# Satisfaction in Qualities of Tourism Destination Management: A Case of American Tourists in Thailand

Sakul Jariyachamsit[1], Kevin Wongleedee and Kingkan Ponsiri

International College, Suan Sunandra Rajabhat University

**Abstract.** A plethora of inbound tourists visit Thailand every year. However, the American tourist segment is an astonishing small fraction of Thai tourism market share. Why? Are Americans not satisfied with their experience in Thailand? This paper studies the level of satisfaction of American tourists concerning their experience with the quality of tourism management received in Thailand in order to understand the post purchase dissonance. The objectives of this paper were (a) to evaluate the level of satisfaction of American tourists in Thailand about their experience of the qualities in three categories: products & services, tourist destination, and tourist information and (b) to study their willingness to revisit Thailand in the future (c) to investigate if there are differences in overall tourists' satisfaction in terms of age and level of education. The respondents were 400 outbound American tourists on their way back home through Suvannabhumi airport, Thailand. Findings revealed that American tourists ranked the quality of food & beverage as their highest satisfied in the category of product & service. The quality of shopping malls in Thailand had the highest satisfaction rank in the category of tourist destination. The quality of tourist information from business organizations had the highest satisfaction rank in the category of tourist information. In addition, the findings revealed that the overwhelming 96 percent of American tourists who had already visited Thailand wanted to revisit Thailand and as high as 97 percent of them would recommend their friends and family to visit Thailand. Finally, analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that age and education level did not lead to significance in overall American tourists' satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Satisfaction, Quality, Tourism Management, Thailand, American Tourists

## 1. Introduction

Tourist satisfaction is generally accepted as the most important factor to tourist destination management. High quality of tourism resources and management links to a high tourist's level of satisfaction. The logic goes on, high level of satisfaction links with tourist loyalty which means the tourists are more likely to come back or revisit the destination. According to Kozak and Rimmington (2010), satisfaction is the most important tool to the tourist destination marketing [1]. One important study of satisfaction by Heskett et. al. (1997) showed that the path from customer satisfaction to profitability often goes through customer loyalty [2]. Tourist satisfaction has increasingly become one of the important goals of the tourism industry in Thailand. This is because of the belief that tourist satisfaction influences decisions to revisit Thailand and many times patronage the same hotel and the same restaurant. Tourist satisfaction often happens right after they have experienced the particular tourist destination or tourism resources. Tourists will evaluate the benefits after their purchase and it is common for them to be concerned about their purchase decision. Tourists are concerned about their purchase decision and will evaluate the benefits of the decision after the purchase. It is a post purchase evaluation. A post purchase dissonance is an after purchase cognitive behavior. This is caused by cognitive dissonance. If tourists believe they should have visited some other places, this simply means that they are not completely satisfied with their destination choice and clearly there is no destination loyalty.

Thailand is the top tourism destination for many western countries such as England, Germany, France, and Russia. Accounting to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand (2011), the overall tourists from the European Union to Thailand is as much as 25.6 percent of the total international tourists visited in the year 2010. However, the American tourist segment accounts for only 3.5 percent of market share [3]. The revenue received from America tourists should be more than it is at the present time. Therefore, there are some questions that need to be asked. As a tourism researcher, the author intends to find these important answers from these research questions.

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[1] Corresponding author.  Tel: +662 160 1195, Fax: +662 160 1199, E-mail: a.sakul@yahoo.com

- What are the American tourists' levels of satisfaction in terms of quality from three important categories: satisfaction in goods and services, satisfaction in tourism destinations, and satisfaction in information?
- Will the American tourists revisit Thailand?
- Will the American tourists recommend their friends and family to visit Thailand?
- Are there any differences in overall American tourists' satisfaction in terms of demographic characteristic such as age and education level?

