A Study of Ideal and Perceived Images of Thailand Based on Inbound Tourists Perception

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Abstract

This research had two aims, (1) to determine information sources influencing inbound tourist's perception on the ideal image of Thailand (images of Thailand before visiting) and (2) to compare between ideal and perceived images (images of Thailand after travelling). Data was gathered from 400 inbound tourists who had experiences in travelling in Thailand. Selection of respondents of inbound tourists, by accidental sampling at Suvannabhum Airport 250 respondents and at Don Muang Airport 150 respondents. The research tools used in the study were structured questionnaires. The statistics for test the hypothesis "The ideal and perceived image of Thailand is significantly different" is a t-test. The study findings are as follows 1. The majority of respondents were mostly female, single and aged under 30 years old. Most respondents had Bachelor Degree in Education, were professional employees and earned income less than 20,000 US$ per year. The dominant characteristics are western (England, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Norway and Australia, respectively), spending from 10 to 20 days in Thailand, travelling alone, and their visit was mainly influenced by the nature and climate. Furthermore, most of them claimed the significant sources of Thailand information were their friends and social media, respectively. The social media they accessed regarding Thailand information, they mainly mentioned websites i.e., www.lonelyplanet.com and www.tripadvisor.com, respectively.Travel public relations agencies most used personal media or word of mouth, followed by social media especially the website www.lonelyplanet.com and www.tripadvisor.com.(2) Most respondents positively perceived ideal images of Thailand and reported positive perceived images of Thailand with very good level in all aspects. Significantly, the various kinds of food was given the highest score of both ideal and perceived images of Thailand. (3) The comparison between ideal images and perceived images of Thailand reveals that after travelling the scores given to an aspect of various kinds of food decreased, while the highest scores were given to an aspect of natural resources and environment. (4)The hypothesis test showed the difference in ten aspects between ideal images and perceived images of Thailand including aspects of natural resources and environment, safety of places, various kinds of food, excellence of hotels, worthiness of shopping, reasonability of service prices, information for travel, residential information, discounts for travel, and information publication for tourists by agencies and/or government organizations.

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Introduction

Thailand's Inbound tourism is a major industry sector, which offers the country tremendous value for several consecutive years. This is increasing steadily, as seen by the increase in revenue from 1,172.498 billion baht in 2015 to 1,475.150 billion baht in 2016. (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2015) As a result, the businesses of manufacturing products and services experienced expansion to accommodate tourists, including hotels and beverages manufacturing and trading of souvenirs, car rental services, parking facilities,etc. Such businesses generate employment and are an important factor in the distribution of income and prosperity to the region as well.

During the years 2002–2011, the number of inbound foreign tourists experienced a continuous rise. In 2010, more than 16,000 people voted around the world for Bangkok as the most attractive city in the world. The vote was organized by a well-known US magazine called Travel & Leisure. In 2010, Thailand had income from foreign tourists of 592,794.09 million baht, or 5.9% of the gross domestic product. (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2012)

The source of residence of foreign tourists was found.; 55% came from the Asia- Pacific region, mainly Japan and Malaysia, while most Western tourists came from the UK, Australia, Germany, the US and Scandinavia. The number of tourists from the Middle East and Russia had also increased.

Thailand's tourism situation in 2017 is likely to improve. From visa fee waivers and the reduction of visa arrival fees for foreign tourists, that includes 21 countries. As well as having other foreign tourist markets to support the tourism sector in the first half of 2017, ASEAN and Europeans, especially Russian tourists market recovered from 2016.

Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have opened their tourism sector to international tourism which has created increased competition for Thailand. Angkor Wat and Luang Prabang are now a competitor for Thailand. The competition is a new phenomenon since Thailand had a monopoly on tourism in the region. Thailand must target different and varies tourist markets. Tourists problems exist such as, the problem of insecurity of life and property, unsafe to travel, the problem of fraud that effects the image of tourism in Thailand. The data on media behavior of tourists, especially the Internet, where visitors spend the most. Recognizing the ideal and real images of inbound tourists to Thailand is an important

undertaking in order to be able to improve the services offered, to correct the negative image, strengthen the positive image of the inbound tourist as well as for sustainable tourism development and generate increase income for Thailand in the future.

