

Towards Sustainable Tourism in Thailand: Example of Tourists' Implementation at Heritage Destinations

Akhilesh Trivedi¹

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper were to study tourists' practices at heritage destinations of Thailand, in terms of their sustainable tourism implementation, as well as their tourism behavior at those destinations. The research problem was the deterioration of Thai heritage destinations due to lack of effective sustainable tourism management of tourism stakeholders. The samples of this paper were 400 tourists who were visiting heritage destinations of Thailand, i.e. museums, temples, archaeological sites, historical buildings/cities and world heritage sites. The data was collected by using purposive sampling method and self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire covered all three aspects of sustainable tourism; environmental; economic and socio-cultural. Additionally, descriptive statistic including percentage, mean and standard deviation were utilized to analyze the data. Hypothesis tests were conducted by using statistical techniques t-test and F-test. The research results illustrated that most of the respondents rated actions towards all aspects of sustainable tourism in overall at the degree of moderate implementation. In details, it was found that respondents rated the actions towards environmental aspect at the degree of high implementation. Nevertheless, they rated both the actions towards economic and social-cultural aspects at the same degree of moderate implementation. In testing the hypothesis, the means on the implementation of sustainable tourism at heritage destinations of Thailand were not different at the significant statistical level of 0.05, when classified the respondents according to gender. Consequently, several recommendations were advised for Thai tourism stakeholders in order to provide knowledge and motivate tourists on sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, Tourists, Heritage destinations, Thai Tourism

¹ Dr., Dusit Thani College, Thailand

1. Introduction

The tourism industry has been known as Thailand's major source of income. In 2016, the Thai tourism industry hit the record-breaking performance in the history in terms of both revenue and number of tourist arrivals. According to the preliminary figures, Thailand received tourism revenue around 1.65 trillion Baht or around 46 billion US dollars with growth of 13 percent, and the total number of international visitor arrivals of 32.6 million, which was an increase of 9 percent over 2015. Thailand's top five destinations for international visitors in the year 2016 were Bangkok, Phuket, Chon Buri, Chiang Mai and Surat Thani. International visitors had an average length of stay of roughly 4 days per person per visit, and their average daily expenditure was 4,200 Baht (115 USD) per person (Tourism Authority of Thailand. 2017). This positive tendency resulted from the competitiveness of Thailand, which has an abundance of tourism resources.

Thailand is rightly renowned for its rich cultural heritage, crafted over 700 years. From the friendly earthiness of village life to high arts and performance. A number of cultural heritage sites around the country provide evidence of human settlement during the Neolithic age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. Those are museums, temples, archaeological sites, historical buildings/cities and world heritage sites. UNESCO has promoted some Thai famous heritage destinations to be world heritage destinations. For example Sukhothai, the capital of the first kingdom of Siam, comprises monuments, illustrating the beginnings of Thai architecture, Ayutthaya, the second Siamese capital and was destroyed by the Burmese in the 18th century. Its remains, characterized by eye-catching prang (reliquary towers) and gigantic monasteries, and Ban Chiang, Udon Thani, the most important prehistoric settlement in South-East Asia. It presents the earliest evidence of farming in the region and of the manufacture and use of metals. In addition to cultural and historical sites, Thai food, dance performance, arts and crafts and indeed a laid-back art of living are aspects of culture, which visitors can experience every day (Mekong Responsible Tourism. 2016)

Most of heritage destinations in Thailand are famous among both Thais and foreigners. Therefore, the number of tourists is increasing every year. This has led to the deterioration of the environment due to a lack of preservation measures. Consequently, the Tourism Authority of Thailand and other relevant departments have drawn up the "Sustainable Tourism" regulations in order to preserve tourist attractions in their original condition. (Tourism Authority of Thailand. 2010).

The fundamental importance of the sustainable approach for all types of development including tourism is now universally accepted. (World Tourism Organization.1998) Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-heritage aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability. (World Tourism Organization.2004). Sustainable tourism means tourism, which is economically viable but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of the host community. (Swarbrooke. 1999)

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations. Therefore, it requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them. (World Tourism Organization.2004)

With recognition on the previously mentioned importance of sustainable tourism and the research problem of the deterioration of Thai heritage destinations due to lack of effective sustainable tourism management, the author is interested in conducting the research on foreign tourists' opinions toward their perception on this issue. The results of this research will benefit the relevant parties in promoting sustainable manner for tourists, which will bring about the long-term sustainability to Thailand tourism industry in the future.

