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## **TRAVEL BEHAVIORS OF THAI AND FOREIGN TOURISTS TRAVELING TO SURAT THANI PROVINCE**

### **Abstract:**

Increasing of tourists' number has impact on the tourism economy and the change in the structure of the local economy and society. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to study travel behaviors of Thai and foreign tourists traveling to Surat Thani Province, Thailand, in order to be guideline for the tourism planning and development in the province, which can lead to effectiveness of tourism strategy and marketing to suit the needs of tourists and targets group. There were 798 samples in total. The data collection tool was the questionnaires. The frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data.

The study found that tourists between the ages of 21 and 30, who had graduated with a bachelor's degree, and worked in private business or company, mostly chose to travel to Koh Samui, Koh Phangan, and Koh Tao, respectively. Most of them chose to travel with family and friends with the aim of natural attraction. The findings revealed that most of tourists received information from the internet, friends telling and television, respectively. Time of spending was less than one week and travel cost was between 1,001- 2,000 Baht (between USD 30 - 62) per day. Moreover, the findings found that most of tourists were satisfied in transport quality at good level. However, travel cost, accommodation quality, accommodation cost, and security conditions were found at moderate levels. The overall satisfaction of the visit to Surat Thani province was at good level.

### **Keywords:**

Travel, Behavior, Tourists, Surat Thani

**JEL Classification:** Z00

## **Introduction**

Thailand has unique culture, art, tradition, abundance of resources, and many famous natural and historical tourist attractions. Continuing of expansion and creation of tremendous economic value in tourism has driven the economy and generated income in the country. Thai tourism becomes one of the top businesses and income-producing enterprises (Kuawiriyapan, et al., 2010; Praneetham and Satjachaleaw, 2015). Each year, the tourists' number had a continuous increase of approximately 15-20 % (Khunon, 2015). Promoting tourism industry will enable the country to have prosperity, opportunity in economic growth and development for well-being of people.

Surat Thani is the largest province of Southern Thailand. The province has many natural and historical attractions, tradition, and cultural tourism, including Koh Samui, Koh Phangan, Koh Tao, and the abundance of Mu Koh Ang Thong Marine National Park. Surat Thani has opportunity in economic growth and tourism and travel industry enormous because it is a commercial and transportation hub (Department of Tourism, 2013). Increasing of tourists' number has impact on the tourism economy and the change in the structure of the local economy and society. Therefore, the researcher is particularly interested in studying travel behaviors of Thai and foreign tourists traveling to Surat Thani Province, Thailand. The data and results obtained from this study can be used as guidelines for the tourism planning and development in the province, which can lead to effectiveness of tourism strategy and marketing to suit the needs of tourists and targets group.

## **The Purpose of the Research**

The objective of this research was to study travel behaviors of Thai and foreign tourists traveling to Surat Thani Province, Thailand.

## **Methodology**

The samples in this study were 798 tourists traveling to Surat Thani province, Thailand. The cluster random sampling technique was employed to select 398 Thai tourists and 400 foreign tourists for the quantitative research. The research instrument was the close-ended questionnaire. The mean, frequency, percentage, and standard deviation were used to analyze the data.

## **Results**

The respondents of this study were 398 Thai tourists and 400 foreign tourists traveling to Surat Thani province, Thailand. Most of them were female with 52.1%. The ages were between 21-30 years old with 37 %, and most had education at Bachelor level with 54.6%, as shown in table 1

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics		
Type of Tourists	Frequency	Percent
Thai tourists	398	49.9
Foreign tourists	400	50.1
Total	798	100.0
Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	382	47.9
Female	416	52.1
Total	798	100.0
Age	Year	Percent
Less than 21 Years old	32	4
21-30 Years old	295	37
31-40 Years old	229	28.7
41-50 Years old	136	17
51-60 Years old	71	8.9
More than 60 Years old	35	4.4
Education Level	Frequency	Percent
Primary school	7	0.9
Secondary school level	38	4.8
High school level	87	10.9
Vocational school level	130	16.3
Bachelor	436	54.6
Higher than Bachelor	100	12.5
Total	798	100.0

Table 2: Travel Behaviors (n = 798)

