

# An investigation of international tourists' loyalty: a case study of Chiang-mai, Thailand

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## Keyword

Satisfaction, Loyalty, International Tourists, Chiang-Mai

## Abstract

*International tourist loyalty is a vital for the success of Thai tourism and loyalty is also the major measurement of the future success of Thai tourism since the major tourist income will come from the revisiting tourists. Therefore, it is vital to investigate the experiences of international tourists. The purposes of this research were to investigate international tourists' loyalty during their visiting in Chiang-Mai, Thailand during April to June, 2016 as well as to investigate their propensity to revisit Chiang-Mai in the near future. This was a quantitative research method. A non-probability random sampling was utilized to obtain 400 samples. An English questionnaire with Likert-five-scale questionnaire was developed to collect the data in order to study their experiences of traveling in Chiang-Mai. The important results revealed that the majority of respondents had a high level of satisfaction which led to high loyalty. Moreover, the loyalty factors and indicators can be ranked according to the mean average from high to low as follow: to plan to revisit Chiang-Mai within a year, to recommend friends and family to visit Chiang-Mai, to tell positive things about Chiang-Mai tourism, to search for more information about Chiang-Mai tourism, and to plan to revisit Thailand in the next year.*

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## 1. Introduction

Loyalty is an important topic in Business. Why? Because strong loyalty from customers often leads to high profit of business and organization. The high rate of tourists' destination loyalty means the high rate of revisiting the particular tourist destination in the near future. In other words, it can be said that frequent travels to Thai tourist destinations is a positive sign of sustainable Thai tourists' destination loyalty. In fact, tourists' destination loyalty is one of the most important tourism topics frequently investigated by tourism researchers. This is because the word "customer loyalty" is linked to the success of tourism destinations (Chen & Gursoy, 2001). Moreover, it is vital to understand tourists' destination loyalty in order to secure a sustainable success of tourism industry. The fact is any condition of success in tourism is changing rapidly, therefore, tourism business needs to react to the changes as soon as possible (Brosekhan, Velayutham, and Phil, 2006). With the coming of ASEAN Economic Community also means great opportunity for Thai tourism because of the huge demand for tourism in the near future. The opportunity, certainly, includes a large single market. In order for Thai tourism industry, especially Chiang-mai, to have competitive advantages, it is vital for the Thai tourism to focus on tourists' destination loyalty. Many tourism researcher and scholars often concurred that high customers' satisfaction was the major factor that led to customers' loyalty (Kotler, 2003). Certainly, a high rate of tourists' destination loyalty from satisfied tourists can provide many benefits such as a sustainable demand of both domestic and international tourists to revisit the same tourist destination, a positive image created by word of mouths from many satisfied tourists, and a steady tourists' revenue from revisiting of tourists (Wongleedee, 2013). In other words, a high tourists' satisfaction level can be the key to revisit a particular destination. Also, Chen (1998) did the research about the tourists' decision making process and reported that past trip experiences, whether it was good or bad, often directly and indirectly influenced the future decision of tourists either to revisit or not to revisit the same destination. In other words, this research focused on a survey of international tourists who visited Chiang-Mai, Thailand in order to investigate and to measure if there were any sign of destination loyalty.

## 2. Research Methodology

In order to answer the research questions, a quantitative research surveying method was developed to investigate international tourists' destination loyalty during their visiting in Chiang-Mai, Thailand during April to June, 2016 and to investigate their tendency to revisit Chiang-mai in the near future. Questionnaire was using as research tool. An English Likert-five-scale questionnaire was developed specifically to examine international tourists' destination loyalty from the perspectives as well as experience during their visiting Chiang-Mai, Thailand and to evaluate their level of interest in revisiting tourist destinations of Thailand in the near future. Three parts of the English questionnaire included demographic question part, destination loyalty question part, and tourists' comment part. The population included all international tourists visiting Chiang-Mai, Thailand during the second quarter of 2016. The non-probability sampling method was conducted to obtain a sample group that included 400 international passengers from the departure lounge of Chiang-Mai international airport. Taro Yamane Sampling Technique was utilized to obtain a proper sample group. Descriptive statistics utilized in this research including percentage, mean, standard deviation, and t-test. In addition, 25 pilot questionnaires were chosen for the reliability test in order to improve the quality of research paper. In other words, each question have to pass the Cronbach Alpha criteria with at least 0.70. Moreover, the proof of the validity of the questions in each part was tested by using IOC technique with five experts in the areas of tourism and hotel management.

