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TRAVEL CONSTRAINTS OF TAKING A VOLUNTEER VACATION ABROAD

Abstract:

This study examines travel constraints and risks faced by Thai people in taking a volunteer vacation overseas. The primary objective of this study was to gain rich, in-depth, and holistic understanding of how Thai people perceive and interpret travel constraints and risks in taking a volunteer trip overseas. An interpretive paradigm utilising qualitative research approach was employed in this study. The data were gathered from 28 respondents who had experience in volunteering in Thailand, but had no experience in taking a volunteer vacation overseas. The number of the informants was determined by data saturation point, which is when new theme stopped emerging from the data during the data collection and analysis process. These informants were selected via purposive sampling and snowball sampling. A combination of semi-structured interviews and participant observation was used to collect the data. The data were then analysed by thematic analysis technique. The research findings showed that all informants in this study had perceived of travel constraints and risks which influenced their decision to take a volunteer trip overseas. In terms of travel constraints, three categories of travel barriers were identified: intrapersonal barriers; interpersonal barriers; and structural barriers. As for the travel risks, seven categories of risks were found including: risks concerning transportation; risks concerning laws and orders; health risks; risks concerning accommodations; risks concerning climate; risks concerning tourist attractions; and risks concerning medical support system.

Keywords:

travel barriers; travel risks; volunteer tourism; Thai tourists

JEL Classification: A14, L83, A14

I. INTRODUCTION

Volunteer tourism is a one form of tourism activities that is believed to provide mutual benefits for both tourists and local residents at tourist destinations. During the past decades, volunteer tourism has experienced a significant growth, not only in terms of the number of people taking a volunteer vacation, but also in terms of the number of organizations offering volunteer placements in countries throughout the world.

The concept of volunteer tourism has caught the interest of researchers and practitioners (Guttentag, 2009; Wearing, 2001). It can be defined as a combination of holiday and volunteerism (Raymond and Hall, 2008). It is also viewed as a more sustainable form of tourism (McGehee and Andereck, 2009). Undertaking a volunteer vacation in poor and developing countries has become a growing trend among Western people. However, nowadays volunteer tourism has also become a norm among people from developing countries who do volunteer works in their own countries as well as in other countries.

The topic of volunteer tourism is well researched, especially in the areas of volunteer tourists' motivations and experiences. However, the study on constraints and risks to take a volunteer trip is currently limited.

Travel constraints and risks represent the significant factors influencing the tourist decision-making process to travel. They play an important role in preventing or impeding tourists to take a holiday. Currently tourists are more concerned about travel constrains and risks occurring in many parts of the world, especially at famous tourist attractions. Limited time and budget, family burden, natural disasters, terrorism, plane crashes, car accidents, and disease outbreaks are the examples of major travel constraints and risks perceived by tourists. Understanding travel constraints and risks are pivotal because this can help tourism-related stakeholders to develop appropriate strategies to overcome them and find the way to encourage them to make a decision to travel.

In Thailand, the number of people taking volunteer activities during their free time has been increased. However, such activities seem to be limited within the country. Very few Thai people decides to take a volunteer vacation abroad because they are aware of travel constraints and risks. This study thus aimed to investigate travel constraints and risks associating to taking a volunteer trip abroad perceived by Thai tourists.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism is viewed as an alternative niche market to mass tourism (Wearing, 2001), which has been criticized as a major cause of the exploitation of destinations' socio-cultural and natural environments (Holden, 2000). To date, there are a number of

researchers and scholars who have attempted to define 'volunteer tourism'. The major examples include: McGehee and Santos (2005, p. 760) who define it as "utilising discretionary time and income to go out of the regular sphere of activity to assist others in need" and Wearing (2001, p.1) who define volunteer tourism as "those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or the environment". Volunteer tourism can be characterised as an integrated combination of 'travel' or 'tourism', and 'volunteering' (Raymond and Hall, 2008; McGehee and Andereck, 2009).

