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Thailand's cultural heritage and destination image through the perception of British tourists*

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泰國文化遺產
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Abstract

Thailand's cultural heritage and destination image are essential to determine international tourists' leisure destinations. Since 2015, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has launched the *Discovery Thainess* campaign to promote Thailand's brand image and become a global cultural leisure destination. According to UNWTO Tourism Highlights, the United Kingdom was ranked on the 4th international biggest spender in the global tourism market, contributing US\$ 64 billions to the global tourism industry. Thus, British tourists were the target group of the study due to their conservative behavior and spending power. 550 British tourists' attitudes were collected through questionnaire, followed by a focus group interview. This data were collected at the departure passenger site at Suvarnabhumi International Airport. The result shows that British tourists preferred Thai massage and spa, Thai culture tour, Thai cooking, Thai classical dance, and Thai handmade products. In addition, Thailand was perceived as a terrific destination with freedom and relaxation. Overall, the majority of British tourists' perceptions towards Thailand were great and they are likely to return to Thailand in the next two years.

Keywords: British tourists, Cultural Heritage, Thainess, Destination image, Thailand

Introduction

After the military coup in May 2014, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has used the slogan ‘Amazing Thailand: Discovery Thainess’ campaign to promote Thailand’s image. This campaign emphasized the traditional aspects of Thailand. According to TAT, Thainess is a distinctive characteristic that lies at the heart of the national and cultural identity of Thai people in seven areas. These areas are Thai food, Thai arts, Thai ways of life, Thai wisdom, Thai wellness, Thai festivity, and Thai fun.¹ Thainess is deeply combined with Thailand’s traditional values and activities, reflecting Thailand’s life history and the life of people. Thus, exploring the value of intangible Thai cultural heritage to international markets would help increase the number of the international tourists, leading to the national economic growth.

As a result of the TAT’s promoting plan, Thailand became the top-ten most visited country in the ‘World Tourism Ranking’ with 29.9 million international guests in 2015, which then continued increasing to 35.38 in 2017 and hitting a new record of 39.79 million in 2019. Moreover, Thailand was recognized as the world’s leading international tourists’ destination, the ninth (38 million) International tourists’ arrivals and the 5th international tourists’ receipts worthy US\$63 billion in 2018.² Thailand’s tourism industry contributed up to 21.2% of national gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 and created 2,006,500 jobs or 6.2% of total employment.

The United Kingdom was the top fourth-largest international tourist's spender worth US\$79 billion, followed by France, Australia, and Russia. Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, and Sports showed that China was the biggest spender which spent 6,545 baht per day, and stayed for nine days. Meanwhile, Britain was the most prolonged stay in Thailand, averagely 18 days/trip, and spending per day approximately 4,290 baht.³ This point indicates that tourists from Europe and America region visited Thailand for long-stay orientation and spent their money on Thailand's local resources rather than shopping and the entertainment program.

Based on Table 1, British tourists did not spend much on shopping and entertainment programs, although the length of stay in the country was relatively high. This implies that they enjoyed staying in Thailand due to the relaxed destination, the low cost of living, friendly culture, and the relaxing environment.⁴ As the results of Thailand's rebranding image, in 2016, Thailand tourist receipts went up to the third place from the fifth in the second year of the 'Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess' campaign, hitting US\$ 50 billion in 2016.⁵ To boost foreign exchange inflows to Thailand's economic growth, UNWTO secretary-general Taleb Rafai said in the statement below;

"With decreasing commodity prices, spending on international tourism grew significantly, providing the sector's capacity to stimulate economic growth, boost exports, and create

