

A Study of Effects of European Tourists' Satisfaction on Destination Loyalty in Phuket

การศึกษาผลของความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวยุโรปที่มีต่อความภักดีต่อ จุดหมายปลายทางการท่องเที่ยวในจังหวัดภูเก็ต

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บทคัดย่อ

ตลาดนักท่องเที่ยวชาวยุโรปเป็นตลาดนักท่องเที่ยวต่างประเทศที่สำคัญตลาดหนึ่งของจังหวัดภูเก็ต อย่างไรก็ตาม ประเด็นเรื่องการกลับมาท่องเที่ยวซ้ำของนักท่องเที่ยวกลุ่มนี้ยังมีข้อมูลอยู่น้อย ทั้งนี้การเดินทางมาท่องเที่ยวซ้ำหรือที่เรียกว่า ความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทางเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญทางการตลาดในการแข่งขันด้านศักยภาพความดึงดูดใจของจุดหมายปลายทางการท่องเที่ยว ซึ่งผู้บริหารด้านการท่องเที่ยวควรเข้าใจถึงความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยวกับความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทาง เพื่อนำข้อมูลไปพัฒนาแผนงานหรือกลยุทธ์ในการดึงดูดนักท่องเที่ยวให้มาเยือนซ้ำ ดังนั้น การวิจัยในครั้งนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์การวิจัยเพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพลของความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยวชาวยุโรปที่มีต่อความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทางของจังหวัดภูเก็ต ดำเนินการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจากนักท่องเที่ยวจำนวน 225 คน โดยใช้การเลือกตัวอย่างแบบตามสะดวก และวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลโดยการวิเคราะห์การถดถอยพหุคูณ (multiple regression analysis) ผลการวิจัยพบว่า ความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยวในด้านสิ่งแวดล้อมทางธรรมชาติ วัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่น และความปลอดภัย มีอิทธิพลต่อความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทางการท่องเที่ยวของจังหวัดภูเก็ตอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ดังนั้น งานวิจัยในครั้งนี้จึงได้ให้ข้อเสนอแนะเพื่อส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวของจังหวัดภูเก็ตให้มีประสิทธิภาพมากขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: ความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยว ความภักดีต่อจุดหมายปลายทาง นักท่องเที่ยวชาวยุโรป ภูเก็ต

Abstract

The European travelers market is one of the important international tourist markets to Phuket. However, little is known on their intention to revisit Phuket. Destination loyalty is an important marketing factor in sustaining the destination attractiveness. It is necessary for tourism managers to understand the relationship between tourist destination and destination loyalty to develop proper plans or strategies to attract more repeat tourists to the destination. Thus, this study has an objective to investigate an effect of European tourists' satisfaction on destination loyalty in Phuket. Data were collected from 225 European tourists through the convenience sampling, and were analyzed by the multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that tourist satisfaction on natural environment, local culture, and safety were found to affect tourists' destination loyalty. Recommendations for Phuket's tourism industry are addressed.

