



Factors Affecting Malaysia Tourists' Destination Loyalty Behavior:

A Case Study of Hatyai, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Retaining the loyal visitors to revisit is highly crucial for generating the revenue in tourism destination as well as reducing the marketing expenses, this empirical study has been designed to primarily explore factors that motivate Malaysia tourists to revisit Hatyai and to identify the key factors that affect Malaysia Tourists Destination loyalty behavior. The results of this study indicated that “destination attractiveness” “social interaction” and “Cost/Price/Value” were the most important destination attributes and travel motives for malaysia tourists revisit to Hatyai. Concerning Malaysia tourists destination loyalty behavior, the result reveals that “destination attractiveness” “social interaction” and “price/value/cost” predicts Malaysia tourists' destination loyalty behavior with $R^2 = 58.9\%$.

Keyword: Malaysia Tourists' Destination, Loyalty Behavior, destination attractiveness, social interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, the international tourism industry is played a more important role to develop the Thailand economy for long time ago until now. This industry has contributed income to GDP of Thailand more than decades. Thailand has rich natural resources such as sea sides, waterfalls, mountains, and caves, in order to observe natural phenomena, and they also visited manmade sites, such as Buddhist temples, castles, palaces, and old buildings to

appreciate their historic and aesthetic value that shows the uniqueness cultural resource made Thailand as a tourist destination international that visitors intent to visit. According to the World Tourism Organization, Thailand has been considered as one of the top three most popular tourist destinations in Asia. According to the statistics of tourists visiting Thailand, Malaysia retains its number 1 position for consecutive years. The popular destination of the Malaysian tourists is Muang Hat Yai. Hat Yai is a prosperous city located in the lower South. It is the center for trade, economy, higher education, cultures, tourism transportation, with easy access to downtown. Hatyai is located 60 kilometers from the Malaysian border (Bukit Kayu Hitam-Sadao Border). Hat Yai international airport is the major southern hub airport in Thailand. This is a chance for the city of Hat Yai to attract especially tourists from neighboring Malaysia who can travel back and forth and also stay overnight in the short weekend. Malaysia tourists, which is the biggest accounted more than 75%, followed by Singapore tourist and Indonesia tourist. There is research study found that more than 10 million of Malaysian tourists have had experience traveling to Thailand about 6,578,142 people, accounting for 60.7%. According to their travel planning in the next 2-3 years of Malaysian tourists, for the experienced group travels to Thailand, most of them still have plans to return to visit again 83.2% of the respondents and for the first visit group their intention to revisit accounted for 80.1% of the respondents.

Therefore, this study is needed to extend the research into explore the factors that motivate Malaysia tourists to revisit Hatyai, and to identify the key factors that affect Malaysia tourists' destination loyalty behavior.

2.Literature Review

Destination image is one of the most researched topics in tourism due to tourist destination images influence the decision-making behavior of potential tourists.

2.1 Defining Destination Image

The image of a destination varies with different individual perceptions and can be analyzed from different perspectives.

**Table 1 Selected
Definitions of Destination Image**

Author	Definition
Hunt (1971)	Impressions that a person or persons hold about a state in which they do not reside
Lawson and Bond-Bovy (1977)	An expression of knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations and emotional thoughts an individual has of a specific object or place
Crompton (1979)	the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination
Assael, (1984)	“the overall perception of the destination that is formed by processing information from various sources over time”
Embacher and Buttle (1989)	Ideas or conceptions held individually or collectively of the destination under investigation
Echtner and Ritchie (1991)	he perceptions of individual destination attributes and the holistic impression made by the destination
Gartner (1993)(1996)	Destination images are developed by three hierarchically interrelated components: cognitive, affective, and conative
Baloglu and McCleary (1999)	An individual's mental representation of knowledge, feelings, and global impressions about a destination
Murphy, Pritchard, and Smith (2000)	A sum of associations and pieces of information connected to a destination, which would include multiple components of the destination and personal perception
Bigné et al. (2001)	The subjective interpretation of reality made by the tourist
Kim and Richardson (2003)	A totality of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations, and feelings accumulated toward a place over time

In order to better understand the concept of destination image, Echtner and Ritchie (1993) gave four suggestions for conceptualizing and measuring destination image: 1) destination image has to be viewed as having attribute based and holistic components, 2) these components have functional (tangible) and psychological (abstract) characteristics, 3) images range from common and functional to unique, and 4) a combination of structured and unstructured methodologies should be used in order to identify the destination image.