Table 1. International Tourist Receipts Arrivals Jan-Dec 2017

Country of Residence	No. of Arrivals	+/- (%)	Length of Stay (Days)	Per Capital Spending	Average Expenditure of International Tourist							Tourism Receipts Mil. Baht	% Share 2017	
					Shopping	Entertain-ment	Significa- tion	Accom- modation	Food & Lodging	Loca- l Transport	Acces- s to air			
ASEAN	9,644,324	+8.40	5.64	5,498	+4.02	1,626	560	133	1,415	1,044	445	73	299,045	16.33
-Brunei	18,249	-1.42	7.42	6,682	+4.52	2,246	538	166	1,902	1,163	569	96	905	0.05
-Cambodia	851,879	+24.39	6.67	5,475	+11.5	1,718	882	112	1,147	1,082	483	51	31,205	1.70
-Indonesia	567,060	+6.37	6.03	5,161	-1.60	1,637	282	187	1,602	901	487	65	18,489	1.01
-Laos	1,592,866	+19.64	5.69	5,205	+11.7	1,944	530	72	1,230	966	424	40	50,135	2.74
-Malaysia	3,593,112	-0.37	4.96	5,507	+2.47	1,815	529	166	1,475	1,015	416	90	95,410	5.21
-Myanmar	387,722	+6.55	7.43	5,714	+7.03	2,069	894	93	1,280	891	430	57	16,462	0.90
-Philippines	361,218	+11.54	7.33	5,024	+0.21	1,511	347	158	1,173	944	507	84	13,301	0.73
-Singapore	1,259,523	+8.27	5.40	6,393	+1.59	1,861	654	116	1,814	1,372	477	99	43,482	2.37
-Vietnam	983,695	+14.11	5.78	5,205	+0.26	1,858	384	150	1,249	1,042	445	78	29,655	1.62
China	9,846,818	+12.16	8.80	6,545	+3.79	1,995	596	347	1,645	1,250	594	118	520,722	28.44
Russia	1,340,376	+23.44	17.35	4,414	-0.71	697	429	154	1,372	1,059	436	67	102,658	5.61
Australia	837,485	+3.01	16.51	5,671	+0.04	976	755	245	1,808	1,223	563	-	65,776	3.59
UK	9,455,061	-1.71	18.25	4,290	+1.78	517	552	194	1,428	1,017	508	74	73,992	4.04
Japan	1,525,707	+7.68	7.81	5,595	+4.35	903	644	156	1,650	1,261	506	76	56,680	3.64
Korea	1,498,608	+17.18	7.60	5,849	+3.43	1,207	816	174	1,682	1,193	468	109	75,507	4.12
USA	1,206,939	+7.25	14.18	5,204	+1.80	777	624	232	1,715	1,097	660	98	74,307	4.06
India	1,281,681	+19.01	7.45	5,733	+1.61	1,462	667	216	1,641	1,093	544	109	54,739	2.99
France	693,426	-0.62	17.57	3,714	-3.96	518	380	149	1,280	810	519	58	45,510	2.49

Source: Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2017)

jobs.” Taleb Rafai cited in Boonsong Kositchotethana.⁶

The Thai government must promote Thailand to become a quality tourism destination in the ASEAN region by representing and giving the message of “Thailand culture image” to global audiences in order to maintain Thailand’s tourism capacity. Therefore, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said, “the government has designated 2015 Discover Thainess, which emphasizes the country’s unique cultural treasures and the Thai way of happiness to be passed on to international visitors.” The Tourism Authority of Thailand has launched the ‘2015 Discover Thainess’ campaign to boost international visitors, rebranding Thailand’s destination image, and building confidence among tourists to choose Thailand as their first destination in the ASEAN region. The study’s significance is to explore Thailand’s cultural heritage in the way of intangible and tangible assets called ‘Thainess’ as a strategy tool that positively contributes to Thailand’s tourism strategic plan and destination image. Thus, the integration of the uniqueness of Thai culture, ‘Thainess’, and Thailand’s geographical advantage, which located in the center of ASEAN, enhances Thailand’s reputation as a unique country that international tourists must visit once in a lifetime.

Literature Review

Cultural Heritage

The cultural heritage consists of two sets of tangible and intangible assets. Intangible culture is physical assets such as monuments, objects, and buildings, whereas tangible assets represent people's life-style, value system, and moral beliefs in different societies.⁷ In 1993, UNESCO established the intangible heritage section in different measures and programs to promote intangible heritage. In 2001, UNESCO, then, introduced "intangible" as a term that should be applied instead of other equivalents, including nonmaterial and invisible. These culture heritages are such as performing arts, social practices, rituals, and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship.

