

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This research puts forward a descriptive study that investigates the influences on the decision making of Thais for their Songkran holidays. This chapter consists of the rationale for the study, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scopes of the study, limitation of the study, and, conceptual framework.

#### **Rationale for the Study**

Festivals have recently become the fastest growing tourist destination attraction as the survey of International Festival and Event Association (IFEA) found that festival and special events tend to impact significantly worldwide due to the fact that they contribute to local economies and employment (IFEA, 2007). Festivals are also an opportunity to preserve culture and history of the country through hand-made arts and crafts and performances (Long, et al, 2004). Festivals are originally a community event celebration. Over time they can change into some festivals becoming well-known from the outsider's perspective and then they become tourist destination attractions (McDowall, 2010).

Thailand has many magnificent festivals which are local festivals and some are distinctively national festivals. Songkran is one of such national festivals. It is the most famous festival and also a major holiday in Thailand. The tradition of Songkran is recognized as an important custom for the Thai community in terms of religion, family, and community unity aspects. It is shown through the value transfer of giving, forgiving, and paying respect from generation to generation through this festival (Bangkok insight, 2007). Also, it is an occasion of family reunion that gathers family members who have to go away from home for some reasons, but return in order to spend a time with their family.

In the past, the temple was assumed as central to the Thai community; as it was in this festival. Thais went to the temple with their family for merit making, and then paid homage to their ancestors. Also, Songkran brought people in community together to reveal the unity of community (Office of the National Culture

Commission, 2009). Additionally, this was a good opportunity to gather people to take care of their community and environment. One good example is taking the sand back to the temple and cleaning the building and toilet of the temple.

Songkran activities are related closely to Buddhism (Office of the National Culture Commission, 2009). It is a time for Buddhists to worship Buddha and practice Dhamma in order to preserve and prolong Buddhism. In the past days, splashing water was only part of the festival in order to pay respect to people and release people from the heat but the main part was pouring water to Buddha images, monks and the elders in order to wash the bad things away and receive the blessings and good luck for New Year.

Even though there are varieties of activities in Songkran holidays, splashing water has currently become a major activity of this festival. Many destinations try to promote this festival as a water festival in order to attract more visitors to their destination. Studying consumer behavior of Thai decision making on this festival will provide interesting information on the tourism aspect.

In terms of consumer behavior in terms of tourism, Songkran as a holiday is an occasion that many people will take time to do some things special for themselves as individuals or with their family and friends. Also, they are likely to plan for this occasion in advance (Blichfeldt, 2008). This is an advantage for hospitality businesses to attract people who are free from work to travel in the country or attend some local activities in order to generate their business earning. It also encourages economic circulation of the country and distribute income to local destinations.

Studying the behavior of Thais on these holidays, about what influences their decision making on this holiday, may broaden one's horizons not only to what influences them on the holiday spending but also what they do on this holiday. Therefore, this study investigates the influences on the decision making of Thais for their Songkran Holidays. The researcher selected the influences; demographic factors and the push/pull factors from previous studies, text books, and related studies in order to examine the actual influences on Thais' decision making. Thai people were the targeted population because of their understanding of the importance of Songkran holidays.



The researcher also explores activities that Thais decided to attend on Songkran holidays by using both traditional activities such as making merit and bathing rite, and other leisure activities that Thais are likely to do on this holiday such as traveling, shopping and staying at home. This exploration provides useful information about what activities influence Thais' decision making on Songkran holidays. The research confirms current practices. It is commonly thought that Thais understand what choices are available to them for this national holiday, but this research will consolidate a position based on contemporary society and the decisions made by individuals.

As a result, studying factors and activities that influence Thai decision making and the process of Thai decision making on Songkran provides significant information in the view of domestic tourism development. The outcome of this study would be beneficial as a literature for the further researches. Also, both individuals and organizations that desire to fulfill targeted customers' satisfaction during this holiday would get benefits from this study.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the influences on Thais' decision making for their Songkran holidays. The specific objectives of the study are;

1. To study the influence of different demographic factors on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012
2. To investigate the influence of push and pull traveling factors on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012
3. To explore the top activities that Thais participate during Songkran holidays 2012

#### **Significance of the Study**

The results from this study would be useful for many sectors as follows. Firstly, the Tourism Authority of Thailand is mainly the organization to get a benefit from this research. Due to their responsibilities to develop the operation of proactive marketing strategies and promote cooperation on promotion of tourism market (TAT. n.d.), this organization can use this research on marketing strategies to design the

interesting projects to attract people who live in Bangkok to travel within the country at the time of Songkran holidays.

Secondly, local governors and businesses of attractive destinations can use this research for tourism policy making to attract the targeted tourists visiting their area. The efficient strategy will create jobs for local people as well as distributing income for the local and the whole nation, as well.

Lastly, this research can also benefit individuals, nationally and internationally, and educational organizations as they can use the research as value-added on their knowledge and literature for further researches.

### **Scope of the Study**

The content in this research was focused only on Songkran holidays because it was the most important and iconic national holiday that people are likely to plan for and seek something special to do on this holiday.

