

Satisfaction of European Tourists Regarding Destination Loyalty in Phuket

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Abstract. The European travelers market is one of the important international tourist markets to Phuket. However, little is known on their intention to revisit Phuket. Destination loyalty is an important marketing factor in sustaining the destination attractiveness. It is necessary for tourism managers to understand the relationship between tourist destination and destination loyalty to develop proper plans or strategies to attract more repeat tourists to the destination. Thus, this study has an objective to investigate the effect of European tourists' satisfaction on destination loyalty in Phuket. Data were collected from 225 European tourists through the convenience sampling, and were analyzed by the multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that tourist satisfaction on natural environment, local culture, and safety were found to affect tourists' destination loyalty. Recommendations for Phuket's tourism industry are addressed.

Keywords: tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, European tourist, Phuket

1 Introduction

With the rapid growth of tourism industry in Thailand, toady tourism has been regarded as one of the most important tools used to boost economies and promote country's development. The growth of tourism in Southeast Asia has developed very fast and each country is attempting to promote tourism to generate revenues to the country. Every nation has developed various marketing campaigns to persuade tourists to visit its state by promoting attractive destinations, local culture, food, architecture, folklore and man-made attractions. As tourism industry makes lots of benefits to the country, particularly the economic contributions, the Thai government has established various national policies to develop Thailand's tourism continuously. Phuket is Thailand's the largest island and the only province-island in the country. It has many beautiful natural attractions, particularly the beaches and small islands. Phuket is not only well-known for its beach tourism but also the charming sub-cultures (e.g. Thai, Chinese and Muslim) and historical attractions. Phuket has attracted millions of people from all over the world for decades. Since Phuket is rich in the natural resources, particular the image of beach tourism, and becomes the top tourist destinations in Thailand, it, therefore, is chosen as the area of investigation on the destination loyalty due to its high potentiality to attract loyal/repeat tourists. Furthermore, the European tourists are the focus of this study because they are the largest market segment visiting Phuket [2]. Nevertheless, there are limited studies exploring this segment, particularly their travel satisfaction and intention to revisit the same destination. This study therefore has an objective to investigate the effect of European tourists' satisfaction on destination loyalty in Phuket. Understanding this issue may help the local authorities develop appropriate strategies to attract and increase European tourist arrivals to Phuket, particularly the number of repeat visitors and economic revenues.

2 Methodology

The samples in this study were European travelers (aged 20 years older and over) who traveled independently to Phuket. Using a convenience sampling method, data were collected at major tourist attractions in Phuket (city and beaches) through a closed-ended, self-administered questionnaire. During the survey (May 2015), the respondents were asked if they would be interested to participate in the survey. A total usable of 225 questionnaires were obtained during the survey since this research was a part of a larger research project. Several prior studies with 200 – 300 usable questionnaires were argued for their sufficiency to provide statistical analysis [1,4]. The questionnaire was developed from a review of previous studies focusing tourist satisfaction [1,4,5]. According to the literature, tourist satisfaction is generally measured by 2 items: (1) attribute satisfaction and (2) overall satisfaction [1,4,6]. The eighteen destination attributes were reviewed from related literature [1,4,6], and were modified to correspond to Phuket's destination features (i.e. beaches, leisure activities, culture, services, and tourism environment). The respondents were asked to evaluate their satisfaction on 5-point Likert scale (5=very satisfied and 1=very dissatisfied). With regard to destination loyalty, most prior studies have measured destination loyalty on two items: (1) the intention to revisit the destination in the future and (2) the likelihood to recommend the destination to other people [1,5,7]. Following the literature, this study asked the respondents to rate their intention to revisit Phuket in the near future, and their likelihood to recommend Phuket to their relatives/friends by using a 5-point Likert scale (1=least likely and 5=most likely).

A reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was performed for tourist satisfaction (attribute satisfaction) with a result of 0.89, exceeding the minimum standard (0.80) [3]. The validity test (face validity) was also undertaken to obtain feedback and comments on the clarity and appropriateness of the research questions. Descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, S.D.) were used to describe respondents' profile, mean score of tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty while inferential statistics (multiple regression analysis) were used to analyze the impact of tourist satisfaction (independent variable) on destination loyalty (dependent variable).

