

Destination Image of Thailand and Singapore

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Abstract

Globalization and advancement of transportation technology has brought the much closer than, say, a decade ago. It is a lot easier to travel from one place to another and tourism is affordable and reachable to every household. With such competition between tourism destinations, a destination must have a very good and positive image if it is to succeed.

This research is to study the perceived destination image of Thailand and Singapore by international tourists, to use the results as a marketing tool in promoting the two countries. The final result analyzed using SPSS reading would determine the differences of images between Thailand and Singapore as a tourism destination.

The demographic profiles are grouped to determine what each of the different groups perceived as the destination image of the two countries by comparing one to the other. 170 questionnaires were distributed to international tourists who were waiting to board aircraft both at Yangon International Airport and Don Muang International Airport. A number of questionnaires were also distributed at various tourist attractions in Myanmar as well as at Asiatique the Riverfront, Bangkok's popular night market. The analysis of the results found a significant difference in the destination image between Thailand and Singapore as perceived by international tourists.

Keywords: Destination Image, Thailand, Singapore



Introduction

Tourism is a major source of income for many countries. It contributes a big proportion of foreign expenditure injected into the economy in a form of export earning. The importance of tourism to a country could even be crucial as it affects directly on the social, cultural, educational, economic and diplomatic level. Tourism can create great income for the local economy and create employment in the community in which tourism activities take place. In a tourism reliant destination such as Thailand, its economy is dependent on tourism expenditure which in turn creates jobs. While France holds the highest position as the most visited destination in the world, Thailand and Singapore are emerging a fast growing in popularity and featuring as a top desired Asian countries to visit.

Like many tourism destinations, Thailand has been receiving both positive and negative images by international tourists. According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), safety is the chief concern for international tourists visiting Thailand, Tourists from China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan and Italy have the least confidence in visiting Thailand because of previous experiences with fraud and bad services. On top of this, many international tourists perceived Thailand as being a poorly organized destination. In the past, when Thailand experienced crisis, the government could not fully control the situation and direct it back to order resulting in lack of security felt by visiting tourists.

Another concern is that tourists did not see advertisements with positive images of Thailand when they arrived. Some tourists complained about being overcharged by Phuket taxi drivers.

However, despite the negative perceived images, most tourists still recognized Thailand as a great value for money, with one Korean tourist mentioning that there was no other place in the world that could offer such comfort for similar prices.

Previous research by Rittichainuwat, Qu and Brown (2001) describes travelers coming to Thailand with a mostly favorable image of the country, although still aware of certain negative aspects. While tourists who travel to Thailand may have many positive images, they are also aware of certain negative aspects that Thailand has as an effect of tourism development. Despite negative comments, Thailand's tourist arrival continues to increase annually.

International arrivals to Thailand between the year 2000 and 2014 shows a significant rise from the year 2000 onwards. Taking year 2000 as a benchmark with 10 million visitors at the time, the country reached 26.74 million visitors by 2013, an increase of 167%. However the number of arrival decreased by 6.66% during 2014, the beginning of which was affected by several severe political demonstrations, followed by a military coup ceasing the operation of the government. A recovery was only noticed during the final quarter of the year, according to the report made by TAT.

Because of the popularity, tourists both from Europe and Asian countries prefer Thailand as a holiday destination. Tourists who prefer Thailand exhibit different travel behaviors with different interests and perceptions.

Between January and April 2013, TAT reported 8,841,730 tourist arrivals to Thailand predominantly consisting of Asians. Bangkok is still the most popular destination for Thailand where its historical, natural and cultural sights are the main consideration.

European tourists, however, also visit the beaches in the southern and eastern regions further away from Bangkok. In general, Bangkok is still a popular destination as it is Thailand's capital city.

Meanwhile Singapore's tourism is also a major contribution for its country's economic sector. Singapore attracts a large number of international tourists from its safety and security images, as well as easy access to public infrastructure including transportation, and man-made tourist attractions. As Singapore is predominantly an English speaking country, there is no language barrier between the local people and international tourists. This is one of the main characteristics that attracts more international tourists into the country.