2. Objectives of the Research

- 1) To study demographic data of foreign tourists
- 2) To study perception of foreign tourists on sustainable tourism at heritage destinations of Thailand
- 3) To study behavior of foreign tourists on heritage destinations of Thailand
- 4) To study the difference of foreign tourists' perception on sustainable tourism at heritage destinations of Thailand regarding their demographic data
- 5) To study the difference of foreign tourists' behavior on heritage destinations of Thailand regarding their demographic data

3. Literature Review

International tourist arrivals have almost quadrupled over the past 30 years and domestic tourism has intensified in most developed and newly industrialized countries. At the same time, tourist movements have spread geographically to reach practically all countries of the globe, becoming for many of them an important economic sector in terms of income generation, foreign exchange earnings and employment creation. Awareness about sustainability issues—, which referred originally to the natural environment but now also covers the social, economic and cultural spheres as well as the built environment—also developed significantly over those 30 years. Today, most governments, international development agencies, trade associations, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations acknowledge that, without sustainability, there cannot be development that generates benefits to all stakeholders, solves serious and urgent problems such as extreme poverty, and preserves the precious natural and man-made resources on which human prosperity is based. (United Nations Environment Programme. 2005).

In moving towards sustainability, the concept of sustainable management is developed. This concept is generally understood as encompassing three inter- related dimensions: environmental, social and economic sustainability (Adams, 2006) that “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission, 1987). The relative importance of each of these components may change from time to time and in different circumstances, but in the long run each of these must be fulfilled for sustainability to be achieved.

All forms of tourism should strive to be more sustainable. Therefore, making tourism more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing the negative impacts of the industry. Tourism is in a very special position to benefit local communities, economically and socially, and to raise awareness and support for conservation of the environment. Within the tourism sector, economic development and environmental protection should not be seen as opposing forces—they should be pursued hand in hand as aspirations that can and should be mutually reinforcing (United Nations Environment Programme. 2005).

Cultural Heritage Tourism (or just Heritage Tourism) is a branch of tourism oriented towards the cultural heritage of the location where tourism is occurring. The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States defines heritage tourism as “travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past,” (Cultural Heritage Tourism. 2016). Heritage tourism is a burgeoning area of research that was initially construed in simple supply side terms as visited spaces deemed, usually by experts, to constitute or contain the heritage of a destination. This heritage, moreover, was associated with the more distant past, implicating castles, plantation great homes, battlefields, old churches and similar historical phenomena as significant cultural inheritances worthy of protection and presentation (Yale, 1991).

In addition, the heritage tourism is a phenomenon based on tourists' motivations and perceptions rather than on specific site attributes. The alternative definition it provides is based on individual motivation for a given visit, which it is maintained, is more useful for understanding heritage tourism and the management of heritage and historic places. It should thus help clarify the nature of heritage tourism as a phenomenon, which at its core, has not the heritage attributes of a specific site, but rather the motivation to visit it, in relation to both that site's attributes and the tourists' perception of their own heritage (Poria, et.al 2001). Besides, Weaver (2010) stated that the contemporary tourism as commercially viable heritage tourism includes perceptions that it is not marketable, attractive or interesting, and too recent to be construed as 'heritage'. Also pertinent are its rapid destruction and replacement by even newer structures as well as its diversion of resources from 'legitimate'

heritage interests and existing mass tourist markets that include individuals attracted by their own past personal experience with these phenomena.

In conclusion, the historic and cultural resources associated with people, events, or aspects of a community's past give that community its sense of identity and help tell its story. These resources are the most tangible reflections of a community's heritage. The recognition of an area's historic resources can bring about neighborhood revitalization, increased and sustainable tourism, economic development through private investment, and citizenship building (Burns et.al. 2010). Emerging tourist regions which are dependent on heritage resources for a core tourist product (Jarrod and Fyall, 2000; Poria et al., 2001; Aas et al., 2005; Korzay and Alvarez, 2011), present some challenges for heritage tourism management. The heritage dimension often entails a range of potentially difficult characteristics. (Gilmore, Carson, & Ascenção, 2007). It is a product and process that provide society with physical and intangible, movable and immovable attributes that are either inherited from past generations or created in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. From a wider point of view, it can also be seen as production as well as a dynamic process that undergoes continuous change and that has changing values (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016).

