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Survey of Tourists' Attitudestoward Sky Lantern Release in Chiang Mai, Thailand

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Abstract

This study, Tourists' Attitudestoward Sky Lantern Release in Chiang Mai, was conducted by Plant Genetic Conservation Project of Maejo University. It had objectives to 1) know background of tourists who got involved in sky lantern release in Chiang Mai, and 2) understand their attitudes toward the sky lantern release. Questionnaire was used to collect data from 400 study samples which were 242 Thai tourists, and 152 tourists from other countries.

The study results showed that majority of the international visitors were male tourists in their 20s, had bachelor degree as their highest educational attainment, were single, were employed at private company, had monthly incomes of 70,001-140,000 baht, and came from Europe. While most Thai visitors were female tourists in their 20s, living in the North of Thailand, earned a lower grade than a bachelor's degree, single, were self-employed with monthly income of 15,000 baht.

Thai visitors had more positive attitude than the international visitors toward the sky lantern release. However in terms of the bad effects that the sky lanterns may cause to the city, the Thai visitors were more serious and negatively looking at the problem.

The sky lantern launching could be improved to meet tourist needs better by, for instance, providing more bathrooms, parking lots, and wider or more access paths to the event, and pushing the venues further away from Chiang Mai International airport to make sure that the launching will not pose danger to airplanes.

Keywords: sky lantern, release, Chiang Mai, attitude, tourist

Introduction

Today, Thailand has increased support for tourism Industry in the country by expanding its tourism market, developing its economic structure as a tourism hub in ASEAN, and building up a strong brand image for tourist destinations through its unique local lifestyles, cultures, traditions, and indigenous knowledge. More varieties of tourism types were developed in Thailand to meet the customer needs, for example, ecotourism, medical tourism, and agritourism. The number of international tourists visited Thailand was 19,090,000 in 2011 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2011) and has grown up to 25,951,848 in 2013 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013). Most of the international tourists were from East Asia, Europe, America, South Asia, Oceania, Middle East, and Africa, respectively.

In the North of Thailand, Chiang Mai was the city that was most visited by international tourists. In 2013, there were 2,126,964 foreign tourists visited Chiang Mai (National Statistical Office, 2013), while the number kept growing every year. Chiang Mai is an interesting tourist destination and keep attracting visitors both Thai and international to the city to experience its local life style, Lanna culture, beautiful scenery, and varieties of natural attraction.

Yi Peng or Lanna Loy Krathong is a festival that well represents Northern Thai lifestyle and culture. During the festival we would hear telling of the great birth story (ThetMahachat), and see local residents decorating their houses, temples, and streets with sugar canes, banana trees, coconut leaves, Lanna Buddhist flags (Tung Chor), candle pots (PhangPrateep), and colorful hanging lanterns (Khom Yi Peng). At night, people launch illuminated sky lanterns into the sky to be an act of paying worship to the Buddha's relic (PhraKetKaewJulamane) in the heaven for divine beings (Tavatimsa Heaven) (VoiceTV, 2015). The most attractive highlight of the festival is the illuminated sky lantern launching. Unlike most areas in Thailand, the sky lantern launching in Chiang Mai is a mass lantern launching. This gives visitors opportunity to witness amazing moment of illuminated night sky when thousands of lanterns floating in the sky at the same time. The event has impressed many visitors and attracted more visitors every year to the festival.

Despite the fact that the mass sky lantern launching in Chiang Mai has drawn many visitors to the event and generated more income to the locals, there was also danger caused by them. The lanterns could start a fire on someone's house, if they come down alight, and releasing them during restricted time or using poor quality material to make them can be very dangerous to the safety of aircrafts. This study aimed to understand tourists' attitudes toward the sky lantern release in Chiang Mai in order to have helpful insights for a proper attraction development proposal for Chiang Mai province.

Objectives

- 1) To know background of tourists who got involved in sky lantern release in Chiang Mai
- 2) To understand their attitudes toward the sky lantern release

Research Methodology

- 1) Questionnaire was used to collect data from study samples
- 2) Data analysis was conducted using Chi Square statistic to test relationships between variables with a significance level of .05, means, standard deviations, one-way analysis of variance: ANOVA, and only using Least Significant Difference method (LSD) to compare two means after they were found significantly different.
- 3) The analyzed data was publicized through a discussion forum for entrepreneurs, government and private agents to hear and exchange their helpful opinions.

