



# An investigation of major aspects influencing domestic tourists' choosing of upscale hotels in Phuket during COVID-19

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## Abstract

Phuket is one of the most successful tourist destinations in Thailand but has been heavily impacted by COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 resulted in Phuket's 2020 tourist arrivals falling to just 4 million and its revenue to 108 billion baht (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2021). For many years, hospitality and tourism have been the growth drivers of Phuket's economy. Consequently, the objective of this study is to investigate the deterministic factors for selecting an upscale hotel during the pandemic. A quantitative approach was adopted employing over 420 usable questionnaires that were completed at three tourist destinations in Phuket. Then, data analysis of descriptive statistics was used to determine tourists' characteristics and behavior while inferential statistics of factor analysis was used to investigate meaningful relationships between variables. Furthermore, a binary logistic regression was implemented to investigate the hotel factors that influenced the possibility of upscale hotel selection. The results indicated that hotel service and facilities, hotel image and reputation, and hotel location and design have a significant impact on the selection of an upscale hotel. According to the findings, the upscale hotel must emphasize for the customer positive perceptions of hotel service and facilities, the hotel's image and reputation, and the hotel's location and design to attract domestic tourists during the pandemic. Furthermore, the outcome of this study would provide insights into the needs of domestic tourists in Phuket, enabling the hospitality and tourism industries to provide appropriate products and services.

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## Introduction

Thailand has grown in popularity as a tourist destination for visitors from all over the world. Tourism contributed 16 percent of GDP in 2019, with international tourists accounting for 61 percent of that revenue while domestic tourists accounted for 39 percent (Krungthai compass, 2020). This indicates that tourism is very important to the growth of the Thai economy, particularly the arrival of foreign tourists. The COVID-19 pandemic, which originated in Wuhan, China, is currently the greatest global threat. A nationwide state of emergency was declared in Thailand and borders were closed in order to stop the spread of COVID-19. Thailand's tourism industry was threatened by border closures and travel restrictions that have seen the number of international tourist arrivals to Thailand drop by 83.21 percent in 2020 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2021). With regard to attracting tourists from other countries, Phuket is Thailand's most successful tourism destination, but has been seriously damaged by COVID-19. According to government statistics, Phuket's 2020 tourist arrivals were reduced to only 4 million, a 72 percent decline, and revenue decreased to 108 billion baht, a 75 percent decline from 2019 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2021). As to supply, Phuket had approximately 86,000 hotel rooms in 2020, which were dispersed among a variety of budget, middle scale, upscale, and luxury properties throughout the island, with approximately 22,450 rooms in the luxury and upscale sectors. In recent years, the upscale and luxury sectors appear to be attracting an increasing number of investors to the island. By 2021, the supply of luxury and upscale accommodations reached 23,565 rooms, a 3 percent increase year on year. This indicates that hotel investors and operators have confidence in the island's hospitality sector recovery even though the hotel's average daily rate (ADR) dropped to 2,343 THB, a new record, in the first half of 2021 (Martinez, 2021). Moreover, the Bangkok Post (2022) reports that in the second half of 2021, the luxury and upscale hotel market's ADR was marginally improved by 8 percent as a result of the re-opening policy, resulting in an ADR of approximately 2,442 THB per night. This study estimated a room rate of more than 2,001 THB per night, which was deemed an upscale hotel for the purposes of this study.

During the pandemic, Thailand's government launched a campaign encouraging Thai residents to travel together in order to boost domestic tourism. The "Travel Together" campaign provided government subsidy to

encourage Thai domestic tourists to travel together in Thailand, by covering 40 percent of their travel expenses. According to research, the Travel Together campaign was projected to help Thailand generate approximately 3.6 to 6.2 billion baht more in tourism revenue (Krungthai compass, 2020). This indicates that, despite the epidemic, tourism is crucial to the majority of people's lives today. This Travel Together campaign helped Phuket businesses thrive by increasing occupancy and raising over 100 million baht for Phuket tourism (The Phuket News, 2020). In terms of supply support, the Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration (SHA) project has been a collaboration between the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Ministry of Public Health, and the Thailand Tourism Authority. The purpose has been to assist tourism entrepreneurs and to build confidence through tourism protocol. SHA provides certification for hospitality and tourism entrepreneurs to improve their products and services to a high and controlled standard of hygiene and sanitation to control the spread of COVID-19 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2021). Tourism organizations in Thailand have demonstrated that, in the context of the changing circumstances, Thailand tourism must take into consideration the assurance of safety and hygiene.