Keywords: tourist satisfaction, destination loyalty, European tourist, Phuket

Paper type: Research



1. Introduction

With the rapid growth of tourism industry in Thailand, today tourism has been regarded as one of the most important tools used to boost economies and promote country's development. The growth of tourism in Southeast Asia has developed very fast and each country is attempting to promote tourism to generate revenues to the country (Marzuki, 2012). Every nation has developed various marketing campaigns to persuade tourists to visit its state by promoting attractive tourist destinations, local culture, food, architecture, folklore and man-made tourist attractions. As tourism industry makes lots of benefits to the country, the Thai government has established various national policies to develop Thailand's tourism continuously. Thailand, the leading tourism state of the ASEAN, has various major tourist attractions located in different parts of the country both natural and cultural heritages. Among the major tourist destinations, Phuket is one of the most famous places for beach tourism among international tourists. Phuket is Thailand's the largest island and the only province-island in the country. It has many beautiful natural attractions, particularly the beaches and small islands. Phuket is not only well-known for its beach tourism but also the charming sub-cultures (e.g. Thai, Chinese and Muslim) and historical attractions. According to Marzuki (2012), Phuket has experienced tremendous development since 1980s. Many construction projects have been carried out on the islands with the main purpose to accommodate tourism development. Rapid investments by the government and private sector have significantly turned Phuket into a popular tourist destination and a shopping paradise for local and foreign tourists. As a result, Phuket has attracted millions of people from all over the world for decades. Since Phuket is rich in the natural resources, particular the image of beach tourism, and becomes the top tourist destinations in Thailand, it, therefore, is chosen as the area of investigation on the destination loyalty due to its high potentiality to attract loyal/repeat tourists. Furthermore, the European tourists are the focus of this study because they are the largest market segment visiting Phuket (Department of Tourism, 2014). Nevertheless, there are limited studies exploring this segment, particularly their travel satisfaction and intention to revisit the same destination. This study therefore has an objective to investigate an effect of European tourists' satisfaction on destination loyalty in Phuket. Understanding this issue may help the local authorities develop appropriate strategies to

attract and increase European tourist arrivals to Phuket, particularly the number of repeat visitors.

A review of literature indicates several studies examining tourist satisfaction in Phuket in various issues such as cultural tourism, sustainable tourism, and destination image (Panitcharemkit, 2013; Polnyotee & Thadaniti, 2014; Thongkundang & Promsivapallop, 2012). However, there is still a lack of empirical studies examining the impact of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty pertaining to Phuket. Destination loyalty is an important marketing issue used to develop competitive advantages and effective marketing strategy for the destination (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Understanding the determinants of destination loyalty will allow tourism managers to concentrate on the major influencing factors leading to customer retention (Chi & Qu, 2008). Therefore, more research is needed to yield a greater knowledge and a better understanding on the determinants of destination loyalty, particularly in relation to tourist satisfaction. The findings may assist local authorities in developing more effective plan/strategy and to sustain destination attractiveness to attract more repeat visitors to Phuket.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Tourist Satisfaction

According to tourism literature, tourist satisfaction refers to the result of tourists' evaluation and comparison with the perceived performance of products/services with expectation (Heung & Cheng, 2000). If performance exceeds expectation, the result turns to be satisfied, however, when expectation exceeds performance, the result becomes dissatisfied. Tourist satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing because it influences the choice of destination, the consumption of goods and services, repeat visits, word-of-mouth publicity, and destination loyalty (Fornell, 1992; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Kozak, Bigne, & Andreu, 2004). Tourist satisfaction may be determined by tourists' perceived comparison between the preferred expectation about a destination and the perceived evaluative experience in the destination (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). An understanding of tourist satisfaction is a basic tool used to evaluate the performance of destination products and services (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Monitoring tourist satisfaction is, therefore, an important task for destination authorities/planners to get feedback and detect problems that cause tourist dissatisfaction which may have a negative impact

on future visitation (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Thus, it is argued that an assessment of tourist satisfaction can help destination authorities adjust their efforts on enhancing tourists' travel experience, improving the quality of products/services, and developing effective destination marketing strategy (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Several scholars argue that tourists' assessment of the destination's different attributes is important to determine the overall satisfaction and tourists' intention to return (Alegra & Garau, 2010). In case of Phuket, it is important for destination authorities to assess tourist satisfaction in association with Phuket's destination attributes that may affect the overall satisfaction and destination loyalty for a benefit of future development of Phuket's tourism industry.