Tangible and Intangible Culture within the Thai Cultural Context

Thailand's cultural heritage has been seen as the significant factor for national economic prosperity due to its contribution to the national income and employment. It has a strong link between tangible and intangible cultural heritage, which the former refers to tangible cultural heritage products, for example, Museums, natural resources, and historical places, the latter means "intangible cultural heritage products", for example, songs, dances, traditional knowledge, and cuisine.

In Thailand's cultural context, it integrates the preservation of natural resources with the cultural environment, which results in enriching people's social and cultural living, and increasing the national revenue. This fact is supported by Liu, who stated that "Tourists never buy resources, they go to tourist destinations, visit attractions and facilities."⁸ The National Tourism Development Plan 2012-2016; therefore, has been set to enhance Thailand's competitiveness to become top-five destinations in Asia.⁹ To create confidence in Thailand's right image among visitors has become a part of the strategic plan so that the country will welcome a significant number of visitors. To make this happens, this action would be taken by the participation of tourism stakeholders including the public sector, civil society, and local administration.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand, established in 1959, has played a crucial role for tourism development in Thailand for more than 60 years. TAT has become members of many international organizations related to tourism promotion such as PATA, and World Tourism Organization. Its tasks are to propagate Thailand's natural beauty, archaeological sites, antiquities, history, art, culture, and sports, and provide advices to tourists. To achieve the top-five destination in Asia, Patawari and Sharma advised Thailand to implement the following ideas 1) creating a new image in world tourism; 2) enhancing branding and promotion schemes; 3) promoting its food industry 4) training employees with knowledge of English and 5) enhancing ancient monuments in the tourism marketing plan.

Thailand's marketing campaign, 'Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess,' represents the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions of the destination country.¹⁰ Based on these suggestions, TAT has embarked on a new campaign for 2015 entitled "2015: Discover Thainess" in seven unique perspectives, namely, (1) Thai food; (2) Thai Arts; (3) The Thai way of life; (4) Thai Wellness; (5) Thai Festivals; (6) Thai Wisdom and (7) Thai Fun.¹¹ The campaign idea elaborated from tourism stakeholders were classified into nine categories areas, including (1) Thai boxing; (2) Thai massage/ spa; (3) Thai cooking; (4) Thai classical dance; (5) Thai handmade product; (6) Coral scuba diving; (7) Elephant riding; (8) Museums; and (9) Thai culture tour.¹² These values are explained in the following Table 2 below;

Table 2. The Definition of 'Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess'

Amazing Thailand	Discover Thainess	
	The essence of 'Thainess'	Nine Value Categories
1. A unity country which needs to be discovered	Thai Food	Thai cooking

Amazing Thailand	Discover Thainess	
	The essence of 'Thainess'	Nine Value Categories
2.Thailand's creative tourism which refers to colorful activities	Thai Art	Thai boxing Thai classical dance Thai handmade product Museums
3.Several tourism attractiveness destinations	Thai Way of Life	Elephant riding Thai culture tour Coral Scuba diving
4.Thailand's unique cultural treasures	Thai Wellness	Thai massage and spa
5.A land of happiness to be passed on to international visitors	Thai Wisdom	
	Thai Festivals	
	Thai Fun	

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand (2016)

Table 2 shows the essence of 'Thainess' in seven unique aspects, which are grouped into nine value categories. As such Thai food refers to the best-loved dishes, for example, Pat Thai, Tom Yam Kung, and Som Tam salad. Thai art refers to intangible cultural heritage in terms of arts which are Thai traditional dance, Thai boxing and literature, and tangible culture, including temples, palaces, and historical

parks. The Thai way of life means the richness of natural resources from different landscapes, including area tropical islands, misty mountains, the activities' coral scuba diving' on the islands around Phuket, elephant riding, and cultural tours. A homestay experience allows tourists to immerse themselves into the Thai culture and enjoy the local resources. Therefore, 'Thainess' has been a part of Thai cultural heritage integrated between tangible and intangible culture.

