

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents conclusions of the study “Investigation of the Influences on the Decision Making of Thais for Their Songkran Holidays” which was conducted through participant observation, questionnaire survey and interview. The content of this chapter is divided into three parts which are findings, discussion, and recommendations for future research.

Findings

The purposes of study were to investigate the influences on Thais’ decision making for their Songkran holidays. Due to a mixed methodology in this research, findings based on participant observation, online questionnaire and in-depth interview shown as following details:

1. To study the influence of different demographic factors on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012

The outcome of Hypothesis testing indicated that partial demographic factors affect decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran Holiday 2012. It was found that two demographic factors; gender and work place were influential on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012 (see Table 9 and 11).

2. To investigate the influence of push and pull traveling factors on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012

The outcome of Hypothesis testing indicated Family Togetherness, Cultural Value, and Knowledge were the significant push factors that affect the decision- making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012 (See table 30) whilst all pull factors do not affect decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012 (See table 34).

Moreover, interviewees indicated that family togetherness and cultural value were influential factors to participate traditional activities in terms of traditional

appreciation whilst family togetherness influenced significantly on leisure activities in terms of family reunion which some families celebrated their family reunion at the restaurant while some did at home as home as in a party. Relaxation was found as another influential factor due to the work pressure during working days. Interviewees have various ways to relax. Some went out to find some new activities while others did what they liked to do at home.

Furthermore, safety issue influenced interviewees who decided to spend holidays in Bangkok. Even more, it was found that the past experience was another variable influencing interviewees' decision making to travel during Songkran holiday whilst television was observed as an influential factor.

3. To explore the top activities that Thais participate during Songkran holidays 2012

It was observed that local people in Bangkok who decided not to travel to Songkran attractions in upcountry celebrated their Songkran holidays simply with their family and friends. Activities in their Songkran were diverse such as making merit at the temple, home relaxation, dinner out or joining Songkran activities in Bangkok.

The respondent's top three traditional activities were surveyed as Making Merit, Bathing Buddha Image and Family Reunion respectively (see Table 5) whilst top three leisure activities were Home Relaxation, Dinner Out and Shopping respectively (see Table 6). Releasing freely Animals ($N = 24$, 1.9%) and Social Activities ($N = 22$, 2.1%) respectively (See Table 5 and 6).

From the observation, it was also discovered that traditional activities related closely to Buddhist belief. The participants perceived that religious activities were part of Songkran holidays as they had an intention to attend those activities. However, some traditional activities such as carrying sand into the temple and releasing animals have been changing the way to perform traditionally.

Moreover, people in Bangkok perceived that Songkran activities were fun and joyful. It was observed from their smiles, atmosphere and the music. People looked happy joining such activities with their people and were willing to attend other fun activities during a holiday. Participants joined religious activities with their family while joining water plashing with a group of their friends.

Last but not least, people who decided to stay at home with two reasons; one is staying at home because they needed a rest from loads of their work. Another is staying at home because they had no idea where to go. It was implied that they were willing to go out but lack there's lack of information or motivation.

Discussion

This research was conducted to investigate the influences on Thais' decision making for their Songkran holidays. Various previous researches and theories were used to discuss on the major results of this research.

1. The result of this research showed that the different gender influencing the decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012.

This result agreed with the idea of Collins and Tisdell (2002) and Bowen and Clarke (2009). They said that gender was a major influential factor in terms of tourism aspect. They explained about travel patterns of outbound Australia traveler that women traveled on holiday and VFR more than men. The result of previous study was similar to this study which Thai women participated in activities during Songkran more than Thai men. From participant observation, it discovered the difference between genders in terms of customer behaviors; Thai females were likely to plan on what to do and where to go during Songkran activities more than Thai men. One interviewee said that he had no plans yet what else to do in Songkran holidays.

2. Family togetherness was found as an influential factor on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012

The results agreed with the study of McDowall (2011) namely "The festival in My Hometown: The Relationships among Performance Quality, Satisfaction and Behavioral Intentions". The result signified that family togetherness was the most important motivation of people to attend the festivals. It could be mentioned as a form of collectivistic cultures which family members were dependent to each other (Reisinger, 2009). The study of Lovelock, Patterson and Walker (2007) also supported the result that Thais' satisfaction on decision-making were likely to rely on the in-group such as family, friend or social network as a collectivist culture. Van Raaij and Francken (1984); Hyde and Decrop, (2011) added that vacation decision-

making usually relied on decision making of family members. The result of this study found that Thais perceived Songkran as a family time. Therefore, their decision-making to do things or go out related closely to their family members. Majority of the interviewees spent time of the holidays with their family than others. One interviewee said that family was the most influential factor for her to spend Songkran holidays.

