



Traveling Behaviors of International Cruise Passengers in Thailand

Nakarin Thangthong^{1,*}, Kewalee Inmoonnoi², Chariti Khuanmuang³

¹Department of Hospitality Industry (International Program), Rangsit University, Thailand

²Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Rangsit University, Thailand

³Department of Foreign Languages, Kasetsart University, Thailand

*Corresponding author, E-mail: nakarin.t@rsu.ac.th

Abstract

The objectives of this study were to investigate international cruise passengers' demographic data and their traveling behaviors including numbers of travel companions, length of stay, travel frequency, type of tourism activities, souvenir shopping behavior, plan for future visits, and traveling satisfaction. The data was collected from 400 respondents in Thailand's Laemchabang Port of Call from January to March 2018 via questionnaires and was then analyzed by automatic statistic software using frequency distribution and percentage. The findings were that the majority of the international cruise passengers were seniors with strong financial and educational backgrounds. Additionally, they were almost equal in terms of gender and preferred traveling as couples. Most of them visited Thailand for the first time although they were frequent cruise passengers. They were very satisfied with the provided tour programs and a myriad of authentic souvenirs despite their one-day excursion in Thailand, making the Laemchabang Port of Call one of their repeated destinations in the future.

Keywords: Cruise; tourism; traveling behaviors

1. Introduction

Tourism is an important industry for Thailand's socio-economy since it generates a great number of revenues to the county and distributes expansive careers to the locals. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2014) has estimated that there would be an increase of 1,600 million international travelers and that one of the most promising tourism types would be cruise tourism.

As cruise tourism is the fastest growing tourism industry in the 21st century, the Cruise Line International Association (CLIA) predicted that the global cruise industry would constantly be expanding. By 2019, the number of cruise passengers was forecast to rise by 6 percent (over 30 million people) comparing to 28.2 million passengers in 2018 (Cruise Lines International Association, 2016). As a result, the purchasing orders of cruise ship, notably large cruise ship, by several cruise line companies worldwide have escalated to serve the tremendous increase in demand (Weaver, 2005). In 2016, the total number of the cruise ship was 458 across the world (Cruise Lines International Association, 2016), and was expected to have 18 more cruise ships by 2019. Subsequently, the number of ports of call would be established at popular destinations globally to facilitate the increasing number of cruise travelers who have been classified as high-quality passengers. Most of them are residents of North America, aged over 25, and earn over 40,000 US dollars per annum (Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association, 2012).

Located at the heart of Southeast Asia, Thailand has become one of the most popular destinations among cruise tourists. Several major cruise line companies – mostly from North America – have included Thailand in their international routes. In 2016, there were 60 cruise ships carrying over 3.1 million international passengers to Asia including Thailand (Cruise Lines International Association, 2016). This has boosted the local economy, particularly in the areas where these cruise ships make a stopover. At present, Thailand caters three ports of call: the Phuket Port of Call covers tourism destinations in Phuket and the neighboring areas which include the archipelagoes in the Andaman Sea; the Samui Port of Call serves as the gateway to tourist spots in the Gulf of Thailand; and the Laemchabang Port of Call bridges the maritime tourism in the Gulf of Thailand with the mainland destinations in Chonburi Province as well as Bangkok and the metropolis. From 1999 to 2008, the number of cruise ships constantly increased with at least 30 cruise ships making a stopover at the Laemchabang Port of Call and brought the biggest number – totaling



199,690 – of high-quality tourists to Bangkok in 2006 (Thangthong, 2011). With its great significance, the Laemchabang Port of Call was selected as the setting in this present study.

Due to a large amount of revenue from cruise tourism, the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board has included cruise tourism and port of call development plans in the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017-2021). A substantial number of evidence from research studies are, therefore, crucial in the decision making of future megaproject initiatives concerning Thailand's cruise tourism and port of call development. However, the number of studies on cruise tourism, especially traveling behaviors of cruise passengers, in Thailand is still limited. As a result, this current study contributes essential information which can be a part of the evidence for considering future projects in cruise tourism in Thailand.

2. Objectives

To study the traveling behaviors of international cruise passengers in Thailand, two research objectives needed to accomplish.

1. To investigate the demographic data of international cruise passengers
2. To explore the traveling factors determining international cruise passengers' traveling behaviors

These two research objectives can achieve by adopting the following conceptual framework focusing on two groups of variables – demographic data and traveling factors. These variables led to the traveling behaviors of international cruise passengers in Thailand as presented in Figure 1.