Behaviors	Thai tourists		Foreign tourists		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. Place to visit *						
Koh Samui	269	52.7	241	47.3	510	100.0
Koh Pha ngan	173	44.7	214	55.3	387	100.0
Koh Tao	89	48.1	96	51.9	185	100.0
2. Sources of information *						
Magazines	78	67.2	38	32.8	116	100.0
Television	107	64.1	60	35.9	167	100.0
Newspapers	49	44.1	62	55.9	111	100.0
Internet	256	49.9	257	50.1	513	100.0
Publication	62	61.4	39	38.6	101	100.0
Relative / friend	176	69.8	76	30.2	252	100.0

Behaviors	Thai tourists		Foreign tourists		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Agencies/tour companies	47	39.2	73	60.8	120	100.0
3. Main reason of visiting Surat Thani						
Natural attraction	265	54.8	219	45.2	484	100.0
Cultural attraction	30	30.9	67	69.1	97	100.0
Historical sites	9	16.7	45	83.3	54	100.0
Religious spots	9	25.7	26	74.3	35	100.0
To see relative & friends	52	98.1	1	1.9	53	100.0
Business / job purpose	33	60.0	22	40.0	55	100.0
Handicrafts & gems	0	0	20	100.0	20	100.0
4. Partners in travel						
Alone	27	60.0	18	40.0	45	100.0
Family members	148	62.2	90	37.8	238	100.0
Couple	74	54.8	61	45.2	135	100.0
Friends & relatives	132	48.5	140	51.5	272	100.0
Tour / travel agency	17	15.7	91	84.3	108	100.0
5. Amount of money spent <b>per day</b>						
Less than 1,000 Baht ( <i>Less than USD 30</i> )	70	49.0	73	51.0	143	100.0
Between 1,001-2,000 Baht ( <i>Between USD 30 - 62</i> )	158	53.7	136	46.3	294	100.0
Between 2,001-3,000 Baht ( <i>Between USD 62 - 93</i> )	99	49.3	102	50.7	201	100.0
Between 3,001-4,000 Baht ( <i>Between USD 93 - 93</i> )	49	43.4	64	56.6	113	100.0
More than 4,000 Baht ( <i>More than USD 124</i> )	22	46.8	25	53.2	47	100.0

Symbol \* means the respondents can give more than one answer

Table 2 shows that mostly, tourists chose to travel to Koh Samui, Koh Phangan, and Koh Tao, respectively. They chose to travel with family and friends with the aim of natural attraction. The study revealed that most of tourists received information from the internet, friends telling and television, respectively. Travel cost was between 1,001- 2,000 Baht (between USD 30 - 62) per day.

Table 3: Traveling frequency and duration of stay (n = 798)

1. Traveling frequency	Thai tourists		Foreign tourists		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1 <sup>st</sup> time	68	8.52	114	14.29	182	22.8
2 <sup>nd</sup> time	103	12.9	116	14.51	219	27.4
3 <sup>rd</sup> time	76	9.56	103	12.91	179	22.4
4 <sup>th</sup> time & above	151	18.92	67	8.39	218	27.4
Total	398	49.9	400	50.1	798	100

  

2. Duration of stay	Thai tourists		Foreign tourists		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 week	228	28.57	101	12.66	329	41.2
1 to 2 weeks	121	15.16	184	23.06	305	38.2
3 to 4 weeks	28	3.5	49	6.15	77	9.7
Over 1 month	21	2.67	66	8.23	87	10.9
Total	398	49.9	400	50.1	798	100

Table 3 shows that this trip was the second time, and fourth time and above to visit Surat Thani province for the respondents. Overall, time of spending was less than one week. Duration of stay for foreign tourists was 1 to 2 weeks and time of spending for the Thai tourists was less than one week.

Table 4: Satisfactions in transport quality, travel cost, accommodation quality, accommodation cost, security conditions, and overall satisfaction (n = 798)

Topics	Thai tourists		Foreign tourists		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
1. Transport quality						
1.1 Bad	181	83.0	37	17.0	218	100.0
1.2 Moderate	182	63.0	107	37.0	289	100.0
1.3 Good	35	12.0	256	88.0	291	100.0
2. Travel cost						
2.1 Too high	17	13.0	114	87.0	131	100.0
2.2 Moderate	304	55.8	241	44.2	545	100.0
2.3 Cheap	77	63.1	45	36.9	122	100.0
3. Accommodation quality						
3.1 Bad	193	82.4	41	17.6	233	100.0
3.2 Moderate	181	52.2	166	47.8	347	100.0
3.3 Good	24	11.1	193	88.9	217	100.0
4. Accommodation cost						
4.1 Too high	21	14.9	120	85.1	141	100.0
4.2 Moderate	272	54.1	231	45.9	503	100.0

