

A Study of Tourist Behavior: A Case Study of Independent European Travelers in Bangkok

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Abstract

The main purposes of this research were to investigate the general characteristics and behavior of independent European travelers in Thailand, and to identify the influence of the western socio-cultural background on the behavior of these travelers during the trip. The survey of 100 tourists who visited five major attractions in Bangkok during December 2002 to January 2003 was conducted by accidental sampling method. The qualitative method was also applied in an analytical process based on contemporary tourism philosophy, lifestyle and postmodernism. The study was able to identify common characteristics in terms of travel patterns, travel duration, accommodations, travel companions, source of information, places of interest, preferred activities, motivation, purposes of travel, problems during a journey and the possibility of revisiting. The major findings showed that the tourists still utilized services and facilities provided by tourism institutions although they enjoyed being independent and having the freedom to pursue their interests. Major activities and visited places were based on cultural interests and pleasure orientation. The discussions emphasized Thailand tourism promotion strategy should be adjusted to the changing patterns of consumption behavior of this group of tourists when the new

trend of worldwide tourism has shifted to an individualistic approach.

1. Introduction

Thailand is one of the world's well-known travel destinations. The number of tourists coming to Thailand has been increasing rapidly since 1960, proving that Thailand is internationally recognized as a place for travel and relaxation. The tourism industry has become a major source of revenue for Thailand. Even during the economic crisis in 1997, tourism continued to bring in a large amount of revenue to the country whilst income from other industries decreased. According to the data collected through August 2001 by the World Tourism Organization (WTO), Thailand, along with other Southeast Asian countries, is becoming one of the world's favorite tourist destinations. In terms of number of tourist arrivals, Thailand ranked fourth as a favorite tourist destination in East Asia and the Pacific, following China, Hong Kong and Malaysia.

On the contrary, mass tourism, which involves the movement of large numbers of tourists has contributed to a wide range of social and environmental problems. The new trend of world tourism in the 21st century is an alternate "sustainable tourism", which pays more attention to the local community and environment of the host country, known as ecotourism or green tourism. Mowforth and Munt (1998, p. 53) described that the traditional mass tourism, typically described as the "4Ss"-sun, sea, sand, and sex, is now challenged with the new "3Ts" of sustainable tourism- traveling, trekking and trucking. To promote sustainable tourism and prove its significance, the United Nations declared the year 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism. The concept of ecotourism is emerging and has now been applied with sustainable development policy in many countries.

OLD	NEW
FORDIST Mass Packaged Ss (sun, sea, sand, sex) Unreal Irresponsible (socially, culturally, environmentally) MODERN	POST-FORDIST Individual Unpackaged/flexible Ts (traveling, trekking, trucking) Real Responsible POSTMODERN

Figure 1 Shifts in contemporary tourism.

From *Tourism and Sustainability: New Tourism in the Third World*. (p. 53), by M. Mowforth and I. Munt, 1998, London: Routledge.

In addition to the new trends in the tourism industry, the philosophy of contemporary tourism has shifted from Modernism to Postmodernism, leading to a change in consumption behavior and lifestyle. More tourists tend to travel independently rather than book traditional package tours. The higher number of independent travelers in Thailand corresponds with the increasing number of independent travelers worldwide. Although all independent travelers cannot be classified as practicing sustainable tourism, more of this group is likely to travel ethically than mass tourists in general because they have more leisure time to spend with local communities.

Although the tourism research in Thailand is now increasing, only a few focus on independent travelers. In order to maintain the number of European tourists and attract more independent travelers, it is necessary to study their characteristics and tourist behavior to effectively respond to their demands. This better understanding will strengthen the competitiveness of Thailand tourism in the global tourism market.

2. Statement of the Problems

This research aims at finding answers to the following questions.

1. What are the general characteristics and behaviors of independent European travelers in Thailand?
2. How does a western socio-cultural background influence tourist behavior of the independent European travelers in Thailand?

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are as follows.

1. To identify the general characteristics and behavior of independent European travelers in Thailand
2. To investigate the influence of a western socio-cultural background on behavior of the independent European travelers in Thailand

4. Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the behavior of individual European travelers visiting five areas of Bangkok:

1. The Grand Palace and Tha Chang Pier
2. Wat Phra Chetuphonwimonmangkalam (Wat Pho)
3. The National Museum and Pra Sumen Fort
4. Vimanmek Mansion
5. Bang Lumphu and Khao Sarn Road

In addition, the study will identify behavior pattern of the individual travelers from European countries in general and analyze their behavior according to social and cultural backgrounds.

