered. Moreover COVID-19 pandemic has affected to the level of Gross Provincial Product (GPP) decreased in 2019 and 2020 at the level of 300,133 and 294,604 million baht, respectively, or a decrease of 1.84%. Gross Provincial Product per capita (GPP per capita) also decreased in 2019 and 2020 at the level of 119,530 and 117,521 baht, respectively, or 1.68%, according to the latest information (Office of the Economics and Social Development Council, 2021). Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative effect on Nakhon Ratchasima Province. If this situation is allowed to continue in Nakhon Ratchasima Province, its tourism industry and the overall economy will be severely impacted.

Therefore, it is necessary to study the factors influencing the decision of Thai visitors to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Identifying the factors having an impact on the tourism industry of Nakhon Ratchasima Province and those influencing the decision of Thai visitors to travel back to the province amid the COVID-19 pandemic would be an interesting topic of study, and the results could be used as a guideline for determining the policy and strategy for the tourism industry in the province in both the short and long term. Stimulating the tourism industry in Nakhon Ratchasima Province would enable it to fully recover from the effects of COVID-19, bringing the same number of Thai visitors back to the province as before the pandemic. The tourism industry and economy of Nakhon Ratchasima Province will then become strong again in the future.

Objective

To study and analyse the factors influencing the decision of Thai visitors to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conceptual framework

According to the literature review, Chaowalitthamrong, Y. (2010); Boonmasungsong et al. (2012); Nootayasakul & Pasunon (2016); Maneesaeng & Wall (2017); Koedmeemul (2018); Jariyachamsit (2019); Chuaikrut et al. (2020); and Kulsantiwong (2021), use guidelines to design the conceptual framework and questionnaires to find a correlation between the predictive variables and dependent variable. The predictive variables are based on personal factors and marketing

mix factors (4Ps). The dependent variable is the decision of Thai visitors to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown in Figure 4.

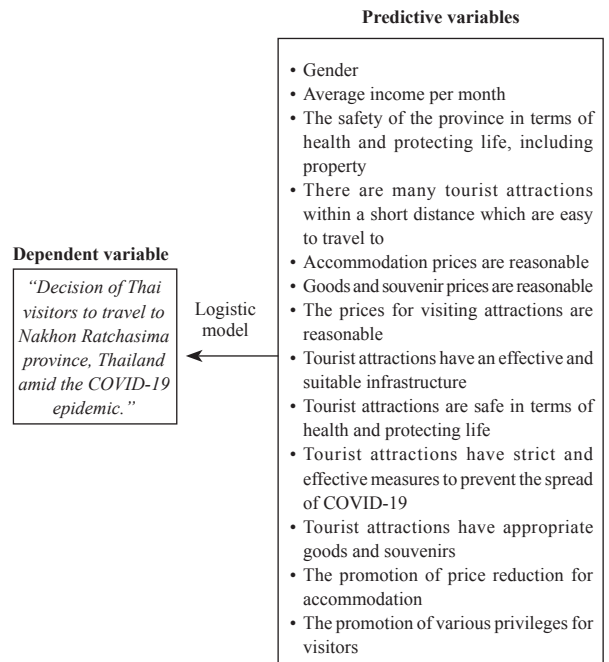


Figure 4: Conceptual framework

Research methodology

1. Data collection

This study used a questionnaire to collect primary data from the sample of Thai visitors deciding to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 epidemic between March and December 2021 (first to fourth quarters of 2021) using nonprobability sampling. The questionnaire is divided into two parts: 1) personal factors and 2) marketing mix factors (4Ps).

2. Population and Samples

In this study, the exact size of the population is unknown, but the researcher is aware that many people live in the area. Therefore, the sample size is calculated from the population of Thai visitors travelling to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, by setting the reliability level at 95%. Equation 1 is used to calculate the sample size when the exact population size is unknown, as proposed by Srisa-ard, B. (1995).

$$n = \frac{P(1-P).z^2}{e^2} \quad (1)$$

Where: n is the sample size, e is the discrepancy level of the sample size = 0.05, and z is the reliability or significance level. If the reliability level is 95% or the significance level 0.05 according to the values obtained from the normal distribution table is equal to 1.96, the substitution and calculation can be written as Equation 2 below.

$$n = \frac{0.5(1-0.5).1.96^2}{0.05^2} = 384.16 \approx 400 \quad (2)$$

According to the calculation, a sample size of 384.16 is appropriate for this study to avoid errors and incomplete questionnaires. Therefore, the primary data was collected from a sample size of 400.

3. Research instrument

The data obtained from the sample size is analysed using the following statistical values: 1) frequency, 2) percentage, 3) standard deviation, 4) mean, and 5) a logistic or binary logistic regression model. The logistic model is processed as follows.