Objectives

1. To determine the source of influence of inbound tourists in the ideal of Thailand before traveling.
2. To compare the ideal and perceived images of Thailand based on inbound tourists perceptions.
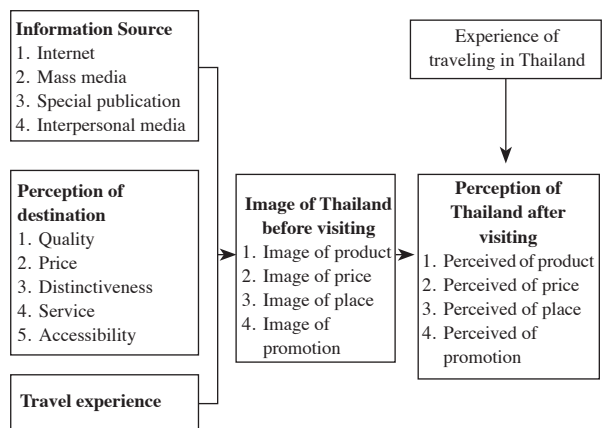
Conceptual framework

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Research methodology

1. Population and samples

The population was inbound tourists to Thailand between December 2014-March 2015 .

The appropriate sample size of the inbound tourists was determined using Yamane's principles calculation and resulted in 400 people for this research.

Selection of samples of inbound tourists, by accidental sampling at Suvannabhum Airport 250 samples and Don Muang Airport 150 samples.

2. Research instrument

The research tool used in the study were structured questionnaires. Questionnaire details are discussed below.

Questionnaire is divided into three parts.

1. General information on personal factors, including gender, age, marital status, education and occupation is characterized by checklists questions (1-11), media behavior by Likert Scale questions (12-14).

2. The reality and images of Thailand perceived by inbound tourists by Likert Scale questions.

In this study, the marketing mix was used primarily to create the following questions

Tourism products such as natural resource and environmentally, good service, safety places, clean city, various foods, excellent hotel.

Tourism price such as reasonable accommodations rates, value of shopping, reasonable price for food, reasonable price for services, reasonable price for travelling and low cost of living

Tourism place such as accommodation information ,travel information,tourist crisis management,attraction's information, good travel agency and call centers for tourist.

Tourism promotion such as discount for accommodation, sales promotion, variety of adventure and family activities, discount for travelling, Thailand tourism advertising, Thailand tourism public relations and festivals.

3. Suggestion

After creating the questionnaire, the researcher took the questionnaire to test and find credibility with 30 foreign tourists who travel to Thailand At Khao San Road, a group similar to the real population, tested for ALPHA (Cronbach's Alpha), which was. 979.

3. Collection of data

The data collection consisted of the procedure as follows:

3.1 Collect questionnaire data from inbound tourists, 400 sample.

3.2 Collect data from interviews with 250 inbound tourists at Suvannabhum Airport and at Don Muang Airport, 150 inbound tourists .

4. Data analysis

Analysis of data from questionnaires and interviews used software. After the field survey by questionnaire and then by voted code created by the user by parsing purposes. The statistics for testing the hypothesis "The ideal and perceived image of Thailand is significantly different" a T-test .

A questionnaire and interview, the procedure is as follows:

1. Review of documents and related research to serve as a guide to create questionnaires and interviews.

2. Create questionnaires and interviews, analysis by objective research to create questions.

3. Introduce draft questionnaires to the experts for review and conduct a content validity and try to gauge

sentiment survey.