## 2. Research Methodology

The population of this study consists of outbound American tourists at Suvannabhumi airport. The target population were the American tourists who had already visited Thailand at least once. By using Taro Yamane (1973) formula with a 0.05 level of significance, 400 samples were required [4]. The convenience sampling was used since there was time limit to be on the premises of the airport. The content validity was obtained by getting three experts in the field of hospitality and tourism to examine each question. The validity of each question in the questionnaire was tested by using Item-Objective Congruency or IOC index. A face to face pre-test questionnaire was conducted to clarify questions and eliminate mistakes.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

|  | Frequency | Percent | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** |  |  | 400 |
| Male | 213 | 53.2 |  |
| Female | 187 | 46.8 |  |
| **Age** |  |  | 400 |
| 13-25 | 175 | 43.8 |  |
| 26-60 | 201 | 50.2 |  |
| 61 + | 24 | 6 |  |
| **Education** |  |  | 400 |
| Primary school | 14 | 3.5 |  |
| High school/GED | 110 | 27.5 |  |
| Undergraduate/Associate's degree | 216 | 54 |  |
| Graduate degree | 60 | 15 |  |
| **Decision to visit Thailand influenced by** |  |  | 400 |
| Recommended by friends and family | 107 | 26.8 |  |
| Experience from traveling | 69 | 17.2 |  |
| Passing through | 17 | 4.2 |  |
| Find new experiences | 101 | 25.3 |  |
| Recommended from tour agency | 22 | 5.5 |  |
| Websites and magazines | 45 | 11.2 |  |
| Others | 39 | 9.8 |  |
| **Spending per trip** |  |  | 400 |
| Below US $5,000 | 184 | 46 |  |
| US$5,000 - US$10,000 | 118 | 29.5 |  |
| US$10,000 - US$20,000 | 54 | 13.5 |  |
| More than US$20,000 | 44 | 11 |  |
| **Image of Thailand** |  |  | 400 |
| Thai food | 139 | 34.7 |  |
| Thai culture | 100 | 25 |  |
| Souvenir and crafts | 10 | 2.5 |  |
| Natural beauty | 19 | 4.6 |  |
| Shopping mall | 11 | 2.7 |  |
| Historical sites | 14 | 3.5 |  |
| Beach and sun | 93 | 23.5 |  |
| Other | 14 | 3.5 |  |

The reliability of instrument was measured by using the Alpha Coefficient which had a value of 0.816 for the whole set of the questionnaire. In addition, the value of Alpha Coefficient was 0.736 for the part of satisfaction in the quality of goods and services, 0.857 for the part of satisfaction in the quality of tourist

destinations, and 0.855 for the part of satisfaction in the quality of tourist information received. These was a high scale measurement of reliability. With the approval of Suvannabhumi airport authority, 400 questionnaires were conducted with outbound American tourist participants during January to June, 2011.

Each respondent had been rechecked to make sure that there was no missing data. The first part of questionnaire focuses on demographic variables such as gender, age, level of education, and etc. The second part deals with satisfaction level by using five Likert scale in three categories: satisfaction in goods and services, satisfaction in tourism destinations, and satisfaction in tourist information received. The third part of questionnaire asks the participants if they intend to revisit Thailand and if they would recommend their friends and family to visit Thailand. Data analysis was done by the use of Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Table 1 shows the American tourist sample characteristics. A demographic profile indicated that male samples were a little more than female samples with the ratio of 53:47. A working class age group of 26 – 60 years old made up 50.2 percent of the sample population and a student class of 13-25 years old made up 43.8 percent. Whereas, the age group of 61 or more, which were the senior group, was only 6 percent. The majority of American tourists in this sample had an undergraduate degree or about 54 percent and 27 percent of American tourist had a high school diploma/GED. Their decision to come to Thailand came from the recommendation of friends and family which was about 27 percent. The second factor that influenced their decision was to find new experience which was about 25 percent. Up to 46 percent of American tourists spent less than US$ 5,000 per trip and almost 30 percent of them spent about US$5,000 - US$10,000 per trip. When asked about a single important image of Thailand that they can think of, almost 35 percent of American tourists chose Thai food, 25 percent of them chose Thai culture, and 23.5 percent chose beach and sun.

## 2.1. Results and Discussion

Mean and standard deviation were used to rank the level of satisfaction of quality in goods and services from the highest to the lowest level. From table 2, the overall level of satisfaction is "satisfied" with the overall mean of 4.13 and standard deviation of 1.0504. Also, from the level of satisfaction, the five categories of spending can be ranked from the highest satisfaction to lowest satisfaction: 1) quality in food & beverage, 2) quality of lodging, 3) quality of service 4) quality of natural beauty sites and 5) quality of souvenir and crafts. Thai food was considered by American tourists as the number one in terms of image of Thailand and was also ranked as number one in terms of quality satisfaction.

