

## **A Survey of Destination Potential, Tourism Activities and Future Travelling Intention towards Tourism along the Rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province**

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### **Abstract**

*This research was aimed to examine the potential of tourism destinations along the rivers and the factors affecting tourists' future travelling intention towards the tourism along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province. It includes the questionnaire with 5-level of Likert scale - as the tools in collecting data from the samples of 400 Thai tourists of the tourism who answered while spending time along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province. Statistics for data analysis were step-wise regression and Pearson's correlation coefficients. The research results were shown as the following. The evaluation of tourism destinations along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province was found to be high potential with historical value as the first rank. The analysis revealed that the factors affecting tourists' future travelling intention towards the tourism along the rivers included historical value of identity, tourism management and environmental factors, respectively at the statistical significance level of 0.05. In addition, there were positive relationships between attitude towards tourism activities and tourists' future travelling intention.*

**Key words:** Destination Potential, Future Travelling Intention, Tourism along the Rivers

### **Introduction**

According to the tourism survey of 2011, the findings revealed that Ayutthaya was regarded as one of the favorite tourist destinations of Thailand. Ayutthaya was ranked as the fourth province of Thailand which most tourists are interested to visit (Manager Online, 2012). Ayutthaya was apparent of having long and ancient history as well as temples and ancient places with high historical values.

In addition, there are three rivers surrounding Ayutthaya, including Chao Phraya River, Pasak River and Lopburi River. This landscape brings various tourism activities, which offer tourists the opportunities to learn the ancient histories, sceneries and local folkways of communities along the rivers in Ayutthaya. This tourism along the rivers is favorite among both Thai and foreign tourists (Governor's Office of Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, 2012).

Therefore, the tourism along the rivers offer for visitors the opportunities to experience not only new and unfamiliar places with naturally spectacular sceneries and views, but also exploring the way of lives of local communities as well as tourism destinations along the rivers, which bring tourists delightful and relaxing experiences. To date tourists' travelling behaviors have been changed dramatically. Nowadays, tourists give more emphasis on local communities, cultural heritage and the quality of tourism destinations with safety, cleanliness, environmental friendly and orientation. Moreover, they utilize more tourism information when travelling (Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand, 2011, p. 1). In line with tourists' behaviors, the market survey of tourism destination indicated that the destination value and readiness of supporting tourism activities are the determinant in attracting tourists to visit. Moreover, tourism activities are regarded as the major indicators in bringing satisfaction, enjoyment and happiness to tourists. These tourism outcomes resulted in tourists' revisiting in the future and recommendation to others to visit tourism destinations.

## ***Literature Review***

### ***Tourism***

Tourism is defined as the travel for seeking new experiences and relaxation which travelers are not forced to travel (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2001). Moreover, tourism is regarded as the temporary travel, not for the sake of occupation or staying permanently (World Tourism Organization, n.d.) with the objectives of recreation, business or others within less than one year (Rowe, Smith & Borein, 2002). This definition is consistent with International Union of Official Travel Organization (IUOTO) which internationally specifies three characteristics of tourism (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006) including (1) travelling outside their usual environment temporarily (2) voluntary travelling (3) travelling without any professional purpose.

### ***Destination Potential***

The reason why tourists choose a destination is based on the extent of destinations' attractiveness and interestedness in influencing tourists' satisfaction. The assessment of destination potential helps indicating and rating the importance of existing destination resources in each region or province (Jittangwatana, 2005). In addition, the assessment of destination potential also identifies destinations' capabilities and readiness in order to rank them according to their importance (Emphadhu & Ruschano, 2007). The assessment of tourism destination potential includes the examination of destination value or equity, physical aspects of destinations, readiness of destinations in terms of infrastructure, accessibility, environment, reputation and safety. However, the assessment of destination potential was related to the five major components of destination or 5A (Dickman, 1996) including attraction, accessibility, amenities, accommodation and activities. Most of the tourism destinations along the river in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province are historical destinations.

Thus, the concept of the assessment of historical destinations and the assessment criteria of destination potential of the Office of Tourism Development. It was adopted to examine the attitudes towards destination potential in this research project (Office of tourism development, 2008). This assessment included historical value, physical aspect of tourism destination (accessibility, safety, varieties of tourism activities), destination potential in developing facilities and infrastructure and potential in tourism management.