There are many tangible and intangible aspects of tourism products that influence tourists' perceptions towards destination image. Beerli and Martyn established the purpose of nine dimensions/aspects which determine tourists' perceptions such as leisure and recreation, culture, history and art, infrastructure, tourist infrastructure, political and economic factors, natural resources, natural environment, social environment, and the atmosphere of the place or destination.¹³ According to previous researches, theories, and literature review, Thailand's tourists facilities and destinations can complete well by following the quality standards of tourism and sustainable tourism models. Thus, the concept of 'Thailand culture heritage' can be defined as the same as 'Discover Thainess.'

Thailand's the status of tourist destination has been presented as an outstanding medical tourism leader in Asia over the decades. The motive factors that push the number of international tourists to choose Thailand for the medical tourism destination, including (1) a beautiful country, (2)

Thai hospitality, (3) the previous good experience in Thailand, (4) reputation of medical experience, (5) recommendation from friends, (6) medical costs, and (7) the ease of travel as summarizing in Table 4. These are the combination of tangible and intangible products that contribute to tourists' perceived value, experience, and personal interaction, which turn to Thailand's global marketing opportunities and sustainability.¹⁴

Maitreesophon explored and compared foreign tourists' perspectives on selecting Thailand, the land of smile, as a tourist attraction. The study conducted data from tourists across 30 nationalities, and the finding shows that tourists are more concerned about the quality of accommodation followed by the friendliness of local people, satisfaction after visiting Thailand, cultural and historical diversity, safety and security, nightlife and entertainment, ease of travel and shopping facilities.¹⁵ Moreover, recent studies indicate that Thailand is one of the charming destinations represented by Thai hospitality and Thai way of life, which are unique in the ASEAN. However, Thailand's destination image is diversified in a variety of both tangible and intangible images, the government of Thailand and tourism stakeholders; therefore, should strengthen the country's image by presenting 'Thainess' with a wholeheartedly service mind style to promote Thailand tourism. Nevertheless, Thailand's cultural image has not been established a destination picture clearly. The concept of 'Thainess' enables them to use as a tourism strategy tool

to attract international tourists. This study will analyze Thailand's cultural heritage through British tourists' perceptions.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses tangible and intangible cultural heritage in tourism to guide this research.¹⁶ Since tourism become the part of Thailand's economic activities, cultural heritage ,an early phenomenon, has become growing to be addressed. In 2015, the Thai government initiated the tourism strategy campaign 'Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess' whereby 'Amazing Thailand' refers to tangible culture and products such as natural resources, colorful activities. While "Discover Thainess" refers to tangible products (Thai handmade product, elephant riding, and museums) and intangible products (Thai boxing, Thai massage/spa, Thai cooking, Thai classical dance, scuba riding, and Thai culture tour) (refer to Figure 1).

Thailand's cultural heritage become a tool contributing to developing tourism strategies via the 'Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess' message campaign, which 'Thainess' links tourist experiences with people interaction. Thus, the research question arises "how do tourists perceive the value of a trip taken?";

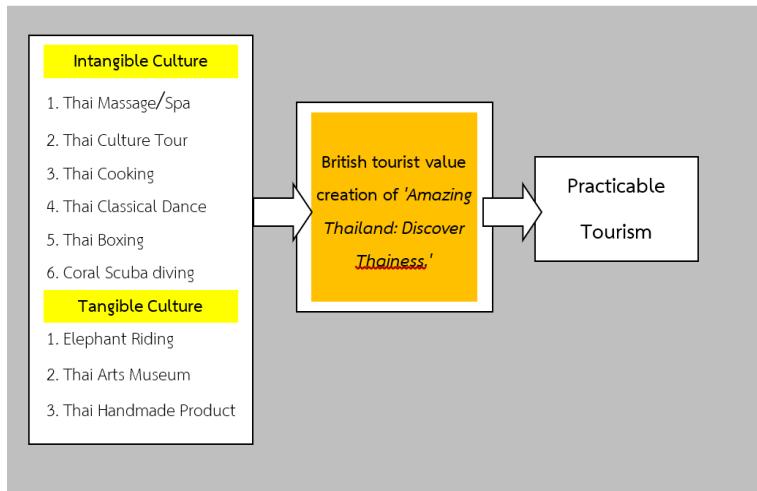


Fig. 1 Tangible and Intangible Theoretical Framework

Research Methodology

Mixed methods approach was used by using a questionnaire tool to capture British tourists' perception of "how do British tourists perceive value of Thainess in several aspects?" followed by a semi-structured interview for conducting an interview data. Primary data and documentary evidence are enabling to improve the quality of research.¹⁷ The focus group interview was applied with British tourists who had visited Thailand for the first time and repeat visitors.¹⁸

