

## **Tourists' Attitudes towards Tourism Development and Heritage Preservation in the World Heritage Town of Luang Prabang, Lao PDR**

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### **Abstract**

*The main purpose of this paper is to assess the level of international tourists' attitudes towards heritage preservation and their satisfaction with tourism activities, facilities and services in the Town of Luang Prabang, Northern Laos. The data collection was undertaken by using a self-administered questionnaire survey, with a total of 400 respondents. The findings showed that the majority of international tourists had a positive attitude towards tourism development in Luang Prabang. Even though the international tourists stated that the heritage in this town is well preserved, their perception on the preservation of "traditional music, classical dance and puppetry" was still on "neutral" level. The tourists were satisfied with activities, facilities and services which are provided nowadays in Luang Prabang, but their satisfaction did not reach "very satisfied" level. The research outcomes should help decision makers to formulate better future strategies for sustainable development of tourism in Luang Prabang.*

**Keywords:** tourist attitude, tourist satisfaction, tourist motivation, heritage preservation, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

According to the most recent record from the World Tourism Organization, the tourism sector has experienced continuous expansion and diversification, and has become one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world over the past six decades (UNWTO, 2014). The number of international tourist arrivals has dramatically increased from 25 million in 1950 to 808 million in 2005 (Becken & Hey 2007, cited in Phosikham 2010). By 2013, international tourist arrivals grew by 5%, reaching a record 1087 million arrivals worldwide, up from 1035 million in 2012, when the one billion mark was exceeded for the first time ever. Of these, Asia and the Pacific were regarded as having the fastest relative growth with a 6% increase in international arrivals (UNWTO, 2014). The leading sub-region was Southeast Asia (+10%), where the number of international tourists grew by 14 million to reach 248 million (UNWTO, 2013).

In 2013, Travel and Tourism sector's total contribution to the global economy rose to 9.5% of the total GDP (US \$7 trillion). Nearly 266 million jobs were created by the Travel and Tourism sectors in 2013, the equivalent of 1 in 11 of all jobs in the World (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2014). The Lao People's Democratic Republic, or in short "Laos" is located in Southeast Asia. Thanks to Laos' wealth of natural and cultural heritage resources, there has been a sudden growth in international tourist arrivals (UNCTAD, 2014). According to recent figures from the Lao Authority of Tourism Development, the number of international tourist arrivals to Laos rose consistently with an average growth rate of 19% between the years 1993-2013. The number of International tourists reached 3,779,000 in 2013 and generated a total revenue of \$595 million (USD) (Tourism Development Department, 2013). Along with international tourist arrivals trends at the national and provincial levels, International tourist arrivals to Luang Prabang province have dramatically rocketed with an average growth rate of 2335% between the years 1995-2014. In 1995, only 16 230 international tourists visited Luang Prabang, but this figure reached 378 999 in 2014, which generating a total revenue of \$193 450 545 (USD) (Provincial Tourism office, 2014). Because of the rapid growth of international tourists and the high competition among several attractions in tourist destination regions, tourist attitude and their satisfaction are not only fundamentally important in tourism studies, but also important for tourism development. Scientific knowledge on tourists' attitude towards tourism development in Luang Prabang and their satisfaction on tourism activities, facilities and services can play a crucial role in predicting the sustainability of tourism in Southeast Asia, in general and in the Town of Luang Prabang, in particular. The research outcomes should help decision makers to formulate better future strategy for sustainable development of tourism sectors and to reduce any negative impacts from tourism.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this paper are as follows. First, to evaluate international tourists' attitudes towards heritage preservation in the Town of Luang Prabang. Second, to assess the level of international tourists' satisfaction with tourism activities, facilities and services. Third, to investigate the relationship between the levels of tourists' attitude towards heritage preservation and tourists' satisfaction level and, finally, to investigate the relationship between travel motivational factors and tourists' satisfaction levels. The result of this study will benefit local government, heritage preservation and tourism related authorities, tourism related business people and local communities. It aims to assess the international tourists' attitude towards tourism development in Luang Prabang, which should assist in understanding strong and weak points of heritage preservation, tourism activities, facilities and services provided to tourists. This can also help in formulating future strategies for sustainable development of tourism, especially in Luang Prabang Province.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Tourist Attitude**

