

## ความคาดหวังของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติที่มีต่อร้านอาหารไทยในจังหวัดภูเก็ต

### International Tourists' Expectations Toward Dining Experience in Thai Restaurants in Phuket Province

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#### บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อศึกษาความคาดหวังของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติที่มีต่อร้านอาหารไทยในจังหวัดภูเก็ต ซึ่งในปัจจุบันพบว่าร้านอาหารไทยในจังหวัดภูเก็ตได้รับความนิยมมากในกลุ่มนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติมากขึ้น ประกอบกับกลุ่มลูกค้าที่เป็นนักท่องเที่ยวชาวต่างชาติมีความคาดหวังที่หลากหลายและแตกต่างกันมากขึ้น ทำให้ร้านอาหารไทยในจังหวัดภูเก็ตกลายเป็นธุรกิจที่มีการแข่งขันกันสูงมากขึ้น การเข้าใจถึงสิ่งที่นักท่องเที่ยวมีความคาดหวังก่อนเข้ารับบริการในร้านอาหาร จึงเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญที่จะทำให้ผู้ประกอบการสามารถตอบสนองความต้องการและความคาดหวังของนักท่องเที่ยวได้อีกทั้งผู้ประกอบการร้านอาหารยังสามารถใช้ผลลัพธ์ที่ได้เป็นกลยุทธ์เพื่อเพิ่มความนิยมและทำให้กลุ่มลูกค้ากลับมาใช้บริการอีกครั้ง ผู้วิจัยได้ทำการเก็บข้อมูลโดยใช้แบบสอบถามจากกลุ่มตัวอย่างจำนวน 440 ตัวอย่าง ผลที่ได้รับจากการเก็บข้อมูลพบว่าผู้ตอบแบบสอบถามส่วนใหญ่มีความคาดหวังต่อร้านอาหารไทยในจังหวัดภูเก็ต ด้านคุณภาพอาหาร คุณภาพการบริการ และความคุ้มค่าของเงินในระดับที่สูง

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the expectations of international tourists towards dining experiences at Thai restaurants in Phuket Province. Currently, Thai restaurant industry in Phuket is continuing to grow as they are widely popular among international tourists. Besides, international tourists had different expectations towards Thai cuisines and restaurants. As a result, Thai restaurant industry in Phuket became highly competitive. Understanding their expectations towards dining experiences was very important factors for the restaurant owners and operators to reach the expectations of the clients. Moreover, the results can be applied as a guideline to gain competitive advantages in today's market. This can lead to customer retention and customer loyalty

and can gain a strong competitive position in today's business. The questionnaires were distributed in order to collect the data from 440 international tourists. The data were analyzed through frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviation (S.D.). The results showed that the majority of respondents' expectations towards the dimensions of food quality, service quality, and value-for-money were at a "high" level.

*Keywords: Customer expectations, Thai restaurants, international tourists, Phuket*

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### 1. Introduction

Nowadays, Thai food has become very popular and more recognized as a great cuisine. Furthermore, Thai food industry has achieved high international quality standards.

Among Southern region of Thailand, Phuket is an international tourist destination that can be developed to be a world-class destination (TAT, 2010). According to Phuket Provincial Administration Organization (2010), within a year there are many new restaurants are registered for operating in Phuket. Consequently, it can bring a lot of income for both Phuket and as well as the country.

Besides, the restaurant industry seems to grow continuously. Customers in different countries from around the world have different perceptions and expectations toward Thai cuisines and Thai restaurants (Qin, 2010). As well as, customers have more restaurant choices than ever before. Furthermore, customers seek for quality, value, comfortable ambience, pleasant memories, and desirable environment away from the pressures of daily life. (Pedraja, 2001; Markovic, 2010).

Hence, restaurant owners and operators should have a deeper understanding of what customers expect toward food, service, and value-for-money

(Sukala kamala, 2004; Nadiri & Hussain, 2005). The results can be applied as a guide for restaurant owners and operators to deliver the right offering to their customers, as this can lead to customer retention and loyalty and can gain a strong competitive position in today's competitive market

Lastly, the researcher found that recent studies concerning customer expectations in restaurant industry in Phuket province have remained limited. Based on this background, the researcher believed that the results of this study would be very useful for the restaurant owners and operators in Phuket Province.

### 2. Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore the level of expectations of what international tourists expect toward dining experience in Thai restaurants in Phuket.

### 3. Materials and Method

This study is considered as exploratory-descriptive in nature. Quantitative research approach had been applied to collect data with survey technique (Choi & Chu, 2001).

This research based on the concept of customer expectations toward dining experience,

which are food quality, service quality, and value-for-money. The level of expectations was assessed using a seven-point Likert-types scale, “very low expected” as 1 and “very high expected” as 7.

