

Exploring the Relationship between Eco-tourism Activities, Destination Satisfaction and Loyalty Intention towards Nakhon Nayok

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between the tourists' motivation towards selecting ecotourism destinations as their travel choice, their level of satisfaction when they participate in ecotourism activities, their overall satisfaction towards the destination and loyalty intention while they are on an eco tour in the Nakhon Nayok Province of Thailand. Onsite survey was conducted by adopting convenience sampling method directly with the tourists visiting Nakhon Nayok Province. The sample size of the study is 243. It is vital to understand the tourist's motivation, experience, behavior and loyalty intention as they undertake various activities at the ecotourism destinations. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were computed to describe the demographic profile, to identify the prime factors of motivation and satisfaction, to measure the relationship between motivation and satisfaction, and to analyze the impact of satisfaction on loyalty intention. The results show that Nature appreciation, recreation and relaxation, and environmental protection were the prime attributes of motivation. It further presents the importance of these attributes in their experience towards the activities they engage in the ecotourism destination. Of all the available ecotourism activities in the destination, Visiting waterfalls, white water rafting and visiting reservoirs or dam were identified as the prime factors with very high mean of satisfaction level. The factor analysis, correlation and regression analysis results provide sufficient evidence to accept the relationship that arises between ecotourism activities, destination satisfaction and loyalty intention.

Keywords: Tourists' Motivation, Eco-Tourism Activities, Destination Satisfaction, Loyalty Intention

1. Introduction

Tourism is considered the most vital to the Thailand's economy. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (1) the direct, indirect and induced contribution of travel and tourism to Thailand's GDP was US\$66 billion (17% of Country's GDP which is comparatively more than double the size of financial services GDP impact at 8.0% and three times the size of the mining sector's GDP contributing at 4.9%) and accounted for 5.3 million jobs in 2013 which is 13.3% of country's employment share. Over the next ten years, this industry is expected to grow by an average of 8.6% annually, taking it to be the fastest growing GDP of Thailand comparatively almost doubles the size of expected expansion of total economy of 4.1%.

At present, National parks have become primary destinations for nature based tourism activities with promotional efforts in Thailand. The Key term "Ecotourism" was first defined by The International Ecotourism Society as, "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improve the well-being of local people" (2). In Thailand, as part of encouraging tourism, ecotourism has been promoted and introduced for tourism development in protected areas, including national park (3).

When people are motivated to travel, they choose the destination based on the attractions of the destination and activities to be pursued. Also when a tourist decides to visit a destination, he considers not only the major attraction, but also looks in to the overall infrastructure and facilities of the destination. This in turn is, related to trip satisfaction and subsequent recommendation of the trip to others. It is expected that people with similar motivations will, to a certain degree, choose the same destinations and pursue similar types of activities while staying at the ecotourism sites. A satisfied tourist is expected to be more likely to choose to visit the same destination on other occasions and to become a promoter via positive word-of-mouth than an unsatisfied tourist (4).

The choice of destination is influenced by activities offered at the destination. The numerous destinations and activities offered at the ecotourism destinations, are more or less similar in the customers' minds, and have major influences on their choices. The popularity of a destination has the potential to contribute to its economic success through an increase in modern infrastructure and employment (5). According to Morgan, N., Prichard, A. and Piggott, R., destination features represent the facilities, attractions and experiences that a destination can offer a tourist (6). However, a lack of certain activities at the destination can have negative impacts on the tourists' motivation choice- satisfaction relationship. In order to meet the needs of the tourists in a satisfactory way, it is better to acknowledge and recognize why tourists visit certain destinations, and what types of activities they pursue while staying there.

Motivations and behaviors are generally affected by tourists' self perceptions. Leary and Tangney illustrated the importance of acknowledging individual self-perception in that an individual's self-concept or identity has tremendous effects on the way they feel, think and behave, and for their future choices and ambitions as well (7). Trip experience, self perceptions and opinions are seen as important antecedents of tourist motivation. Past experiences and self insight will affect tourist motivation

and thus is the choice of destinations/activities. Experience and behavior issues are also linked to economic and environmental considerations through product delivery and the economic benefits realized by visitors.