3.1 Logistic model

The logistic model is used to analyse and predict the independent variables or data on the predictive variable from the questionnaire. Where the dependent variable (y) has values of 0 and 1, representing the correlation between the dependent variable and predictive variables, it has a characteristic curved shape resembling the letter "s". Therefore, the form of the logistic model can be written as Equation 3 (Charoensit, 2017).

(3)

When: $P_{(y)}$ is the probability that events are of interest. $Q_{(y)}$ is the probability that no events are of interest. Where: $P_{(y)} \geq 0.5$ refers to events of interest and $P_{(y)} < 0.5$ refers to events of no interest.

If the correlation between the dependent variable and predictive variables is not a straight line or linear, it must be adjusted to be in linear form. In the form of odds or odds ratio, it can be written as Equation 4.

$$\text{odds} = \frac{P(y)}{P(\bar{y})} \quad (4)$$

Odds represent the event of interest, namely how many times it is not an event of interest. Therefore, in the logistic model, it is written in the form of log odds as Equation 5.

$$\log\left(\frac{P(y)}{P(\bar{y})}\right) = b_0 + b_1x_1 + \dots + b_px_p \quad (5)$$

3.2 Statistical value for choosing a suitable logistic model

The choice of a suitable model is determined by the -2log likelihood (-2LL), with a low value indicating that the logistic model equation is appropriate. To test the suitability of the logistic model equation, the statistical value of χ^2 should be used where $df = p$. The hypothesis can then be tested as follows (Kaiyawan, 2012):

$$H_0: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \dots \beta_p = 0$$

$$H_1: \beta_i \neq 0 \text{ at least 1 value; } (i = 1, 2, \dots, p)$$

Where: log likelihood

$$= \sum_{i=1}^N [y_i \ln(\hat{y}_i + (1 - y_i)) \ln(1 - \hat{y}_i)] \text{ and } \chi^2 = 2[LL(\beta) - LL(0)]$$

After testing, if χ^2 is significant or H_1 accepted, the group of predictive variables can jointly predict the event of interest ($y = 1$) at a confidence level of $(1-\alpha) \times 100\%$.

To assess the suitability of the logistic model, the method proposed by Hosmer and Lemeshow (*H&M*) was also considered. The hypothesis is tested using Equation 6.

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \quad (6)$$

The two hypotheses are tested H_0 : the logistic model is suitable and H_1 : the logistic model is not suitable. Where: χ^2 is not significant or H_0 is accepted, the logistic model is considered to be suitable.

3.3 Coefficient test for the logistic model

The coefficient test for the logistic model determines whether the predictive variables affect the dependent variable by considering the Wald statistic. The hypothesis is tested in the following equation (Kaiyawan, 2012).

$$\text{Wald } (W) = \left[\frac{b_i}{SE(b_i)} \right]^2 \quad (7)$$

Where: $H_0: \beta_i = 0; i = 1, 2, \dots, p$ (the predictive variable does not affect the odds ratio) and $H_1: \beta_i \neq 0$ at least 1 value; $i = 1, 2, \dots, p$ (the predictive variable does affect the odds ratio)

4. Data analysis

The SPSS software was used in this study to

conduct qualitative statistical analysis and an onsite questionnaire distributed to 385 participants based on logistic regression involving three types of variables: interval, dichotomous, and polytomous.

Results

The data obtained from the questionnaire distributed to 400 Thai visitors was analysed to identify a suitable logistic model and select suitable predictive variables. According to the analysis, 13 suitable predictive variables influenced the decision of Thai visitors to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 epidemic. The suitability test for the logistic model revealed that the logistic model equation of $-2LL$ was equal to 321.684, Rcs^2 equal to 0.388 (38.80%), and Rn^2 equal to 0.534 (53.40%). The H&M test indicated that χ^2 was equal to 11.280 and the significance level equal to 0.186. W was equal to 34.872, with the percentage collected equal to 87.30%. It can therefore be stated that the predictive variables in the logistic model equation were suitable. Details of the coefficient test for predictive variables and statistical values used in the logistic model are shown in Table 2.

Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, can be constructed as in the following equation:

$$\text{Logistic}(y) = (-0.742) + (-1.015)Gen + (0.606)Inc + (1.062)Saf + (0.926)Dis + (11.443)Acc \\ + (-4.577)Gsp + (-2.219)Pva + (-11.196)Tat + (5.270)Hlp + (1.328)Cov \\ + (0.748)Ags + (-1.359)Rap + (-1.124)Vpt \quad (8)$$

Discussion and Conclusions

According to Table 2 and Equation 8, the factors influencing the decision of Thai visitors to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 pandemic are statistically significant at the 0.01 level when predicting the probability by considering the $Exp(\beta)$ or Odds ratio. The influential factors can be divided into 1) personal and 2) marketing mix (4Ps).