The sustainable management of cultural heritage at the service of development bears at least two important dimensions- that of longevity and that of economic, environmental and social viability. Thus in the first instance, the physical aspects of cultural heritage are valued and their continued existence in good condition represents a form of sustainability of heritage management at the service of development. This longevity of cultural heritage can play an important role in building an attractive, confident or bold image of countries both inside and outside their own boundaries, for investors, tourists or their own population. Secondly, no management of cultural heritage is sustainable unless it is economically, environmentally and socially viable. (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2016)

However, the experts considered that the great potential of World Heritage, and heritage in general, for contributing to these three dimensions is still not sufficiently recognized both in developing and developed countries. Indeed, the protection of heritage, as an attribute of natural and cultural diversity, plays a fundamental role in fostering strong communities, supporting the physical and spiritual well-being of its individuals and promoting mutual understanding and peace. Through a variety of goods and services and as a storehouse of knowledge, moreover, a well protected World Heritage property very often contributes directly to livelihoods and sustainable development, intended as a development where each of the three pillars, the environmental, the economic and the social – including intra and intergenerational equity – is given adequate consideration. However, Experience shows, indeed, that an unsustainable development is perhaps the most significant threat to heritage conservation, both in developing and developed countries. In this sense, it can be argued that sustainable development is a development that takes also into account the need to conserve the heritage. Similarly, a sustainable conservation of the heritage will take into account and integrate a concern for the social, economic and environmental dimension of development. (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010)

Ensuring effective management and conservation of cultural and historic heritage sites, tourism policies in this area should focus on, conserving historic and cultural heritage features and effective tourist management. The level of designation and protection varies between countries. Promoting the inclusion of sites on the World Heritage Convention list is appropriate in certain situations. This can include a range of techniques such as spreading and deflecting demand, physical site management, informing tourists about local traditions and local culture before and during the trip. Even, there is no "one-fits-all" solution to address the question of sustainability in tourism management; one key universal message states that in order to succeed in making tourism more sustainable, it is crucial to work hand in hand with all relevant stakeholders, within and outside government (United Nations Environment Programme. 2005).

4. Research Methodology

The research covered foreign tourists' information: gender, age and education. Their perception on sustainable tourism at heritage destinations of Thailand was also studied as well as their behavior on those destinations.

In collecting data of foreign tourists, the authors used a self-administered questionnaire as a research tool. The samples were 400 foreign tourists who have visited heritage destinations of Bangkok, Thailand. Convenience sampling was used to collect data concerning well-known heritage tourist destinations. The data was analyzed using several statistical techniques including frequency, percentage, t-test and F-test.

5. Research Results

Section 1 Demographic data of respondents

The research found that 69% of the respondents were female. 40% were less than 30 years old and 65% held a bachelor degree.

Section 2. Perception of foreign tourists on sustainable tourism at heritage destinations

SUSTAINABLE ASPECTS	\bar{X}	S.D	Degree of Perception
I.ENVIRONMENTAL			
1. Recognize the importance of environmental and natural resources at the heritage destination sites.	3.72	0.75	High
2. Use the least possible amount of non-renewable resources i.e. water, energy etc.	2.62	0.71	Moderate
3. Avoid damage to the environment at the heritage destination sites.	3.46	0.70	High
4. Make positive contributions to the conservation of natural and heritage heritage in order to maintain the world's diversity.	2.86	0.73	Moderate
5. Throw wastage in the dust bins at heritage destination sites.	3.67	0.75	High
6. Do not smoke in the restricted areas of the heritage destination sites.	3.78	0.76	High
7. Follow the rules and regulation at the heritage destination sites.	3.92	0.54	High
Average	3.43	0.73	High
II.ECONOMIC			
1. Recognize economic awareness at heritage destination sites.	3.31	0.53	Moderate
2. Support local economy by purchasing local goods and participating with small local businesses at the heritage destination sites.	3.62	0.61	High
3. Participate in local events of small local businesses.	2.94	0.66	Moderate
4. Support small local businesses that employ local residents.	2.63	0.55	Moderate
5. Minimize negative economic impact at the heritage destination sites.	2.75	0.53	Moderate
Average	3.05	0.50	Moderate