5. Significance of the Study

The study helps create a better understanding of European travelers' consumer behavior and characteristics. It will enable all sectors in the tourism industry to adjust their strategy effectively to attract this group

of tourists during the shift in trends of the worldwide tourism market. The study will also identify socio-cultural backgrounds, which influence the behavior of independent European travelers in Thailand.

6. Review of Literature

6.1 Tourist Motivation

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

It is one of the most commonly cited theories of motivation in the study of tourist behavior. A.H. Maslow organized the behavior of the individuals according to expressed and subconscious needs. He identified a five-step pyramid of needs: 1) the satisfaction of physiological needs, 2) the need for safety, 3) the need for a sense of belonging and love, 4) the need for esteem, and 5) the need for self-actualization (see Figure 2). Maslow suggested that these needs form a hierarchy. If the lower needs are satisfied, they would no longer motivate and the individual would move up to the next level. However, in his later work, Maslow also stated that the individual did not have to satisfy the needs at one level fully before climbing the ladder to the next step. The individual could be “partially satisfied and dissatisfied at all levels in the hierarchy at the same time”. (Witt & Wright, 1993, p. 35)

Physiological needs	Hunger, thirst, sex, sleep, air, etc.
Safety needs	Freedom from threat of danger; a secure, orderly and predictable environment
Love (social) needs	Feeling of belonging, affectionate relationship, friendship, group membership
Esteem needs	Self-respect, achievement, self-confidence, reputation, recognition, prestige
Need for self-actualization	Self-fulfillment, realizing one's potential

Figure 2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

From “Tourist Motivation: Life after Maslow,” by C. A. Witt and P. L. Wright, 1993, *Choice and demand in tourism*, p. 35, ed. by P Johnson and B. Thomas, 1993, London: Mansell.

Iso-Ahola's Push and Pull Factors

Referring to Iso-Ahola's study found in Witt and Wright (1993, p. 39), there are two main types of push and pull factors, personal and interpersonal. Iso-Ahola also defined leisure travel in terms of escaping and seeking dimension. He explained that people are motivated to seek leisure activities because they want to "both leave behind the personal and/or interpersonal problems of everyday life and to obtain personal and/or interpersonal rewards from participation in the leisure activities concerned." The concept was also clarified by Shaw and Williams (1994, pp. 77-78) when they said that those individuals who have a high level of stimulation in their working lives tend to want to escape stimulation on holiday. On the contrary, people who have lower levels of stimulation at work tend to seek greater novelty and seek stimulation on holiday. The recognition of push and pull factors forms a critical issue in much of the literature. The push factors determine the need for travel, or those that make an individual want to make a journey, while the pull factors tend to affect the choice of travel destination or where to travel.

6.2 Tourist Typology

Tourism researchers create various typologies of the tourist in an attempt to explain lifestyles of the tourists on how and why people differ in tourist behavior.

As cited in Lowyck, Langenhove and Bollaert (1993, pp. 18-27), Stanley C. Plog developed his tourist motivation work based on original work for 16 airline and travel companies. He divided people into psychocentrists and allocentrists. Psychocentrists refer to people who focus their thoughts on small problem areas. They are less adventurous and inward-looking people. They tend to prefer the familiar in travel destination, have low activity levels, enjoy familiar atmosphere and appreciate tour packaging. On the other hand, allocentrists refer to persons whose interest patterns are centered on varied activities. They are outward-looking people who like to take risks and seek adventurous holidays. Plog believed that these people would prefer exotic destinations, less tourist-developed areas, and independent tour arrangements. The 'near-psychocentrists', the 'mid-centrics' and the 'near-allocentrists' are placed between the two extremes. Later, Plog

created an all inclusive typology of all types of tourist, which consists of eight categories as follows:

1. Venturesomeness. This refers to the tourist who is seeking and exploring, and tends to be the first user in terms of travel destinations.
2. Pleasure-seeking. This type means the tourist who desires a considerable amount of luxury and comfort in all aspects of travel, transportation, hotel services and entertainment.
3. Impassivity. For this type of tourist, the trip decision is made very quickly, at the last moment and without planning.
4. Self-confidence. The self-confident tourist is willing to do very different things, reflected in the selection of unusual tour destinations or activities at these destinations.
5. Planfulness. The tourist in this category plans the trip well in advance, but looks more for pre-packaged tour programs than does the previous type.
6. Masculinity. This tourist is action-oriented and seeks outdoor activities in a very traditional way such as fishing, camping, and hunting. Wives are often forced to participate in the outdoors or they are left at home.
7. Intellectualism. This type of tourist refers to an individual who pays a lot of attention to historic and cultural aspects of the holiday destination.
8. People orientation. The people orientation tourist has a desire to have close contact with the people they visit in order to experience various cultures.

