



Tourist behaviors and needs for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism marketing for special interest tourism

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate tourist behaviors and needs for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism to support special interest tourism. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 400 foreign tourists who visited Bangkok with special interest tourism for Thai traditional sport. The results revealed that the majority of this group of tourists are interested in Thai traditional sports tourism, and are impressed by courtesy and friendliness of local people, and love participating in activities from which they can learn about Thai traditional sport and local culture. The results of the survey on tourist needs show that they want a warm and friendly welcoming from a local community, a clean and pleasant sightseeing place, a safe route to the destination, a variety of creative activities, food service with local ingredients and produce, and credibility of the information source is also desired.

Keywords: Sport tourism, creative tourism, tourism marketing, tourist behavior, Thailand

Introduction

The tourism industry has played a significant role in the global economy. Many countries are driven by income generated from the tourism industry sector as it increases employment opportunities on both national and regional levels. Besides making income in foreign currency, the tourism industry also creates more jobs for local people. According to the report from World Tourism Barometer of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in 2017 the number of international tourist arrivals grew up to 6% or 1,323 million, and this is a good sign for the recovery of the global tourism industry. Additionally, UNWTO has estimated that the number of international tourist arrivals will increase to 1,600 million by 2020 and that Asia Pacific and Southeast Asian countries will be popular destinations. This is a chance for the tourism industry's growth and development especially in the countries of the Southeast Asian region and in ASEAN Economics Community (AEC) (World Tourism Organization, 2018).

For Thailand, one of the national agendas is tourism development since the tourism industry is the main source of national income. According to the Department of Tourism, the number of tourists has increased continuously every year. In 2017, there were 35 million international arrivals, which were higher than in 2016 by 11.66% (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018). Obviously, this increasing number has generated an enormous amount of foreign currency income for the nation. More emphasis has been put on this sector as it positively impacts the national economy and plays a crucial role in national development. From the Fourth Plan to the Twelfth Plan, which is the current plan used for 2017 - 2021, of the National Economic and Social Development Plan, the policy framework has laid out a tourism development plan that



is appropriate and responds to the direction of tourism flows on domestic and international levels. The plan also aims to increase creativity and routes of tourism to generate a new value-added economy and to promote the quality of tourist destinations. In other words, the aim is to create varieties of tourism that can respond to visitor's needs, and at the same time, to promote conservation of Thai culture, tradition, and Thainess (Tourism Council of Thailand, 2018).

Thai traditional sport is a unique art and culture of Thailand. Its grace and value have been passed down and developed from generation to generation. Not only it improves physical strength, but it can also help players improve concentration, creativity, and ingenuity, which are spontaneously required in a match. Additionally, playing some type of team sports can create unity and responsibility among players. Some Thai traditional sports have become famous legendary sports and are kept in memory for many generations, and most importantly, are still being played with some adjustments made to keep the game up to date. All Thais should be grateful and support this Thai local wisdom so that it's being conserved and passed down to the next generation. Thai boxing (Muay Thai) and Thai sword fighting are Thai martial arts that can be applied in sport and in self-defense in a real-life situation. From ancient times, a virtuous son would be educated and trained in this martial art for self-defense, and most young sturdy men would also be trained in Muay Thai and sword fighting. All famous warriors practiced and trained these martial arts. Originally, Muay Thai and sword fighting with tactics were only taught to men in higher prestigious families, which included those from the ruling class, the royal family and the Defence nobility. Later, these martial arts were well-known among commoners and training was provided by a skillful teacher who was a former warrior or a soldier. Because of this, Muay Thai and Thai sword fighting are being practiced extensively. There are not only Thais' but also foreigners who are interested, educated and trained in these sports. As can be seen nowadays, there are many academies teaching Muay Thai and Thai sword fighting to foreigners in different styles and for different purposes, for example, Muay Thai performance is for entertainment or for sports tourism that focuses particularly on these two types of martial art. Most martial art academies are located in urban and touristy areas such as Bangkok, Phuket, Pattaya, etc. (Department of Cultural Promotion, 2016).