In the late 20th century, the phenomenal growth of mass tourism on the global scale (Callanan and Thomas, 2005; Tomazos and Butler, 2009), together with the power of the media, have resulted in the emergence of volunteer tourism (Callanan and Thomas, 2005). These two factors have unveiled other cultures to people, especially those from developed or Western countries (Callanan and Thomas, 2005), which has made them more aware of "the explicit divisions between the 'haves' and 'havenots' in the society. Environmentally- and socio-culturally- conscious travelers (Harlow and Pomfret, 2007), as well as people who have become weary with standardised pre-package, traditional holidays (Callanan and Thomas, 2005; Must, 2010) have realized the opportunity to do something more worthwhile and meaningful by giving back to society through volunteer tourism.

The emergence of volunteer tourism is argued to be a result of the phenomenal growth of mass tourism in the global scale in the late 20th century together with the power of the media (Callanan, and Thomas, 2005). These two factors have unveiled people, especially those from developed or Western countries to other cultures, which consequently make them more aware of "the explicit divisions between the 'haves' and 'havenots' " of the society (Callanan, and Thomas, 2005). Generally, volunteer tourists come from developed or Western countries, of which United State of America, United Kingdom, and European countries appear to be the major supply for this type of tourist (Tourism Research and Marketing, 2008).

Travel Constraints

The term "constraint" has been defined differently across academic disciplines and context (Kim and Trail, 2010). In the field of economic, a constraint can be defined as boundaries or obstructions (Kim and Trail, 2010; Hawkins, 2003). In the context of business management, it refers to a factor or factors which may limit the performance of the organization relative to its goals (Kim and Trail, 2010; Cox and Goldratt, 1986). In the context of tourism, a constraint means a factor or factors that may impede an individual from participating in a certain tourism activity or visiting a certain destination (Kim and Trail, 2010; Jackson, 2000).

A number of researchers and scholars have defined 'travel constraints'. The examples include: Crawford and Godbey (1987) who refer to travel constraints as "...any factor which intervenes between the preference for an activity and participation in it"; and Kimmm (2012) who defines travel constraints as a barrier factor against leisure activity participation, or as a cause of frustration to participate in leisure activities such as traveling or golfing. In a broad sense, leisure activity participation constraints would include a limitation/restriction on motives, and other factors such as personal or social situation preventing one from participating in leisure activities. Examples of these situations can include lack of time, finances, partners, or recreational facilities.

Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) develop a model for examining travel constraints. This model is known as 'the hierarchical constraints model'. Based on this model, travel constraints can be categorized into three main groups: intrapersonal constraints; interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints.

Intrapersonal constraints are limitations or barriers related to psychological conditions that are internal to the individuals such as stress, anxiety, health, fear, and other personality factors. A major example of intrapersonal constraints is food risk at the destination (Poolklai, 2015). As for interpersonal constraints, they refer to factors related to interaction with others such as family members, relatives, friends, colleagues, and others. Lack of appropriate accompanying persons to travel with represents one of the obvious examples of the interpersonal constraints. Structural constraints are factors that external factors such as barriers related to family life cycle, insufficient time to travel, and insufficient budget to travel, climate, and travel seasonality. According to this model, individuals usually starts to realise intrapersonal constraints first, then they move up to be aware of interpersonal constraints. Individuals tend to perceive the structural constraints at the latest.

Travel Risks

A perceived travel risk is one of the factors that impede individuals to make a decision to take a trip. Understanding perceived travel risks is very significant because such knowledge could help tour operators and other tourism-related stakeholders to have a better understanding of the perception of tourists regarding their decision to travel oversea.

Taylor (1974) defines 'risk' as 'possible loss', whereas Tsaur, Tzeng, and Wang (1997: 798), defines 'tourist risk' as "the possibility of various misfortunes which might befall a group package tourist in the process of traveling or at its destination."