Table 2: Level of satisfaction in goods and services

| Categories | Mean | S.D. | Level of Satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Quality of food & Beverage | 4.25 | .73149 | Satisfied |
| 2. Quality of lodging | 4.24 | .72713 | Satisfied |
| 3. Quality of services | 4.22 | 2.1848 | Satisfied |
| 4. Quality of natural beauty sites | 4.08 | .81076 | Satisfied |
| 5. Quality of souvenir and crafts | 3.89 | .80471 | Satisfied |
| Overall | 4.13 | 1.0504 | Satisfied |

Table 3: Level of satisfaction in tourist destinations

| Categories | Mean | S.D. | Level of Satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Quality of shopping malls | 4.24 | 2.57445 | Satisfied |
| 2. Quality of beaches | 4.16 | .75221 | Satisfied |
| 3. Quality of historical sites | 4.10 | .76315 | Satisfied |
| 4. Quality of natural beauty sites | 3.97 | .80537 | Satisfied |
| 5. Quality of souvenir and crafts | 3.86 | .87314 | Satisfied |
| Overall | 4.06 | 1.9488 | Satisfied |

From table 3, the results reveal that American tourists ranked the quality of shopping malls as number one in the tourist destination category, followed by the quality of beaches, quality of historical sites, quality of natural beauty sites, and quality of souvenir and crafts respectively. This is understandable since Thailand

has plenty of high quality shopping malls, whereas, the souvenir and crafts are essentially low price but low in quality.

From table 4, the results reveal that the number one satisfaction for American tourists in information is quality of tourist information from business organizations, followed by quality of the channel to receive information, quality of signs and information boards, quality of information from Thai government, and the last one in the rank is quality of communication in English. Table 5 shows that the overwhelming majority of American tourists indicated that they would revisit Thailand and they would recommend their friends and family to visit Thailand. This is crucial since word of mouth is one of the cheapest marketing tools and yet one of the most powerful marketing techniques. Also, 26 percent of American tourists expressed that the recommendation from friends and family was the main influence on their decision to visit Thailand.

Table 4: Level of satisfaction in information

| Categories | Mean | S.D. | Level of Satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Quality of tourist information from business organizations | 3.91 | .72882 | Satisfied |
| 2. Quality of the channel to receive information | 3.78 | .835 | Satisfied |
| 3. Quality of signs and information boards | 3.75 | .80801 | Satisfied |
| 4. Quality of information from Thai government | 3.56 | .91295 | Satisfied |
| 5. Quality of communication in English | 3.53 | .95195 | Satisfied |
| Overall | 3.7 | .83704 | Satisfied |

Table 5: Senior tourists' intention to revisit Thailand

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Yes, I will revisit Thailand. | 386 | 96.5 |
| Yes, I will recommend my friends and family to visit Thailand. | 392 | 97.8 |

From an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), the results show that age and educational level did not lead to significance differences in overall American tourists' satisfaction. The findings did not concur with the study of Jonsson and Devonish (2008) which found that age and income are important determinants but gender was not [5]. Overall, the findings indicate that the quality of Thai food & beverage had been held as the highest rank in terms of quality satisfied. However, Thai food & beverage was not the main motive that influenced American tourists to visit Thailand. Their first motive to visit Thailand was the recommendation from friends and family and their second motive was to find new experiences. The results of this study did not concur with the study of Sangpikul (2008) which found that the main motives for American senior tourists to visit Thailand were adventure and cultural & historical sites [6]. But part of this result agreed with the study of 2nd Bangkok Poll (2008) which also found that the number one satisfaction of foreign tourists was food & beverage [7]. Logically, there is an important connection here. The overwhelming majority of American tourists said they will recommend their friends and family to visit Thailand and this recommendation, in fact, is the key factor that influences American tourists to make their decision to visit Thailand.

## 2.2. Limitations and Future Research

Nowadays, tourism is an important service industry for growth in Thailand and many other countries. Therefore, it is important to pay heed to the big segment of the American tourists, especially because Thailand has such a small market share of this big market. This paper aimed to investigate the level of satisfaction in the qualities of tourism management in Thailand. From the findings, tourists are satisfied, but not very satisfied. The main limitation of this paper came from using a convenience sampling which is not a highly desirable technique for studies in social science. Therefore, future research should use random sampling if possible. Also, the future studies should cover not only the level of satisfaction of American tourists but also the reasons that American tourists are satisfied or are not satisfied with Thailand as a tourism destination and resources. Then, it will possible to find the marketing strategies that are suitable to increase the level of satisfaction for the American segment.

## 3. Acknowledgements

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