Bangkok is a famous destination with various types of interesting tourist attractions. This city never sleeps. It is packed with historic memories and stories to be told. Tourists can wander around the city at any time of the day even with a little amount of budget. For sightseeing, palaces and temples are located in this city. The famous destinations are the Grand Palace, the Dusit Maha Prasat Throne Hall, the Chakri Maha Prasat Throne Hall, Temple of the Emerald Buddha, and Phra Chetuphon Vimolmangklararm Rajworamahavihara Temple (Wat Pho). Other kinds of tourist places are also available around the city such as museums, art galleries, monuments, and ancient sites, for example, Bangkok Art and Culture Center and Bangkok National Museum (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2018a). Bangkok is also well-known for Thai traditional sports tourism, especially for Muay Thai and Thai sword fighting. This type of tourism has become widespread among foreign visitors and, as a result, has generated income and enhanced the level of competitiveness of Thailand in Southeast Asian tourism industry.

The strategy being used involves promoting Thainess and charm of traditional sports. With uniqueness and cultural creativity of Muay Thai and Thai sword fighting, an enormous amount of visitors has been drawn into the country (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2018). People come from around the world to see and to practice Muay Thai, and this helps develop sports tourism continuously. In the cultural aspect, this sport tourism promotes cultural understanding among Thais and foreigners who share the same interest in Thai martial arts. In terms of economic benefits, sports tourism generates more income for the country and for local tourism businesses, such as Muay Thai gym or Muay Thai souvenir business (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2016).



Hence, the researcher is interested in this area and conducted this study which aimed to investigate tourism behaviors and needs for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism for special interest tourism.

Methodology

This study adopted quantitative method by employing the survey research method. The survey was used to collect data and to explore different variables in this study. The key informants of this study were 400 foreign tourists who visited Bangkok and ethical aspects were considered. The items in the survey included close-ended questions in a 5-point rating scale and open-ended questions. The research instrument was piloted with a sample group of 40 respondents, accounted for 10% of the target population. The pilot study was conducted at the site which is similar to the area of the study such as Adisorn Boxing Gym and Keangkoi Sword Fighting Club in Sara Buri Province. After the tryout, the validity of the survey items was tested using the index of item-objective congruence (IOC) and the result was 0.89. The descriptive statistics were used to analyze data from the survey to find frequency, mean, and standard deviation. The survey items in the rating scale were analyzed by a computer program and the results were reported in tables with descriptions.

Results and Discussion

The results from the survey on tourist behaviors and needs for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism marketing for special interest tourism are presented below.

Background information of the respondents

The results of background information of the respondents are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Background Information of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	247	61.80
Female	153	38.30
Age (year)		
21-30	37	9.30
31-40	115	28.70
41-50	154	38.50
51-60	78	19.50
61 or older	16	4.00
Status		
Single	123	30.80
Married	245	61.30
Divorced	32	8.00
Level of Education		
High school graduate	16	4.00
Bachelor's degree	224	56.00
Master's degree	112	28.00
Doctorate degree	48	12.00
Occupation		
Agriculturist	16	4.00
Business owner	134	33.50
State enterprise employee	95	23.80
Employee	107	26.80
Government office	48	12.00
Income (baht/month)		
10,001 - 15,000	45	11.30
15,001 20,000	83	20.80
Above 20,000	272	68.00
Region		
Europe	81	20.30
America	52	13.00
Australia	28	7.00
Africa	10	2.50
Asia	229	57.30
Total	400	100.00



Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents was male (61.80%) between 41 – 50 years old (38.50%). More than half of them were single (61.30%) and had a Bachelor's degree (56.00%). One-third of the respondents (33.505) were business owners, and most of the respondents (68%) had income more than 20,000 baht/ month. The majority of the respondents (57.30%) in this study were from Asia.