2.2 Destination loyalty

Destination loyalty refers to tourists' intention to revisit the same destination, and their intention to recommend the destination to their friends/relatives (Toyama & Yamada, 2012). It is also defined as the whole feeling and attitudes that encourage travelers to revisit a particular destination (Hsu, Killion, Brown, Gross, & Huang, 2008). The concept of destination loyalty has been widely examined among tourism scholars to develop effective ways to attract more tourists to their destinations (Kim & Brown, 2012; Toyama & Yamada, 2012; Mechinda, Serirat, & Gulid, 2009; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Destination loyalty is regarded an important indicator used to develop competitive advantages of the destination and effective marketing strategy (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In general, destination loyalty may be measured through tourist's intention to revisit the same destination, and their intention to recommend the destination to others (Toyama & Yamada, 2012). Of these two measures, repeat visitation is considered as a very strong indicator of future behavior (Mechinda et al., 2009). In the tourism literature, there were empirical studies revealing that tourist satisfaction is a strong indicator of repeat visitation and recommendation of the product/service to others, which is the main component of loyalty (Chi & Qu, 2008; Kozak, Bigne, & Andreu, 2004; Toyama & Yamada, 2012; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Kozak et al. (2004), for example, explored satisfaction and destination loyalty by comparing between non-repeat and repeat tourists in Calpe, Spain. The finding revealed some significant differences in destination loyalty between first-time visitors and repeat visitors (e.g. season time to visit Calpe and leisure

activities). In particular, the finding indicated that the level of satisfaction and the number of past visits considerably influence tourists' intentions to make repeat visits. Yoon and Uysal (2005) investigated the effects of satisfaction on destination loyalty in Northern Cyprus. The findings revealed that satisfaction was found to directly affect destination loyalty in a positive direction. Also, satisfaction was determined to be a mediating construct between travel motivation and destination loyalty. The study suggested that destination managers should establish a higher tourist satisfaction level to create positive post-purchase tourist behavior to sustain destination competitiveness. Another study by Valle, Silva, Mendes and Guerreiro (2006) explored the relationship between travel satisfaction and destination loyalty in Arade, Portugal. The study established a direct causal relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty intention. The study showed that tourists experiencing higher satisfaction levels revealed favorable intention behavior (the willingness to return to Arade and to recommend it to others). Chi and Qu (2008) examined the impact of tourist satisfaction (attribute satisfaction and overall satisfaction) on destination loyalty in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. They examined the impact of the attribute satisfaction separately from the overall satisfaction on the destination loyalty. The study revealed that tourists' destination loyalty was influenced by high satisfaction. In particular, both attribute satisfaction and overall satisfaction influenced the destination loyalty. The study suggested destination managers focus on establishing a high tourists' satisfaction level so as to create positive post-purchase tourist behavior. A recent study by Toyama and Yamada (2012) explored the relationships between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty in Takayama City, Japan. The findings disclosed that the overall satisfaction had a direct influence on destination loyalty. The study suggested that destination authorities reduce the risk of unsatisfactory experience by improving destination's services and quality in order to create tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty.

In relation to studies in Phuket, there are several related studies exploring Phuket's tourism. For instance, Thongkudam & Promsivapallop (2012) examined and compared the perception of Phuket's image between Australian and Russian tourists as well as their intention to revisit Phuket. The study found that there were some differences in perception between both groups. Australian tourists perceived Phuket as a good place to enjoy a wide

range of tourist attractions and activities whereas Russian tourists perceived Phuket as an excellent natural environment than its counterparts. In addition, Russian tourists had higher future intentions than Australians. The study also revealed that natural and cultural attractions had a direct relationship to the overall image of Phuket and future behavioral intentions. Another study by Panitcharemkiet (2013) assessed cultural tourism resources in Phuket, and found that most tourists had high satisfaction level with cultural tourism in Phuket's historic area. They were most impressed with historical value, local wisdom, and unique architecture through the conservation plan of the city. The study indicated that the historical area of Phuket may provide three types of creative cultural tourism activities: 1) interaction between hosts and tourists through home stay and business services 2) education activities through learning about local way of life and 3) cultural identity through sightseeing of the historical area. A recent study by Polnyotee and Thadaniti (2014) explored the factors influencing sustainable tourism at Patong beach. The study found that tourism situation in Phuket faced several problems, particularly, the environmental, economical, and social issues. At the same time, among tourists' attitude, it was found that tourist attraction was regarded highly competent factor whereas accessibility, facilities, and safety were moderate factors attracting tourists to Phuket.