The study population was all 5,590,080 tourists visited Chiang Mai during the Yi Peng festival, in November 2015, while the study sample size was determined using Taro Yamane formula (Yamane, 1973) with 95% confidence level as following.

$$\text{Taro Yamane's formula: } n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

where: n = sample size

N = population size (the universe)

e = sampling error

$$\begin{aligned} \text{then } n &= \frac{5590080}{1 + 5590080 (0.05)^2} \\ n &= 399.97 \text{ (400 samples)} \end{aligned}$$

After having the sample size determined, stratified sampling was used to divide the samples into smaller groups (strata) judging from whether they are Thai or international visitors in order to have sufficient samples from both strata. Then proportional stratified random sampling was utilized to randomly pick the samples from each strata as shown below.

Table 1: Numbers of study population and samples categorized as Thai and international visitors visited Chiang Mai in 2013

Types of visitors	Number of population (persons)	Number of sample size (persons)
Thai visitors	3,463,116	248
International visitors	2,126,964	152
Total	5,590,080	400

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013(Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013)

A questionnaire used in this study contained both close-ended and open-ended questions. It was designed to meet the objectives of the study by having two different parts as the following.

Part 1: Demographic questions including gender, age, education level, etc.

Part 2: Tourists' attitudes toward sky lantern release In Chiang Mai, Thailand

Part 2 of the questionnaire contained 5-point rating scale questions: strongly agreeable, agreeable, not sure, disagreeable, and strongly disagreeable, while 5 = strongly agreeable, 4 = agreeable, 3 = not sure, 2 = disagreeable, and 1 = strongly disagreeable.

Results

1) Demographic information of international visitors

1.1) General information of international visitors

The collected study data of international visitors showed that the international visitors were male tourists (54.9%), and female tourists (45.1%). Their ages were between 20-30 years (45%), 31-40 years (25.5%), 41-60 years (22.6%), 61 years or more (7.3%), and 20 years or less (0.6%). They were from Europe (62.8%), North America (17.1%), Asia (9.8%), Oceania (5.5%), and South America (4.9%). Their educational attainments were higher than bachelor degree (42.7%), bachelor degree (39.0%), and lower than bachelor degree (18.3%). Their marital status were single (58.5%), married (37.8%), and divorced/ widowed (3.7%). They were employees of a private company (48.5%), self-employed (17.8%), government employees (15.3%), retired/ unemployed (11.7%), and college students (6.7%). Their monthly incomes were between 70,001–140,000 baht (30.0%), 35,001–70,000 baht (29.3%), higher than 200,000 baht (14.7%), 140,001–200,000 baht (18.0%), and higher than 200,000 (8.0%).

1.2) International visitors' behaviors and choices

The collected study data showed that the international visitors came for vacation (95.7%), visiting their relatives (4.3%), working (1.8%), and studying (0.6%). This trip was their first trip to Chiang Mai (86.0%), and was not (14.0%). They traveled to Chiang Mai in November – February (75.6%), July – October (7.3%), and March – June (3.7%). They were traveling with their partner (40.5%), friends (27.0%), family/ relatives (16.5%), alone (12.9%), and with a tour company (3.1%). They came to see religious places (78.7%), local cultures (75.0%), natural attractions (71.3%), local lifestyles (57.3%), festivals (40.2%),

entertainments/ shopping (37.8%), ancient ruins (36.0%), and package tours provided by a travel agent (3.0%). They traveled by walk (64.6%), public transport (56.1%), rental motorbike/ bicycle (18.3%), tour bus provided by a travel agent (11.6%), and rental car (5.5%). They stayed at a hotel (62.8%), a guesthouse/ a homestay (33.5%), a house of a friend/ relative (3.7%), and a resort (1.8%). Their trip lasted 3-7 days (75.6%), 1-2 days (12.1%), 2 weeks (6.7%), longer than a month (3.0%), 3-4 weeks (1.2%), and not able to identify as they were residing in Chiang Mai (1.2%). They received tourist information from tourism website (56.1%), friend/ relative (50.6%), tourism book/ brochure/ billboard (34.1%), tourist guide (7.9%), and tourist staff (3.0%). During their trips they spent, on average, 32,472.58 baht per trip with a standard deviation of 24,560.30 baht, their highest spending at 150,000 baht, and lowest spending at 5,000 baht. They were certain to revisit Chiang Mai (82.9%), were not sure if they will (13.4%), and will not come back (3.7%).

2) Demographic information of Thai visitors

2.1) General information of Thai visitors

The Thai visitors were female tourists (56.3%), and male tourists (43.7%). Their ages were between 20-30 years (39.3%), 31-40 years (21.0%), 41-60 years (20.2%), 20 years or less (14.7%), and 61 years or more (4.8%). They were from northern region (52.8%), central region (28.6%), north-eastern region (7.9%), southern region (5.6%), and eastern region (5.2%). Their educational attainments were lower than bachelor degree (50.8%), bachelor degree (42.9%), and higher than bachelor degree (6.3%). Their marital status were single (59.9%), married (37.3%), and divorced/ widowed (2.8%). They were self-employed (40.5%), college students (23.8%), employees of a private company (16.3%), government employees (10.3%), retired/ unemployed (9.1%). Their monthly incomes were less than 15,000 baht (50.8%), 15,001 – 30,000 baht (30.2%), 30,001 – 45,000 baht (8.7%), 45,001– 60,000 baht (5.2%), and 60,001 baht or more (5.2%).