Personal factors consisted of 1) Gender (*Gen*) and 2) Average income per month (*Inc*), with both having the statistical significance level of 0.01. Most of the Thai visitors were female (54.75%) and have a characteristic negative relationship with the dependent variable—the coefficient being equal to -1.015 . When the gender (*Gen*) changes by 1 unit, it decreases the probability of Thai visitors deciding to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima

Table 2: Coefficient test of the predictive variables and statistical values used in the logistic model.

Predictive variables	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Exp(β)</i>
1) Gender (<i>Gen</i>)	-1.015	0.301	11.362	0.001	0.362
2) Average income per month (<i>Inc</i>)	0.606	0.219	7.627	0.006	1.833
3) The safety of the province in terms of health and protecting life, including property. (<i>Saf</i>)	1.062	0.311	11.699	0.001	2.893
4) There are many tourist attractions within a short distance which are easy to travel to. (<i>Dis</i>)	0.926	0.195	22.505	0.000	2.524
5) Accommodation prices are reasonable. (<i>Acc</i>)	11.443	3.423	11.175	0.001	93,226.633
6) Goods and souvenir prices are reasonable. (<i>Gsp</i>)	-4.577	1.723	7.056	0.008	0.010
7) The prices for visiting attractions are reasonable. (<i>Pva</i>)	-2.219	0.414	28.769	0.000	0.109
8) Tourist attractions have an effective and suitable infrastructure. (<i>Tat</i>)	-11.196	3.283	11.634	0.001	0.000
9) Tourist attractions are safe in terms of health and protecting life, including property. (<i>Hlp</i>)	5.270	1.597	10.889	0.001	194.357
10) Tourist attractions have strict and effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. (<i>Cov</i>)	1.328	0.301	19.401	0.000	3.772
11) Tourist attractions have appropriate goods and souvenirs. (<i>Ags</i>)	0.748	0.288	6.733	0.009	2.114
12) The promotion of price reduction for accommodation (<i>Rap</i>)	-1.359	0.343	15.735	0.000	0.257
13) The promotion of various privileges for visitors (<i>Vpt</i>)	-1.124	0.386	8.473	0.004	0.325
Constant = -0.742					

$-2\log$ likelihood ($-2LL$) = 321.684

Cox & Snell R^2 (Rcs^2) = 0.388

Nagelkerke R^2 (Rn^2) = 0.534

Hosmer & Lemeshow ($L\&M$) = 11.280, Significant = 0.186

Wald (W) = 34.872

Percentage collect = 87.30%

Source: Calculations

Note: β is beta, *S.E.* is standard error, *W* is Wald statistic and $Exp(\beta)$ is the expected beta or odds ratio.

Table 2 shows that the logistic model equation for predicting and analysing the factors influencing the decision of Thai visitors to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima

Province 0.362-fold. Average income per month (*Inc*) has a positive relationship with the dependent variable, the coefficient being equal to 0.606. Most of the Thai visitors had an *Inc* ranging from 15,000–45,000 baht (57.50%), which affects their decision to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima. When the *Inc* changes by 1 unit, it increases the probability of Thai visitors deciding to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima 1.833-fold.

Marketing mix (4Ps) consists of 11 factors, all of which are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Four factors are statistically significant at the level of 0.000, namely: 4) There are many tourist attractions within a short distance which are easy to travel to (*Dis*); 7) The prices for visiting attractions are reasonable (*Pva*); 10) Tourist attractions have strict and effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. (*Cov*); and 12) The promotion of price reduction for accommodation (*Rap*). The factors *Dis* and *Cov* have positive relationships with the dependent variable, the coefficients being equal to 0.926 and 1.328, respectively. When the *Dis* and *Cov* factors change by 1 unit, it increases the probability of Thai visitors deciding to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima by 2.524 and 3.772-fold, respectively. In contrast, *Pva* and *Rap* have negative relationships with the dependent variable, the coefficients being equal to -2.219 and -1.359, respectively. When *Pva* and *Rap* change by 1 unit, it decreases the probability of Thai visitors deciding to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima by 0.109 and 0.257-fold, respectively.

The next four factors exhibiting statistical significance at the level of 0.001 are: 3) The safety of the province in terms of health and protecting life, including property (*Saf*); 5) Accommodation prices are reasonable (*Acc*); 8) Tourist attractions have an effective and suitable infrastructure (*Tat*); and 9) Tourist attractions are safe in terms of health and protecting life, including property (*Hlp*). The factors *Saf*, *Acc*, and *Hlp* have characteristic positive relationships with the dependent variable, with the coefficients being equal to 1.062, 11.443, and 5.270, respectively. When *Saf*, *Acc*, and *Hlp* change by 1 unit, it increases the probability of Thai visitors visiting Nakhon Ratchasima by 2.893, 93,226.633, and 194.357-fold, respectively. A change in *Tat* of 1 unit has no effect on the probability of Thai visitors deciding to visit Ratchasima due to the odds ratio being constant.

