

LOCAL TRAVEL BEHAVIOR DURING COVID – 19 : A PRELIMINARY STUDY

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected individuals worldwide and most industries around the globe have experienced difficult times. The tourism business is perceived as one of the most vulnerable industries as they face a declining number of tourists. The COVID-19 outbreak has impacted tourist behavior. This research aims to seek a greater understanding of domestic travel behavior post COVID-19. Potential domestic tourists' attitudes and travel motivation were investigated. A quantitative research with a questionnaire was adopted in this study. The local Phuketians were approached across Phuket city. 201 usable cases were used for a descriptive statistical analysis. A statistical descriptive analysis using MS excel was conducted. It was found that the key purposes of the holiday post COVID-19 were having a natural experience, relaxation, and adventure, respectively. The top three domestic destinations were Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Bangkok. The research findings provide practical implications for local governments to use in reviewing their policies to suit post COVID-19 tourism management.

Keywords: COVID-19, Travel behavior, Domestic tourists, Phuket

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected individuals worldwide and most industries around the globe have experienced difficult times. The tourism business is perceived as one of the most vulnerable industries as they face a declining number of tourists. The COVID-19 outbreak has impacted tourist behavior, for example, the shutting down of airports, the prohibiting of international travel, and the practicing of social distancing. However, the situation is now easing and many governments are encouraging their citizens to travel domestically in order to boost the economy and assist in the survival of the tourism business.

In Thailand, while there is concern, fear, and stress about the epidemic, there are also preparations to cope with the situation. Local Thais are adopting to the new normal way of life by creating new habits and implementing appropriate behavior. As part of this adaptation, tourists may end up changing their travel patterns. The literature review supports the idea that travel motivation should be investigated as tourist decision making and behavior will be changing constantly. In addition, travel motivation can change because of other uncontrollable variables such as crisis events. Although the key travel motivations include

relaxation and destination image, such motivations may change because of the health crisis. This research aims to seek a greater understanding of domestic travel behavior post COVID-19. Potential domestic tourists' attitudes and travel motivation were investigated.

2. Literature Review

The review of the literature involves tourist behavior in the context of the crisis situation. The literature illustrates several tourism scholars have examined behavior of tourists in this regard (e.g., Backer & Ritchie, 2017, Lu, Ching-Lung & Chen, 2018, Li, Wen & Ying, 2018). For instance, Chahal (2015) examined the role of perceived risk in the tourism destination attributes and destination image. This present study found perceived risk significantly moderates the relationship between tourism destination attributes and destination image. Furthermore, human induced risk, financial risk, service quality and facility risks have negative impact on destination image. Later, Backer & Ritchie (2017) Integrates both medical literature and tourism literature to consider whether Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) travel may be viable for destinations to consider after crises/disasters. VFR travel offers both benefits and risks and recommends that only domestic VFR travelers are targeted to aid destination recovery. However, tourism may have negative impacts in terms of interfering with the destination recovery efforts, and adding distress to local residents. In the same year, Chetthamrongchai (2017) provided a destination image theoretical model that identified the influence of travel motivation, tourist destination image, sources of information and crises in tourism for Thailand.

Changes in travel behaviour post crisis have been investigated by the tourism scholars. Wu & Walters (2016) examines the travel behavior of the Chinese tourism market following the 2011 Japan earthquake. They distributed a questionnaire of the 535 Chinese travelers who had existing plans to travel to Japan at the time of the earthquake. The characteristics of Chinese travelers who would still travel under such circumstances was explored. Relationships between travel decision and variable were measured. Those factors included past travel experience, trip purpose, image perception and demographic background. Lu, Ching-Lung & Chen (2018) focused on seven major Asian tourist destinations and investigated the changes in international tourism demand before and after economic crisis. The data period was January 2004 to December 2014. The results demonstrated the tourist numbers in each country was affected by the income variable. The decrease in tourist numbers was most significant during and after the economic crisis, indicating an increase in the sensitivity of tourists toward their economic-crisis-based income fluctuations, causing changes in their travel behavior. Furthermore, Li, Wen & Ying (2018) attempted to understand how experienced Chinese tourists respond to such destination crises by examining changes in their perceived destination image intention to revisit the country. Built upon 32 semi structured interviews, the study's findings suggest that North Korea's most recent series of nuclear tests led to divergent perceptions among different groups. Results showed that some Chinese tourists saw North Korea as an even more 'mysterious' country after the recent crisis, a response that had actually stimulated their intention to revisit the country.