4. Suggestions and comments from leading experts as well as analysis were used to improve questionnaires and interviews.

Results

1. The majority of respondents were female, single and aged under 30 years old. Most of the respondents had Bachelor Degree in Education, were professional employees and earned income less than 20,000US$ per year. The dominant characteristics are Westerns (England, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Norway and Australia, respectively), spending from 10 to 20 days in Thailand, travelling alone, and their reasons for visiting is mainly influenced by the nature and climate. Furthermore, most respondents claimed the significant sources of Thailand information were their friends and social media, respectively. For the social media that they accessed for Thailand information, they mainly mentioned www.lonelyplanet.com and www.tripadvisor.com, respectively.

2. The study of the respondents (inbound tourists) about the their ideal and perceived images of Thailand conducted by the analysis of the mean and standard deviation. To present the ideal and perceived images of Thailand of inbound tourists in four aspects: product, price, place and promotion as shown in the following table.

Table 1 Mean score for influential media before visiting Thailand

Influential media before visiting thailand	Mean	S.D.	Level comments	rating
1. U-Tube	2.94	1.44	moderate	4
2. Social media	3.06	1.34	often	2
3. Tour agent	2.43	1.26	moderate	7
4. Travelling website	3.04	1.46	often	3
5. Blog	2.73	1.40	moderate	6
6. Guide book	2.77	1.36	moderate	5
7. Travelling magazine	2.22	1.20	moderate	8
8. Movie	1.92	1.25	Not often	9
9. Friends	4.32	1.08	Most often	1

Table 1 shows the results and found that the majority of influential media before visiting Thailand are friends, followed by Social media, Travelling Website, U-Tube and Guide book.

Table 2 Mean score for the image of Thailand before visiting

Image in four aspects	Mean	S.D.	Level comments	rating
Product				
1. Natural resource and environment	3.20	0.69	Very good	6
2. Good service	3.25	0.67	Very good	2
3. Safety places	2.92	0.77	good	16
4. Clean city	2.58	0.82	good	24
5. Various foods	3.30	0.69	Very good	1
6. Excellent hotel	3.09	0.70	Very good	11
Price				
1. Reasonable accommodations rates	3.21	0.65	Very good	4
2. Value of shopping	3.18	0.65	Very good	7
3. Reasonable price for foods	3.23	0.69	Very good	3
4. Reasonable price for services	3.10	0.66	Very good	8
5. Reasonable price for travelling	3.11	0.62	Very good	10
6. Low cost of living	3.20	0.67	Very good	5
Place				
1. Accommodation Information	3.15	0.63	Very good	9
2. Travel Information	3.08	0.64	Very good	12
3. Tourist crisis management	2.69	0.76	good	23
4. Attractions Information	3.07	0.62	Very good	13
5. Good travel agency	2.94	0.71	good	15
6. Call center for tourist	2.55	0.77	good	25
Promotion				
1. Discount for accommodation	2.87	0.72	good	19
2. Sales promotion	2.81	0.75	good	22
3. Variety of adventure and family activities	3.02	0.65	Very good	14
4. Discount for travelling	2.86	0.71	good	20
5. Thailand tourism advertising	2.89	0.62	good	17
6. Thailand tourism public relations	2.86	0.67	good	21
7. Many of festival	2.88	0.74	good	18

Table 2 shows the results and found that the majority of respondents had a positive image about Thailand at a very good level in almost every aspect, followed by an appearance at a good level. Image of various foods had the highest average, followed by the image of good services, reasonable prices for food, reasonable accommodation rates and low cost of living, respectively.