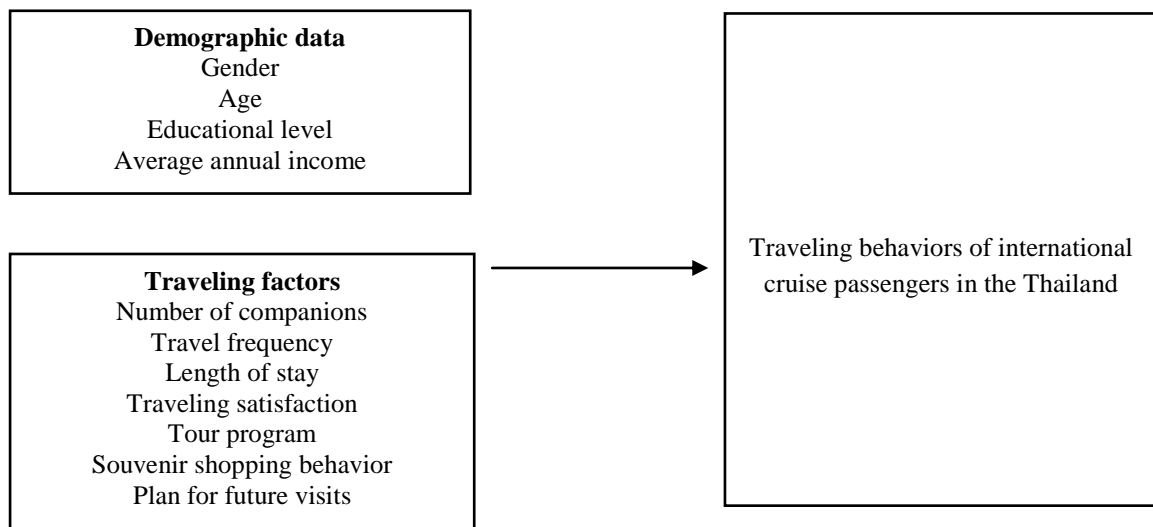


Figure 1 Research framework

3. Materials and Methods

Aimed to (1) investigate the demographic data of international cruise passengers; and (2) explore their traveling factors affecting their traveling behaviors in Thailand's Laemchabang Port of Call, this current study of traveling behaviors of international cruise passengers in the Laemchabang Port of Call employed quantitative research approach using questionnaire as the tool for data collection.

The population in this study was international cruise passengers traveling to the Laemchabang Port of Call, Chonburi Province, Thailand. To ensure the 95 percent reliability of the findings, the sample size of at least 380 participants is required (Cochran, 1963). This current study, therefore, included 400 respondents by employing an accidental sampling method. Demographic data – gender, age, educational level, and average annual income – was the personal variables. Traveling factors included the number of travel companions, length of stay, travel frequency, type of tourism activities, and plan for future visits,



souvenir shopping behavior, and traveling satisfaction. Questionnaires were used to collect the data. They were divided into three sections. The first section included four close-ended questions regarding the respondents' personal information – their gender, age, educational level, and average annual income. The second section covered four close-ended questions relating to traveling behaviors – numbers of travel companions, travel frequency, length of stay, tour program, plan for future visits, souvenir shopping behavior, and traveling satisfaction. The final section provided respondents with open-ended questions to give any additional information and suggestions about their experiences in the Laemchabang Port of Call.

The data was collected via questionnaire distribution between January and March 2018 from 400 respondents using the accidental sampling method. The setting was at the Laemchabang Port of Call, Chonburi Province, Thailand. The data from the collected questionnaires was analyzed by automatic statistic software using descriptive statistic, namely frequency distribution and percentage.

4. Results and Discussion

To achieve research objective 1 – *to investigate the demographic data of international cruise passengers* – it was found that the number of male and female international cruise passengers was almost equal – 197 male (49.20 percent) and 203 female (50.80 percent). The ages of the majority of international cruise passengers were between 51 and 60 years old. There were 170 of them (42.50 percent). The second largest age range was between 21 and 30 years old. There were 71 of them (17.75 percent). The third largest age range was between 41 and 50 years old (16.75 percent). The fourth largest age range was between 31 and 40 years old (16.50 percent). The smallest number of age range was over 60 years old. There were 26 of them (6.50 percent) as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Personal data of international cruise passengers