The review of the literature indicates lack of studies have examined the travel behaviour post health crises. It is evident that travel behaviour post crisis has been studied in the context of economic, natural, and political circumstances. Little is known how local tourist behaviour after the health-related crisis. For instance, we know very little about how local plans a trip domestically if the COVID-19 situation eases.

3. Method

Quantitative research methods were used in this study. Quantitative researchers use one type of techniques to conduct their research: survey designs (Neuman, 2011). There are many reasons for using the survey method. Firstly, accuracy, reliability and validity are provided (Neuman, 2011). Finally, Babbie (2013) confirms that the survey method is suitable for a study in which several questions are asked on a given topic and, especially, when many variables are analyzed concurrently. Therefore, the survey questionnaire needs to be well constructed and easy for respondents to understand.

Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that the subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. The subjects are selected just because they are easiest to recruit for the study. Local Phuket residents were recruited. 250 copies of the questionnaire were distributed in Phuket town, several areas where they were a residential area for local people.

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was adopted. Questions were adapted from the existing research (e.g., Caber & Albayrak, 2016, Wong, Musa & Taha, 2017). The first section of the questionnaire was the main section and contained questions relating to travel motivation. The second part of the questionnaire asked about socio-demographic factors. The last section of the questionnaire was an open-ended question for respondents to provide further information. The questionnaire was pre-tested to ensure that the items were simple and understandable. 200 usable cases were used for a descriptive statistical analysis. A statistical descriptive analysis using MS excel was conducted.

4. Result and Discussion

The descriptive analyses indicated more than half of the respondents were female. Most of them were from 18 to 25 years old. More than 80% of them were single and were originally from Phuket. 50% of the respondents obtained their bachelor's degree and another 42% of them finished high school.

Table 1. Demographic Information

	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	- Male	81	16.2%
	- Female	116	46.4%
	- Not specified	3	1.8%
Age	- Below 18	30	6%
	- 18 – 25	125	50%
	- 26 – 30	18	10.8%
	- 31 – 45	19	15.2%
	- More than 45	8	7%
Status	- Single	173	34.6%
	- Married	22	8.8%
	- Other	5	3%
level of education	- Below a bachelor's degree	91	18.2%
	- Bachelor's degree	105	42%
	- higher than bachelor's degree	4	2.4%
Occupation	- Student	128	25.6%
	- Government officials	14	5.6%
	- Company employee	42	9.6%
	- Self-employed	17	4.8%

Table 2 displays travel pattern of the post COVID-19 potential local travelers. It was found that most of them preferred to enjoy a road trip. Regarding the preferred length of stay,

nearly half of them indicated less than three days per trip, whereas 34% would take a longer trip for up to six days. They preferred to stay in a hotel, home, and homestay, respectively. The key purposes of the holiday post COVID-19 were having a natural experience, relaxation, and adventure, respectively. The top three domestic destinations were Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Bangkok.

Table 2. Travel Pattern Post COVID-19

	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Type of transport	- Own vehicle	165	33%
	- Public transport	28	11.2%
	- Rental transport	7	4.2%
Length of stay	- 1 – 3 days	91	18.2%
	- 4 – 6 days	67	26.8%
	- 7 days and above	42	25.2%
Accommodation	- Home	55	11%
	- Hotel	60	24%
	- Resort	31	18.6%
	- Homestay	32	25.6%
	- B&B	3	3%
	- Hostel	19	28.8%
Travel purpose after crisis	- Adventure	55	11%
	- Nature	60	24%
	- Eco-friendly	34	20.4
	- Shopping	32	25.6%
	- Food	16	19.2%
The most preferred destination	- Relaxation	3	4.2
	- ChiangMai	53	10.6%
	- Phuket	16	3.2%
	- Bangkok	16	3.2%

Table 3 explains ideas of local Phuketian plan a trip post COVID-19. It was found that nearly all of the respondents plan to protect themselves and set up domestic travel plans designed to prevent themselves from getting COVID-19. For example, most of them avoided travelling to places with crowds.