The target respondents of this study are international tourists who had dining experience in Thai restaurants in Phuket. A convenient sampling method was used to collect data. Data analysis based on 440 valid questionnaires.

Thai 8 restaurants were selected to represent the majority of Thai restaurants in Phuket. These restaurants have Thai food as the majority and popular among international tourists, according to many websites (gothailand.com, 2010; phuket.net, 2010; phuketindex.com, 2010; phuketvogue.com, 2010).

The questionnaires had been distributed during July to August 2011. Data had been entered and analyzed by using SPSS program. Basic descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviations and frequency distribution were used as the tools for this research.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The results of descriptive analyses obtained are presented and discussed below. Table 1-10 shows the results of respondents' expectations toward dining experience in Thai restaurants in Phuket.

**Table 1** Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the level of customer expectations toward presentation of food quality

Items	Mean	S.D.	Level of Expectation
Attractive decorations on plates	4.83	1.154	High
Fresh garnishes	4.65	1.145	High
Edible garnishes	4.31	1.006	Neutral
Attractive colors of the garnishes	4.48	1.054	High
Attractive and appropriate arrangements of the garnishes	4.45	1.013	High
Appropriate size and shape of the garnishes	4.36	.986	Neutral
Total	4.51	.990	High

Table 1 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward presentation of food quality is at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 4.51$ ). The first three items with highest expectations toward presentation were regarding attractive decorations on plates ( $\bar{x} = 4.83$ ), fresh garnishes ( $\bar{x} = 4.56$ ) and attractive colors of garnishes ( $\bar{x} = 4.48$ ). It indicates that among the items of presentation, attractive decoration on plates is significant related to International tourists' expectation in Thai restaurants.

**Table 2** Mean, Standard Deviation and the level of customer expectations toward sensory characteristic of food quality

Items	Mean	S.D.	Level of Expectation
Attractive colors of the food	5.14	.863	High
Pleasant smell of the food	5.40	.949	Somewhat High
Good taste of the food	5.59	.914	Somewhat High
Appropriate texture of the food	4.96	1.038	High
Right food temperature	5.01	.992	High
Clean food	5.50	1.167	Somewhat High
Well-cooked food	5.37	.999	Somewhat High
Fresh ingredients	5.56	1.110	Somewhat High
Appropriate portion size of the food	5.14	1.041	High
Total	5.30	.887	High

Table 2 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward *sensory characteristic of food quality* is at a somewhat high level ( $\bar{x} = 5.30$ ). The first three items that have a somewhat high level toward *sensory characteristic* are good taste of the food ( $\bar{x} = 5.59$ ), fresh ingredients ( $\bar{x} = 5.56$ ) and clean food ( $\bar{x} = 5.50$ ). From the findings, among the items of sensory characteristics, good taste of food was shown to have the strong impact on the expectations of International tourists.

**Table 3** Mean,  $\bar{x}$  Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the level of customer expectations toward variety of food of food quality

Items	Mean	S.D.	Level of Expectation
A variety of food items / food categories on the menu	5.27	1.018	Somewhat High
A various choices of raw ingredients used for the specific types of food	5.06	1.015	High
A various cooking methods used for the specific types of food	4.92	.876	High
A various types of condiments	4.85	.904	High
Total	5.03	.909	High

Table 3 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward variety of food of food quality is at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 5.03$ ). The first three items that have a high level toward variety of food is a variety of food items / food categories on the menu. It implies that variety of food items/ food categories on the menu is the item that most of respondents expect highly among the items of variety of food.

Briefly, the overall mean score for the food quality expectation items was 5.30. This score indicates rather high expectations of respondents regarding the sensory characteristics, followed by variety of food and presentation. The results reveal the similarity to the study conducted by Kivela et al., (1999), which proposed that taste of food is considered as the important factors that influence customer expectations and satisfaction. Moreover, the findings

were consistent with Lui and Jang (2009), which reported that food taste appear to be the key attributes for restaurants' success.

**Table 4** Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the level of customer expectations toward tangibles of service quality

Items	Mean	S.D.	Level of Expectation
Clean dining area	5.17	.966	High
Good queue management	4.62	1.002	High
Easy to move around in dining area	4.90	1.029	High
Appropriate interior décor	5.21	.912	High
Appropriate lights around dining area	5.17	.991	High
Comfortable and pleasant temperature	5.20	1.007	High
Pleasant odour or scent	5.20	.989	High
Pleasant music	5.12	1.042	High
Comfortable seat	5.29	.977	Somewhat High
Clean tableware	5.16	1.030	High
Clear signs and symbols	4.87	.914	High
Clean and tidy restrooms	4.90	.917	High
Total	5.07	.869	High

Table 4 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward tangibles of service quality is at a somewhat high level ( $\bar{x} = 5.07$ ). The item that has a

somewhat high level toward tangibles is comfortable seat ( $\bar{x} = 5.29$ ). The first three items that have a high level are appropriate interior décor ( $\bar{x} = 5.21$ ), comfortable and pleasant temperature, and pleasant odour or scent ( $\bar{x} = 5.20$ ). From the results, it means appropriate interior décor is the item that the majority of international tourists have the highest expectation among the items of tangibles.