Based on a review of relevant literature, it was discovered that several studies on hotel selection have been conducted across the world with significant factors such as hotel safety and security, value for money, location, and so on, have been found to be given various degrees of importance. However, the coronavirus-caused global pandemic has greatly disrupted people's normal routine, value, and economic concerns. A recent study indicated that cleanliness and hygiene, safety and security, and economic expenditure appear to be the factors most influencing hotel selection during an outbreak (Awan et al., 2020; Ivanova et al., 2020; Shin & Kang, 2020; Spoerr, 2020; Stansbury et al., 2021). Regardless of the fact that several previous studies on hotel selection in other locations were conducted, there is no study on upscale hotel selection in Phuket impacted by the outbreak. This paper attempts to investigate the deterministic factors for upscale hotel selection in Phuket throughout the pandemic.

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## Literature Review

Throughout history, arranging appropriate accommodation while travelling has always been a major challenge. An important part of planning any trip involves selecting an

appropriate place to stay. When selecting a hotel, travelers must consider several factors, including safety, price, cleanliness, facilities, location, value for money, etc. One study discovered that tourists perceived hotel attributes as an important factor in hotel selection; thus, tourists expend considerable effort in choosing hotels by considering hotel attributes and aspects, which seem to be dynamic and variable (Soulidou et al., 2018). In addition, tourists' interests, perspectives, needs, and wants might shift throughout time as a result of environmental and social change (Tsai et al., 2009).

Precautions for *health and sanitation* have grown in importance and influenced travel demand during the outbreak (Ivanova et al., 2020). One survey showed that one of the most essential considerations in deciding on a hotel in Greece is cleanliness, price, hotel reputation and marketing (Soulidou et al., 2018). Similar findings were found in Spoerr (2020) research, which indicated that cleanliness is a significant factor to consider when selecting a hotel in Germany. Likewise, Shin and Kang's (2020) study revealed that cleanliness had an influence on perceived health protection to attract hotel visitors during an outbreak. In Bulgaria, Ivanova et al. (2020) discovered that hygiene, disinfection, and a trustworthy health system are enablers of travel behavior and decision-making during pandemics. Awan et al. (2020) stated that cleanliness was a determining factor in the hotel industry's service redesign in Malaysia during COVID-19. Another study demonstrated that cleanliness and health measures, clear and frequent communication, and customer flexibility are important determinants of travelers' reactions to the pandemic (Stansbury et al., 2021). Numerous studies have proven that cleanliness and hygiene are essential requirements for travelers during this outbreak.

In addition, the *pricing* of accommodation is a significant factor for travelers when choosing accommodation. According to a study by Chan and Wong (2006), hotel pricing in Hong Kong is more aggressive due to the highly competitive structure of large supply, with cut-rate pricing strategies being used to secure favorable room occupancy. Elsewhere in Germany, analysis indicated that the most important hotel selection factors for leisure travelers are economic value, cleanliness, and security (Spoerr, 2020). Furthermore, the findings of the study by Siantar and Joye (2020), price guarantee with discount, flexibility in booking, and safety are the most significant factors to consider when choosing a hotel during a pandemic.

One of the critical deterministic factors is *safety and security*, which are frequently considered interchangeable.

Hotel safety focuses on protecting guest and employee from harm and death, whereas hotel security refers to protecting guests' personal belongings and maintaining hotel property safe from theft and crime (Enz, 2009). According to a study by Lee et al. (2010), safety & security was found to be the most important determinant for hotel selection in Korea. Tsai et al. (2009) found that leisure travelers are most concerned about safety & security, value for money, and cleanliness of hotel while traveling to Hongkong. Chebli and Ben Said's (2020) recent study discovered that tourist consumption behavior can be influenced by concerns about personal safety, economic expenditure, conviction, and attitude as a consequence of COVID-19. Meanwhile, research conducted in Indonesia discovered that tourists appear to be concerned about the safety and cleanliness in their travels during COVID-19 (Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020). Furthermore, Pappas and Glyptou (2021) discovered that health and safety, price quality, aspects of risk, quality related to health and safety are tourist decision determinant attributes influencing their accommodation purchasing preference during COVID-19.