Different researchers defined "attitude" in various ways. Some definitions are meaningful for tourism: "an attitude is a trend, pro or con, to an environmental element, which becomes a positive or negative value" (E.E Bogardus, cited in R.G Albu & L.C Nicgolau, 2010). While Rokeach, (cited in R.G Albu & L.C Nicgolau, 2010) defined that "attitude is a sustainable organization of beliefs towards an object or a situation that predisposes an individual to respond in a preferential manner." Jafari (2001) mentioned that tourists' perceptions are significant for tourism development which influence local economies, societies, cultures and environments as well as their intention to revisit the destination. Other views suggested that an attitude toward the environment is a measure of how people would like to experience the landscape according to their personal preferences for cultural, social, and environmental aspects. These preferences reflect environmental value orientation and they are often related to attitudes toward specific environmental conditions and impacts as well as management and development options (Kaltenborn et al., 2011). The attitude of tourists towards tourist destination is important for tourism sites because more positive attitude from tourists towards tourism sites can bring about tourist satisfaction.

### **2.2 Tourist Motivation**

Dan (1981) revealed that people are motivated to travel because they have been influenced by internal motives and external stimulation that are called "push and pull factors." On the one hand, push factors are internal motivators (mainly social-psychological motives) that are related to the needs and wants of the tourists, for example, the desire for rest and relaxation, doing different things, increasing knowledge, knowing different cultures and lifestyles and meeting interesting people (Correia & Valle, 2007).

On the other hand, pull factors are those that emerge as a result of the attractiveness of a destination as perceived by tourists with the capacity to travel, such as recreation facilities, natural and cultural attraction, and tourists' perceptions and expectations such as security, relaxing atmosphere, social environment, and hospitality (Correia & Valle, 2007). Timothy & Boyd (2003) indicated that people visit heritage places to enhance learning, satisfy curiosity and feel nostalgia, grow spiritually, relax and get away from home. In order to market tourism service and destination well, marketers must understand the motivating factors that lead to travel decisions and consumption behaviors (Thaothampitak & Weerakit, 2012; cited in Sirisack et al., 2014). For these reasons, understanding tourist motivations is seen as a significant aspect of both tourism management and academic investigation (Poria et al., 2004; cited in Phosikham, 2010).

### **2.3. Tourist Satisfaction**

Tourism scholars have defined tourist satisfaction as the results of the comparison between "a tourist's experience at the destination visited and the expectations about the destination" (Sukiman et al., 2013). Satisfaction is recognized as a post-purchase construct that is related to how much a consumer likes or dislikes a service or product after experiencing it (Frey & Daly, 1989; cited in Sukiman et al., 2013). Tourist satisfaction is an important factor in successful marketing of heritage and cultural tourism because it affects the selection of destination, consumption of service and decision to revisit (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; cited in Singh, 2014). There are a number of reasons that make tourists satisfied with their trip or journey, including the quality of services provided, such as infrastructure, security, cleanliness, natural situation, consumer protection and accessibility (Handzuh, 1995; cited in Salleh et al., 2013). Knowing the level of tourists' satisfaction on tourism activities, facilities and services in the Town of Luang Prabang is also essential for the marketers and tourist related managers in order address the weak points and improve the destination to become more attractive for tourists.

### **2.4 Town of Luang Prabang**

Luang Prabang Province is located 420 kilometres north of Vientiane, the capital city of Laos. There are 12 districts in the Luang Prabang province and the town of Luang Prabang is the capital city of this province. In 2014, the population of Luang Prabang town is 82,000, with a high density of 106 persons per square kilometer (Luang Prabang district administration office, 2014). Luang Prabang has very unique architecture, with; "The UNESCO report identified 34 Wats (monasteries) and 111 civic buildings for preservation, and classifies another 450 houses, making Luang Prabang the best-preserved traditional town of Southeast Asia" (Englemann, 1999; cited in Aas et al., 2005: 35). Because Luang Prabang showed evidence of its unique combination of nature and architecture, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) inscribed Luang Prabang on its World Heritage List on December 9<sup>th</sup> 1995 under criteria 2, 4 and 5. The designation plus the intrinsic value of the town has made Luang Prabang a popular tourist destination in this region.