The questionnaire used a checklist scale based on the definition 'Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess' (see detail in Table 2). The purposive sampling method was setup 550 sampling. The questionnaires were distributed to British

tourists at passenger departure, Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Sukhumvit road, Ratchaprasong, and Petchburi road between October and December in 2017 and January in 2018. All questionnaires were filled out and collected in a self-administered manner. The data are tabulated and analyzed by using frequency and percentage before interpreting data results empirically.

Table 3. Research Sampling and Collecting Data

Methods

No.	Thailand Research Objective	Data Collecting method	Instrument	No. of survey	No. of FG
1.	Examine the concept of 'Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess'	Survey and focus group interview	The adapted concept from the Tourism Authority of Thailand	550	12
2.	To explore 'Thailand destination status.'	Survey and focus group interview	The adapted concept from the Tourism Authority of Thailand	550	12

After the survey, the focus group interview method was starting. The moderator asked the respondents to provide useful information about Thailand's cultural image, beginning with open-end questions, 'what is the awareness perception of Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess?'; and "what are the perceptions about Thailand destination status?" British tourists could give their ideas based on their perceptions and experiences. The study was used to interpret Thailand's image guiding by a semi-interview structure because the interview method possessed the capacity emerging from the group discussion rather than individuals.¹⁹

Data Analysis

The 550-questionnaire data were collected via self-administration rather than encoding to the SPSS program and analysis using descriptive statistics or frequency. The interview data were analyzed by using content analysis and backing up by the essence of 'Thainess' according to TAT. A total of twelve British sampling ideas and suggestions were categorized by grouping similar answers into the same categories (see detail Table 7 and 8).

Quantitive Research Findings

A.The Respondents Demography

The majority of 347 respondents were male (63%), and 203 were female (37%). The average age was below 20 years old (11.3%), between 21-30-year-old (36.2%), 31-40

years old (25.5%), between 41-50 years old (14%), 51-60 years old (9.5%), and more than 61 years old (3.6%). The majority of 254 respondents were married (46.2%), and 296 were single (53.8%). Approximately 14.7% of British tourists graduated from school, (57.5%) followed by a bachelor degree and the master degree and above which are 57.5%, and 27.8% respectively. Regarding Income, the majority of British tourists' income were less than 5,000 USD (31.8%), followed by the range between 5,001-10,000 USD (30.9%), the next range from 10,001 to 15,000 USD (23.8%) and 13.5% of tourist's incomes which has over than 15,000 USD. Most British tourist's occupations were an employee (60.5%), followed by the business owner (21.8%), student (12.2%), others such as freelance and retired approximately (5.5%).

When it comes to the purposes of visiting Thailand, British tourists came to Thailand for travel (96.4%), business trips (3.6%). Most of them are repeat visitors whereby (49%) come to Thailand 1-2 times, (11%) 3-5 times, (3.3%) 6-10 times, and the first time (36.7%). British tourists know about Thailand from media advertisement and news (28.7%), followed by travel guide/trip advisor (29%), friend and family (27%), Thailand Authority of Tourism (TAT) (3.8%), and master card worldwide (2.7%). The average duration for British tourists staying in Thailand were between 5-7 days (24.2%), 8-10 days (50.4%), and more than two weeks (25.5%). Most of the British tourists prefer to stay in the hotels and guesthouses (63.6%), followed by the hostels (20%) and residents of friends or families (16.4%). They arranged their

trip to Thailand by collecting information, and booking via the internet (67%), and buying a package tour from the agency (33%). The budgets of British tourists spent in Thailand per trip was about 1,001-1,500 USD (39.3%), followed by 2,001-2,500 USD (29.5%), 1,501-2,000 USD (17.6%) and more than 2,501 USD (11.5%). A few of them who spent the money less than 1,000 USD per trip was about 2.2%.

