

# **Volunteer Tourism Development: Perceptions from University Students in Thailand**

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## **Abstract**

Volunteer tourism is an alternative tourism aiming to support local destination in order to perform responsible tourism development. Thailand is one of the most famous destinations for volunteer tourism destination. This paper provides background of volunteer tourism in Thailand using university students, as main target, to explore their perceptions, attitudes, and motivations of involvement. Data collection was implemented through questionnaire survey and in-depth interview. This is to understand perceptions and motivation of involvement from university students, as main target population. Findings show that university students understand that volunteer tourism is a traveling for conducting volunteer works at host destination but they rarely involved in such programs due to limited information, time availability, and preferring of different type of tourism which providing more attractive activities for them. Perceptions and motivations of university students found from this study, therefore, will contribute as important information for future volunteer tourism development which will meet the needs of target people.

**Keywords:** perceptions; university students; volunteer tourism; Thailand

## Introduction

For decades, there is a great debate on whether tourism significantly contributes to the socio-economic and environment or it is harmful to the host destination. Various scholars (Aronsson, 2000; Jamieson, 2001; Guysoy, 2004; and Pongponrat, 2006) mentioned that tourism related activities degrade quality of natural resources leading to degradation of environment while also threaten and destroy local traditions, means of livelihood, and self-reliance since locals depends upon tourism-based activities which is a sensitive sector. According to obvious negative impacts of tourism, UNESCAP (2001) mentions that responsible tourism is one approach which was designed to balance the positive and negative impacts at present and in the future. Responsible tourism development aims to manage resources in such a way to fulfill socio-economic needs while maintaining cultural integrity, ecosystem and biological diversity. To follow the concept of responsible tourism, there is an ‘volunteer tourism’ as an alternative way for tourism development to reduce its negative impacts and to serve for sustainability. Considering volunteer tourism, it is a combination of volunteering and alternative tourism. This form of alternative tourism is aimed at so-called new tourists, who normally would like to be labeled as travelers instead of tourists, the term associated with traditional mass tourism (Mowforth and Munt, 1998). McGehee (2002) stated that the popularity of volunteer tourism as a form of alternative tourism has grown significantly over the past decade. Ideally, volunteer tourism is expected to be a tool to support local sustainable development project for the host community through tourism sector. The popularity of volunteer tourism as a form of alternative tourism has grown significantly which influenced by the concept of ‘saving the world’ after a declaration of sustainable development as a mainstream of global community development. Tourists who concern on social responsibility began to search for new and exciting forms of travelling with the need of social standing more than just joining the traditional mass-tourism product.

Volunteer tourism has more important roles since there are increasing of natural disaster such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Indian Ocean tsunami, Earthquakes in Pakistan and China, cyclone in Myanmar, East Japanese earthquakes and tsunami, and other catastrophic events. This circumstance generates volume of people to get involved in volunteer work for relief by travelling to disaster effected areas. It is also happened in tourism sector which this phenomena triggered tourist's getting involved in relief efforts though volunteer tourism. According to Tomazos and Butler (2009), there are around 146 volunteer tourism organizations worldwide that send thousands of volunteer tourists around the world each year. There are volunteer opportunities on every continent of the world with the top five countries being China, India, USA, Indonesia and Brazil.

Thailand is one of the famous destinations for volunteer tourism operated by various international organizations such as International Volunteer Program Association, Travel to Teach, Earth Watch, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), or Bridge Volunteer. Volunteer tourism became to be interesting area to study from last decades. This due to its significant growth which contributes to sustainable development worldwide. Actually, volunteer tourism in Thailand was initiatively addressed since the Tsunami disaster in year 2004, there were many volunteers went to the disaster effected area in the southern of country provided relief works to the Tsunami victims and their communities. Those volunteers mainly were backpackers and ordinary tourists who used to visit the tsunami effected areas or stayed in Bangkok but willing to help. They gathered as a group and traveled down south to the tsunami effected areas. Moreover, during a time of disaster recovery, many interest groups and organizations were formulated as volunteer working group, which later, became volunteer placement organizations.

Major target of volunteer tourism is young generation who mostly study in college or university level. They look for new experiences in different culture while also be part of the sustainable practices. This supported by study of Wearing et al. (2004) that meaning of volunteer

tourism is a learning process in a form of academic knowledge, the development of personal knowledge, self-confidence, independence, cultural awareness and social abilities appears to be a central expectations and experiences of volunteer tourists. This occurs when university students, considering as youth, travel outside campus to learn for different culture while working as volunteer for host community development projects. Although volunteer tourism seems popular among international university students for decade but not for young Thais. This issue should be considered even more significant when many Thai universities put an idea of 'university social responsibility' into its strategic development plan to build social awareness for young generations and involve them in volunteering. This leads to a major question of 'why university students 'want' or 'do not want' to get involved in volunteering program', especially through volunteer tourism. Unfortunately, there is still limit research emphasizes on this particular issue.

This paper aims to provide current situation of volunteer tourism in Thailand by using university students as target population to understand the circumstance. Moreover, it aims to examine attitudes, perceptions and motivation factors that effected on university students' decision-making to involve in volunteer tourism program. It is based on a research project using both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. Results of the research will provide recommendation to strengthen volunteer tourism development in Thailand which can be used to develop volunteering program for tourism sector as well as adapting into general volunteering program for other purposes.