### **2.5 Heritage in Luang Prabang**

Most researchers accept that "heritage is linked to the past, that it represents some sort of inheritance to be passed down to current and future generation, both in terms of cultural traditions and physical artifacts" (Hardy 1998; cited in Timothy & Boyd, 2003:2). Trotter (2001) and Timothy & Boyd (2003) indicated that heritage can be divided into natural and cultural, as well as tangible and intangible resources such as building, natural areas, objects in museums, ceremonies, and people's lifestyles. UNESCO (2004) presented a catalogue of Luang Prabang's wide range of natural, built and cultural heritage, including the people and their lifestyles and beliefs, numerous festivals throughout the year, traditional arts and crafts, performing arts and cuisine. It is this living heritage that makes Luang Prabang a unique destination in Southeast Asia. The Lao ethnic group constitutes the majority of the residents and, consequently, as the Lao culture is strongly influenced by their religion, Theravad Buddhism; the town's religious heritage is an essential part of the local culture and is one of the major features attracting tourists to Luang Prabang. The town's natural resources form the foundation on which the area's cultural heritage is based. Built on a small peninsula at the confluence of the Mekong and Khan rivers, the town of Luang Prabang is located in a majestic and scenic position against a backdrop of forested mountains. The waterways that pass through the town bring trade, and increasingly visitors. The heritage value of Luang Prabang is derived largely from its rich architectural endowment, such as the individual buildings, their elaborate embellishments and their urban assemblages. As the former royal capital, Luang Prabang boasts a strong tradition of patronage of the arts.

Residents of the town are well-known for their skills in carving, silverwork, blacksmithing, paper making, weaving, embroidery and pottery. The distinctive natural, built and cultural heritage discussed in this section is the basis for tourism in Luang Prabang.

## **2.6 Tourism in Luang Prabang**

The tourism sector has contributed significantly to the development of Luang Prabang province. Luang Prabang has been implementing the provincial development strategy, which was released on 18 March 2003, stating that Luang Prabang be developed as a tourism centre for cultural, natural and historical sites, and to promote the town of Luang Prabang as a linked land and a wonderful holiday town (Luang Prabang Governor, 2007; cited in Phosikham, 2010). In the past two decades, Luang Prabang not only witnessed an increasing number of international tourist arrivals, but it has also experienced a rapid development in tourism-related sectors. In 1995, there were only five travel agencies, seven hotels, four guesthouses and eight restaurants. These numbers increased dramatically in 2008, there were 36 travel agencies, 32 hotels, 236 guesthouses, 124 restaurants and 112 tourist sites (Heritage house, 2008 and Provincial Tourism office, 2008). The tourism related sectors has been continuous expanding notably, in 2014 there were 74 travel agencies, 72 hotels, 325 guesthouses, 283 restaurants and 228 tourist sites (Provincial Tourism office, 2014). Because of the rapid growth of international tourists and the high competition between many attractions in tourist destination regions, the study concerning tourists' attitudes towards tourism development in the World Heritage Town of Luang Prabang is therefore needed.

## **3. Research Methodology**

The data for this paper was collected using a self-administered questionnaire survey with closed and open-ended questions. The target population sample of this study was international tourists with age of 18 years and over who stayed in Luang Prabang at least one night. A systematic random sampling method was employed to ensure the representativeness of the total population. The survey was conducted from October to December 2014 at three main points; departure areas of Luang Prabang International Airport, Wat Xieng Thong and Mount Phousy. Every respondent who sits on the third seat of each block at departure areas of Luang Prabang International Airport starting from the first randomly selected seat was selected as respondents. Similarly, every third visitor who entered the gates of Wat Xieng Thong and Mount Phousy was requested to participate in the survey. Over the three-month period, 400 respondents participated in the survey. The survey was conducted seven days a week.