2. Literature review

Tourists' perceptions and awareness about a destination can help to determine the destination's success or failure (8). The perceived attractiveness (9) and perceived quality (10) of a destination can influence repeat visitations. Since it is widely stated in literature that satisfied tourists have the tendency to relay their positive experience to third persons and to repeat their visit towards a destination (11) (12) (13) (14), Understanding what drives satisfaction for a tourist is one of the most relevant areas of research for the tourism industry (15) (16).

The type and varieties of activities available throughout the stay at the destination are of utmost importance for two specific reasons: (i) they facilitate social interaction (17) (18) (19), and (ii) to constitute one of the most influential factors when choosing a holiday destination (20). They both play a vital role in determining the level of tourist's satisfaction. However, Danaher, P.J. and Arweiler, N. (21) established that, although to some extent the degree of tourist's satisfaction towards a destination depends on transport and accommodation, the major positive tourist feedback focused mainly on outdoor activities. Based on the above literature, it becomes essential for the industry to understand the clear sources of satisfaction for the tourist at the Nakhon Nayok province. This will be the activities they engage and perform during their visit at the ecotourism destination and their experiences during these ecotourism activities at the Destination.

Since, motivation is the basis of the travel decision process it should be considered when analyzing destination loyalty intentions. Beerli and Martín (2004) propose that "motivation is the need that drives an individual to act in a certain way to achieve the desired satisfaction" (22). Motivations can be intrinsic (push) or extrinsic (pull) (23). Push motivations correspond to a tourist's desire and emotional frame of mind. Pull motivations represent the attributes of the destination to be visited. Yoon and Uysal (24) take tourist satisfaction to be a mediator variable between motivations (pull and push) and destination loyalty.

When it comes to source of Information, tourists have the opportunity to know about the destination through multiple information sources, such as through word-of-mouth communication from friends or family members, guide books, brochures, Visitor information centre, Travel Agents, Internet and others sources. Also both commercial and social environment have been shown to affect destination choice (25). The information collected from guide books, brochures, Visitor Information Centre and Travel agents refers to information provided by the companies about the destination, and tourist businesses; whereas the information gathered from friends and other family members through word-of-mouth communication refers to the interaction with friends, relatives, and reference groups who do not expect to gain anything. Thus Tourists' own experiences with the destination should be regarded as a third source of information.

