

Post Covid-19 Travel Behaviour of Thai Tourists in the Northern Region of Thailand

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Abstract

The objectives of this paper are 1) to analyze the behavior of Thai tourists traveling in the northern region in Thailand after Covid-19, and 2) to propose the marketing guidelines of domestic tourism in the northern region by government agencies and entrepreneurs. It is a quantitative study using questionnaire surveys with 400 respondents using convenience sampling in Chiang Mai. The results showed that the northern province that Thai tourists visit the most is Chiang Mai. The post-covid-19 tourist behavior of the Thai people can be described as follows: 1) Thai tourists pay cash for their tourism spending; 2) they travel as free independent travelers, 3) they travel with their families, 4) they use private vehicles, 5) they travel twice a year, 6) they are likely to travel during the weekends, 7) their purpose is for recreation and eating, 8) they like to take pictures, 9) they find travel information mostly from the Internet, and 10) they prefer to spend no more than about 1,001-5,000 baht each trip. The proposed guideline is that tourism businesses and government could use the results from this study for their marketing plan to attract Thai tourists after the Covid-19 pandemic has ceased by offering a value for money travel to the Northern part of Thailand as well as providing more travel information on the Internet to suit with the tourist behaviour in the new generations. It is the study provides insightful managerial implications that many regional tourism sectors in Thailand can adapt for the better tourism marketing.

Keywords: Post Covid-19, Travel Behaviour, Thai Tourist, Northern Region in Thailand

Introduction

During the recent decades, new infectious diseases such as Ebola, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), New Influenza A (H1N1), Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and recently the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) have emerged (Choe, Wang, & Song, 2021; Yu, Park, & Hyun, 2021) and critically affected the global tourism industry (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Compared with

the other epidemics, COVID-19, which was identified in Wuhan, China in late 2019, has spread more rapidly and extensively due to increased globalization and the highly contagious nature of the virus (Zeng, Chen, & Lew, 2020). COVID-19 has caused an unprecedented disruption of population health, everyday life and work, financial resources, and economic systems around the globe (Fotiadis, Polyzos, & Huan, 2021). Although COVID-19 vaccines have been developed and even deployed since early December 2020 (World Health Organization, 2021), the spread of COVID-19 has continued unabated around the world (Foo, Chin, Tan, & Phuah, 2021). Thus, there is currently no accurate estimation of when the COVID-19 pandemic situation will end (Altuntas & Gok, 2021; Zandifar & Badrfam, 2020).

Each time the outbreak of a virus of these types can cause economic damage both during the onset and after the disease is managed such as that experienced during the SARS epidemic in 2003. The economic damage then was not less than 30 billion baht (estimate), and it is estimated from medical data that COVID-19 will cause economic damage of not less than 60 billion baht. The reason for the economic downturn is due to the suspension of travel, but stop spending, stop working, and stop consuming something attitude that is caused by fear is causing the economy to grind to a halt (Idoiga, Berasategi, Eiguren, & Dosil, 2021). Thailand's economic system relies mainly on two activities, tourism and export. If both activities are interrupted for a long time this will cause negative growth nationally, and adversely affect the development of various parts of the country (World Health Organization, 2021).

This pattern is seen in foreign countries, for example, China has announced the cessation of work in schools, universities, government offices, various fresh markets, airports, and hotels, resulting in disinvestment. New development has been stopped as well. It is found that the virus is spread mostly from coughing and sneezing, thus social distancing is part of stopping the spread of the disease. Since the start of 2022 however, there have been some measures taken to relax travel and tourism restrictions by further defining important measures such as social distancing or frequent cleaning, and always wearing a mask (Qiu, Park, Li, & Song, 2020). While these activities adversely affect life behavior and tourism, they should be inevitable until the pandemic is declared finally over. Offsetting this approach are various forecasts such as: First, creating a seamless interface such that the current tourism, political and business economy is contactless as far as possible otherwise there is no way of taking care of yourself or being safe when contacting the police, various hospitals, an embassy, or receiving official information when disaster strikes that may change over time during an emergency (which must be in an international language).

The cleaning and disinfection system of tourist service facilities must be improved (Bufquin, Park, Back, de Souza Meira, & Hight, 2021). For example, there should be a room and service sterilization service, and disinfection systems that may be attached to banknote containers used by customers. In addition, in hotels, the communication system between the guests and service

personnel may need to be via the Internet (Noorashid & Chin, 2021). In the event of an epidemic, more robots will be needed to serve guests; Thirdly, the cashless society must move forward fully in the tourism industry; Fourthly, a shared economy system like Airbnb or homestay may be less popular post pandemic due to distrust of standards, which vary according to the context of the area they are in. If thinking of improvement, this will require higher investment. And the Ministry of Tourism and Sports may itself need additional disaster management standards; And finally, reopening of tourism in the form of a "Travel Bubble" is a new form of tourism in the era of COVID-19. This is based on negotiation between countries that can control the spread of the virus and open travel routes between them without quarantine (State Quarantine) for 14 days (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2021).

