

## Examination of Thailand as International Volunteer Tourism Destination: Profiling of the market and motivations, strengths and weaknesses

Juthaporn Kankaew<sup>1</sup> and Tatiyaporn Jarumaneerat<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine profiles of international tourist volunteer in Thailand in terms of their core behavior, types, and especially their motivations, to assess the strength and weaknesses of Thailand as international volunteer tourism destination. And to determine the reasons of their future intentions. Central to this topic is the collection of in-depth information about profiles and motivation of international volunteer tourists. This research uses non-probability sampling due to its small-scale survey (Berg, 2007). Non probability snowball sampling is used. Results were separated into six parts: Core behavior; Contribution their own financial and volunteer outside their original country; Types: Shallow Vocation Minded; Motivation: Project Factor, Relationship, Escapism; Strength: Helpful people, Friendly people, Safe; Weaknesses: Less Promote, Lack of Government Controls and Bad Accommodation. and Future intention: Money and Time. Value information and advice are provided to those who interested in promoting volunteer tourism in Thailand as how to motivate the international volunteer tourist to add some volunteer activities to their holidays, including host community, non-government organizations and tour operators.

**Keywords:** Volunteer tourism International Volunteer tourist Motivation

### Introduction

From 2000 to 2010, 1,600 studies were conducted in Thailand about the hospitality and tourism industry. Covering the areas of tourism, hospitality, tourists, private organization, and communities (Sangpikul,2012). Current studies use the same topic and only changing target group of population or increasing the scope of the study (Sangpikul,2011). However, it's very hard to find creative studies about the hospitality

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<sup>1,2</sup> Faculty of Hoapitality and Tourism, prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus,83120 Thailand

and tourism industry for the last 10 years are rare. In addition, creative studies should come from focus groups on tourism such as niche markets, Green Tourism, Businesses, Medical tourism, Volunteer tourism, Food tourism, Long stay tourism, Film tourism and new product development or service innovation (Sangpikul,2011).

Recently, “The Little Big Project”, a volunteer tourism competition funded by the Tourism Authority of Thailand TAT (2013) was promoted within the new market strategy. TAT expected this market will be growing in tourism at least 70 million people or 25-30% per year.

Volunteer tourism gains more interesting to the researcher than other fields of tourism, Moreover, volunteer tourism can be linked to those focus groups on tourism, because the main activities of volunteer tourism involve protecting the environment as “Green tourism business”. The length of time for volunteer tourist in some organization is longer and comes closer to the definition of “ Long stay tourism” in which tourist stay for a period of one month to one year Hongsrnagon (2006). Volunteer tourism is a sub-classification of niche market Callanan and Thomas (2003).

Despite of the fact Thailand has one of the top ten highest numbers of volunteer tourism projects. There have not done many research studies in Thailand about volunteer tourism. (Table 1)

**Table1** Volunteer Tourism Expansion (2003-2007) Top 10 Countries

Country	Projects 2007	Project 2005	Project 2003
India	241	185	51
Costa Rica	201	133	43
Peru	193	122	1
Ecuador	188	150	47
Kenya	183	102	21
Thailand	176	138	3
Ghana	171	149	37
South Africa	148	135	3
Nepal	144	117	2
Brazil	96	91	15
Totals	1741	1322	223

Source: Tomazos and Butler (2009)

Condé Nast Traveler magazine in 2013 reported that, Voluntourism trends are quite popular among Europe and America because the new generation want to make the difference and make a better world, They want to do something worthwhile, meaningful, helpful to the community while they are travelling to, by participating in community development, teaching, or conservation project ([www.prachachat.net](http://www.prachachat.net)). The Little Big Project Campaign is one of the special focus group campaign of international marketing strategy of Tourism Authority Thailand. Voluntourism will give the good experience to the tourist by people, community and the culture (TAT, 2013).