## **Literature Review**

This section provides overview of volunteer tourism based on various studies including concepts, types and targets, motivation of involvement, and benefits and constraints of volunteer tourism. Volunteer tourism in Thailand is also delineated in this section to generate awareness of its practices.

## **Overview of volunteer tourism**

Tourism is a very large sector and is growing rapidly. Assessing the impact of tourism on livelihood is not a simple matter because tourism is a multi-faceted phenomenon. In general, the impacts of tourism can be categorized into positive and negative effects. Promoting tourism is a major mechanism of economic growth. Nevertheless, since there are many negative impacts of, the relative values of benefits versus harms must be carefully assessed. High income from a tourist invasion of a rural village may decrease the value of traditional way of life or destroy natural scenery value by the local community. To solve problems, UNESCAP (2001) addressed that sustainable tourism is one approach of development to reduce negative impact of tourism. Recently, sustainable tourism was transformed its terminology into an alternative tourism which recognized as a distinct form of tourism. Weaver and Opperman (2000) addressed that mass tourism has contrasting ideal types with alternative tourism because mass tourism attractions are artificial and foster externally controlled and high-leakage operations. Meanwhile alternative tourism attractions area mostly authentic and offering locally controlled and high-linkage opportunities. Consequently, alternative tourism can be defined as a form of tourism that consider on social, environmental, and community values which allows both hosts and guests appreciate contributions of its while also having interaction and shared experiences among them. Volunteer tourism can be, therefore, seen as suitable with a key concept of alternative tourism. This due to its presenting an opportunity for maintaining an alternative traveling purpose that significantly contributes to host community development than other vacations.

Volunteer tourism is a combination of ‘tourism’ and ‘volunteerism’. This aims to present so-called new tourists, who normally would like to be labeled as ‘travelers’ instead of tourists, the term associated with traditional mass tourism. In general, this type of traveler aims to work as a volunteer in one destination, meanwhile, learn other cultural, interact with social and community and raise awareness. Wearing (2004)

had mentioned the meaning of volunteer tourism as learning in the form of academic knowledge, the development of personal knowledge, self-confidence, independence, cultural awareness and social abilities appears to be central to many volunteer tourism experiences and expectations. It offers unique opportunities for intense cross-cultural interactions that may lead to an increased awareness of global issues.

Volunteer tourists or travelers travel to work for various purposes such as research, assist, teach or exchange their experience with people and community without receive income from company or organization. Wearing (2002) identified volunteer tourists as those tourists who volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society and environment. Brown and Morrison (2003) found two types of volunteer tourists which are a) volunteer-minded tourists who are willing to spend most or all of their vacation volunteering and b) vacation-minded volunteer tourists who dedicate partial of their vacation time to voluntary work. Volunteer tourism makes contributions on development for both personal, interpersonal and society as a whole. Chen and Chen (2011) noted that the contributions of volunteer tourism for individual include personal growth, personal awareness, self-confidence, self-contentment, self-development, and satisfaction. Volunteer tourism provides education and learning process for individual, skills development, and work experience. For contributions on interpersonal and a society as a whole include cross cultural interaction, interpersonal awareness, opportunity for person-to-person encounters, as well as sharing and appreciating culture (Chen, 2009). Moreover, the international setting of most volunteer tourism can bring additional benefits including international knowledge, increased cultural awareness and mutual understanding, intercultural competence, language skills, and also enhancement of social relationship between volunteer tourists and host communities.

Previous research (Mowforth and Munt, 1998; McGehee, 2002; Wearing, 2004; Tomazos and Butler 2009; and Proyrungroj, 2015) confirmed that major target of volunteer tourism is young generation who mostly study in college or university level and willing to experience new things in different culture with their energetic condition while also be part of the sustainable concept. Wearing et al. (2004) mentioned that the meaning of volunteer tourism is a learning process in a form of academic knowledge, the development of personal knowledge, self-confidence, independence, cultural awareness and social abilities appears to be a central expectations and experiences of volunteer tourists. Mentioning social capital, as knowledge and network, also plays vital role in generate volunteer program in different practices and places. This occurs when university students travel outside campus to learn for different culture while working as volunteer for host community development projects which slightly contradicted with Sin (2009) who stated that motivating factors for volunteer tourists were 'to travel' rather than 'to contribute' or 'to volunteer'. Volunteering in the local community was also a reason but one of many means of travelling to different destinations to 'learn about local cultures' or to 'beyond superficial tour packages where you don't see how people really live'. Many studies show that volunteer tourism have used these approaches to examine why people volunteer abroad, and to a lesser extent why they chose the country, organization, or project. Similar to findings from broader volunteering, volunteer tourists hold both altruistic (e.g., desire to help, give back, make a difference) and self-interested motivations for volunteering abroad (e.g., authentic travel, gain experience, engage in travel and adventure, learn, pleasure-seeking, personal growth, cultural exchange, and professional development. Considering decision-making to involve in volunteer tourism programs, volunteer tourists select an organization to involve in volunteer activities for its reputation, varieties of program and schedule, marketing, safety and security, specific projects, organization type such as NGO, type of people involving, and

recommendations from family or friends (Coghlan, 2007, Wearing and McGehee, 2013).