Table 2 Mean score for the perceived of Thailand after visiting

Perceived in four aspects	Mean	S.D.	Level comments	rating
Product				
1. Natural resource and environment	3.02	.75	Very good	15
2. Good service	3.22	.68	Very good	3
3. Safety places	3.07	.71	Very good	11
4. Clean city	2.53	.77	Very good	25
5. Various foods	3.56	.60	Very good	1
6. Excellent hotel	3.16	.66	Very good	7
Price				
1. Reasonable accommodations rates	3.19	.62	Very good	4
2. Value of shopping	3.06	.69	Very good	14
3. Reasonable price for foods	3.30	.65	Very good	2
4. Reasonable price for services	3.11	.67	Very good	9
5. Reasonable price for travelling	3.07	.68	Very good	12
6. Low cost of living	3.16	.68	Very good	8

Table 2 (

Perceived in four aspects	Mean	S.D.	Level comments	rating
Place				
1. Accommodation Information	3.11	.65	Very good	10
2. Travel Information	3.18	.70	Very good	5
3. Tourist crisis management	2.66	.84	good	23
4. Attractions Information	3.18	.68	Very good	6
5. Good travel agency	2.99	.73	good	16
6. Call center for tourist	2.61	.84	good	24
Promotion				
1. Discount for accommodation	2.80	.75	good	19
2. Sales promotion	2.73	.84	good	22
3. Variety of adventure and family activities	3.06	.75	Very good	13
4. Discount for travelling	2.79	.72	good	20
5. Thailand tourism advertising	2.83	.72	good	18
6. Thailand tourism public relations	2.78	.72	good	21
7. Many of festival	2.93	.79	good	17

Table 3 shows the results and found that the majority of respondents had a positive perception about Thailand at a very good level in almost every aspect. Followed by an appearance at a good level. Image of various foods had the highest average, followed by the image of reasonable prices for food, good services, reasonable accommodation rates and travel information, respectively.

Table 4 The difference between the mean and standard deviation of the image of Thailand before and after visiting to Thailand.

Perceived in four aspects	Mean	S.D.	Level comments	rating
Product				
1. Natural resource and environment	.16	.73	increase	1
2. Good service	.02	.79	increase	14
3. Safety places	-.13	.84	decrease	24
4. Clean city	.07	.87	increase	5
5. Various foods	-.27	.78	decrease	25
6. Excellent hotel	-.07	.70	decrease	21
Price				
1. Reasonable accommodations rates	.02	.73	increase	15
2. Value of shopping	.12	.72	increase	2
3. Reasonable price for foods	-.06	.77	decrease	20
4. Reasonable price for services	.07	.75	increase	4
5. Reasonable price for travelling	.03	.71	increase	13
6. Low cost of living	.05	.73	increase	9
Place				
1. Accommodation Information	.04	.73	increase	11
2. Travel Information	.10	.75	increase	22
3. Tourist crisis management	.03	.79	increase	12
4. Attractions Information	-.12	.73	decrease	23
5. Good travel agency	-.06	.69	decrease	19
6. Call center for tourist	-.04	.75	decrease	16
Promotion				
1. Discount for accommodation	.05	.71	increase	8
2. Sales promotion	.06	.80	increase	7
3. Variety of adventure and family activities	-.04	.78	decrease	17
4. Discount for travelling	.08	.73	increase	3
5. Thailand tourism advertising	.05	.70	increase	10
6. Thailand tourism public relations	.07	.71	increase	6
7. Many of festival	-.05	.76	decrease	18

Table 4 shows the results and found the perception of inbound tourist towards Thailand after visiting was lower from the ideal images before visiting in many ways such as, natural resource and environment had the highest decrease, the second was in safety places, attraction's information, travel information, and excellent hotel, respectively.

Table 5 Relationship test between the image before visiting and perception after visiting