Topics	Thai tourists		Foreign tourists		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
4.3 Good	105	68.2	49	31.8	154	100.0
5. Security conditions						
5.1 Bad	142	70.6	59	29.4	201	100.0
5.2 Moderate	226	59.5	154	40.5	380	100.0
5.3 Good	30	13.8	187	86.2	217	100.0

Table 4 shows that, overall, most of tourists were satisfied in transport quality at good level. However, travel cost, accommodation quality, accommodation cost, and security conditions were found at moderate levels. The study found that most of foreign tourists were satisfied in transport quality at good level, while most of the Thai tourists had satisfaction in the transport quality at moderate to bad levels. Moreover, the security conditions were found at moderate level by the Thai tourists, while most of the foreign tourists found that security conditions were at good level.

Table 5: Overall satisfaction on the visit to Surat Thani (n = 798)

	Thai tourists		Foreign tourists		Total	
	$(\bar{x})$	SD	$(\bar{x})$	SD	$(\bar{x})$	SD
Overall satisfaction on the visit to Surat Thani	3.94	0.65	4.01	0.79	3.98	0.72

Table 5 shows that, overall, the tourists' satisfaction on the visit to Surat Thani was at "good" level (Mean = 3.98). Both Thai tourists and foreign tourists were satisfied on the visit to Surat Thani (Mean = 3.94 and Mean = 4.01).

## Discussion

The study found that most of respondents were female tourists between the ages of 21 and 30, who had graduated with a bachelor's degree, and worked in private business or company, mostly chose to travel to Koh Samui, Koh Phangan, and Koh Tao, respectively. The findings revealed that, overall; most of tourists were satisfied in transport quality at good level. However, travel cost, accommodation quality, accommodation cost, and security conditions were found at moderate levels. The overall satisfaction of the visit to Surat Thani province was at good level. Kuawiriyapan, et al. (2010) pointed out that expense of travel was the most importance factor for Thai tourists. The tourists focus mostly on traveling by themselves using information from the media to choose the place. As for promotion,

they put importance on advertising through media like television, radio and press. The most important factor on service was the media such as press and guide services regarding historical knowledge and services concerning safety in travel should be available.

Moreover, the finding from this study revealed that most of Thai and foreign tourists chose to travel with family and friends with the aim of natural attraction. The study revealed that most of tourists received information from the internet, friends telling and television, respectively. Time of spending was less than one week and travel cost was between 1,001- 2,000 Baht (between USD 30 - 62) per day. This is consistent with research of Sanjaiya (2009) that most of tourists received information from the internet. Attractions favorite was the nature of tourism. The reason for the trip was relaxing. Most of them travelled with family and duration of stay was five days. Sanitmatcharo (2006) revealed that the sources of travel information for independent travelers were mainly non-institutional, mainly from guidebooks, friends, colleagues and relatives. Internet was another source of information which they utilized to find new destination, share travel experiences, and prepare themselves for the new exploration of the real world. Charoenphon and Chienwattanasook (2013) mentioned that the objective of the trip in Koh Samui of most of the foreign tourists was to travel and they usually travel with their family. The average duration of stay was between three to seven days, and the hotels with room rates between USD 80.86 - 113.15 were mostly chosen. Most of the foreign tourists decided on accommodation by themselves and also reserved the room via telephone in advance. Due to the location, most of European tourists chose accommodations close to the sea or the beach while Asian tourists chose to stay close to the communities. Channual (2013) found that most of the Chinese tourists travelled to Thailand for the first time, mostly planned to travel using travel agencies services. The purpose of travelling to Thailand was to relax. The most popular place was the natural attractions in the southern part of Thailand.

## **Conclusions**

The finding found that natural attraction is favorite travel attraction among tourists travelling to Surat Thani; therefore the Tourism Authority of Thailand should promote natural based tourism such as ecotourism, marine ecotourism and geo-tourism in Surat Thani province. Moreover, most of tourists find the tourist attractions, accommodation and travel information via the internet because it is quick, easy and convenient. Hence, tourism information should be promoted more on the website to easily access the information about travel.

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