There is increasing of discussion on whether volunteer tourism contributes to host community or it generates negative impact. Volunteer tourism offers local people chances to meet interesting people, make friendships, learn about the world, and expose themselves to new perspectives. Experiencing different cultural practices enriches experiences, broadens perspective, and increases insight as well as appreciation for different approaches to living which a sense of achievement, sense of belonging as citizen of global community. McGehee and Santos (2004) addressed that the interaction between the volunteer tourists and the host communities is a vital component of volunteer tourism for both parties. However, Sin (2009) highlighted that there are two sides of volunteer tourism. There is a positive relationships creating between volunteer tourists and the locals. On the other hand, these relationships are not equal since the volunteer is initially placed in a powerful position. There is a belief that educational volunteer projects are more beneficial than others since they help the people help themselves instead of only helping them for a short time. These provide long-term effects to host communities that in time will allow the population break out of their poverty (Sin, 2009, McGehee and Santos, 2004). According to Wearing (2004), volunteer tourism is as much a pursuit to explore the self as it is a pursuit to help others, and is thus rewarding to both parts. Bringing mutual benefits and positive interaction between host communities and volunteer tourists is a main focus of volunteer tourism program. As a volunteer tourism organization, it may need time to develop its identity along with the tools and strategies that will serve both volunteers and locals effectively.

### **Volunteer tourism in Thailand**

Volunteer tourism in Thailand was formally initiated after Tsunami disaster hit north Andaman coastal zone in 2011. However, the concept

of volunteering in Thailand has been recognized long ago before Tsunami happened. In year 1957, there were representatives from Young Buddhist Association of Thailand under Royal Patronage attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Asia Volunteer Leadership Camp organized by Indian Organizing Committee for International Voluntary Work Group and UNESCO. Later, this group of representatives also attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> Asia Volunteer Leadership Camp. From this international camp, the representatives obtained views, information, strategies to formulate volunteer program in Thailand as it could help for developing the country. Therefore, there was an idea to set up volunteer camp for young people in public universities. Chulalongkorn University and Thammasat University, as major public universities in Thailand, were the first-two universities that implemented volunteer camps by involving university students in the camp. Later, this type of student camp became student volunteer club implementing through different universities nation-wide. Mainly, the idea of university volunteer club is to involve university students in public works or community development to follow the idea of citizen social responsibility for country development. Previously, besides university volunteer club, there were other volunteer organizations organized volunteer camp such as Y.M.C.A. and American Friends Service Committee. Later in 1980, there was a formulation of Thai Volunteer Service Foundation (TVS) to act as a main body of volunteering program planning, management, and operating though the country. TVS was formally registered as volunteer service center in 2000.

TVS has organized different projects for young people including Full-Time Volunteer, Human Rights Volunteer, Young People Development for Social Change, and Teacher Volunteer. Besides domestic volunteering, TVS also has the collaboration among Mekong countries for the Young Generation in Mekong Region project which aims to build up network among youth in Mekong Region for sustainable development. Main objective of TVS is to create forum of leaning and developing attitudes and skills for

committed volunteers who want to contribute to unfortunate people. Meanwhile TVS also try to enhance capacity of young people to develop their skills and analytical thinking by conducting training and exposure trips. TVS acts as a liaison to promote collaboration among NGO and governmental agencies in seeking for participatory social development.

Although there was a long legend of volunteering in Thailand, but the concept of volunteer tourism is very young in this country. Mostly, volunteer tourism programs in Thailand are owned and operated by international organizations. Major volunteer tourism organizations such as MONO Travel, Openmind Projects, Volunteering Solutions, iCare Thailand Foundation, GapYearThailand, ISV, Gibbon Rehabilitation Project, Teach English Abroad, Cross-Cultural Solutions, Go Abroad.com, Projects abroad, and Volunteer Forever. These volunteer organizations do volunteer placement worldwide and have sub-office branches in different countries including Thailand. However, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), as a main actor of tourism promotion and marketing, also tried to deal with a trend of volunteer tourism. In 2013, TAT launched a project called “The Little Big” which was a volunteer tourism program designing competition to inspire worldwide travelers to take a volunteer vacation in Thailand. Unfortunately, this project was a so called ‘marketing campaign’ for tourism business which not generated any significant impact on volunteer tourism development in long term.

To deal with Tsunami disaster in Thailand, volunteer tourism became more interesting for people who want to help tsunami victims. There was a main volunteer center called ‘Tsunami Volunteer Center’ (TVC) located in Khao Lak, Phang Nga Province, one of the main tsunami effected areas. It was founded in 2005 in directly response to Indian Ocean Tsunami. This was Thai-led NGO funded by private donation which not affiliated with any religions. Main objective of TVC is to assist in the restoration of tsunami-affected

communities through empowerment approach. There are various development projects focused on community-based tourism, children outreach and education, and small business development for locals. Besides tsunami relief projects, TVC tries to encourage volunteer spirit amongst volunteers to rebuild tsunami effected communities by providing opportunities to interact with local villagers through learning of Thai cooking, dancing, batik painting, and also Thai language class. Another main volunteer organization which directly dealing with tsunami relief project is Andaman Discoveries. It is a non-profit organization based in Thailand that provides assistance to tsunami-affected villages in the north Andaman Sea region which became a success model of volunteer organization transformed into volunteer tourism organization focusing on promoting and facilitating cultural exchanges between villagers and volunteer tourists.

