

Thai Beaches Tourism Image among Chinese Millennials in Thailand

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Abstracts

Chinese Millennials are Chinese mainland who were born in 80s and 90s represented over 31% of China's total population (which are more than 415 million Chinese) who make trip average at 2.3 trips per year. Chinese Millennials spend money on their travel in average US\$346 per day. The aim of this paper was to discover and investigate Thai beaches images among Chinese Millennials on mobile Chinese application (Ctrip, Qunar, Mafengwo and Qyer) and the result revealed that there are 4 top beaches destinations in Thailand Chinese Millennials frequently searched which are Phuket, Pattaya, Samui and Krabi. It indicated that Chinese Millennials perceived Thai beaches as having variety activities to engage both land-based and sea-based activities. Thai beaches are beautiful, nice, clean and good environment. Local Thai foods are interesting and all destinations are good for family trip and honeymoon trip. Destinations also offer attractive hotels which offer impressive services and facilities. From the study, there were four strategies for making a tourism development plan; awareness building strategy; Infrastructure Development and Improvement Strategy human resource development strategy and strategy to promote the beach as a tourism destination. Thai beaches are beautiful, pleasant, sanitary, and have an appealing climate. Local Thai cuisine is intriguing, and all destinations are suitable for family vacations and honeymoons. Destinations also feature appealing hotels with remarkable services and amenities. The study revealed four strategies for creating a tourism development plan: awareness building, infrastructure development and improvement, human resource development, and strategy to promote the beach as a tourism destination.

Keywords: Beach Tourism; Tourism Destination Image; Chinese Millennials; Tourism Development Plan

Introduction

Chinese Millennials are Chinese mainland who were born in 80s and 90s which will be now between 24-43 years old. Chinese Millennials are more than 31% of China's total population which represent over 415 million Chinese (Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, 2015 :6). According to the report, Chinese Millennials will be over 46% of China population in 2021. Chinese Millennials are characterized as open-minded and digital-savvy (Dudarenok, 2020 : 5). In the context of tourism, Chinese Millennials were found to be the heart of tourism sector as it represents that there are over 55% of Chinese Millennials who make trip average 2.3 trips per year. Chinese Millennials spend money on their travel in average US\$346 per day which is more than other group of Chinese (US\$320) (Amonhaemanon& Amornhaymanon, 2015 : 19). It reveals that Millennials are the biggest group who use online platforms to make holiday trips. In China, over 720 million smartphone users and application

in smartphone plays a vital role to Chinese. It found that there are over 40 applications installed in each person's smart phone (Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2017: 2). According to PATA report, they refer Chinese as 'Netizens' as they are mobile first and highly digital. There are over 95% of China's internet users use mobile to connect online. Chinese are now preferring independent travels rather than package tours especially Millennial group of Chinese who are highly individualized and strong-minded, has become the main e-consumers of those travelling plans (Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2017: 2). When they search the information, they expect to find the inspiration for their next holiday trip. This inspiration they expect to hear and see from the real travelers such as by their friends, relatives, key opinion leaders (KOLs) and online influencers (Calantone et al., 1989: 28). With this growing number, it is interesting to understand what's truly driving their travel plans.

Top Chinese Travel Apps: Ctrip, Qunar, Mafengwo, Qyer and Tuniu.

According to the survey in 2020, there are 5 top Chinese travel applications used by approximately 100 million Chinese users (for example, Mafengwo and Qyer) (Guo, 2017: 1) At the present, these 5 applications have become a user-generated content (UGC) platform where Chinese can share photos, travel notes, travel experiences, travel journey and Q&A online (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003:8-9). It targets Chinese independent travelers who need tourists' preferences, destination ranking lists and other recommendation to do things for their trip planning (Beerli & Martín, 2004: 659-660). In addition to this, there are over 3,000 journals, 5,000 Q&A, 10,000 comments and 100,000 footprints are generated daily in each application.