Based on a review of existing literature, four main categories of travel risks generally perceived by individuals are found. These include:

- I. Risks of terrorism (Sönmez, Apostologpulos and Tarlow, 1999): during the past decades, there were a number of terrorism incidents occurring in many parts of the world including the countries that are reputable as major tourist destinations. Many tourists were affected from these incidents: some were died, whereas some were seriously hurt. The example is the incident of terrorism occurring in Egypt in 1997 when 71 tourists were shot by a gunman. These incidents have been happening continuously and have affected the tourism industry in many countries because tourists are scared and decide not to travel (Lepp and Gibson, 2003). For example, the 9/11 incidents in USA caused a decrease in the number of tourists travelling to USA by 6.8 per cent in that year, compared to the number of tourists in the year before (World Tourism Organisation, 2002).

- II. Risks related to wars and political instability (Loannides and Apostolopoulos, 1999): Wars and instability in politics occurring in many countries are also factors causing tourists to be anxious and scare of travelling. For example, the incident of Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 caused approximately 11,500 tourists to cancel their trips to Beijing, China (Garner and Shen, 1992).

- III. Health-related risks or health concerns (Carter, 1998; Cossens and Gin, 1994): at the present time, more and more people are aware of the risks of being infected with a disease or getting sick from visiting at a certain destination. Such perception of risks causes tourists not to travel. The prime example of the consequence of this category of risk is the incident of the mad cow disease outbreaks in the United Kingdom in 2001 which caused more than one thousand tourists to cancel their trip to the country (CNN Europe, 2001). The studies of Carter (1998) and Cossens and Gin (1994) similarly report that in the opinion of general tourists, Europe is a safe continent and free from health-related risks, whereas Africa is the most dangerous place where tourists have to face these risks the most, especially the risks of being infected with HIV. Health concerns also covers the perceptions on food safety at the destination. Choovanichchannon's (2015) study reports that a number of tourists are more concerned about how clean and safe food and beverage at the destination is.

- IV. Crime (Brunt, Mawby and Hambly, 2000; Dimanche and Leptic, 1999): tourists are often the target of crimes because they normally carry a lot of money with them, are not familiar with the destination, have language barrier, and have such behaviors that are risky to cause crimes such as visiting a night club, drinking alcoholic beverage, and roaming into unfamiliar places (Lepp and Gibson, 2003).

Tsaur, Tzeng, and Wang (1997) propose a criteria the evaluation criteria for tourist risks which consists of seven aspects as follows:

Table 1: The evaluation criteria for tourist risks

Objective	Attribute
Transportation	Safety of transportation Convenience of telecommunication facilities Safety of driving
Law and order	Political stability Possibility of criminal attack Attitude of inhabitants towards tourist
Hygiene	Possibility of contracting infectious diseases Hygiene of catering conditions
Accommodation	Hotel fire control system Hotel security system
Weather	Difference of weather change Possibility of natural disasters
Sightseeing spot	Safety of recreational facilities Quality of the management staff
Medical support	Degree of assistance available in case of accident Completeness of medical service system

Source: Tsaur, Tzeng, and Wang (1997: 799)

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As the main aim of this research is to gain an in-depth, holistic understanding of the travel barriers and risks in taking a volunteer vacation overseas perceived by Thai tourists, an interpretive paradigm utilising qualitative research approach deems to be an appropriate approach to be used. Specifically, this study employed a combination of semi-structured interviews and participant observation as data collection methods. This approach served as a triangulation strategy in which data gathered from different methods were cross-checked and any similarities and differences (if any) in the data could be identified. Moreover, with the use of both qualitative data collection methods, a more complete picture of the travel barriers and risks in taking an overseas volunteer tourism perceived by Thai tourists could be achieved. All in-depth individual interviews were video-recorded upon receiving a permission via a consent form from the informants. They were ensured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their information by the use of pseudonyms.

Before the main study was undertaken, the pilot study was conducted for four weeks. The aim for conducting the pilot study was to test the effectiveness of the data collection methods in order to ensure that they could enable the researcher to achieve the research objective. After reflecting on the pilot study, the main study was carried out over a period of three months between January and March 2018.

