



# Tourism Marketing For Elderly Inbound Tourists Traveling in Thailand

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## **Abstract**

For inbound senior tourism in Thailand, there were many different kinds of tourists categorized by various objectives such as traveling for leisure, doing volunteer activities, or the medical treatment of disease. However; the proportion of senior tourists in Thailand was still considered as quite very few number compared with the other type of tourists. Due to poor organization and tourism marketing in Thailand, most tourism stakeholders did not treat this segment as more specific and very important, especially in the private sector that might not understand the market and took interesting in inbound senior groups seriously because of the difficulty in the operation.

As results, the researcher found that the image of Thailand, safety in travel and comfort of the accommodation was the most important to inbound senior tourists because the recent years ago, Thailand's political problems and protests made visitors feel uncomfortable in visiting in Thailand, and government policy did not plan to create the tourism image of the value chain. By the inquiry in the tourism market for the old, tourism agents ought to focus more in the diversity of the tour programs as well as modern transport systems that encouraged them to travel conveniently in Thailand and then attended some interesting activities. If demanding to make a market for tourists in this group, the booking of senior tourism products via websites must be established and provide Thai tourism information of the elderly foreign tourists easily.

**Keywords :** senior tourism, marketing management, inbound tourists

## **Introduction**

Tourism is one of the important activities that nowadays many countries give attention to particularly in times of economic downturn as it releases tension from working and also contributes

to learning as well as increases visibility to visitors. Another importance of traveling is the distribution of income to local people and eventually to national development. Many countries rely on tourism as a major concern, especially Thailand,

which targeted 505,000 million baht income from around 14 million foreign tourists in 2552.

In order to accomplish such a target, public and private agencies involved in tourism need to understand and study the behavior and motivation of foreign tourists coming to visit Thailand. What can be improved to satisfy the increasing number of tourists and their main objectives to travel here? The study of marketing strategy and behavior of travelers in Thailand especially for the elderly in retirement is an important new major type of tourist today. It is the present trend of the world's population. Since the 21st century began, the population of the Baby Boom generation represents nearly 40 percent of the total world population. Academics believe that this population is an important source of revenue for travel around the world including Thailand. The statistical survey of elderly tourists who travelled to Thailand during the years 2539 - 2543 found an average annual percentage increase of 6 percent and the number continues to increase (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2552), consistent with the research. Cleaver, Muller, Ruys and Wei in 1999, found a greater proportion of the population of older U.S. residents and many other developed countries had opportunities to travel. The ratio was higher when compared with other age groups in the population. In Canada, Austria and New Zealand, the elderly population has reached 2.9 million and 7 million five hundred thousand, respectively, in 1997. (Cleaver, TE Muller, Ruys, & Wei, 1999) Moreover, the World Tourism Organization in a report by Deborah Luhrman, estimated the elderly population is expected to increase by about 10 percent of the world's population, which had 6 billion people in October 1999 and is expected to reach 20 percent in the year 2050 AD.

For the reason that Thailand has a strong

policy to promote tourism, we expect that the tourist potential of the elderly is estimated to be particularly important in the tourism market of Thailand in the future; researchers are interested in the study of tourism marketing for the elderly traveling to Thailand. To ascertain the needs and behavior of these groups coming here, tourism marketers are able to create a highlight that will enable Thailand to attract tourists in foreign countries for doing activities longer.

### **Aims**

1. To study the behavior of the elderly foreign tourists to Thailand
2. To study tourism marketing strategies applied to elderly foreign tourists to Thailand
3. To collect problem causes in order to adjust tourism marketing strategies applied to elderly foreign tourists to Thailand

### **The Significance of the Research Project**

The research will be useful for many reasons:

1. to improve the marketing strategy for a tourist group of elderly foreigners who travel to Thailand, to investigate travel behavior and expectations of tourists and also support the growth of this tourist group in the future, 2. to improve the management of various agencies involved in both private and public sectors to understand the nature of elderly foreign tourists who travel to Thailand, and 3. to enhance the competitiveness of the tourism market in Thailand for greater successful to compete effectively with other countries in Southeast Asia.

### **Research Methodology**

- 1) The form and method of conducting research consisted of questionnaire surveys, which were analyzed by statistics such as the

t-Test, One-way Analysis of Variance and Chi-square test. In-depth interviews were conducted by dividing the respondents, a group of elderly tourists in Thailand, totaling 90 subjects by accidental sampling. 2) The in-depth interviews were semistructured, and the process involved creating tourism marketing strategies for private operators conducting elderly tourism activities, at least 15 people, and officials of the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. Tour operators and related staff in hotels organized all information obtained through the analysis and processing in the form of tables and descriptive summaries of research findings. 3) Research results were reported and recommendations written for the public to acknowledge.

