

The behaviour of long stay foreigners as tourists in Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

This study looks at (1) the travel behaviour of long-term foreigners living in Thailand, and (2) investigates the influence of demographic factors on foreigners' travel behavior in Thailand. It is quantitative research using a self-administrated and online questionnaire survey of 560 long-stay foreigners in Thailand. Both descriptive and inferential statistics are used to analyze the data. The results are that most respondents in this study have lived in Thailand for more than six years for work purposes. They rent a condominium or serviced apartment. The family members are two-three persons. And they travel once in every four to six months for relaxation and sightseeing. Hypothesis testing shows that these demographic factors have an influence on travel behaviour. As a result, tourism authorities and businesses can adopt the results from this study for their marketing plans to help stimulate the tourism activity of foreigners living in Thailand.

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Introduction

Thailand is target country for many international tourists for travel and long-stay tourism. It has many things to attract them, such as nice tourist sites, cultural interest, reasonable climate, and low living costs. As a result, the trend in tourism in Thailand shows a continuous increase. Tourism is an important income contributor to Thailand (Kummaraka & Jutaporn, 2011). Thus, the amount of long-stay tourism can be used to predict the changing patterns of travel behaviour to provide more knowledge of, and experience of foreigners in Thailand (Kummaraka & Jutaporn, 2011). Thus, there are many past researches on tourist behaviour in Thailand for example; Pimwipar Trachuwanich and Nattapong Punnoi (2022) had studied tourism behaviour of quality tourist in Thailand; and Kamonwan Choeichuenjit and Watcharapoj Sapsanguanboon (2014) on foreign tourists' demand on Thai cultural tourism supply chain. Therefore, the study regards the tourism behaviour of long-stay foreigners has been neglected. In addition, many studies had been conducted on long-stay tourists such as the opportunities and difficulties of long-stay accommodation in Thailand (Muthita Phiromyoo, 2011), Model of Long Stay Tourism for Korean Tourists Visiting Thailand: A Case Study of Chiang Mai Province (Chonthicha Rungsattra, Keerati Trakansiriwanich, Weerapon Thongma, & Yutthakarn Waiarpha, 2021); however, the context of travel behaviour of those foreigners who stay in Thailand for more than 3 months in a year had been neglected. As a result, this paper will fill the academic gap of such lack of study on this particular group.

Recently, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has occurred (Choe, Wang, & Song, 2021; Yu, Park, & Hyun, 2021) and critically affected the global tourism industry (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Since the start of 2022 however, there have been some measures taken to relax travel and tourism restrictions by further defining important measures such as social distancing or frequent cleaning, and always wearing a mask (Qiu, Park, Li, & Song, 2020). While these activities adversely affect life behavior and tourism, they are inevitable until the pandemic is declared finally over (Warach Madhyamapurush, 2022). Hence, tourists are at the heart of travel and tourism industry. If the industry continues to grow as projected, it is imperative that tourism



professionals who are responsible for serving the tourists understand their needs and behaviours (Chompunuch Jittithavorn, 2007).

Literature Review

Tourist behaviour

Travel behaviour can be defined as the physical movement of persons outside their reference locations for any purpose (Axhausen, 2007). The other basic elements, which need to be fixed or chosen by the traveler, are: the purpose of the activity, the timing of the activity and by implication of the associated movements, duration of the activity, location of the activity, which is normally requested at a level of detail convenient for its recall by the respondents, participants in the activity, and the expenditure on the activity. Poon (1993) believes that tourists are the products of changing population demographics and are more experienced, flexible, and independent-minded. Tourists can change their values and lifestyles, which affects tourist demand (Choibamroong, 2006).

Schiffman and Kanuk (2009) assumed that studies of consumer behavior should focus on how people make choices to spend their resources, including period of time, funds, and work on items. Also, these actions are directly concerned on selecting, obtaining, using, and removing of goods and services and perceptions to meet their satisfaction, including the purchasing decisions that preface and follow these actions (Richard, van der Pligt, & de Vries, 1996). But social factors psychological factors, marketing and consumer characteristics are also important in understanding the criteria effects on customers (Karantinou, Hogg, & Lewis, 2006). According to Karantinou, Hogg, & Lewis, (2006) marketing criteria should cover the activities and inputs of manufacturers and distributors in terms of marketing mix, brand, products price, place, and promotions.

