

Satisfaction: Global Senior Tourists in Thailand

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Abstract. A rise in world tourism invigorates the growth of modern world economy. Therefore, a rise in senior global tourist segment certainly has a magnitude effect to hitherto stimulate the growth of Thai economy. The purpose of this paper was to study global senior tourists in Thailand in order to gain a better understanding of an astounded rising global senior tourist segment. The objectives of this study were (a) to study global senior tourists' traveling behavior and (b) to study their level of satisfaction on their spending in five important categories: hotel, food & beverage, transportation, entertainment & activities, and shopping. Questionnaire was given to 400 participants who are global senior tourists passing through Suvarnabhumi airport, Thailand. Mean and standard deviation were used to rank their level of satisfaction in each category. Furthermore, independent sample t-test was used to differentiate of level of satisfaction between male and female as well as between age groups. The findings of the study show that there were more European senior tourists traveling in Thailand than Asian Senior tourists. Global senior tourists spent most of their budget on transportation but the majority of them ranked food & beverage as the highest level of satisfaction. Overall, male and female senior tourists did not have much difference in their preference. Also, age groups did not play any important role in their preference.

Keywords: Satisfaction, Global Senior Tourists, Thailand

1. Introduction

Thailand is a momentous tourism destination and tourism is one of the main sectors that contribute significantly to the social and economic development of the country. According to Ministry of Tourism and Sport of Thailand (2010), tourism industry contributed to the Thai Gross Domestic Product 6 percent and this is expected to increase to 9 percent in the future [1]. A rise in tourism also stimulates and invigorates the growth of economic development in other related areas such as hospitality, transportation, construction, and retail. The financial benefits and employment opportunities of tourism often spread from gigantic business organizations to grassroots workers.

Global senior tourists have become an increasingly crucial tourist segment to the world tourism and to Thai tourism. The baby boom generation is now a senior boom generation. According to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division (United Nations, 2010), the global population of senior citizens was 8 percent in 1950, and it increased to 11 percent in 1999. It is expected to increase to be 22 percent of the global population in 2060 [2]. The global senior tourists have become the essential target market for many tourist destinations around the world. The Tourism Authority of Thailand has laid down three measurable rules to assess a tourist segment; these are cluster, size, and growth. First, the global senior tourists are an outstanding cluster that has different needs and wants from other tourist groups. Second, the size of global senior tourists is substantial enough to be a lucrative segment for any national marketing campaign. Third, the global senior tourist segment is growing and actually growing more rapidly than any other tourist groups [3]. Faranda & Schmidt (1999) and You & O'Leary (2000) all acceded that global senior tourists are a unique tourist market segment [4, 5]. Therefore, a broad-spectrum marketing strategy is unproductive to target this unique tourist market segment. There is a need to scrutinize how to satisfy their distinctive needs and wants. Crompton & McKay (1979) and Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger (1997) elucidated the rational understanding of tourists: first, it assists the firm in initiating services that directly corresponds with the special need of each group of tourists. Second, the equilibrium between tourists' expectation and fulfillment lead to high tourists' satisfaction. Third, high tourists' satisfaction, of course, will lead to tourists' loyalty. In the end, tourists' loyalty insinuates profitability [6][7].

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In view of the fact that satisfaction plays a pivotal role in tourist loyalty, it was chosen as the main variable in the study of global senior tourists. It is essential to study the behavior of global senior tourists in order to comprehend ways to satisfy them. Heskett, Sasser, and Schlesinger (1997) explained the result of their study that customers will be loyal to the product and service of the firm only when they have an average of at least 4.5 out of 5 level of satisfaction [7]. The combination of satisfaction and spending behaviors of global senior tourists in Thailand had not been seriously studied before. The question often comes up, why study satisfaction? It should be studied because tourists' satisfaction, more often than not, leads to tourists' loyalty and profitability.

This paper endeavours to uncover the answers to the following questions:

- What is global senior tourist spending behaviour?
- What are their levels of satisfaction in the five categories: hotel, food & beverage, transportation, entertainment & activities, and shopping?
- Do gender and age group play a significant role in their level of satisfaction in the five categories?