**Table 5** Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the level of customer expectations toward reliability of service quality

Items	Mean	S.D.	Level of Expectation
Food served in the appropriate time	5.29	.708	Somewhat High
Food correctly served as ordered	5.30	.714	Somewhat High
Food correctly served as described on menu	5.30	.716	Somewhat High
Accurate bills and changes	5.51	.772	Somewhat High
Total	5.35	.697	Somewhat High

Table 5 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward reliability of service quality is at a somewhat high level ( $\bar{x} = 5.35$ ). The item that has a somewhat high level toward sensory characteristic is accurate bills and changes ( $\bar{x} = 5.51$ ). The results reveal that accurate bills and changes is the item that most International tourists expect the most among the items of reliability.

**Table 6** Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the level of customer expectations toward responsiveness of service quality

Items	Mean	S.D	Level of Expectation
Staff greet promptly on arrival	5.08	.802	High
Staff are always available upon requests	5.10	.845	High
Staff keep eyes searching on customers	5.09	.867	High
Staff check back after serving	5.17	.793	High
Total	5.11	.742	High

Table 6 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward responsiveness of service quality is at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 5.11$ ). The items that have a high level toward responsiveness are staff check back after serving ( $\bar{x} = 5.17$ ), and staff are always available upon requests ( $\bar{x} = 5.10$ ) respectively. It can explain that International tourists have the highest expectation on check back after serving

**Table 7** Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the level of customer expectations toward assurance of service quality

Items	Mean	S.D	Level of Expectation
Attentive staff	5.41	.873	Somewhat High
Friendly staff	5.53	.851	Somewhat High
Polite and courteous staff	5.59	.921	Somewhat High
Well dressed staff	5.11	.952	High

Staff maintain eye contact and directly to customers	5.15	.948	High speak
The menu items and restaurants knowledge of staff	5.21	.872	High
Staff recommend special dishes or promotions	5.14	.906	High
Staff repeat the ordered food taking order clearly	5.00	.927	High while
Show description or picture of each item on menu clearly	5.14	.813	Somewhat High
Show price of each item menu clearly	5.09	.806	High on
Feeling safe for financial transactions	5.47	.781	Somewhat High
Total	5.26	.732	Somewhat High

Table 7 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward assurance of service quality is at a somewhat high level ( $\bar{x} = 5.26$ ). The items that have a somewhat high level toward assurance are polite and courteous staff ( $\bar{x} = 5.59$ ), friendly staff, and show description or picture of each item on menu clearly ( $\bar{x} = 5.14$ ) respectively. In short, polite and courteous staff is the item that the majority of international tourists expect at the high level.

**Table 8** Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the level of customer expectations toward empathy of service quality

Items	Mean	S.D	Level of Expectation
Good communication skills of staff	5.12	.878	High
Staff understand and fulfill your specific needs	5.29	.743	High
Other foreign languages are available on menu	5.09	.838	High
Convenient operating hours	5.32	.831	Somewhat High
Total	5.21	.701	High

Table 8 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward empathy of service quality is at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 5.21$ ). However, the item that has a somewhat high level toward empathy is convenient operating hours ( $\bar{x} = 5.32$ ), Staff understand and fulfill your specific needs ( $\bar{x} = 5.29$ ) and good communication skills of staff ( $\bar{x} = 5.12$ ) respectively. The results explain that convenient operating hours is the item that the majority of international tourists have the highest expectation among the items of empathy.

To summarize, among the dimensions of service quality, most of respondents have the highest expectation toward reliability with the overall mean scores at 5.35, followed by assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and tangibles respectively. The results contradicted the study of Andaleeb and Conway (2006), which stated that responsiveness was the most significant dimension to customer expectations and satisfaction. However, findings of Lui and Jang (2009),

Steven et al. (1995), and Zopiatis and Pribic (2007) reported that the highest expectations scores among service dimensions were given to reliability.