In sum, although there is a number of prior studies investigating the relationship between tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty, few scholars have attempted to examine this relationship in an island-based destination with high potential to promote repeat intention. Importantly, there is a lack of empirical studies investigating the effect of tourist satisfaction on Phuket loyalty among European tourists. Phuket, the most famous island in Thailand, is therefore chosen as an area of investigation and a case study to assess European tourists' destination loyalty to Phuket and reveal this relationship for further development. The results of the study will benefit the local authorities in order to further develop their policies, plans and strategies to promote tourists' loyalty to Phuket.

3. Methodology

The samples in this study were European travelers (aged 20 years older and over) who traveled independently to Phuket. Using a convenience sampling method, data were collected at major tourist attractions in Phuket (city and beaches)

through a closed-ended, self-administered questionnaire. During the survey (May 2015), the respondents were asked if they would be interested to participate in the survey. Once they agreed, questionnaires were distributed on site and collected by researcher team (researcher and college students). All research respondents received small souvenirs for their participation. A total usable of 225 questionnaires were obtained during the survey. Several prior studies with 200 – 300 usable questionnaires were argued for their sufficiency to provide statistical analysis (Mohamad & Ghant, 2014). The questionnaire was developed from a review of previous studies focusing tourist satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008; Ekiz & Khoo-Lattimore, 2014; Hsu, 2003; Kim & Brown, 2012; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). According to the literature, tourist satisfaction is generally measured by 2 items: (1) attribute satisfaction and (2) overall satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008; Hsu, 2003; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). Satisfaction research has indicated that tourists are generally satisfied with individual attribute of the destination (i.e. nature, culture, services) which subsequently leads to overall destination satisfaction. Base on a review of destination attribute literature applicable to Phuket, this study measured tourist satisfaction through eighteen destination attributes and one single overall satisfaction. The eighteen destination attributes were reviewed from related literature (Ekiz & Khoo-Lattimore, 2014; Kim & Brown, 2012), and were modified to correspond to Phuket's destination features (i.e. beaches, leisure activities, culture, services, and tourism environment). Meanwhile the single overall satisfaction was measured on the overall tourist satisfaction towards Phuket. A number of satisfaction studies have used a summative overall measurement of satisfaction due to an ease of use and a direct measurement (Bolton & Lemon, 1999; Chi & Qu, 2008). For the attribute satisfaction, the respondents were asked to evaluate their satisfaction on 5-point Likert scale (5=very satisfied and 1=very dissatisfied), for example, "how satisfied are you with the beach/natural environment of Phuket?" or "how satisfied are you with the services of tourism businesses in Phuket?". As for the overall satisfaction, the respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with Phuket. With regard to destination loyalty, most prior studies have measured destination loyalty on two items: (1) the intention to revisit the destination in the future and (2) the likelihood to recommend the destination to other people (Chi & Qu, 2008; Kim & Brown, 2012; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Following the literature, this study asked the respondents to rate their intention to revisit Phuket in the near future, and their likelihood

to recommend Phuket to their relatives/friends by using a 5-point Likert scale (1=least likely and 5=most likely).

A reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was performed for tourist satisfaction (attribute satisfaction) with a result of 0.89, exceeding the minimum standard (0.80) (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Blac, 2006). The validity test (face validity) was also undertaken to obtain feedback and comments on the clarity and appropriateness of the research questions.

Descriptive statistics (percentage, mean, S.D.) were used to describe respondents' profile, mean score of tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty while inferential statistics (multiple regression analysis) were used to analyze the impact of tourist satisfaction (independent variable) on destination loyalty (dependent variable). All statistical tests were performed at the .05 level of significance.

