

The Characteristics and Motivations of Foreign Tourists Who Visit Luang Prabang Province, Lao PDR

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The World Travel and Tourism Organization (WTTC) trends indicate that the travel and tourism is the growing industry which generates 9% of global GDP and travel in the South East Asia leads the world in the expansion (WTTC, 2013). Culture tourism has also become the greatest growing segment of tourism (WTO, 2001). These trends stimulate Laos' position as a tourism destination as the country located in the region. The outstanding of country's natural resources, the uniqueness of cultural heritage and the government support make Laos won the World Best Tourist Destination in 2013 (Vientiane Time, 2013).

The tourism Industry is one of the most important and significant economic sectors in Lao PDR (Laos) because it provides huge sources of income to Lao economy. WTTC reported that visitor exports are a key component of the direct contribution of Travel and Tourism in Laos. It generated LAK 3,951 billion in 2013 and is expected to grow by 9.1% in 2014. WTTC also forecasted that tourism industry in Laos ranked the fourteenth in the Asia Pacific countries in the contribution to GDP. The direct contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP was LAK 3,893.8 billion (4.7% of GDP). It forecast to rise by 8.7% to LAK 4,230 billion in 2014 and is expected to grow by 5.8% to LAK 7,436.6 billion (4.4% of GDP) in 2024. Also, the total contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP was LAK 11,803.7 billion (14.2% of GDP) and is expected to grow by 8.7% to LAK 12,829.6 billion (14.3% of GDP) in 2014. It forecast to rise by 6.1% pa to LAK 23,301.8 billion by 2024 (13.9% of GDP).

MICT¹ further reported that the tourism sector contributed approximately 514 million US\$ to the Lao economy in 2012. This was a 26.43% increase over the previous year. The number of tourists who visited Laos has increased gradually since 2004. It reached 3,330,072 people in 2012, which was a 22.43% increase over the previous year. The share of Thai tourists was top, accounting for 58.18% of visitors (1,937,612 people), followed by Vietnamese at 21.18% (705,596 people) and Chinese at 10.47% (348,637 people).

Luang Prabang, the former capital city of Laos, used to be the center of cultural, architectural historical and political activities. The city is not only one of famous tourist destination in Laos, but also in the Mekong Sub-region. The status of the World Heritage city influenced international tourists to select the town as their vacation destination (Sirisack, 2014). Since the city has declared as the World Heritage in 1995 by UNESCO, making the city further fascinating destination for tourists. The number of tourist arrival to Luang Prabang increased consistently from 1997 to 2009.² A continued annual increase in the number of international tourists illustrates that Luang Prabang is an attractive destination. The city's popularity and attractiveness has earned the city awarded by Wanderlust, a famous travel Magazine in United Kingdom as the Top City for tourism in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively.³

According to a Statistical Report on Tourism, 342,611 international tourists visited Luang Prabang in 2013 (See figure 1.1). Among international tourists Thai tourists were top, accounting for (41,725) visitors, followed by people from the U.K (29,051), France (27,766), the U.S (26,243), and Germany (26,299). Thus, Thailand, the U.K France, the U.S, and Germany are the leading generators of international tourism and these tourists are the major spender in Luang Prabang.

There are some studies that related to tourism in Luang Prabang. Some researchers have been conducted some researches focused on human resources or labor and tourism development in Luang Prabang. However, the number of empirical studies about the characteristics and motivations of foreign tourists who visit Luang Prabang is still limited. Thus, there are many unknown points due to a lack of studies on the motivation and satisfaction of foreign tourists travelling to Luang Prabang as well as to Laos.

Therefore, this study fills in the gap regarding empirical data on motivations and satisfaction of foreign tourists who visit Luang Prabang, including recommendations for improvement as an essential theme. Hence, to understand why foreign tourists travel to Luang Prabang, what factors motivates their visitation and how they think about Luang Prabang are of significant interest to the Lao government, relevant authorities and local community to maintain and increase the tourists from these lucrative markets.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

There are two major objectives of this study: The first is to understand and explore the demographic characteristics and some behaviors of foreign tourists. The second is to study the motivations of foreign tourists who visited Luang Prabang.

The results of the study will be beneficial to tourism managers, authorities of Laos and local communities. It reveals what foreign tourists think about Luang Prabang and, aides in understanding the strong and weak points of Luang Prabang as a tourist destination. Also, it will improve knowledge about how to protect and develop tourism in Luang Prabang so it can become a more attractive destination and maintain and attract more tourists from foreign countries.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Motivations

A topic motivation is interested for academics and practitioners in examining tourist's motivation (Brent, Aaron & Pam, 2010). To market tourism service and destination well, marketer must understand the motivating factors that leads to travel decisions and consumption behaviors (Thaothampitak & Weerakit, 2012). Understanding how and why people travel, decide and select a certain destination and what they expect from their destination to fulfill their actual requirement are also very critical topic among tourist researchers (Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

¹ Ministry of information, Culture and Tourism, Tourism Development Department, Tourism Research Division. (2013). 2012 Statistical Report on Tourism in Laos, Vientiane, P.5.

² However, the number of visitors decreased slightly in 2003 and 2010.

³ Wanderlust Travel Magazine, <http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/magazine>. 29 June, 2013 accessed.

According to Fridgen (1996) and Mounthiho (2000) motivation is a force occurring inside an individual to act in a certain way to receive acquired satisfaction or series of needs that stimulates him or her to do something to fulfill their actual needs and wants.