A hotel's tangible attributes including *hotel facilities, front desk and room features* etc. seem to contribute to a higher level of guest satisfaction but are less important for hotel selection in Korea (Kim et al., 2019). According to the significant findings of Chu and Choi's (2000) study, both business and leisure travelers in Hong Kong chose hotels based on room and front desk facilities, followed by security. As important factors of hotel selection in Hong Kong, Asian visitors valued hotel facilities and security, whereas western tourists emphasized cleanliness and ambience. Xue and Cox's (2008) study has confirmed that Chinese business travelers seem to perceive front desk service, image, security, and common facilities are most important when selecting a hotel, while western business travelers agreed that the most desired attribute is hotel location. Additionally, Jones and Chen (2011) suggested that non-smoking, a swimming pool, high-speed internet, a hot tub, a fitness center, room service, and a set pricing range were the most preferred hotel attributes based on online behavior of leisure tourists in Las Vegas. Several studies have found that hotel tangible attributes are an important consideration for a wide range of travelers, particularly Asians and business travelers.

*Employee quality* seems to have a role in increasing customer satisfaction. According to Qu et al. (2000), the quality of staff performance, room amenities, and value for money are all important factors in determining tourists' satisfaction while choosing a hotel in Hong Kong. Similarly, Dolnicar (2002) stated that the

friendliness of the employees is a significant factor in Hong Kong hotel selection. Mainland Chinese travelers place a high value on staff attentiveness and courtesy when selecting a hotel, as proven by the study by Tsai et al. (2009). A study in Hong Kong confirmed that convenience of location and excellent hotel service are the most influential attributes for leisure tourists, even when hotel pricing is not considered (Chan & Wong, 2006). This was reinforced by research from the tourists' perspective in the hotel selection study, which indicates that the most significant hotel attribute for over six years of hotel review is the staff, which contributes to improved customer satisfaction (Jang et al., 2018) while domestic travelers in Danang, Vietnam emphasize hotel location, staff quality, and safety when making hotel decisions (Tuan, 2019).

The location of a hotel is crucially important in many geographical areas and is permanent. According to Yusoff and Abdullah (2010), location, cleanliness, and service attributes were identified as factors of hotel choosing in Malaysia by Middle Eastern visitors. As shown in research done by Baruca and Civre (2012), location and hotel pricing were the most important criteria influencing international guests' hotel selection on the Slovenian coast. A study encompassing 21 published studies and 173 hotel characteristics conducted by Dolnicar and Otter (2013) discovered that the three most essential qualities for hotel choosing are a convenient location, service quality, and reputation. When choosing a hotel in Danang, Vietnam, domestic guests prioritize hotel location, staff quality, and safety (Tuan, 2019).

A good *hotel image and reputation* seem to provide a competitive advantage to business, especially in the advanced technology era. The Lee et al. (2010) study found that safety, ease of access, and close connection to attractions seem to be key requirements for hotel selection in Korea. The study also suggests that if the hotel has a weak location, a good reputation and a customer loyalty program could attract a better segment of customers.

According to Huang and Patrick (2010), baby boomers, who are one of the oldest generations, reach retirement age with more discretionary time and income. Generation X is approaching its peak earning year and is expected to have greater purchasing power. Moreover, the study about generation X tourist behavior by Sima (2016) found that generation X tourists are the primary target market for full-service and chain hotels, as they seek the best hotel facilities, including flat-screen televisions, spacious bathtubs, swimming pools, yoga service, rooftop bars, and full service. It could be argued that Generation X, Baby boomer tourists have the

financial means to afford a higher level of accommodation while on vacation.

A higher education can lead to increased employment and earnings. The study found that bachelor's degree holders were likely to have better earnings and a 3.5 times lower poverty rate than high school degree holders (Edelson, 2022). It could be argued that a person who holds at least a bachelor's degree has the ability to afford better products and services.

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## Methodology

### *Research Instrument*

The research instrument used for data collection was a self-administrated questionnaire (SPSS version 26; SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). The first section of the questionnaire was designed to identify tourist characteristics of the respondents. The second section of the questionnaire was to identify the tourist behavior of the respondents. The final section indicated the measured level of importance of hotel attributes for hotel selection in Phuket during the pandemic, which consisted of 35 hotel attributes based on the literature review (Awan et al., 2020; Chan & Wong, 2006; Ivanova et al., 2020; Jones & Chen, 2011; Lee et al., 2010; Qu et al., 2000; Shin & Kang, 2020; Siantar & Joye, 2020; Soulidou et al., 2018; Spoerr, 2020; Stansbury et al., 2021; Tsai et al., 2009; Tuan, 2019; Xue & Cox, 2008; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2010). The self-administrated questionnaire was structured to be closed-ended and straightforward questions with checklist, multiple-choice, and Likert scale response strategies. The important 35 hotel attributes were rated using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). The self-administrated questionnaire was available both online and as a paper self-administrated questionnaire in both Thai and English languages. Additionally, this study has been approved for human research ethics by the Center for Social and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board at Prince of Songkla University on October 4, 2021.