B: British Tourist Perception Concept of ‘Amazing Thailand’

‘Amazing Thailand’ is measured by the five concepts adapted from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) as showed in Table 4. About 34% of British tourists perceived the concept of ‘Amazing Thailand’ as several tourism attractiveness destinations, followed by Thailand’s creative tourism, which refers to colorful activities (24%), a land of happiness to be passed on to international visitors (19%), unique culture treasures (15%), and a unity country where needs to be discovered (8%) respectively.

Table 4. British Tourist Perception Concept of ‘Amazing Thailand’

No.	British Tourist Perception	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Several tourism attractiveness destinations	332	34
2	Thailand’s creative tourism which refers to colorful activities	229	24

No.	British Tourist Perception	Frequency	Percent (%)
3	A land of happiness to be passed on to international visitors	181	19
4	Thailand's unique cultural treasures	145	15
5	A unity country where needs to be discovered	80	8
	Total no. of respondent	550	100

*Note = Number of Ideas (Applicable can choose > 1) (N=550)

C: British Tourist Perception about 'Discovery Thainess'

The concept of the 'Discovery Thainess' campaign is classified into nine concept ideas adapted from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), as showed in Table 5. Most of the British tourists' Perception on the concept of 'Discovery Thainess' was a Thai massage/Spa (19%), followed by coral scuba diving (14%), Thai cultural tour (13%), elephant riding (11%), Thai art museums (11%), Thai cooking (10%), Thai classical dance (10%), Thai handmade (7%) and Thai boxing (5%) respectively.

Table 5. British Tourist Perception about 'Discovery Thainess'

No.	British Tourist Perception	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Thai Massage/Spa	290	19

No.	British Tourist Perception	Frequency	Percent (%)
2	Coral Scuba Diving	209	14
3	Thai Culture Tour	200	13
4	Elephant riding	166	11
5	Thai Arts Museums	160	11
6	Thai Cooking	157	10
7	Thai classical dance	150	10
8	Thai Handmade Product	99	7
9	Thai Boxing	79	5
	Total no. of respondent	550	100

*Note = Number of Ideas (Applicable can choose > 1) (N=550)

D: British Tourists Perception Thailand Destination Status

Overall, British tourists perceived Thailand as a wonderful place (36%), followed by the land of freedom and relaxation (22%), a happy country (18%), the culture diversity (16%), the land of a smile (6%), and the shopping paradise (2%) respectively.

Table 6. British Tourists Perception of 'Destination Status'

No.	British Tourist Perception	Frequency	Percent (%)
1	Thailand is a beautiful place	200	36

No.	British Tourist Perception	Frequency	Percent (%)
2	Thailand is the land of freedom and relax	120	22
3	Thailand is happiness country	100	18
4	Thailand is culture diversity	90	16
5	Thailand is the land of smile	30	6
6	Thailand is a shopping paradise	10	2
	Total no. of respondent	550	100

*Note = Number of Ideas (Applicable can choose > 1) (N=550)

Quantitive Research Findings

The interview method was used to collect the data given by British tourists who have been in Thailand for a minimum of 1-2 times (repeat visitors) and for the first time visiting. There are 12 samples from the British group which consisted of seven males and five females. The age ranged between 31-40 years old. A total of 12 cases provided the information regarding Thailand cultural image, both negative and positive aspects, which will be discussed in the following;

A: 'Amazing Thailand'

British people defined Thailand as a beautiful place, and the land of freedom and relaxation (see more detail in Table 7). The interview data of 12 British tourists' perception about 'Amazing Thailand' as the 'dream destination' due to beautiful beaches and Thai culture diversity. The land of

freedom with the smiling of Thai people made Thailand become a wonderful place, and its hospitality made them feel to stay at home. British tourists had earned new valuable experience from traveling, which can be defined as ‘diversity, stunning and unexpected.’ British tourists had an impressive experience with Thailand’s beautiful scenery, such as beautiful beaches, spectacular islands, and exotic wildlife. Overall, Thailand’s natural resources and scenery; thus, defined the concept of amazing Thailand as ‘the tropical paradise of ASEAN and ASIA.’ Similarly, ‘the beautiful sand sea sun of ASIA’ also applied with Thailand’s concept.