Also, the popular motivation theories in the U.S. tourism management literature are expectancy theory and Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Chulwon, 2000). To specify, Parrinello (1993) and Gnoth (1997) studied tourism motivation in terms of expectation and anticipation, which sees people as pulled by the expectancy of outcomes, mostly consciously. The expectancy theory of motivation has been refined and expanded by Deci (1975) and Deci and Ryan (1987). According to Deci and Ryan (1987) motivation is formed by autonomous initiation or self-determination of behavior and is expected to lead to personally satisfying experiences.

Many tourism researchers base their theoretical background on Maslow's five-stage hierarchy of needs theory. Maslow's theory offers one systematic approach to motivational structure (SooCheong, 2002). Based on Maslow's theory, Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) analyzed nearly 400 travel episodes, employing a five-stage classification, and argued for a different needs system that may fit tourists more appropriately. They suggest that there exists a motivational career in travel, with more experienced travelers emphasizing higher needs than less experienced travelers.

Dann (1981) proposed two forces that motivate people to travel. He indicated that people are motivated to travel because they have been influenced by internal motives (e.g. motivation, personal interest) and external stimulation (e.g. information sources, advertising) that are called push and pull factors. Dann also noted push factors and pull factors in a travel decision. The push factors are internal to individuals and install a desire for people to want to travel. The pull factors are external to individuals and affect where, when, and how people travel, given the initial desire to travel. Thus, people travel because they are pushed by their internal force and pulled by external forces such as destination attributes. It is usually accepted that push factors are present before pull factors can be effective.

McIntosh and Goeldner (1984) summarize previous studies on travel motivation, separating them into four categories: (1) physical motivators, including those related to physical rest, participation in sports, need for recreation at a beach, and those motivations directly connected with a person's bodily health; (2) cultural motivators concerning the desire to gain knowledge about other countries in term of cultural activities; (3) interpersonal motivators, including a desire to meet new people, visit friends or relatives, get away from routine conventions of life or to make new friendships; and (4) status and prestige motivators, related to self-esteem and personal development.

SooCheong (2002) suggests that although a complex of motives was uncovered in previous research, the push and pull typology is an appropriate approach to study travel motivation. SooCheong (2002) used a push and pull approach to identify key motivational factors that have significant effects on destination choice. "Knowledge seeking" and "cleanliness & safety" were perceived as the most important push and pull factors respectively. The results of logistic regression analyses showed that the British tend to visit the U.S. for "fun & excitement" and "outdoor activities", Oceania for "family & friend togetherness", and Asia to seek a "novel experience".

Witchu and Kullada (2011) used a "push and pull" approach to identify the characteristics of Thai Outbound Tourists and to investigate the motivation and behavior of Thai Outbound Tourists visiting Europe. The study found and recommended that (1) Thai tourists are very aware of and influenced by the desire to experience European landscapes; and (2) Thai tourists demand experiences related to exploring new things. This study suggests that, in order to increase efficiency in marketing European destinations for Thai tourists, marketing teams should focus on the beauty of the landscape.

Dunn and Iso-Ahola (1991) studied the motivation and satisfaction dimensions of sightseeing tourists. For this purpose, 225 people were tested for motives before the day's tour and for their satisfaction after it. The results indicated a considerable similarity between motivation and satisfaction dimensions, with "knowledge seeking", "social interaction", and "escape" emerging as important motives and satisfactions. This similarity led to a very high overall satisfaction with the tour. A group of tourists who came together by chance scored significantly higher on the knowledge-seeking motive and on five satisfaction dimensions than did the regular tour group and the convention group.

Kao (2008) studied the motivations of Taiwanese visitors to Australia and investigated the satisfaction they received from their visit. The study used a push and pull approach to find 17 push motivations and 18 pull motivations for travel. 'Travelling around the world' was found to be the most important push factor, while 'sunshine and scenery' was regarded as the most important pull factor.

2.2 Luang Prabang Tourism

There are several researchers conducted a research related to tourism in Luang Prabang. These included Xayavong (2013) studied the characteristics, motivations and satisfaction of Thai tourists who visit Luang Prabang province. The objectives of the study were: (1) to understand and explore the demographic characteristics and traveling behaviors of Thai tourists; (2) to study the motivations of Thai Tourists who visited Luang Prabang; and (3) to investigate the Thai tourists' satisfaction towards the destination. This study uses a 'push and pull' approach to find 23 push motivation factors and 22 pull motivation factors for travel. The study found that Thai tourists strongly agreed that 'Doing and seeing destinations' unique things' and 'Going places I have never visited', which are so-called "knowledge seeking" factors, were the most important push factors causing them to visit Luang Prabang. On the other hand, 'Historical, archeological buildings and places' was the most important factor to motivate Thai tourists to visit Luang Prabang, followed by 'Friendliness, politeness and hospitality of local people'.

A year later, Sirisack (2014) studies the consumer decision making for the selection of tourist destination. The study applied a qualitative approach to collect data from two key informants, foreign visitors and government officials. The study found that the image of Luang Prabang resulting from its status as a World Heritage City, traditional culture, hospitality and the safe place for travelling were all major motivated foreign tourist to visit the town.

UNESCO (2004) examined the impact of tourism on the culture and environment of Luang Prabang and provided guidelines for identifying and measuring the types of impacts (both positive and negative) that tourism has on the town's heritage.

In addition, UNESCO suggested how to derive an overall strategy that manages tourism in Luang Prabang in such a manner that tourism becomes a positive force for heritage conservation as well as contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of the town's inhabitants. Phokham et al (2008) attempted to identify how to quantify service quality by using the SERVQUAL gap model ($Q = P - E$) and also to compare service delivery of major hotels and guesthouses in Luang Prabang province. Vilayphone (2010) used a qualitative approach to investigate the current state of tourism and tourism development in Luang Prabang. She found that the facilities and the quality of services provided to tourists does not meet international standards and are still limited due to a lack of human resources, specifically people who have knowledge and capacity working in the tourism sector. Thus, she suggests that it is necessary to have qualified staff to manage businesses related to tourism.