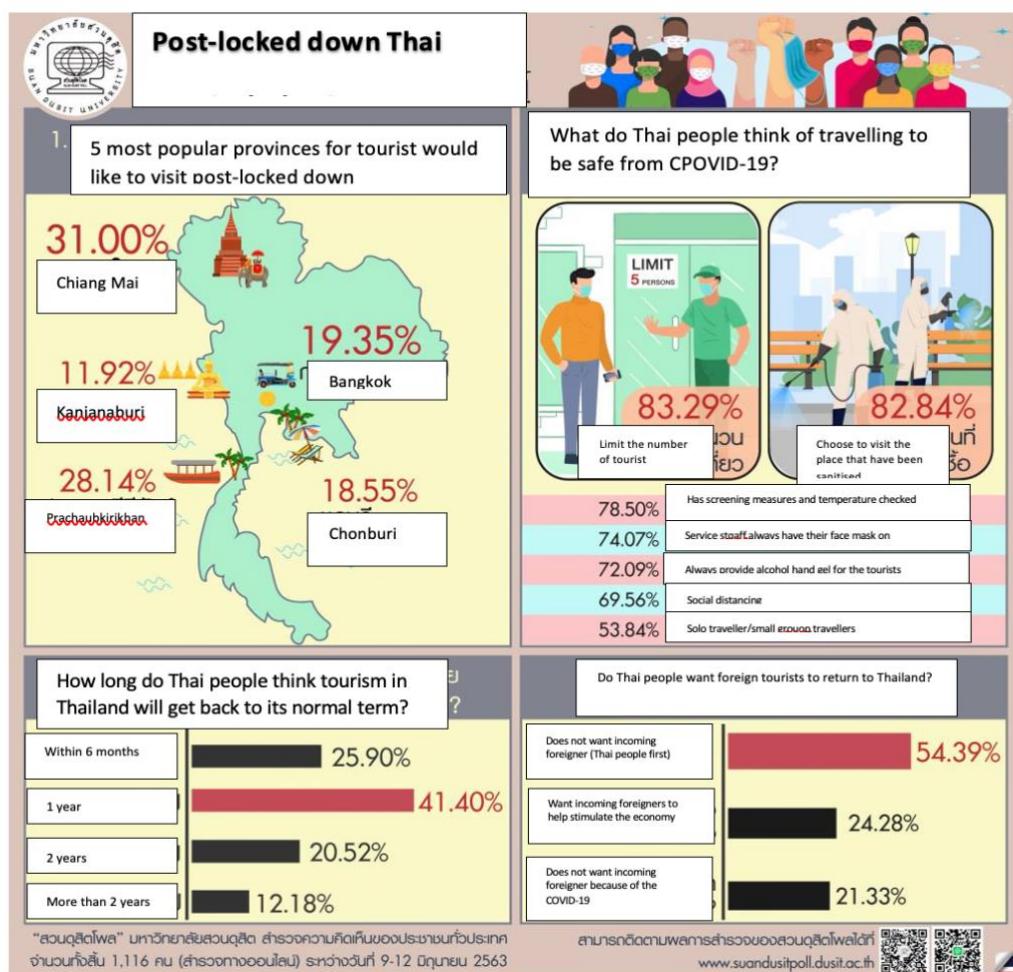


Figure 1. Post locked down Thai tourist behaviour.

Source: Suan Dusit Poll (2020)

A poll carried out by Suan Dusit University surveyed the opinions of people across the country on tourism behaviour after the lockdown is relieved. A total of 1,116 people (online survey) were contacted between June 9-12, 2020, and the results can be summarized as follows:

Question 1: The “five provinces” that people most want to travel to after the government announced the release of lockdown are: The first place was Chiang Mai (31.00%); the second was Prachuap Khiri Khan (28.14%); the third Bangkok (19.35%); the fourth Chonburi (18.55%); and the fifth Kanchanaburi (11.92%).

