

Chapter 5

A Study of Tourist Perceptions of Overseas Travel Stress While Visiting Bangkok, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Traveling has long been considered one of the best ways to release the stress caused by work and life. But in fact, uncertainties and negative experiences can break down the benefits and may make travelers feel stressed. A considerable amount of literature in tourism focuses on topic areas like destination building, market operation, and consumer satisfaction, but ignores one important aspect which negates many of the positive benefits of tourism—stress. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to examine foreign tourists' perceptions of travel related stress on their visits to Bangkok, Thailand, and test how demographic and traveler characteristics act on them by such data statistical treatments as independent sample t-test and one way ANOVA. Descriptive research and questionnaires are used as the research method and the research instrument in this study, which involved 384 tourists. Results reveal that there are significant differences in foreign tourists' perceptions of stress, which can be classified in terms of nationality, personality, type of tour, purpose of tour, group size, and familiarity with fellow travelers.

INTRODUCTION

It is accepted that the disruption of routines, tourism planning, and related arrangements, as well as other physical and psychological issues raise stress levels quickly in travelers. Specialists who are engaged in sleep research mention that,

according to an assessment of insomnia, 34% of travelers suffer from sleeplessness, and the causes of this problem are pre-holiday stress, exhaustion during traveling as well as strangeness and discomforts (<http://www.jsjk.net/jsxinhuanet>). Yavas (1987) states that a vacation is a stressful and high purchase risk because it involves considerable

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time, money and energy for travelers to enjoy it. Shepell.fgi Research Group (2007) also stress that a holiday can be a most stressful time because the pressures of holiday planning, booking, last minute arrangements, over-spending, gift distribution and post-holiday feelings will compromise health and wellness (Hill, 2000).

PERCEIVED RISKS IN THAILAND

Thailand is positioned as a safe and friendly destination that features varied attractions. According to research reported by Yau and Chan (1990) cited in Rittichainuwat et al. (2001, p. 83), on the image of Southeast Asian countries, Thailand indeed has been perceived as a destination with beautiful beaches, reasonable prices, and various attractions – one that is often regarded as a destination of choice for European tourists. However, there are problems associated with regular international news coverage of prostitution and AIDS in Thailand. For instance, Suwanmoli's (1998) study of foreign media coverage of prostitution and tourism in Thailand, cited in Rittichainuwat et al. (2001, p. 83), found that foreign reporters usually relate stories about AIDS and prostitution because such news is easily sold and interests both foreign readers and editors.

According to Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty (2009, p. 410), even though Thailand was perceived as having low security risks and medium political risks (Control Risks Group, 2003; Wilks, 2006), recent violence in the Muslim-dominated southern provinces of Thailand has led to negative images of Thailand. In addition to terrorism, the threat of disease is also an emerging travel risk for Thailand. Although Thailand has been perceived as a safe destination if tourists are circumspect regarding sexual contact and food and water consumption (Carter, 1998; Cossens & Gin, 1994; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty 2009), this perception has changed because of the SARS and bird flu outbreak. Because cases of bird flu

appeared in several Thai provinces and tourists themselves were found to be carriers of SARS, fear and exaggerated perceived disease risk resulted.

The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Thailand>, 2007) warned that sexual assault, food and drink spiking, and assault and robbery against foreigners occur in Thailand, especially in areas popular among backpackers. As well, some travelers to that country have become the victims of scams after they have accepted offers from people recommending or offering various goods or services, particularly shopping for jewelry and gems. Travelers to Thailand have also lost large sums of money through bogus investment schemes and card game scams. Other incidents which happened unexpectedly, in 2007, were forest fires in Chiang Mai, flash floods in Trang (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/20070415-065239-1488r.htm>) as well as man-made incidents like the bomb blasts in Bangkok on New Year's Eve, in 2006, related to the unstable political situation. Killing, bombing and terrorism in South Thailand obviously add to the potential dangers and stress of traveling in that region (<http://www.tatnews.org>).

Holiday travel stress feel be the same, but the way a traveler responds to such stress varies from individual to individual and this may depend on situation, personality, attitude, motivation, age, gender and education. This research will mainly focus on finding those stages which cause stress during traveling, while also testing how demographics and traveler characteristics affect tourists' stress level during their trip to Thailand.

Thus, the research objectives are: to investigate the phases of stress from pre-holiday to post-holiday as perceived by foreign tourists; to analyze the differences in foreign tourists' perceptions of travel related stress on their visits to Bangkok, Thailand; and to analyze if the differences in tourists' demographic profiles influence their perceptions of travel-related stress on their visits.

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