Tourist behaviors for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism marketing

The results of tourist behaviors for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism marketing are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Tourist Behaviors for the Development of Creative Thai Traditional Sports Tourism Marketing

Tourist Behaviors for the Development of Creative Thai Traditional Sports Tourism Marketing	Frequency	Percentage
Source of information for Thai traditional sports tourism in Bangkok		
- Relative or friend	16	4.00
- Television	49	12.30
- Newspaper / magazine / tourism journal	61	15.30
- Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) website	167	41.80
- Other online media	107	26.80
Reason for your interest in Thai traditional sports tourism in Bangkok		
- To learn about real Thai traditional sports.	147	36.80
- To spectate an authentic Thai traditional sports game.	124	31.00
- To maintain good health.	97	24.30
- To participate in a sports competition in which I can gain a reputation for being ambitious.	32	8.00
What impresses you on traditional sports tourism in Bangkok		
- The quality of the sightseeing place for Thai traditional sports tourism	115	28.70
- Courtesy and friendliness of local people	120	30.00
- Variety of activities for Thai traditional sports tourism	103	25.80
- Variety of products and goods related to Thai traditional sports	62	15.50
The most favorite activity for Thai traditional sport tourism		
- Learning about Muay Thai.	152	38.00
- Watching Muay Thai matches.	142	35.50
- Competing in a Muay Thai match.	32	8.00
- Spending time with local people who are involved in Thai traditional sports.	74	18.50
What you gain from this Thai traditional sport tourism		
- Application of sport local wisdom and ideas of the creative economy.	119	29.80
- Learning about lifestyle and local culture related to Thai traditional sports.	156	39.00
- Supporting local wisdom of Thai traditional sports.	125	31.30
In your opinion, creative Thai traditional sports tourism is about ...		
- designing activities for Thai traditional sports tourism that focus on the benefits for the local community.	160	40.00
- promoting tourism that is driven by a local resource that is Thai traditional sports.	122	30.50
- educating local youth guides on Thai traditional sports.	118	29.50
The benefit of creative Thai traditional sports tourism		
- It adds more value to Thai traditional sports tourism.	152	38.00
- It increases the self-efficiency of a community in tourism management.	115	28.70
- It strengthens the local community with the application of sufficient-economy philosophy.	133	33.30
Role of tourists on creative Thai traditional sports tourism		
- Follow rules and regulations.	32	8.00
- Help to conserve the identity of Thai local sports.	107	26.80
- Create more cultural value for Thai local sports.	116	29.00
- Promote creative Thai traditional sports tourism.	145	36.30
Effective channel for advertising creative Thai traditional sports tourism		
- Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) website	163	40.80
- Travel magazine or guidebook	114	28.50
- Travel TV shows	123	30.80
What needs to be improved for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism		
- Accommodation that responds to the style of Thai traditional sports tourism	176	44.00



Tourist Behaviors for the Development of Creative Thai Traditional Sports Tourism Marketing	Frequency	Percentage
- Activities for creative Thai traditional sports tourism	115	28.70
- Organization of ceremonies or events that are related to Thai traditional sports culture.	109	27.30
Total	400	100.00

Table 2 presents the results of tourist behaviors for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism marketing. The results reveal that almost half of the respondents (41.80%) learned about Thai traditional sports tourism from the website of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the reason for their interest in this tourism was that they wanted to learn about real Thai traditional sports (36.80 %). One-third of the respondents (30%) were impressed by the courtesy and friendliness of local people and enjoyed learning about Muay Thai (38%). When being asked about what they gained from this tourism, 39% got a chance to learn about the lifestyle and local culture related to Thai traditional sports. In the opinion of 40% of the respondents, creative Thai traditional sports tourism was about designing activities for Thai traditional sports tourism that focus on the benefits for the local community and almost the same amount thought that creative Thai traditional sports tourism added more value for Thai traditional sports tourism (38%). In addition, 36.30% thought that their role in this tourism was to help promote creative Thai traditional sports tourism, and 40.80% thought that the channel that was effective for advertising Thai traditional sports tourism was Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) website. Lastly, 44% agreed that there should be an improvement in accommodation that responds to the style of Thai traditional sports tourism.