SUSTAINABLE ASPECTS	\bar{X}	S.D	Degree of Perception
III.SOCIO-CULTURAL			
1.Recognize the socio-culture and politics of the communities visited at the heritage destination sites.	2.72	0.71	Moderate
2. Anticipate and respect local cultures, expectations and assumptions at the heritage destination sites.	2.75	0.74	Moderate
3. Contribute to cultural understanding and tolerance at the heritage destination sites.	2.91	0.70	Moderate
4. Support the integrity of local cultures by favoring businesses which conserve cultural and traditional values at the heritage destination sites.	2.95	0.68	Moderate
5. Minimize negative social impact on local community at the heritage destination sites.	2.84	0.66	Moderate
6. Enjoy the cultural exchange while being at heritage destinations and historical sites by being interactive and respectful to local culture.	3.94	0.72	High
7. Find out / ask someone about written information of the heritage destination sites.	2.63	0.60	Moderate
8. Do not climb onto/touch any historical or heritage structure at the heritage destination sites.	3.95	0.61	High
9. Remember not to write on any surfaces at the heritage destination sites.	2.77	0.72	Moderate
10.Do not take any part of the structure with you at the heritage destination sites.	2.65	0.70	Moderate
Average	3.01	0.61	Moderate
Average of All Aspects	3.15	0.58	Moderate

The above table illustrated the perception of the respondents on sustainable tourism at heritage destinations of Thailand. It was found that most of the respondents rated all aspects of sustainable tourism; environmental; economic and socio-cultural in overall at the degree of moderate perception. When considering in details, it was found that respondents rated environmental aspect at the degree of high perception. However, they rated both economic and social-heritage aspects at the same degree of moderate perception.

Section 3. Behavior of respondents on heritage destination of Thailand

It was found that most of the respondents came to visit Thailand at a frequency rate of twice over the last 2 years. The main reasons of visiting were traveling and shopping. Their favorite tourist destinations were heritage destinations and shopping places. Source of travel information was internet and websites. In the future 85% will come back to visit Thailand with the probability of visiting 90%.

Section 4 Hypothesis Test

As for hypothesis test, when classified the respondents according to gender, age, and education, the means on the perception on sustainable tourism at heritage destinations of Thailand were different at the significant statistical level of 0.05. By which the mean of female respondents was higher than of male, the mean of over than 50 years old respondents was higher than those of other age groups were, and the mean of master degree respondents was higher than those of other education levels were.

Moreover, the means on behavior of the respondents on probability to visit Thailand in the future were different at the significant statistical level of 0.05. By which the mean of male respondents was higher than of female, the mean of 30- 39 years old respondents was higher than those of other age groups and the mean of master degree respondents was higher than those of other education levels.

6. Discussion and Recommendation

From the research results, it was revealed that most of respondents who were foreign tourists were less than 30 years old; however, the rest had fallen in a diversified age range between 30 to 50 years old and above. Moreover, most of them held bachelor degrees and some held higher degrees, it is true that tourists that travel around the world were of every age and education level.

In researching about the respondents' perception on sustainable tourism at heritage destination of Thailand, perception actually was a process by which respondents select, organize, and interpret information to form a meaningful picture of the world. (Armstrong and

Kotler. 2000). How that person acts is influenced by his or her perception of the situation. (Kotler. 2006). Therefore, the respondents rated one sub-aspect of sustainable tourism, environmental, at the high degree of perception, which was different from the other two sub-aspects, economic and social-cultural, which were rated at the moderate degree. The difference in rating caused the overall mean of perception to fall in the moderate degree. This result happened because of different respondents had different experience and information about sustainable tourism. Nevertheless, as the respondents rated only the environmental sub-aspect at high degree of perception, this indicated that they had high recognition and more concern with conserving environmental and natural resources. We could see from the means of some items under environmental sub-aspect that had high figures. They were following the rules and regulation at the heritage destination sites, not smoking in the restricted areas of the heritage destination sites, recognizing the importance of environmental and natural resources at the heritage destination sites, throwing wastage in the dust bins at heritage destination sites and avoiding damage to the environment at the heritage destination sites.

Apart from the above sub-items under environmental sub-aspect, which the respondents rated at high degree, they also had more concern on some sub-items under economic and social-cultural. These sub-items were supporting local economy by purchasing local goods and participating with small local businesses at the heritage destination sites, enjoying the cultural exchange while being at heritage destinations and historical sites by being interactive and respectful to local culture and not climbing onto/touching any historical or heritage structure at the heritage destination sites. Their high perception on these sub-items indicated that they had some certain level of awareness on economic and social-cultural aspects; this made them behave in an appropriate manner when they visited heritage destination sites. Additionally, they were also concerned about the rest sub-items at some lower level; therefore, they merely rated them at moderate degree. Thus, the relevant parties who support and supervise the tourism industry should take into action to encourage foreign tourists to participate in sustainable tourism.