personal data	<i>n</i>	percentage	personal data	<i>n</i>	percentage
gender			educational level		
male	197	49.20	below high school	3	0.80
female	203	50.80	high school	96	24.00
			undergraduate level	235	58.80
			graduate level	26	6.50
age			post-graduate level	40	10.00
21 - 30 yrs	71	17.75	average annual income		
31 - 40 yrs	66	16.50	50,000 - 59,000 USD	3	1.50
41 - 50 yrs	67	16.75	60,000 - 69,000 USD	23	5.80
51 - 60 yrs	170	42.50	70,000 - 79,000 USD	90	22.50
over 60 yrs	26	6.50	80,000 - 89,000 USD	99	24.80
			over 90,000 USD	185	46.20
total	400	100	total	400	100

Table 1 also shows that the majority (235 respondents; 58.80 percent) of international cruise passengers held a bachelor degree, and the second largest group (96 respondents; 24 percent) of international cruise passengers graduated from high school. The third largest group (40 respondents; 10 percent) held a doctoral degree. The fourth largest group (26 respondents; 6.50 percent) had a master degree. The smallest group (3 respondents; 0.80 percent) did not finish high school. The average annual income of the majority of them was over 90,000 USD. There were 185 (46.20 percent) of them. The second largest group of international cruise passengers had an average annual between 80,000 and 89,000 USD. There were 99 (24.80 percent) of them. The third largest group with 90 respondents (22.50 percent) had the average annual income between 70,000 and 79,000 USD. The fourth largest group with 23 respondents



(5.80 percent) earned between 60,000 and 69,000 USD on average per annum. The smallest group with 3 respondents (1.50 percent) earned between 50,000 and 59,000 USD on average per annum respectively.

Table 2 Traveling factors of international cruise passengers

Traveling factors	<i>n</i>	Percentage	Traveling factors	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Number of companion			Travel frequency to the port of call		
One (single)	33	8.20	One time	227	56.80
Two (couple)	329	82.20	Two times	103	25.80
> Three (group)	38	9.50	> Three times	70	17.50
Travel frequency by cruise ship			Length of stay		
One time	60	15.00	One day (no overnight stay)	400	100
Two times	104	26.00			
> Three times	236	59.00			
Traveling satisfaction			Tour program		
Most satisfied	77	19.25	Ancient City Tram	55	13.60
Very satisfied	258	64.50	Bangkok on Your Own	60	15.00
Satisfied	62	15.50	Hidden Jewels of Bangkok	77	19.20
Somewhat satisfied	2	0.50	Grand Palace & Venice of the East	76	19.00
Least satisfied	1	0.25	Sanctuary of Truth	48	12.00
			Pattaya Elephant Village	22	5.50
			Nong Nooch Village	26	6.50
Souvenir shopping behavior			Plan for future visits		
Yes	355	88.75	Yes	245	61.20
No	45	11.25	No	155	38.80
Total	400	100	Total	400	100

To achieve research objective 2 – to explore the traveling factors determining international cruise passengers' traveling behaviors – the data in Table 2 illustrates the traveling factors of international cruise passengers in the Laemchabang Port of Call. The findings were that the majority of them (227 respondents; 56.80 percent) visited Thailand for the first time. The second largest group with 103 respondents (25.80 percent) had visited Thailand twice. The smallest group included 70 passengers (17.50 percent) who had been to Thailand more than three times. However, the data revealed that the majority of passengers (236 respondents; 59.00 percent) had traveled on a cruise ship more than three times while the minority of them (60 respondents; 15 percent) traveled on a cruise ship for the first time. Among those, 104 respondents (26.00 percent) had been on a cruise ship once before.

In addition, all international cruise passengers (400 respondents; 100 percent) did not spend a night during their visit. Instead, they spent a day in the Laemchabang Port of Call by participating in a tour program. The data indicated that the most popular tour program was Hidden Jewels of Bangkok, with 77 passengers (19.20 percent) joining the program. The second most popular tour program was Grand Palace & Venice of the East, with 76 passengers (19.00 percent). The third most popular your program was Bangkok on Your Own, with 60 passengers (15.00 percent). There were 48 passengers (12.00 percent) who joined the Sanctuary of Truth Tour Program, 26 passengers (6.50 percent) who booked a tour program at Nong Nooch Village, and 22 passengers (5.50 percent) who spent their day at Pattaya Elephant Village respectively.