Therefore, the mentioned theories are the foundation for this study in order to understand into the travel behaviour of those foreigners who stay in Thailand for more than 3 months annually since there are very few studies on this study on this particular group. It is undoubtedly that the travel patterns of this group might be different from those tourists who visit Thailand for short period.



Long stay foreigners in Thailand

The history of the Long Stay Foundation goes back to the “Silver Columbia Plan ‘92” launched by the former Ministry of International Trade and Industry in 1986. This was a government-led project to promote residing overseas as a way to live a prosperous second life after retirement (Ono, 2008). Intararat, et al. (2006:10) stated that long stay tourism is different from general tourism, in which the former must develop the following: 1) preparation of standard accommodation and it must be inexpensive; 2) preparation of accommodation equipped with convenience facilities suitable for long stay of aging people; and 3) preparation and collection of convenience facilities on health care and for various activities. This is not only for relaxation it is also for physical/emotional aesthetic reasons. Also, the following facilities support long stay programs: good transportation services, language support, good communications, suitable visa programs, banking, self-development opportunities, and so on (Rungsattra, Trakansiriwanich, Thongma, & Waiarpha, 2021).

The Thai government has passed a cabinet resolution to establish the Thai Longstay Management Company Limited, with the Tourism Authority of Thailand as a joint shareholder with the private sector to provide convenience services to foreign tourists wishing to stay for a long period of time within Thailand. The Cabinet had a consultation meeting on September 15, 2020 at which it: (1) agreed to the guidelines for the exposure to special tourist categories, the Special Tourist VISA (STV) as proposed by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports; and (2) approved the policies of the Ministry of Interior on permission for certain types of aliens to stay in the Kingdom in a special case. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, it can be offered for 90 days at a time, and when the permission is expired it can be extended for two more periods of 90 days for a total of 270 days (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020). This research has paid attention to foreigners who stay in Thailand for more than 3 months annually regardless their retirement or long-stay employability.

COVID-19 pandemic

A new coronavirus disease known as COVID-19 was first introduced to the world in early January 2020 in Wuhan, People’s Republic of China (PRC) (Abiad et al., 2020, p. 1). On January 30, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the coronavirus outbreak an international public health emergency, and the disease was officially named COVID-19 on 11 February (Coronavirus Disease [COVID-19] – World Health Organisation, 2020). Tourists to the Asia Pacific



Region was the first to suffer from the impact of COVID-19 after a 35% decrease in arrivals in Q1 of 2020 (United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2020). Thailand detected its first domestic case on 20 January 2020, when a 51-year-old male taxi driver who had encountered Chinese tourist passengers in his taxi and had no history of travel to China presented with the symptom of frequent coughing (Pongpirul, Pongpirul, Ratnarathon, & Prasithsirikul, 2020). Even though the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the coronavirus outbreak a ‘public health emergency of international concern’ on 30 January, Thailand announced that tourism in the country was taking place as usual, and reiterated that the country was working closely with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to ensure that the situation was controlled (TAT Newsroom, 2020a).

From 25 February, the Tourism Authority of Thailand provided the clarification from the National Communicable Disease Committee of Thailand (NCDC) regarding a move about declaring Coronavirus Disease 2019 as a dangerous contagious disease (TAT Newsroom, 2020b). This declaration was essentially to step up the safety measurement, which subsequently affected the next step of implementation from Thailand as related to travel restrictions (Asunee Na Ayudhaya, 2019).

The objectives of our study were to:

1. study the travel behaviour of long-term foreigners living in Thailand during COVID-19 pandemic; and
2. investigate the influences of demographic factors on foreigners’ travel behaviour in Thailand.

Research hypothesis is: Demographic factors influence foreigners’ travel behaviour in Thailand:

H1. Demographic factors influence foreigner travel behaviour in Thailand (main purpose of stay in Thailand).