Figure 1 Chinese Travel Application

Source: (Guo, 2017: 1, Beerli & Martín, 2004: 671)

Ctrip (携程) – is a user-generated content (UGC) travel website and application and is the largest online travel platform. It presently provides all booking services such as hotels, airline tickets, transportation ticket, tour packages and many more of domestic travel services. Ctrip provides services not only for Chinese but also international tourists who would like to visit China as a destination. It also is a platform where key opinion leaders (KOLs) in China plays an influence role to people by creating a variety post as a real user.

Qunar (去哪儿) – is user-generated content (UGC) and is one of most well-known travel information platforms. Qunar is travel website and application where it provides many services such as hotels, flight tickets, package tours and other travel services. It has some of the lowest prices and discounts for travel services.

Mafengwo (马蜂窝) – is user-generated content (UGC) and is similar to TripAdvisor. Mafengwo is also one of the popular online platforms among Chinese travelers. It serves travelers in the areas of travel services and also all information relates to tourism such as shopping centers, entertainment centers, local areas and etc. Many real users have used Mafengwo to share experiences, photos and tips when they travel and share the real information from the destination they visited (Guo, 2017: 1).

Qyer (穷游) – is user-generated content (UGC) and is one of the biggest one-stop outbound online travel platforms. Qyer is similar to Mafengwo; real users have used Qyer to share travel notes, photos, and tips of their experiences. Qyer has won an award of ‘Top travel Influencer’ (Guo, 2017 :1).

Tuniu (途牛) – is user-generated content (UGC) and is an online travel platform where it provides over 140 countries worldwide information and popular tourist attraction in China country. It presently serves over 80,000 tourism products and services such as cruise service, accommodation service, visa service, tour company service and etc.

Destination Image

The word ‘Destination Image’ has identified by many researchers since the early 1970 (Gunn, 1972:173;Hunt, 1975:5). Previous studies have described the term destination image as a perception of people toward particular destination (Hunt, 1975 :6; Phelps, 1986 : 171;Calantone, et al. 1989:28). According to Crompton (1979: 411), he stated that destination image is the beliefs, ideas and impressions of a person toward a particular destination. In addition to the definition, Gartner (1989: 18) and Richardson & Crompton (1988 : 129-130) characterized it as a list of attributes that the destination offers to travelers. Recent studies have illustrated the definition into multidimensional concept; Chen Tsai (2007: 1120) described the term as “The destination image consists of destination brand, entertainment, nature and culture, sun and sand. It is mental representation of knowledge, feelings and overall perception of a particular location”. Kim (2014:34-35) mentioned that destination image is the combination of a destination’s attribute such as beautiful landscapes, infrastructures, activities, natural resources, atmosphere of locations, and etc. Moreover, it is consistent with the study of Nuchruedee Ruimai (2022: 37), who claimed that tourism strategies are important information that must be used in planning to expand the tourism market, namely the image of Thailand in the eyes of foreign tourists (Chen& Tsai, 2007: 1121). Developing a good communication plan will lead to sustainable tourism management in the future.

Beaches Tourism Image in Thailand Via Chinese Mobile Applications

Thailand as beaches destination tourism plays a significant part in Chinese Millennials as it discovered that Phuket, for example is found to be one of the most crowded tourists’ preferences and one of the most searching in online platform. Since Chinese Millennials became the tourists of the future; more than 60% of Millennials perceive travelling as one of essential parts of their lives (Confederation, W. T.,2015: 5-6). Chinese Millennials make average 2.3 trips per year and the main reason of making trip is to seek experiences, seek some fun and variety activities. Referring to the report, it also found that Phuket Island ranked as number one destination Chinese tourists visit (Tse & Hobson, P. J.,2008: 146-147) At the same

time, destination brand also plays a vital role over 94% in decision making for tourists (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999: 890). Therefore, the image of Beaches destination in Thailand significantly affects Chinese Millennials' decision making.