Table 7. British Tourists Awareness Perception about ‘Amazing Thailand’

No.	British Tourists (UK)
1	- Thai island scenery - Beautiful beaches and blue seas
2	- Unique country - unexpected, stunning, spectacular Thailand
3	- Thailand is a very fantastic place to travel
4	- A dream destination for people around the world - Diversity culture & beautiful scenery
5	- The land of tourist dream - The long historical, unique and charming people

No.	British Tourists (UK)
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversity of culture and nature - Best tropical beaches and islands - Many world heritage sites
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spectacular islands and exotic wildlife - “The dream destination”
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The dream destination” - “Thailand, the land of freedom”
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Thailand, the land of freedom”
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The tropical paradise of ASEAN” - The unique culture and traveling places - Breathtaking scenery
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The tropical paradise of ASIA”
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The beautiful sand sea sun of ASIA”

B: ‘Discover Thainess’

‘Discovery Thainess’ via British tourists’ perception mainly refers to Thai massage/spa, scuba diving, and Thai culture tour (see more detail in Table 8). Twelve British tourists have awareness about ‘Discovery Thainess’ as ‘the rich cultural diversity’ and ‘magnificent, heritage, advantages, and cultural diversity.’ Due to the diversity of Thai cultures, various cultural festivals, British tourists immersed in Thai rich culture, which is stunning and unexpected experience, and they are impressed Thai people who have the ‘nice and friendly smiling,’ that makes them feel comfortable with Thai hospitality. Thainess seems to be a traditional Thai

culture, which makes them relax in this country. Thus, the ‘Thainess’ campaign has still been an effective strategy to attract British tourists to come to Thailand as their ‘paradise on earth.’

Table 8. British Tourists Awareness Perception about ‘Discovery Thainess’

No.	British Tourists (UK)
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Much more relaxing in the way of Thai people’s life - Beautiful beaches and cultural diversity
2	Thai conservative, friendly, and kindness
3	Smile as much as possible
4	Diversity, Stunning & unexpected
5	Traditional, easy-going, and tropical
6	Heritage, adventurous and spectacular
7	Magnificent, heritage, advantages, and cultural diversity
8	The rich of cultural diversity
9	culture diversity
10	Tropical and historical of Thailand
11	Thai hospitality
12	Thai Traditional culture

Conclusion

Triumphant praise of Thailand's destination branding campaign was 'Amazing Thailand.' This campaign was created just after the economic crisis of 1997. One word of 'Amazing' enabled us to bring all diverse aspects of Thailand. The government lunched campaign in 1998, discussing with agencies such as tour guides, restaurants, and souvenir associations. After a group discussion, the ideas came out with 'Amazing Thailand,' which 'Amazing' covered all aspects, such as historical and cultural sites, beautiful beaches, and amiable people. To promote this campaign in the global market, the Thai government allocated 37.9 Million USD in 1998-1999. However, 'Amazing Thailand' was hardly promoted for the shopping destination, tasty food, beaches, Thai spa and traditional massages. This campaign's effects were the significant increase in the number of tourists from 7 Million to 10 Million in the next five years.

In 2003, the government launched the 'Unseen Thailand' campaign, which covered the culture, heritage sites, food, shopping, and sightseeing beaches and promote golfing tours, adventure activities, wedding packages, and destination to shoot films. This brand attracted the backpacking tourists and young urban professionals who look for something different. As the results of this campaign, it make Thailand become an affordable destination through international tourists' perspectives.

When it comes to the latest campaign, TAT had embarked on a new campaign entitled ‘Discover Thainess’. This campaign lead to Thailand’s position as the luxury brand aimed at the rich professionals desiring for leisure destination. TAT intended to deepen the emotional value and tourist experience by immersing oneself with Thailand’s culture, Thainess. After launching the campaign, Thailand had more than 29 million international visitors at the end of 2015, which then had reached over 30 million visitors in 2016 before the arrival at 35 million tourists in 2017, although the concept of ‘Thainess’ has been still vague in terms of the meaning and practical activities.

