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KEY FACTORS OF WEDDING TOURISM IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

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Abstract

Wedding tourism is the activity or experience when new couples leave the place they usually reside in and go to destinations for their wedding ceremony. Wedding tourism is a rather new trend of tourism in Thailand. Therefore, investigating this sector is meaningful for both academic and commercial purposes. This study explores the key factors of wedding tourism in Bangkok, Thailand to attract couples (couples-to-be) to choose Thailand as their wedding destination by using purposive sampling. This study also focuses on the socio-demographic factors of couples (couples-to-be): nationality, religion, budget, and also investigates the relationship between those socio-demographic factors and the choice of key factors. Eighty-five questionnaires were distributed from November 2012 to January 2013, of which sixty completed usable questionnaires were returned, giving a 70.6% response rate. One way ANOVA was utilized to test hypotheses testing. The result shows that couples visiting Thailand for holding one of the critical moments of their lives are mainly attracted and satisfied by cost of organizing the wedding event, plus budget that can cover flight journey and accommodation, scenic locations, safe to organize wedding, wedding packages, beach, atmosphere, warm and comfortable climate, beautician/make-up/hairstyle services and a marriage ceremony which suits their religious inclination. Furthermore, some key factors can influence by the socio-demographic factors of couples. In light of the findings this study proposes that for an international wedding tourism destination such as Thailand, it is of great importance to set a reasonable and affordable price, to provide solitude and a romantic environment, and to improve the quality of wedding related factors, especially the process of marriage registration.

Keywords: *Wedding tourism, region, budget, key factors*

01. INTRODUCTION

A wedding is one of the most significant events in a person's life. It is not only for people who want to share their lives together for the first time but it can also be a celebration of the renewal of vows and anniversaries (Krishnan, 2008).

Globalization and the rapid increase of the global economy have led to new trends in marriage and wedding ceremonies. With the extension of leisure time and changing views, more and more people, especially young couples on the middle and upper social class levels of a society, see wedding tourism as the most popular and romantic fashion and also a way to show their status of society and economy.

The Kingdom of Thailand is seen as the most popular and traditional tourism destination in Southeast Asia and even in the whole world, because of its marvelous culture, history, warm climate and beautiful landscape. As one of the world's top honeymoon destinations, now Thailand offers an increasing variety of wedding ceremony that can be chosen by couples according to their different lifestyle, such as themed festival weddings, beach-side or mountain-top weddings, traditional Thai weddings, cultural weddings, and so on. Besides the actual ceremony, other elements for making a perfect wedding experience are provided, which include preparing aspects for the ceremony, rings, the bride's dress and groom's suit, hotel accommodation for guests, food, photographer, live band, wedding planner, flower and music arrangement. After the wedding, a honeymoon can be arranged for couples and at the same time, guests can take a trip and enjoy their holiday conveniently.

Nowadays, wedding tourism forms a part of event tourism and it has become one of the hottest trends for the Thailand tourism industry. By using the slogan "Amazing Thailand", TAT and travel operators have developed attractive wedding and honeymoon packages for international tourists. The seven cities Bangkok, Chiang Rai, Samui, Hua Hin, Krabi, Phuket, and Chiang Mai are promoted as top wedding destinations by the Thai government and TAT. Apart from different wedding locations, there are also different styles of wedding packages to satisfy different demands of tourists: Thai traditional wedding ceremony, Buddhist wedding ceremony, church wedding and the western style civil wedding ceremony (beach wedding).

India is seen as one of the main markets for Thailand wedding tourism for the last three years. More and more Indian newlyweds choose Phuket or Bangkok as the venue for their wedding ceremony, followed by Pattaya. Apart from the current main market mentioned above, Japan, Korea, the UAE, France and the United States are becoming five major weddings and honeymoon markets for Thailand's tourism industry (TAT, 2011) Singapore and Hong Kong

are the potential markets.

02. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research of Jamieson (2004) focuses on tourists who had their wedding ceremony or honeymoon in Cook Island. The result shows that in some respect, wedding tourists participate in the same activities with other tourists, but they have a more intense personal agenda. This study also investigates the pull factors of Cook Island as a tourism destination that attracts couples-to-be, and the finding shows that beach (landscape) was the most important selling point, followed by consistently good weather and available accommodation. There were also some wedding tourists interested in culture and customs of the island. At the same time, remote (being alone) and possession (claiming ownership) during stay were also two important pull factors.