The informants of the study data were Thai people aging between eighteen and sixty years who had an experience in volunteering within Thailand but had never taken an outbound volunteer trip. These informants were selected by purposive sampling and snowball sampling. As a result, a total number of 28 respondents were selected. This total number was determined based on the data saturation.

In terms of the respondents' profile, they consisted of 10 males and 18 females. Their ages ranged from twenty to fifty-one years old at the time of conducting the study. Fourteen respondents were married, and the rest respondents were single. In terms of educational background, it varied from high school education to postgraduate studies. As for the professional background, six respondents had their own business, fifteen were university students, two were recent graduates and had no work at that time, two was a home maker and the remaining were workers in either a government agency or a private company.

The collected data were analysed by thematic analysis. The data analysis was conducted at the same time as the data collection continued after data collection was completed. Although, there were computer software programmes that could facilitate the analysis of qualitative data, the researcher chose to analyse the data manually by following six steps of the thematic analysis: (i) becoming familiar with the data; (ii) generating initial codes; (iii) searching for themes; (iv) reviewing themes; (v) defining and naming themes; and (vi) producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Research Findings

The part discusses the research findings which are divided into two parts. The first part explains travel constraints faced by Thai people in taking a volunteer trip overseas, and the second part discusses travel risks perceived by these people.

Travel Constraints of Thai People in Taking a Volunteer Vacation Abroad

The data analysis in this part followed the hierarchical constraints model proposed by Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) which was used as the framework in this study. To briefly reiterate, the model holds that travel constraints can be categorized into three groups with the intrapersonal constraints at the bottom, interpersonal constraints in the middle; and structural constraints on the topmost. This means that generally individuals are aware of the intrapersonal constraints before realising the interpersonal constraints and the structural constraints.

The findings of this study revealed that all of these three groups of travel constraints were found. Figures 1-3 illustrate the summary of travel constraints categorized in each group of three constraints according to the hierarchical constraints model.

(i) Intrapersonal constraints. Included in this group of travel constraints are fear of travelling with certain modes of transportation, language barriers, fear of terrorism and/or natural disaster, and health limitations.

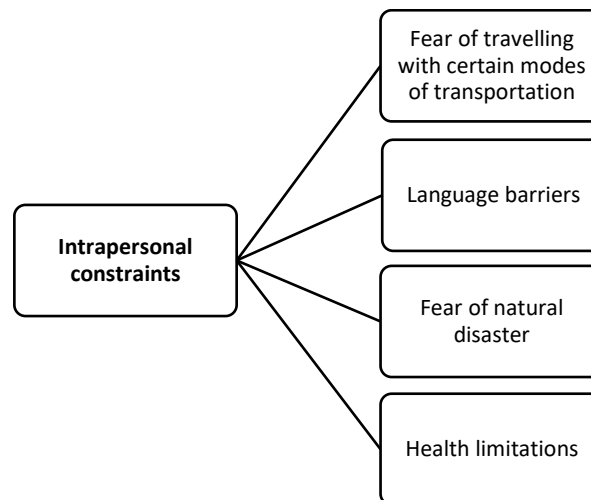


Figure 1: Intrapersonal constraints of taking an outbound volunteer vacation

Language barrier was found to be the most cited intrapersonal constraints encountered by the respondents. In the view of the respondents, they believed that an ability to communicate in English was very significant and necessary for traveling and doing volunteer works abroad. Most of the respondents revealed that they could not communicate in English or their English communication ability was not good enough therefore they were afraid that they would face difficulties during the volunteer trip.

Scare of travelling with a plane was one of the major travel constraints faced by the respondents. Six respondents stated that they were always scare to travel with a plane, especially when taking a long trip. The respondents explained that their fear or anxiety was a result of the accidents news of airplane crash that had often occurred in many parts of the world. They were afraid that they might have to face those accidents if they travel.