Question 2: How do people think they should travel to be safe from COVID-19 (percentage of respondents): No.1. Limit the number of tourists to suit the size of each area, 83.29%; No.2. Choose a place that is cleaned, sprayed, disinfected before and after every service 82.84%; No.3. The place has a screening and temperature measurement control system, 78.50%; No.4. Service providers, drivers must wear masks every time while on duty, 74.07%; No.5. Provide disinfectant alcohol gel for tourists, 72.09%; No.6. Put in place social distancing, 69.56%; and No.7. Travel solo or in a small group, 53.84%.

Question 3: How long do people think it will take the tourism situation in Thailand to recover (percentage of respondents)? No.1. 1 year, 41.40%; No.2. Within 6 months, 25.90%; No.3. 2 years, 20.52%; and No.4. Over 2 years, 12.18%.

Question 4: Do people want foreign tourists to come back to Thailand or not (percentage of respondents)? No.1. Don't want them to come in. Would like to invite Thai people to travel in the country first, 54.39%; No.2. Want to visit to stimulate the economy and generate income for the country, 24.28%; No.3. Don't want to come in because of fear of spreading covid-19, 21.33%.

In addition, the guidelines and operational plans of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2021) are divided into three phases: Phase 1: Lockdown Exit consists of “Rebuild-Rebalance-Refresh” preparation. Repair and build supply. Communicate to think of amazing “Trusted Thailand”, Phase 2: Selective Open is the reboot period of Thai Tiew Thai. Open cities, open countries for limited tourism; and Phase 3: Extensive Open is a rebound, opening the country to open the country for sustainable tourism. The new way of life (New Normal) will lead to tourism that is driven by public health principles. Under the concept of “BEST: Thai tourism in a new way;” B or Booking is planning a trip before-during-after traveling. Allocation of passengers Book everything in advance under limited conditions and space management; E for Environment, that is the conservation and preservation of the recovering nature. Tourists participate in socially and environmentally responsible tourism; S for Safety Information for decision making meaning tourists will attach importance to cleanliness, safety, and good hygiene; and T for technology that is essential for tourism that enhances the valuable experience for tourists and improves service potential.

From all the information shown above, tourism can be stimulated by various methods. To recreate tourism, although it is not the same, we must rely on likelihood that the behaviour of Thai tourists will change after the pandemic. In the North, a major tourist attraction of the country that tourists come to travel for nature history, culture, and leisure. So, prepare for good service. Therefore, there must be an understanding of the changing behaviour of tourists, to make the information for marketing planning manageable. The objectives of this research are: (1) To analyze the behavior of

Thai tourists traveling in the northern region in Thailand after Covid-19; and (2) To propose the marketing guidelines of domestic tourism in the northern region by government agencies and entrepreneurs.

Literature Review

Tourism Behavior

The concept of tourism behavior theory is making the root of the problem the behavior of tourists. Thus, there are components of the behavior of tourists to consider (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2005) as follows: (a) The economy consists of income distribution. personal income, exchange rate, size of the economy; (b) The social aspect consists of the population structure. lifestyle changes, and social relevance of families; (c) Technology, including internet, television, transportation, etc; (d) Media influence from media related to tourism or advertising; (e) Market industry product and service development, pricing, strategic planning promotion; and (g) Politics, visa policy, or visa type, political changes, tourism policies, and tourism promotion fund.

In addition, consideration must also be given to knowledge, cognition, perception, and the concept of Maslow's need for motivation in various conditions, whether socially motivated, physical, emotional, personal development or cultural development. They must also consider the internal and external factors of causing tourism. Internal factors are necessities, needs and motivations, perceptions, learning, personality, lifestyle, stressful lifestyle, self-concept, attitude, stress factor from work. income factor time factor condition and health family factor. It also makes them aware of the types of groups or tourists including: (1) tourists traveling in groups; (2) independent traveler tourists, who like to explore wandering tourists; (3) tourists who like to seek out novelty; (4) tourists who like to travel alone; (5) tourists who like to travel to avoid large groups of tourists or traveling with other groups of tourists at the same time, which sometimes travel according to their own values or society (March & Woodside, 2005).

As for tourist behavior, this should be considered according to Morrison's concept. Factors related to behavior are divided into two categories: First, internal factors are needs and motivations, perceptions, personality, lifestyle self-concepts, and attitudes. Second, another important group is those external factors such as culture and subculture, social class, reference group, thought leaders, family consumer demand (black box theory). Without anyone knowing what consumers truly want would mean those who must sell goods and services would have to create stimuli to make consumers want the product or service. However, those who sell products or services will have to wait to receive feedback to consider how they are doing to improve their operations (Angkarangkoon, 2005).