However, there were three interesting points from participant observation and in-depth interview about Family togetherness factor. First, when interviewees mentioned family togetherness, most of them meant single family including parents and children, not including grandparents or other relatives of the family. This supported the previous study of Jaichalard (2006) that Thai family structure had changed from joint family to nuclear family. Even though they perceived Songkran as a family time, size of family that they perceived was smaller. When interviewees talked about family togetherness or family reunion, most of them mentioned themselves as parents with their own children or mentions themselves as children with their own parents. One interviewee said they spent most of holiday with her family, she meant being with her husband and her kids.

Second, it was found that Thais did not spend a whole holiday with their family although they said that they valued family togetherness. It could be explained that because Songkran holidays were held continually for at least four days, there were various activities which could possibly happen during the holiday depending on the condition of such time. It was also found that majority of interviewees liked to spend the last day or last two days at home by their own in order to get ready for their work. The activities that those people did were on computer playing on internet and games, chatting on social network or reviewing photographs from the trip. Interviewees perceived that playing computer such as online social networks; YouTube, internet or games were relaxing activities at home. "It's cheap and fun", said one interviewee.

Last, it was found that kids were significantly an influential person of family members on participant's decision making during Songkran holidays 2012. This result agreed to the study of Nanda (2006). She said that the researches had also presented that more families agreed that their children had a significant effect on the leisure holidays decisions. One interviewee informed that she would rather stay at home but she finally decided to participated Songkran activities at Wat Pho because of her kids'

needs. Another interviewee took his kids out during Songkran because it was a perfect time to spend with them and a chance to teach his kids about traditional festival.

3. Cultural Value was found as another influential factors on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012

The outcome of this study agreed to the study of Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010) and Lovelock, Patterson and Walker (2007). Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010) discussed that culture value affected on people's buying behavior while Lovelock, Patterson and Walker (2007) explained that Thailand was considered as collectivist culture which decision making of people relied on the in-group such as family and also cultural value of their society. From participant observation and in-depth interview, people valued religious traditions. People went out to participate in religious activities at the temple during Songkran holidays because people perceived that religious activities particularly making merit, paying homage to ancestors and bathing Buddha image were parts of Songkran holidays. Buddhist belief was significantly influential on traditional activities during Songkran holidays. It was also found that people believed that participating in religious activities allowed good things come their life particularly in Songkran which was Thai New Year. They thought that making merit could let good things coming into their lives in New Year. One interviewee said that making merit made her feel good. Another said that Songkran was Thai New Year; making merit on Songkran was a good start for her new year and new life. This result supported the study of McDowall (2010) which Thai Buddhists believed in Karma where they would get merit from behaving well. Therefore, on the festival people went to make merit at the temple with a willingness to get merit by their goodness.

Participant observation and in-depth interview showed another similar aspect in terms of cultural value to the study of McDowall (2010) which was a sense of uniquely festival pride. McDowall (2010) said that when people went back to visit their hometown during the festival, they also brought their kids to the festival. It was an opportunity of their children to learn and be proud to their hometown tradition. The results of this study found that Thai parents particularly in Bangkok performed their appreciation in the same way of the previous study. From participant observation and

in-depth interview, it was found that interviewees took their children to attend Songkran activities because they wanted their kids to learn about their national culture.

However, from participant observation and in-depth interview, it found a missing cultural value "Sense of community unity" which was opposed to the previous studies. Office of the National Culture Commission (2009) mentioned that traditional way of Songkran was an opportunity that people in the community met and enjoyed the festival together and also an opportunity to express the unity in community by cleaning or restoring the temples and public places together. The study of McDowell (2010) mentioned that local people went to attend religious activities and also community activities together. From participant observation and in-depth interview, it did not find community activity in the observation area, which people in the community could attend in together. People attended religious activities at the temple with their family. They did not perceive that Songkran was the time for community unity or other social activities. One interviewee said that he had no idea that social activities were part of Songkran activities.