4. Findings

Table 1: Profile of research respondents

Characteristics	Descriptions	Number (n=225)	Percent (100%)
Gender	Male	120	53.0%
	Female	105	47.0%
Age	20 - 30 years	63	28.0%
	31 - 45 years	75	33.0%
	46 - 59 years	69	31.0%
	60 years or older	18	8.0%
Marital status	Married	140	62.0%
	Single	70	31.0%
	Divorced/Separated/Widowed	15	7.0%
Education	Bachelor degree	132	58.0%
	Master degree or higher	78	35.0%
	High school or lower	15	7.0%
Occupation	Company employee	53	24.0%
	Government officer	45	20.0%
	Business owner	38	17.0%
	Independent/self-employed	30	13.0%
	College student	20	9.0%
	Housewife	18	8.0%
	Unemployment	14	6.0%
	Retired	7	3.0%
Monthly Income	Euro 1,000 or lower	18	8.0%
	Euro 1,001 – 2,500	47	21.0%
	Euro 2,501 – 3,500	93	41.0%
	Euro 3,501 – or higher	67	30.0%
Number of visit to Phuket	First time	168	75.0%
	2-3 times	40	18.0%
	4 times and more	17	7.0%

According to table 1, most of the respondents (53%) were males and 47% were females. Most of them were in the age group of 31 - 45 years (33%) and 46 – 59 years old (31%). More than half were married (62%), and the majority (58%) had education at the college level. The respondents came from different occupations, for example, 24% were company employees, 20% were government officers, 17% were business owner, and 13% were independent/self-employed. Nearly half of them (41%) had monthly income in the range of Euro 2,501

– 3,500 while 30% had income in the range of Euro 3,501 and higher, and 21% earned approximately Euro 1,001 – 2,500 or lower. Most of them (75%) were first time visitor, while 18% visited Phuket 2-3 times, and 7% return to Phuket 4 times and more. Among 225 European respondents, they came from UK (41), Germany (35), France (30), Sweden (27), Russia (25), Italy (15), Norway (13), Switzerland (11), Belgium (9), Spain (8), Austria (6) and eastern European countries (5).

Table 2: Mean score ranking of tourist satisfaction towards Phuket

Attribute satisfaction	Mean	S.D.
1. Beaches/seasides	4.45	0.78
2. Natural environment/scenery	4.39	0.91
3. Friendliness of local people	4.37	0.66
4. Business services	4.29	0.88
5. Product and service quality	4.27	0.79
6. Tour/excursion	4.25	1.15
7. Cost of living	4.19	0.97
8. Local culture/attractions	4.15	0.69
9. Thai way of life	4.14	0.74
10. Leisure activities	4.09	0.98
11. A variety of shopping places	4.02	0.99
12. Reasonable prices of products/services	3.99	0.85
13. Local food	3.95	0.86
14. Nightlife/entertainment	3.90	0.79
15. Climate	3.71	1.12
16. Cleanliness	3.70	1.08
17. Safety	3.32	0.88
18. Local transportation	3.30	0.64
19. Overall satisfaction	4.03	0.89

Table 2 shows the mean score ranking of tourist satisfaction towards Phuket. The top three most satisfied attributes of Phuket are 1) beaches/seasides (mean=4.45), 2) natural environment/scenery (mean=4.39), and 3)

friendliness of local people (mean=4.37). While the least three satisfied attributes are 1) cleanliness (mean=3.70), 2) safety (mean=3.32), and 3) local transportation (mean=3.30). However, the overall satisfaction was scored at 4.03.

Table 3: Mean score of loyalty to Phuket

Phuket's loyalty	Mean	S.D.
1. Likelihood to return to Phuket	4.00	0.89
2. Likelihood to recommend Phuket to friends, family, relatives	4.28	0.75

Table 3 shows mean score of respondents' opinions on Phuket's loyalty. Based on the finding, the respondents rated their likelihood to return to Phuket with an average score

of 4.00 while the likelihood to recommend Phuket to their friends, families, and relative was rated scored at 4.28.