Some respondents stated that they did not want to take an oversea volunteer vacation because they were afraid of natural disasters which may occur at the tourist destination. The respondents also explained that they had been heard about the incidents of terrorism and/or natural disasters happening in many countries such as USA, Japan, and some countries in Asia. One respondent said that she would like to participate in a volunteer trip to Japan but recently she had learnt from the news that there were many incidents of natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods occurring in Japan and was afraid that such incidents might happen during the time that she visited.

Some respondents stated that their main travel constraint that prevent them to take an oversea volunteer trip was related to their health condition. They added that they had congenital disorder or medical problems which prevent them to travel a long way from their home.

(ii) Interpersonal constraints. This category of constraints refers to the factors related to interactions with other people that impede Thai tourists to take an outbound volunteer trip. Two main interpersonal constraints were identified: lack of appropriate persons to accompany when travelling, and having family burden

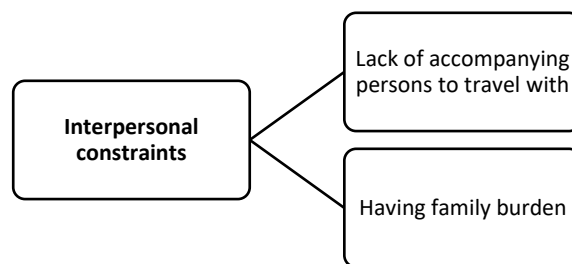


Figure 2: Interpersonal constraints of taking an oversea volunteer trip

Five respondents stated that lack of appropriate accompanying persons to travel with was their main constraints impeding them to take an oversea volunteer tourism. They explained that travelling and doing volunteer work would be fun and meaningful if they could travel with certain persons such as family members, close friends, relatives, or spouse. Many reasons that made them not to take an outbound volunteer trip alone were stated. For some respondents, having right accompanying persons were very important and necessary for travelling and doing volunteer work abroad because these people could make them confident and feel warm during the trip, especially when they knew that they might have to face with difficulties during volunteering in a foreign country. Moreover, travelling with the right persons would prevent them from getting bored, and these people could help them solve problems that might occur during the trip, take pictures for them, support them when they face problems or difficulties, and share experiences. This is illustrated by T13 that

If I don't have friends to go with, I would definitely not travel alone. I always want to do volunteer works abroad with my close friends. If doing alone, I think I will be scared and that trip wouldn't mean anything... I don't want to face problems alone.

Some respondents stated that for them, family burden was a significant constraint. This constraint was found to be a major barrier for the respondents who had to take care their parents who were old or had health problem or their children who were still too little to travel with them. T7 stated about his constrain by saying that

I have a little daughter. She is still a baby therefore I don't want to her to meet a lot of people or to be in a crowded place which is full of diseases. It may be dangerous to my baby...I also don't want to leave her at home and travel with my husband. I think I may be very worried.

(iii) Structural constraints. This category of travel constraints consisted of two factors: having insufficient time to travel, and having insufficient budget to travel.

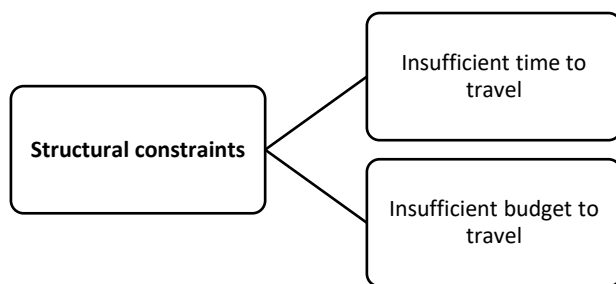


Figure 3: Structural constraints of taking an outbound trip

The factor of having insufficient time to travel was the most cited constraint of taking an outbound trip. Specifically, it was cited by all of the respondents. They similarly stated that they had to spend most of their working or studying which was their major responsibility. In their view, travelling abroad would take a long time, generally around 5-6 days at the least. Therefore, it would be difficult or impossible for them to take a leave for that long.