Furthermore, most international cruise passengers (258 respondents; 64.50 percent) were very satisfied with their time at Laemchabang Port of Call. There were 77 respondents (19.25 percent) who were extremely satisfied, 62 respondents (15.50 percent) were satisfied, 2 respondents (0.50 percent) were somewhat satisfied, and 1 respondent (0.25 percent) was unsatisfied with the time in the port of call. Also, the majority of international cruise passengers (355 respondents; 88.75 percent) purchased souvenirs during their visit, and 45 passengers (11.25 percent) did not buy any souvenirs in the port of call. Finally, the majority of them (245 respondents; 61.20 percent) planned to visit the Laemchabang Port of Call again in the future whereas 155 respondents (38.80 percent) thought they did not want to return to the port of call.

Table 3 Purchased souvenirs by international cruise passengers

Souvenirs	Numbers
Clothing with Thai and / or local patterns	187
Handicrafts	165
Buddhist images	22
Ornaments	20
Postcards	12

The results in Table 3 display souvenir items purchased by respondents during their visit to the Laemchabang Port of Call. It can be seen that clothing with Thai and/or local patterns was the most popular souvenirs, with 187 purchased items. The second most popular souvenir was handcraft, with 165 purchased items. Respondents bought 22 Buddhist images, 20 ornaments, and 12 postcards respectively.

When considering the demographic data – that international cruise passengers were almost equal in gender and between 51 and 60 years of age – with the data from traveling factors which indicated that the majority of international cruise passengers traveled as a couple, such results confirm the findings from a related study by Thangthong (2011) that international cruise passengers tend to travel with their partner and/or spouse due to popular campaigns cruise line companies as *love boat* and *honeymoon cruise* which attracted a number of couples to spend their holidays as cruise travelers. Additionally, most cruise line companies provide accommodation for two, therefore, many holiday goers plan to travel on a cruise ship with a partner. That is, staying alone in a room can be more expensive since most rooms are designed for two and come with the price for two. Aside from traveling as a couple, the ages of most international cruise passengers were ranged from 21 and 50. During these ages, they tend to be employed and therefore have strong purchasing power and are willing to spend during their holidays (Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association, 2012). Further, most international cruise passengers earn over 90,000 USD per annum and had a bachelor degree. These findings go hand in hand with the results by Field et al (1985) who found that cruise passengers appeared to come from upper-middle to high social classes. Hence, it can be inferred that international cruise passengers are high-quality tourists.

Most international cruise passengers came to Thailand for the first time despite their being frequent cruise travelers. This evidence shows that Thailand is becoming a popular maritime tourist destination as much as tourism on the mainland. Such findings confirmed the prediction from Cruise Lines International Association 2016 that cruise tourism in Thailand would extensively be growing and more international cruise line companies would include Thailand as one of their favorite destinations.

The Laemchabang Port of Call serves as a bridge to bring tourists from the sea who normally prefer spending their holidays with nature to the tourist destinations on the land which often offer the opportunities to experience local cultures and traditions. That is probably why excursions to Bangkok's cultural heritages such as temples and palaces were popular among international cruise passengers. Although cruise passengers may have planned to spend most of their time enjoying facilities provided onboard the ship as well as the sun and the sea breeze while the cruise is at sea, it could perhaps be a nice change of scenery to switch from being offshore and being exposed to the universal or western cultures aboard the ship to experience new cultures and embrace different ways of living at exotic mainland destinations.



Since cruise line companies provide their passengers with accommodation and various facilities such as entertainment centers, five-star restaurants, and sports complexes, the cruise ship itself serves as the main destination for tourists. Cruise tourists are able to take part in excursions during the period the cruise ship makes a stopover a port of call. Thus, these cruise passengers are considered excursionists while they are on land. Since many ports of call facilitate them with unusual yet exotic memorable experiences, these excursionists may wish to prolong their stay but are unable to do so according to the immigration regulations and traveling contracts with the cruise line company. Subsequently, they plan to return to such a port of call during their future overseas travels. The Laemchabang Port of Call may be considered as a repeated tourist destination for international cruise passengers due to their satisfaction with the variety of cultures ranging from cultural heritages in Bangkok to dazzling nightlife in Pattaya which the passengers can experience through the one-day tour program they attended. By contrast, excursions to Pattaya Elephant Village and Nong Nooch Village gained the lowest popularity among international cruise passengers. This could be because most of the cruise passengers were from North America where wild animals are treated in respectful and humane ways. Their perception toward wild animals could be that elephants, tigers, or bears should roam freely in the wild. If they are kept in an animal sanctuary, they should not be forced to perform tricks or shows merely to entertain visitors. As a consequence, international cruise passengers may not be satisfied with the activities provided by these two places. Such evidence supported the notion by Ross that satisfaction is one of the factors to determine traveling behaviors.