According to the research results on behavior of respondents, Thailand tourism parties were very pleased that a high percentage of them would come back to visit Thailand in the future. Their probability of visiting would also very high. This probability assures that the relevant parties will take quick action to provide more knowledge on sustainable tourism to those foreign tourists especially on heritage destinations as those sites are their main reasons of visiting.

In addition, the hypothesis tests illustrated that there were differences in the means on the perception on sustainable tourism at heritage destinations of Thailand and in the means on behavior of the respondents on probability to visit Thailand in the future, regarding all the demographic data of respondents that were studied. This is consistent with the theory of perception that people can form different perceptions on the same stimulus (Armstrong and

Kotler. 2000) and the theory of customer behavior that is influenced by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors (Kotler. 1999)

These hypothesis tests can be guides for the relevant parties in developing particular activities to provide knowledge and motivate foreign tourists on sustainable tourism in consistency with their demographic data.

From the above discussion, the authors then would like to give recommendations to the parties of Thailand tourism that they should undertake the following steps:

1. Form particular organizations to take care of the heritage destinations of Thailand by assigning individual destinations or area-based destinations, so that each heritage destination will be taken care of properly according to their own characteristics and conditions.
2. Allocate sufficient budget for developing activities and projects to serve the improvement on enhancing sustainable tourism knowledge for both domestic and foreign tourists.
3. Plan sustainable tourism for heritage destinations by integrating the overall development schemes. This will ensure that the demands on local resources are assessed together, and the objectives of sustainable tourism are in harmony with those of socio-economic development at heritage destinations. An integrated approach is the key factor for the success of the sustainable tourism.
4. Cooperate with non-government organization groups because they have to play significant role in monitoring and understanding of local environmental conditions and the effect on tourist activities at heritage destinations.
5. Maintain the beauty, along with cleanliness and hygiene at heritage destinations in consistency with natural setting.
6. Hold seminar or meeting for brain storming about improving and developing sustainable tourism to heritage destinations of Thailand. Their opinions will assist relevant parties in determining activities respectively to priority.
7. Hold training courses about sustainable tourism on heritage destinations for travel agents, tour operators, tour guides, hotel personnel, tourist police, government agencies, restaurants managers, academic members and interested people, so that they will have correct knowledge and understand how to promote this approach to domestic and foreign tourists in the right way.
8. Establish exclusive souvenir shops at the exit points of heritage destinations in order to support local arts, culture and craft businesses because they have crucial contributions to the local economy, help in revival of lost arts and practices, and attract tourists as well.
9. Publish colorful and attractive brochures or leaflets to introduce background and history of Thai heritage destinations as well as provide knowledge about sustainable tourism to foreign tourists by distributing those brochures or leaflets at tourist destinations, airports, railway stations, tourist information centers, provincial offices of tourism organization and tourist companies, etc.
10. Contact publishers of tourism magazines and producers of television programs for promoting sustainable tourism approach on heritage destinations to both domestic and foreign tourists. In promoting, they should accentuate Thai art identity and cultural value that is presented through the attractive appearance of Thai heritage destinations, so that tourists will be aware of their appropriate performances toward sustainability while visiting those destinations.
11. Hire website designers to develop own website. The website designers will assist in administrating and updating information of sustainable tourism toward heritage destinations on website. Their own website will be an important channel that provides an opportunity to access both domestic and foreign tourists. These tourists will easily to access online heritage destinations' information and other sustainable tourism knowledge.

12. Approach educational institutions to have students, majoring in tourism, participate in sustainable tourism activities arranged by the relevant parties. They may provide students with sustainable tourism knowledge and practice to deal suitably with domestic and foreign tourists. This will help in building positive attitude and encouraging them to promote Thai identity of heritage destinations and best practices to those tourists. This will bring about sustainability of heritage destinations of Thailand from present generation to the next generation.
13. Hold contest on consistent basis on sustainable tourism of Thai heritage destinations by rewarding the relevant parties who succeeded in maintaining and developing heritage destinations.
14. Have an introductory video on best practices and short history of the heritage destinations of Thailand.
15. Involve private sector for creation of basic infrastructural facilities to maintain a desirable development. Private organizations or trusts may be used to operate at heritage destinations selectively.
16. Develop the luxury and economical lodging facilities near the heritage destinations so that tourists who visit these places are able to stay in close vicinity.
17. Protect the biosphere and minimizing the environmental impact of sustainable tourism on built and physical infrastructure at the heritage destination sites. Sustainable use of resources and compensating the environmental damage and degradation.
18. Conduct regular environmental audits, carrying capacities analysis and tourism impacts assessment to evolve action plan is the need of hour.

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