Over half (53%) of the tourists who visited Singapore in 2010 came from five largest markets, mainly Indonesia (2,305,149), China (1,171,337), Malaysia (1,036,918), Australia (880,486) and India (828,903). Other major markets include the Philippines (544,344), Japan (528,817), the United Kingdom (461,714), Thailand (430,022) and the United States of America (416,990).

Tourism receipt reached S\$18.8 billion in 2010, a growth of 49% compared to 2009, with shopping and sightseeing/entertainment accounting for 21% of the total expenditure. Accommodation made up 19% while food and beverage contributed 10%. Medical receipts, representing the medical-tourism industry which the country was promoting, contributed at 5%. Sightseeing/entertainment, which included expenditure at two new integrated resorts grew by 1,834%, according to the statistics by the Singapore Tourism Board.

Singapore has been promoting and building its image as a safe and secure destination with high security as well as being an eco-friendly destination.

According to the findings, tourists who visited Thailand and Singapore displayed different perceptions when the two countries' destination image results were compared. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the differences of destination images between Thailand and Singapore to provide implications for destination image development.

The paper will outline the purpose of the research where it wishes to achieve benefits of the results. Previous research findings will be discussed in the paper before leading to the explanation of the methodology, population samples, and instruments which it uses. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, a pilot test was administered. After the questionnaires have been completed and collected, the data are analysed to interpret the results. The findings are explained according to demographics, destination images of the two countries, followed by the significant differences by T-Test results. The last part of the paper concludes the findings and provides recommendation to tourism destination marketers such as TAT and the Singapore Tourism Board.

Literature Reviews

Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) indicated that travelers to Thailand carried a mostly favorable image of the country, but they were also aware of certain negative aspects. The tourists who travelled to Thailand had many positive images about the destination while they were still aware of other negative impacts that the destination posed.

Sereetrakul, Wilailuk (2012) found that Thai and foreign tourists does not have different satisfactions five strategies which include product, place, promotion, people and physical evidence.

Horneman, Carter, Wei, and Ruy (2002) dis-



covered that the characteristics of senior travelers have become an important area of interest because of the market size and its potential for growth of the aging population.

Charlotte Echtner and Ritchie pointed out the important role of destination image, both in terms of understanding travel behavior and designing effective tourism marketing strategies. They underscored the need to develop methodologies to comprehensively and accurately measure this concept. This is why destination image study is crucial if a country wants to develop its tourism activities.

Reisinger and Turner (2003) mentioned that perception can be created without experience and knowledge of the person and this is often the case when tourists develop perceptions of a destination prior to their visit.

With the above research finding by various tourism academics, it is clear that a tourist destination must consider the importance of destination image study. Destination marketers should create and manipulate the destination image in a desirable positive position that is not so different from the way they are perceived by potential tourists. As a result, branding a Thailand project was initiated by the Thai government to find out how people worldwide view the nation's strength and weakness.

Tapachai and Waryszak,(2000), Rittichainuwat et al. (2001), Henkel, Agrusa, and Tanner (2006) all conducted a research to determine the opinions of foreign tourists on various aspects of Thailand such as the Thai tourism industry performance, the image of Thailand and the loyalty of tourists where repeated visits and recommendation to friends and family members are concerned.

Purposes

The purpose of the study is to illustrate the perceived image of Thailand and Singapore by international tourists and compare their differences. The differences will be grouped according to the demographic profiles of the respondents (tourists), with images derived from the result analysis

Benefit of Research

This replicated study is to provide beneficial indication for TAT by determining the differences and similarities between Thailand and Singapore's destination images. Strengths and weaknesses will be determined for both of the countries. The tourists' outstanding positive and negative perceptions of Thailand and Singapore will also be identified. In this research, TAT and Singapore Tourism Board can use the results to determine changes that may occur and compare them to previous destination image surveys of Thailand and Singapore for the purpose of tourism marketing positioning.

Research Process

This study uses a self-complete questionnaire to measure the destination image of Thailand and Singapore as tourist destinations. From 21 December 2014 to 05 January 2015, the research was conducted at different tourist attractions in Myanmar. The questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of international tourists who were waiting to board aircraft at Yangon International Airport and DonMuang International Airport. A number of the questionnaires were also distributed at Asiatique the Riverfront, Bangkok's popular night market and entertainment venue.