When considering the factors affecting tourist behavior, the concepts can be summarized with components including culture with social class, social factors consisting of reference groups and

families, personal factors consisting of age, occupation, income, lifestyle and personality, and the last is psychological factors that include motivation, perception, learning, and attitude (Kotler & Keller, 2006). It is concluded that tourist behavior is related to travel planning, period of stay, tourist attraction (type of attraction), destination (country, province, city), accommodation, and tourism activities available (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2005). As for the aforementioned, the research framework is as follows.

**Post-COVID-19 Tourist
Behaviour**

- Tourism spending
- Travel characteristics
- Travel companionship
- Travel mode
- Frequency of travel
- Travel period
- Types of tourist attractions
- Tourist activities
- Factor affecting the choice of tourism
- Tourist information search
- Tourism expenditure

The marketing guidelines of
domestic tourism in the
northern region

Figure 2. Research framework

Research Methodology

The researcher collected data through questionnaires with Thai tourists by focusing on perceptions of tourism behavior, and the demand for tourism in the post-Covid-19 period, including the use of social media of tourists to analyze the behavior of Thai tourists. The population sample is 400 domestic tourists in Chiang Mai. The research tool is close-ended questionnaire checked for content validity and passed through the Human Ethics Committee of University of Phayao.

Research Approach and Data Sources

Quantitative research is research that focuses on obtaining numerical data. Research of this nature requires the use of statistical methods to analyze raw data. This is done with different types of statistical tools such as descriptive statistics or inferential statistics and is designed to summarize the results or conclusions obtained as numbers that can be explained, proven, or referenced. Quantitative research tool is validated, and the liability of the information can be checked (Phopruksan, 2013). The questionnaire had been validated with 5 research experts, 2 of whom are from the University of Phayao, 1 from Mae Jo University, 1 from Naresuan University, 1 from Kasetsart University Sriracha Campus. Hence, the researcher had adjusted the questionnaire according to the

comments from experts then pilot test with 30 respondents in Phayao province, who were separated from the actual respondents of this research. The reliability test showed the average alpha co-efficiency of 0.90. Therefore, there were no factor has a result less than 0.70, which considered acceptable (Phopruksanan, 2013).

Data collection and Analysis

The sample size was calculated using the Cochran formula (Cochran, 1977). Estimated the proportion of the population to determine the sample at the 95% confidence level. Traveling in Chiang Mai 956,581 people (statistical data on the number of Thai tourists in Chiang Mai in the year 2020). Therefore, a sample of 369 people was obtained to prevent inaccuracies of information. The researcher therefore increased the sample population to 400 people by means of convenient sampling. The statistics used to analyze the data was descriptive statistics used to describe the data the researcher has collected using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. (Sangpikul, 2013).

Results

Part 1 General Information of the Respondents

A summary of the general information of the respondents in Part 1 can be noted as follows: most of the tourists surveyed were female of 270 people (67.5%). The age range of 21-30 years old of 345 people (86.5%). The education qualification at the bachelor's degree level of 213 (76.1%). There were students of 240 people (60%). They have a monthly income of not more than 10,001 baht of 210 people (52.5%). They are resident or stationed in the northern region of 343 people or 85.7% (as shown in table 1).

Table 1 General Information of the respondents

Information	Frequency (n = 400)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	111	27.7
Female	270	67.5
LGBT	19	4.9
Age range		
Less than or equal to 20 years	6	1.4
21 – 30 years	345	86.5
31 – 40 years	26	6.4
41 – 50 years	18	4.5
51 – 60 years	5	1.2
Education		
Primary school	1	0.4

Information	Frequency (n = 400)	Percentage
High school or equivalent	6	2.1
Bachelor's degree	213	76.1
Postgraduate	60	21.4
Occupation		
Government service	53	13.2
General employee	10	2.4
State enterprise employee	8	2.0
Private company employees	50	12.7
Retire	12	3.0
Student	240	60.0
Online marketing consulting business	10	2.4
Construction contractor	1	0.3
University staff	8	2.0
Government employee	1	0.3
Government employees	1	0.3
Personal business	6	1.4
Income		
Less than 10,001 THB	210	52.5
10,001 – 20,000 THB	85	21.2
20,001 – 30,000 THB	21	5.3
30,001 – 40,000 THB	31	7.7
40,001 – 50,000 THB	25	6.3
50,001 – 60,000 THB	8	2.1
60,0001 – 70,000 THB	3	0.7
More than 70,000 THB	14	3.5
Resident or permanent residence		
Bangkok and surrounding areas	32	7.9
Central region	16	3.9
Eastern region	3	0.7
Northern region	343	85.7
Southern region	2	0.4

Part 2 The Decision-making Behavior of Tourists during the COVID-19 Period

The decision-making behavior of tourists during COVID-19 in terms of their spending showed that many chose cash payments (82.2%), followed by money transfer/QR CORD (56.7%). Twenty-five chose to pay via credit card (27.8%), and 14 used the state welfare card (15.6%) (shown in figure 3).