The five-point Likert scale was used to assess tourists' attitude, their level of satisfaction, and tourist motivation factors. A Tick list response was used to find out the international tourists' demographic characteristics. The descriptive statistics were used to analyse the demographic data. Inferential statistical analysis, especially a multiple regression, was used to examine the association between tourists' attitude towards heritage preservation and their overall satisfaction, as well as to investigate the relationship between tourist motivation and their overall satisfaction.

## **4. Results of the Study**

### **4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

The demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1. Of the total number of 400 respondents, 56% were female. The age of respondents varies from 18 to 81 years old, averaging 41 years old. The research included both tourists' nationality and country of residence in the analysis because some of them live in other countries than their own. Survey results showed that participants in this study were diversified. International tourists from more than 30 different countries were represented. The largest proportion of participants (40.3%) was from Europe, overwhelmingly from the UK. Participants from Asia and Pacific accounted for the second largest (36.8%), while the rest were from the Americas and the Middle East (23%). The share of international tourist arrivals was dominated by the European countries. The countries with the largest numbers of international tourists were Australia (15.3%), UK (12%), the US (11%), France (10%) and Thailand (9.5%) respectively. Approximately 10% of the total respondents completed high school, while 12% graduated from college. The biggest proportion of tourists (78%) said that they had a tertiary education background completing a university degree. The analysis also reveals that the largest proportion (45.3%) of the total respondents confirmed that they had no religion whereas the second largest share (36.3%) reported that they were Christian. The third were Buddhist (12%), and 5.8 percent of respondents did not want to answer about their religion.

#### **4.2 Tourists' Perspectives towards Heritage Preservation in the town of Luang Prabang**

As shown in Table 2, generally, international tourists perceived the current heritage preservation in the town of Luang Prabang in "good" level, except for the preservation of "traditional music, classical dance and puppetry" which was in "neutral" level. The heritage that participants said as the most well preserved was "friendliness, politeness and honesty of local people" (mean= 4.32; st. Deviation= .824), followed by "temples" (mean= 4.27; st. Deviation= .749), and "cultural heritage" (mean= 4.11; st. Deviation= .802).

#### **4.3 Tourists' Satisfaction on Tourism Activities, Tourism Facilities and Tourism Services**

Table 3 indicates that international tourists who visited Luang Prabang satisfied with activities, facilities and services provided currently. Natural tourism related activities received the highest level of satisfaction (mean= 4.05; st. Deviation= .539), followed by cultural and folk way of communities (mean= 3.84; st. Deviation= .518), ancient and religious related activities (mean= 3.76; st. Deviation= .582), and facilities and services (mean= 3.64; st. Deviation= .561) respectively. The international tourists expressed a relatively high level of overall satisfaction (mean= 3.81; st. Deviation= .445).

#### **4.4 Importance of Factors Attracting International Tourists to Luang Prabang**

International tourists believed that "friendliness of local people" was the most significant factor attracting international tourists to Luang Prabang among others (mean= 4.21; st. Deviation= 3.609), followed by "natural scenery and nice landscape" (mean= 4.16; st. Deviation= 1.001), "enhance knowledge and experience Laos" (mean= 4.12; st. Deviation= .928), "cultural and historical places" (mean= 4.07; st. Deviation= .991), and "safety and security" (mean= 3.94; st. Deviation= 1.191).

#### **4.5 Results of Regression Analysis between Perspectives towards Heritage Preservation and Overall Satisfaction**

Table 4 shows that there is a relationship between tourists' perspective on heritage preservation and their overall satisfaction. Tourists who perceive heritage as well preserved in Luang Prabang are likely to have a higher level of satisfaction with tourism activities, facilities and services in this town. The good preservation of "friendliness, politeness and honesty of local people" has contributed the greatest positive impacts on their overall satisfaction among heritage attributes in the Town of Luang Prabang. The preservation of "temples and monasteries" has contributed the second greatest positive influence on tourists' overall satisfaction, followed by the preservation of "natural heritage".