The respondents (tourists) were asked to fill out the questionnaire and further open ended,

unstructured questions, were asked regarding the images of Thailand that first came to their mind. As for elderly tourists, the questionnaires were read and filled out by the surveyor. The questionnaire took approximately 15-20minutes to complete on average. Tourists were also interviewed in order to find out the reason why they visited Thailand.

Population and Sample

Questionnaires were given to a group of randomly selected international tourists at tourist destinations both in Bangkok, Thailand and Yangon, Myanmar. Out of 250 samples, 170 were returned, providing a response rate of 70% .

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics including frequency distribution and independent sampling mean,

t-test, and ANOVA were used to analyse the data. Frequency distribution was used to describe the destination image of Thailand and Singapore as perceived by international tourists. Independent sampling means t-test was also used to identify any differences in the destination image between male and female. Lastly, ANOVA was used to identify any difference in the mean regarding the destination image of the two countries across the demographic profile of age, educational level and occupation.

Results

Demographic Profile

Table.1 indicates the demographic profile of 170 respondents. The tourist respondents consist of 54.8 percent male and 45.3 percent female. The respondents are identified into 3 age groups ranging from under 20 - 29 year old (62.4 percent),

Table.1 Demographic Profile

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Gender	Male	93	54.7
	Female	77	45.3
	Total	170	100
Age Group	Less than 20 and old to 29	106	62.4
	30-50 years old	49	28.8
	Older than 50	15	8.8
	Total	170	100
Marital Status	Single	87	51.2
	Married	83	48.8
	Total	170	100
Country of Residence	Asian	86	50.6
	European	70	41.2
	Others	14	8.2
	Total	170	100
Occupation	Workers	131	77.1
	Non-workers	39	22.9
	Total	170	100
Education Level	Non-degree holder	48	28.2
	Degree holder	122	71.8
	Total	170	100

Table.2 Image of Singapore and Thailand from highest to lowest ranking

Singapore				Thailand			
	N	Mean	Std Deviation		N	Mean	Std Deviation
Safety & Security	170	4.31	0.73	Price	170	4.57	0.61
Convention & Exhibition Facilities	139	4.20	0.73	Friendliness of People	170	4.37	0.59
Hotel/resort	170	4.17	0.74	Shopping	170	4.24	0.63
Transportation	170	4.17	0.64	Cultural/historical sites	170	4.23	0.64
Overall	170	4.1	0.78	Hotel/resort	170	4.08	0.66
Overall service Quality	170	4.02	0.76	Natural scenery	170	4.01	0.64
Cuisine in Restaurant	169	4	0.84	Overall	170	4	0.62
Ease of access	170	3.95	0.85	Overall service quality	170	3.88	0.62
Shopping	170	3.91	0.92	Cuisine in Restaurants	170	3.8	0.7
Friendliness of People	170	3.44	1.02	Convention/Exhibition facilities	103	3.56	0.71
Price	170	3.35	0.86	Safety & Security	170	3.23	0.75
Climate	170	3.33	0.9	Ease of access	170	3.21	0.74
Natural Scenery	170	3.26	0.87	Transportation	170	3.21	0.72
Cultural/historical sites	170	3.24		Climate	170	3.13	0.76

30 - 50 year old (28.8 percent) and over 50 year old (8.8 percent).As for marital status, 51.2 percent of respondents are single and 48.8 percent are married. Their countries of residence are divided into three groups, 50.6 percent Asian, 41.2% European and other residences contributing to 8.2 percent. Most of the Asians from China and Korea and the Europeans are mostly from Germany and France. As for occupation, two groups are classified. There are 77.1 %who are in the workforce (worker) and 22.9 %not in the workforce (non-worker).Those who are not working, consisting of students and retired groups. As for education level, 71.8 % of the respondents regarding as a degree holders with only 28.2 % were still in high school including secondary school graduates who are marked as non-degree holders.