### ***Tourism Activities***

Tourism activities are defined as the attractiveness and facilities which are developed enhance recreational and relaxing tourism such as golf, theme parks, entertainment complex, zoos, aquarium, parks and other activities. These tourism activities allow tourists to have participation in such activities such as sports, shopping or activities related to business, agriculture and industry (Tourism Authority of Thailand, n.d.). Even though tourists pay attention to destination and facilities as the first priority, tourism activities play the important role in attracting tourists in participating in these activities (Merchant, 2005).

Consequently, tourism activities are regarded as another important component of tourism. If tourists hold favorable and pleasant attitudes towards tourism activities, the future intention to visit the tourism destinations will be elevated. The tourism activities along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province were considered as the tourism activities in relation to ecological tourism. These activities give tourists opportunities to engage in historical and cultural activities such as the sightseeing and learning of the identity of ancient places and objects, the background of historical and ancient places, works of art, local handicrafts, local culture and traditions, folk wisdom and local souvenirs and products (Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research (1997). Moreover, tourism activities also include boat trips for the sightseeing of natural scenery, the scenery along the canal, the worship of holy things and photographing (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2005). The tourism along the rivers is associated with tourism destinations with identities of cultures and traditions. The findings of the examination of the number of tourists’ participation in activities revealed that the sightseeing of scenery, museums, works of art and historical places resulted in the repeated travelling and positive recommendation to others (Taks et al., 2009).

**Future Travelling Intention**

Intentions were defined as a person’s expectation regarding certain behavior which has the tendency to happen under the specific conditions (Hsu & Crotts, 2006). Future travelling intention was defined as the tendency that tourists repeat travelling in the future. This intention influence future tourists’ behaviors which implies that tourists repeat visiting the same places and engage themselves in the same tourism activities because of favorable past experiences and attitudes regarding certain tourism destinations and activities (Chen & Gursoy, 2000). Thus, future travelling intention is influenced by attitudes and satisfaction towards past experiences. According to the planned behavioral theory (Ajzen, 2006), attitude toward behavior is the belief towards behavioral outcome and the evaluation of behavioral outcome while subjective norms is the belief towards others’ expectation as the norms and the motivation of expectation. Attitude and subjective norms have an impact on individuals’ intention and behavior. Therefore, the more favorable attitudes and subjective norms, the more behavioral intention will be. Francis et al. (2004) adopted the planned behavioral theory in forecasting the behavioral intention as (1) the assessment of attitude is to identify whether a person likes something (2) subjective norms is the situation that a person is socially forced to do something.

**Tourism along the Rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province**

One’s of the activities in tourism along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province is the boat sightseeing trip around the ancient city and temples of Ayutthaya. This boat trip allows tourists to visit temples in ancient city of Ayutthaya and experience local way of lives of communities along the Chao Phraya river. The boat trips along the rivers in Ayutthaya are favorite among tourists because tourists can experience not only beautiful scenery and way of lives along the rivers but also the history of ancient city of Ayutthaya.

**Conceptual Framework**

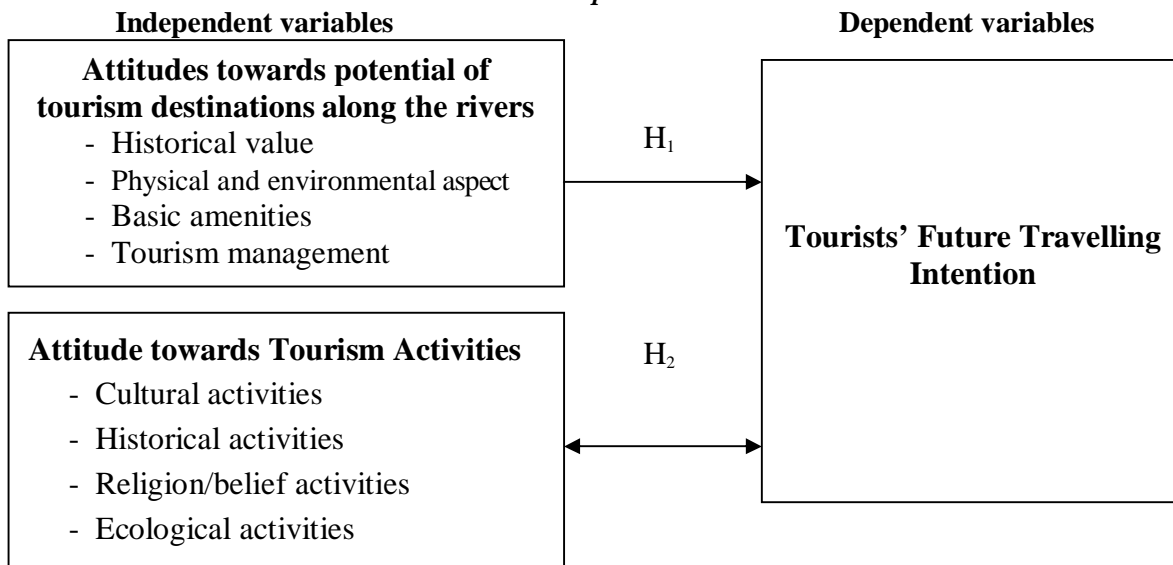


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

## **Research Hypothesis**

Empirical research of this paper is based on testing the following research hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: Attitudes towards potential of tourism destinations along the rivers have an effect on tourists' future travelling intention.