Table 1 Thai Beaches Destination Searched by Chinese Millennials

	Ctrip	Qunar	Mafengwo	Qyer	Tuniu
1	Phuket	Phuket	Phuket	Phuket	Phuket
2	Samui	Pattaya	Pattaya	Pattaya	Krabi
3	Pattaya	Samui	Samui	Ko-PhiPhi	Samui
4	Krabi	Krabi	Krabi	Krabi	Phuket
5	Ko-PhiPhi	Huahin	Huahin	Samui	Samed

Source: by author

According to table 1 above, there are 7 Thai beaches destinations searching by Chinese Millennials which are Phuket, Samui, Pattaya, Krabi, Ko-PhiPhi, Huahin and Samed. However, Phuket, Pattaya, Samui and Krabi are the most top 4 destinations searching by Millennials in each application. The study, therefore, investigating these 4 destinations in order to see how Chinese Millennials perceive Thai beaches.

Thai Beaches Tourism Image Among Chinese Millennials

According to the survey in this study, it discovered that content and information from Tuniu application is duplicated with the other 4 applications. Therefore, this study is investigating 4 applications which are Ctrip, Qunar, Mafengwo and Qyer. The total unit of analysis is 800 units of post: 50 posts per destination and per application.

Table 1 Phuket Destination Image Among Chinese Millennials

Phuket	Ctrip	Qunar	Mafengwo	Qyer	Total
Beach	2.5	4.5	4.5	5	16.5
Shopping	3	1	0	1	5
Activities	5.5	3.5	6	4	19
Thai Food	3	3	4	2	12
Diving	2	2.5	0.5	5	10
Family/Couples	1.5	3.5	7.5	3	15.5
Ways of Life	1.5	0.5	1	1.5	4.5
Accommodation	4.5	3.5	1	2.5	11.5
Night life	1.5	3	0.5	1	6
Total	25	25	25	25	100

Source: by author

According to the table 2 above, there are 5 top images in Phuket seen by Chinese Millennials. Firstly, they see Phuket as a destination providing variety of products and services as well as variety of activities (19%) for instance, scuba diving, rock climbing, riding the elephant, cooking class and shows. Secondly, they see Phuket as a beautiful beach (16.5%) such as Karon beach and Kata beach and Patong beach. This beautiful beach they see it for family trip and honeymoon trip which consists of activity as pre-wedding. Thirdly, Phuket is best for their kids (15.5%) as Phuket has zoos, water parks and other kids-related activities. Next, they love Thai foods both seafood and street foods (12%). Lastly, they see Phuket has many hotels offering swimming pools, fitness, spas, restaurants and many other services that can satisfied them (11.5%).

Table 3 Pattaya Destination Image Among Chinese Millennials

Pattaya	Ctrip	Qunar	Mafengwo	Qyer	Total
Beach	4.5	5.5	3.5	3.5	17
Shopping	1.5	1.5	1.5	3.5	8
Activities	6	4.5	9.5	6.5	26.5
Thai Food	4.5	3.5	4.5	5.5	18
Diving	1	0	0	0	1
Family/Couples	4	2	2	2.5	10.5
Ways of Life	1	3	1.5	1	6.5
Accommodation	2.5	2.5	0	1.5	6.5
Nightlife	0	2.5	2.5	1	6
Total	25	25	25	25	100

Source: by author

According to the table 3 above, there are 5 top images in Pattaya seen by Chinese Millennials. Firstly, they see Pattaya as a destination that consists of variety activities (26.5%) such as sky diving, nautical sport etc. Secondly, they enjoy Thai foods (18%). Thirdly, they like beautiful beach (17%) and they see it nice for family trip and couple trip. Next, Pattaya in Chinese Millennials is best for family and couples (10.5%). And last, they enjoy shopping centers in Pattaya such as floating market, walking street and duty free (8%).