Although there are volunteer organizations working in different purposes in Thailand, unfortunately, organizations that dealing specifically with volunteer tourism is limited which possibly leading to a limit access for people to involve in volunteer tourism activities as based on its core value of the original concepts. Mostly, what appear in tourism industry is an ‘adding-up volunteer activities’ in a tour itinerary that using to marketing a tour program. Thailand has a potential for volunteer tourism to grow due to its country resources attracted tourists worldwide with plenty of available areas to implement volunteer activities in different remote communities. Issue to concern is how to develop and expand target of volunteer tourism not only for young foreigners but also young Thais in expecting to increase their sense of belonging while understanding different customs and cultures within their own country, not yet to mention about university social responsibility as a core idea to develop mindset, skills, and maturity for young people in university level that was addressed as one of main duties of Thai public universities.

## **Research Methodology**

Since tourism is one of Thailand's main sources of income, the research seeks to provide strategies for sustainable development in long term. Volunteer tourism, as a form of alternative tourism, is an increasingly popular activity in which individuals combine travel with voluntary work, meanwhile, it represents a more reciprocal form of tourism facilitates the social development among participants. This paper is based on results from an exploratory research focusing on strengthening volunteer program in tourism sector at the grassroots level which can be implied into national plans and policies for future development. Results of the research can be addressed as a form of alternative tourism for community development appearing in volunteer tourism program. Results delineate how university students response on university social responsibility along with their attitudes and perceptions on volunteer tourism which serving as a guideline for the national and local communities in formulating volunteer tourism plans in line with sustainable development.

This paper used both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to understand overall perceptions and motivation of university students, as main target group, and to obtain in-depth information from key informants who directly engaging in volunteer tourism in Thailand for specific concerned issues. To select universities as destination for data collection, those universities would have the significance of university direction to implement university social responsibility plans and policies which could appeared in the existing of volunteering programs. The research selected main government universities located around Bangkok and nearby areas by using purposive sampling technique. Consequently, the research selected four major government universities including Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Mahidol University and Thammasat University as main target of the research. Target population was university students in various years with diversified fields of study. From total number of population is 101,088

(Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2010), the research applies Taro Yamane's formula (1967) to define sample size of respondents for questionnaire survey which will be 400 respondents. There were 100 respondents represented for each selected university. There was in-depth interview with 6 informants to understand construction of selected case study. Questionnaire survey was implemented to describe social phenomena including university students' awareness, understanding, attitudes, perceptions, expectations, and motivation of volunteer tourism. Analytical statistics was applied for quantitative data analysis. In-depth interview with key informants who work with volunteer tourism organizations was applied to obtain qualitative data on opinions and comments on volunteer tourism development in Thailand. Content analysis was applied to analyze qualitative collected data. Results of this study provide basis information on opinions, attitudes and feedbacks on volunteer tourism development which is useful to understand the mechanism and pattern of volunteer tourism, problems and constraints facing, and its implication for future development.

From data collection, demographic of respondents including gender, age, year of study, field of study, monthly salary, source of salary, and residency were presented. A total of 400 respondents, who were university students from four main public universities, were recruited to complete questionnaire survey. Findings show that majority of respondents were female (63%). Most of respondents were 19-21 years old (64.5%) and studying in the first year of university so called freshman (45.3%). Majority of respondents study in field of humanities and social science (64%). Mostly, respondents received their monthly salary from their family (80.7%) with an average of 4,000-6,000 Baht per month (32.2%). More than half of the respondents were from other provinces outside Bangkok (53.8%). Demographic of respondents will be presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Demographic of Respondents

Characteristics		Frequencies (n = 400)	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>			
	Male	148	37.0
	Female	252	63.0
<b>Age (years old)</b>			
	Less 18	67	16.8
	19-21	258	64.5
	22-24	63	15.7
	More 25	12	3.0
<b>Year of Study</b>			
	Freshman (First-year)	181	45.3
	Sophomore (Second-year)	77	19.3
	Junior (Third-year)	65	16.2
	Senior (Fourth-year)	75	18.7
	Super Senior (beyond Fourth-year)	2	0.5
<b>Field of Study</b>			
	Humanities& Social sciences	256	64.0
	Pure& Applied sciences	144	36.0
<b>Monthly Salary</b>			
	less 4,000 baht	65	16.3
	6,001-8,000 baht	101	25.3
	4,001-6,000 baht	129	32.2
	8,001-10,000 baht	75	18.7
	more 10,001 baht	30	7.5
<b>Source of Income (multiple-answers)</b>			
	Family	323	80.7
	Part-time job	36	9.0
	Scholarship	32	8.0
	Others	9	2.3
<b>Hometown</b>			
	Bangkok	185	46.2
	Provincial	215	53.8