From participant observation, it was discovered that the sense of community unity was caused of changing the way to perform an activity namely "carrying sand into the temple" during Songkran holidays was missing. From the previous studies, Rattanamontri (2003) said that traditionally, Thai Buddhists believed that when they left the temple; there was some sand in the temple getting in their shoes or feet. Therefore, every New Year they would take those sand back into the temple. A bunch of sand were built into a pagoda-shape and decorated from colorful flowers and hand-made flags. In the meantime, it was a time for community unity. People in the community would use the sand to restore their community temple (Rattanamontri, 2003). This concept was different from the result of observation which found that carrying sand activity became a temple business. People didn't have to carry sand into the temple. The temple serviced people by preparing a bunch of sand with decorating stuffs. People who wanted to build sand in pagoda shape could buy the service. People today did not perceive the sense of community unity from this activity. One interviewee pointed that she didn't attend this activity because she thought that this was the way the temple tried to make money. "It's just a temple business", she said.

4. The study found that pull factor namely Safety was not influential on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012.

The result of the hypothesis testing was not found 'Safety' as an influential factor. It opposed the study of Azim (2010) which explained that feelings of safety and risk had impact on travel behavior. People avoided unsafe situation. They would decide not to go if such place made them felt threatened or unsafe. In Thailand, the period of Songkran holidays from 11 April – 17 April of every year was called "Seven Dangerous Days" (Emergency Medical Institute of Thailand, 2012). Emergency Medical Institute of Thailand was responsible to record daily street vehicle accidents on seven dangerous days and broadcasted via media channel such as television and radio every single day in order to remind people to be careful on their driving and street usages. However, result of the observation and interview discovered that interviewees perceived "Safety issue" as an influential factor on their decision making when they considered to go or not to go traveling particularly to upcountry during Songkran holiday. Safety was a major concern for interviewees who decided to stay in Bangkok during Songkran holidays. Some interviewees who need to travel to upcountry during Songkran holidays sought their own way to avoid the risk. One interviewee traveled by plane to avoid the unexpected street accidents. Another interviewee who decided to stay in Bangkok during Songkran holidays 2012 said that she decided not to travel to upcountry on Songkran because of unsafe situation like street vehicle accidents. "You might be a good driver but others might not be," she said.

5. Relaxation was not found as an influential factor on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012.

The result of the hypothesis testing did not find 'Relaxation' as an influential factor. The result was different from the previous study of Pangruang (2006) about "Trends on Traveling during Songkran Festival in 2006 of working age population in Bangkok" which found that the level of motivation for working age Thais for relaxation was high. Nevertheless, the result of the interview agreed that interviewees perceived Songkran holidays as a time for leisure and relaxation. An interviewee said that her work was in pressure What she had done on her Songkran

holiday was for relaxing. It was similar to the previous studies that people decided to go somewhere or do something new on holiday because they would like to escape from their routine life or release their stress (Kim, et al., 2003).

It discovered that relaxation for the respondents' perspectives did not mean only home relaxation but also doing something or going somewhere to make themselves felt relaxed such as going out with their family. Stebbins (2005) said that when people were on holidays, their behaviors were to do things they are relaxed to do and not pushed to do. During Songkran holidays 2012, dinner out was found as the second leisure activity that Thais attended the most followed by home relaxation. The result agreed with a study of Rojanaprapayon (2006) which mentioned that Bangkok people tend to eat outside more because they thought that cooking takes more time than buying cooked food or eating at the restaurant. Interviewees said that they liked to go to the restaurant because it was easy and convenient; they didn't have to waste time cooking and cleaning.

Table 35 Summary of findings and discussion

| | Objectives | Hypothesis | Findings | Literature |
|---|--|---|--|---|
| 1 | To study the influence of different demographic factors on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012 | The difference of demographic factors (birth place, work place, gender, ages, educational level, occupation and monthly income) affect the activities that Thais decided to participate during Songkran Holiday 2012. | Gender and work place were influential on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012. | As supporting to: The studies of Bowen and Clarke (2009). |

Table 35 (cont.)

| Objectives | Hypothesis | Findings | Literature |
|--|--|---|--|
| 2 To investigate the influence of push and pull traveling factors on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012 | The difference of push and pull factors affect the activities that Thais decided to participated during Songkran holidays 2012 | Family Togetherness, Cultural Value, and Knowledge were the significant push factors whilst all pull factors do not affect decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012. | <p>As supporting to:</p> <p>The studies of McDowall (2010), McDowall (2011), Reisinger (2009), Lovelock, Patterson and Walker (2007), Hyde and Decrop, (2011), Jaichalard (2006), Nanda (2006), Kim et al, 2003, and Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010)</p> <p>As opposed to:</p> <p>The studies of McDowall (2010), Azim (2010), Pangruang (2006), and Stebbins (2005)</p> |