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of Local Phuket Trip Planning Behaviour Post COVID-19

Item	Frequency	Percentage
I plan to protect yourself from COVID-19	189	2.75%
I plan to travel after COVID-19	181	4.74%
I plan to travel by your own after COVID-19	172	4.38%
The New Normal are important to tourism	166	3.77%
I want the government to take tourism measures to prevent COVID-19	1665	4.27%
I want to travel far from your hometown after the COVID-19	166	3.93%
I want to travel with others after COVID-19	151	4.27%
I have knowledge about New normal travel after COVID-19	146	4.27%
I want to travel at Phuket after COVID-19	135	4.01%
I like to go the place with many people	103	3.36%

Table 4 illustrates attitude toward local Phuketians post COVID-19. It was found that the health crisis prevention measures were believed to be continued. The research respondents agreed that wearing a face mask was essential. They insisted to avoid crowd.

Table 4. Descriptive Analysis of Travel Attitude Post COVID-19

Item	Mean score	Standard deviation
I believe we should wear a face mask on the flight	4.28	0.83
I believe wearing a mask at all time is essential for traveling	4.21	0.84
Tourism safety measures are important	4.16	0.91
I am happy to travel after COVID-19	3.92	0.97
I am ready to travel after COVID-19	3.87	0.93
I still concerned about the situation of COVID-19	3.83	0.85
I try to avoid flights with large numbers of people	3.83	0.95

Local Phuket travel motivation was explored in this research. Table 5 indicates the most important travel motivations post crisis. It was found that according to local Phuketians, related to adventure, nature, and family togetherness, respectively.

Table 5. Descriptive Analysis of Local Phuket Travel Motivation

Item	Mean score	Standard deviation
To find new experiences	4.11	0.82
To enjoy the beautiful nature	4.21	0.77
To reduce stress	4.15	0.79
To do something exciting	4.25	0.81
To get away from daily work	4.17	0.81
To enjoy the show and entertainment	4.08	0.82
To visit various places in one trip	3.98	0.90
To be with the family	4.19	0.85
To take advantage of travel agency promotions	3.98	0.93
To meet new friends	3.85	1.08

The key or important destination images post crisis were safety and hygiene, variety, and reasonable price offerings. It was highlighted that destination image regarding budget accommodation was rated low in relation to the travel image post crisis. The descriptive analysis of destination image post COVID-19 is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Descriptive Analysis of Destination Image Post COVID-19

Item	Mean score	Standard deviation
Security	4.25	0.81
Cleanliness	4.23	0.56
Hygiene	4.23	0.77
Various excursions / short tours	4.21	0.77
Affordable trips	4.17	0.79
Reliable weather	4.17	0.83
Access to tourist spots	4.12	0.77
Infrastructure conditions	4.11	0.92
Thai hospitality	4.10	0.80
Availability of restaurants	4.07	0.78
Easy accessible	4.06	0.81
Budget accommodation	4.05	0.88

5. Conclusions

This research aimed to seek a greater understanding of domestic travel behavior post COVID-19. Potential domestic tourists' attitudes and travel motivation were investigated. Quantitative research methods were used in this study. The descriptive analyses indicated

more than half of the respondents were female. Most of them were from 18 to 25 years old. Most of them were single and were originally from Phuket. Half of the respondents obtained their bachelor's degree and the rest of them finished high school. Regarding the preferred length of stay, nearly half of them indicated less than three days per trip, whereas one-third would take a longer trip for up to six days. The key purposes of the holiday post COVID-19 were having a natural experience, relaxation, and adventure, respectively. The top three domestic destinations were Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Bangkok. Regarding travel plans post COVID-19, nearly all of the respondents set up domestic travel plans designed to prevent themselves from getting COVID-19. For example, most of them avoided travelling to places with crowds. The most important travel motivations post crisis, according to local Phuketians, related to adventure, nature, and family togetherness, respectively. The key or important destination images post crisis were safety and hygiene, variety, and reasonable price offerings.

The research findings provide practical implications for local governments to use in reviewing their policies to suit post COVID-19 tourism management. The research suggested that a destination should continue encourage locals and tourists practicing the health and hygienic measures. In addition, a destination should provide excitement and new experience in order to satisfy customers' needs. Furthermore, security, cleanliness, and hygiene aspects should be ensured.

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