Nonetheless, this study discovers that most British tourists perceived the concept of ‘Amazing Thailand’ as several tourism attractive destinations (32%), followed by colorful activities (24%), happiness destination (19%), and unique cultural destination (15%), see Table 7. Since Thailand is an attractive destination which have colorful activities from the British tourist’s perspective, it is no doubt that this group stayed in the country longer than other nationalities, approximately 18 days. The majority of the respondents are male (63%), 30s (36.2%) and being single (53.8%). Many British tourists’ occupations were employees (60.5%), whereby the average income less than 5,000 USD. The finding also indicated that nearly 50% of respondents came to Thailand twice. Moreover, British tourists spent their money per trip about 1,000 to 1,500 USD (39%). They also enjoyed staying long-term in Thailand due to the low cost

of living and friendly tourist culture. Similarly, interview data found that British tourists saw Thailand as the dreaming destination or tropical paradise of ASEAN.

British tourists defined the term and meaning of 'Thainess' in different perspectives upon their experiences. The study shows that most British respondents discovered the experience of 'Thainess' in the form of Thai Traditional massage and spa (19%). Therefore, Thai spa products, Thai massage, and related activities help show 'Thainess' in cultural diversity and hospitality. At this point, Thai massage and spa (Tangible culture) can represent Thailand's cultural image (Intangible resources), which emphasizes the country's unique cultural treasures and the Thai way of happiness that will be passed on to British tourists.^{7,12} Similarly, They see 'Thainess' as a rich cultural diversity.

Also, British tourists perceived Thailand as the 'wonderful place' (36.4), following by 'relaxed destination' (21.8%), 'happiness country' (18.2%), 'culture diversity' (16.4%), 'land of smile' (5.5%) and 'shopping paradise' (1.8%). Based on British tourists spending reported by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, their shopping spending was lowest (517 Baht/Day) among the top 20th tourism countries, while China was the biggest shopping spender (1,995 Baht/Day), followed by tourists from ASEAN, average 1,826 Baht/Day. Thus, it is no wonder that Thailand is not a 'shopping paradise' from the British tourists' perspective, but it is the 'wonderful place,' and 'relaxed destination' which make British tourists want to stay longer in Thailand. The interview

data supports that Thailand is the “wonderful place which refers to beautiful sand sea sun in Asia,” British tourists’ views are supported by Maitreesphon’s study that international tourists choosed Thailand due to cultural and historical diversity. This data indicated that British tourists are likely to revisit Thailand for a holiday relaxing destination, learning a new experience with colorful activities.²⁰ Thus, they expected Thailand as a relaxing destination for leisure with family.

The vast majority of British respondents are repeat visitors who have inherited Thai culture’s value, which tends to be a refined visitor’s excellent experience. Therefore, the marketing message ‘Amazing Thailand: Discover Thainess’ was released to promote Thailand through various aspects of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Research has shown that Thailand’s destinations are engaging with unique cultural properties. British visitors discovered that Thai massage and spa are the favorite activities. Moreover, the focus group interviews confirm that ‘Thainess’ is based on an intangible culture which tourists experienced with Thais’ smiles and hospitality. With this local charm, Thailand has become a beautiful land of freedom, relaxation, and pleasure from the British tourists’ perspective.

In conclusion, ‘Thainess’ can be used as a tool for Thailand’s tourism strategy, represented by nine Thai value categories (refer to Table 5. British Tourist Perception about Discovery Thainess). The interaction of British tourists with local people makes Thai destinations a wonderful place to

obtain a good travel experience. Unsurprisingly, the number of British tourists grew to nearly 1 million in 2019, which was influenced by the Discover Thainess marketing campaign. Based on the discovery and theoretical supports, it is possible to carry out that 'Thainess' is part of Thailand's cultural heritage to represent Thai hospitality and a welcoming environment for foreign tourists. Thus, British tourists tend to return to Thailand for their other vacations.

NOTES

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