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FACTORS MOTIVATING CHINESE TOURISTS TO CHOOSE THAILAND AS A DESTINATION FOR RELIGIOUS TOURISM

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Abstract

This research focuses on the study of factors motivating Chinese tourists to choose Thailand as a religious tourist destination. The demographic elements consist of religion, region, gender, age, education level and occupation. Tourists are investigated in both push factors and pull factors, those factors such as relaxation, desire to learn, faith, word of mouth, media, temple, amenities, cultural difference, religious activities, tourism product which become factors that motivate Chinese tourists to choose Thailand as a religious destination. For this study, the researcher used convenience sampling method and the sample size is 200. The Sampling focused on the Chinese tourists who had religious reasons to visit 5 famous temples in Bangkok. The questionnaire was distributed during July 2012. The result of frequency analysis shows that most of the Chinese tourists don't have clear religious reasons to visit the religious sites (55.8%). They are from North of China (29.6%) and the number of female (53.3%) is slightly higher than male. The major group of Chinese tourists is between 19-30 years old (53.3.6%), they hold a Bachelor's degree (62.5%) and work as employees in companies (51.2%). For hypothesis test, the research used both independent t-test and ANOVA. The results of P value indicate that there are significant differences in push factors motivating Chinese tourists to choose Thailand as religious destination regarding gender and education. Also there are significant differences in pull factors motivating Chinese tourists to choose Thailand as religious destination regarding religion and gender. Women prefer to have good amenities, arts, shopping and take photos; men like to learn Thai culture, Buddhism and religious activities. Different education level and different occupations cause Chinese tourists to have different needs for religious tourism. A Chinese tourist comes and visit Thai temples because of those both Pull and pushes motivating factors. For future, if the tourism sector could investigate and get good use of tourists' needs and make plan to promote religious tourism in Thailand, it will benefit both Thai government and locals.

Keywords: Religious tourism, Motivating factors, Push and Pull factors.

01. INTRODUCTION

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has recognized that and would like to develop three main religious products of visiting temples, meditation and religious tourism routes (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2009).

Thailand's official religion is Buddhism. It has a long history, many visitors come to Thailand to visit Buddhist temples. Each temple contains one or more Buddha images. They are built in the form of statues and revered as a depiction of the Lord Buddha. These images are built in many different styles, and are made from a variety of materials, such as concrete, bronze, gold, sandstone and wood (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2009).

Temples are also the centre of learning Buddhist knowledge. Buddhist monks teach reading and writing, the ancient art of traditional herbal healing and Thai massage. Thai art and culture are important parts of Thai traditional festivals, performances and paintings. Visitors also would like to revisit the temple for religious instruction and much *sanuk*. The temple is the place to meet new friends and renew old friends (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2009).

Meditation is more and more popular in Thailand now, many foreign visitors perform the meditation. They come from different countries including the US, Europe and the nearby region. Reasons for the high growth of meditation in Thailand are discussed below.

Meditation programs for tourists are available at some of temples. Buddhamonthon is one of Thailand's most revered religious sites. It offers vipassana (insight meditation) training the first weekend of each month. Vipassana targeting foreign followers is also conducted at Wat Suan Mokkh in Surat Thani, which houses the International Dhamma Hermitage. In Chiangmai province of Thailand, there are many young monks learning the monk chant program in English at the Maha Chulalongkornrajavidyalaya Buddhist University. Other temples, such as Wat Srisuphan, offer a two-hour meditation 'taster' instruction for beginners (Wandering Dhamma 2009).

Religious Festival is the important part of religious tourism in Thailand. Songkran and Loy Krathong festivals are now major highlight of tourism promotion in Thailand. In Sukhothai, the event includes the 'Dawn of Happiness Ceremony', 'King Ramkamhaeng Brahman Ceremony' and a Royal Given Lamp and Krathong process parade. The candle festival in Ubon Ratchathani is the start of Buddhist Lent Day. Tak province hosts 'Tad Bat Deve' festival to celebrate the return of Buddha from Heaven to earth.

Many Chinese tourists choose Thailand as a religious destination to visit Thai temples. They know Thailand is a Buddhism country and has their traditional Buddhism culture. They want to visit Buddhism temples, familiarize with Buddhism knowledge and experience. They also believe that the visit to Thai temples and pay tribute to Buddha will bring them peace and good fortune.

Religious tourism of the type that includes New Age Tourism, is therefore, a means of thinking sensitively about (core) human values regarding what is sacrosanct in nature and culture and (core) religious beliefs that emphasize brotherhood and peace. (Singh, 2004)

02. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

In this research, internal factors come from tourists' side, such as personality, life style, social status etc. On the other hand, there are important external factors such as destination image, food, accommodation, transportation, which can directly affect the tourists' decision.