### Literature Review

Niche Tourism is a recent concept which all tourism stakeholders organize tours for travelers who usually buy similar tourism products at lower costs, created to match particular traveling styles. They are eager to look for new and different patterns of travel that suit their desires. The term Niche Marketing can be explained through two approaches:

1. Niche marketing for the specific tourism products targets only one type of customer since it is very clearly unique.
2. The only place on the market is suitable for this product only

Hannan and Freeman (1977) provided a definition of "NICHE" that is rooted in the concept of competition, which means the difference between predicted customers in each market segmentation and its real group of customers. Niche marketing can be described as the classification of the needs of similar consumers from all submarkets. Applied with tourism, it can be

classified by tourists' motivation such as a specific destination or unique outstanding activities. Arranging into specific groups of tables, Mike Robinson and Marina Novelli (2005) have identified five specific elements of tourism:

1. Cultural Tourism- heritage tourism, religious tourism, tourism education and research, tourism in national races and minority
2. Environmental Tourism- nature tourism, coastal tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism
3. Rural Tourism- farm tourism, tour camping, wine and food sports tourism, arts and crafts tourism as well as festival tourism.
4. Urban Tourism - tourism for business negotiations, seminar and meeting, sport tourism, tourism for exhibition and arts and
5. Other Tourism- photographic tourism, volunteer tourism, dark tourism as well as transportation tourism (Robinson & Novelli, 2005).

### Trend of Elderly Tourists

The report of An Aging World 2008: International Population Reports, made in the United States, identified the demographic changes around the world by organizing the relevant data into significant issues as follows:

1. In the next ten years, the number of elderly people will increase more than population at children's age for the first time in history due to the lower birth rate, while the death rate will decrease as a result of the advancement of medical technology and social pressures.
2. The elderly population during the period of July 2007 to 2008 was estimated to amount to more than 10.4 million people or 870,000 people per month.
3. The proportion of people in the area of Caribbean increased 7.8 percent, followed by 6.4 percent in Latin America, in Asia (excluding Japan), 6.3 percent and 3.3 percent of the population in Africa.
4. The population in China of elderly citizens is expected to be extremely high, up to

108 million people in 2008. 5. The elderly population in Japan, accounting for 22 percent of the total country population, is supposed to be the largest record of elderly proportion in the world. 6. The rate of population aged from 80 years old increased 4.3 percent during 2007 to 2008 while the rate of population aged 65 years old was only 2.1 percent during the same years. 7. The number of citizens in at least 11 countries will be reduced to 1 million people in 2050 due to lower birth rates, which have apparently appeared in Japan, Russia and the Ukraine (Kinsella & He, 2009).

This information is key indicator for the rate of increase in the elderly and linkage with tourism, which is a desirable activity for them. Moreover; the needs of these people can be related to other industries such as agriculture, finance, news, and the maintenance service industry including support equipment to facilitate the elderly.

**Concept and Theory in Marketing Management**

Boonlert Jitwattana (2005) illustrated sustainable marketing concepts for tourism as follows:



According to Professor Philip Kotler, who wrote Principles of Marketing, the importance of positioning in the market sentiment of the tourists is essential. A strong and unique attraction over its competitors can be positioned using seven important rules as follows:

1. The positioning of tourism products by their own features – for example, if a tourist attraction has varied kinds of fish, community leaders may have a policy for determining the market position to the attractions as the learning center for natural fish. This market position is determined by the properties of a tourist destination.
2. The positioning of tourism products based on quality - for example, the community leaders may have marketing plans to advertise that this attraction is the longest beach in Thailand or the purest white beach, one of the world’s destinations.
3. The position of tourism product by user - for example, this waterfall is the most popular for married couples and new honeymooners due to its beauty and romantic scenery.
4. The position of tourism product by usage - for example, this community market is famous for an impressive diversity of products and services that are purely unique.
5. The position of tourism product by significant hierarchy - for example, this is one of the most important cultural heritages in the world.
6. The tourism product’s market position against competitors – For example, the Bann Mai Floating Market, with the same point of marketing position as the Amphawa Floating Market.
7. The market position of tourism product by its symbol- for example, this community market still maintains the central Thai identity entirely due to the architecture of their own buildings, which is visually stunning (Kotler, 2000).

Marketers can select the target visitors by classifying the main demographic, geographic,

psychological or behavioral segments, then gradually choosing the visitors to suit the marketing objectives that focus on sustainable needs for long-term benefits. Marketers do not only operate a short-term business but also leave waste into the environment and society as well as focus on the social materialism.