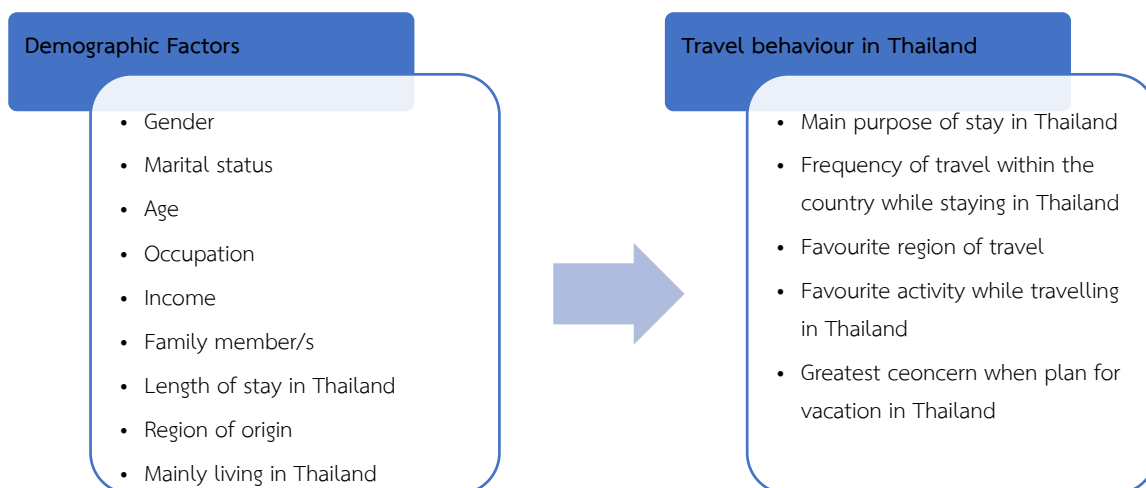
H2 Demographic factors influence foreigners’ travel behaviour in Thailand (frequency of travel within the country while staying in Thailand).

H3 Demographic factors influence foreigner travel behaviour in Thailand (favourite region to travel).

H4 Demographic factors influence foreigner travel behaviour in Thailand (favourite activity while travelling in Thailand).

H5 Demographic factors influence foreigner travel behaviour in Thailand (greatest concern when planning for vacations in Thailand).

Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

This study uses data from questionnaires designed with reference to our review of the literature on related past research. In this study, the questionnaire was used to measure the behaviour of long stay foreigners as tourists in Thailand during the COVID-19 pandemic. The population is foreign tourists with long stay status in Thailand. The respondents of this study are those who live in Thailand for more than 3 months annually or those who considered Thailand as his or her second home. Using statistics, referenced in December 2020, there were 6,556 people in this category (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020); therefore the target sample as of the calculation using Taro Yamane table is 375 with confidence level of 95 percent. Within this research, the researchers planned to collect the questionnaires by using the non-probability sampling technique convenience method.

The researchers distributed a total of 600 questionnaires in six provinces in Thailand through domestic travel agents who serve foreign tourists as well as through accommodations for those long-stay foreigners (as addressed below), but the response was low. As a result, the



researchers had to change the questionnaire distribution to an online survey through the networks of the reserchers and snowball of the respondents' networks. The number of respondents was 560 in total both from questionnaire distributions and online survey and was thought affected by the decreasing number of foreigners living in Thailand due to the COVID-19 pandemic (shown in Table 1). As a result, the researchers could not clarify the number of response from each target survey sites.

Table 1 Sample size and response

Survey site	Sample size	Response size
Bangkok	100	-
Pattaya	100	-
Hua Hin	100	-
Phuket	100	-
Chiang Mai	100	-
Khon Khaen	100	-
Total	600	560

The research tool was in closed-ended question format for which the researcher reviewed the literature, concepts, theories, and related research to create and develop the questionnaire in accordance with the framework of this research to completely able to answer the objectives of the research. The questionnaire was developed then submitted to the University of Phayao for the ethical in human approvals. The questionnaire was submitted to 3 scholars are the college of management, the University of Phayao for content validity test. Then, the researchers distributed the questionnaire to 30 samples as pilot test for the reliability of the research tool. The overall result of Cronbach alpha coeeficiancy is 93 percent.

The analysis of the data is divided as follows: Descriptive Statistics including frequency distribution, calculating mean, percentage, and standard deviation, and inferential statistics. analysis of the data from the study was used to test the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables to know the relationship between these variables more clearly.