This research focuses on Thai people as target population because it was investigated as they are most likely to understand the importance of traditional festivals.

### **Limitation**

Participant observation during this study was limited to the period of Songkran festivals in Bangkok, the nation's capital city. The Songkran festival also took place in many locations across the country at the same time; however this study was restricted to the metropolitan area for logistical reasons. The researcher conducted the observation for three days during 13-15 April 2012.

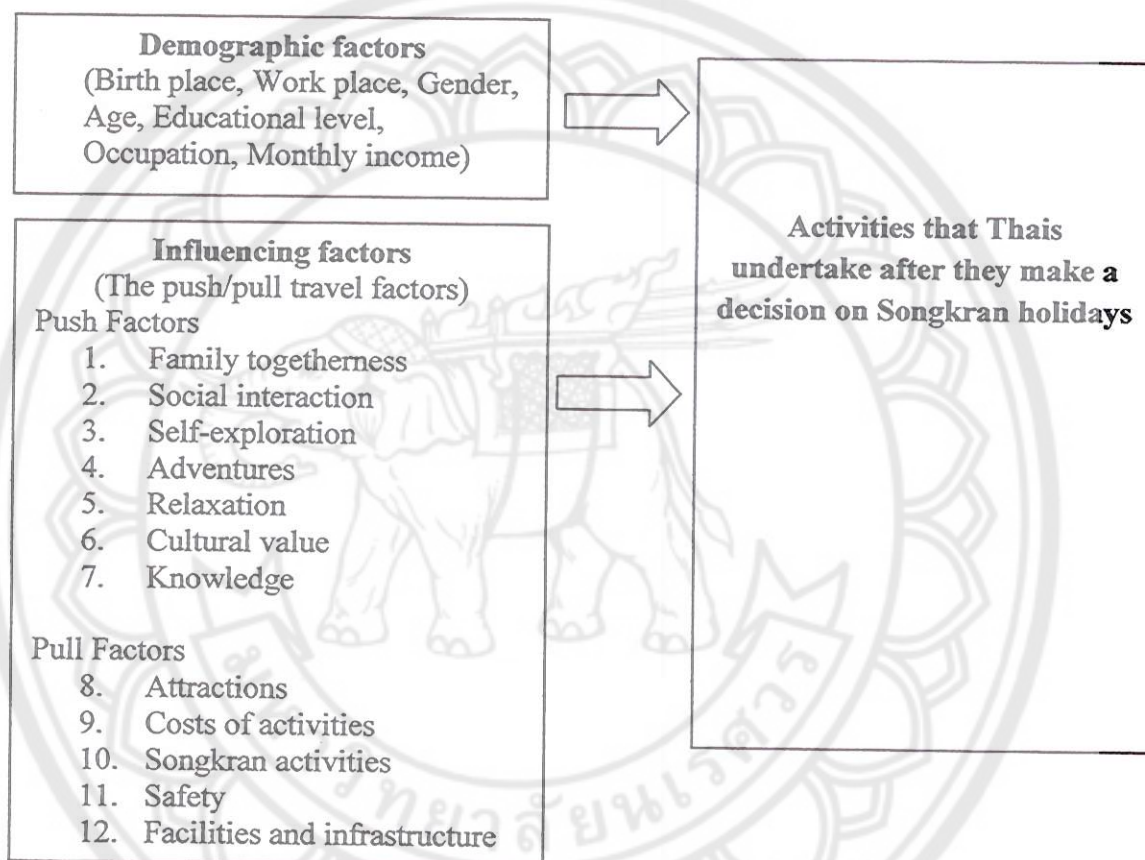
Due to the huge volume of Thai population, it had been determined that distributing an online questionnaire was the most convenient approach to the quantitative aspects of the mixed methodology used in this research. However, the online questionnaire was limited to survey only Thai people who could access the Internet. Therefore, the outcomes of this research have limitations.

A structural equation to assess the influence on the decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays should be more effective by using a 5-Likert scale instead of using 'yes' or 'no' question.



### Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

The following framework briefly shows an overview of the conceptual basis for finding the relationship between the influence of factors and activities and Thai decision-making on Songkran holidays. The conceptual framework of this study is as follows:



**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework**

### **Hypothesis**

H<sub>1</sub>: The difference of demographic factors (birth place, work place, gender, ages, educational level, occupation and monthly income) affects the activities that Thais decided to participate during Songkran Holiday 2012.

H<sub>2</sub>: The difference of push and pull factors affect activities that Thais decided to participated during Songkran holidays 2012

All of hypotheses above will be tested of the level of significance of 0.05

### **Conclusion**

This chapter includes an overview of the study such as the rationale, purposes, significances, scope, limitations, and the study's conceptual framework. While the Songkran festival is well understood by the majority of the population, it is clear there is little documentation regarding the influences of holiday choices made by Thais at this time. In order to investigate influences on decision making of Thais for their Songkran holidays, a review of related research in Chapter Two will extend knowledge collected from the participant observation and this qualitative ethnographic study being undertaken.