The study by Kim & Agrusa (2004) defined a pool of initial attributes which had a potential to impact the demands of consumers by comparing the relative positioning of five popular overseas honeymoon destinations for Korean tourists: Australia, Europe, Hawaii, China, Guam, Thailand, and Japan. The pull factors included good scenery, a comfortable and romantic place, safety and security, a good place for shopping, tourism cost, a good climate, and historical and cultural resources. The result of this study indicates that when couples choose the destination for their once-in-a-lifetime experience, tourism cost is not a highly regarded attribute. Hawaii and Australia were ranked as the ideal honeymoon destinations for the Korean market. For the former, good scenery, a romantic place, a comfortable place and good weather are the main attractive factors, while for the latter, the reason is outdoor activities. This study also finds that the destinations with natural resources are more attractive than those with cultural and historic resources.

The research of Witt & Com (2006) investigates key factor of tourism on a different angle. It explores the key factor for managing successful wedding tourism. This study indicates that events are influenced by both external factors (such as economy, socio-culture, technology, competitor and political and legal environment) and internal factors (include marketing, human resource, finance and facility). It found that the most important aspects in managing wedding tourism are services, unique products and business ethics.

Krishnan (2008) explores the factors which are likely to influence couples-to-be's choice for themed wedding packages. People are willing to show their culture, social status and personalities in their wedding. A wedding is not only the couples-to-be's but also guests'

experience. The result found that when purchasing a themed wedding package, couples are motivated by cost to a certain degree, but it is not the most significant purchasing motivation. Others, such as recommended from family and friends, advertising and the media wedding operators used for advertisement and some personal factors of couples-to-be, might have a deeper influence on their purchasing behavior.

Major, McLeay & Waine (2010) explored the role and relevance of marketing within the destination weddings sector by analyzing a case study of Perfect Weddings Abroad Ltd in the United Kingdom. The result shows that couples who hold abroad weddings usually have more extensive needs than those who hold domestic weddings. Additionally, selecting an international wedding destination, product and service is a process of high-involvement decision-making. The factors which influence tourists' purchase behavior can also influence a couples' choice of wedding destination. This study also identifies eleven key drivers of wedding abroad sectors, and lower cost is one of the reasons behind the growth of the married abroad market.

It can be concluded that wedding tourism as part of event tourism needs to satisfy personal demands of tourists, such as an attractive landscape and scenery, nice climate, remote atmosphere, lower cost, safety and security. On the one hand, these studies also discuss that wedding tourism has similar attractive features with other tourism aspects, such as a natural environment with good scenery, safety, romance, culture etc. However, consumers for wedding tourism pay more attention to the quality of service and facilities, than costs. Additionally, the findings further show that demographic factors also impact couples-to-be's purchasing behavior. These demographic factors include socio-culture, income, lifestyle, family and friends, education background and even travel experience.

Jamieson's (2004) study gets similar findings when compared to Kim & Agrusa's (2004) study, as both of them find that climate, romantic atmosphere/place and scenery/landscape are the main factors to attract and satisfy couples. Furthermore, in the findings of Kim & Agrusa (2004), cost is also a key pull factor of wedding tourism to attract tourists. The same result can also be found in both of Krishnan's (2008) study and Major, McLeay & Waine's (2010) study, where the latter finds that lower cost is one of the reasons behind the growth of the married abroad market. Witt & Com (2006) find that providing unique products and high quality of service is one of the most important factors to attract couples.

For the demographic factors of couples, Kim and Agrusa's (2004) study finds socio-demographic factors of tourists had effect on their choice of key factor. Krishnan (2008) also gets a similar finding to support this, His study argues that lifestyle of couples influences their purchase behavior.

Based on the findings about empirical references, it can be concluded that physical environment, cost, wedding related product and service, safety and security can be the five dimensions of key factor of wedding tourism in Thailand. Meanwhile, socio-demographic factors influence tourists' choice of key factor.

03. METHOD

This research surveys the key factor of wedding tourism in Thailand (physical environment, accommodation, transportation, basic wedding products and services, costs, safety and security). The target population is international tourists who traveled to Thailand for celebrating their wedding ceremony. This research studies tourists based on their demographic factors, which include region, religion and budget.

As the number of wedding tourists is hard to be estimated, this research uses non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is a sampling technology in which units of the sample are selected on the basis of personal judgement or convenience (Zikmund, 2003). In a related study the sampling size has been relatively small. 23 couples have been chosen as the sample in Gottman and Krokoff's study (1989) about honeymooners, and 60 in Yin's research (2007) about perception of honeymoon tourists in Thailand. So this research collected data from 60 couples.