3 Findings

Table 1: Profile of research respondents

Characteristics	Descriptions	Number (n=225)	Percent (100%)
Gender	Male	120	53.0%
	Female	105	47.0%
Age	20 - 30 years	63	28.0%
	31 - 45 years	75	33.0%
	46 - 59 years	69	31.0%
	60 years or older	18	8.0%
Marital status	Married	140	62.0%
	Single	70	31.0%
	Divorced/Separated/Widowed	15	7.0%
Education	Bachelor degree	132	58.0%
	Master degree or higher	78	35.0%
	High school or lower	15	7.0%
Occupation	Company employee	53	24.0%
	Government officer	45	20.0%
	Business owner	38	17.0%
	Independent/self-employed	30	13.0%
	College student	20	9.0%
	Housewife	18	8.0%

Table 1, cont.

	Unemployment	14	6.0%
	Retired	7	3.0%
Monthly Income	Euro 1,000 or lower	18	8.0%
	Euro 1,001 – 2,500	47	21.0%
	Euro 2,501 – 3,500	93	41.0%
	Euro 3,501 – or higher	67	30.0%
Number of visit to Phuket	First time	168	75.0%
	2-3 times	40	18.0%
	4 times and more	17	7.0%

According to table 1, most of the respondents (53%) were males and 47% were females. Most of them were in the age group of 31 - 45 years (33%) and 46 – 59 years old (31%). More than half were married (62%), and the majority (58%) had education at the college level. The respondents came from different occupations, for example, 24% were company employees, 20% were government officers, 17% were business owner, and 13% were independent/self-employed. Nearly half of them (41%) had monthly income in the range of Euro 2,501 – 3,500 while 30% had income in the range of Euro 3,501 and higher, and 21% earned approximately Euro 1,001 – 2,500 or lower. Most of them (75%) were first time visitor, while 18% visited Phuket 2-3 times, and 7% return to Phuket 4 times and more. Among 225 European respondents, they came from UK (41), Germany (35), France (30), Sweden (27), Russia (25), Italy (15), Norway (13), Switzerland (11), Belgium (9), Spain (8), Austria (6) and eastern European countries (5).

Table 2: Mean score ranking of tourist satisfaction towards Phuket

Attribute satisfaction	Mean	S.D.
1. Beaches/seasides	4.45	0.78
2. Natural environment/scenery	4.39	0.91
3. Friendliness of local people	4.37	0.66
4. Business services	4.29	0.88
5. Product and service quality	4.27	0.79
6. Tour/excursion	4.25	1.15
7. Cost of living	4.19	0.97
8. Local culture/attractions	4.15	0.69
9. Thai way of life	4.14	0.74
10. Leisure activities	4.09	0.98
11. A variety of shopping places	4.02	0.99
12. Reasonable prices of products/services	3.99	0.85
13. Local food	3.95	0.86
14. Nightlife/entertainment	3.90	0.79
15. Climate	3.71	1.12
16. Cleanliness	3.70	1.08
17. Safety	3.32	0.88
18. Local transportation	3.30	0.64
19. Overall satisfaction	4.03	0.89

Table 2 shows the mean score ranking of tourist satisfaction towards Phuket. The top three most satisfied attributes of Phuket are 1) beaches/seasides (mean=4.45), 2) natural environment/scenery (mean=4.39), and 3) friendliness of local people (mean=4.37). While the least three satisfied attributes are 1) cleanliness (mean=3.70), 2) safety (mean=3.32), and 3) local transportation (mean=3.30). However, the overall satisfaction was scored at 4.03.