Internal factors and external factors have strong relationship, because destination features should meet tourists' needs. Otherwise, they don't come. Therefore, pull and push theories are used in the research.

The following figure shows the conceptual framework modified from the fundamental model to be used in this research.

Table 1 Conceptual Framework of Demographic Characteristics Influencing Push and Pull Factors

| Independent variable | Dependent variable | | | |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| Demographic Characteristics 1 Religion 2 Regions in China 3 Genders 4 Age 5 Education | Push and pull factors <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border: none; vertical-align: top;"> Push factors 1 Relaxation 2 Desire to learn 3 Faith differences 4 Word of mouth </td> <td style="width: 50%; border: none; vertical-align: top;"> Pull factors 1 Temple 2 Amenities 3 Cultural 4 Religious activity </td> </tr> </table> | | Push factors 1 Relaxation 2 Desire to learn 3 Faith differences 4 Word of mouth | Pull factors 1 Temple 2 Amenities 3 Cultural 4 Religious activity |
| Push factors 1 Relaxation 2 Desire to learn 3 Faith differences 4 Word of mouth | Pull factors 1 Temple 2 Amenities 3 Cultural 4 Religious activity | | | |

03. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research is adopted in this research and survey technique is used. Questionnaire was distributed in 200 Chinese visitors who visited the main temples where Chinese tourists frequently visited in Bangkok. Data collected was analyzed specifically with statistical method.

In this study, the type of study is problem solving research. The minimum sample size is 200. The researcher selects 5 temples that Chinese tourists frequently visit, samples are randomly selected. Each temple was fixed with 40 samples to make equally probable to investigate as common, totally sample size in 200. Five temples chosen by talking to staff of Chinese Tourist Company according to their tourism package and survey in temple measured by the largest population of Chinese tourists visit. Due to the time and resource limited, convenience sampling was used in this research.

SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The target population of the research is the Chinese tourists who visited temples the Chinese tourists frequently visit in Bangkok during the month of July 2012.

The Chinese tourists are from Mainland of China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. Most of them came here with tour guides on one or 2-day package tours. Respondents were chosen by observation, based on their clothes, language and behaviour.

04. DATA ANALYSIS

The independent T-test is a statistical tool that tests the statistical hypothesis followed by study's distribution. Normally, it makes a comparison of two variables with their conventional control and experimental control.

ANOVA is used to determine whether there are significant differences in the means of two or more variables. The one-way ANOVA tests the significance of two or more than two variables by comparison of their means. The F-distribution is used to determine whether the variability of two samples differs significantly (Zikmund, 2003).

The Tukey's Honestly Significant Different test (HSD) is used in this study. The HSD test belongs to post hoc analysis and used with both unequal samples size and equal samples size. The critical value for HSD test is the differentiation between variances and finds critical value for the one-way ANOVA.

05. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For the present study, the important reasons for Chinese tourist Choose Thailand as a religious destination are relaxation, desire to learn, faith, word of mouth, temples and cultural differences. The less important reasons are media, amenities, religious activities and tourism product. It is important to promote religious tourism by focusing the strongly motivated factors that influence the tourists' trip decision making.

Concerning on the objective of this study, objective 1 is about the differences in demographic factors that motivate Chinese tourist to visit temples in Bangkok. The result tells that most religious tourists from North of China, age around 19-30 years old, education level is bachelor's degree and work in private enterprises.

Objective 2 is about the push motivating factors from tourists. The most important Push motivating factors for Chinese tourists are relaxation, desire to learn, and word of mouth.

The result tells that most the Chinese tourists strongly believe that life in China are stressful and they would like to travel abroad to learn new knowledge and experience. Most of them feel that religious tourism might reduce their stress and would improve their spiritual development to lead their lives toward a positive way. The result also tells that most of the Chinese tourists strongly believe in WOM from relatives and friends. Most of them feel that information from media might influence them to make decision as a trip. Armstrong (1996) added that tourists generally have limited knowledge about a destination choice that they have not previously visited. Hence, their destination choice often depends upon symbolic information acquired either from the media or from social groups.

Objective 3 is about pull motivating factors from destination. The most important Push motivating for Chinese tourists are temple and culture differences.

The result tells that most of the Chinese tourists strongly believe that Thai temples are beautiful, Thai painting and Thai music are special and Thai people are friendly. There are the best points in building destination image. Most of them think temples stay, vegetarian food, transportation, souvenir and religious activities are good, which refer to the middle level of motivating factors.

There are differences in the pull factors motivating Chinese tourists to choose Thailand as their religious destination based on gender. Women prefer good amenities,

beautiful architecture, taking photo and shopping. Men prefer to get new knowledge and experience from religious trip; they are interested in the introducing scenic spots and activities such as candles lighting.