A self-administered questionnaire is utilized as a tool to collect primary data as it facilitates gaining more structured responses individually in a concise manner along with further statistical treatment of the data effectively, which is designed for collecting the information on experience and view of couples toward the key factor of Thailand as a wedding tourism destination. This questionnaire includes two parts:

Part 1: Demographic characteristic of couples-to-be: This part of the questionnaire includes demographic information of the respondents: region, religion and budget of the wedding. In this section, three questions are asked.

Part 2: Key factor of wedding tourism in Thailand: This part of the questionnaire consisted of 30 questions on the respondents' views toward key factor of Thailand as a wedding tourism destination. Respondents rated on a Five-Point Likert scale of agreement which ranges from five to one: 5= strongly agree, 4=agree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 2= disagree and 1= strongly disagree.

This research selected the couples who had their wedding in Thailand. The questionnaire is designed in English and was planned to be provided to the samples in airports, hotels and resorts and if needed via E-mail, accompanied by a cover letter to explain the purpose of this research to make them understand this questionnaire.

A purposive sampling method is used and the sample procedure of the research follows these stages:

1. In the first stage, the researcher distributed 15 questionnaires for pretesting to couples who held their wedding in Bangkok, Thailand.

2. In the second stage, as the existing target customers are the couples who plan to marry in Thailand, it was a challenging task to find required sample. It is understandable that not many people get marry in a day. Therefore, the researcher turned to snowball approach to select the couples.

Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) is used to process the result of the questionnaires. This research will use descriptive statistics to describe the basic features of the data, and provide brief summaries of the sample and the measures. In this research, the researcher will use descriptive statistics to describe the demographic characteristics of respondents including region, religion and wedding budget.

One-way analysis of variance is used to examine more than two means at a time. This research applies ANOVA to test the significant relationship between independent variables about key factor of Thailand as a wedding destination, and dependent variables about each item of demographic characteristics of couples-to-be. P value of 0.05 or less was used as the criterion to determine the significance of observed differences.

04. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result shows that there are more tourists from South Asia (28.3%) than tourists from other areas who have held their wedding in Thailand. 11 respondents (18.3 %) are from East Asia, 11 respondents (18.3%) are from South-east Asia. 9 respondents (15.0%) are from Europe, 4 respondents (10%) are from South Asia, 9 respondents (22.5%) are from Europe, 7 respondents (11.7%) are from America, 2 respondents (3.3%) are from the Middle-East and 3 respondents (5%) are from Australia and New Zealand. It is noticeable that the number of Asian tourists (39 respondents) is the largest, accounting for 64.9% of the respondents in this study

Table 1 Region of Respondents

Region

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid East Asia	11	18.3	18.3	18.3
South-east Asia	11	18.3	18.3	36.7
South Asia	17	28.3	28.3	65.0
Europe	9	15.0	15.0	80.0
America	7	11.7	11.7	91.7
Middle East	2	3.3	3.3	95.0
Australia/New Zealand	3	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 below shows that out of 60 respondents in this research, 6 respondents (10%) are Buddhist, 45 respondents (75%) are Christian, 1 respondent (1.7%) is Muslim, 1 (1.7%) is Hindu, 4 respondents (6.7%) are Sikh, 3 respondents (5%) are non-religious. 75% respondents of this research are Christian, this phenomenon probably because Christian ceremony is solomonized in more simplified manner than other religions.

Table 2 Religion of Respondents

Religion

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Buddhist	6	10.0	10.0	10.0
Christian	45	75.0	75.0	85.0
Muslim	1	1.7	1.7	86.7
Hindu	1	1.7	1.7	88.3
Sikh	4	6.7	6.7	95.0
No Religion	3	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

It can be seen from Table 3 that, related to the budget for wedding tourism (without cost for flight tickets and guests accommodations) among the respondents in this study, nearly half of the respondents spent a basic budget between USD5,500/THB17,000 to USD9,000/THB28,000 (41.7%) followed by those whose wedding budgets were more than USD15,001/THB46,001 on their weddings (30%), and those who held the wedding by spending between USD12,001/THB37,001 to USD15,000/THB46,000 (25%), while the least number is those whose budgets were between USD9,001/THB28,001 to USD12,000/THB37,000 (3.3%).