### *Data Collection*

A pilot test study was conducted at two popular tourist destinations in Phuket (Patong Beach and Promthep Cape) with 40 respondents and a Cronbach's alpha of .927. The sample for this study consisted of tourists who visited Phuket staying overnight. A quota sampling method was used to sample equally from

Phuket's popular tourist destinations (Patong Beach, Phuket Town, and Promthep Cape) under a social distancing policy to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The data collection was conducted during October 2021 with a total 420 responses.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study includes both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics include mean, percentage, and standard deviations to analyze the characteristics of tourists, tourists' behavior, and hotel attributes while inferential statistics of factor analysis with VARIMAX rotation was employed on 35 important hotel attributes. The factor loadings, eigenvalues, and percentage of variance explained were used to determine whether an attribute should be included in a factor. A significant attribute would be the factor loadings equal to or greater than 0.40,

eigenvalues equal to or greater than 1 and the percentage of variance at least 60 percent of total variance were included in analysis. Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the measures, and only variables with coefficients greater than or equal to 0.60 (Hair et al., 2014). Moreover, an inferential statistic of a binary regression was used to determine the influence of the hotel factor on the likelihood of selecting an accommodation based on the room rate. The following Equation (1) was implemented for analysis:

$$\text{RATE} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{SAFE} + \beta_2 \text{CLEAN} + \beta_3 \text{FAC} + \beta_4 \text{VALUE} + \beta_5 \text{STAFF} + \beta_6 \text{IMAGE} + \beta_7 \text{LOC} + \beta_8 \text{AEC} + \beta_9 \text{AGE} + \beta_{10} \text{EDU} \quad (1)$$

Furthermore, all of the important variables in the equation were derived from the previous research and employed into new variables of this study, which are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1** Explanation of key variable in equation

Variable	Explanation	Measurement	Expected sign	Previous study
RATE	Accommodations room rate	Pricing of accommodations per room per night	0: < 2,000 baht 1: > 2,001 baht	Martinez (2021); Bangkok post (2022)
SAFE	Hotel safety and security	The accommodations' safety and security services are available	Scales 1–5	Tsai et al. (2009); Tuan (2019); Chebli and Ben Said, 2020; Wachyuni and Kusumaningrum (2020); Pappas and Glyptou (2021)
CLEAN	Hotel cleanliness and hygiene	Accommodations' cleanliness and hygiene standards		Soulidou et al. (2018); Awan et al. (2020); Spoerr (2020); Shin and Kang (2020); Ivanova et al. (2020); Stansbury et al. (2021)
FAC	Hotel service facilities	Service available by accommodations		Chu and Choi (2000); Xue and Cox (2008); Jones & Chen (2011); Kim et al. (2019); Kim and Han (2022)
VALUE	Value of money	The monetary value of the expected service to be received.		Chan and Wong (2006); Siantar and Joye (2020); Spoerr (2020);
STAFF	Staff service	Accommodations provide staff service.		Qu et al. (2000); Dolnicar (2002); Chan and Wong (2006); Tsai et al. (2009); Jang et al. (2018); Tuan (2019)
IMAGE	Hotel image and reputation	The accommodations' image and reputation		Lee et al. (2010); Soulidou et al. (2018); Kim and Han (2022)
LOC	Hotel location and design	The location of the accommodation and its own uniqueness		Yusoff and Abdullah (2010); Baruca and Civre (2012); Dolnicar and Otter (2013); Tuan (2019); Kim and Han (2022)
AEC	Accessibility to attraction	Accommodation capabilities for easy access to places to visit		Lee et al. (2010)
AGE	Age	Respondent's age group	0: < 40 years. 1: > 41 years.	Huang and Patrick (2010); Sima (2016)
EDU	Education level	Respondent's educational level	0: < bachelor's degree 1: Bachelor's degree and above	Edelson (2022)



## Results and Discussion

### Respondents' Characteristics and Behaviors

According to the findings of Table 2, 58.3 percent were female. The age groups of the respondents were 21–30 (49.5%), 31–40 (27.9%), 41–50 (10.5%), below 20 (5.7%), 51–60 (4.3%), and above 60 (2.1%). The majority of respondents were single (63.3%). Due to international travel restrictions on tourists to Phuket, the whole group was of Thai nationality. Bachelor's degree (66.4%) and master's degree (15.2%) were the most common educational levels. The most frequent occupations were employee (43.1%) and self-employed/entrepreneur (27.9%). Furthermore, respondents had annual incomes of below 150,000 THB (27.4%), 150,001–300,000 THB (25%) and 300,001–500,000 THB (23.6%).