Southiseng and Walsh (2011) affirmed that significant increases in tourists' arrivals to Luang Prabang have provided opportunities to the residents of Luang Prabang to earn income and increase their knowledge and levels of experience. However, the study argues that substantial gains were not sustainable due to the lack of qualified labor to supply the booming sectors. To propose guidelines for sustainable tourism development in cultural heritage site, Luang Prabang, Chansone (2009) studied the existing management system in this world cultural heritage site and assessed the community participation in tourism development. The study found that the involvement of local residents in tourism development in terms of participation in planning, activities, decision making and benefits were at the 'fair level', which indicated that the community participation and partnership among all stakeholders in this world heritage site was not sufficient.

Thongmala (2010) studied the significant factors influencing international tourists' decision-making to visit Town of Luang Prabang and the role of the town's World Heritage status on international tourists' decision to visit Luang Prabang. Semone (2012) noted that tourism in Laos is a relatively new phenomenon that commenced in earnest in the late 1990s. A decade later, the country's tourism portfolio is dominated by region-specific visitors originating from neighboring China, Thailand and Vietnam who generally tend to come in large numbers, are relatively low spenders and register a short average length of stay.

As mentioned earlier, although, there were several studies related to tourism in Luang Prabang, most of these previous studies focused on human resources or labor and the state of tourism management in Luang Prabang.

However, the number of empirical studies about the characteristics and motivations of foreign tourists who visit Luang Prabang is still needed to fill in of this hole in empirical data. This study will aid to update information the current state of tourism in Luang Prabang.

3. Explanation of Data and Research Methodology

This study uses a push and pull approach to find 23 push motivation factors (items) and 22 pull motivation factors (items) for travel. The target population of this study was foreign tourists who traveled to Luang Prabang province. The questionnaires were translated into the Thai Language and Japanese from English to accommodate the potential needs of interviewees. The survey was conducted in March 2013. A convenience sample was applied to identify respondents. A pilot test with 20 tourists was conducted first. Data was collected from 414 foreign tourists who had already stayed more than one day in Luang Prabang.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections: Tourist demographics, behaviors, tourist motivations, and tourist satisfaction. A Linkert scale was applied as an analysis tool to explain data from the questionnaires. Specifically, a five point Linkert-type scale was used to analyze tourist motivations (push and pull factors).

Each motivation push and pull factor were measure using a five-point scale, with 1 indicating least significant, 2 little significance, 3 moderate significance, 4 much significance, and 5 most significant. To interpret the data, class intervals were set. This was accomplished by first calculating class width. Class width was calculated by dividing the range (maximum level minus minimum level) by the number of classes.

$$\text{Class width} = \frac{\text{Maximum}-\text{Minimum}}{\text{Number of Classes}} = \frac{5-1}{5} = 0.80$$

According to these criteria, the class intervals for the factors were set as follows:

- Average points 1.00 – 1.80 = least significant
- Average points 1.81 – 2.60 = little significance
- Average points 2.61 – 3.40 = moderate significance
- Average points 3.41 – 4.20 = much significance
- Average points 4.21 – 5.00 = most significant

Additionally, a multiple linear regression analysis is applied. The results of the regression analysis between each motivation factor and overall satisfaction to explain which factors represent statistically significant effects on the overall satisfaction of foreign tourists.

4. Empirical Results

4.1 Demographic Characteristics and Behaviors of Respondents

The demographic profiles (see Table 1) show 46.7% of respondents were males (N=193) and 53.3% were females. In terms of age, the largest group of travelers consisted of tourists between 20 and 30 years of age (36.23%), followed by the group of between 31 and 40 years of age (24.63%), the group of between 41 and 50 years of age (17.39%), between 51 and 60 years of age (10.14%) and more than 60 years of age (7.97%). The marital status of the respondents was single (57.90%), followed by married (35.26%) and other 6.73%. The education level of the participants were undergraduate (44.79%), graduate (Master's degree/ PhD) (26.03%), high school (15.32%) and vocational school (7.78%). Most respondents confirmed that they had a high educational background, with 70.79% of them completing at least a college degree. The respondents came from various countries around the world. However, 35.55% of the respondents came from Thailand, which is close to Laos as well as to Luang Prabang province, followed by Germany (11.11%), France (8.82%), the U.K. (7.72%), Japan (7.79%), the U.S. (7.00%) and Australia (4.62%). Thus, these countries were the leading generators of international tourism and their tourists were the major spenders in Luang Prabang. Most respondents were first time visitors to Luang Prabang (84.50%) and 15.5% of respondents were repeaters who have visited Luang Prabang more than one time.

In term of occupation, there were employees (37.71%), entrepreneurs or business men (14.84%), students (13.86%), retired (7.54%) and others (housewife, unemployed, etc.). The monthly income of respondents were 'Less than 417 US\$ (5,000 US\$/year)' (21.53%), 'between 417-1,250 US\$ (5,000-15,000US\$/year)' (29.45%), 'between 1,251-2,917 US\$(15,001-35,000 US\$/year)' (23.26%) and 'more than 2,917 US\$ (35,000US\$)' (25.74%). Thus, the majority of foreign tourists were people who earn more than 5,000 US\$ a year (78.47%).