Research Findings

Demographic characteristics

Table 2 Demographic characteristics of the respondents (n = 560)

Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Gender			
Male	203	36.3	2
Female	343	61.3	1
Not specified	14	2.4	3
Marital status			
Married	203	36.2	2
Single	266	47.5	1
Divorced/Separated	48	8.8	3
Not specified	43	7.5	4
Age			
Less than 20 years old	21	3.8	4
21-40 years old	259	46.2	1
41-60 years old	224	40.0	2
More than 60 years old	56	10.0	3
Occupation			
Self-employed/Business owners	133	23.8	2
Public servants/Government officers	49	8.8	5
Private company employed	175	31.2	1
Freelancers	91	16.2	3
Retirees	21	3.8	6
Students	84	15.0	4
Unemployed	7	1.2	7
Income			
Less than USD 1,000	63	11.2	4
USD 1,001 - 2,000	224	40.0	1
USD 2,001 - 3,000	84	15.0	3
USD 3,001 - 4,000	105	18.8	2
USD 4,001 - 5,000	42	7.5	5
More than USD 5,000	42	7.5	5



Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Family member/s			
1 person	63	11.2	4
2-3 persons	203	36.2	1
4-5 persons	77	13.8	3
6 persons and more	21	3.8	5
I am alone.	196	35.0	2
Length of stay in Thailand			
Less than 1 year	42	7.5	4
1-3 years	154	27.5	3
4-6 years	161	28.7	2
More than 6 years	203	36.3	1
Region (Continent) of origin			
America	161	28.7	2
Africa	77	13.8	4
Asia	168	30.0	1
Europe	119	21.3	3
Oceania	35	6.2	5
Mainly living in Thailand			
Bangkok and surrounding provinces	413	73.8	1
Central region	42	7.5	2
Eastern region	35	6.2	3
Northeastern region	28	5.0	4
Northern region	28	5.0	4
Southern region	14	2.5	6

From table 2, we see that most respondents are female (61.3%) whereas their male counterparts were 36.3 %, and 2.4 percent chose not to specify their gender. Most respondents (47.5%) are single, and 36.2% are married. Respondents (46.2%) are aged between 21 - 40 years old followed by 40% at 41 - 60 years old. The respondents of 31.2% are private company employed, 23.8% are self-employed or a business owner, with unemployed at 1.2 percent. 40% of respondents earn between USD 1,001 – 2,000 followed by those who earn between 3,001- 4,000 of 18.8%. Many respondents live in Thailand with 2 – 3 family members (36.2%), followed by those living alone at 35%. 36.3% percent of the respondents had lived in Thailand for more than 6 years followed by those who had lived in Thailand between 4 –



6 years (28.7%). Most respondents are from Asia, America, and Europe (30.0, 28.7, and 21.3 % respectively). Most of the respondents (73.8%) live in Bangkok and its surrounding provinces.

Tourist behaviour

Table 3 Travel behaviour of long stay foreigners in Thailand (n = 560)

Travel behaviour of long stay foreigners in Thailand	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Main purpose of stay in Thailand			
Work/Profession/Business	308	55.0	1
Married to local	77	13.8	2
Study	77	13.8	2
Health and medical care	42	7.4	5
Holidays, leisure, recreation	49	8.8	4
Others	7	1.2	6
Frequency of travel within the country while staying in Thailand			
Once every 4-6 months	238	42.5	1
Once every 2-3 months	175	31.2	2
Once a month	112	20.0	2
Twice a month	7	1.3	4
Three times a month	7	1.3	4
Every week	21	3.7	3
Favorite region to travel			
Bangkok and surrounding provinces	203	36.3	1
Central region	70	12.5	3
Eastern region	49	8.8	4
Northeastern region	35	6.3	6
Northern region	42	7.5	5
Southern region	161	28.6	2
Favorite activity while travelling in Thailand			
Relaxing/sightseeing	238	42.5	1
Enjoy health and wellness	49	8.7	3
Shopping	21	3.8	8
Enjoy cultural activities	42	7.5	4
Enjoy eating Thai food and beverages	77	13.8	2
Enjoy sport activities	35	6.2	6
Enjoy nightlife/entertainment	35	6.2	6