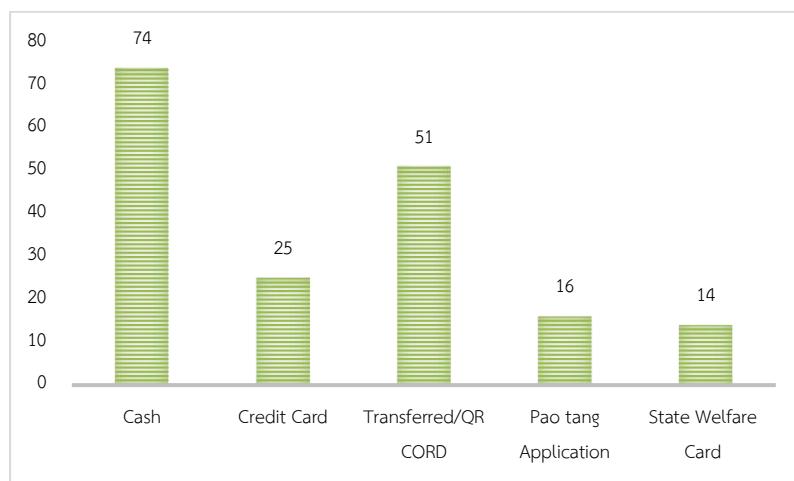


Figure 3. Methods of tourism spending

The decision-making behavior of tourists during the COVID-19 period is seen in the fact that most of them traveled alone or as free independent travelers (FIT) (92%), followed by traveling by tour companies (8%). Other travel patterns included traveling with their families (46.7%), followed by two-three women traveling with friends (14.8%). During the COVID-19 period most tourists chose to travel in private cars (81.3%), and the remainder public transport (9.2 %), and bus or van (4.2%). During the COVID-19 period most tourists traveled a maximum of two times per year, others traveled three times a year (19.8%) or four times a year (7.9%) (as shown in figures 4-7)