## 3. Findings

As soon as the data collection was finished, the data analyzed was performed in order to find the answer to the research questions. The findings of this study revealed that in the part of demographic information male and female respondents were collected the proportion of 70:30 respectively, this was due to the high proportion of male international tourists and the easiness to approach from the perspective of researchers. The majority of the respondents were male and had the age between 35-45 years old. About 49.5 percent of the respondents were single, 32.5 percent were married, and the rest of them were either divorced or widowed. Up to 78.5 percent of the respondents had a college degree or high school certificate. Many of the respondents were identified as backpack tourists who aimed to traveling to Thailand for their long vocation. Their average spending in Chiang-Mai was about 50-100 US\$ a day. Three of their major items for spending were accommodation, food, and transportation. In terms of their traveling, 53.5 percent chose to travel in small groups of 2-3 persons. In terms of their motivation to travel in Thailand, the finding reveal the fact that the majority of respondents reported that a special vacation in an exotic place with a low cost was their major reason for choosing Chiang-Mai as their tourist destination in Thailand.

TABLE I

TOURIST DESTINATION LOYALTY INDICATORS

	Mean	S.D.	Rank
Indicators			
-To plan to revisit Chiang-Mai in the next year	4.40	0.890	1
-To recommend friends and family to visit Chiang-Mai	4.27	0.672	2
-To buy some souvenirs from Chiang-Mai	4.01	1.091	3
-To say positive things about Chiang-Mai tourism	3.98	0.887	4
-To search for more information about	3.31	0.597	5

Ching-Mai tourism		
Overall	3.994	0.827

From TABLE I, the information revealed the five different levels of importance from the perspectives and the experience of international tourists who had visited Chiang-Mai as follows: 1) the respondents rated the ability to plan to revisit Chiang-Mai in the next year as the number one indicator of loyalty with a mean of 4.40 and 0.890 SD. 2) the respondents rated the ability to recommend friends and family to visit Chiang-Mai as the number two indicator of loyalty with a mean of 4.27 and 0.672 SD. 3) the respondents rated the ability to buy some souvenirs from Chiang-Mai as the number three indicator of loyalty with a mean of 4.01 and 1.091 SD. 4) the respondents rated the ability to say positive things about Chiang-Mai as the number four indicator of loyalty with a mean of 3.98 and 0.887 SD. 5) the respondents rated the ability to search for more information about Ching-Mai tourism as the number five indicator of loyalty with a mean of 3.31 and 0.598 SD. The overall mean was 3.994 with 0.827 SD. From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the majority of international tourists in Chiang-Mai had only a medium to high level of loyalty since the overall mean was close to 4.00.

#### 4. Limitations and Future Studies

When look closely, it showed that one of the limitations in this study was to focus more on the attitude loyalty than behavior loyalty. Therefore, the future research should balance on these indicators. In order to obtain more specific results and meaningful results, the future research should also collect the samples of international tourists based on their country of residence to obtain representative opinions from a variety of international tourists in Chiang-Mai, Thailand. Then, the findings would be able to generalize to make a more specific and meaningful findings. Therefore, future research should use a proportion sampling technique, rather than non-probability sampling, with a diverse group of international tourists. Moreover, future studies should include qualitative method such as an in-depth interviews and focus group to find the reasons behind their decision making to revisit Chiang-Mai, Thailand.

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