Travel behaviour of long stay foreigners in Thailand	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Enjoy adventure tourism activities	42	7.5	4
Others	21	3.8	8
Of greatest concern when planning for vacation in Thailand			
Safety & security	63	11.3	3
The attractiveness of tourist attractions	119	21.3	2
The price	147	26.3	1
Easy access & transportation	63	11.0	3
Cleanliness & hygiene	21	3.8	7
Destination reputation	35	6.3	6
Tourism activities	56	10.0	5
Others	56	10.0	5

When considering the travel behaviour of long-stay foreigners in Thailand, the results show that most respondents stay in Thailand for work or profession, or a business reason (55.0%), followed by being married to locals or for study purposes (13.8% each). 42.5% percent of the respondents indicated that they travel within Thailand once every 4-6 months, followed by those who travel in Thailand once every 2-3 months and once a month (31.2% and 20.0%, respectively). Bangkok and surrounding provinces are their favorite destination region followed by the central region (36.3% and 12.5% respectively). Respondents of 42.5% said that they enjoy relaxing and sightseeing as favorite activities while travelling in Thailand followed by those who like to eat Thai food and beverage at 13.8%. Most respondents said that their greatest concern when planning for vacations in Thailand are the price followed by the attractiveness of the site (26.3% and 21.3% respectively, as shown in table 3).



Hypothesis testing

Table 4 Demographic factors that influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand.

Demographic factors	Foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand									
	Main purpose of stay in Thailand		Frequency of travel within the country while stay in Thailand		Favourite region to travel		Favourite activity while travelling in Thailand		Greatest concern when planning for vacation in Thailand	
	Chi-Square	H test	Chi-Square	H test	Chi-Square	H test	Chi-Square	H test	Chi-Square	H test
Gender	29.029*		72.300*		73.410*		84.401*		104.451*	
Marital status	137.767*		149.461*		176.952*		242.007*		190.529*	
Age	273.397*		157.037*		109.366*		357.439*		190.984*	
Occupation	796.317*		130.254*		198.743*		460.556*		420.238*	
Income	284.313*		219.037*		197.239*		359.439*		308.009*	
Family member/s	226.021*		78.521*		130.067*		444.525*		137.058*	
Length of stay in Thailand	177.849*		121.222*		137.373*		217.878*		168.686*	
Region (continent) of origin	377.285*		150.398*		316.221*		365.588*		330.715*	
Mainly living in Thailand	256.050*		51.975*		120.343*		475.880*		186.964	

H_1 : Demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (main purpose of stay in Thailand).

From the Chi-Square test, demographic factors, and the main purpose of stay of foreigners are related. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, it is considered to accept the hypothesis and we conclude that demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (Main purpose of stay in Thailand). Thus demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (frequency of travel within the country while staying in Thailand) (shown in Table 4):



H₂: Demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (frequency of travel within the country while staying in Thailand).

From the Chi-Square test, demographic factors and frequency of travel are related. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, it is considered appropriate to accept the hypothesis and conclude that demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behavior in Thailand (frequency of travel within the country while staying in Thailand). Demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (favorite region to travel).

H₃: Demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (Favourite region to travel).

From the Chi-Square test, demographic factors and frequency of travel are related. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, it is considered appropriate to accept the hypothesis and conclude that demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behavior in Thailand (favorite region to travel). Demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (favorite activity while travelling in Thailand).

H₄: Demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behavior in Thailand (favourite activity while travelling in Thailand).

From the Chi-Square test, demographic factors and frequency of travel are related. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, it is considered appropriate to accept the hypothesis and conclude that demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behavior in Thailand (favorite activity while travelling in Thailand). Demographic factors also influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (greatest concern when plan for vacation in Thailand).

H₅: Demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (Greatest concern when planning a vacation in Thailand).

From the Chi-Square test, demographic factors and frequency of travel are related. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, it is considered appropriate to accept the hypothesis and conclude that demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behavior in Thailand (greatest concern when plan for vacation in Thailand). The hypothesis testing for



demographic factors influencing foreigners' travel behavior in Thailand is accepted, the alternative hypothesis in all aspects of the significant value is less than 0.05.