The length of stay of respondents were one day (1.45 %), two days (11.62%), three days (31.23%), four days (23.97%), five days (13.07%), six days (5.08%), seven days (6.53%) and more than one week (7.02%). Thus, the majority of respondents stayed in Luang Prabang between three and four days (55.2%). Most of them were short haul tourists from neighboring country as Thailand. Most respondents confirmed that their objective of visiting Luang Prabang was a 'Vacation holiday' (82.25%). The respondents who traveled alone were 21.50%; most the respondents traveled with others, including with an organized groups (13.04%), with friends (24.64%), as a couple (27.05%), or with family members (10.39%). The respondents confirmed that they found information about Luang Prabang through various sources such as magazines (11.35%), newspapers (3.62%), the website of Lao National Tourism Administration (10.39%), guidebooks (43.24%), tourism fairs (7.25%), word of mouth (20.05%), T.V (16.91%), friends or relatives (30.92%), social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) (5.31%) and the Internet (60.87%). Thus, the majority of foreign tourists found information about Luang Prabang through the internet (60.87%). However, the percentage of those using the website of Lao National Tourism Administration was low (10.39%). Also, the respondents spent approximately 34.9 US\$ and 30.69 US\$ per day for accommodations and for food & drink, respectively.

4.2 The Ranking of Push and Pull Factors

As shown in Table 2, 'Going places I have never visited' was the most important among all push factors (Mean=4.56), followed by 'Doing and seeing destinations' unique things' (4.44), 'Opportunity to increase one's knowledge' (4.40), 'Experiencing a new and different lifestyle' (4.32) and 'Desire to try something new' (4.32). The push factors that were indicated at the 'much important' level included, 'Meeting new and different people' (4.18), 'Trying new foods' (4.04), 'Unique or different aboriginal or indigenous people' (4.04), 'Experience a simpler lifestyle' (3.94), 'Visiting places I can talk about when I get home' (3.93), 'Escape from the routine/ordinary' (3.90), 'Having fun and being entertained' (3.56), 'Getting away from the demands of jobs' (3.55), 'Getting away from a busy job' (3.54), 'Just relaxing' (3.47), 'Meeting people with similar interests' (3.47) and 'Finding thrills and excitement' (3.43). Also, the 'Going to a place my friends have not been' (3.31), 'Being together as friends' (3.20) and 'Being together as a family' (2.63) factors were of 'moderate significance' level. However, 'Doing nothing at all' (2.57), 'Indulging in luxury' (2.35) and 'Visiting friends and relatives' (2.33) were at the 'little significance' level on push motivation factors.

On the other hand, among the pull factors, the respondents felt that the 'Outstanding natural scenery and landscape' was the most important factor (4.40) to motivate them visit Luang Prabang (see Table 3). This was, followed by 'Friendliness, politeness and hospitality' (4.36), 'Historical, archeological buildings and places' (4.35), 'Interesting rural countryside' (4.34), 'Lao ethnic diversity' (4.23) and 'Nice weather' (4.21). These are strengths of Luang Prabang that need to maintain and can be used to drawing foreign to the city. The 'much significance' factors included 'Exotic atmosphere' (4.15), 'Visits to appreciate natural ecological sites' (4.12), 'Peaceful and personal safety' (4.06), 'Environment quality, air, water and soil' (3.72), 'Inexpensive Restaurants' (3.63), 'Availability of pre-trip and in-country tourist info' (3.61), 'Destination that provides value for holiday money' (3.61), 'Standard of hygiene and cleanliness' (3.54) and 'Public transportation such as airlines, etc.' (3.43). The following factors were indicated as 'moderate significance' level: 'Outdoor activities' (3.39), 'Local cuisine' (3.33), 'The best deal I could get' (3.32), 'Nightlife and entertainment' (2.98), 'Activities for the entire family' (2.87), 'Ease of driving on my own' (2.83) and 'Primitive outdoor camping' (2.80).

4.3 Results of the Regression Analysis between Motivation Factors and Overall Satisfaction

According to the results of the regression analysis between each push motivation factors and overall satisfaction (see Table 4), the 'Opportunity to increase one's knowledge' factor had the greatest positive impact on overall satisfaction among push factors, followed by 'Escape from the routine/ordinary'. This suggests that the overall satisfaction with the trip of foreign tourists will increase when groups of tourists are satisfied with these two factors. It further means that overall satisfaction will increase when tourists who are seeking the opportunity to increase knowledge and escape from the routine/ordinary are satisfied. However, 'Experiencing new and different lifestyle', 'Unique or different aboriginal or indigenous people', 'Meeting new and different people', 'Trying new foods', 'Experiencing a simpler lifestyle', 'Getting away from the demands of jobs', 'Getting away from a busy job', 'Going to a place I have never visited', 'Doing and seeing destinations' unique things', 'Desire to try something new', 'Visiting places I can talk about when I get home', 'Finding thrills and excitement', 'Having fun and being entertained', 'Going place my friends have not been', 'Just relaxing', 'Doing nothing at all',

'Indulging in luxury', 'Visiting friends and relatives', 'Being together as a family', 'Being together as friends' and 'Meeting people with similar interest' did not have any important impact on tourists' overall satisfaction.

On the other hand, the 'Friendliness, politeness and hospitality' factor had the greatest positive impact on the overall satisfaction among pull factors, followed by 'Inexpensive restaurants' and 'Visits to appreciate natural ecological sites (see Table 5). It can be suggested that tourist' overall satisfaction with their trip will be increased when tourists are satisfied with these factors. Especially, the 'Friendliness, politeness and hospitality' of local people is very important in satisfying and impressing foreign tourists as Luang Prabang People are known to be calm, sweet, hospitable, spiritual in nature and helpful (Sirisack, 2014). It indicates the importance of community participation in tourism development in a world cultural heritage site like Luang Prabang.