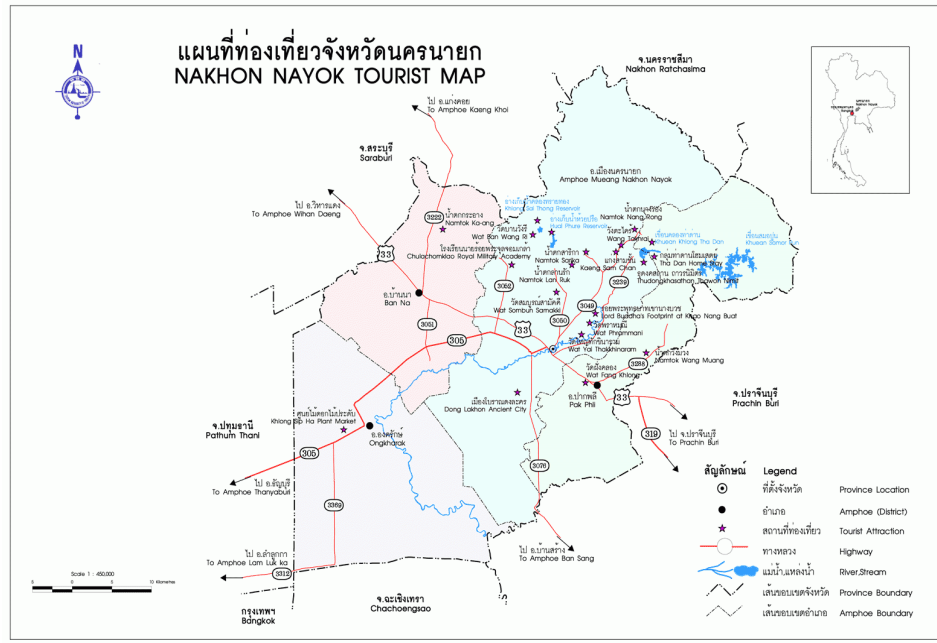


Figure 1: Nakhon Nayok Tourist Map

3. Research Objective & Background of the Study Area:

3.1 Research Objective:

The aim of this study is to determine tourists' satisfaction and loyalty intention by investigating their destination satisfaction and ecotourism activity satisfaction in order to find out their loyalty intention. The purpose of this study was to find out the following (1) to identify the motivation factors influencing tourist's decision to take part in an eco tour at Nakhon Nayok Province, Thailand (2) To find out the dimensions/attributes that leads to tourist satisfaction towards destination and ecotourism activities. (3) To analyze the relationship between motivation factors and tourists satisfaction towards eco-tourism. (4) And finally, to analyze the impact of tourist satisfaction on their loyalty intention, means tourist willingness to participate in future eco tours at the same destination.

3.2 Background of the Study Area:

Nakhon Nayok previously known as "Ban Na (Village of the rice field)" is the province located in the Central region of Thailand. The province's northern and eastern parts are tableland interspersed with mountain bordering the Dong Phraya Yen mountain range. The central and southern regions are low lying areas. Important mountains such as Khao Yai, Khao Khiew, Khao Cha-ngok, and Khao Nang Rong are the source of beautiful rivers and streams in this province. The province covers 2,122 square kilometers comprising four districts – Muang, Ongkharak, Pak Phli and Ban Na. The north borders Saraburi and Nakhon Ratchasima; the south borders Chachoengsao, the east borders Prachin Buri, and the west borders Pathum Thani. Its

geographic significance of being located just 107 Kilometers from Bangkok with its natural attractions of important mountains such as Khao Yai, Khao Khiew, Khao Changok, and Khao Nang Rong, beautiful rivers, streams, a number of waterfalls such as Sarika Waterfall, Nang Rong Waterfall, Wang Muong waterfall and manmade attractions such as Chulachomklao Royal Military Academy and the Royal initiated 93 meters high and 2,594 meters long World's longest roller-compacted concrete (RCC) Khun Dan Prakarnchol Dam has made Nakhon Nayok as one of the major tourist's attractions in Thailand.

4. Materials and method:

4.1 Survey Instrument

A Structured questionnaire was constructed for this study, from which the analysis is made and results are presented. It is composed of three sections. Section one, consists of questions of social characteristics and demographics. The Section Two consists of questions on trip characteristics attributes using a 2-point scale of yes/no and the section three entailed questions on travel motivation and activities using a 5-point scale evaluating tourist's attributes such as experience, satisfaction and loyalty intention.

4.2. Study method

The target population of this study includes Thai and foreign tourists visiting Nakhon Nayok province and engaged in eco tourism activities at the major attractions of the province. Since it is not possible to obtain a list of all tourists visiting the destination, an appropriate sample was chosen for the study from proportionate population size. Survey was conducted using questionnaire from domestic and foreign tourists who visited ecotourism attractions in Nakhon Nayok Province during the period of January 2014 to March 2014. A total of N=243 respondents took the survey giving information of their experience, participation satisfaction in ecotourism activities and their loyalty intention. Data from both the close-ended questions and open-ended questions were coded. They were then computed and analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including simple frequencies, mean ratings of the respondents' related to demographic and trip characteristics, factor analysis for motivation and activities, pearson correlation for measuring relationship between activities, satisfaction & loyalty and linear regression using enter method for predicting loyalty intention were computed.