Image and perceived about Thailand	Mean	S.D.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Product				
1. Natural resource and environment	.16	.73	4.23	**.000***
2. Good service	.02	.79	.63	.524
3. Safety places	-.13	.84	-3.15	**.002***
4. Clean city	.07	.87	1.74	.081
5. Various foods	-.27	.78	-6.79	**.000***
6. Excellent hotel	-.07	.70	-2.09	**.037***
Price				
1. Reasonable accommodations rates	.02	.73	.62	.530
2. Value of shopping	.12	.72	3.41	**.001***
3. Reasonable price for foods	-.06	.77	-1.75	.079
4. Reasonable price for services	.07	.75	2.07	**.039***
5. Reasonable price for travelling	.03	.71	.99	.320
6. Low cost of living	.05	.73	1.46	.145
Place				
1. Accommodation Information	.04	.73	1.24	.215
2. Travel Information	-.10	.75	-2.89	**.004***
3. Tourist crisis management	.03	.79	.91	.363
4. Attractions Information	-.12	.73	-3.26	**.001***
5. Good travel agency	-.06	.69	-1.70	.089
6. Call center for tourist	-.04	.75	-1.07	.283
Promotion				
1. Discount for accommodation	.05	.71	1.64	.101
2. Sales promotion	.06	.80	1.47	.140
3. Variety of adventure and family activities	-.04	.78	-1.10	.268
4. Discount for travelling	.08	.73	2.08	**.038***
5. Thailand tourism advertising	.05	.70	1.53	.127
6. Thailand tourism public relations	.07	.71	2.07	**.039***
7. Many of festival	-.05	.76	-1.30	.191

The perception of Thailand after visiting decreased from the images before visiting in many ways such as, various foods decreased the most, the second was value of shopping, discount for travelling, reasonable price for services and clean city, respectively.

The comparison showed that the relationship to the image and perception of inbound tourists visiting Thailand had 10 significantly differences such as natural resource and environment, the safety places, the various food , excellent hotel, value of shopping, reasonable price for services, travel information, attraction's information, discount for travel and Thailand tourism agency public relations.

Discussion

Most inbound tourists have a positive image about Thailand before traveling and after traveling in a very good level in every category. The food variety has the highest average.

Comparing the image of Thailand before and after traveling the score for various food was reduced. While the score increased for natural resource and environment.

The hypothesis test showed the reality and images of Thailand as perceived by inbound tourists had 10 different significant aspects in four aspects as discussed below:

(1) Product , the ideal and real images of Thailand as perceived by inbound tourists had 4 different aspects significantly such as nature resource and environment, the safety places, the various food and excellent hotel.

(2) Price , the ideal and real images of Thailand as perceived by inbound tourists had 2 different aspects significantly such as value of shopping, reasonable price for service.

(3) Place , the ideal and real images of Thailand as perceived by inbound tourists had 2 different aspects significantly such as travel information, attraction's information.

(4) Promotion , the ideal and real images of Thailand as perceived by inbound tourists had 2 different aspects significantly such as discount for travel and Thailand tourism agency public relations.

The results of this research found that beautiful nature, food and safety is a factor that attracts foreign tourists which corresponds to Tourism Department, Faculty of Arts Rajamangala University of Technology (2018). In addition, the issue of the image of Thailand in the eyes of foreign tourists was found to be consistent with Hathaiwaleewong (2016), that the average image of Koh Samui showed that the image of Koh Samui was mostly positive. Therefore, the quality of tourism services creates a good image. Because when tourists are impressed, they will create word of mouth. This is align and consistent with the work of Inthasang (2017), who found that foreign tourists perceived news from the personal media first, similar to this current research.

This research found that most tourists travel on their own. This is consistent with the research of Hiranrak (2007), "Report on the survey of foreign

tourists' attitudes" on travel issues Domestic travel of foreign tourists who travel outside of Bangkok Most of them travel by themselves. This may mean confidence in the travel safety of foreign tourists as well as having enough tourism information. The important information is the Internet. This is consistent with the research of Ruimai (2018), a study of information exposure behavior of foreign tourists. Traveling to Koh Phangan It was found that the most used medium was the Internet. An important source information before traveling is the Internet. Resources in The important country is the internet.

Suggestions

1. There should be a separate study of opinions about the different images between foreign tourists in each group, such as European tourists and Asian tourists because of the fundamentals of both personal factors different travel behaviors and preferences. This will cause different expectations about the image of Thailand.

2. Satisfaction should be assessed after continuing to travel to Thailand to compare the level of image and satisfaction and use the results of the study to improve on issues that have a bad image or less satisfied to improve.

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