Destination Image

Table.2 indicates the ranking of tourists' perceived views for the destination images of Singapore and Thailand based on thirteen items and overall images. From the result reading, Singapore is seen as one of the safest countries in South East Asia. It is also known for providing good convention and exhibition facilities as it has convenient transportation services. Singapore's safety and security scores high at M=4.31, convention & exhibition facilities scores M=4.20, and transportation and hotel/resorts have the same perception level at M=4.17. People perceived Singapore's safety and security as its biggest strength and this makes many tourists prefer Singapore as a holiday destination. One respondent mentioned about taxi drivers being honest and

mostly polite. Some taxis even have warning alarm that signals should the taxi drives over the speed limit on a freeway. The fact that most Singaporeans are able to use English, make it for tourists easy to communicate and get direction from the locals. Visitors frequently associate Singapore with words like ‘safe’, ‘clean’, ‘green’ and ‘efficient’. Thailand, on the other hand, scores the top 3 highest ranks for price (M=4.57) ranking nearly 5(very good),- friendliness of the people(M=4.37) and shopping (M=4.24).Thailand is a destination which offers value for money. Visitors to Thailand are able to find practically everything in terms of shopping, dining, and entertainment. Thailand attracts tourists from all around the world coming into the country to shop, especially in Bangkok. With more than 100 shopping malls and walking street markets, visitors consider Thailand as a favorable destination and a shopping paradise that has value for money.

Singapore’s cultural/historical sites scores M=3.24 and Thailand’s climate scores M= 3.13which has the lowest score recorded. The result determines that both countries did not score lower than having neutral feeling based on the 13 attributes.

Significant Difference by T-test

Table.3 shows a significant difference between the images of Singapore and Thailand from demographics of the gender and occupation sections. The sample population of male (N=93) tourists is slightly higher than that of the female (N=77) tourists in Thailand and Singapore. As for Thailand, there is a area significant difference of enjoyment in cuisine at restaurants between male (M=3.68) and female (M= 3.94). This indicates that female tourists enjoyed restaurant cuisine more than the male respondents, where the mean number of female respondents is close to 4 (Good).

Table.3 Significant Differences of image of Singapore and Thailand between gender and occupation

Thailand	Gender	N	Mean	T-value
Cuisine in restaurants	Male	93	3.68	-2.46
	Female	77	3.94	
Cultural/historical sites	Male	93	4.13	-2.14
	Female	77	4.35	
Natural scenery	Male	93	3.91	-2.32
	Female	77	4.14	
Overall service quality	Male	93	3.79	-2.13
	Female	77	4	
Singapore Overall	Male	93	4.01	-2.13
	Female	77	4.22	
Singapore	Occupation	N	Mean	T-value
Convention/exhibition facilities	Worker	106	3.83	-0.976
	Non-worker	33	5.36	
Overall service quality	Worker	131	4.09	2.1
	Non-worker	39	3.79	
Thailand Hotels/resorts	Worker	131	4.17	3.45
	Non-worker	39	3.76	

1=very poor, 2=poor , 3=neutral , 4=good , 5=very good



Another significant difference in the perceived image of Thailand in cultural/historical sites is male (M=4.13) and female (M=4.35). In this case, female and male tourists perceived image according to their mean number 4(Good). The mean in the male (M=3.91) and female (M=4.14) tourists' assessment on natural scenery is 4(Good) where both male and female respondents are satisfied with Thailand's beautiful scenery. There is no doubt that Thailand offers beautiful hills, mountains and natural scenery. For overall service quality, the significant difference between male(M=3.79) and female (M=4.00) respondents indicates that female's perceived image on service quality is higher than male as the male respondents perceived service quality as being in between neutral and good.

As for Singapore, there is no overall significant between male (M=4.01) and female (M=4.22) tourists as they both perceived good image most tourists of Singapore. The common image is safety and tourists like to visit Singapore because they feel safe as crime rarely occurs. Furthermore, a convenience subway service system is a factor that tourists choose as being positive for Singapore with a score of 4 (Good).

In the occupation section, the samples were split among the 170 respondents into two groups: Worker and Non-worker. Thailand has a significant different image in hotels/resorts, worker (M=4.17) and non-worker (M=3.76). In this table, the workers rate in hotel/resorts is higher than non-worker because workers have a higher budget than non-workers (students/retired/and unemployed). There are two differences in the images of Thailand regarding convention/exhibition facilities : workers (M=3.83) and non-workers (M=5.36). Predominantly non-workers (students) go to exhibition shows which are mainly related to educational promotion program for their school projects whereas non-workers (retired) do not. Students are able to attend Trade-shows even during weekdays while workers would be busy working. That may be the reason why the non-worker scores a higher evaluation than workers in convention/exhibition facilities. As for the images of overall service quality, workers score M=4.09 and non-workers score M=3.79. There is no doubt that workers understood service quality better while working in their work place and receiving different services from different companies.