**Table 9** Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the level of customer expectations toward value-for-money of food dimension

Items	Mean	S.D.	Level of Expectation
The overall food presentation	5.16	.756	High
The overall sensory of the food	5.35	.824	Somewhat High
Quality of ingredients	5.14	.770	High
Portion size of food	5.42	.731	Somewhat High
Total	5.27	.685	Somewhat High

Table 9 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward value-for-money of food dimension is at a somewhat high level ( $\bar{x} = 5.27$ ). The items that have a somewhat high level toward value-for-money are portion size of food ( $\bar{x} = 5.42$ ) and the overall sensory of the food ( $\bar{x} = 5.35$ ) respectively. It implies that portion size of food is the item that the most of international tourists have the highest expectation among the items of value-for-money about the dimensions of food.

**Table 10** Mean, Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the level of customer expectations toward value-for-money of service dimension

Items	Mean	S.D.	Level of Expectation
Ambient/atmosphere/decorations of the restaurant	5.53	.661	Somewhat High
Service performance of staff	5.48	.665	Somewhat High
Facilities provided	5.02	.730	High
Quality of tableware	5.03	.751	High
Total	5.26	.628	Somewhat High

Table 10 shows the level of expectations of the respondents toward value-for-money of service dimension is at a somewhat high level ( $\bar{x} = 5.27$ ). The items that have a somewhat high level toward value-for-money of service dimension are ambient/atmosphere/decorations of the restaurant ( $\bar{x} = 5.53$ ), and service performance of staff ( $\bar{x} = 5.48$ ) respectively.

From the results, among the items of value-for-money about the dimensions service, ambient/atmosphere/decorations of restaurant is the item that the majority of respondents have the highest expectation. In short, the majority of international tourists expected the value-for-money about food with the higher overall mean scores at 5.53 which is more than service related ( $\bar{x} = 5.48$ ). The results contradicted with the previous study of Lee and Ulgado (1997), which concluded that service

performance affect customer expectations and satisfaction.

Based on the results reported in this study, consequently, Thai restaurant owners and operators could interpret these results as a guide that they may analyze which factors that should be concerned the most in order to maintain the quality of the restaurants. They can apply the results of this study as the information and direction to address the weaknesses and strengths of their restaurants. Then, they can improve business strategies in order to exceed customer expectations and requirements as well as ensure their potential for competitive advantage. Furthermore, for anyone who interest in opening a new restaurant, they can also apply the outcomes of this study as a guide direction for operating new restaurant in the future.

## 5. Conclusion

This research mainly aims to study the expectation of International tourists toward dining experience in Thai restaurants in Phuket province. The concept of customer expectations in this study related to three dimensions (Food quality, service quality, and value-for-money), which are the significant factors to restaurant sector.

The questionnaires had been distributed to the selected 8 restaurants. Data had been entered and analyzed by using SPSS program. Cronbach's alpha will be used to test reliability and consistency. Basic descriptive statistics, which are mean, and S.D. and frequency distribution were used as the tools for this research. To summarize, first, for the food quality



dimension, the highest expectation scores were given to the sensory characteristics, followed by variety of food and presentation. Second, for the service quality, the highest expectation was given to reliability, followed by assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and tangibles respectively. Lastly, for the dimensions of value-for-money, the majority of international tourists expected the value-for-money about food and higher than service.

It is recommended that restaurant owners or operators should address the problem areas of their own restaurants by applying the results of this study as a guide. To ensure customer satisfaction toward the food quality, it is suggested to pay attention to the sensory characteristics of food, especially, taste of food, as it is considered to be the most expected among International tourists. Besides, the restaurants should develop variety of food items and attractively decoration on plates.

In terms of the dimensions of service quality, focusing on the reliability of the restaurants are recommended. Thus, Thai restaurants should put the best effort to deliver the promised service, accurately, for example, presenting accurate bills and changes, serving food correctly as ordered and described on the menu. Furthermore, friendly and polite staff can also please customer satisfaction.

For the dimensions of the value-for-money, the majority of International tourists seem to focus more on the value-for-money toward the dimensions of food than service. It is recommended that ensuring portion size of food is one way to satisfy customers with the value-for-money. However, restaurant owners

and operators should pay attention to the ambient, atmosphere, and decorations of restaurants as well. These items also significantly affect the expectation of International tourists.

To successfully achieve in reaching the expectations of different customers with different expectations toward dining experience, it should be noted that restaurants owners and operators should not ignore the restaurant dimensions that were assessed with the low scores level of expectations. It is suggested that restaurant owners and operators should maintain other dimensions at least to meet the minimum expectations. These items are just less important when compared to other items. It does not mean that these items are not at all important to customer expectations.

In addition, despite being reliable and valid, this study had some limitations. This study only focused on international tourists and also dealt with Thai restaurants in Phuket. It is suggested that the future researchers should try to engage customers in different types as well as different types of restaurants. Besides, to comprehensive insights of customer expectations toward dining experience in restaurants, quantitative research in the future should incorporate qualitative techniques in data collection process.

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