The results showed that most tourists knew about Thai traditional sports tourism in Bangkok from TAT website and the reason why they were interested in this tourism was that they could learn about real Thai traditional sports. In their visits, they were impressed by the courtesy and friendliness of local people. This is similar to the study that used constant comparison method and qualitative data to understand participants' experiences at the nexus of tourism, sport and charity events (Coghlan & Filo, 2013). In this study, it was found that tourists were impressed by the memorable experience they gained. Although they had faced some difficulties during the trip, they were still satisfied with their trip (Clarke, 2018).

Most tourists love activities related to Thai traditional sports, especially Muay Thai, and what they gained from this sports tourism was that they could learn local wisdom and philosophy through traditional sports. This is relevant to the study of A Model of Creative Experience in Creative Tourism (Tan, et al., 2013), which explored creative tourism and tourist perceptions of creative tourism. The results of this study show that when tourists have a chance to interact with surroundings in the local community where they travel to and to participate in an activity that promotes the learning of local culture (Kim, et al., 2018), which is the process that can develop their perception and what they learn of their destination, they gain impression and memorable experience which motivate them to revisit the place (Nicolaidis, 2014; Mirzaei & Mohammadi, 2018).

This finding is also similar to the study of sports tourism: Factors of influence on sports events visit motivation (Otteranger, H, 2007) in which they found that entertainment is the main motivation for sports tourism or participation in a sports event or competition because tourists can gain excitement and new experience during their trip (Nicolaidis, 2014; Heuwinkel & Venter, 2018). Besides, they can also learn about different cultures, which is another motivation for traveling in sports tourism. Most tourists think that creative Thai traditional sports tourism is about designing activities for Thai traditional sports tourism that focus on the benefits for the local community, and its benefit is that it adds more value to this kind of tourism (Vizcaíno & Callejo, 2018). This is similar to the results of central place theory and sports tourism impacts study (Daniels, 2007) which claimed that sports tourism can stimulate the local economy, increase opportunities and equality of local people and the local community. Hence, a location designated for the destination of sports tourism is significantly important (Di



Palma, et al., 2018) as there are many tourism aspects to be considered such as branding and advertising. Most tourists in sports tourism can access creative Thai traditional sports tourism via TAT website (Hinch & Ito, 2018). Similarly, the findings in the study of Progress in sports tourism research; a meta-review and exploration of futures (Weed, 2009), which found that tourist behavior in sports tourism can be highly motivated by advertisement or media that arouse positive emotions such as excitement or challenge (Dogaru, 2018). Moreover, this finding conforms with the study of the effectiveness of a distribution channel for wholesaler travel agencies (Huang & Hsien-Tang, 2008), which conducted the study on 12 travel major agencies and 7 distribution channels to investigate the most effective and appropriate distribution channel. The seven channels in this study included direct and indirect channels such as websites, TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, small business sales representatives, and business alliances. The results reveal that most Taiwanese wholesaler travel agencies focus mostly on small business sales representatives and on websites respectively. Three aspects that play a role in their consideration for a distribution channel are the level of accessibility, amount of gross profits of the distribution channel, and shared expense.

The distribution channel and selection criteria are analyzed for the effective channel for tourism market (Mateos, 2018). Additionally, most tourists think that there should be some improvement that can elevate creative Thai traditional sports tourism in Bangkok, especially on accommodation, for example, accommodation for tourists should somehow relate to sports tourism (Mxunyelwa & Mangisa, 2018).