Table.4 Significant differences of image and Thailand by age groups

Factor	Mean	F ratio	F probability	Significant difference between country of resident groups
	Group 1 Group 2 Group 3			
Transportation	3.05	4.86	.009**	Group 1 & Group 2
	3.41			
	3.21			
Safety & Security	3.19	6.15	.003*	Group 2 & Group 3
	3.44			
	2.78			

**p≤ .009 *p≤.003

Group 1= Asian Group 2= European Group 3 = Others

Table.4 shows the differences of image in transportation and safety and security between different countries of residence.

Conclusion

This research paper has investigated the subject of tourists' destination image of Thailand and Singapore as perceived by international tourists. In this research, it is found that destination image of the country has high influence in terms of selecting a holiday destination. Tourists prefer to travel to a destination that has received more positive review by previously visited tourists.

This study was tested by a questionnaire survey on the destination image of Thailand and Singapore as a tourist destination, using a 5 point likert-scale, with 1 (very poor), 2 (poor), 3 (average), 4 (good), and 5 (very good). Tourists were interviewed and asked to fill in the questionnaire concerning on the destination image of Thailand and Singapore.

The survey result shows that Thailand has been receiving a lot of positive review regarding the sites, cultural and historical places where Singapore's cores average on these attributes for its tourist attractions. Shopping in Thailand has more value for money for international tourists since Thai products are trendy and cost less compared to Singapore. Singapore often offer expensive designer labels. There is only a few significant difference between Singapore and Thailand namely safety, security, and historical places as well as price. The tourists who visit Thailand are satisfied with the overall service quality. It is easier to induce repeat visitors to recommend Thailand to their friends and relatives instead of attracting first time visitors. European tourists visit both destinations, Thailand and Singapore. Moreover, there are more business

travellers in Singapore while Thailand receives more leisure travellers and non-workers who are retired, unemployed, and students.

Overall, Thailand has more negative images compared to Singapore but there are a lot more tourists who are interested in travelling to Thailand as repeat visitors rather than to Singapore. This may be because Thailand is a destination that has higher value for money and provides more tourist attractions as tourists would want to visit big cities. Thailand can improve the safety and security attributes of its destination image which are the major concerns and this will be able to attract more international tourists, because current tourists in Thailand are already satisfied in general.

Recommendation

This replicated study provides both differences and similarities between Thailand and Singapore's destination images. The aim of the research is to gain insight and understanding of the tourists' perceived destination image to provide recommendation for TAT. Importance should mainly be on the safety and security issue of Thailand since the tourists are not satisfied with this attribute. Giving attention to this problem, Thailand should be able to attract more international tourists. On the other hand, Singapore receives the most satisfaction in safety and security, which is the main difference between the two countries. Thailand should promote more on its cultural and historical places as it is one of the attributes that tourists prefer as opposed to Singapore. The increasing number of cultural and historical places continues to attract more tourists. Thailand also needs to improve sanitation and cleanliness in tourist attraction areas. The tourists perceived that the tourist attractions



in Thailand are often not clean compared to Singapore; which are both cleaner and more environmentally friendly. Moreover, the tourists perceived the living cost and travel cost in Thailand to be more affordable while the living cost in Singapore is very high. This is the major difference between the two countries and it is one of the reason why tourists prefer to travel to Thailand for long stay while only short stay is common for Singapore. Thailand, as a tourist destination, should maintain its value for money attribute. For shopping, tourists love to do shop more in Thailand compared to Singapore with the major concern being the price and the availability of shopping items.

The tourists think that transportation in Thailand and accessibility is not very convenient,

an effect of trafficjams, especially in Bangkok. Moreover, some taxi drivers have bad manners. This difference could be because Singapore has a smaller land area, which is easier to manage in terms of transportation systems and traffic problems. Thailand should also improve its public transportation systems infrastructure, traffic congestions, and pollution.

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