For the respondents who are the owner of business, they stated that they had to manage their business which normally require most of their time. When being asked why they did not take an oversea trip during long holiday such as during the New Year Day, they said that they did not like to travel during those times, because there were normally a lot of tourists and they had to face with a long queue when used the services. Some said that they had to go to their hometown to visit their family. For example, T28 who is a university student stated that

I have to study from Monday to Friday and have to do a part-time job during the weekend. I cannot take a leave for many days. Actually I would like to travel to South Korea and Japan, but it normally takes 4-5 days which I cannot take a leave for that long.

Having insufficient budget to travel also serves as one of the major travel constraints preventing Thai tourists to travel abroad. Most of the respondents stated that they had to spend their money on other important things such as household expenses, education fee of their children, education fee for themselves, and saving for the future. For them travelling abroad required a lot of money which usually accounted for around 30-50 per cent of their income per month.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal that some of the respondents were aware of all these three groups of travel constraints, while some perceived only one or two groups of travel constraints. This study suggests that the tourist's decision not to travel overseas was not necessary a result of tourists' awareness of all these three groups of travel constraints, on the other hand, such decision could come from tourists' perception of one or two groups of these constraints.

Travel Risks Perceived by Thai People in Undertaking a Volunteer Trip Abroad

Based on the analysis of the data, seven themes of travel risks, as proposed by Tsaur, Tzeng, and Wang (199), were found to influence the perception of the respondents in taking an overseas trip. These themes were discussed below.

- (I) Risks arising from travelling with certain modes of transportation: many respondents stated that when they thought about travelling overseas, they were always scared of travelling with a plane. They added that their fear of travelling with a plane came from having heard the news about plane crashes occurring many times recently. Some respondents also perceived about risks associated with travelling with a car such as car accidents.
- (II) Risks concerning law and order: five respondents stated that they perceived the risks of being attacked or robbed during the trip because tourist attractions were always crowded with people and tourists were usually targets for such crimes. T 21 stated that, "One of my friends have been to France and Italy. She told me that one tourist in her group was robbed by pickpockets and did not realize when it happened".
- (III) Risks concerning health: the perception of these risks were found to be one of the travel risks influencing the decision of the respondents to travel abroad. However, in the view of the respondents, health-related risks were perceived to be associated with specific countries, especially the countries where there were certain kinds of disease outbreaks.

- (IV) Risks related to accommodation: the perception on the risks related to accommodation was also mentioned by some respondents. The analysis of the data showed that this category of risk was found only in some countries such as T21 said that “I don’t want to go to some countries. I have heard that the places are crowded and the hotels are very old and dirty. I don’t want to travel and come back to stay in such a hotel.”
- (V) Risks related to weather: some respondents stated that they did not want to travel abroad, especially to some countries where natural disasters, such as tsunami, earthquake, flood, or storm, used to occur. The respondents also added that they would not go to countries where natural disasters recently occurred because they were scare that the similar incident would occur again.
- (VI) Risks concerning sightseeing spots: these risks include fear of insufficient and dirty toilets, unfamiliar food and beverage, difficulties to find convenient stores and restaurants, being crowded and difficulties to reach the attractions. These risks were also found to impede the respondents to take an oversea trip. Similar to the risks related to accommodation, this category of risk was viewed to be associated with certain countries, not with every country.
- (VII) Risks related to medical support. According to the respondents, they did not want to travel abroad because they were afraid that they would not get prompt and proper medical support at the destination in case that they were sick or got hurt.

V. IMPLICATION

The findings of this study could provide a valuable insight for an outbound tour operator in Thailand as well as other tourism-related businesses on the travel constraints that impede Thai tourists to take an outbound trip. They can use this knowledge to plan and develop strategies to overcome or eliminate these constraints as well as find the appropriate ways to encourage these tourists to travel abroad.

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