For selecting the best-featured tourists, Boonlert Jitwattana has proposed these interesting six hints:

1. Community tourism must be managed to meet tourists' satisfaction.
2. The community must create a profitable business for tourism.
3. The community must develop a better quality of life for all local residents.
4. The community must establish a good environment to in the tourism destination.
5. Community resources required to accomplish tourism activities must be consumed economically.
6. Community participation must occur for everyone to feel satisfied.

Palmer and Cole (1995) have suggested that the manufacturing products will distinguish the process between production and marketing significantly. However, in services, marketing will continue to process at once inextricably. Production and consumption may occur at the same time. For example, a waiter not only serves food to customers, but must impress clients at the same time. It is considered in the name of the restaurant that the waiter acts as a temporary marketer. At the end of the service, customers will be impressed and remember to tell the taste of food and service received (Palmer & Cole, 1995).

In service marketing, since the product is intangible, it cannot be tested in advance. Therefore, tourists rely on the experience of others, or word of mouth to decide whether they should try to get that service or not, Jay Kandampully explained the causes of achievement should be

made available in the market range period that the customer has received service experience. As a result, the cost of marketing should be lower and generate good profit in return. Unlike tangible products, marketing motivation should be done in the buying decision period.

## Research Conclusion

Tourism marketing for the elderly foreigners who travel to Thailand was seen as a niche market and that Thailand still has a small market share compared with the number of the other types of travelers coming to Thailand. Despite the prediction that the proportion of elderly would amount up to 1/3 of the world in the future, the Thai government, focused on tourism as a strategic core, and had no policy or strategy to support this group of tourists. Especially for the elderly that are interested in medical tourism, most of promotion activities were managed by a few groups of leading hospitals in Thailand. Furthermore, for the elderly tourists who traveled here for leisure, management of most of the private sector still lacked understanding in their nature and made errors constantly, as no guidelines have been established for sustainable management strategies, including marketing efforts from doing research. Therefore; this research summary is an overview of the characteristics of tourists and their behavior as well as collection issues in need of amendment as follows:

Most questionnaire responders were married males between 55 and 60 years as well as vocational educational level. Almost all were healthy and had travel budget from their own savings or pension. Nationalities sampled during the survey taking were American and British. Patterns of tourist behavior were classified by traveling purpose and separated into four groups:

1) tourists' traveling for wellness (Direct-Fly for Health) 2) tourists traveling to escape the winter (Snow Bird) 3) tourists traveling to events of charity (Social Volunteer) and 4. ) tourists traveling to relax and enjoy leisure activity (Leisure & Slow). Most tourists came here and were familiar with Thai culture by obtaining information from multiple sources such as newspapers, advertising from television, close personal Thai friends or tour magazines as well as Thailand Travel guide books or tourist information on the Internet. These tourists found most information from this channel. Traveling in Thailand, the elderly tourists mostly stayed in the three to four star hotels, not in extravagant luxury accommodations and duration of stay was for about two weeks to one month and often traveled for the first or second time mostly. In terms of participation in tourism activities, mostly the older inbound travelers ran tour program by themselves or sometimes depended on travel agents. From surveys it was found that the male tourists usually travelled by themselves unlike women who traveled through a travel agent and the guides took care of all travel programs. Although tourists were divided by a variety of purposes, they were often focused on service standards and a variety of tourism activities. Mainly their needs focused on physical and mental relaxation such as learning Thai cultural arts such as lotus folding or Thai cooking, language teaching for cultural exchange, offering food to monks, etc. The cost of travel was approximately 50,000 to 70,000 baht per person, which tourists in married and high graduate level groups tended to spend more on tourism activities. Moreover; the moderate significant factors related to the budget costs of elderly tourists were the image of Thailand as well as medical services. In addition, travel discounts, facilitators in tourist

attractions, and location of the office of tourism agents were related to duration of tourists stay in Thailand at the medium level. Mostly male visitors had the period of stay here in Thailand shorter or longer than most female tourists who stayed for about one week to one month. Most elderly inbound visitors often did not travel alone, but with their spouse. They usually searched for information on the internet or close friends, and set up activities that did not involve travel agents. The costs of travel mostly were higher than of those who were single: the higher the level of education, the longer the period of travel.