#### **4.6 Results of Regression Analysis between Motivation Factors and Overall Satisfaction**

Table 5 indicates that there is a relationship between motivation factors and tourists' overall satisfaction. The regression analysis revealed that "safety and security" factor accounted for the greatest positive impact on tourists' overall satisfaction, which implies that the tourists who visit Luang Prabang because of its safety are likely to be satisfied with existing tourism activities, facilities and services in the town while the item "enhance knowledge and experience Laos" factor received the second greatest influence on tourists' overall satisfaction, followed by the "natural scenery and nice landscape" factor.

### **5. Discussion**

The objectives of this research are 1), to evaluate the level of international tourists' attitude towards heritage preservation in the Town of Luang Prabang, 2), to evaluate the level of international tourists' satisfaction on tourism activities, facilities and services, 3), to find out the relationship between the level of tourists' attitude towards heritage preservation and tourists' satisfaction level, and to find out the association between travel motivation factors and 4), tourists' satisfaction level. There were 400 international tourists who came from more than 30 different countries who participated in this research survey. The top five countries with the largest number were Australia, the UK, the US, France and Thailand. Possibly, there were more participants from English speaking countries because the questionnaire was obtained in English. This finding was similar to previous study conducted by Phosikham (2010), who found a similar rank of tourists' countries of residence. The largest group of participants had a higher education background, having completed a university degree. Although the Town of Luang Prabang is often seen as a religious cultural heritage and tourist destination, almost half of the respondents confirmed that they had no religion and about six percent of tourists did not want to mention about their religion. This demonstrates that not only the religious tourists visited religious places.

This finding is also similar to the past study by Phosikham (2010) which found that only one in three of the tourists who traveled to the World heritage Town of Luang Prabang perceived themselves as heritage tourists. In general, international tourists who visited Luang Prabang recognized that the heritage is well preserved. The heritage of “friendliness, politeness and honesty of local people” was seen as the most well preserved. The question is to what level can Luang Prabang preserve this heritage? Inevitably, it will be difficult in the face of challenges such as globalization, economic growth, and the rise of social media (particularly for youth). On the other hand, the preservation of “traditional music, classical dance and puppetry” was reported as the lowest level of heritage preservation among others even its mean score achieved the “neutral” level. This finding is parallel to the claim of Phoummasack (2014) who stated that tourism causes cultural changes mostly occurred with the youth who imitated the foreign fashion like color hair dyeing, bizarre dances in village party or at Boat racing festival, and neighboring country’s song singing was easily seen that may lead to a reduction of Lao traditional songs and dances. In spite of the fact that most of respondents stated that they were satisfied with activities, facilities and services currently provided in Luang Prabang, there were different mean scores among them. While “natural tourism related activities” gained a relatively higher satisfaction from the international tourists, “facilities and services” received the lower.

Regarding tourist motivation, “friendliness of local people” was believed the most significant factor attracting international tourists to Luang Prabang, followed by “natural scenery and nice landscape” and “enhance knowledge and experience Laos”. This implies that the pull factors within the Town of Luang Prabang were the most valuable tourist motivation to attract international tourists to the town. The results of regression analysis between perspectives towards heritage preservation and overall satisfaction shows that tourists’ perception on good preservation of “friendliness, politeness and honesty of local people” had the greatest positive impact on overall satisfaction among heritage attribute in the Town of Luang Prabang. The preservation of “temples and monasteries” had the second greatest positive influence on tourists’ overall satisfaction, followed by the preservation of “natural heritage”. The results of regression analysis between motivation factors and overall satisfaction showed that “safety and security” factor had the greatest positive impact on tourists’ overall satisfaction. The finding is similar to the result of the study on tourist satisfaction in Luang Prabang which was conducted by the provincial tourism office (2013), which stated that the safety of Luang Prabang played a significant role in making tourist satisfaction. The second greatest motivation factor that influences tourists overall satisfaction was “enhance knowledge and experience Laos” and followed by “natural scenery and nice landscape” factor.