Source: Field Survey, 2014

## Findings

Considering on university social responsibility concept, it focuses on making difference for social and economic well-being through teaching, research, and volunteering in public events and activities for sustainable development. Recently, concept of university social responsibility applied into various universities in Thailand in expecting to raise students' concerns of on society where they live in. Unfortunately, findings show that most of respondents do not aware on this concept (80.5%). The results show that students have no idea about policies, plans, or activities provided by university to support the concept of university social responsibility. However, when they were asked about involvement in social activity and student clubs, findings show that almost half of total respondents (45.2 %) involved in social activities through student clubs. Sports was social activity that one-third of the total respondents (21.3%) involved, following by community development (17.3%) and music, cultures, and arts (11%), respectively. There were very few of respondents involved in rights and labor social activities (2.5%) and business and management (2%). Different social activities of respondents involved are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2 : Social Activities of Respondent (multiple answers)

Social Activities	Frequencies (n = 400)	Percentage (%)
Sports	85	21.3
Community development	69	17.3
Music/cultures/arts	44	11.0
Religions/Ethics	43	10.8
ASEAN & Public Affairs	35	8.8
Environmental, Wildlife and Natural Resources	27	6.8
Politic	11	2.8
Rights/Labor	10	2.5
Business and Management	8	2.0
Others	7	1.8

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Interestingly, students do not aware on the concept of university social responsibility but involving in various social activities through student clubs especially those related to volunteering work for social and environmental development. This may implies that they do not know the linkages of the concept and social activities that they involved with, leading to a question of awareness and understanding of university students where university social activities concept was applied.

### **University students and their volunteering activities**

Although university students do not aware of university social responsibility concept mentioned in an earlier section this paper, many of them involved in social activities in different categories. Considering volunteer activities, findings show that more than half of respondents (54.5%) never get involved in such activities. Respondents mentioned that they were able to manage time for both studying and involving in volunteer activities which provide them experiences outside classroom. Some respondents mentioned that they involved in more than one volunteer activity since they have several interests to learn and to get involve. One-third of respondents (24.3%) indicated that they involved in environmental conservation while others (18.8%) involved in disadvantaged population supporting. There were very few respondents (2.3%) involved in agriculture activity. Table 3 below shows types of volunteer activities.

Table 3: Types of Volunteer Activity (multiple answers)

Types of Volunteer Activities	Frequencies (n = 400)	Percentage
Public utilities	44	(%)
Community development	33	11.0
Environmental, Wildlife and Natural Resources	97	8.3
Agriculture	9	24.3
Volunteer teaching	32	2.3
Research and development	19	8.0
Religious	36	4.8
Support disadvantaged people	75	9.0
	30	18.8
Disaster recovery volunteer	27	7.5
Public Health	6	6.8
Others		1.5

According to findings, every university supports social activities for students through various student clubs. This is to develop skills and knowledge for students once they learn how to work with others and how to contribute their capabilities and talents to society outside classroom. There are various student clubs that students can choose freely for which clubs they want to be a member or to join activities. These students clubs have wide range of focus such as environmental concerns, sports, arts, music, science, volunteering, and social concerns. Student clubs are organized by student themselves with a financial support from host university.

### **Perceptions of university students on volunteer tourism**

Beyond a volunteering, there is a concept called ‘volunteer tourism’ which is a linkage of volunteering and alternative tourism that tourist travel for a leisure trip and also involve in volunteer works for host destination that they visit. When asking respondents whether they know about this concept or not, findings show that almost of respondents (41%) indicated that they never heard about volunteer tourism before while one-third of respondents (22.5%) indicated that

they were not so sure about what volunteer tourism is. However, the research tried to examine further on perceptions of university students on this concept to obtain their opinions and ideas. More than half of respondents (59%) mentioned that volunteer tourism is about to travel for doing volunteer works as a main purpose of travelling while one-third of respondents (26.8%) mentioned that it is about travel to visit some volunteer projects in host destination. Few respondents (14.2%) mentioned that volunteer tourism is a leisure trip but can involve in volunteer activities if possible (Table 4).

**Table 4:** Perceptions on Concept of Volunteer Tourism

Perceptions on Concept of Volunteer Tourism	Frequencies (n = 400)	Percentage (%)
Travel for volunteering work as main purpose	236	59.0
Travel for leisure and do some volunteer activity	57	14.2
Travel for visiting the volunteer project in area	107	26.8
Total	400	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Respondents were also asked about their perceptions on purpose of volunteer tourism through questionnaire survey which findings show in Table 4.5 below. Majority of respondents (67.6%) mentioned that main purpose of volunteer tourism is to support disadvantaged population while more than half of respondents (59.8%) mentioned on conserving natural and environmental resources following by strengthening and learning cultural diversity (46%). Purpose of volunteer tourism is also related to conserving traditional and cultural resources mentioned by one-third of respondents (38.7%) and strengthening economic and income distribution in host destination (36.2%). Very few respondents (9.8%) thought that volunteer tourism is all about business-oriented activity for profits.

**Table 5:** Perceptions on Purpose of Volunteer Tourism

Perceptions on Purpose of Volunteer Tourism	Frequencies (n = 400)	Percentage (%)
To conserve natural and environmental resources	238	59.8
To conserve traditional and cultural resources	154	38.7
To support social disadvantaged population (ex. orphan, elderly, disabled, women group)	269	67.6
To strengthen community economic and income distribution	144	36.2 4
To strengthen and learn the cultural diversity	183	6.0
To do increase benefits for tourism business	39	9.8

Source: Field Survey, 2014

There are various interpretations trying to explain what does volunteer tourism means in literature review study. This research tries to examine perceptions of university students, as main target of volunteer tourism, to develop fundamental knowledge of this concept for further development that match with the needs of its target since volunteer tourism has increased in popularity and prevalence and is no longer considered only a small section of alternative tourism.