### **Tourism Marketing Mix Strategies**

Elderly foreign tourists extremely emphasized on the highest level of security and image in Thailand, which are affected by the political situation as well as the comfort of their accommodation. All this, including operation management to international standards relate as follows:

- Passenger cars need to install seat belts to all seats.
- Bus drivers must not use the mobile phone while driving.
- In the tropical zone, all vehicles must be equipped with air conditioning or in cold countries; service vehicles must be equipped with heating units.
- Bus drivers must drive according to the speed limit and control the driving time up to the conditions of the tour agreement.
- Hotel floors must have wheelchair ramps and hand rails around the stairs and bathrooms for the elderly. Similarly, the lighting in the hallways and rooms ought to be adequate.
- Hotels must have a nursing room inside and provide nursing care of a doctor regularly. The location of the accommodation should be nearby hospitals and police stations for safety.
- Hotel management standards should protect

the environment and provide social services to the surrounding community as well. - Tour companies must provide a translator or interpreter and guides to take care of tourists throughout the period of stay in the country, etc.

When conducting a variety of tour programs, modern transport systems and environmental management standards in both natural and social needs, for all requirements must be accomplished as an agreement with a representative of international travel. The only factor of moderate significance for the elderly tourists was availability of luxury shopping centers.

Most visitors focused on the high important level of prices. All tour expenses must not be very expensive compared to competitors in the same class. Thailand had already been noted as a worthy tourist destination.

Elderly foreign visitors usually made tourism product bookings via the Internet or through a representative by phone. In some cases, they purchased a health tourism package via the hospital association or its agents that they had membership with and used services on a regular basis. Furthermore, the location of the tour office and its reputation were of moderate significance. Even if travel agents were reliable and trustworthy, it would help to promote more female visitors. Lastly, visitors were interested in any web site that could provide information and sell tourism products they desired. Most visitors normally found information on the web site and television. Mass public media to promote a well-known tourist destination in foreign magazines would make more visitors interested in Thailand. Offering souvenir gifts from the tourism promotion agency of the government may make tourists feel impressed especially for females who stressed the importance of tourism exhibitions held in

their country to promote Thailand.

The importance of human resource management in tourism has already been achieved at a high level in terms of quality of service and hospitality provision. For these criteria, tourism service providers in Thailand are second to none in the world, but might be diminished in the field of language communication. However, it could also be attractive to elderly foreign tourists. Thai service providers could provide good services without having to communicate much to make them impressed.

### **Research Suggestion**

1. To attract elderly foreign tourists, Thai tourism stakeholders need to maintain a friendly and peaceful image of Thailand without political violence, by focusing on creative social activities and advertizing them all over the world. Tourists should feel safe to come to Thailand and significantly have no news of the protests, closing of the airport or military tanks in the streets since it destroys the atmosphere of tourism.
2. Three to four star hotels for elderly foreign tourists should be fully equipped with facilitators to maintain comfort levels, and keep high standards of safety and health. When an emergency happens, they will receive attention and care immediately.
3. Development of elegant shopping malls is not necessary for this market group. Perhaps some convenience stores for relaxing would be enough. Therefore, hotel accommodations do not need to be located close to mall areas.
4. Information on tourism or involving facilities like hotels, airlines, and buses, etc. should be organized through computer websites so that visitors interested in organizing traveling activities themselves or choosing tourism activities through a travel agent are able to book and find information easily.

In travel exhibitions, marketer should focus on the elderly female tourists who prefer a high degree of comfort.

5. Marketers should offer souvenir gifts to niche tourists to create a strong impression. In addition they should provide subsidies allocated to tour companies that bring elderly inbound tourists to expand the tourism market in this part.

6. There should be a longer extension of the visa for elderly foreign tourists to increase their duration of stay in Thailand, and lower costs for travelers.

7. Tourism activities in the main tourist cities such as Chiang Mai and Phuket including the non-tourist destinations like Lampang as well as Nan should be expanded to create a variety of tour programs to impress the elderly coming to Thailand. They must feel something to do especially in terms of charity such as teaching children in a hill tribe, activities of reforestation, and cultural arts like traditional basket making.

8. Since the trend of environmental saving influences the number of tourists traveling into the country, Thailand tourism board should arrange

tourism activities related to natural and social environmental periodically. 9. For medical tourism, public and private sectors should cooperate in promoting tourism in this field in a systematic way by not leaving the private sector play a major role solely. On the other hand, the government should take part in driving the promotion of tourism through various advertising media. In addition, the hospital must have a standard of patient treatment and join with travel agencies in the tourism process to facilitate patients or relatives in the recovery phase.

10. Foreign language training should be arranged for employees working in tourism and the hotels to create a competitive advantage over competitors. 11. Special promotions should be organized such as medical tourism programs at soft prices for the foreign elderly tourists who are married and have higher educational levels in order to increase the number of days to travel in Thailand and the cost of traveling in Thailand further.

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