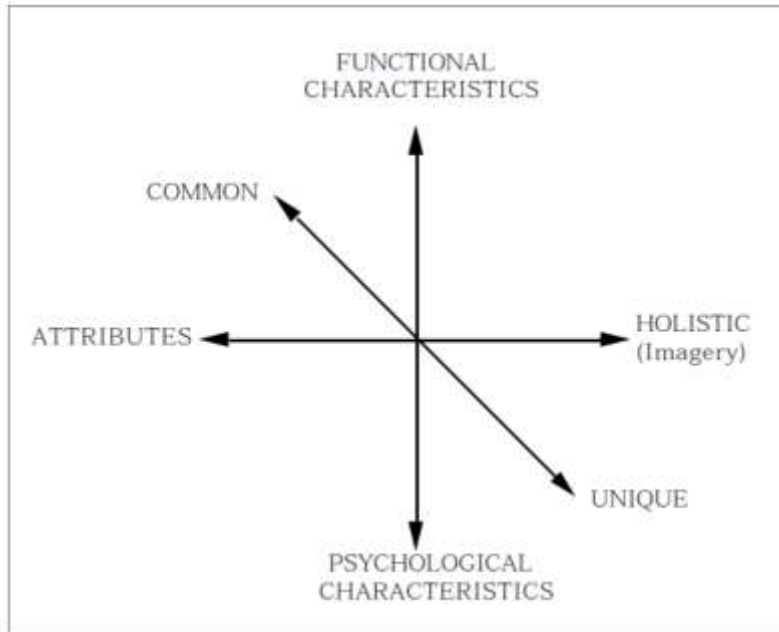


Figure 1. An illustrative example of four components of destination image
Source: Echtner and Ritchie (1991)

In line with Echtner and Ritchie (1991), the operationalization of destination image should incorporate apart from attributes also holistic impressions. Destination image is complex and multiple, it is not static, and changes depend on time and space, the previous studies from 1999 - 2016 gave operationalization and measurement of the tourist destination image. The variety of attractions and natural resources is the most mentioned as the destination image in previous researches (see table 2).

Table 2
Measurement scales and literature sources (2005 – 2020)

	Variety of attraction	Price value	safety & security	Local Infrastructure/Transportation	Hospitality/ friendly people	Food and restaurant	Accommodation	Souvenirs	Budget travellers	Natural Resources	Traditional & Festivals	Hospitality & Friendly people	cultural and historical attractions	Experience Value in Tourism	Entertainment	shopping facilities	Service quality	Access	Climate	Outdoor Activities	facilities	Restful/Relaxing	beautiful scenery	cleanliness and hygiene	Spa
Total	11	3	11	9	1	11	8	3	8	11	6	8	8	2	#	8	4	4	5	5	5	2	2	5	2
Kulwadee & Pornpimon (2010)	•		•	•	•																				
Jirayut (2014)	•		•	•		•	•	•	•																
Porawat Wanadilokrat (2010)										•	•	•													
Panita & Kasemsan (2010)	•			•			•	•	•																
Ausanee & Warat (2012)	•		•	•									•	•											
Jareerat (2012)	•					•	•			•					•	•									
Sarunporn (2013)	•								•																
Rukdee & Kailerk (2015)	•		•	•		•	•	•	•																
Kinga Thinley (2008)			•							•		•	•				•	•	•	•					
Xiaoli Zhang (2012)			•							•					•	•	•				•				
Darko Prebezac and Josip Mikulic (2008)				•		•	•		•	•	•	•			•	•				•					
Joaquin Alegria and Magdalena (2009)									•	•															
Mai Nhoc and Huynh Thi Thu Ha (2014)	•		•	•		•	•				•		•							•	•				
Hong-bumm kim and Sunggun Lee (2015)	•		•							•			•		•	•					•		•	•	
Bongkosh Ngamsom (2008)						•			•	•		•	•	•	•	•				•					
Maja Konecnik (2005)	•			•		•			•	•	•	•	•	•	•				•	•	•			•	•
Gengqing Chi (2005)		•				•	•			•	•	•				•				•		•			
Tran Thi Ai Cam (2011)		•	•	•		•	•			•	•	•			•	•	•	•		•	•			•	
Pobporn Yaowapa (2013)	•	•										•	•		•	•			•				•	•	
Aswin Sangpikul (2016)			•	•		•	•				•				•		•				•			•	
Pratt & Chan (2020)			•			•							•		•		•							•	