2. Research Methodology

A survey research method was employed to study global senior tourist satisfaction in the five important categories which are hotel, food & beverage, transportation, entertainment & activities, and shopping. An English Questionnaire was given to 400 participants, who were inbound and outbound at the Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand during January to June, 2011. The first part of the questionnaire measures characteristic and behavior of global senior tourists such as gender, age, education, country of origin, and the main motive of visiting Thailand as a tourist destination. The second part of the questionnaire measures level of satisfaction by using five Likert scale. Responses range from 1) very dissatisfied, 2) dissatisfied, 3) okay, 4) satisfied, and 5) very satisfied. The last part of the questionnaire inquires global senior tourists if they have any intentions to revisit Thailand. The validity of each question in the questionnaire was tested by using Item-Objective Congruency or IOC index.

In terms of data collection, the Suvarnabhumi airport authority consented to the data collection at the passenger hall using an interception technique. Initially, exactly 30 respondents had been used as a pilot study in order to find Alpha Coefficient and ways to improve each question in the questionnaire. The pilot study and questionnaire improvement resulted in the Alpha Coefficient value 0.777 for the whole questionnaire and 0.842 for the satisfaction questions, after that the researcher started to collect data from the total of 400 participants [8]. Sample size was determined by using Taro Yamane (1973) formula with a 0.05 level of significance [9]. Global senior passengers were asked to participate in the study as they passed by the passenger hall and lobby. Each respondent was rechecked if they had completed all the questions in the questionnaire to prevent any missing data.

Table 1 presents characteristics of the sample. Females are exactly two-thirds of the sample population. The age group of 60 – 65 years old makes up 73.4 percent of the sample population. There is only a small sample 3.8 percent of the age group of more than 70 years old. The sample is predominantly from European countries makes up almost 50 percent of the sample. The next two largest groups are senior tourists from North America and from Australia & New Zealand. The majority of global senior tourists or 64.5 percent have undergraduate or associate degree and about 19.5 percent have high school or GED. Only 16 percent have a graduate degree. When asked about their single main motive to visit Thailand, the high responses went to natural beauty, Thai cultural, and historical sites, but not to Thai food and beverages. Almost 50 percent of senior tourists in the sample spent less than US\$ 5,000 per trip. The majority of them or about 54 percent spend most of their money on transportation and only a small amount or 7 percent on shopping.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

	Frequency	Percent	N
Gender			400
Male	240	60	
Female	160	40	
Age			400
60-65	294	73.4	
66-70	91	22.8	
70 +	15	3.8	
Country of origin (Region)			400
Asia	34	8.5	
Europe	197	49.3	
Middle East	12	3	
North America	76	19	
Australia and New Zealand	68	17	
Others	13	3.2	
Education			400
High school/GED	78	19.5	
Undergraduate/Associate's degree	258	64.5	
Graduate degree	64	16	
Main Motive to visit Thailand			400
Natural beauty	109	27.2	
Low cost of traveling	55	13.8	
Recommended by friends and family	54	13.5	
Live in the neighbor country	10	2.5	
Thai culture and historical site	86	21.5	
Thai food and beverages	36	9	
Others	50	12.5	
Spending per trip			400
Below US \$5,000	199	49.8	
US\$5,000 - US\$10,000	129	32.2	
US\$10,000 - US\$20,000	57	14.2	
More than US\$20,000	15	3.8	
Spending most of the money on			400
Food & Beverage	65	16.2	
Lodging	66	16.5	
Shopping	14	3.5	
Activities and Entertainment	28	7	
Transportation	216	54	

2.1. Results and Discussion

One of the chief purposes of this paper was to investigate the level of satisfaction of global senior tourists by examining five spending categories. From table 2, the overall level of satisfaction is “very satisfied” with the mean of 4.16 and standard deviation of 0.7900. Also, from the level of satisfaction, the five categories of spending can be ranked from the highest satisfaction to lowest satisfaction: 1) Food & Beverage, 2) Lodging, 3) Shopping 4) Activities & Entertainment and 5) Transportation. Even though Thai food was not their main motive to visit Thailand, senior tourists ranked food and beverage as number one in terms of satisfaction.

Table 2: Level of satisfaction in five main areas of global senior tourists

Spending in five categories	Mean	S.D.	Level of Satisfaction
1. Food & Beverage	4.36	.77391	Very Satisfied
2. Lodging	4.29	.68419	Very Satisfied
3. Shopping	4.17	.78989	Very Satisfied
4. Activities & Entertainment	4.15	.76317	Very Satisfied
5. Transportation	3.87	.79319	Very Satisfied
Overall	4.16	.7900	Very Satisfied

From table 3, the results suggest that there is only one category “shopping” which female senior tourists have a higher than male average of satisfaction with a 0.05 level of significance. In other categories, there are no significant differences between male and female.