There are differences in the pull factors motivating Chinese tourists to choose Thailand as their religious destination based on religion. Different religions have different motivating factors when they take a religious trip. For example, the Buddhists are strongly motivated by Thai temples and would like to take religious activities more than the Muslims and other religions. Chinese Muslims have less feeling to buy tourism product than Buddhist and other religions. Tourists of different religions have different pull motivating factors, it is important to differentiate them and provide proper service.

06. RECOMMENDATIONS

Religious activities should be simple and make them feel and touch every aspect of Thai culture. Most of the Chinese tourists don't pay much attention and shy to join religious activities, so it is very important to make them feel the religious tour interesting and fun by making the visiting time short with different style of activities.

Tourist agents, accommodation, food and transportation should be simple and appropriate, so they won't be shocked or make a fuss about them. Meanwhile, tour guides are the most important factors for them to make them feel that their religious trips are interesting, knowledgeable, and worthwhile. Otherwise, they will have negative feelings on this kind of tour.

For TAT, this is a good opportunity to promote religious tourism in Thailand to foreign people, especially Chinese group tourists. Some religious route should be developed for Chinese tourists and cooperation with tourist agents should be made to make them in the package. Media is important to introduce the religious destination and promotion to let Chinese tourists know religious tourist in Thailand.

APPENDIX

Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|------------------|------------|
| .899 | 35 |

Frequencies

Statistics

| | | Religion | Region | Age | Gender | Education | Occupation |
|---------|---------|----------|--------|-------|--------|-----------|------------|
| N | Valid | 199 | 200 | 200 | 198 | 199 | 199 |
| | Missing | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Mean | | 1.268 | 2.342 | 3.233 | 4.154 | 5.270 | 6.285 |
| Minimum | | 1.1 | 2.1 | 3.1 | 4.1 | 5.1 | 6.1 |
| Maximum | | 1.4 | 2.7 | 3.4 | 4.2 | 5.4 | 6.7 |

Frequency Table

Religion

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Buddhism | 84 | 42.0 | 42.2 | 42.2 |
| | Christian | 4 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 44.2 |
| | Islam | 3 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 45.7 |
| | Others | 108 | 54.0 | 54.3 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 199 | 99.5 | 100.0 | |

| | | | | | |
|---------|--------|-----|-------|--|--|
| Missing | System | 1 | .5 | | |
| Total | | 200 | 100.0 | | |

Region

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | North | 55 | 27.5 | 27.5 | 27.5 |
| | Northeast | 27 | 13.5 | 13.5 | 41.0 |
| | East | 24 | 12.0 | 12.0 | 53.0 |
| | Middle | 25 | 12.5 | 12.5 | 65.5 |
| | South | 28 | 14.0 | 14.0 | 79.5 |
| | Southwest | 25 | 12.5 | 12.5 | 92.0 |
| | Northwest | 16 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 200 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Age

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Under 18 | 12 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 6.0 |
| | 19-30 | 119 | 59.5 | 59.5 | 65.5 |
| | 31-49 | 60 | 30.0 | 30.0 | 95.5 |

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----|-------|-------|-------|
| Older than 50 | 9 | 4.5 | 4.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 200 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Gender

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | male | 91 | 45.5 | 46.0 | 46.0 |
| | female | 107 | 53.5 | 54.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 198 | 99.0 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 2 | 1.0 | | |
| Total | | 200 | 100.0 | | |

Education

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|----------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | High school or below | 29 | 14.5 | 14.6 | 14.6 |
| | College | 25 | 12.5 | 12.6 | 27.1 |
| | Bachelor | 121 | 60.5 | 60.8 | 87.9 |
| | Master or high | 24 | 12.0 | 12.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 199 | 99.5 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 1 | .5 | | |

Education

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|----------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | High school or below | 29 | 14.5 | 14.6 | 14.6 |
| | College | 25 | 12.5 | 12.6 | 27.1 |
| | Bachelor | 121 | 60.5 | 60.8 | 87.9 |
| | Master or high | 24 | 12.0 | 12.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 199 | 99.5 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 1 | .5 | | |
| Total | | 200 | 100.0 | | |

Occupation

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Employees in private enterprise | 101 | 50.5 | 50.8 | 50.8 |
| | Student | 23 | 11.5 | 11.6 | 62.3 |
| | Entrepreneur | 11 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 67.8 |
| | Retired | 12 | 6.0 | 6.0 | 73.9 |
| | Government office | 10 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 78.9 |
| | Agriculturalist | 4 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 80.9 |
| | Other | 38 | 19.0 | 19.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 199 | 99.5 | 100.0 | |