H<sub>2</sub>: There are positive relationships between attitude towards tourism activities and tourists' future travelling intention.

## **Methodology**

This research used quantitative methodology. The survey was answered by 385 Thai tourists who have travelled along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province. Non-probability sampling technique of judgmental and convenience sampling are employed in this research. This research used quantitative methodology. The sample size for this research is 385 Thai tourists who have travelled along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province. Non-probability sampling technique of judgmental and convenience sampling are employed in this research.

## **Research Instrument**

Attitudes towards destination potential was based on the concept of evaluation of tourism resources potential measure of 7 dimensions by using 35-item scale with 5-level of Likert scale. The labels were ranged from "(1) not very well" to "(5) very well". The scale reliabilities of these variables were quite high with alpha coefficient between 0.80-0.96. The scale measuring attitude towards tourism activities was adapted from the concept of tourism activities of Tourism Authority of Thailand (n.d.) and Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research (1997). The instrument was measured in 4 dimensions by using 12-item scale with 5-level of Likert scale which were ranged from "(1) not interest" to "(5) very interest". The scale reliabilities of this measurement scale ranged from 0.72 to 0.91. Tourists' future travelling intention was based on the theory of planned behavior of Ajzen (2006). The measurement included 4 items with 5-level of Likert scale, ranging from "(1) strongly disagree" to "(5) strongly agree". The scale reliability with alpha coefficient was 0.93.

## **Respondent Profile**

The result showed that the majority of 400 Thai tourists of the tourism along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province were female (55.25%), aged between 25-34 years old (39.50%), married (55.50%), with bachelor degree (59.75%), government/state enterprise official (29.25%). Most of them had monthly household income between 15,000-29,999 Baht (39.75%) and were living in central region (37.50%).

## **Results**

According to Table 1, the findings of tourists' attitudes towards potential of tourism destination along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province showed that tourists held highest positive attitudes towards identity of historical value ( $\bar{x} = 4.06$ ) as the first rank, reputation ( $\bar{x} = 3.95$ ), environment ( $\bar{x} = 3.68$ ), basic amenities ( $\bar{x} = 3.54$ ) and tourism management ( $\bar{x} = 3.54$ ), accessibility ( $\bar{x} = 3.50$ ) and safety ( $\bar{x} = 3.45$ ), respectively.

The step-wise regression analysis revealed that the factors affecting tourists' future travelling intention towards the tourism along the rivers included historical value (identity), tourism management, physical and environmental factors (environment), respectively at the statistical significance level of 0.05. In addition, these above mentioned factors could explain tourists' travelling intention towards the tourism along the rivers at 15.20%.

**Table 1 Step-Wise Regression Analysis with Future Travelling Intention towards Tourism along the Rivers as Dependent Variable**

| Potential of tourism destinations along the rivers |      |      | Future travelling intention towards tourism along the rivers |          |      |
|--|------|------|--|----------|------|
|  | Mean | S.D. | Standardized estimate ( $\beta$ )                            | t-values | Sig. |
| 1. Historical value                                |      |      |  |          |      |
| 1.1 Identity                                       | 4.06 | .610 | .235   | 4.989**  | .000 |
| 1.2 Reputation                                     | 3.95 | .709 |  |          |      |
| 2. Physical and environmental                      |      |      |  |          |      |
| 2.1 Accessibility of destination                   | 3.50 | .917 |  |          |      |
| 2.2 Safety   | 3.45 | .898 |  |          |      |
| 2.3 Environment                                    | 3.68 | .625 | .125   | 2.352*   | .019 |
| 3. Basic amenities                                 | 3.54 | .871 |  |          |      |
| 4. Tourism management                              | 3.54 | .748 | .209   | 4.001**  | .000 |

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ,  $F = 24.760^{**}$ ,  $R^2 = 15.8\%$ ,  $Adj. R^2 = 15.20\%$

According to Table 2, the results of tourists' attitude towards tourism activities along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province indicated that tourists were most interested in historical activities ( $\bar{x} = 4.15$ ) as the first rank, ecological activities ( $\bar{x} = 4.01$ ) cultural activities ( $\bar{x} = 4.00$ ) and religion/belief activities ( $\bar{x} = 3.66$ ), respectively.