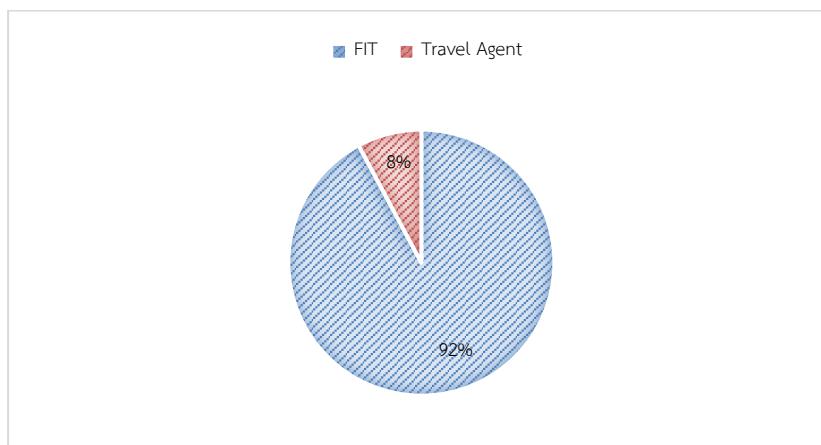


Figure 4. Travel characteristics

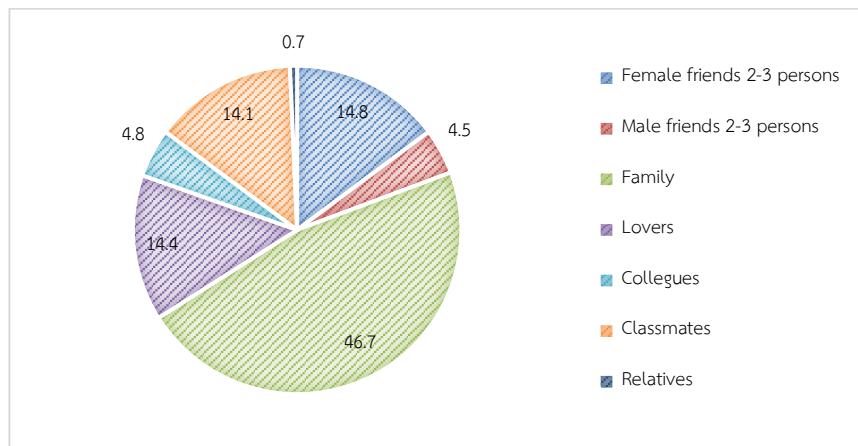


Figure 5. Travel companion

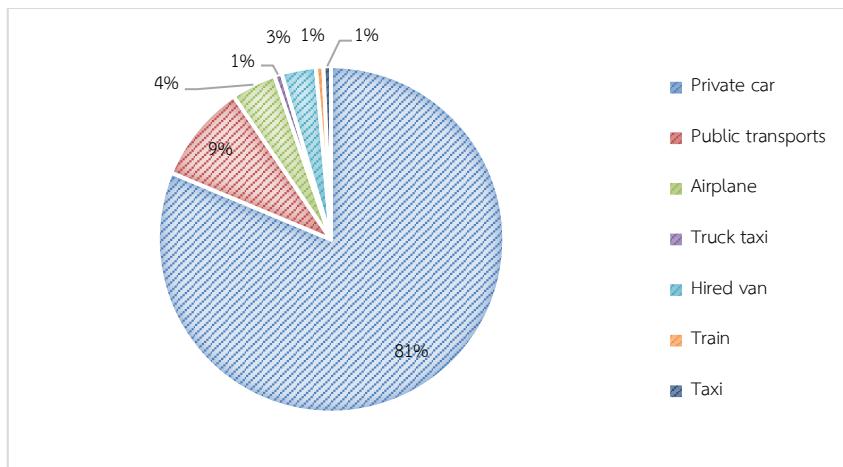


Figure 6. Mode of transportation

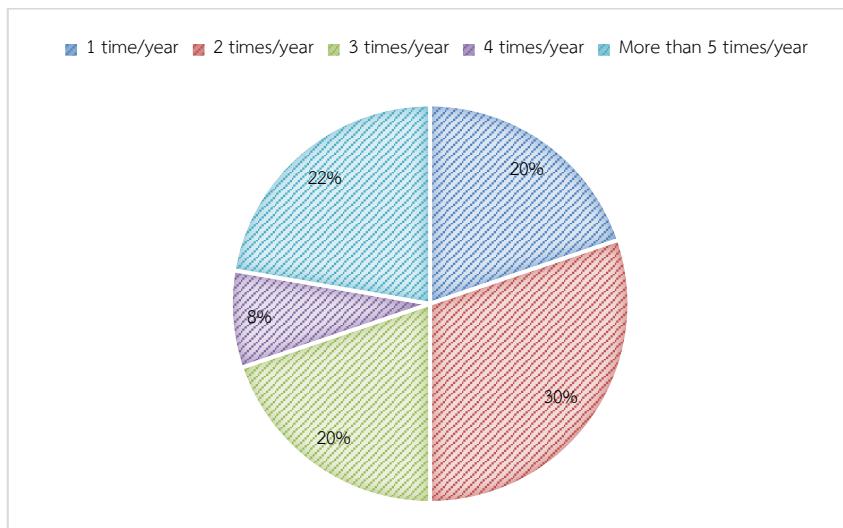


Figure 7. Travel frequency annually

The decision-making behavior of tourists during the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of travel period found that many preferred to travel during weekends (37.8%), on weekdays (22.00%), or during public holidays (19.9%). In terms of type of tourist attractions, this study found that most of the tourists chose to travel in the leisure/dining style (65.6%), followed by cafe tourism (62.2%). As activities hiking, climbing, bird watching, caving, sailing, canoeing, etc., accounted for 40%, followed by central market tours accounting for 31.1%, followed by community tourism (28.9%). Street art tourism (street painting art, wall painting in the community, etc.) attracted 27.8%, and 19 people (21.1%) preferred shopping malls (shown in figures 8-9).