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics

Variables	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	161	38.3%
Female	245	58.3%
Prefer not to say	14	3.3%
<i>Age</i>		
Below 20 years old	24	5.7%
21–30 years old	208	49.5%
31–40 years old	117	27.9%
41–50 years old	44	10.5%
51–60 years old	18	4.3%
Above 60 years old	9	2.1%
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	266	63.3%
Married	100	23.8%
Divorced	13	3.1%
Engaged	3	0.7%
Living with partner	30	7.1%
Prefer not to say	8	1.9%
<i>Education</i>		
Primary or high school	49	11.7%
Diploma	21	5.0%
Bachelor's degree	279	66.4%
Master's degree	64	15.2%
Ph. D	6	1.4%
Other	1	0.2%
<i>Occupation</i>		
Self-employed/Entrepreneur	117	27.9%
Employee	181	43.1%
Government officer	37	8.8%
Unemployed	20	4.8%
Retired	8	1.9%
Student	48	11.4%
Other	9	2.1%
<i>Level of income (baht per year)</i>		
Below 150,000	115	27.4%
150,001–300,000	105	25.0%
300,001–500,000	99	23.6%
500,001–750,000	41	9.8%
750,001–1,000,000	21	5.0%
1,000,001–2,000,000	30	7.1%
2,000,001–5,000,000	5	1.2%
More than 5,000,001	4	1.0%

**Table 2** Continued

Variables	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Travel frequency</i>		
Once a month	205	48.8%
Twice a month	58	13.8%
Three times a month	39	9.3%
> three times a month	30	7.1%
Other	88	21.0%
<i>First time traveler</i>		
Yes	338	80.5%
No	82	19.5%
<i>Travel purpose</i>		
Vacation and relaxation	313	74.5%
Business	29	6.9%
Visit a friend and family	23	5.5%
Honeymoon	11	2.6%
Meeting and conference	16	3.8%
Sightseeing and cultural	25	6.0%
Other	3	0.7%
<i>Travel duration</i>		
2 days 1 night	74	17.6%
3 days 2 nights	204	48.6%
4 days 3 nights	96	22.9%
5 days 4 nights	22	5.2%
More than 6 nights	24	5.7%
<i>Travel plan (before traveling date)</i>		
Less than one week	115	27.4%
Less than one month	123	29.3%
One to two months	88	21.0%
Two to three months	89	21.2%
Other	5	1.2%
<i>Booking channel</i>		
Hotel website	103	24.5%
Travel agency	4	1.0%
Online travel agency	189	45.0%
Social media	50	11.9%
Call to hotel directly	70	16.7%
Other	4	1.0%
<i>Type of accommodation</i>		
Hotel and resort	339	80.7%
Private pool villa	46	11.0%
Hostel (bed & breakfast)	14	3.3%
Apartment /condominium	21	5.0%
<i>Accommodation room rate (baht per night)</i>		
Price below 500	31	7.4%
Price between 501–1,000	128	30.5%
Price between 1,001–1,500	97	23.1%
Price between 1,501–2,000	62	14.8%
Price between 2,001–3,000	57	13.6%

Tourists' behavior showed that the majority of respondents travelled during COVID-19 once a month (48.8%), with the highest proportion travelling for the first time to Phuket during COVID-19 at 61 percent. The primary purposes of travel to Phuket were vacation and relaxation (74.5%) and business (6.9%). The average stay of tourists in Phuket were three days and two nights (48.6%) and four days and three nights (22.9%). Moreover, most tourists booked accommodation through an online travel agency (44.5%) and hotel websites (24.5%). The most frequently booked kinds of accommodations were hotels and resorts (80.7%), private pool villas (11%), apartments and condominiums (5%), and hostels (3.3%). Furthermore, these tourists likely

paid between 501–1,000 baht per night (30.5%) and 1,001–1,500 baht per night (23.1%).