Table 3 Budget for wedding

Budget

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Basic (USD5,500/THB17,000-USD9,000/THB28,000)	25	41.7	41.7	41.7
Economy (USD9,001/THB28,001-USD12,000/THB37,000)	2	3.3	3.3	45.0
Premium(USD12,001/THB37,001-USD15,000/THB46,000)	15	25.0	25.0	70.0
Luxury(USD15,001/THB46,001and above)	18	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Based on the hypothesis testing result by using One-way ANOVA to explore the differences in key factor of wedding tourism destination among seven region groups, and the significant value of twelve items is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis of these twelve items is rejected. They are “Atmosphere is remote and romantic” (p = 0.001); “Unlimited number of guests can be invited for wedding” (p = 0.019); “The special transportation for bride and groom to ceremony and reception is available” (p = 0.000); “Bride’s dress/gown can be made to order/or easily bought at a short notice”(p = 0.000); “Variety of rings and jewelry can be bought from jewelry stores at a reasonable price” (p = 0.035); “Flower/garlands/decoration/arrangement is available” (p = 0.000); “Music/DJ and wedding bands facility is available” (p = 0.011); “Food and caterers can be arranged on demand for matrimonial celebration” (p = 0.000); “Wedding cakes can be arranged on demand” (p = 0.09); “Exotic honeymoon escapes are available” (p = 0.000); “It is quite safe and secure to celebrate a wedding in Thailand” (p = 0.006); “It is not challenging to register marriage with

relevant embassy in Thailand” ($p = 0.001$); “Arranging an official(district office)to attend marriage is easy” ($p = 0.009$); and “It is not time consuming to sort out legal documentation prior to marriage” ($p = 0.030$). Therefore, it can be concluded that there are significant differences existing between nationalities of couples with regard to these twelve pull factors mentioned above.

For comparative differences in religion of couples and the key factor of wedding tourism destination, 10 items “Landscape and scenery are beautiful and attractive” ($p = 0.011$); “Climate here is warm and nice” ($p = 0.011$); “Unlimited number of guests can be invited for wedding” ($p = 0.047$); “Accommodation for out of town guests can be arranged without hassle” ($p = 0.000$); “Variety of rings and jewelry can be bought from jewelry stores at a reasonable price” ($p = 0.000$); “Music/DJ and wedding bands facility is available” ($p = 0.022$); “Overall budget to hold marriage is an affordable experience” ($p = 0.006$); “It is quite safe and secure to celebrate wedding in Thailand” ($p = 0.034$); “Arranging an official (district office) to attend marriage is easy” ($p = 0.018$) and “It is not time consuming to sort out legal documentation prior to marriage” ($p = 0.046$) with significant value less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected for these 10 items, which means that the differences in these 10 pull factors with regard to religion of couples are significant.

For comparative differences in budget of couples and the key factors of wedding tourism destination, fourteen items are rejected. They are “Climate here is warm and nice” ($p = 0.002$); “Unlimited number of guests” ($p = 0.000$); “The special transportation for bride and groom to ceremony and reception is available” ($p = 0.000$); “Bride's dress/gown can be made to order/or easily bought at a short notice” ($p = 0.000$); “Variety of rings and jewelry can be bought from jewelry stores at a reasonable price” ($p = 0.001$); “Flower garlands/decoration/arrangement is available” ($p = 0.000$); “Music/DJ and wedding bands facility is available” ($p = 0.000$); “Food and caterers can be arranged on demand for matrimonial celebration” ($p = 0.000$); “Wedding cake can be arranged on demand” ($p = 0.005$); “Language is not a barrier for “tying the knot” in Thailand” ($p = 0.030$); “Overall budget to hold marriage is affordable experience” ($p = 0.000$); “Exotic honeymoon escapes are available” ($p = 0.000$); “It is quite safe and secure to celebrate wedding in Thailand” ($p = 0.000$); “It is not challenging to register marriage with relevant embassy in Thailand” ($p = 0.000$). This means that the differences in these fourteen key factors mentioned above with regard to budget are significant.

05.CONCLUSION

This study has identified the key factor of wedding tourism in Thailand and how these key factors are related to new couples' socio-demographic characteristics. The research revealed similar findings with literature reviewed in Chapter two. Beautiful landscape and scenery, romantic atmosphere, cost are the most attractive factors for foreign couples. It was also revealed that different regions, religions and budgets to different feelings toward key factor of wedding tourism in Thailand, which is the same with the findings of literature review. There is still space to extend the study to include other aspects such as couples' behavior, satisfaction of wedding related products and services. On the other hand, future researchers also can enlarge the sample size to get more comprehensive results. It will be interesting to conduct a qualitative research to have a broader reflection of international visitors' intentions to have wedding experience in Thailand.

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