#### **Motivations of university students on volunteer tourism**

As earlier sections of this paper addressed on perceptions of university students on volunteer tourism, the research also tried to examine their motivations to involve or willing to be involved in this type of tourism. The research designed forty-one motivating factors based on previous studies to receive feedback from respondents on degree of motivations which showing in Table 4.6 below. Findings show that significant motivating factors which having highest level to motivate university students to get involve in volunteer tourism included twenty-two motivating factors which were to be fun; to do activities with family and/or friends; to explore new sceneries; to learn new things; to develop personal interests; to experience the challenge of the task; to be away from

everyday stress; to be close to nature; to be with people from different cultures; to experience peace; to develop a new relationship with other volunteer tourists; to learn about other people; to experience adventure; to strengthen family relationships; to strengthen friend relationships; to have a new life style; to combine a love of travel with a desire to give back; to strengthen the creativity; to develop knowledge of a destination; to meet the locals; to become immersed in the host community's culture; and to participate in the cultural and environmental conservation. Among those twenty-two motivating factors that having highest degree of motivations, top three motivating factors that motivate university students to get involved in volunteer tourism includes to learn new things (mean=4.29); to experience the challenge of the task (mean =4.26); and to have a new life style (mean =4.20), respectively.

**Table 6:** Motivating Factors on Volunteer Tourism.

Motivating Factors	Level of Motivating Factors (Percentage %)					Mean (n=400)
	Highest (5)	High (4)	Moderate (3)	Low (1)	Lowest (0)	
1. to be fun	1.3	13.3	56.4	28.8	4.13	4.13
2. to relax	2.3	22.1	49.1	26.3	4.00	4.00
3. to travel with friend	2.0	25.8	43.1	28.8	3.99	3.99
4. to be activities with family and/ or friends	0.5	23.1	49.4	26.8	4.03	4.03
5. to be independent	2.8	27.6	43.9	25.8	3.92	3.92
6. to explore new sceneries	1.3	24.1	41.1	33.1	4.06	4.06
7. to learn new things	0.3	15.5	38.6	45.6	4.29	4.29
8. to fulfill a dream	2.3	30.8	40.1	26.8	3.91	3.91
9. to develop personal interests	1.5	20.5	20.6	44.4	4.10	4.10
10. to experience the challenge of the task	0.8	14.5	42.6	42.1	4.26	4.26
11. to be away from everyday stress	0.3	1.8	18.8	43.3	4.12	4.12
12. to get away from everyday life	2.3	6.3	28.3	41.9	3.73	3.73
13. to be close to nature	1.8	18.3	47.6	32.3	0.0	4.10
14. to be with people from different cultures	1.3	17.3	47.6	33.8	0.0	4.14
15. to be excitement	0.5	2.3	21.3	48.9	27.1	3.99
16. to develop skills and abilities	0.3	2.8	26.6	45.7	24.6	3.91
17. to be recognized by others	1.8	6.3	29.1	43.6	19.3	3.72
18. to experience peace	0.3	1.5	19.5	51.4	27.3	4.04
19. to be away from daily routine	1.8	18.3	47.6	32.3	0.0	3.90
20. to develop a relationship with other volunteer tourists	1.5	23.1	51.6	23.5	0.0	4.07

**Table 6:** Motivating Factors on Volunteer Tourism (Cont.)

Motivating Factors	Level of Motivating Factors (Percentage %)					Mean (n=400)
	Highest (5)	High (4)	Moderate (3)	Low (1)	Lowest (0)	
21. to give something back to society	20.8	2.0	24.8	52.1	0.3	3.91
22. to learn about other people	1.3	20.8	46.4	31.6	0.0	4.08
23. to make new friends	0.8	17.0	48.9	32.8	0.5	4.14
24. to experience adventure	0.8	17.0	48.9	32.8	0.5	4.12
25. to strengthen family relationship	1.5	17.3	52.9	28.1	0.3	4.08
26. to strengthen friends relationship	1.3	23.8	46.1	27.8	1.0	3.98
27. to go somewhere for personal interests	2.8	20.1	44.1	32.6	0.5	4.05
28. to travel around the world	4.5	25.8	38.3	29.8	1.5	3.90
29. to improve self-esteem	2.3	22.1	49.1	26.3	0.3	3.99
30. to think about personal values	2.0	22.6	48.9	26.6	0.0	4.00
31. to have a new life style	1.0	13.8	48.9	36.3	0.0	4.20
32. to combine a love of travel with a desire to give back	1.5	14.8	47.4	36.3	0.0	4.18
33. to strengthen the creativity	1.3	17.8	46.6	34.4	0.0	4.14
34. to get a sense of achievement	2.8	26.6	46.1	24.6	0.0	3.92
35. to develop knowledge of the destination	1.0	16.8	47.1	35.1	0.0	4.16
36. to meet the natures	2.5	24.3	49.1	24.1	0.0	3.94
37. to meet the locals	1.5	21.3	48.1	29.1	29.1	4.04
38. to become immersed in the host community's culture	1.8	19.0	51.4	27.8	0.0	4.05
39. to participate in the cultural and environmental conservation	1.3	15.5	49.6	33.3	0.3	4.14