Table 4Samui Destination Image Among Chinese Millennials

Samui	Ctrip	Qunar	Mafengwo	Qyer	Total
Beach	5	9	2.5	3	19.5
Shopping	0	0.5	0	0.5	1
Activities	4.5	1.5	7.5	8.5	22
Thai Food	2.5	7.5	2.5	2.5	15
Diving	0.5	1	0.5	1	3
Family/Couples	2	1	8	3.5	14.5
Ways of Life	0	1	0	0.5	1.5
Accommodation	10.5	2.5	3.5	5	21.5
Nightlife	0	1	0.5	0.5	2
Total	25	25	25	25	100

Source: by author

According to the table 4 above, there are 5 top images in Samui seen by Chinese Millennials. Firstly, Samui is the destination of variety activities (22%) such as scuba diving, full moon party, riding the elephant, kayak and etc. Secondly, Samui has interesting accommodation to offer (21.5%). Accommodations in Samui comprises of many services such as swimming pool, spas, restaurants, fitness and other services. Thirdly, Samui has very beautiful beaches (19.5). Fourth, they like Thai foods (15%) and last, they see Samui is best for family trip and honeymoon trip (14.5%).

Table 5 Krabi Destination Image Among Chinese Millennials

Krabi	Ctrip	Qunar	Mafengwo	Qyer	Total
Beach	7.5	7.5	8.5	8.5	32
Shopping	0	0.5	0.5	0	1
Activities	4	4.5	8	5.5	22
Thai Food	2.5	5	3.5	2.5	13.5
Diving	2	0	1	2	5
Family/Couples	4	2.5	3.5	3	13
Ways of Life	0.5	2	0	1.5	4
Accommodation	4	2.5	0	2	8.5
Nightlife	0.5	0.5	0	0	1
Total	25	25	25	25	100

Source: by author

According to the table 5 above, there are 5 top images in Krabi seen by Chinese Millennials. Krabi has very beautiful beaches (32%) such as Phi Phi Island, Lanta Island, Maya Bay and etc. Krabi is the destination consists of variety activities (22%) such as scuba diving, rock climbing, kayak and etc. Next, Krabi has the best Thai foods both seafood and street food (13.5%). They see Krabi is best for family trip and honeymoon trip (13%) and nice for pre-wedding. Krabi also comprises of many kid activities. Lastly, hotels in Krabi are very nice providing many services (8.5%).

Table 6 Top Thai Beaches Destination Image Among Chinese Millennials

	Phuket	Pattaya	Samui	Krabi
Top 1	Activities	Activities	Activities	Beach
Top 2	Beach	Thai Food	Accommodation	Activities
Top 3	Family/Couples	Beach	Beach	Thai Food
Top 4	Thai Food	Family/Couples	Thai Food	Family/Couples
Top 5	Accommodation	Shopping	Family/Couples	Accommodation

Source: by author

For information above, it can be concluded that the images of Thai beaches: Phuket, Pattaya, Samui and Krabi among Chinese millennials are positive. Thai beaches consist of variety activities both land-based and sea-based activities which can be enjoyed by Chinese Millennials. Thai beaches are beautiful as they perceived it as nice, clean, and good environment. Thai foods also play an important part among Chinese Millennials travelers as they enjoy local (Amonhaemanon& Amornhaymanon, 2015 : 21-22) Thai foods and enjoy trying new things. In addition, they perceived Thai beaches as a destination for family trip and honeymoon trip. Thai beaches destination also offers an amazing accommodation where they can enjoy using facilities inside the hotels.

Thailand Tourism Policy and Thai Beaches Tourism Image Among Chinese Millennials

According to this study, investigating Thai beaches image among Chinese Millennials, the study results conform with The Third National Tourism Development Plan (2023-2027) in the area of Thailand's tourism's 5-year strategic axes including four strategies as follows:

Strategy 1 Development of tourism attractions, products and services including the encouragement of sustainability, environmentally friendly, and Thainess integrity of attractions:

This strategy, therefore, conform with how Chinese Millennials perceived Thai beaches. Referring to Table 6, Chinese Millennials enjoy activities (Hunt,: 1975: 6) Thailand offers in four destinations. It is consistent with the study of (Hartanto et al., 2022: 591), who point out that every tourist attraction uses marketing channels as social media to promote itself. Thus, tourists can learn about many tourist attractions in Rejang Lebong Regency. The high number of tourist visits to tourist attractions in Rejang Lebong can increase regional income.