When comparing tourist behaviors in Thai traditional sports tourism in different aspects, it was found that 1) there is a difference in tourist behaviors and opinions on what needs to be improved in Thai traditional sports tourism in Bangkok between the two genders: male and female, 2) tourists with different status, single and married, have different preference on the activity and gained different things from Thai traditional sports tourism in Bangkok, and 3) tourists from different regions have different impression on Thai traditional sports tourism in Bangkok; impression of tourists from Europe and America differs from those who are from Australia. Additionally, the result shows that behaviors of tourists from America are different to those who come from Asia. These findings conform to the study which claims that human behaviors from different social contexts can be different because of individual preferences or status expression for social acceptance and recognition and that traveling is motivated by the desire to escape from monotony or to look for new experiences (Hengsathanakul, 2004).

• **Tourist needs for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism marketing**

The results of tourist needs for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism marketing are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Tourist Needs for Development of Creative Thai Traditional Sport Tourism Marketing

Facets of tourist needs for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism	Levels of need		
	\bar{x}	S.D.	Interpretation
1. Attitude	4.36	0.32	High
2. Tourist attraction site	4.41	0.23	High
3. Accessibility	4.38	0.22	High
4. Accommodation	4.43	0.22	High
5. Tourism activity	4.31	0.23	High
6. Facilities	4.28	0.24	High
7. Public relation and advertisement	4.23	0.30	High
Total	4.34	0.09	High

Table 3 presents tourist needs for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism. The results show that the overall average level of tourist needs in all aspects is at a high level ($\bar{x} = 4.34$), which is similar to the level of needs in each facet. The mean scores of the need for accommodation ranked highest ($\bar{x} = 4.43$) with the need for tourist attraction site at the



second ($\bar{x} = 4.41$), while the mean score of the need for public relations and advertisement is the lowest ($\bar{x} = 4.23$).

The results reveal that there is a high level of tourist needs for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism. The level of needs is also high in each aspect. The mean score of the need for accommodation is the highest, followed by tourist attraction site, while the lowest mean score is on public relations and advertisement. This finding is similar to the idea that the desire for traveling is driven by many factors and needs. Tourists usually choose a destination that matches their needs and wants and of course, their budgets, so they can have contentment during their trip. Tourist needs for attitude or warm welcoming and friendliness of local people have the highest mean score (Gems, 2017), which is similar to a model of creative experience in creative tourism (Tan, et al., 2013), in which the objective of the study was to explore creative tourism and perceptions of tourists on their experience in creative tourism.

The findings suggest that tourists tend to revisit the destination where they had a chance to interact with the local community and participated in local cultural activities (Hinch & Holt, 2017). This interaction opens their perceptions and creates positive and memorable experience of that particular destination (Auger, 2017). For the tourist attraction site facet, tourists want clean and beautiful scenery the most. For the accessibility facet, a safe route to a tourist attraction site is the most important for them (Ramshaw & Gammon, 2017). This finding responds to the Safety Needs in the Hierarchy of Needs [16] that refers to security and protection of body, life, and possessions, for example, safety from accident, crime, and danger from consumption or traveling, job security, desire to live in an organized and predictable society (Geffroy, 2017) where individual knows his/her limit or boundaries accepted in the society. For accommodation facet, reasonable price is needed the most. For tourism activities, tourists want a variety of creative tourism activities (Hurych, 2017).

This finding is similar to the results from the study of the role of sports tourism in employment, income and economic development (Homafar, et al., 2011), which explained that sports tourism is a new trend that gains popularity and continuously grows in the global tourism industry. Not only it is a way to relax and join recreational activities, but sports tourism is also a key factor for economic growth as it provides many advantages such as more job opportunities in the local community (Miyake, et al., 2018) and thus the buy-in of all stakeholders is paramount (Nicolaidis, 2014; 2015). One research study suggested that to develop a sport tourist destination that can arouse the interest of tourists, support should be given to investment, infrastructure development, integration of sports activities (González-García et al., 2018). This support will create efficient and effective results. Also, facilities and local agricultural products and ingredients must be available for tourists (Shipway, 2018).