Mentioned in the tourism study by Horner and Swarbrooke (1999, pp. 86-87) and Lowyck et al. (1993, pp.16-18), Erik Cohen, the influential sociologist, identified four main types of tourist in 1972 as follows:

1. The organized mass tourists. These tourists are highly dependent on familiar environment and protection. They buy a package holiday to a famous destination and largely prefer to travel around with a large group of other tourists, following an inflexible predetermined itinerary.
2. The individual mass tourists. These tourists buy a looser package that allows them more freedom and autonomy. They are more likely to look for the occasional novel experience. However, they tend to stay off the beaten track but still rely on the formal tourist industry. The experience of novelty is greater than the first group.

3. The explorers. They make their own travel arrangements and set out to avoid contact with other tourists and stay off the beaten track as much as possible. The explorers want to associate with local people they visit, but they will expect a certain level of comfort and security.

4. The drifters. The drifters try to make direct contact with local cultures and try to become accepted. They choose their destinations and accommodations on a whim. Inasmuch as they can, the drifters avoid all contact with the formal tourism industry. Novelty is of great concern.

In addition, Cohen described the first two types of tourists as institutionalized tourists, and the latter two as non-institutionalized tourists. The latter are the pioneers who explore new destinations. The industrialized travelers then follow them when it has become less adventurous and more comfortable to travel there because of the development of infrastructure and facilities.

6.3 Postmodernism

Postmodernism has emerged as an area of academic study since the mid-1980s. Postmodernism is a sociological theory that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology. Very broadly, postmodernism refers to the new cultural styles, which replace modernism, which emerged from scientific and technological advances in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries and led to mass production and the belief in the development of a homogeneous mass market, where everybody would have similar attitudes and tastes. This sociological theory has major implications for the study of consumer behavior in tourism.

The easy way to understand the concept of postmodernism is to compare it with modernism. Owen (1997) described the major differences between the features of socioeconomic modernism and the postmodern condition. He explained modernism in terms of “the structural stability of capitalism, the centrality of class and class-based politics, the primacy of nation-states, and sustainable growth through material production” (pp. 14-15). On the contrary, the main characteristic of postmodernism involves features such as “the increasingly disorganized character of capitalism, the fragmentation of class allegiances, the growth of a culture of consumerism, the development of mass media

and information technologies, shifts in the social production and circulation of knowledge, and the impact of globalization on nation-states and national economies".

Mowforth and Munt (1998) found that postmodernism has been closely linked to the growth of the new middle classes, the key social groups in initiating, transmitting and translating new cultural processes and consumption patterns. The theory of postmodernism suggests that the traditional boundary, such as those upmarket and downmarket leisure activities, are becoming blurred and breaking down. It is based on the idea that in industrialized, developed nations, the basis on which people act as consumers has been transformed in recent years (p. 33).

Lyon (1995) noted three significant characteristics of postmodern consumer behavior as follows:

Consumption and a focus on the production of needs and wants are central.

The altered emphasis from economic and functional to the cultural and aesthetic is clearly visible in the city, the site of cultural shifts.

Consumer culture maybe connected with other cultural phenomena. For example, not only artistic and consumer goods but also intellectual and even religious ones become subject to the market.

To conclude, post-modernism represents the breakdown of the previous structure of society and signifies the replacement of the belief in progress based on scientific rationality by emphasizing choice, a plurality of ideas and viewpoints and the eclectic borrowing and mixing of images from other cultures.

6.4 Postmodernism and Tourist Behavior

The emergence of postmodernism is predicted to have an effect on the tourism industry. It is associated with a society where consumer lifestyles and mass consumption dominate life of people in the post-industrial society.