Discussions

The results suggest that the tourist behaviour of long-stay foreigners in Thailand is secondary to the main purpose of their stay in Thailand, which is to work. They travel in Thailand once every 4-6 months, while their favorite travel region is Bangkok and its surrounding provinces. Their favorite activity while travelling in Thailand is relaxing and sightseeing. Their greatest concern when planning for vacation in Thailand was the ease of access to tourist attractions and transportation. However, Xue & Zhang, 2020 suggested that among the factors that influence tourist behavior, travel distance has been found to be a critical one that is directly related to tourists' choice to visit a destination and their behavioral patterns after they arrive.

The hypothesis to answer this research objective is: Demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand. The results are as shown in the table below.

Table 5 To investigate the influences of demographic factors on foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand

Hypothesis	Accept	Reject
Demographic factors <u>influencing</u> foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand		
H1 Demographic factors influence foreigner travel behaviour in Thailand (Main purpose of stay in Thailand).	✓	
H2 Demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand (Frequency of travel within the country while staying in Thailand).	✓	
H3 Demographic factors influence foreigner travel behaviour in Thailand (favourite region to travel).	✓	
H4 Demographic factors influence foreigner travel behaviour in Thailand (favourite activity while travelling in Thailand).	✓	
H5 Demographic factors influence foreigner travel behaviour in Thailand (greatest concern when planning for vacations in Thailand).	✓	



It was found that demographic factors (gender, marital status, age, occupation, income, family member/s, length of stay, region of origin, and mainly living in Thailand) have an influence on foreigner's travel behaviour in Thailand (main purpose of stay, frequency of travel, favorite region to travel, favorite activity while travelling in Thailand, and greatest concern when planning a vacation in Thailand).

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes an insightful contribution in the impact of COVID-19 pandemic by investigating demographic factors influence foreigners' travel behaviour in Thailand. It adds a value in one of the strategic niche areas in the tourism industry in the country, long stay foreigners. It offers a valuable guideline in the consumer behaviour of the tourists who stay for a long period in the massively damaged periods in the tourism industry. Since, the travel behaviour of the tourists has changed tremendously as a result of the pandemic. As seen from the result of this study that the long-stay foreigners in Thailand paid particular attention towards the safety and security of the third rank followed the attractiveness of the tourist attractions and price.

Managerial Implications

The results of this study have benefits for different stakeholders and delivers a managerial recommendations as follows:

First, tourism authorities and businesses can use the results of this study to plan their tourism campaigns. It can be seen that most respondents travelling in Thailand for relaxation or sightseeing travel once every four to six months and are more concerned about accessibility and transportation to tourist destinations and attractions.

Second, Thai tourism industry practitioners have to investigate the primary reasons why overseas tourists want to come to Thailand to stay for months of period. They should establish strategic examination on what are the unique attractions and motivations that make overseas tourists want to stay for a long period during the pandemic period.

Third, each region in Thailand needs to develop its own unique attraction to attract overseas tourists in different destinations so they can stay not only in Bangkok areas. Fourth,



each tourist destination in Thailand have to develop and promote diverse range of leisure activities in each place so overseas tourists can stay for a longer period of time. Fifth, tourism planners need to identify what have to be improved in order to have overseas tourists more satisfied while they stay in Thailand.

Finally, academic institutions can use the results from this study as case studies for their students, not only in the tourism field but also business administration. In addition, researchers can use this study as a reference for their future research.

Conclusion

It was found that demographic factors (gender, marital status, age, occupation, income, family member/s, length of stay, region of origin, and mainly living in Thailand) have an influence on foreigner' travel behaviour in Thailand (main purpose of stay, frequency of travel, favorite region to travel, favorite activity while travelling in Thailand, and greatest concern when planning a vacation in Thailand).

Limitations and Directions of Future Research

Due to time limit and the COVID-19 situation, the researchers were unable to conduct intercepted questionnaire surveys at those survey sites as planned. Hence, the researchers hadgathered the questionnaires through online survey instead. Therefore, it is suggested that the future research of the same should have done through qualitative research methodology for more in-depth details of the behavior of long-stay foreigners in Thailand. Moreover, the comparative research can be done by comparing the behavior of those foreign tourist and long-stay foreigners in Thailand to provide more data for the stakeholders in the tourism industry.



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