2.2) Thai visitors' behaviors and choices

The collected study data showed that Thai visitors came to Chiang Mai for vacation (60.3%), working (24.6%), studying (11.9%), could not identify as they were staying in Chiang Mai (7.7%), and visiting their family/ relatives (6.7%). They have been to Chiang Mai before (79.8%), were staying in Chiang Mai (14.4%), and have come to Chiang Mai for the first time (20.2%). They traveled to Chiang Mai in November – February (81.3%), July – October (12.3%), and March – June (5.6%). They were traveling with their partner (30.3%), family/ relatives (27.7%), unidentified (22.1%), with a tour company (8.3%), alone (5.2%), and with a company they were working for (0.9%). They came to see religious places (72.2%), natural attractions (69.8%), entertainments/ shopping (59.1%), local cultures and lifestyles (46.8%), ancient ruins (43.3%), festivals and traditions (41.7%), and package tours provided by a travel agent (25.4%). They traveled by their private car (64.3%), rental car (41.7%), walk (14.3%), a bus provided by a travel agent (9.5%), rental motorbike/ bicycle (8.7%), and public transport (5.6%). They stayed at a hotel (57.9%), a guesthouse/ a homestay (23.4%), a house of a friend/ relative (15.5%), a resort (5.3%), and a tent/ motorhome (1.6%). Their trip lasted 3-7 days (39.3%), 1-2 days (26.2%), unidentified as they were staying in Chiang Mai (25.8%), longer than a month (3.9%), 2 weeks (3.2%), and 3-4 weeks (1.6%). They received tourist information from friend/ relative (67.5%), tourism website (50.8%), tourism book/ brochure/ billboard (19.0%), tourist staff (5.2%), and tourist guide (2.8%). During their trips they spent, on average, 11,678.89 baht per trip with standard deviation of 14,507.86 baht, their highest spending at 100,000 baht, and lowest spending at 1,000 baht. They were certain to revisit Chiang Mai (69.4%), do not have to revisit Chiang

Mai as they were permanently staying (25.8%), were not sure if they will (4.0%), and will not come back (0.8%).

3) Thai and international visitors' attitudes toward sky lantern release in Chiang Mai

Each statement is assigned a numerical score ranging from 1 to 5, and the measurement criteria of the levels of opinions are as follows.

Scores	levels of opinions
4.21 – 5.00	= strongly agreeable, all of the time, very positive
3.41 – 4.20	= agreeable, very often, positive
2.61 – 3.40	= undecided, not sure, neutral
1.81 – 2.60	= disagreeable, sometimes, negative
0.00 – 1.80	= strongly disagreeable, hardly ever, very negative

3.1) Opinions of Thai and international visitors on sky lantern release venues in Chiang Mai

The results from t-test analysis of the two samples' means, Thai and international visitors, of their opinions about sky lantern release venues in Chiang Mai, showed that international visitors had neutral opinions (3.47%) while Thai visitors had positive opinions (3.69%) with t value of -3.093 and significance value of .002, less than the determining significance at .05. Therefore it can be concluded that opinions of Thai and international visitors about sky lantern release in Chiang Mai were different, and the difference was statistically significant at a statistical significance level of .05 and 95% confidence level. However there were four questions, about whether or not they think there are sufficient venues of lantern launching, whether the venues are safe, have proper facilities such as restroom and parking lots, and are convenient to access, that opinions of the Thai and international visitors were not significantly different at a statistical significance level of .05 and 95% confidence level. The significance values of the four points were .159, .998, .154, and .097 respectively, which were higher than the determining significance at .05.

3.3) Opinions of Thai and international visitors on public relation for sky lantern release in Chiang Mai

The results from t-test analysis of the two samples' means, Thai and international visitors, of their opinions on public relation for sky lantern release in Chiang Mai, showed that international visitors had neutral opinions (3.19%) while Thai visitors had positive opinions (3.69%) with t value of -5.987 and significance value of .000, less than the determining significance at .05. Considering each of the questions about public relation individually, all their significance values were less than the determining significance at .05. Therefore it can be concluded that opinions of Thai and international visitors on public relation for sky lantern release in Chiang Mai were different, and the difference was statistically significant at a statistical significance level of .05 and 95% confidence level.