To create an interesting tourist spot that can draw attention, there are many components including 1) beauty of natural resources, 2) impressive culture and traditions, 3) facilities including accommodation, restaurants, souvenir shops, laundry stores, and other services, 4) infrastructure, 5) convenient communication and transportation systems, 6) hospitality of local people, and 7) effective public relations and a credible source of information (Chuchat, 2004). Deferred demand is a suppressed demand that we all have, for traveling as well, but it may not happen without enough knowledge or information about the destination. However, this demand can be met if there are proper public relations, sales techniques, convenient communication, and an effective information system (Mathieson, 1996).

When comparing different variables of tourist needs in Thai traditional sports tourism, four main differences were found; 1) a need for accommodation is different between male and female tourists, 2) a need for sports tourism activities is different between tourists in different age ranges; tourist in the age range of 31-40 and 41-50 years old have higher mean score than those between 51-60, and the mean score of those who are older than 61 is higher than of those in 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, and 51-60 years old, 3) tourists with different status have



different needs for attitude facet; the mean score of single tourists is higher than divorced tourists, and 4) tourists from different regions have different needs in three facets (Bauk, 2018) including attitude, tourist attraction site, and public relations. For different needs among tourists from different regions, the results show that 1) the need for attitude; the mean score of tourists from America is higher than those from Europe and Asia, 2) the need for tourist attraction site; the mean score of tourists from America is higher than those from Europe, Australia, and the mean score of those from Asia is higher than those from Australia, and 3) the need for public relations; the mean score of tourists from Asia is higher than those from Australia and Africa (Gibson, et al., 2018).

This finding is supported by the idea that variety and differences in sports tourism marketing are essential to motivate and respond to tourist needs. Hence, support for the development of tourism marketing or a destination is important in order to serve all groups of tourists. This can create both direct and indirect benefits for the destination (Hallmann, 2015). This is also mentioned in the study of Motivation of Sport tourists – An Empirical Analysis in Several European Rock Climbing Regions (Woratschek, et al., 2007), which explored motivation in participating in sports tourism and found that each sports tourist attraction requires different marketing technique to raise interest and motivate a tourist to visit the place. Not surprisingly, each group of sports tourists has different motivation and factors for destination decision making, so while planning a successful sports tourism marketing strategy, one must pay attention to the characteristics of each group of tourists (Bogan, et al., 2018).

Conclusion

Practicing Thai traditional sports including Muay Thai and Thai sword fighting can preserve the culture of Thai martial arts, increase the economic value of tourism business, and generate more income in sports tourism as these two sports have become more and more popular among foreign visitors. Hence, in the campaign and development plan of Bangkok and the tourism development plan, there should be a consideration on the appropriateness of the activity, how meaningful the tourism activity is to a visitor, a role in the cultural preservation of Thai martial arts, and last but not least, social and economic benefits for the stakeholders.

Overall, most tourists in Thai traditional sports tourism in Bangkok are interested in this kind of tourism, are impressed on how friendly local people are, and enjoy doing Thai traditional sports tourism activities and learning the local culture. For tourist needs in the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism marketing, tourists want warm and friendly welcoming from the local community, clean and beautiful scenery, a safe route to tourist attraction site, a variety of creative activities, availability of local food that uses local agricultural products, and credibility of the information source.

The guideline for the development of creative Thai traditional sports tourism marketing to support special interest tourism includes the following; 1) promotion of investment and infrastructure development to support visitors, 2) integration of different sports in sports tourism, 3) convenient communication, public utility, and logistic systems 4) friendly local people, 5) effective public relations and sales techniques, 6) convenient and effective communication channels, and 7) development of the information system that can arouse motivation for traveling and help promote tourism.

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