Parrinello (1996) mentioned the main features of post-modern society particularly relevant to tourism as follows. Firstly, there is a continual increase in the amount of leisure time. People have more freedom of choice, different attitudes to work and free time, including tourism. Secondly, decentralization of production and gradual growth of service sectors are present. Thirdly, mobility has become the key to

the working of the system and the presence of conditions that make spatial mobility more intensive, frenetic and non-stop. Fourthly, ecological threats and awareness, the rediscovery of nature-orientation and the increasing importance thereof are given to places and forms of tourism. Fifthly, growing stress is placed on the quality of new forms of social needs, such as friendship and community life. Lastly, the distribution of information through modern media links every community to today's global village (pp. 56-57).

Horner and Swarbrooke (1999) indicated that tourism is now developing into a series, which is more personalized and adapts to the new awareness of nature and self. The post-modern consumer will require more individualistic and highly developed products. Contrary to modernist consumers, postmodern tourists are showing different behavior patterns and demanding greater choice and variety in tourism products. The postmodern tourists seek out new experiences and will require much more individualistic approaches with more variety and quality. They also suggested that the mass-product and standardized approach to tourism will become increasingly out of date over the next few years. Major concerns for the environment and sustainability are the highest order discourse of post-modernization. The development and popularity of green or eco-tourism underline the post-modern trend in today's worldwide tourism market (p. 221).

7. Methodology

7.1 Subjects

Primary Source is independent European travelers visiting Thailand from December 2002 to January 2003 which mark the beginning of peak season in Thailand. During this time, many European tourists make a journey overseas during the winter vacation. The accidental sampling method was used to select 100 samples in five areas of Bangkok. The objective is to gain in-depth information about the behavior of independent travelers in Thailand.

Secondary Sources are printed materials, guidebooks, reports of TAT (the Tourism Authority of Thailand) from the year 2000, and pamphlets distributed at the Bangkok Tourist Bureau between November 2002 and January 2003. This is to gain an overall picture of tourist

promotion in Thailand, recommended places for traveling, and general travel patterns of independent tourists.

The sample of this research includes

- 1) the data from printed materials and pamphlets,
- 2) 100 samples of independent tourists from Europe.

7.2 Materials

The researcher compiled information from the secondary sources such as pamphlets and TAT reports to understand an overall picture of tourism in European countries. In addition, to study behavior of independent European travelers, data from a primary source was collected by the following methods.

1. Questionnaire: A survey questionnaire consisted of

Part 1: Five close-ended questions on demographic data.

Part 2: Eleven close-ended questions on tourist behavior. The questions focus on travel duration, accommodations, travel companions, travel patterns, sources of information, places of interest and motivation. Some questions were applied from a German study carried out in 1986-1987 on tourists' motivation and behavior during a holiday journey cited in Krippendorf (1984/1999, pp. 30-31).

Part 3: Two open-ended and one close-ended questions about troubles during a journey in Thailand and the possibility of re-visiting Thailand in the future.

2. Interview: An interview with the independent European travelers was unstructured. The objective was to provide an opportunity for the respondents to freely express their attitudes, share experience and give some comments about Thailand tourism in addition to the general questions in the questionnaire. Besides this, an unstructured interview with the officers of the Bangkok Tourist Bureau was conducted to get general background of tourist behavior since most of the visitors there were independent travelers.

3. Observation: This strategy was used to observe the travelers visiting the Bangkok Tourist Bureau.

7.3 Procedures

1. Document: All English-written documents which include pamphlet, brochure, bus and train time tables, Bangkok guide maps,

free travel magazine and other materials published for tourists were collected from the Bangkok Tourist Bureau.

2. Questionnaire: The questionnaire was tested by a survey of 15 tourists on Kao Sarn Road in November 2002. The researcher made some changes before conducting a survey with the real samples in December 2002 to January 2003. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to tourists in five areas of Bangkok: 1) The Grand Palace and Tha Chang Pier, 2) Wat Phra Chetuphonwimonmangkalam, 3) the National Museum and Pra Sumen Fort, 4) Vimanmek Mansion, and 5) Bang Lumphu areas and Khao Sarn Road. Before starting to fill out the questionnaire, the tourists were explained about the objectives of the survey in brief.

3. Interview: An unstructured interview was conducted to gain in-depth information from individual travelers. The interview was conducted after the tourists finished filling the questionnaire. This method was applied to find out other details about their trip, general interests, travel destinations in Thailand and neighboring countries, travel experiences, and promotion of Thailand tourism in their country. For the interview with officers of Bangkok Tourist Bureau, the researcher explained the objectives of the study and asked for details about general characteristics of tourists who came to ask for information and other services at this office.