### **Objectives**

1. To examine profiles of international tourist volunteer in Thailand in terms of their core behavior, types, and their motivations.
2. To assess the strengths and weaknesses of Thailand as the destination for volunteer tourism.
3. To examine the future intention reasons of the international volunteer tourist to participate in volunteer trip in Thailand.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Volunteer tourism**

There have been a number of volunteer tourism definitions and classification in previous studies starting from David Smith (1992) and continued interest in The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and George Washington University's International Institute of Tourism Studies (IITS), 2000; Lyons, 2003; Uriely, Reichel, & Ron, 2003; Jones, 2004; Brown and Lehto (2005); Hawkins, Lamoureux, & Clemmons (2005); Millington, 2005; Marta, Guglielmetti, & Maura, 2006, p.222; Holmes and Smith (2009), p.6; VolunTourism.org, 2009. No single universally accepted definition exists but similarities are found so volunteer tourism can be defined in this study as:

Any voluntary service which involves spending time and no financial return, to do something which aims to benefit someone combination with traditional travel at those

service destination and more concern on environmental, cultural, humanitarian to make a positive impact upon the local and tourist themselves.

The classification of this tourism is separated into two groups as "Vacation-minded holiday" where only a small part of a trip is devoted to volunteering, and "Volunteer-minded mission" where most of or the entire trip is devoted to volunteering.

#### **Volunteer tourist**

Previous studies pointed out that there are different types of volunteer tourist depending on various factors including commitment of volunteering, length of time participating in the volunteering works, skills and knowledge of volunteers, availability of financial resources, and age of volunteer. MacCannell, 1976; Sylvan, 1985; Wearing (2001), p.1; Brown and Morrison, (2003); Coghlan, 2006; Mintel, (2008); Peach and Coghlan, (2009); Chen, (2011) called the participants who participate in volunteer tourism as volunteer tourist and defined them as :

Who are volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some group in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspect of society or environment by invest their time, budgets and manpower at a destination outside their original country. Travelling is also their main motivation.

Based on the previous studies by MacCannell, (1976); Sylvan, (1985); Brown and Morrison, (2003); Callanan and Thomas, (2005); volunteer tourists are operationally classified into three groups:

Shallow vacation minded---who focused predominantly on their self-development and how their experience can be used for academic credit, enhancing their curriculum vitae and career/ academic achievement and for ego-enhancement than about the welfare of local community or project itself. The volunteer element is not always the primary motivation for travelling and the main activities undertaken at the destination may involve both volunteering and travelling.

Intermediate---who focuses on both on altruistic and self-development motives.

Deep volunteer minded---where self-interest motives are secondary to altruistic ones and will spend most or all of their vacation volunteering.

According to previous study, the researcher will use the deep commitment (MacCannell, 1979) to classify the group of volunteer tourist in volunteer tourism.

**Table 2** The commitment of volunteer tourists

Main Commitment	Shallow vacation minded	Intermediate volunteer	Deep volunteer minded
Importance of the destination	The destination is important in the decision-making	Focuses on both the project and the destination	More attention is given to the project than the destination
Duration of participation	Short-term, typically less than 4 weeks in duration	Medium-term typically less than 6 months in duration	Medium to long-term, 6 months or intensive shorter term projects
Focus of experience : altruistic v. self-interest	Self-interest motive are more important than altruistic ones	Self-interest motives are of similar importance to altruistic ones	Altruistic motives are more important than self-interest one
Skills/ Qualification of participants	Offer minimal skill or qualification	May offer generic skills	May offer some technical/ professional skills and experience and/ or time
Active/ Passive participation	Tend to be more passive in nature	Mixture of passive and active participation	Tends to be more active in nature
Level of contribution to locals	Minimal direct contribution to local area	Moderate direct contribution to local area	High level of direct contribution to local area.