Table 4: Factor analysis of tourist satisfaction

Factor dimensions (Cronbach's alpha)	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Factor Mean
Factor 1: Natural attraction ($\alpha = 0.81$)		5.21	28.49	4.18
Beach/seaside	0.88			
Natural environment/scenery	0.73			
Climate	0.65			
Factor 2: Local hospitality & culture ($\alpha = 0.88$)		2.24	11.32	4.10
Friendliness of local people	0.85			
Cultural attractions	0.73			
Local food	0.71			
Thai way of life	0.70			
Factor 3: Leisure & recreation activities ($\alpha = 0.85$)		1.53	7.55	4.01
A variety of shopping places	0.83			
Night life and entertainment	0.81			
Leisure activities	0.72			
Tours/excursion	0.69			
Factor 4: Services and facilities ($\alpha = 0.74$)		1.75	8.98	3.98
Business services	0.87			
Product and service quality	0.81			
Reasonable prices of products and services	0.72			
Cost of living	0.70			
Local transportation	0.69			
Factor 5: Safety & cleanliness ($\alpha = 0.71$)		1.35	6.86	3.5
Safety	0.72			
Cleanliness	0.69			
Total variance explained	63.20%			

According to table 4, a factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to group satisfaction attributes. Five satisfaction factors were derived from the factor analysis of 18 satisfaction attributes. They were labeled as 1) natural attractions 2) local hospitality & culture 3) leisure & recreation activities 4) services & facilities, and 5) safety & cleanliness. Among them, natural attraction was the most satisfactory factor (mean=4.28). According to Kaiser's (1974) criterion, a factor dimension with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 can be reported in the final factor structure, and only items with factor loading greater than 0.4 (indicating a good

correlation between the items and the factor grouping they belong to) should be retained for each factor grouping. In this study, all satisfaction factors had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, and the items in each dimension had a factor loading greater than 0.4. In addition, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to test the internal consistency of items within each factor. The test showed that the alpha coefficients for the five factors ranged from 0.75 to 0.89, well above the minimum value of 0.6 as an indication of reliability (Hair et al., 2006). Thus, all five satisfaction factors were retained for the final structure for regression analysis.

Table 5: Regression analysis of satisfaction factors on destination loyalty

Tourist satisfaction factors	Beta	t-value	Sig.	Multicollinearity (VIF value)
1. Natural attraction	0.39	1.89	0.02*	1.06
2. Local hospitality and culture	0.28	1.67	0.01*	1.12
3. Leisure/recreation activities	0.11	2.25	0.45	1.25
4. Services and facilities	0.08	0.89	0.68	1.31
5. Safety and cleanliness	0.25	0.96	0.04*	1.47

$R^2 = 0.374$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.365$

Table 5 shows the finding of regression analysis and its coefficients (beta) indicating the relationships between independent variables (satisfaction factors with each mean factor) and dependent variable (destination loyalty with averaged items). The finding is expressed in terms of beta coefficient, which is a standardized regression coefficient that allows for a direct comparison between coefficients as to their relative explanatory power of the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2006). The finding indicates that 1) natural attraction, 2) Thai hospitality & local culture, and 3) safety & cleanliness had the impacts on destination loyalty ($p < 0.05$), and their relationships were positive. This may suggest that the respondents who are satisfied with natural attraction of Phuket, admiring Thai hospitality & local culture, as well as feeling confident in safety in Phuket are more likely to revisit Phuket. Among the five satisfaction factors, the coefficients of natural attraction is greater than those of the four factors, suggesting that natural attraction is a more powerful variable to explaining destination loyalty in this study. However, other

