

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The Tourism Industry is a major source of income for many countries, and tourism in ASEAN has been growing rapidly. The top three tourist destinations in ASEAN, in terms of the number of tourist arrivals, are Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. It is apparent that tourism in Thailand has always been an important signifier of Thailand's confidence index and it has consistently served as its main economic driver for the past four decades. Generally, the number of international tourist arrivals in Thailand, especially Bangkok, has continued to grow at a satisfactory level.

Figure 1. Tourism Statistics in Thailand 1998-2007.

Year	International						
	Tourist		Average	Average Expenditures		Revenue	
	Number	Change	Length of Stay	Person/Day	Change	Million	Change
	(Million)	(%)	(Days)	(Baht)	(%)	(Baht)	(%)
1998	7.76	+ 7.53	8.40	3,712.93	+ 1.12	242,177	+ 9.70
1999	8.58	+ 10.50	7.96	3,704.54	- 0.23	253,018	+ 4.48
2000	9.51	+ 10.82	7.77	3,861.19	+ 4.23	285,272	+ 12.75
2001	10.06	+ 5.82	7.93	3,748.00	- 2.93	299,047	+ 4.83
2002	10.80	+ 7.33	7.98	3,753.74	+ 0.15	323,484	+ 8.17
2003	10.00	- 7.36	8.19	3,774.50	+ 0.55	309,269	- 4.39
2004	11.65	+ 16.46	8.13	4,057.85	+ 7.51	384,360	+ 24.28
2005	11.52	- 1.51	8.20	3,890.13	- 4.13	367,380	- 4.42
2006	13.82	+ 20.01	8.62	4,048.22	+ 4.06	482,319	+ 31.29
2007	14.46	+ 4.65	9.19 ^P	4,120.95 ^P	+ 1.80	547,782 ^P	+ 13.57

From *Tourism Authority of Thailand*, 2007. Retrieved September 7, 2009, from http://www2.tat.or.th/stat/web/static_tsi_detail.hp?L=&TsiID=9

The World Tourism Organization has ranked Thailand in the top 25 most popular tourist destinations in the world since 1990. In 2009, Travel and Leisure magazine ranked Bangkok as the third best city in the world. (World best city, 2009).

Inner Rattanakosin Island was built in 1782 in the reign of King Rama I, when Bangkok became the new capital of Siam (Thailand's old name). It is a landmark of Bangkok's Golden Yesteryear. This area of the city covers only 1.8 square kilometers and is surrounded by the Chao Phraya River, with the Bang Lamphu Canal and the Ong Ang Canal formerly having served as a natural defense against enemies. (Rattanakosin Island location, 2003). Up until now, Inner Rattanakosin Island has represented the old city of Bangkok, where many important places such as Buddhist temples, palaces, throne halls, historical buildings, residential areas, canals, schools and universities are located.

Inner Rattanakosin Island has its own significance, prestige, and is widely known among Thais and foreigners. The Grand Palace and the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, the City Pillar, the Pho Temple, and the Front Palace are the main attractions, with their architectural beauty appealing to many tourists. On a yearly basis, nearly two million tourists pay a visit to these places. Therefore, Inner Rattanakosin Island has gained fame as one of the most important tourist attractions, creating national prestige and generating significant revenue essential to the economic and social development of the country.

Even though Bangkok has many years of experience in managing its wonderful travel and tourism industry, there have been some complaints from tourists. The obvious problems in this particular area are traffic congestion, air pollution, street vendors displaying their merchandise on the pedestrian walkways, unreliable taxi drivers, and the inconvenience of public transportation. Moreover, many business operators in the area have been seeking government intervention to boost their slacking businesses with Thailand facing an economic downturn. As a result of the global economic crisis in 2009, international arrivals have suffered a strong slowdown, which was also reflected in the air transport and hotel industries.

Therefore, the growth of international tourism was expected to decline further in the remainder of 2009, with this slowdown forecasted to continue into 2010 as the recession has already hit most of the top spender countries. The decline was exacerbated in some regions, including Bangkok, by the outbreak of influenza A (H1N1) virus. To make matters even worse, Bangkok faced political uncertainty which affected tourists' confidence. Analysts believe that it would take some time to bounce back after these shocks, whether they be natural catastrophes, political turmoil or the declining economy. (Amazing Thailand...Amazing Value, 2010).