Source: MacCannell, (1976)

## Volunteer motivation approach (The Voluntary Functions Inventory (VFI))

### Volunteer motivation approach

VFI is the instrument of The Functional Approach to measure the volunteers' motivations. A modified version of the Voluntary Function Inventory (VFI) scale (Clary et al., 1998) has been used extensively by a variety of researchers have established the reliability (.82 to .85 alpha reliability) of the VFI scale (Clary et al., 1998; Okun et al., 1998; Snyder & Cantor, 1998; Welker, 2001). Volunteer Function Inventory which assesses motivation for, and rewards (functions) of, volunteering or volunteering motivation has a main assumption as follows:

#### Assumptions

People are purposeful, plan, goal-directed - - Volunteers engage in volunteer work in order to satisfy important personal goals.

Different people may do similar things for different reasons – Volunteers performing the same volunteer activity for the same organization may have different reasons for volunteering.

Any one individual may be motivated by more than one need or goal – An individual volunteer may be attempting to satisfy two or more motives through one activity at your organization.

Outcomes depend on the matching of needs and goals to the opportunities afforded by the environment – successful volunteer recruitment, satisfaction, and retention is tied to the ability of the volunteer experience to fulfill the volunteer's important motives.

The Voluntary Function Inventory (VFI) scale developed by Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen and Miene in 1998 suggest that people maintain their voluntary behavior provided they fulfill one or more of six individual functions as postulated by Clary et.al, (1998). The six different functions that exist in unique degrees of interest for each individual are:

- I. Value – addressing the altruistic and humanitarian concerns for other, often distinguishing volunteers from non volunteers, or the chance to use

skills or knowledge that would otherwise go unpracticed, (e.g. reinforcement or expression of personal values).

- II. Understanding – creating opportunities to permit new learning experiences, or the chance to use skills or knowledge that would otherwise go unpracticed (e.g. personal growth).
- III. Social – concerns relationship with other and address the need to be with one friend or create new relationship (e.g. be part of a groups).
- IV. Career – suggests that avenues of volunteering have the possibility to assist career opportunities in the future (e.g. work skills and contracts).
- V. Protective – serves to protect the self from negative thoughts of perhaps being more fortunate than others (e.g. increasing confidence).
- VI. Enhancement – offers the ego positive growth and development. Often used in contrast to the protective function which aims to eliminate negativity, whereas the enhancement function aims to promote a positive environment. (e.g. learning).

Anderson and Cairncross (2005) studied to understand and manage volunteer motivation in the two regional tourism cases by using Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI) to measure both management and volunteer perceptions as they relate to motivation. Their study reported the motive for the volunteers was the “understanding function” and ‘I can explore my own strengths’ was highest score in the understanding function while “career function” proved to be the least relevant.

## **Methodology**

### **Population**

Population in the study is international volunteer tourists who come from related organizations, with criteria in the previous study to select the related organization in Phuket, Krabi, Phang-Nga and Songkha Only.

The related organizations in the study mean those who have registered to one of these organizations: The Ministry of Finance, The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security institutions. Even though there were 3 main organizations to register but

the researcher found only the statistics from The Ministry of Social Development in year 2011 shows about the international volunteer in Thailand. International volunteer in Thailand includes 617 persons in 4 organizations. But the exact name and location of 4 organizations are unknown. The sampling size of international volunteer tourist to be interviewed was chosen from a list of companies being a partner with Tourism Authority of Thailand to operate "Volunteer Vacation in Thailand". According to the data, there were 20 tour companies spread around Thailand, of which 5 organizations had the main office in Thailand and operated volunteer trip in Thailand, 15 organizations had the main office in other countries, operated volunteer trip in Thailand and as well as other countries, early 5 usable organizations to get the international volunteer tourist for the interviews.

#### **Sampling Group, Sample Size and Sampling Method**

Non-probability and Snowball sampling methods were used in face-to-face in-depth interview with international volunteer tourist. The snowball method was chosen because certain organizations needed to be targeted and their knowledge of the related organizations operates volunteer tourism might help to find more international volunteer tourist to interview. Purposive method was used based on the organization that is a partner with Tourism Authority of Thailand to operated volunteer vacation in year 2013. The snowball method was used to ask the related organization to recommend other organizations to be interviewed. Interviews with related organization in Phuket, Krabi, Phang-Nga and Songkha were conducted until the answers from international volunteer became similar and conclusion could be made. The person who had participated in volunteer tourism in those organizations was chosen for the interviews.