4. Observation: The researcher observed the independent European travelers who visited the Bangkok Tourist Bureau in December 2002 and January 2003. This observation was undertaken to gain a general background regarding tourist ages, genders, travel companions and places of interest.

8. Data Analysis

The researcher used the SPSS program to analyze data from the questionnaire in descriptive statistics showing percentage and mean. After that, the results of qualitative study gained from documents and in-depth interviews were applied to support in analytical process to explain the characteristics and travel behavior of independent European travelers.

9. Results

Demographic Characteristics

From the survey results, 53 percent of the respondents were male and 46 percent were female. Four age groups were used to categorize the respondents. 40 percent of the tourists were between the ages of 30 and 39. Nearly the same percentage was below 30 years old. The respondents came from 13 countries in Europe. The British and German tourists shared the highest percentage of the respondents. No travelers from Eastern Europe were involved. In terms of marital status, single respondents represented the majority of the tourist at 65 percent, while 22 percent were married. Among the respondents, 34 percent of independent travelers reported that they were company employees and 30 percent indicated their occupation as professionals, namely teachers, engineers, medical doctors, nurses, consultants, commercial analysts, journalists, artists, aroma therapists, acrobatic workers, IT specialists and university personnels.

Tourist Behavior

Number of Visits

More than half of the respondents were visiting Thailand for the first time. A relatively high number of respondents at around 40 percent had previous travel experience in Thailand at least once.

Length of Stay

From the findings, the average length of stay in Thailand is 25.37 days or around three and a half weeks. However, there was a high variety in the durations of stay, which ranged from 3 days to 6 months. This included the stay in any region of the country. However, the duration did not need to be a continual period because some travelers made a short visit before going to another country in the region and then returning to Thailand later. The total length of stay was counted only the days the tourists stayed in Thailand on the entire trip before going back to their country of residence.

Travel Companion

The majority of respondents have at least one travel companion either in pairs or in groups. The highest percentage of respondents (30 percent) traveled with friends or colleagues. Around a quarter of all respondents (24 percent) chose to take a journey alone rather than travel with a travel companion. To investigate by gender, most of the male travelers were unaccompanied. On the contrary, the highest number of female tourists reported that they made a journey with friends or colleagues.

Travel Arrangement

About 60 percent of independent travelers arranged their entire trip by themselves, while around 40 percent used the services of a travel agency. Individual arrangement was frequently chosen by both male and female tourists. In other words, the percentage of male and female travelers who made travel arrangement by themselves was higher than those who used services made available by travel agency. It should be noted that there was not a great difference in preferences of travel arrangements among independent travelers.

Choice of Accommodation

The guesthouse was the most selected accommodation by travelers, followed by hotels, and youth hostels, respectively. However, the guesthouse was not the most popular place between both genders because the highest frequency, 33 percent of male travelers, reported that they chose to stay in hotels. On the other hand, guesthouses were the favorite place to stay among female travelers, chosen 21.2 percent of the time, while only 14.7 percent stayed in hotels.

The preferred accommodation was effected by the reasons for choosing accommodation. Reported by 69 travelers or 22 percent, the price or room rate was the most frequently cited reason affecting decision-making, followed by location at nearly the same percentage. In addition, a high percentage of travelers depended on recommendations by others as well as their satisfaction with the surrounding atmosphere of that place.

Source of Travel Information

The guidebook was the main source of travel information in Thailand that most travelers relied on, most notably *Lonely Planet*, *Le Guide du Routard*, *Rough Guide*, *Stefan Loose Verlag's Guidebook* and *Vis à Vis*. The guidebooks were in English and other languages. Basically, the guidebook provided travel information about location of tourist sites, transportation, guide maps, restaurants, accommodation, and other travel tips. The *Lonely Planet*, which some tourists named "the Bible for independent travelers", was the most popular guidebook among travelers from different countries.

In addition, people are an important source of travel information. A high percentage of travelers gained travel information from friends, colleagues, and relatives. It should also be noted that the Internet was another source of information which independent travelers utilized. The proportion using these was higher than the proportion using tourist information centers and travel agency, which are institutions in the tourism industry.

Preference of Tourist Attraction

To investigate the preferred tourist attractions, the independent travelers were requested to identify general characteristics of locations they visited or planned to visit. The results showed that at least 50 percent of respondents preferred a trip to famous and recommended tourist sites, 36 percent enjoyed traveling to new and rarely visited places, and 14 percent cited both types of attractions. Both male and female travelers preferred traveling to famous places to new locations.