5. Results and discussion:

5.1 Demographic and social characteristics of the respondents

It is found that 40.3% of the respondents (N=98) were females and the remaining (N=145) were males and shows that Nakhon Nayok attracts 78.2% participants from the younger age group of 15-44 of which 36.2% were at the age of 15 -24 (N=88) and 42% at the age group of 25-44 (N=102). It is reflected from the study that 90.9% of the tourist were Thai Nationality (N=221) and 9.1% of them were foreigners (N=22).

About 84.8% (N=206) of the respondents indicated that their level of education is at the College level or Higher and 15.2% (N=37) have indicated that their level of education is up to school level. The profile of the respondents indicates that 29.6% (N=72) of the respondents were students and 11.9% (N=29) of the respondents were homemakers or housewives. It is inferred that 44% (N=107) were working professionals and 14.4% (N=35) self-employed accounting to a total of 58.4% (N=142) of the respondents either employed as a professional or self-employed by doing a business.

5.2 Trip characteristics of participants

When it comes to planning an eco tourism activity and deciding to visit a particular destination, it is revealed that 60.9% (N=148) of the participants responded that the decision was taken in consulting with their friends or family. While 18.1% (N=44) of the participants responded that they decided by themselves with their previous experience and knowledge, whereas 11.9% (N=29) were influenced by Community Organizations and 9.1% (N=22) were influenced by Travel organizations. It is obvious that 74.9% (N=182) of the tourists organize their itinerary by themselves and only 4.9% depend on Travel agents or Tour operators in planning their trip and activities. Amongst the survey sample, it is obvious that 53.5% of the respondents were visiting the province for the first time and found that 98.4% of the respondents took part in one or more than one ecotourism activity during their visit. Table 5.1 reveals that 90.5% of the respondents confirmed that they are willing to revisit the province again and participate in ecotourism activities and 8.6% replied “may be” which can also turn into a positive influence. Also, 32.9% of the respondents were visiting Nakhon Nayok province with their spouse/partner or family, 45.3% were with friends, while 5.8% were alone and 16% were part of organized groups. Personal References also known as “word-of-mouth information” from friends or family members played a major first source of information (86.0%) for the respondents. Internet the easiest way to reach the customers was the second largest source of information (44.4%) followed by printed promotional materials such as Brochures (15.2%) and Guide Books (12.8%) which are available with Visitor Information Center (13.6%). The results also find out that only 12.3% of visitors refer Travel Agents or Tour Operators for Information. Though personal reference was the major source of reference, this study also shows that internet is emerging as a major source of information for ecotourism destinations.

Table 5.1: Revisiting Intention

Yes	90.5%
May be	8.6%
No	.8%

Table 5.2: Revisiting Intention of First Time Visitors

Cross tabulation		Revisiting Intention			Total
		Yes	May be	no	
First time visitor	Yes	83	20	10	113

Table 5.2 provides us the sufficient evidence that first time visitors are satisfied with the ecotourism activities they engage and are intended to revisit the destination.

5.3. Trip Motivation and Satisfaction

Table 5.3 Motivation

Motivation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Nature Appreciation	4.5638	.66108
Local Culture	3.9547	.83938
Environmental Protection	4.3539	.91715
Recreation and Relaxation	4.4115	.51765
Nature Knowledge	4.2510	.83242

Table 5.4 Activities Engaged in at Ecotourism Destination

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Nature Walk	3.4362	.78140
Visiting National Park	3.4156	.81062
Wildlife / Bird Watching	3.2757	.68793
Buying Souvenirs / Crafts	3.6667	.82322
Adventure Activities	3.6091	.82287
Whitewater Rafting	3.9218	.89884
Visiting Reservoirs or Dam	3.8848	.80488
Visiting Waterfalls	4.1523	.86571
Cycling	3.1317	.44437

Table 5.5 Assessment of Experience

Assessment of Experience	Mean	Std. Deviation
Eco Tourism Satisfaction	4.4198	.77456