4.4 Discussion

Based on the results of this study, we found that, in the case of Luang Prabang province, most of the visiting tourists came from Thailand, Germany, France, the U.K, Japan, the U.S, and Australia. Thus, the foreign tourists came from various countries around the world. Indeed, many tourists that come to Luang Prabang are not just from neighboring countries with easy access to the town. This information updates the study by Semone (2012), which noted that "tourism in Laos is a relatively new phenomenon that commenced in earnest in the late 1990s. A decade later, the country's tourism portfolio is dominated by region-specific visitors originating from neighboring China, Thailand and Vietnam who generally tend to come in large numbers, are relatively low spenders and register a short average length of stay". However, this studied is similar to Xayavong (2013) in term of important items of push and pull factors motivated Thai Tourist to the town of Luang Prabang.

A major reason for Luang Prabang attracting so many tourists is that it is home to the most famous historic site in Laos, making it famous as a historical location with, archeological buildings and a unique townscape. Many historic temples and Lao-French buildings remain as relics of this historical background throughout Luang Prabang. In addition to visiting the World Heritage site of Laung Prabang, tourists can also visit the surrounding areas, which offer various attractions including caves, waterfalls, and villages. As well as being a World Heritage site, Luang Prabang is also famous for the scenic mountains that surround the town, as well as for its multi-ethnic population, comprised of many different ethnic groups.

Therefore, the results of our study found that, the 'Outstanding natural scenery and landscape', 'Historical, archeological buildings and places' and 'Interesting rural countryside' were the most important among all of the pull factors. Furthermore, the 'Friendliness, politeness and hospitality of local people' and 'Lao ethnic diversity' also were one of the most important factors among of all pull factors to motivate and satisfy foreign tourists to visit Luang Prabang. Especially, the 'Friendliness, politeness and hospitality of local people' factor indicates the importance of community participation in tourism development in a world cultural heritage site like Luang Prabang.

In this regard, this study confirmed the findings of previous research. Particularly, this study is consistent with the study by Chansone (2009), who suggested that "Sustainable tourism development should give greater priority to community participation in sustainable tourism development" and that "The local tourism sector should provide more in the area of education and training local residents that should focus on tourism knowledge, English skills for tourism, being a good host community to tourists, and provide more awareness and understanding of sustainable tourism development to the local community". Sirisack (2014) also suggested that to maintain the sustainability of the current World Heritage city of Luang Prabang, an effective tourist strategic management plan to protect the city should be created as tourist is a major source of income for the province and generate direct revenue to the local residents. This strategy included an allocating part of revenue to improve image of the city such as the city landscape, architectural heritage, fine tradition, the nature and the environment surrounding the city.

This study also found that the 'Outdoor activities', 'Local cuisine', 'The best deal I could get', 'Nightlife and entertainment', 'Activities for the entire family', 'Ease of driving on my own' and 'Primitive outdoor camping' were indicated at the 'moderate significance' level, which shows that they were not very important factors to pull foreign tourists to visit Luang Prabang. These factors are thus still weak points of Luang Prabang. Especially, night life activity is limited due to it is concerned that will bring the negative impact to the community. Therefore, tourism managers, relevant authorities and local communities should make a greater effort to create and promote various activities and local cuisine to motivate more foreign tourists.

If done successfully, tourists will stay longer and pay more, which will help the tourism sector in Luang Prabang develop constantly, increase employment and generate income.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusions

According to the results of the studies above, the following can be concluded: The majority of respondents came from Thailand, Germany, France, the U.K, Japan, the U.S, and Australia. Thus, these countries were the leading generators of international tourism and their tourists were the major spenders in Luang Prabang. Most respondents were first time visitors to Luang Prabang. However, more than 15% of respondents were repeaters who have visited Luang Prabang more than one time. Furthermore, most foreign tourists confirmed their objective of visiting Luang Prabang as being a ‘Vacation holiday’. They found information about Luang Prabang through various sources such as magazines, word of mouth, the internet etc. Particularly, the majority of the foreign tourists confirmed that they received information about Luang Prabang through the internet. However, the percentage of those using the Lao National Tourism Administration website was low.

Foreign tourists strongly agreed that ‘Going places I have never visited’ was the most important among all push factors to influence their decision to visit Luang Prabang. This was, followed by ‘Doing and seeing destinations’ unique things’, ‘Opportunity to increase one’s knowledge’, ‘Experiencing a new and different lifestyle’ and ‘Desire to try something new’. On the other hand, among the pull factors, respondents indicated that the ‘Outstanding natural scenery and landscape’ factor was the most important factor to motivate them visit Luang Prabang. This was, followed by ‘Friendliness, politeness and hospitality’, ‘Historical, archeological buildings and places’, ‘Interesting rural countryside’, ‘Lao ethnic diversity’ and ‘Nice weather’.

The results of the regression analysis between overall satisfaction and each push motivation factor show the ‘Opportunity to increase one’s knowledge’ factor had the greatest positive impact on overall satisfaction among push factors, followed by the ‘Escape from the routine/ordinary’. On the other hand, the ‘Friendliness, politeness and hospitality’ factor had the greatest positive impact on the overall satisfaction among pull factors.

Therefore, the friendliness, politeness and hospitality of local people are very important in satisfying and impressing foreign tourists. It can be interpreted that overall satisfaction with their trip will increased when tourists are satisfied with this factor.