The temple was the most visited place among both male and female tourists. The markets and shopping centers were the second most visited place chosen by 78 persons. Beaches and royal palaces were also major places they enjoyed visiting.

Activities during the Journey

To understand more about behavior of independent travelers and their experiences while traveling, the tourists were requested to choose activities they did during their holidays. The favorite activity was to go sightseeing, identified by 96 persons. The second and third ranks were to try local food and to go to restaurant/go out for a drink. Only a small

percentage reported that they participated in cultural events or folk festivals. A greater percentage of travelers reported that they seek more physically relaxing activities such as sunbathing, lying on the beach, taking a medical bath or getting a massage.

The activities undertaken during their stay reflect the main reason for taking a holiday in Thailand. Although the actual activities may not serve as the ultimate purpose for the visit, the tourists were motivated to behave in certain ways to fulfill their needs.

Tourist Motivation

The highest reason for taking a trip to Thailand, reported by 82 respondents or 78.4 percent of the answers, was to experience other countries and to see the world. The second most frequent reason was to "broaden one's horizons", do something for one's culture and education as indicated by 74 respondents or 70.7 percent. Other main reasons were to leave behind their everyday life and environment such as *to get sunshine, to escape from bad weather, to get away from everyday life, have a change of scene, to switch off and relax.*

Problems during the Journey

Only 28 percent of the tourists indicated that they had had problems and inconveniences during the journey. More than half of the respondents had not encountered difficult situations. From the interview, the problems and inconveniences could be categorized into four groups: language, people, environment and information. The majority (42.86 percent) of problems concerned the interaction with local people. These problems included difficulties in dealing with dishonest and aggressive businesspersons especially at tourist sites. For example, they were overcharged by vendors and taxi or tuk-tuk drivers. It should be noted that the language barrier or communication problem was not the major cause of any problems reported by the tourists, even if many Thais do not speak English. The travelers rarely mentioned problems with information or environment. In terms of information, some cited that it was difficult to find a reliable travel information center which could provide complete information about local areas. Information about public transportation was not sufficient. Environmental complaints were overcrowded tourist sites and pollution. Other

troubles included mosquitoes, robbery in hotels, inconvenience due to on-line booking, and food poisoning caused by contaminated food and drinking water.

Possibility of Revisit

The majority of respondents replied that they wanted to return to Thailand again. Only 13 percent were unsure because of different personal reasons. For example, they may have visited Thailand many times and wanted to experience other countries in the world. Some tourists answered that they would come back again if they had had a relaxing time with no hassles. Factors motivating them to revisit were 1) hospitality, friendliness and different mentality of the local people, 2) exotic location and interesting cultural aspects, 3) nice weather, beautiful landscape and relaxing atmosphere, 4) delicious food, 5) a gateway to depart to other Southeast Asian countries, 6) a good place for shopping, low cost travel and high value for their money, 7) safety and 8) no Visa requirements. Some travelers indicated more details such as "*(because) I liked the massage course at Wat Pho*", "*A fantastic holiday country with friendly people*," "*(I want) to find a nice place to stay, without mass tourism, skyscrapers*."

Comments

Comments from the travelers mainly focused on overcrowded tourist sites and beaches such as Koh Chang. As the survey was conducted during the peak season in Thailand, many tourists complained that they hardly found a quiet place to stay and relax as they had expected to. The following are some opinions of the travelers:

- "*If tourism is left to develop at the rate it is, it will spoil a very beautiful country*". (Comment made by a British tourist who had experienced in Thailand before)
- "*Thailand is becoming a place where too many tourists come without respecting and impose their cultures on the locals*". (Comment made by a French man who had visited Thailand ten years ago)
- "*Some people are smiling much more for money than for human contact*".
- "*Koh Pha-ngan was influenced by all the drugs*".
- "*Thailand is losing much authenticity because of too much tourism development, which is not really well managed*".

- *The main sightseeing points should be open longer.*
- *There should be an identification card to differentiate government-run information centers from private travel agencies. This will help tourists to make a judgement on information provided.*

10. Discussions and Conclusion

Most of the independent travelers who made a journey to Thailand were aged between 20 and 40 years old. The average length of stay in Thailand for one trip was around three and a half weeks. The majority of the tourists were from Western Europe, especially England and Germany. Most of the tourists were single and had a permanent occupation, either working for an organization or self-employed. They mostly made a journey during a long vacation from work. The journey was a chance to free them from the routine environment in the more enjoyable and relaxing atmosphere as well as an opportunity to broaden their horizons. The majority were visiting Thailand for the first time. Around 40 percent of independent travelers had previous experience in Thailand. Most of the tourists wanted to make a trip to Thailand again in the future.