Three factors have a statistical significance level of 0.004, 0.008, and 0.009, respectively, namely: 13) The promotion of various privileges for visitors (*Vpt*), 6) Goods and souvenir prices are reasonable (*Gsp*), and

11) Tourist attractions have appropriate goods and souvenirs (*Ags*). The factors *Vpt* and *Gsp* have characteristic negative relationships with the dependent variable, with the coefficients being equal to -4.577 and -1.124, respectively. When *Vpt* and *Gsp* change by 1 unit, it decreases the probability of Thai visitors deciding to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province by 0.010 and 0.325-fold, respectively. Whereas 11) Tourist attractions have appropriate goods and souvenirs (*Ags*) has a characteristic positive relationship with the dependent variable—the coefficient being equal to 0.748. When *Ags* changes by 1 unit, it increases the probability of Thai visitors deciding to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province by 0.010-fold.

When predicting the probability of Thai visitors deciding to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, two conditions are considered: 1) $P_{(\text{Travel})} \geq 0.5$ (Thai visitors decide to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand); and 2) $P_{(\text{no Travel})} < 0.5$ (Thai visitors decide not to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand). The findings of the study reveal that the probability of Thai visitors visiting Nakhon Ratchasima Province is equal to 0.873 or 87.30%. It can therefore be concluded that Thai visitors are likely to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand. However, the tourist industry in Nakhon Ratchasima Province needs preparation guidelines to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and adapt to the “new normal”.

It can be concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the tourism industry in Nakhon Ratchasima Province, with airlines, hotel chains, tour companies, and tourism-related businesses being severely impacted. Therefore, tourism operators in Nakhon Ratchasima need guidelines to help them prepare and adapt to the new normal to support tourism following the COVID-19 outbreak. The following suggestions are proposed:

1) Personal factors consisting of gender (*Gen*) and average income per month (*Inc*). Businesses and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry of Nakhon Ratchasima Province should set a diversity policy and strategy that takes into account the gender of Thai visitors and responds to the needs of each appropriately. The price of products and services provided by businesses and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry of Nakhon Ratchasima Province should comply with the average income per month of Thai visitors. The price of various products and services should be adjusted to ensure they align with the average income per month of Thai visitors

to encourage them to pay more to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province.

2) Marketing mix (4Ps) factors. Businesses and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry of Nakhon Ratchasima Province should be able to ensure the safety of the province in terms of health and protecting life, including property (*Saf*), to facilitate stress-free travel to the local attractions since there are many tourist attractions within a short distance which are easy to travel to (*Dis*). By ensuring accommodation prices are reasonable (*Acc*) as well as goods and souvenir prices are reasonable (*Gsp*), including the prices for visiting attractions (*Pva*), the purchasing power of Thai visitors will increase, aligning with their average income per month. When tourist attractions have an effective and suitable infrastructure (*Tat*), they should be able to effectively support tourism activities, including the basic needs of Thai visitor. Moreover, businesses and entrepreneurs in both the public and private sectors involved in the safety of Thai visitors should make sure tourist attractions are safe in terms of health and protecting life, including property (*Hlp*). It is also important for all tourism-related sectors in Nakhon Ratchasima Province to take care of hygiene to ensure the tourist attractions have strict and effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (*Cov*). The promotion of tourism should focus on ensuring attractions have appropriate goods and souvenirs (*Ags*). Moreover, businesses and entrepreneurs involved in hotels, guesthouses, or resorts should implement the promotion of price reduction for accommodation (*Rap*). Ultimately, the promotion of various privileges for visitors (*Vpt*) should be designed to attract the attention of Thai visitors, making it an easy decision to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province and stimulate its tourism industry towards recovery.

Suggestions

The travelling behaviour of Thai visitors is outside the scope of this study, and the analysis does not therefore cover the significance of predictive variables in encouraging Thai visitors to travel to Nakhon Ratchasima Province amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The addition of these factors may make the study results more accurate and bring new interesting, comprehensive information. It would also be beneficial for entrepreneurs in the tourism industry in setting planning strategies and managing their businesses in the future. Furthermore, it would be interesting to study ways to enhance the

understanding of visitors on the behaviour of tourists under the new normal concept and the satisfaction of Thai visitors towards the use of tourist attractions in new normal conditions.

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