Thus, the local communities should be a good host community to tourists, understand and participate in sustainable tourism plans and be aware of the policy making process of the relevant authorities. Also, the local communities should protect and preserve the uniqueness of Laos as well as that of local traditional activities and culture such as dresses, rituals, handicrafts, etc., as tools for attracting visitors and generating more income from tourism sector.

5.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, we provide the following suggestions and recommendations for Lao tourism managers, local communities and relevant authorities:

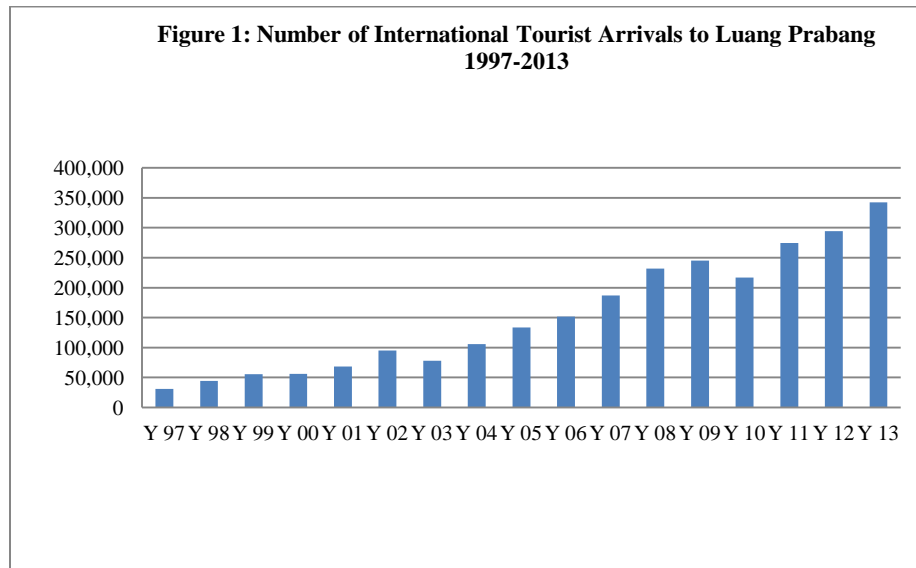
- (1) The growth rate of tourism in Luang Prabang will be maintained in the long haul markets (Australia, Germany, the U.K, France, the U.S, Canada, Italy and other European countries) from which large numbers of tourists have always been visiting Luang Prabang. The economic situation in some of these countries is in the process of recovery and their growth rates are at a constant level. Therefore, emphasis should be placed on conducting activities in short haul markets to raise the growth rate further, especially the East Asian markets (ASEAN countries, Japan, China, the Republic of Korea, Hong Kong and the Taiwan Province of China) due to the short distances from these countries to Laos and the convenience in travelling to Laos and its neighboring countries. In addition, some of these countries have a fairly high economic growth rate.
- (2) In order to increase efficiency in the marketing of the destination (Luang Prabang) to foreign tourists, the tourism authorities should focus on the beauty of the townscape and on the destinations’ uniqueness by preservation of the natural, cultural and historical environment; improvement of the cleanliness and safety of the town are a vital necessity. Especially, ‘historical, archeological buildings and places’, which is one of the most important factors motivating foreign tourists to visit Luang Prabang, should be better preserved and maintained.

- (3) Due to the fact that the majority of foreign tourists confirmed that they received information about Luang Prabang through the internet, but that the percentage of those using the Lao National Tourism Administration website was still low, in order to promote Luang Prabang and increase tourists from foreign countries, Lao tourism managers and authorities should improve the website as well as the information available on the internet by investing in the creation of advertising video clips to promote the destination image via websites more; always updating information about the details of each festival, event, activity, etc. in multiple languages should also be done for the benefit of tourists to further entice them to come to Laos and to Luang Prabang.
- (4) Among the push factors 'Trying new foods' was indicated at the 'much importance' level; among the pull factors 'Inexpensive Restaurants' was also at the 'much significance' level of thing that motivate foreign tourists to visit Luang Prabang. However, the 'local cuisine' factor was reported to be at the 'moderate significance' level. Thus, the Lao tourism managers, authorities and local communities should promote local cuisine more.
- (5) Also, the 'Friendliness, politeness and hospitality' factor had the greatest positive impacts on the overall satisfaction among pull factors. Therefore, the Lao tourism managers and authorities should closely work with and clearly explain to the local people about the significance and role of the tourism sector for their lives. Furthermore, they should encourage the local people contribute to tourism development and preservation. This will help to enhance the tourism sector by making it become the property and responsibility of all people in society. To do this, will help the tourism sector in Luang Prabang develop constantly, increase employment and generate income, stimulate the internal economy, and improve the well being of the local people as well as Laos overall. This will also improve the perception of foreign tourists and would likely encourage them to visit Luang Prabang as well as Lao PDR.

Recommendations for Further Research

In conducting this research, we had some limitations, such as the sample size being quite small, the period of time conducting survey was only two weeks in March, and the questionnaires were translated into only two languages from English.

Therefore, in order to improve knowledge to be a more attractive destination; to understand more the strong and weak points, the opportunities and challenge of tourism in Luang Prabang; to know what foreign tourists think about Luang Prabang and how they spend their time and money we should study more the characteristics, behaviors, motivations and satisfaction of foreign tourists towards each sector related to tourism in Luang Prabang. For example, a study on foreign tourists' purchasing behavior regarding local products or souvenirs would provide useful information or/and enhancing and creating local product brand to AEC Also, we should divide tourists by country, income and other factors to compare the characteristics, behaviors, motivations and satisfaction of tourists. Especially, the tourists from Thailand, Germany, France, the U.K, Japan, the U.S, Australia, etc., which are the leading generators of international tourism; what makes certain groups the major spenders in Luang Prabang, as well as in Laos; and there are many unknown points due to a lack of studies on the characteristics, behaviors, motivations and satisfaction of each country tourists travelling to Laos, should be further investigated.