3.4) Opinions of Thai and international visitors on cultural aspects of sky lantern release in Chiang Mai

The results from t-test analysis of the two samples' means, Thai and international visitors, of their opinions on cultural aspects of sky lantern release in Chiang Mai, showed that both international and Thai visitors had very positive opinions (4.06% and 4.05% respectively) with t value of 0.93 and significance value of .926, more than the determining significance at .05. Therefore it can be concluded that opinions of Thai and international visitors on cultural aspects of sky lantern release in Chiang Mai were not significantly different at a statistical significance level of .05 and 95% confidence level. However, considering each of the cultural questions individually, there were three questions – the event

was filled with activities and traditional costumes that very well showed Lanna culture, organized activities were more culturally outstanding than those in other provinces, and the sky lantern launching made the festival very unique and attracted tourists in to Chiang Mai every year, had significance values of .033, .036, and .002 respectively, which were less than the determining significance at .05. So we can conclude that opinions of Thai and international visitors on these three cultural points were different, and the difference was statistically significant at a statistical significance level of .05 and 95% confidence level.

3.5) Opinions of Thai and international visitors on negative effects of sky lantern release in Chiang Mai

The results from t-test analysis of the two samples' means, Thai and international visitors, of their opinions on negative effects of sky lantern release in Chiang Mai, showed that international visitors were not sure if the sky lantern launching caused negative effects to the city (3.18) while Thai visitors agreed that it caused bad effects to Chiang Mai (3.81) with t value of -8.132 and significance value of .000, less than the determining significance at .05. Therefore it can be concluded that opinions of Thai and international visitors on negative effects of sky lantern release in Chiang Mai were different, and the difference was statistically significant at a statistical significance level of .05 and 95% confidence level. However, there was one question about the negative effects – people got injury from incorrectly launching the sky lantern that had significance value of .210, more than the determining significance at .05. So we can conclude that opinions of Thai and international visitors on this statement were not significantly different at a statistical significance level of 0.05 and 95% confidence level.

Conclusion

International visitors

Most of the international visitors were male tourists, between 20 and 30 years of age, single, an employee of a private company, from Europe, earned a higher education attainment than bachelor degree, and had a monthly income between 70,001 and 140,000 baht.

Most of them visited Chiang Mai for the first time, traveled to Chiang Mai in November – February, were traveling with their partner, came to see religious places, traveled by walk, stayed at a hotel, were traveling for 3-7 days, received tourist information from tourism website, on average spent 32,472.58 baht for the trip, and were certain to revisit Chiang Mai.

Thai visitors

Most of the Thai visitors were female tourists, between 20 and 30 years of age, single, self-employed, from northern region of Thailand, earned a lower educational attainment than bachelor degree, and had a monthly income less than 15,000 baht.

Most of them were revisiting Chiang Mai, came for vacation, traveled to Chiang Mai in November – February, were traveling alone, came to see religious places and natural attractions, traveled by a private car, stayed at a hotel, were traveling for 3-7 days, received tourist information from friends and relatives, on average spent 11,678.89 baht for the trip, and were certain to revisit Chiang Mai.

Attitudes of Thai and international visitors toward sky lantern release In Chiang Mai, Thailand

Venues for the sky lantern launching

The study results showed that international visitors had neutral opinions, while Thai visitors had positive opinions on venues for sky lantern release in Chiang Mai. Their opinions

influenced Thai visitors to agreed, more clearly than the international visitors did, that the sky lantern launching had caused bad effects to the city.

Recommendations

To make the sky lantern launching activity meet tourists needs and satisfaction better, it is recommended to improve those topics/ questions receiving lower-than-average rating scores from the visitors.

To improve the venues for sky lantern release, it is advised to provide more bathrooms, parking lots, security, and wider or more access paths to the event.

To improve the public relation for sky lantern release, it is recommended to install more directional signs to help the visitors get to the event easier, and the local government needs to provide clear and sufficient information about event.

To improve the cultural aspects of the sky lantern release, it is recommended to encourage people, especially local people, to wear more northern Thai clothes to the event, and organize more activities that show northern Thai culture to the visitors.

To reduce the negative effects of the sky lantern release for Chiang Mai, it is necessary to discuss and find out the number of the lanterns that should be launched at once during the mass sky lanterns launching. This number is the ideal number of the lanterns being released at the same time that makes them looks fascinating and draw attention of the visitors most. Therefore releasing any more lanterns that this amount will not make much of a difference. Then the amount of sky lanterns being launched should be limited to this particular number. The mass sky lantern launching venues should be pushed further away from Chiang Mai International airport, to make sure that the launching will not pose danger to airplanes. Proper steps of launching the sky lantern should also be introduced before having the visitors do it to reduce the injury that caused by releasing the lantern incorrectly.

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