Table 3: Level of satisfaction in five categories between male and female global senior tourists

Spending in five categories	Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	P-value
1. Food & Beverage	Male	240	4.27	0.67034	-.775	.439
	Female	160	4.32	0.70533		
2. Lodging	Male	240	4.15	0.72981	-.027	.979
	Female	160	4.16	0.81300		
3. Shopping	Male	240	4.09	0.80787	-2.447	.015*
	Female	160	4.28	0.74422		
4. Activities	Male	240	4.32	0.75710	-1.214	.225
	Female	160	4.42	0.79740		
5. Transportation	Male	240	3.84	0.90857	-.748	.455
	Female	160	3.91	1.02160		

From table 4, the results suggest that the age group of 66-70 year old have higher average satisfaction than the age group of 60-65 years old in the two categories of “Activity & Entertainment and Transportation” with a 0.05 level of significance.

Table 4: Level of satisfaction in five categories between two ages groups of global senior tourists

Spending in five categories	Age	N	Mean	S.D.	t-value	P-value
1. Food & Beverage	60-65	294	4.25	0.68717	-1.534	.126
	66-70	91	4.38	0.67937		
2. Lodging	60-65	294	4.12	0.77414	-1.424	.155
	66-70	91	4.25	0.72408		
3. Shopping	60-65	294	4.19	0.75710	.664	.507
	66-70	91	4.13	0.84602		
4. Activity & Entertainment	60-65	294	4.32	0.80167	-2.583	.010*
	66-70	91	4.56	0.63611		
5. Transportation	60-65	294	3.81	0.93737	-2.062	.040*
	66-70	91	4.05	0.99289		

Table 5: Senior tourists’ intention to revisit Thailand

Would you like to revisit Thailand, if your time, health, and financial permitted	Frequency	Percentage
I am sure I will be back.	373	93.2
I am not sure I will be back.	21	5.3
I will not be back.	6	1.5

Overall, Food & Beverage has the highest rank in terms of satisfaction. However, Thai food was not their main motive for global senior tourists to visit Thailand. Their main motive to visit Thailand is natural beauty as well as Thai culture and historical sites. These results agree with the study of Sangpikul (2008) which found that the original motives for American senior tourists to visit Thailand are adventure and cultural and historical sites [10]. The results also concur with the study of 2nd Bangkok Poll (2008) which also found that the number one satisfaction category is Food & Beverage [11]. Transportation category received the lowest rank in terms of satisfaction. This is, perhaps, due to extremely traffic congestions in Bangkok and senior tourists often have low tolerant to sit for a long hour in a vehicle. Overall, global senior tourists had a high level of satisfaction in their spending money in Thailand. While the findings of Wang, Chen, and Chou (2007) showed that male or husband tends to have high influence in making decision and satisfaction, this finding, gender factor does not play a significant role in their level of satisfaction, except in shopping which is understandable, since female tourists seems to enjoy the variety of inexpensive goods in Thailand [12]. The overwhelming majority senior tourist said that they would like to revisit Thailand if possible. The word possible means if their time, financial, and health permitted.

2.2. Limitations and Future Research

The non-random nature of the samples utilized by this paper is the primary limitation. This is due to the fact that the employ of English questionnaire inadvertently forced researcher to focus mainly on the senior tourists who were able to correspond in English. Consequently, senior tourists who were unable to correspond in English had less or no chance to be included in the samples. Therefore, the results may not be rightly generalized to the greater population of senior tourists. In addition, Dolnicar & Kemp (2009) also pointed out that the behavior of each market segment has a tendency to change swiftly in the modern world. Hence, the market strategies and plans for each segment may not be applicable in the future as consumer behavior changes [13]. Further research should explore the link between satisfied senior tourists and the impact on both loyalty and profitability. The erudition of the link between global senior tourists' loyalty and profitability will be a beneficial step of future researches. However, keep in mind, there is one truth about senior tourists; their time is running out. The more they age, the more they have to focus on spending their time and money on healthcare rather than traveling.

3. Acknowledgements

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