Source: Statistical Report on Tourism by Luang Prabang Provincial Information, Culture and Tourism Department (2013).

Table1: Demographic Characteristics and Behavior of Respondents

No.	Information & Behaviors	categories	Frequency	%
1	Nationalities	Thai	147	35.55
		German	46	11.11
		French	33	7.97
		Japanese	33	7.79
		British	32	7.72
		U.S	29	7.00
2	Gender	Male	193	46.70
		Female	221	53.30
3	Age	Below 20 Age	15	3.62
		20 – 30 Age	150	36.23
		31 – 40 Age	102	24.63
		41 – 50 Age	72	17.39
		51 – 60 Age	42	10.14
		More than 60 age	33	7.97
4	Marital Status	Single	240	57.90
		Married	146	35.26
		Others	28	6.73
5	Education level	High School	63	15.32
		Vocational School	32	7.78
		College /Bachelor	184	44.76
		Master's Degree/PhD	107	26.03
		Others	25	6.08
6	Occupation	Students	57	13.86
		Employees	155	37.71
		Entrepreneurs or Business men	61	14.84
		Retired	31	7.54
		Others	107	33.57
7	Income in US\$/year	Less than 5,000 (or about 417 US\$/month)	87	21.53
		5,000 – 15,000 (or about 418 – 1,250 US\$/month)	119	29.45
		15,001 – 35,000 (or about 1,251 – 2,917 US\$/month)	94	23.26
		More than 35,000 US\$ (or more than 2,917 US\$/month)	104	25.74
		First time	349	84.50
8	Number of times (Visiting Luang Prabang)	More than one times	64	15.50
		One day	6	1.45
9	Length of staying	Two days	48	11.62
		Three days	129	31.23
		Four days	99	23.97
		Five days	54	13.07
		Six days	21	5.08
		Seven days	27	6.53
		More than one week	29	7.02
		10	The objectives of visiting	Vacation holiday
Business purpose	17			4.07
Meeting/seminar	17			4.07
Relatives or friends	7			1.67
Others	33			7.91
11	Who do you travel with?	Alone	89	21.50
		As a couple	112	27.05
		Family members	43	10.39
		Friends	102	24.64
		Organized groups	54	13.04
		Relatives	6	1.45
		Other	8	1.93
12	How to know and find the information about Luang Prabang?	Magazines	47	11.35
		Newspapers	15	3.62
		Lao National Tourism Administration website	43	10.39
		Guidebooks	179	43.24
		Tourism fairs	30	7.25
		Word of Mouth	83	20.05
		T.V	36	8.70
		Friends or relative	128	30.92
		Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)	22	5.31
		Internet	252	60.87
13	Spending per day (US\$)	Accommodations	21	5.07
		Food and drink		34.9

Table 2: Push Motivation Factors

Ranking	Factors	Factors No.	Mean	S.D	Level
1	Going places I have never visited	f3.1	4.56	0.77	Most
2	Doing and seeing destinations' unique things	f3.3	4.44	0.82	Most
3	Opportunity to increase one's knowledge	f3.2	4.40	0.81	Most
4	Experiencing a new and different lifestyle	f1.1	4.32	0.82	Most
5	Desire to try something new	f3.4	4.32	0.84	Most
6	Meeting new and different people	f1.3	4.18	0.94	Much
7	Trying new foods	f1.4	4.04	0.95	Much
8	Unique or different aboriginal or indigenous people	f1.2	4.04	1.01	Much
9	Experiencing a simpler lifestyle	f1.5	3.94	1.07	Much
10	Visiting places I can talk about when I get home	f3.5	3.93	1.12	Much
11	Escape from the routine/ordinary	f2.3	3.90	1.16	Much
12	Having fun and being entertained	f4.2	3.56	1.16	Much
13	Getting away from the demands of jobs	f2.1	3.55	1.26	Much
14	Getting away from a busy job	f2.2	3.54	1.26	Much
15	Just relaxing	f5.1	3.53	1.18	Much
16	Meeting people with similar interests	f6.4	3.47	1.28	Much
17	Finding thrills and excitement	f4.1	3.43	1.15	Much
18	Going to a place my friends have not been	f4.3	3.31	1.38	Moderate
19	Being together as friends	f6.3	3.20	1.40	Moderate
20	Being together as a family	f6.2	2.63	1.54	Moderate
21	Doing nothing at all	f5.2	2.57	1.34	Little
22	Indulging in luxury	f5.3	2.35	1.34	Little
23	Visiting friends and relatives	f6.1	2.33	1.41	Little