**Table 6:** Motivating Factors on Volunteer Tourism (Cont.)

<b>Motivating Factors</b>	<b>Level of Motivating Factors (Percentage %)</b>					<b>Mean (n=400)</b>
	<b>Highest (5)</b>	<b>High (4)</b>	<b>Moderate (3)</b>	<b>Low (1)</b>	<b>Lowest (0)</b>	
40.to do something new and difference	14.8	32.4	33.7	12.1	7.0	3.28
41.to develop career path	4.8	24.8	49.9	19.0	1.5	3.80

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Note: level of motivating factors 0.01-1.00= lowest, 1.01-2.00= low, 2.01-3.00=moderate, 3.01=4.00= high, 4.01-5.00= highest

Findings also addressed opinions of university students on destination that they prefer to go for volunteer tourism trip (Table 7). More than half of respondents (55.6%) preferred to go for volunteer tourism in mountain area. This is following by island and seaside destination (51.6%) and forest and waterfall destination (43.1%), respectively. Bangkok was rarely preferred destination by respondents (9%) to select as volunteer tourist destination which implied that respondents preferred to be away city for their volunteer time.

**Table 7:** Preferred Destination for Volunteer Tourism (multiple answers).

Preferred Destination	Frequencies (n = 400)	Percentage (%)
Bangkok	36	9.0
Island and seaside	206	51.6
Mountain	222	55.6
Rural/remote community	141	35.1
River	87	21.8
Forest and waterfall	172	43.1
International countries	87	21.8

Source: Field Survey, 201

To receive information on developing volunteer tourism to attract university students as main target, respondents were asked to provide their comments and opinions on components of volunteer tourism for level of concerning. Highest level of concerning on components of volunteer tourism was safety for travel and doing activities (mean = 4.39); following by reliability of agency or organization that operate volunteer tourism program (mean = 4.37); and traveling accompany are friendly and courteous (mean = 4.20), respectively. Lowest level of concerning was facilities providing in destination (mean = 3.77) following by traveling period which not exceeding seven days (mean = 3.85). Concerning on components of volunteer tourism raised by university students will be shown in Table 8 below.

**Table 8:** Concerning on Components of the Volunteer Tourism.

Motivating Factors	Level of Concerning (Percentage %)					Mean (n=400)
	Highest	High	Moderate	Low	Lowest	
Interesting volunteer activities	0.3	14.1	52.5	32.4	0.8	4.15
Interesting destination	0.8	16.0	47.9	35.3	0.0	4.17
Good weather	1.5	19.8	46.6	32.1	0.0	4.09
Local people are friendly	0.5	19.3	47.1	33.1	0.0	4.12
Local people are interested	0.8	21.8	46.9	30.6	0.0	4.07
Traveling accompany are friendly and courteous	1.0	15.0	46.9	37.1	0.0	4.20
Safety for travel and doing activities	0.5	12.0	35.3	52.1	0.0	4.39
Comfortable and cleanliness of accommodation	0.8	2.8	23.9	36.4	36.2	4.04
Facilities providing (ex. restaurant, shop, signal, internet, or wireless)	1.5	6.3	30.1	37.3	24.8	3.77
		5.5	24.1	41.4	27.1	3.85
Period of trip not exceeding 7 days	2.0					
Cost is not too high with value budget	0.3	0.8	17.0	45.1	36.8	4.17
Reliable agency and organization	0.3	0.5	11.0	37.8	50.4	4.37
Others	1.3	2.5	4.0	3.5	88.7	1.32

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Note: level of motivating factors 0.01-1.00= lowest, 1.01-2.00= low, 2.01-3.00=moderate, 3.01=4.00= high, 4.01-5.00= highest

As volunteer activity in volunteer tourism is one of important components that can attract people, respondents were asked to give feedback on activities that they would be interested to get involved (Table 9). Majority of respondents (49.9%) were interested to get involved in environmental conservation activity. Volunteer teaching was also be interested by one-third of respondents (30.1%), following by public utilities development (30.1%), children activities and youth camp (27.3%), community development (26.3%), and disadvantaged population supporting (25.1%), respectively. Religious was the least volunteer activity that respondents were interested to involve (6.3%).

**Table 9** : Interested Volunteer Activity (*multiple answers*).

Interested Volunteer Activity	Frequencies (n = 400)	Percentage (%)
Public utilities development	120	30.1
Community development	105	26.3
Environmental conservation	199	49.9
Volunteer teaching	120	30.1
Research and development	72	18.0
Healthy& public health	81	20.3
Religious	25	6.3
Agriculture	31	7.8
Disadvantaged population supporting	100	25.1
Children activities and youth camp	109	27.3
Helping the disaster victims	80	20.1
Others	3	0.5