Table 3**Attributes Used by Researchers to Measure Destination Image**

	Number of Studies
FUNCTIONAL (physical, measurable)	
Variety of destination	11
Natural resources	11
Safety and security	10
Food and restaurant	11
Cultural and Historical attractions	9
Accommodation	8
Budget travelers	8
Shopping Facility	8
Hospitality & Friendly people	8
Outdoor activities	7
Traditional & Festivals	6
Cleanliness and Hygiene	5
Climate	5
Facilities	5
Access	4
Service Quality	4
Souvenir	3
Price value	3
Experience value in tourism	2
Spa	2
Beautiful Scenery	2
Restful and Relaxing	2
PSYCHOLOGICAL	
Total number of studies referenced is 22	

Research Methodology

A self-administered survey questionnaire was developed to identify factors influencing repeat visitation to Hatyai. The survey instrument was mainly aimed at identifying the underlying dimensions of visitors' revisit intention. A convenience sampling approach was employed to collect data in top destinations of Hatyai, 200 self-administered questionnaires distributed. A four-part self-administered survey focused on Malaysia's tourist travel behavior to Hatyai, destination attributes, tourists' perception on destination loyalty, and demographic variables of the respondents. The attribution items were assessed, using a 5-point Likert scale from 5=most to 1=least. In the second part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with image of Hatyai. Likewise, in the subsequent part, respondents' perceptions on destination loyalty were assessed. The last part posed questions

on respondents' background; the demographic profiles included age, gender, income, education, and occupation. Data were analyzed using computer software package in three steps. First, the findings were profiled by socio-demographic and travel characteristics. Second, a factor analysis using principal component method with varimax rotation was run to identify underlying dimensions of each set of 23 destination attributes, descriptive statistics were used to compute the mean scores for each of tourists' perceptions on destination loyalty items. Finally, multiple regression analysis to predict the key factors that affect Malaysia tourists' destination loyalty behavior.

Research Findings

Table 4
Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Variable	Description	Percentage
Gender	Male	45%
	Female	55%
Age	Less than 25 years	32%
	25-34 years	29%
	35-44 years	28%
	45-54 years	7%
	55-64 years	4%
	More than 65 years	0
Education	Lower than High School	16%
	High School	37%
	Bachelors' Degree	42%
	Higher than Bachelors' Degree	5%
Occupation	Student	35%
	Retirement	3%
	Private/Government sector employee	42%
	Merchant/Business Owner	13%
	Housewife	5%
	Others	2%
Averaged revenue	Less than 1,000 RM	28%
	1,001-2,000 RM	10%
	2,001-3,000 RM	32%
	3,001-4,000 RM	12%
	More than 4,001 RM	18%

Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents are female (55%) the highest frequency of age is less than 25 years (32%), the education is bachelors' degree (42%), the occupation is the private/government sector employee (42%), and the averaged revenue is 2,001-3,000 RM (32%)

Table 5
Malaysia Tourist Travel Characteristics

Variable	Description	Percentage
Number of Visits	2-3 times	50%
	4-5 times	21%
	More than 5 times	29%
Purpose of Visit	Rest and relaxation	73%
	Visiting relatives and friends	7%
	Business reasons	11%
	Sports and recreation	5%
	Health	2%
	Religious reasons	2%
Source of Information	Medias (television/magazines/newspapers)	10%
	Internets	29%
	Friends or relative	42%
	Agents or tour companies	6%
	Book or magazines about tourism	4%
	Tourism Authority of Thailand	9%
Transportation	Private car	46%
	Train	11%
	Bus/Coach	25%
	Van	10%
	A plane	5%
	Others	3%

Table 5 shows Malaysia tourist travel characteristics majority of the respondents which the number of visit are 2-3 times (50%), the purpose of visit for rest and relaxation (73%), source of Information from friends or relative (42%) and the transportation is private car (46%).

Factor Analysis of Destination Attributes

To identify the underlying dimensions of destination attributes of repeat visitors, a principal component factor analysis was carried out to group the destination attribute items with common characteristics. The Barlett's Test of Sphericity shows statistical significance with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of .924, Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was calculated to test the reliability and internal consistency of each factor and a cut-off point of 0.4 was used to include items in interpretation of a factor.