The tourism industry is a kind of service industry, with the focus on satisfaction in terms of service, attractions, security, hospitality, etc. Therefore, if tourists have a positive attitude and are satisfied, this will contribute to their decision to revisit the country and help promote Thai tourism.

Consequently, understanding foreign tourists' attitudes towards visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island will make the tourism organizations and concerned sectors move in the right direction, improve their competitiveness and generate more profit. In addition, this study will enable operators in the tourist industry to put the proper emphasis on specific areas when promoting and dealing with negative factors that cause tourists to seek other travel destinations.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Being able to understand what foreign tourists think when visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island will enable operators in the tourist industry to have a clear understanding of the aspects and situations that the concerned sectors might have overlooked. It will also help the sector deal with actual situations, maintain the positive aspects, as well as correct the negative ones to create a better experience for foreigners. Accordingly, this study was conducted to find out the answers to the following questions:

Main questions

What are foreign tourists' attitudes towards visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island?

Sub-questions

1) What are the trip characteristics of foreign tourists who travel around Inner Rattanakosin Island?

2) What are the problems which foreign tourists face while visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island and their suggestions for improvement?

3) What are the impressions that foreign tourists have while visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study are as follows:

Main objectives

To obtain information about foreign tourists' attitudes toward visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island

Sub-objectives

1) To ascertain the trip characteristics of foreign tourists who travel around Inner Rattanakosin Island.

2) To find out the deficiencies and solutions regarding visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island

3) To identify the impressions of foreign tourists regarding visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Definitions of terms of this study are as follows:

Inner Rattanakosin Island area refers to the area which is located on the eastern bank of the Chao Phraya River. It covers approximately 1.8 square-kilometers. The north reaches Phra Pinklao Bridge, and the east ends at the line of the Ku Mueng Derm Canal. The west extends to the middle of the Chao Phraya River, starting from Phra Pinklao Bridge to Rachinee School, and the south reaches Rachinee School.

Foreign Tourist refers to an international tourist or non-Thai resident who is a temporary visitor staying at least 24 hours in the country. The purpose of the journey can be leisure, business, family, a mission, or a meeting.

Organized through a travel agency refers to tourists whose trip totally or partly involves a tour package. All transportation, places to visit, accommodation and meals are organized in advance by a tour agency.

Self-organized refers to tourists who organize their whole trip independently.

Tourism refers to the processes, activities, and outcomes arising from the relationships and interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities, and the surrounding environments that are involved in attracting and hosting visitors.

Attitude refers to the feeling or idea towards something.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study surveyed foreign tourists' attitudes towards visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island. The study focused on tourist attitudes after visiting this particular area in terms of attraction sites, facilities, city environment, and people. The study population included foreigners who visited Inner Rattanakosin Island during December 2009 to January 2010. One hundred and fifty foreign tourists were included as the subjects in this study. However, the study did not include other areas in Bangkok as the researcher had time limitations in conducting the research. The instrument used was an open-ended and closed-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire related to demographic information, trip information, attitudes about visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island, as well as the problems and impressions of foreign tourists.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings will enable both the government and the private sector, especially the tourism business in the particular area, to understand what foreign tourists think about visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island. Then all concerned parties will be able to rectify deficiencies and make the necessary improvements in order to fulfill the needs of foreign tourists. Moreover, it will enable them to put the right emphasis on the

specific areas for promotion and improving competitiveness to put tourism on the right track. The results will also reveal the problems and give some suggestions to the Thai Tourism industry for future action. Additionally, the study will benefit the Thai economy and Thai people as a whole if there is an increase of satisfied foreign tourists visiting Bangkok.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study of foreign tourists' attitude towards visiting Inner Rattanakosin Island is divided into five chapters. Chapter one includes the background of the study, the statement of the problems, the objectives of the study, the definitions of terms, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, and the organization of the study. Chapter two gives overall information regarding Inner Rattanakosin Island. Chapter three is designed to review the related literature. Chapter four consists of the methodology, including the subjects, materials, procedures, and data analysis. Chapter five presents the findings of the study. Finally, chapter six provides the conclusion, discussion, and recommendations for further studies.