Table 35 (cont.)

| Objectives | Findings | Literature |
|--|--|--|
| 3 To explore the top activities that Thais participate during Songkran holidays 2012 | Top three traditional activities were Making Merit, Bathing Buddha Image and Family Reunion respectively whilst top three leisure activities were Home Relaxation, Dinner Out and Shopping respectively. | <p>As supporting to:</p> <p>The studies of Jaichalard (2006), and Rojanaprapayon (2006)</p> <p>As opposed to:</p> <p>The studies of Office of the National Culture Commission (2009), and Rattanamontri (2003)</p> |

Recommendations

Songkran is a nation's festival which people all over country celebrate with different traditions and activities. Changes in quality of festival experience might not be noticed by the locals but research could point out the evidences on what is happening in order to conserve our beautiful festival for our next generation and also for tourism expansion. Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are made:

One, in order to increase the opportunity of domestic tourism during Songkran, first, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and related stakeholders in tourism section should generate more family activities particularly for kids due to the result of this study which found that a child was a significantly influential person of the family member affecting parent's decision making to participate in activities during Songkran holidays and it was observed that the number of existing activities for kids during Songkran holidays were still not many. Second, there were many people that decided to stay home or go abroad instead of attending Songkran activities with reasons of overcrowding and security. Therefore, creating Songkran activities in different locations could be a way to foster those people to participate such activities

on their Songkran holidays. Lastly, local governor should encourage people to participate in Songkran activities within their local community. As a result, people would not travel to another area which could reduce overcrowding and unfortunate accidents. Moreover, it was an opportunity for community unity where people in the same community meet and attend the activities together.

Another thing is,, in order to sustain the quality of Songkran experience among Thai citizens particularly new generation, first, government and related stakeholders should pay attention on the quality of Songkran activities due to the fact that it was an opportunity of our children to learn and be proud on their national festival. Second, schools and other academic stakeholders should educate new generations about history and tradition of Songkran festival which was a way to pass on the traditional knowledge and sense of cultural pride to our children. Lastly, Thai people all over the country should perform Songkran activities traditionally for their Songkran holidays. It was not only the opportunity to conserve our national festival, but it could also keep tourist destination of the country in the long run.

Recommendations for the future research

Several recommendations based on the findings of this research that provide viewpoints for the future research as follows;

1. As this study, found that a child is an influential person of family member to attend Songkran activities, future research could investigate on the popularity of activities that family Thais would rather participate on their Songkran holidays.
2. As this study investigated working age people as a majority, future research could extend to investigate influences on decision making of Thai teenagers or older people for their Songkran holidays
3. As the scope area of the study is within Bangkok, future research could investigate influences on decision making of Thais on other famous Songkran attractions.
4. As Songkran holidays were related closely to Buddhist beliefs, it's interesting if future research explore on what people in other religions in Thailand do during Songkran festival.

Conclusion

Songkran holiday is a happy family time for Thais. The study found that it was also a long free time for someone who wanted to escape themselves from working environment to do what and go where they want to. This study investigated influences on decision making of Thais for their Songkran holidays. It was found that during a period of the holidays, there were many different influences that affected their decision making to do something or go somewhere. In terms of demographic factors, it was found that gender and work place were influential factors on decision making of Thais to participate in activities during Songkran holidays 2012 whilst family togetherness, cultural value and knowledge were found as major influential push and pull factors. Songkran activities were divided into two types of activities; traditional activities and leisure activities. The top three traditional activities that Thais attended the most in 2012 were making merit, bathing Buddha image and family reunion respectively whilst home relaxation, dinner out and shopping respectively were the top three leisure activities. In discussion, the researcher discussed similarities and differences between previous studies and findings. Findings of this study had both agreement and disagreement to previous studies. Furthermore, this study discovered more interesting influences on observation and interview; for example, it was found that media and past experiences were influential factors for Thais' decision making to attend or not to attend Songkran activities in 2012. Last but not the least, recommendations for the future research could be a guideline for perspective researchers to extend this study or extend the scope of this study in order to contribute and discover new knowledge about Songkran holidays which is one of the most important holidays for Thai people and the nation.

The outcomes of this study will be beneficial to those interested in further research into the quality of the festival experience and the influences on participant decision-making. This makes it of value to those individuals and tourism organizations to better understand how to plan, develop, and market destinations where festivals play an important role in the lives of residents and visitors.