Table 3: Factor analysis of tourist satisfaction

Factor dimensions (Cronbach's alpha)	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Factor Mean
Factor 1: Natural attraction (alpha =0.81)		5.21	28.49	4.18
Beach/seaside	0.88			
Natural environment/scenery	0.73			
Climate	0.65			
Factor 2: Local hospitality & culture (alpha = 0.88)		2.24	11.32	4.10
Friendliness of local people	0.85			
Cultural attractions	0.73			
Local food	0.71			
Thai way of life	0.70			
Factor 3: Leisure & recreation activities (alpha = 0.85)		1.53	7.55	4.01
A variety of shopping places	0.83			
Night life and entertainment	0.81			
Leisure activities	0.72			
Tours/excursion	0.69			
Factor 4: Services and facilities (alpha = 0.74)		1.75	8.98	3.98
Business services	0.87			
Product and service quality	0.81			
Reasonable prices of products and services	0.72			
Cost of living	0.70			
Local transportation	0.69			
Factor 5: Safety & cleanliness (alpha =0.71)		1.35	6.86	3.5
Safety	0.72			
Cleanliness	0.69			
Total variance explained	63.20%			

According to table 3, a factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to group satisfaction attributes. Five satisfaction factors were derived from the factor analysis of 18 satisfaction attributes. They were labeled as 1) natural attractions 2) local hospitality & culture 3) leisure & recreation activities 4) services & facilities, and 5) safety & cleanliness. Among them, natural attraction was the most satisfactory factor (mean=4.28). In this study, all satisfaction factors had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and the items in each dimension had a factor loading greater than 0.4. In addition, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the internal consistency of items within each factor. The test showed that the alpha coefficients for the five factors ranged from 0.75 to 0.89, well above the minimum value of 0.6 as an indication of reliability [3]. Thus, all five satisfaction factors were retained for the final structure for regression analysis.

Table 4: Regression analysis of satisfaction factors on destination loyalty

Tourist satisfaction factors	Beta	t-value	Sig.	Multicollinearity (VIF value)
1. Natural attraction	0.39	1.89	0.02*	1.06
2. Local hospitality and culture	0.28	1.67	0.01*	1.12
3. Leisure/recreation activities	0.11	2.25	0.45	1.25
4. Services and facilities	0.08	0.89	0.68	1.31
5. Safety and cleanliness	0.25	0.96	0.04*	1.47

R² = 0.374
Adjusted R² = 0.365

Table 4 shows the finding of regression analysis and its coefficients (beta) indicating the relationships between independent variables (satisfaction factors) and dependent variable (destination loyalty). The finding indicates that 1) natural attraction, 2) Thai hospitality & local culture, and 3) safety & cleanliness had the impacts on destination loyalty (p<0.05), and their relationships were positive. This may suggest that the respondents who are satisfied with natural attraction of Phuket, admiring Thai hospitality & local culture, as well as feeling confident in

safety in Phuket are more likely to revisit Phuket. Among the five satisfaction factors, the coefficients of natural attraction is greater than those of the four factors, suggesting that natural attraction is a more powerful variable to explaining destination loyalty in this study. However, other satisfaction factors, namely, leisure/recreation activities and services & facilities are not found to be associated with the dependent variable. This suggests that these factors are not significant explanatory variables in destination loyalty.

4 Recommendation

Since the results of the current study reveal that tourists who are satisfied with natural attraction and local hospitality (macro level) are likely to revisit Phuket and recommend Phuket to others, the government and local authorities are therefore the key players in managing and planning these attributes in order to promote higher level of tourist satisfaction and create post-purchase behavior [1]. They may work together to manage these attributes through appropriate strategy, plan or project. In particular, the sustainable management approach should be emphasized. There should be also a regular monitor from city administrators/tourism officials to visit the beaches and natural areas in Phuket throughout the year to control the development, and quality of the tourism sites. Local authorities should pay more attention to the cleanliness of tourism sites by preparing sufficient staff and garbage bins throughout the city. Also, the city administrators/tourism officials may launch the campaign such as “Keep Phuket Clean”. This campaign has been undertaken in several tourism destinations such as Bali, Indonesia and Penang, Malaysia. In addition, the government and local authorities should build the awareness and campaign for local people (including residents, vendors, service staff) for being the good hosts in welcoming and assisting foreign visitors in Phuket. Regular campaigns or related activities may be established to build a good relationship between them such as beach cleaning, friendship sports, food festival, local events or other social events. Also, the safety in Phuket, local authorities and tourism polices should closely work together by providing more channels/information for emergency contact and having officials regularly visit the tourism sites throughout the city.

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