#### **Qualitative**

The Qualitative method was conducted by face-to-face interviews with 17 international volunteer tourists from 5 companies in Phuket, Phang-Nga, Krabi and Songkha who had be a partner with Tourism Authority of Thailand to operate Volunteer Vacation Thailand. Purposive and snowball sampling was used to ask the staff and international volunteer tourist to recommend other companies for future interviews. The international volunteer tourist was chosen for interview.



The questions were developed based on previous studies (Reference be specific). The goal was set for what information would be needed from the interviews to avoid wasting interviewers and interviewees' time and to make the interviews easier for both participants. Interviews were stopped after no further new answers come up. In total 17 interviews were conducted out of originally planned 20 interviews. The related organization were researched before the interviews to provide more background information about the organization and their volunteer tourism activities. A letter from the Prince of Songkla University was sent for the permission from some of related organizations after phone call to make are appointment. Sending the letter to those related organization was needed because of the confidential information provided in the interviews. A guarantee from the university was needed so that certain information would not end up with other related organization competitors. Appointments were arranged as some related organizations were quite busy and do not have international volunteer tourist during the interview period. Making the appointments helped the interviewer to organize the interviews and make sure that they were conducted within a certain time frame. The interviews were tape-recorded only if the interviewee allowed interviews to be recorded. Permission to record interviews was asked from international volunteer tourist before the interview. In Buhalis and Licata (2002) study interviews lasted between 30 min and 1 h, so at least 1- 1.5 hours was reserved for each interview to make sure there was enough time to finish interviews. After interviews, all collected data was transformed to writing. Interviewees were motivated to give realistic responses to questions by establishing credibility and rapport.

#### **Research instruments (Qualitative)**

Using interview for qualitative method was in order to get deeper results for this study and the interviews conducted in August – November 2013. The questions were used during a structured face-to-face interview.

After getting statistical numbers of organization in Phang-Nga, Phuket, Krabi and Songkha, a reliable sample size was chosen by using 17 international volunteer tourists from 5 organizations, of which 2 organizations are a partner with Tourism Authority of

Thailand to operated Volunteer Vacation in Thailand 2013 and 3 are obtained from snowball sampling method was used during the interview to get the recommendations from related organizations of which other organizations could be interviewed. The international volunteer tourist in each organization will be chosen for interviews. The international volunteer tourists were chosen because they are the people who participate in volunteer tourism activity.

(The questions were reviewed from previous studies) International volunteer tourist in Phuket, Phang-Nga, Krabi and Songkha were asked questions relating to examination of Thailand as international volunteer tourism destination : Profiling of the market and motivation, strengths and weaknesses. The interview consisted of 5 parts and the questions were based on a studies by Brown and Lehto (2005), Holmes and Smith (2009), Aalten (2010), Lo and Lee (2011), Chen (2011).

Part One : Core behavior, Part Two : Classifications/Types, Part Three : Strengths and Weaknesses, Part Four : Future intention, Part Five : Motivation

#### **Data Analysis**

For analyzing data the same approach, interpretive/ constructivism was used. This approach is not about putting people into models and boxes according to some theories, rather it is about perceiving people as they really are, and hearing their opinions and experiences (Ateljevic, 2008, PP). All the questions, face-to-face, were open-ended, without pre-defined answer categories. The entire face-to-face and telephone interview were taped with a voice recorder, and afterwards transcribed into word. Data content analysis was applied. Furthermore, coding was used with pre-defined concepts of motivation. The researcher used each theory separately for content analysis.

#### **Results**

Nineteen transcripts of which 13 females and 6 males after coded. First "motivation and volunteer tourism", following by push and pull was used to check what motivations were relevant, and which were not. After that, the commitment of volunteer tourists from (MacCannell,1976) were used to classify the international volunteer tourist.

For the core behavior, strengths and weaknesses, the researcher uses the scheme from previous study to see the relevant topic and the irrelevant.