Apart from the individual background of international cruise passengers, the number of companions, the frequency of travel both to Bangkok and on a cruise ship, length of stay, tour program, and traveling satisfaction, souvenir-purchasing behavior can also affect the traveling behaviors of international cruise passengers. The data revealed that the majority of the cruise passengers made purchases of local products as souvenirs. That is, they enjoyed buying authentic products because of their value to bring back their memorable experience they encountered at certain places (Trinh et al, 2014; Sthapit & Bjoerk, 2017). Clothing with Thai patterns such as Thai alphabets and pictures of Thai boxing or elephants printed on a T-shirt as well as locally made handicrafts such as wood carving, painting, and Thai silk, and may be considered authentic for international cruise passengers and able to bring back good memories they have had at the Laemchabang Port of Call. Hence, they were the most popular purchased items among international cruise passengers.

5. Conclusion

The majority of international cruise passengers were seniors with strong financial and educational backgrounds. Additionally, they were almost equal in terms of gender and preferred traveling as couples. Most of them visited Thailand for the first time although they were frequent cruise passengers. They were very satisfied with the provided tour programs and a myriad of authentic souvenirs, making Thailand's Laemchabang Port of Call one of their repeated destinations in the future.

Thus, this study of *Traveling Behaviors of International Cruise Passengers in Thailand* may yield benefits in three main layers.

1. The Thai authorities may use the results from this study as evidence in considering the national tourism development strategies for fostering cruise tourism and ports of call which include infrastructures, management systems, and the locals' understanding of international cultures to serve the needs of international cruise passengers.

2. The Thai private sectors may use the findings from this study as a guideline to create a variety of interesting excursions which include diverse places and activities reflecting the Thai authenticity to serve the increasing demands of international cruise passengers.

3. This study has paved the way to explore the limited study concerning cruise tourism in Thailand's port of call, therefore, future studies in the similar fields – such as the comparative study of traveling behavior of international cruise passengers in different ports of call in Thailand, the study of income distribution among the locals in the port of calls, and the study of factors determining the selection of ports of call among international cruise companies, as should be conducted to fill in the literature gap



regarding cruise tourism in Thailand. Also, the results of this study can be used as a material for the teaching and learning of tourism studies.

6. References

- Cochran, W. G. (1963). *Sampling techniques*, 2nd Ed., New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.
- Cruise Lines International Association. (2016). CLIA Cruise market overview statistical cruise industry data through 2016. Retrieved October 11, 2018 from <https://cruising.org/-/media/research-updates/research/market-reports/2016-year-in-review.pdf>
- Field, D. R., Clark, R. N., & Koth, B. A. (1985). Cruise Ship Travel in Alaska: A Profile of Passengers. *Journal of Travel Research*, 24(1): 2-8.
- Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association. (2012). Cruise Industry Overview- State of the Cruise Industry. Retrieved October 11, 2018 from <https://www.f-cca.com/downloads/2012-Cruise-Industry-Overview-Statistics.pdf>
- Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2017). Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan 2017-2021 (online). Retrieved April 16, 2018 from https://www.nesdb.go.th/nesdb_en/ewt_w3c/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=4345.
- Sthapit, E., & Bjoerk, P. (2017). Relative constitution of souvenirs on memorability of a trip experience and revisit intention: A study of visitors to Rovaniemi, Finland. *Scandinavian journal of hospitality and tourism*, 1-26.
- Thangthong, N. (2011). Expenditure behaviors of cruise passengers in Thailand: A case study of Princess Cruise Line. A thesis for Master degree, Rangsit University.
- Trinh, T. T., Ryan, C., & Cave, J. (2014). Souvenirs sellers and perceptions of authenticity: The retailers of Hoi An, Vietnam. *Tourism Management*, 45, 275-283.
- Weaver, A. (2005). Spaces of containment and revenue capture: 'super-sized' Cruise ships as mobile tourism enclaves. *Tourism Geogra: Int. J. Tourism Space, Place Environ.* 7, 165-184.
- World Tourism Organization. (2014). *Long-term forecast: Tourism towards 2030*. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The United Nations.