The Pearson's correlation analysis revealed that all factors of attitude towards tourism activities, including cultural activities ( $r = .195$ ), historical activities ( $r = .209$ ), religion/belief activities ( $r = .259$ ), and ecological activities ( $r = .233$ ), were positively correlated with future travelling intention towards tourism along the rivers at the statistical significance level of 0.01.

**Table 2 Mean, Standard Deviations, and Correlation between Observed Variables**

| Attitude towards Tourism Activities | Future Travelling Intention towards Tourism along the Rivers |      |        |                 |
|-------------------------------------|--|------|--------|-----------------|
|                                     | Mean   | S.D. | r      | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Cultural activities                 | 4.00   | .793 | .195** | .000            |
| Historical activities               | 4.15   | .778 | .209** | .000            |
| Religion/belief activities          | 3.66   | .918 | .259** | .000            |
| Ecological activities               | 4.01   | .889 | .233** | .000            |

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ,  $r \leq 0.30$  = low correlation,  $0.31 < r < 0.70$  = moderate correlation,  $r > 0.70$  = high correlation

### Conclusion and Discussion

The research results validated the hypothesis 1 which indicated that attitudes towards the potential of tourism destinations along the rivers (destination identity, tourism management and environmental factor) influence tourists' travelling intention towards the tourism along the rivers. Moreover, the results are also validated by the hypothesis 2 that attitude towards tourism activities (cultural activities, historical activities, religion/belief activities, and semi-ecological activities) were positively associated with tourists' future travelling intention.

The results showed that tourists' attitudes towards tourism activities along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province were found to be "most interested" within many activities. This result indicated that tourists had demand and satisfaction towards tourism activities. There were many tourists' opinions which includes intention to travel again there. Tourism Authority of Thailand considered tourism activities as the important tourism resources which could be core or supportive resources. Tourists with short-term stay were interested in the varieties of activities. According to the notion of Ajzen (2006), the association between attitudes and personal norms would lead to behavioral intention which implied that individual with positive attitudes and high personal norms influenced behavioral intentions.

This notion was consistent with the research finding of Taks et al. (2009) which found that traditional tourism activities such as sightseeing, visiting museums and art exhibition and historical tourism were stimulated by demand in learning tourism destinations and these traditional tourism activities also influenced repeat travelling in the future and positive recommendation to others. Regarding the attitudes towards environment, Imbal (2009) studied the tourism potential of Papua New Guinea and found that 77.3% of tourists indicated that the interesting culture and beautiful natural environment had an impact on the destination selection which might influenced tourists' repeat travelling in the future. However, tourists' travelling intention of tourism along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province was high because tourists were impressed in the identity and historical value of tourism destination including ancient places, temples and beautiful scenery along the rivers. In addition, favorable past experiences towards destinations and tourism activities influenced tourists' repeat travelling and engagement in tourism activities (Chen & Gursoy, 2000).

### ***Managerial Implication***

The related tourism organizations and boat entrepreneurs should develop and promote the destinations along the rivers which will influence tourists' future travelling intentions by:

1. Presenting the identity of tourism destinations along the rivers such as ancient places and temples, historical learning center and cultural world heritage
2. Developing the destination environment in terms of the cleanliness of the rivers, restoring the good condition of destinations and conserving the authenticity of local way of lives of communities along the rivers.
3. Managing tourism by relating tourism along the rivers with communities in order to develop tourism destinations with local wisdom and developing ancient cities along the rivers.
4. Moreover, the creation of tourism activities during travelling along the rivers such as the merit-making boat trips in the morning, the boat trips visiting floating markets, handicraft villages and cultural plays of local communities in the afternoon and the dusk sight-seeing trips with Thai traditional music.
  5. The knowledgeable guides are required to give details of the background of ancient places along the rivers (historical tourism activities) in order to satisfy tourists' interest in tourism activities as well as develop the creative tourism along the rivers.

This will provide tourists an opportunity to gain new experiences from the participation of tourism activities and influence tourists' repeat travelling along the rivers in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province.

### ***Limitations***

The data collection of this research was conducted with only Thai tourists. But foreign tourists from Asia and Europe are also interested in travelling along mentioned area. Thus, these foreign tourists might have different interest in tourism activities from Thai tourists.

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