satisfaction factors, namely, leisure/recreation activities and services & facilities are not found to be associated with the dependent variable. This suggests that these factors are not significant explanatory variables in destination loyalty. The multicollinearity, which is the correlation between two or more independent variables, is also tested with variance inflation factor (VIF) to determine how the independent variables are related to one another (Hair et al., 2006). When the independent variables are highly correlated, it is not possible to determine the separate effect of any particular independent variables on the dependent variable (Williams, Sweeney and Anderson 2006). In this study, the cutoff threshold of VIF values is set at 10 (maximum) as the acceptability of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2006). Table 5 shows that the VIF values ranging from 1.06 to 1.47. This indicates that the regression model used in this study is acceptable to determine the effect of independent variables on the dependent variables.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study had the objective to examine the effect of tourist satisfaction on destination loyalty by focusing on European tourists visiting Phuket. The finding of the study contributes to gaining a better understanding on the determinants of Phuket's loyalty. According to the results, tourist satisfaction on the natural attraction and local hospitality were found to have significant influence on destination loyalty in a positive direction. The result is similar to Kim and Brown (2012) indicating that natural attraction/environment plays an important role in satisfying many tourists in visiting natural-based destinations as well as associates with repeat visitation to the same destination. Likewise, Ekiz and Khoo-Lattimore (2014) revealed that

natural attraction and environment are important to the loyalty intention among family travelers to Goa, India. In particular, in the study of Polnyotee and Thadaniti (2014) reported that tourist attraction in Phuket (i.e. beaches, natural scenery) was the important factor attracting tourists to the destination while other factors such as facilities and safety were not the influential ones. It should be noted that the finding of Polnyotee and Thadaniti (Thai and foreign respondents) was different from the current study due to different samples and research methodology. In addition to the natural attraction, the local hospitality & culture was found to be another factor affecting destination loyalty. This finding corresponds to previous research (e.g. Panitcharemkit, 2013)

revealing that people and local culture were the destination attributes associating with tourist satisfaction and their likelihood to revisit the same destination. Similarly, Rahman (2014) also disclosed that friendliness of local people is the important destination attribute related to destination loyalty in Malaysia. Since the results of the current study reveal that tourists who are satisfied with natural attraction and local hospitality (macro level) are likely to revisit Phuket and recommend Phuket to others, the government and local authorities are therefore the key players in managing and planning these attributes in order to promote higher level of tourist satisfaction and create post-purchase behavior (Chi & Qu, 2008). They may work together to manage these attributes through appropriate strategy, plan or project. For instance, in order to maintain and manage Phuket's natural resources (i.e. beaches, islands, forestry areas), protection policy, conservation plan, and legal action should be seriously taken into consideration. In particular, the sustainable management approach should be emphasized. There should be also a regular monitor from city administrators/tourism officials to visit the beaches and natural areas in Phuket throughout the year to control the development, and quality of the tourism sites. Local authorities should pay more attention to the cleanliness of tourism sites by preparing sufficient staff and garbage bins throughout the city. Also, the city administrators/tourism officials may launch the campaign such as "Keep Phuket Clean". This campaign has been undertaken in several tourism destinations such as Bali, Indonesia (Nurhayati,

2011) and Penang, Malaysia (Lee, 2015). In addition, the government and local authorities should build the awareness and campaign for local people (including residents, vendors, service staff) for being the good hosts in welcoming and assisting foreign visitors in Phuket. Regular campaigns or related activities may be established to build a good relationship between them such as beach cleaning, friendship sports, food festival, local events or other social events. Also, the safety in Phuket, local authorities and tourism polices should closely work together by providing more channels/information for emergency contact and having officials regularly visit the tourism sites throughout the city.

As for the research limitations, this study used a convenience sampling method and the results obtained may not be generalized to the overall European tourists to Phuket. Further, the population of this study was limited to European tourists. Future research may explore other segments such as Asia, Oceania, and North America as well as a comparative study for different segments to increase the generalizability of the finding. In addition, there may be some other factors affecting destination loyalty such as tourist experience, destination image, and travel motivation, it is advisable for future studies to investigate these factors to gain a better understanding on the determinants of destination loyalty.

6. Reference

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