#### **Motivation**

**Project Factors :** By asking the respondent why they choose volunteer in Thailand, most of the respondent answer about they choose to come to the place because of the project itself.

“because I want to go to Asia somewhere, and the project because of the diving that sound interesting to me and to protect the natural, deal with animal, and deal with natural and anything” (Female, 19 German)

“because in this project we go diving and I have rare dived before and I was interested by beaches of Thailand” (Male, 16 Italy)

“Because my sister wants to do about huminitarian job and I find where operator that in the internet, we found that in Thailand has the job like this, I study Biology, She asking me like will you go to conservation marine biology or not, so this company offer we both humanitarian and conservation biology marine project that why I come to volunteer in this organization.” (Female, 21 French)

**Relationship** By using the same question why they choose volunteer in Thailand some of the respondent answer about “relationship”

“I choose to come to Thailand because I'm already go to many countries in Asia so I know a little bit about culture and like my closer he go to Thailand and he told me it a very beautiful country everybody is kind so I choose here” (Female, 19 French)

“Because I have been here before, travelling with my family, and being with my friends so I want to stay in Thailand” (Male, 22 Sweden)

“I love Thailand because it such as a beautiful country when I came last time and i said I want to come back so now I finished my university...” (Female, 21 England)

**Escapism:** By asking the respondent why they feel the need to volunteer abroad instead of within their own environment, and by going in-depth about their travel motivation, results could be drawn about escapism. It seems quite important for international volunteer tourist.

"I just wanted to go away from my house. To see other country I didn't really had an idea..... I found it a little bit boring to stay in my countries" (Female, 21 France)

"....life in England it very quick, a lot of time people just think of time and money so before i go to america i just need to slow down relax before i go to Africa" (Male, 26 England)

#### **Core Behavior**

All of those respondents are not Thai. They come to travel with a purpose to do something good to the society. Two of them visited Thailand before but seventeen people are visit in Thailand for first time. Four of them have been participating in volunteer tourism in other countries before. Fourteen people never participate in other countries before and volunteer in Thailand for first time as well as first time to visit Thailand. Just only one person participates in Thailand before then come back to volunteer again after 3 years.

#### **Classification**

With the commitment from MacCannell, (1976) as comprise of 5 topics to separate the international volunteer tourist in two 3 types of volunteer classification the results reveal that: the duration of participation mostly fell in the category of shallow volunteer minded who are short-term, typically less than 4 weeks in duration of the project and following with who stay medium-term typically less than 6 months in duration where we called intermediate volunteer. The last group was deep volunteer minded the duration of the project between medium to long-term, 6 months or intensive shorter term projects.

#### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The results in this part make us known how worthwhile of volunteer tourism because of the tourists expresses their feeling as:

"Thailand as tourist destination, made me know about thai culture and different when you are just normal tourist because when you are tourist you just come to visiting and nothing, for volunteer we stay here, we can see and meet a lot of culture we are more close to Thai people." (Female, 21 French) (Strengths)

“I think the positive side is you not like a tourist, you not coming as a tourist you stay as a part to help Thailand to actually do something to work and that feel better than just come here and leave the money and just do tourist things feel better to being a country to acutally do something there.” (Female, 19 Germany)(Strengths)

**Future intention reason** was found out just only money and time from fourteen respondents. Five respondents did not have any ideas of the next time to visit Thailand as international volunteer tourist but all of them will come back to travel in Thailand.

### Conclusions

As the result of the study in the topic of examination of Thailand as international volunteer destination: Profiling of the market strength and weaknesses, Thailand needs to get more of international volunteer tourist because this kind of tourists is doing something good to the society, Moreover, international volunteer tourists is worthwhile than the normal tourist which has the different attitude from the international volunteer tourist. Thailand can attract the normal tourists by keeping promoting on the right way to particular groups of the tourist. This market will grow more in the future as TAT strategy keeps focusing on them. This study brings more knowledge about the international volunteer tourist in Thailand.

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