Strategy 2 Development and improvement of supporting infrastructure and amenities without inflicting negative impact to the local communities and environment. This Strategy

consistent with the study of Mukmin (2022 : 420), in a study in Beach Area Development Strategy as the Prime Tourism Area in Indonesia, suggested that the dwelling environment for inhabitants, waste management, and compliance with tourist amenities including trash cans, ATMs, restrooms, small stores, prayer rooms, and others all require upgrading. To be more structured, facilities, infrastructure, and supporting infrastructure need attention.

The strategy, therefore, conform with Chinese's population. According to total Chinese population which represent over 415 million people. It is a great opportunity for Thailand country as Thailand is one of popular destinations among Chinese travelers. Thus, strategy2 can facilitate Chinese in traveling to Thailand. As the present, Chinese Millennials prefer free and independent trip (Free and Independent Travelers: FITs), developing and improving signpost, direction, map and related facilities such as free-Wifi, application is significant (World Tourism Organization, 2017: 124). Additionally, safety and security are also important for FITs; developing, improving and providing supported technology such as CCTV, electricity around destination area, basic first-aid equipment, machine translator and Tourists assistant center are also significant to facilitate Chinese Millennials travelers (Luo et al., 2018 : 659-660).

Strategy 3 Development of tourism human capital's potential and the development of tourism consciousness among Thai citizens. However, strategy 3 found to be irrelevant among Chinese Millennials as the topic of human resources are not discussed within Chinese Millennials (World Tourism Cities Federation & Ipsos, 2018 : 87-90). In addition, it is consistent with the study of Kusluvan et al. (2021: 180-190) who claimed that one of the most valuable resources in tourism and hospitality firms is frequently regarded as their human resources.

Strategy 4 Creation of balance between tourist target groups through targeted marketing that embraces Thainess and creation of confidence among tourists.

Since Chinese Millennials is a huge market cover more than 31% of China's total population and is a high spender in tourism, developing strategy 4 will significantly satisfy Chinese Millennials (World Tourism Organization, 2019 : 54). The strategy can help promote Thai beaches as Preferred Destination which is conform with the image of Thai beaches at the present (see table 6). For instance, the strategy could help promote Thai beaches as family trip or honeymoon trip as well as enhance the image of accommodation and Thai foods by promoting as gastronomy tourism (Tse & Hobson, 2008 :140).

Summary

In summary, according to The Third National Tourism Development Plan (2023-2027), all four strategies are related with the investigation result; strategy1 is conformed with the present image perceived by Chinese Millennials. Strategy 2 can be a part in supporting and facilitating Chinese Millennials when travelling to Thailand. Strategy3 is to develop human resources to enhance services in the destination. And strategy 4 is conformed with specific demand, as Chinese Millennials are huge specific segment and high spending. Developing strategy 4 can help promoting Thai beaches as Preferred Destination.

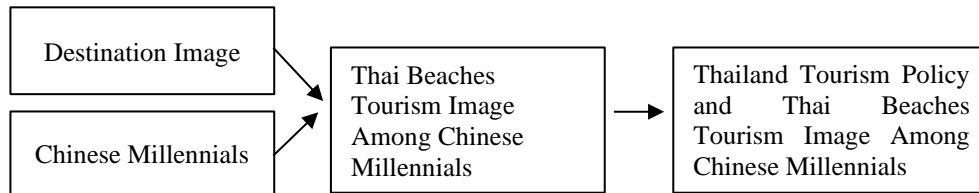


Figure 1: Thai Beaches Tourism Image Among Chinese Millennials
Photo: Author

According to the literature review, Chinese Millennials have a high image of beach tourism. From the information presented Thailand Tourism Policy and Thai Beaches Tourism Image Among Chinese Millennials 4 strategy. strategy 1 is conformed with the present image perceived by Chinese Millennials. Strategy 2 can be a part in supporting and facilitating Chinese Millennials when travelling to Thailand. Strategy 3 is to develop human resources to enhance services in the destination. And strategy 4 is conformed with specific demand, as Chinese Millennials are huge specific segment and high spending. Developing strategy 4 can help promoting Thai beaches as preferred destination.

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