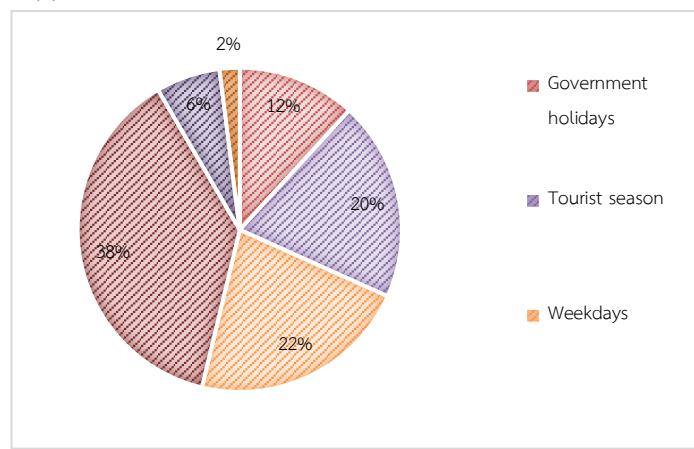


Figure 8. Travel period

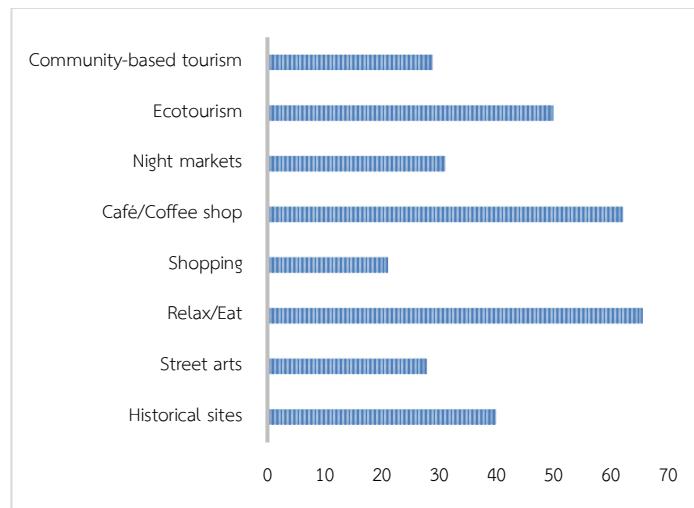


Figure 9. Tourist attractions

Many people also traveled for organized activities related to photography (71.1%), followed by relaxation (65.5%), traveling for food in tourist attractions (63.3%), and religious reasons (52.2%). Of the other reasons identified, 43 people took a trip to buy things (47.8%), community tourism

attracted 30%, trekking and massage (16.7%), and white-water rafting and spa and boating trips (14.4%). Eleven people came to visit a cave (12.2%), and 10% came to fish. Bird watching activities and mountaineering activities both attracted 2.2%, respectively (as shown in figure 10).

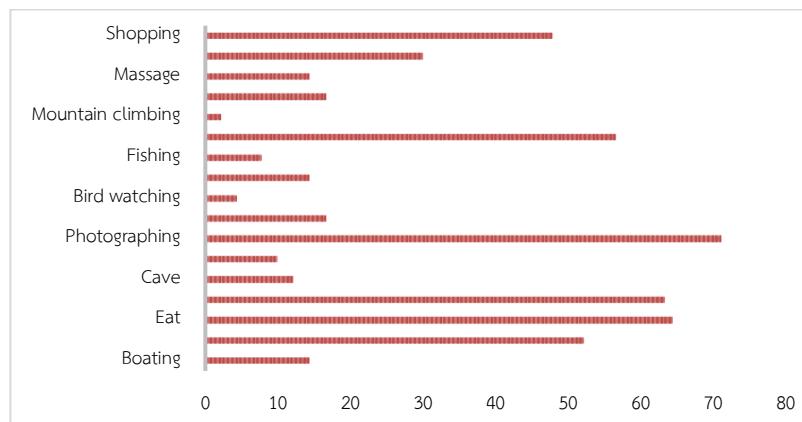


Figure 10. Tourism activities

The decision-making behavior of tourists during the COVID-19 period as a factor affecting the choice of a particular tourism or destination showed that most of the tourists chose places to visit before they traveled (76%) followed by choosing a tourism activity prior to traveling (13%) and 11% selecting accommodation before traveling. To find these activities, the most perceived source of information was from Facebook reviews and posts (77.8%) followed by the Internet (47.8%). 36.7% were invited by friends, 34.4% were YouTubers, 31.4% received information from someone who had traveled before, or from public relations and advertising (16.7%). During the COVID-19 period travel expenses were approximately 1,001 – 5,000 baht for 51.8% of respondents, followed by expenses at around 50,001 – 10,000 baht (20.5%), not more than 1,000 baht for 14.7%, 10,001 baht or more for 8.3%, and others spent 4.7% (as shown in figures 11-12).