Table 6 Factor Analysis of Destination Attributes

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Factor loading</i>	<i>Communalities</i>	<i>Eigenvalue</i>	<i>Variance</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Destination Attractiveness</i>			9.815	49.074	3.98	0.874
Good shopping possibilities	0.807	0.69				
Rest and relaxation	0.803	0.675				
Entertainments	0.736	0.674				
Varieties of special event/Festivals	0.718	0.705				
Facilities for tourism information	0.703	0.697				
Food/Drink/Restaurants	0.693	0.6				
Information access	0.68	0.593				
The quality of accommodation	0.676	0.626				
Good souvenirs	0.662	0.589				
Scenery/Natural Attraction	0.621	0.567				
Variety of Spa/Massage/Medical/Health	0.582	0.482				
<i>Social Interaction</i>			2.233	11.164	3.37	1.24
For business reasons	0.899	0.865				
Visiting relative and friends	0.894	0.856				
Attending a conference, meeting, seminar and exhibitions	0.833	0.804				
Sports activities	0.813	0.76				
<i>Price, Value, Cost</i>			1.454	7.27	3.74	.907
Costs of travel and living	0.762	0.695				
Local transportation service	0.745	0.681				
Easy to get to/Close to home	0.741	0.635				
Safe city	0.732	0.681				
Interesting cultural and historical attractions	0.684	0.625				
<i>Total Variance</i>	67.51					

Table 6, reports that the factor analysis of 19 destination attributes resulted in three factor groupings, which accounted for 67.51% of variance. The factor groupings of destination attributes were “Destination Attractiveness”, “Social Interaction”, and “Price, Value, Cost”. “Destination image” was the most important destination attribute for repeat tourists which explained 49.07% of the variance (eigenvalue is 9.82).

Descriptive Statistic Analysis of Tourists' Perception on Destination Loyalty

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistical analysis regarding the most important dimensions of tourists' perception on destination loyalty which the statement of “I intend to revisit Hatyai in the future” obtained the highest mean value (4.11), followed by “Encourage friends and relative to visit Hatyai (4.07), If I had to decide again I would choose Hatyai as destination again” (4.05), I would like to visit Hatyai more often (4.04), and Hatyai is the priority choice in future travelling (3.99) respectively.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistical Analysis Malaysia Tourists' Perception on Destination Loyalty

Statements	Mean	SD
If I had to decide again I would choose Hatyai as destination again	4.05	0.817
Encourage friends and relative to visit Hatyai	4.07	0.834
I intend to revisit Hatyai in the future	4.11	0.893
I would like to visit Hatyai more often	4.04	0.879
Hatyai is the priority choice in future travelling	3.99	0.837

Multiple regression is performed in this study to predict the destination loyalty behavior. The result shows all three factors namely destination attractiveness, social interaction and price, value, cost had significant positive effects on destination loyalty behavior.

Table 8
Factors affecting Malaysia Tourists Destination loyalty behavior

DV Destination Loyalty Behavior			
IV	B	Beta	Sig
Destination			
Attractiveness	0.802	0.71	.000
Social Interaction	-0.152	-0.227	.000
Price, Value, Cost	0.223	0.215	.001
F statistics = 92.617			
R Square = .589			
Adjusted R Square = .582			

Conclusions

This paper has investigated and presented the influential factors of Malaysia tourist revisit Hatyai. The empirical results of this study highlight the key factors influencing repeat visitors to return to Hatyai. It provides the ground to understand what motivates repeat visitors regarding revisit intention. Destination attributes that reflect Hatyai as a tourist destination were examined.

In this sense, “destination attractiveness”, “social interaction” and price, value, cost. The main factors to revisit Hatyai. “destination attractiveness” was the most important factor for repeat visitors of Hatyai. In terms of destination loyalty, this study reveals that destination attractiveness, price, value, cost is positively significant to tourists destination loyalty behavior in other word Social interaction is negatively significant to tourists destination loyalty behavior. This result supports by the study of Hsiao-Ming Chang, Chin-Lung Chou and Wen-Chih, Yen (2017) which found attractiveness of the destination influences tourists' loyalty to destinations.

Implications

Because the attraction is the tourists choose the main influencing factors of tourism destination. This study found that destination attractiveness has a positive influence on tourists' loyalty to destinations. In addition, support for tourism research confirms the attraction predictors of destination loyalty.

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