Source: Field Survey, 2014

### **Limitations encountering on volunteer tourism development in Thailand**

Based on data collections with mix research methods of questionnaire surveys and key informant interviews, findings show that even there is a potential growth of volunteer tourism development in Thailand as one of top volunteer tourist destination but limitations

also exist. Mainly, volunteer tourism placement and organizations in Thailand are owned and operated by foreign agencies and staffs, rarely Thai-owned organizations. Current situation that addressed by respondents also show that there were rarely Thai university students get involved in volunteer tourism located in Thailand destination, mainly volunteer tourists were from America, EU, and Japan. Andaman Discoveries, one of main volunteer tourism organization in Thailand, addressed that it must be progress of development and planning for volunteer tourism targeting to young Thais to raise their awareness on social responsibility which can be promoted in their universities. This will increase numbers for volunteer recruitment to go for volunteer tourism during their term break. Then volunteer tourism organization such as Andaman Discoveries can help for design volunteer placement functions and operating. Unfortunately, this is not really happened which leading to less number of Thais university students in volunteer tourism. Some comments from key informant is "...encourage students to understand in volunteer activities and return to society...created involvement between the university and the community to develop cooperation in various forms, the more effective." Key informants interviews also provided interesting issues on volunteer tourism development in Thailand that there is no concrete plan of volunteer tourism to develop in Thailand even there was as volunteer tourism year of Thailand announced by Tourism Authority of Thailand in year 2013 under campaign called "The Little Big Project" which hoping to attract tourists who were looking for "A Purposeful Vacation". However, this campaign was not attracted to volume of tourists not even reach to university students who suppose to be a main target. Information distribution to raise awareness

on volunteer tourism seems be a main obstacle of development as mentioned by key informant that “I’m not sure with that volunteer tourism is. Meant to do for others, helped others or to help others, then go with it.” and also “Volunteer tourism is interesting, but I do not know the meaning of it.”

Limitations of volunteer tourism development in Thailand were also related to attractive of volunteer activities and destination which can be motivating factors to motivate young Thais and others to get involve. Unfortunately, it seems there is no solid plan and development on volunteer tourism to attract people for their payment to do volunteering. This addressed by some key informants such as “...should have more concrete activities to encourage awareness that tourism can be integrated with volunteering.” and “... should be developed from the various activities of volunteer tourism promoting on university campus and constructing core values on social responsibility.”

Volunteer tourism in Thailand is a new issue for development which has a potential growth in tourism section. This paper is based on an exploratory research to examine current situation of this typical tourism pattern which still require more research for knowledge development on this issue. Receiving comments, opinions, feedback from university students and key informants who are stakeholders in volunteer tourism were useful to obtain basis information for analysis to develop suggestion for further development that meet the right targets and needs.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

This paper provides findings on perceptions of university students with information supported by key informants on volunteer tourism development in Thailand. These findings provide fresh and

valuable contributions knowledge on the research leading to a discussion and suggestion for appropriate direction of development in future. Based on findings, university students understand that volunteer tourism is about travelling to do volunteering works as a main purpose, then have leisure trip is a plus during their travelling as supported by studies of Chen and Chen (2011), Coghlan (2007), Wearing and McGehee (2013) mentioning volunteering is a main purpose for such travelling approach. However, Thai university students were rarely involved in volunteer tourism pattern which may cause by unawareness of volunteer tourism programs. If they will get involved in volunteering, they will go with social clubs provided by university but not related to tourism sector. To understand motivations of Thai university students for their involving in volunteer tourism, the research found that mainly they will involve if they can learn new things from the programs or having new experience to challenge new task assigned to them supported by study of Wearing (2002) who addressed that volunteer tourism is a self-exploration to new experience. However, many of Thai university students agree that they would prefer to combine travelling trip with some activity for given back to society in form of volunteering. This shows that at least they understand concept of volunteer tourism along with social responsibility as a core value of the concept as also found in study of Brown and Morrison (2003) that volunteer tourism is alternative tourism that supports sustainable development in host community in order to represent social concerns on given society. Volunteer tourism can contributes to cohesive society by building trust and reciprocity among people. It can be both challenging and rewarding for both side of provider and receiver. Volunteer tourists required to use their

skills in a new context of activities which they can transfer useful knowledge while gaining a greater understanding of the issues affecting other people as mentioned in Mowforth and Munt, (1998), McGehee (2002), Wearing (2004), and Sin (2009). These studies lead to an issue found in the research that whether Thai university students will be able to deliver their knowledge to support local host destination where they go for volunteer or not since their perception on volunteer tourism mainly focus on learning new things and getting new experiences more than trying to deliver or transfer knowledge to host destination. However, volunteers themselves, often understand their roles as 'tourist' who doing some volunteer work as additional schedule. This may not match with the volunteer roles that required for volunteer programs even in tourism sector. Therefore, volunteer tourist needs an orientation of expected roles and responsibilities before their placement. Volunteer tourism can contribute to cohesive society by building trust and reciprocity among people. Presently, volunteer tourism in Thailand does not receive effectively supporting from government agencies. Organizations those support the volunteer tourism program are mostly international organizations which supporting on financial support and personnel training. This is leading to a situation that volunteer tourism program in Thailand is limited to foreign group, meanwhile, less interesting from Thais even there is increasing important role of volunteering to support development in Thailand. As discussed earlier that if young Thais want to do volunteer work, they will involve university volunteer club or camps which normally happens in Thai society. This behavior was supported by the idea that young Thais may define volunteering separate from tourism and leisure trip. Meanwhile, even TAT

tried to promote volunteer tourism in Thailand, but the result appeared as a marketing campaign for tourism promoting especially targeting on foreign tourists not domestic tourist. This project even far behind the concept of volunteer tourism as its original focused on social responsibility.

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