According to literature related to motivation it has been acknowledged that certain forces drive individuals to act accordingly in selecting a destination and activities involved during the visit. Hence motivation is measure of the basic function that enables different tourists' activities to be integrated. So, Nature appreciation, learning the local culture, willingness towards environmental protection, gaining nature knowledge and personal interest towards recreation and relaxation were measured as motivation towards the ecotourism destination using the 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 as very unimportant to 5 as very important. Upon pilot visits to the Tourism Authority of Thailand's Nakhon Nayok Provincial office and studies including interviews with the Officials, we evaluated the offerings of the destination and thus 9 ecotourism activities have been identified as primary options available to tourists visiting the province, which include Nature Trails, Visiting reserved areas of National Park, Wildlife and bird watching, Visiting Dam, Visiting Waterfalls, Cycling, Whitewater rafting, adventure activities and buying souvenirs or crafts. The tourist's level of satisfaction have been measured using the 5-point likert scale ranging from 1-very unsatisfied to 5-very satisfied. The mean and standard deviation of the motivation, experience and level of satisfaction and overall satisfaction has been estimated, see Table 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 and 5.16.

The Mean value for all the attributes in motivation is high. But for some attributes Nature Appreciation 4.56, Recreation & Relaxation 4.41 and Environmental Protection 4.35 is very high and considered as prime variables for influencing tourists for visiting the eco-tourism destination. The Mean value for all the attributes in activities engaged in eco-tourism destination is high. But for some attributes Visiting Waterfalls 4.15, White Water Rafting 3.92 and Visiting Reservoirs or Dam 3.88 is very high and considered as prime variables considered by tourists for engaging in eco-tourism destination. The Mean value for eco-tourism satisfaction is very high i.e. 4.42 and most of the tourists are satisfied with the eco-tourism destination.

5.4 Factor Analysis of Motivation and Satisfaction

Table 5.6: Factor Analysis of Motivation and Satisfaction

Motivation	Stimuli 1	Stimuli 2
Nature Appreciation		.622
Local Culture	.638	
Environmental Protection	.867	
Recreation and Relaxation		.668
Nature Knowledge	.801	
KMO= 0.646; Bartlett test=364.244 (0.000); df=10; Sig.p<0.05		

Table: 5.7

Activities engaged in at the ecotourism destination	A1	A2	A3
Nature Walk	.889		
Visiting National Park	.848		
Wildlife / Bird Watching	.914		
Buying Souvenirs / Crafts	.437		
Adventure Activities		.794	
Whitewater Rafting		.828	
Visiting Reservoirs or Dam		.793	
Visiting Waterfalls	.230		
Cycling			.974
KMO= 0.736; Bartlett test=798.91 (0.000);df=36; sig.p<0.05			

In this study, the Factor analysis identified 2 factors relating to tourist motivation and 3 factors regarding activities tourists engaged. Table 5.6, shows for tourists' motivation, Stimuli 1 refers to the acquiring and gaining knowledge about nature, willingness towards environmental protection and experiencing and promoting local culture. Stimuli 2 encompass appreciation towards the nature and recreation and relaxation. On the other hand, activities converged into three groups exhibited in Table 5.7, those related to nature walk, visiting national park, wildlife or bird watching, visiting waterfalls and buying souvenirs/crafts falls in A1, A2 included adventure activities, whitewater rafting and visiting reservoir or dam. A3 encompasses cycling activity. All the factors have high loadings, except visiting waterfalls in Activity 1, which is .230. Hence all the factors encompass appropriate dimensions and converged into 2 & 3 factors for motivation and tourist satisfaction towards ecotourism activities. The result provides sufficient evidence to accept the relationship that arises between motivations and the activities tourist's engage in on at Nakhon Nayok province and their overall level of satisfaction. These results can enlighten ecotourism managers on possible options and offers that can be provided to make ecotours memorable and encourage revisits. In this regard, a wide variety and suitable activities constitute one of the main assets to make Nakhon Nayok Province attractive, successful and competitive one for eco-tourism. Hence, tourism authorities can identify certain factors and focus more to promote the destination as well as include more number of activities and enhance tourist satisfaction.