### Factor Analysis and Scales Measurement

It is important to investigate the underlying dimensions of the factors affecting the selection of upscale hotels in Phuket during COVID-19. An inferential of factor analysis

was conducted to classify 35 hotel features into appropriate factors. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) of 0.917 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity of 7,323.16 at a significance level of 0.000 indicate that exploratory factor analysis and correlation between variables are adequate for this investigation. Principal component analysis with varimax orthogonal rotation was used since the communalities of all attributes were greater than 0.5. According to Table 3,

**Table 3** Factor analysis

N = 420					
Factor	Factor loading	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	$\alpha^b$
Factor 1: Hotel safety and security					
- 24 hour CCTV and security staff on floors	0.823	4.50	11.137	31.821	0.89
- Fire safety system including fire alarm and water sprinkler	0.797	4.46			
- Key card system, chain lock, and safety box available	0.775	4.52			
- Bright walkways throughout the hotel	0.735	4.45			
- Natural disaster evacuation plans available	0.693	4.29			
Factor 2: Hotel cleanliness and hygiene					
- Hotels provide contactless keycard, check-in/out and payment process	0.784	4.39	2.676	7.645	0.88
- Hotels provide physical social distancing	0.776	4.37			
- Hotels provide mask and hand sanitizer	0.720	4.45			
- Hotel provides daily room clean	0.660	4.61			
- Hotels provide SHA standard	0.570	4.37			
Factor 3: Hotel service and facilities					
- Fitness center, health facilities, and spa available	0.757	3.77	1.902	5.435	0.80
- Restaurant, bar, and cafe available	0.707	4.02			
- Swimming pool available	0.654	4.21			
- WIFI and internet free access 24 hours	0.642	4.47			
- 24 hours room service, laundry service, bellman service, in-house medical service, and hotel shuttle bus service available	0.454	4.14			
Factor 4: Value for money					
- Food and beverage with reasonable price	0.671	4.13	1.599	4.569	0.77
- Room rate with special package such as inclusive of F&B	0.650	3.93			
- Hotel joined government campaign	0.637	3.81			
- Flexible room booking with price guarantee	0.620	4.14			
- Special room rate and discount	0.615	4.34			
Factor 5: Staff service					
- Staff are polite and friendly	0.811	4.61	1.515	4.328	0.83
- Staff are helpful, courteous, and attentive to your request	0.784	4.60			
- Promptness of pre-arranged arrival and check-in/out service	0.549	4.43			
- Parking area available	0.403	4.55			
Factor 6: Hotel image and reputation					
- Hotel image	0.792	3.99	1.298	3.710	0.74
- Hotel reputation	0.760	4.09			
- Hotel star rating	0.750	4.01			
- Review by blogger and influencer	0.414	3.88			
Factor 7: Hotel location and design					
- Hotel design	0.642	3.92	1.183	3.381	0.67
- Recommendation by friend or relative	0.609	3.90			
- Close to the beach or beach access	0.512	4.24			
- Located in a quiet and private area	0.560	3.58			
Factor 8: Accessibility to attraction					
- Close to airport	0.736	3.18	1.035	2.956	0.65
- Close to city center and tourist attractions	0.725	4.03			
- Close to shopping center	0.683	3.58			

Note: KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) measure of sampling adequacy: 0.917. Bartlett's test of Sphericity: 7,323.16,  $p$ : 0.00. Cutoff value: 0.40.

a: Scale ranging from 1 = least important to 5 = Most important. b: Cronbach's alpha.

the number of factors retained is determined by an Eigen value greater than 1, a percentage of variance explained of at least 60 percent, and a factor loading greater than or equal to 0.40 (Hair et al., 2014). The Cronbach's alpha was robust between 0.65 and 0.89, which indicated high inter-consistency among attributes within a factor. The factor analysis is divided into eight factors and explains a total of 63.845 percent of all variances. According to the previous study of literature review and factor analysis, the identified factors were named as follows: (1) hotel safety and security; (2) hotel cleanliness and hygiene; (3) hotel service and facilities; (4) value for money; (5) staff service; (6) hotel image and reputation; (7) hotel location and design; and (8) accessibility to attractions. According to mean value, the three most important attributions are as follows: (1) Hotel provides daily room clean (4.61); (2) Staff are polite and friendly (4.61); and (3) Staff are helpful, courteous, and attentive to your request (4.60). while the three least important attributions are as follows: (1) Close to airport (3.18); (2) Close to shopping center (3.58); and (3) Fitness center, health facilities, and spa available (3.77).

### Binary Logistic Regression

A binary logistic regression was done to achieve the study objective. An omnibus test of model coefficients was performed for goodness-fit of the model. It was assumed that the model agreed with the assumption that  $*p < .05$  was statistically significant ( $\chi^2$  ( $df = 10$ ,  $N = 420$ ) = 68.978,  $*p = .000$ ). The Pseudo  $R^2$  value indicated the

dependent variable's ability to explain the independent variable as a percentage (Cox & Snell  $R^2 = 15.1\%$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 22.6\%$ ) while in Table 4, a Hosmer and Lemeshow test was also performed for goodness of fit between data and model. It was shown that the model is a good fit ( $\chi^2$  ( $df = 8$ ,  $N = 420$ ) = 6.670,  $p = .573$ ).