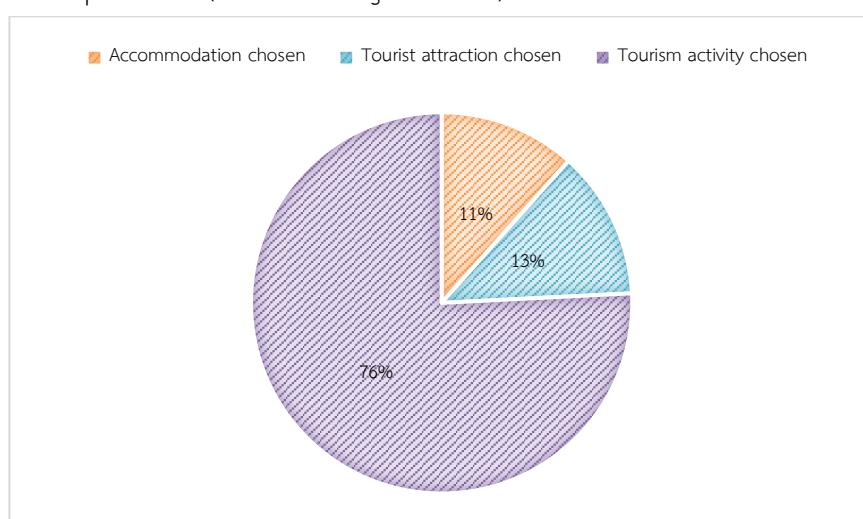


Figure 11. Factor affecting decision making

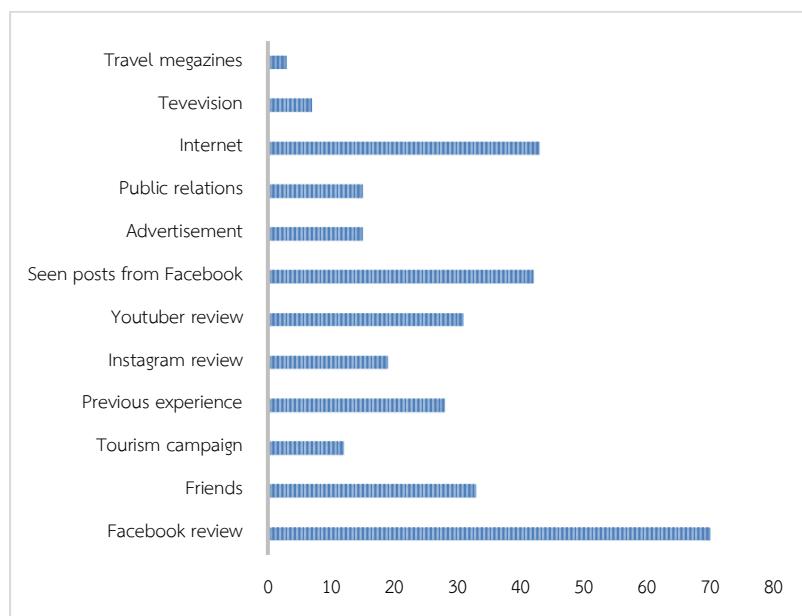


Figure 12. Tourist information source

Part 3. Information on Factors Affecting Tourism Behavior after COVID-19

The results on factors affecting tourism behavior after COVID-19, each aspect can be summarized as follows: in terms of tourism expenses, it was found that tourists have a high level of expenditure on tourism, on average, the results were fairly high at 3.37, in terms of the convenience of each trip they were moderate with an average of 2.99, in terms of the environment of tourist attractions they were at a high level with an average of 4.00, the impact of time on tourism during COVID-19 was at a high level with an average of 3.87. In terms of tourism objectives, the relationship was at a moderate level with an average of 3.09. That data is divided into three parts: Part 1 is receiving images in social media formats, at the most demanding level with an average of 3.91, in the media section at a low level with an average of 2.56 awareness, and in the ad section at a high level with an average of 3.67 respectively.

Conclusions

The results of this study show that, post COVID-19, Thai tourists choose to travel solo (FIT), which agrees with the study from Suan Dusit (Dusit Poll) (suandusitpoll.dusit.ac.th). It also found that more Thai travellers chose to travel by private car than use public transportation, which reflects the safety concern on COVID-19 infection. However, information on factors affecting tourism behavior after COVID-19 on the environment of tourist attractions, showed that Thai tourists perceived the beauty of tourist attractions, cleanliness of the attractions, and the organization of attractions within tourist attractions as three most important factors. These results are in line with the study by Swarbrooke and Horner (2005) on tourist behavior. The proposed

guideline is that tourism businesses and government should offer a value for money travel to the Northern part of Thailand as well as providing more travel information on the Internet to suit with the tourist behaviour in the new generations. This has been confirmed Angkarangkoon, 2005 and Morrison's concept that those who sell products or services will have to wait to receive feedback from their targeted customers to consider how they are doing to improve their operations. The recommendation from this research is that those related organisations and businesses should use the results for their future marketing plan. It is recommended that further research should be done using different research methods as well as adopt it to other regions within the country.

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