5.5. Measuring Relationship between Motivation and Satisfaction

Hypothesis: There is a positive relationship between tourist motivation factors and satisfaction towards eco-tourism activities.

Table.No.5.8 Correlations

		A1	A2	A3	Stimuli 1	Stimuli 2
A 1	Pearson Correlation	1	.000	.000	.157*	.045
	Sig. (2-tailed)		1.000	1.000	.014	.489
	N	243	243	243	243	243
A 2	Pearson Correlation		1	.000	-.026	-.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)			1.000	.685	.223
	N		243	243	243	243
A 3	Pearson Correlation			1	.089	.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.166	.263
	N			243	243	243
Stimuli 1	Pearson Correlation				1	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)					1.000
	N				243	243
Stimuli 2	Pearson Correlation					1
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N					243

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The purpose of correlation analysis is to find out the significant relationship between tourist motivation and satisfaction towards eco-tourism activities. Further, it is utilized to find out the relationship between the dimensions or factors influencing on tourist satisfaction. According to the analysis, all the factors which have been considered as the factors influencing tourist is positively associated with each other, further, but strong positive association has not been found, which is insignificant at $P > 0.05$ level for all attributes except for stimuli 1 and activity 1. But for all factors it is positively correlated with other dimensions but not strongly associated. The Motivation/Stimuli factor 1 and Activity Factor 1 is negatively correlated, which is about Nature knowledge and Adventure Activities are Negatively correlated, means it does not have any relationship with each other.

5.6 Predicting Loyalty Intention

Hypothesis: There is a positive impact of destination satisfaction and eco-tourism satisfaction on loyalty intention.

Table.No.5.9 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.779 ^a	.607	.604	.39579	.607	185.649	2	240	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Eco Tourism Satisfaction, Destination Satisfaction

Table.No.5.10 ANOVA^b

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	58.165	2	29.082	185.649	.000 ^a
Residual	37.597	240	.157		
Total	95.761	242			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Eco Tourism Satisfaction, Destination Satisfaction

b. Dependent Variable: Revisiting Intention

Table.No.5.11 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.624	.207		3.009	.003	.215	1.032
	Destination Satisfaction	.427	.059	.439	7.227	.000	.311	.543
	Eco Tourism Satisfaction	.417	.064	.395	6.516	.000	.291	.543

a. Dependent Variable: Revisiting Intention

The results of regression analysis indicated in Table no.5.11 was performed based on the enter method shows that all the variables related to tourist satisfaction ($b=.624$; $p<0.05$), which have high beta value and has a significant & positive impact on the dependent variable “Loyalty Intention of tourists”. The attribute Destination Satisfaction ($b=.427$; $p<0.05$), eco-tourism satisfaction ($b=.417$; $p<0.05$) has a significant and positive impact on the dependent variable “Loyalty Intention of tourists”. The R^2 and the adjusted R^2 values indicate the model is fit at 78% and 61%, respectively. Therefore, destination satisfaction and eco-tourism satisfaction influence tourists’ loyalty intention and in future tourists intend to show loyalty by revisiting the destination.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The results from this study prove that most of the tourists travelled along with their friends or family to take part in ecotourism activities at Nakhon Nayok Province. It was proven that the tourists were satisfied with their experience and were willing to visit again, indicating that they have become positive promoters for the destination. However, the challenge for the industry and service providers is to be aware of this need of tourists, and respond adequately. This study analyzed elements involved in the complex relationship that exists between motivation, activities and satisfaction and loyalty intention. Here, an individual's personal and intrinsic motivations are focused on finding a place to relax, interact and enjoy personal relationships. These aspects strengthen tourist's satisfaction and their willingness to share memories about their eco tours and to revisit the ecotourism destination in the near future. Though Nakhon Nayok province has got abundant resources and sufficient infrastructure for ecotourism activities, less than 10% of the tourists were foreigners and the major visitors were identified as domestic tourists. Beyond language barriers, the tourism authority of Thailand should promote this province as the prominent destination for ecotourism activities to the foreign tourists visiting Thailand with their family.

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