## **6. Conclusion**

The respondents in this study were diversified in terms of both nationalities and ages. Even though the bigger proportion of the tourists was from Europe, more precisely the majority of respondents came from Australia, the UK, the US, France and Thailand. The largest group of participants had a higher education background, having completed a university degree, while less than half of the respondents believed in religions. The findings showed that the majority of international tourists had a positive attitude towards tourism development in Luang Prabang. International tourists who visited Luang Prabang perceived that the heritage is well currently preserved in this town and they were satisfied with activities, facilities and services provided in Luang Prabang. The tourists’ perception on well preservation of “friendliness, politeness and honesty of local people” had the greatest positive impact on their overall satisfaction. The most important tourist motivation that bring people to come to Luang Prabang was the “friendliness of local people”, followed by “natural scenery and nice landscape” and “enhance knowledge and experience Laos”. The results of regression analysis between motivation factors and overall satisfaction showed “safety and security” factor had the greatest positive impact on tourists’ overall satisfaction. Even though international tourists who visited the town of Luang Prabang stated that heritage in this town is well preserved, their perception on the preservation of “traditional music, classical dance and puppetry” was still on “neutral” level. The tourists were satisfied with activities, facilities and services but the tourist’ satisfaction did not reach “very satisfied” level. The hosts may now pay attention on these points in order to raise the level of tourists’ satisfaction and their perception on heritage preservation in the Town of Luang Prabang and this could help create a tourism industry which is more sustainable.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics**

Demographic characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	male	179	44.0
	female	224	56.0
Age	18-40	209	52.3
	41-81	191	47.8
Region of residence	Asia and Pacific	147	36.8
	Europe	161	40.3
	Americas and the Middle East	92	23.0
Education	Lower than university	88	22.0
	University	312	78.0
Religion	Buddhism	51	12.8
	Christian	145	36.3
	No religion	181	45.3
	Do not want to answer	23	5.8

**Table 2: Tourists' Perspectives of Heritage Preservation in the Town of Luang Prabang**

Heritage preservation	Mean	Std. Deviation
preservation of natural heritage	4.0100	.83164
preservation of built heritage	4.0650	.76958
Preservation of cultural heritage	4.1150	.80211
preservation of river and mountains	4.0779	.80393
preservation of wetland	3.7254	.86028
preservation of temples and monasteries	4.2757	.74966
preservation of individual heritage building	3.8380	.82418
preservation of Buddha image and ancient objects	4.0379	.81199
preservation of typical way of life and daily activities	3.7531	.90706
preservation of traditional festivals	3.6846	.87556
preservation of alms giving	3.6675	.98811
preservation of traditional music ,classical dance and puppetry	3.4859	.80650
preservation of traditional arts and crafts	3.9000	.85547
Preservation of friendliness, politeness and honesty of local people	4.3200	.82420
preservation of traditional costumes	3.6842	.96706

**Table 3: Tourists' Satisfaction of Tourism Activities, Facilities and Services**

Tourists' satisfaction	Mean	Std. Deviation
Natural related activities	4.0523	.53947
Ancient and Religious related activities	3.7680	.58272
Cultural and folk way of communities	3.8497	.51897
Facilities and services	3.6400	.56175
Overall satisfaction	3.8145	.44560

**Table 4: The Relationship between Tourists' Attitudes towards Heritage Preservation and their Overall Satisfaction**

Tourists' attitudes towards heritage preservation	B	Beta	t	Sig
preservation of natural heritage	0.080	0.154	2.934	0.004*
preservation of river and mountains	0.074	0.137	2.651	0.008*
preservation of temples and monasteries	0.098	0.171	3.585	0.000*
preservation of arts giving	0.057	0.125	2.609	0.010*
preservation of traditional music, classical dance and puppetry	0.071	0.131	2.380	0.018*
preservation of traditional arts and crafts	0.074	0.144	2.580	0.010*
preservation of friendliness, politeness and honesty of local people	0.111	0.211	4.372	0.000*

Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.471$ ,  $F = 39.105$ ,  $P^* < 0.005$

**Table 5: The relationship between Factors Attracting Tourists to Luang Prabang and Tourists' Overall Satisfaction**

Factors attracting tourists to Luang Prabang	B	Beta	t	Sig
enhance knowledge and experience Laos	0.084	0.180	2.892	0.004*
natural scenery and landscape	0.059	0.133	2.062	0.040*
safety and security	0.069	0.184	3.024	0.003*

Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.116$ ,  $F = 12.462$ ,  $P^* < 0.005$



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