As shown in Table 5, hotel service and facilities ( $\beta = 0.348$ ,  $p = .011$ ), hotel image and reputation ( $\beta = 0.638$ ,  $p = .000$ ), hotel location and design ( $\beta = 0.547$ ,  $p = .000$ ), respondent's age ( $\beta = 1.003$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and education ( $\beta = 0.859$ ,  $p = .044$ ) contributed *statistically significantly* to the model. Meanwhile, hotel safety and security ( $p = .066$ ), hotel cleanliness and hygiene ( $p = .656$ ), value for money ( $p = .492$ ), staff service ( $p = .157$ ), and accessibility to attractions ( $p = .078$ ) *did not significantly contribute statistically* to the model.

The odd ratio indicates that "If the tourist's perceived level of importance of *hotel service facilities* ( $p = .011$ ) increases by one level, the probability of selecting the upscale hotel ( $\geq 2,001$  baht) is 1.471 times greater than the non-upscale hotel ( $< 2,000$  baht)". The odd ratio of *hotel image and reputation* indicates "If the tourist's perceived level of importance of *hotel image and reputation* ( $p = .000$ ) increases by one level, the probability of selecting the upscale hotel ( $\geq 2,001$  baht) is 1.892 times greater than the non-upscale hotel ( $< 2,000$  baht)". The odd ratio of *hotel location and design* indicates "If the tourist's perceived level of importance of *hotel location and design* ( $p = .000$ ) increases by one level, the probability of selecting the upscale hotel ( $\geq 2,001$  baht) is 1.728 times greater than the non-upscale hotel ( $< 2,000$  baht)".

**Table 4** Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Chi-square	6.670				
df	8				
p	.573				
No.	< 2,000 bath per night = 0		> 2,001 baht per night = 1		Total
	Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
1	40	40.621	2	1.379	42
2	40	39.059	2	2.941	42
3	38	38.268	5	4.732	43
4	35	35.898	7	6.102	42
5	38	34.376	4	7.624	42
6	32	32.586	10	9.414	42
7	27	30.226	15	11.774	42
8	31	27.144	11	14.856	42
9	21	24.119	21	17.881	42
10	16	15.703	25	25.297	41



**Table 5** Binary logistic regression

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	p	Exp (β)	95% C.I. for EXP (β)	
							Lower	Upper
Constant*	-2.302	0.416	30.683	1	.000*	0.100		
Hotel safety and security	-0.231	0.126	3.374	1	.066	0.793	0.620	1.016
Hotel cleanliness and hygiene	-0.061	0.137	0.198	1	.656	0.941	0.720	1.230
Hotel service and facilities*	0.348	0.137	6.503	1	.011**	1.417	1.084	1.851
Value for money	-0.086	0.125	0.471	1	.492	0.918	0.718	1.173
Staff service	0.186	0.131	2.005	1	.157	1.205	0.931	1.559
Hotel image and reputation*	0.638	0.148	18.634	1	.000*	1.892	1.417	2.528
Hotel location and design*	0.547	0.143	14.742	1	.000*	1.728	1.307	2.285
Accessibility to attraction	-0.220	0.125	3.104	1	.078	0.802	0.628	1.025
Age*	1.003	0.309	10.527	1	.001*	2.727	1.488	5.000
Education*	0.859	0.425	4.075	1	.044**	2.360	1.025	5.432
Cox & Snell R Square	0.151							
Nagelkerke R Square	0.226							

Note: \*indicated statistically significant difference  $p < .01$ , \*\* indicated statistically significant difference  $p < .05$ .

Furthermore, the odd ratio also indicates that “The increasing of tourists age ( $p = .001$ ) of above 41 years old and older (generation X and above), the probability of selecting the upscale hotel ( $\geq 2,001$  baht) is 2.727 times greater than the non-upscale hotel ( $< 2,000$  baht)” while “The increasing of tourist education level of bachelor’s degrees and above ( $p = .044$ ), the probability of selecting the upscale hotel ( $\geq 2,001$  baht) is 2.360 times greater than the non-upscale hotel ( $< 2,000$  baht).” Meanwhile there is no statistically significant difference between the value for money, hotel cleanliness and hygiene, and the hotel’s safety and security in terms of the possibility of choosing an upscale hotel in Phuket during COVID-19.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