Table 3: Pull Motivation Factors

Ranking	Factors	Factors No.	Mean	S.D	Level
1	Outstanding natural scenery and landscape	f1.4	4.40	0.75	Most
2	Friendliness, politeness and hospitality	f1.6	4.36	0.79	Most
3	Historical, archeological, buildings and places	f1.2	4.35	0.77	Most
4	Interesting rural countryside	f1.1	4.34	0.80	Most
5	Lao ethnic diversity	f1.5	4.23	0.87	Most
6	Nice weather	f5.2	4.21	0.89	Most
7	Exotic atmosphere	f5.1	4.15	0.94	Much
8	Visits to appreciate natural ecological sites	f1.3	4.12	0.92	Much
9	Peaceful and personal safety	f2.2	4.06	0.90	Much
10	Environment quality, air, water and soil	f2.3	3.72	1.08	Much
11	Inexpensive Restaurants	f5.5	3.63	1.10	Much
12	Availability of pre-trip and in-country tourist info	f3.1	3.61	0.97	Much
13	Destination that provides value for holiday money	f3.3	3.61	1.12	Much
14	Standard of hygiene and cleanliness	f2.1	3.54	1.04	Much
15	Public transportation such as airlines, etc.	f3.4	3.43	1.91	Much
16	Outdoor activities (Variety activities)	f4.2	3.39	1.20	Moderate
17	Local cuisine	f5.4	3.33	1.24	Moderate
18	The best deal I could get	f3.2	3.32	1.18	Moderate
19	Nightlife and entertainment	f5.3	2.98	1.28	Moderate
20	Activities for the entire family	f4.3	2.87	1.33	Moderate
21	Ease of driving on my own	f4.4	2.83	1.36	Moderate
22	Primitive outdoor camping	f4.1	2.80	1.34	Moderate

Table 4: Results of the Regression Analysis between Overall Satisfaction and Each Push Motivation Factor

Factor No.	Push Factors	Coefficients	Std. Error	t-value	Sig
f1.1	Experiencing a new and different lifestyle	0.037	0.047	0.791	0.429
f1.2	Unique or different aboriginal or indigenous people	0.017	0.041	0.427	0.669
f1.3	Meeting new and different people	0.040	0.04	0.985	0.325
f1.4	Trying new foods	0.022	0.037	0.587	0.557
f1.5	Experiencing a simpler lifestyle	0.070	0.037	1.909	0.057
f2.1	Getting away from the demands of jobs	0.011	0.044	0.244	0.808
f2.2	Getting away from a busy job	-0.026	0.045	-0.583	0.56
f2.3	Escape from the routine/ordinary	0.073*	0.037	2.009	0.045
f3.1	Going places I have never visited	-0.009	0.052	-0.181	0.856
f3.2	Opportunity to increase one's knowledge	0.189*	0.049	3.826	0.000
f3.3	Doing and seeing destinations' unique things	0.021	0.053	0.4	0.689
f3.4	Desire to try something new	0.020	0.055	0.366	0.715
f3.5	Visiting places I can talk about when I get home	0.018	0.038	0.461	0.645
f4.1	Finding thrills and excitement	-0.058	0.044	-1.333	0.183
f4.2	Having fun and being entertained	0.022	0.044	0.508	0.612
f4.3	Going to a place my friends have not been	-0.003	0.034	-0.098	0.922
f5.1	Just relaxing	0.000	0.035	0.006	0.995
f5.2	Doing nothing at all	0.034	0.035	0.97	0.333
f5.3	Indulging in luxury	0.036	0.033	1.081	0.281
f6.1	Visiting friends and relatives	-0.010	0.032	-0.323	0.747
f6.2	Being together as a family	0.026	0.028	0.916	0.36
f6.3	Being together as friends	0.027	0.028	0.945	0.346
f6.4	Meeting people with similar interest	-0.049	0.031	-1.575	0.116
	(Constant)	2.433	0.262	9.281	0
F = 4.01	R Square = 0.216	Adjusted R Square = 0.162			

Note: (1) Dependent Variable is Overall Satisfaction,

(2) * indicates statically significant difference between groups at p-value ≤ 0.5

Table5: Results of the Regression Analysis between Overall Satisfaction and Each Pull Motivation Factor

Factor No.	Pull Factors	Beta	t-value	Sig.
	(Constant)	2.265	8.945	0.000
f1.1	Interesting rural countryside	0.011	0.187	0.852
f1.2	Historical, archeological, buildings and places	0.046	0.856	0.392
f1.3	Visits to appreciate natural ecological sites	0.184*	2.654	0.008
f1.4	Outstanding natural scenery and landscape	0.002	0.026	0.979
f1.5	Lao ethnic diversity	-0.024	-0.398	0.691
f1.6	Friendliness, politeness and hospitality	0.287*	5.042	0.000
f2.1	Standard of hygiene and cleanliness	0.01	0.151	0.880
f2.2	Peaceful and personal safety	-0.063	-1.012	0.312
f2.3	Environment quality, air, water and soil	0.023	0.366	0.715
f3.1	Availability of pre-trip and in-country tourist info	0.091	1.558	0.120
f3.2	The best deal I could get	0.012	0.184	0.854
f3.3	Destination that provides value for holiday money	-0.017	-0.266	0.790
f3.4	Public transportation such as airlines, etc	-0.031	-0.613	0.540
f4.1	Primitive outdoor camping	-0.043	-0.64	0.523
f4.2	Outdoor activities (Variety activities)	0.017	0.263	0.793
f4.3	Activities for the entire family	-0.01	-0.148	0.882
f4.4	Ease of driving on my own	-0.121	-1.942	0.053
f5.1	Exotic atmosphere	0.119	1.941	0.053
f5.2	Nice weather	0.037	0.594	0.553
f5.3	Nightlife and entertainment	-0.063	-0.996	0.320
f5.4	Local cuisine	-0.002	-0.034	0.973
f5.5	Inexpensive Restaurants	0.162*	2.758	0.006
F = 5.97	R ² = 0.279	Adjusted R ² = 0.232	S. E of the Estimate = 0.55253	

Note: (1) Dependent Variable is Overall Satisfaction,

(2) * indicates statically significant difference between groups at p-value ≤ 0.5

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