Although the travelers did not want to join a group tour arranged by travel agencies, they still utilized the services and facilities provided by tourism institutions. This can mean that most of the independent European travelers were the Individual Mass Tourists rather than the Explorers or the Drifters. The long length of stay in Thailand affected the use of time during the trip. The travelers had enough time to stay or move to different places whenever they wanted. The schedule was flexible and could be changed anytime by own judgments and convenience. For this reason, they had more chances to observe or interact with locals. A longer length of stay could provide more time to relax and more variety of activities.

The accommodation most popular within dependent travelers was the guesthouse. The major reasons for choosing accommodation were reasonable price and location. It should be noted that service quality and facilities were rarely cited as the major reason, partly because they spent more time traveling around and tried to budget for the length

of their trip. However, the overall atmosphere and recommendation from other people or guidebooks also played an important role in decision-making. More independent tourists today chose to stay in the hotels because of the affordable room rates, relaxing atmosphere and facilities provided which, they said, were worth the money on a long holiday.

The sources of travel information for independent travelers were mainly non-institutional, coming mainly from guidebooks and people. They depended on the recommendation of individuals rather than formal promotion by institutionalized sources like travel agencies or tourist information centers. The impact of globalization also changes the consumption patterns of travelers. The tourists utilize the new information technologies, especially the Internet, to acquire travel information, find new destination, share travel experiences, and prepare themselves for the new exploration of the real world. This is the intensive individual approach to travel information in the new era. It also signifies that travelers rely on and learn from experiences of other tourists. They value the plurality of ideas or viewpoints of people from different cultural backgrounds-major characteristics of postmodernism. On the contrary, tourism institutions only provide basic information such as guide maps, where to go, how to get there, what to see, and formal promotion when they are available. In addition, the formal sources of information do not provide travel skills or tips they need. Consequently, they simply utilize other forms of services provided by travel institutions in the growth of travel industry worldwide, such as booking transportation, accommodation, and free-time package tours. These services can facilitate the tourists and save time during the journey.

In terms of activities and motivation, the independent travelers chose to visit Thailand in order to fulfill both physiological needs and the needs for self-esteem. The major activities and visited places were based on cultural interests and pleasure. The results of the survey proved that the major places they visited were not only cultural tourist attractions like temples and royal palaces, but also natural tourist attractions. For these reasons, the European travelers could be categorized into two major groups by nature of interests. The first group was the culture-oriented travelers, whose major interests were to experience the world, broaden their perspectives, and learn cultural

aspects of different nations. The second group was the pleasure-oriented travelers who enjoyed relaxing activities requiring less physical strength and stayed in pleasant environments and nature. Although these two groups may have different major interests, they shared the same characteristics. That is to say, the independent travelers enjoyed freedom and being independent. They preferred managing their own leisure time with minimum assistance from tourism institutions. By the same token, the European travelers chose overseas travel as a learning process to broaden their perspectives towards the world and life. They were eager to face cross-cultural differences and to learn of new aspects of life from individual experiences. The challenges and difficulties were parts of new experience and real-life lessons, some of which were hardly found in the ordinary routine of work and frenetic life in their own society.

The study of general characteristics of independent European travelers could identify the major travel patterns and preferred activities in Thailand. The western socio-cultural background has an influence on their behavior during the journey. The overall picture of tourist behavior can be a guideline for tourism development in the areas which serve the requirement of visitors and maintain the cultural heritage and natural beauty of Thailand in the long run. Since the new trend of tourism is based on an individualistic approach, a marketing plan and promotion strategy should be adjusted to the changing patterns of tourist behavior. Niche market and e-commerce have a tendency to grow because they can serve a variety of consumption pattern and lifestyles. The problems with dishonesty and crassness of vendors, hassle from tuk-tuk and taxi drivers as well as the inadequate control of tourist numbers in overcrowded tourist areas may lessen the charm of Thailand and affect the attitudes towards Thai people in general. The utmost benefits of tourism research go towards achieving improved competitiveness in the worldwide travel market and sustainable development of the country.

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