COVID-19 is one of the most devastating pandemics in human history, posing numerous challenges for the hospitality and tourism industries. Domestic tourists have surpassed foreign tourists as the primary source of tourism revenue in a number of countries, including Thailand. The goal of this study was to determine whether the preferences of domestic tourists influence their decision to stay in an upscale hotel in Phuket. The study results found that hotel service and facilities, hotel image and reputation, hotel location and design, tourist age, and education level influenced the domestic tourists’ decisions to stay in an upscale hotel in Phuket during the pandemic. The results of this study were consistent with previous studies (Baruca & Civre, 2012; Chu &

Choi, 2000; Dolnicar & Otter, 2013; Jone & Chen, 2011; Kim et al., 2019; Kim & Han, 2022; Lee et al., 2010; Soulidou et al., 2018; Tuan, 2019; Xue & Cox, 2008; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2010;). This indicated that domestic tourists were more likely to choose an upscale hotel due to the increasing importance of hotel service and facilities, hotel image and reputation, and hotel location and design. The previous study findings were consistent with this study finding that *hotel service and facilities* are one of the influential factors for hotel selection, still important for hotel selection in Phuket during COVID-19 (Chu & Choi, 2000; Jone & Chen, 2011; Kim et al., 2019; Xue & Cox, 2008). The *hotel’s image and reputation* were found to be one of the important determinants for domestic tourists to select hotels in Phuket during COVID-19, which complies with the previous studies by Lee et al. (2010) and Soulidou et al., 2018 while *hotel location and design* were important factors in hotel selection in Phuket during COVID-19, which is consistent with previous research (Baruca & Civre, 2012; Dolnicar & Otter, 2013; Tuan, 2019; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2010). Moreover, the findings of this study were consistent with the current study by Kim and Han (2022) about hotel strategies in response to COVID-19, which found that the hotel’s image, reputation, location, and outward appearance of hotel facilities are desired hotel attributes for hotel selection with precaution measurement. A new study by Vannavanit (2021) backs up this finding by pointing out that hotel location and social influence played a big role in Thai travelers’ hotel selection during the pandemic.

Nevertheless, a variety of studies have verified that cleanliness and hygiene seem to be the most important determinants for hotel selection during the pandemic. Thailand's destinations have been implementing public health measurement into new tourism standards as The Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration (SHA). The study determined that Thailand's tourism competitiveness, the reputation and implementation of the SHA standard in the healthcare system, and the introduction of contactless payment, all contributed to tourists' increased trust during the epidemic (Bank of Thailand [BOT], 2021). According to these findings, the hospitality and tourism industries will be unable to operate efficiently unless the SHA sanitation system is implemented and becomes a basic requirement during the pandemic while the World Travel & Tourism Council has certified SHA-certified establishments to meet Safe Travel requirements (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2022). Those mentioned standards and actions by organizations in Thailand could increase traveler trust in cleanliness and hygiene toward tourism businesses, especially domestic tourists who have been living under a strong country's health system. Besides that, the government's subsidy campaign contributes to lower travel expenses for domestic tourists, which enables them to afford an upscale hotel in Phuket. Similarly, the findings indicate that domestic tourists who are representatives of Generation X and above (41 years old and older) holding at least a bachelor's degree may choose to stay in upscale hotels. According to Huang and Patrick (2010), baby boomers are one of the oldest generations, with more discretionary time and income. Generation X is approaching its peak earning year and is expected to have greater purchasing power. It could be stated that generation X and above appear to have better spending power to afford an upscale hotel in Phuket. While higher education leads to more skilled workers and higher earnings (Radcliffe, 2022), college and bachelor's degrees may result in a compensation differential. A person with a greater wage has the means to spend more and to select better products and services.

Furthermore, the recommendation for an upscale hotel's management team is that first they must ensure that all facilities and services are provided in accordance with hotel standards and information available online to avoid guests becoming dissatisfied while hotel management must plan to further improve the service and facilities to create a unique guest experience. Secondly,

the digitalization of social media provides a hotel with the resilience necessary to survive in a difficult time. The hotel's marketing team must monitor negative reviews through online sources with appropriate problem-solving. Domestic tourists are willing to pay more to obtain a better hotel image and reputation, which allows them to post on social media. Thirdly, domestic tourists travel to Phuket for beach escape purposes. Upscale hotels should increase their strength in either good location or good hotel design to attract domestic tourists. As a final recommendation, the upscale hotel must target tourists who are generation X and above (41 years old and older) with at least bachelor's degrees, as they seem to be a group which can afford upscale hotels.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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