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DRIVING HERITAGE TOURISM: FACTORS INFLUENCING THAI TOURISTS' INTENTIONS AT SI THEP WORLD HERITAGE SITE

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Abstract

This study examines the factors influencing Thai tourists' intentions to visit the Si Thep World Heritage Site, with a focus on tourism components (attractions, accessibility, amenities, activities, accommodation, and services), as well as destination image (encompassing both cognitive and affective dimensions). Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and employing the SERVQUAL framework, a quantitative study was conducted with 400 Thai tourists visiting the site. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal that both tourism components and destination image have a significant influence on travel intentions. Specifically, attractions, accessibility, tourism activities, and services have a positive impact on travel intentions. Both cognitive and affective dimensions of destination image exhibit a significant positive influence on visitor intentions. These results emphasize the importance of enhancing tourism infrastructure, promoting a positive destination image, and ensuring high-quality visitor experiences to boost travel intentions. This research offers practical implications for tourism planners, site managers, and policymakers aiming to develop sustainable tourism strategies that align with visitor expectations while preserving the cultural and historical significance of the site.

Keywords: Heritage Tourism, Tourism Components, Destination Image, Travel Intention, Thailand

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Introduction

Historical tourism is a prominent form of tourism that has gained significant popularity (Phisphumvidhi, 2020). It differs from other types of tourism as it offers visitors not only recreational experiences but also historical, cultural, and social value (Department of Tourism, 2014). In particular, World Heritage Sites, which are recognised as possessing outstanding universal value, play a crucial role in historical tourism. These sites are designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as part of humanity's shared heritage, signifying their global importance. Furthermore, obtaining World Heritage status provides substantial benefits for the tourism industry, as it enhances a site's appeal, attracting more visitors and contributing to increased economic revenue for both the heritage site and the surrounding areas. This demonstrates that historical tourism serves as a vital economic driver at both regional and national levels (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2007; Basaran, 2016).

Thailand currently boasts eight World Heritage Sites, encompassing both cultural and natural heritage. Among these, the Ancient City of Si Thep was designated as the country's fourth UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site on September 19, 2023. Archaeological evidence suggests that Si Thep flourished for over 1,400 years (Si Thep, n.d.), meeting the UNESCO World Heritage criteria (ii) and (iii). These criteria recognise the site's unique urban layout, which differs significantly from other Dvaravati cultural sites found in Thailand and Southeast Asia (Supakorn, 2023; Nippaya, 2023). Furthermore, Si Thep holds historical and cultural significance as a key centre within early trade and cultural networks of Southeast Asia. The site served as a hub for cultural diffusion and commercial exchange, facilitating trade and interaction between different regions from prehistoric times through the Dvaravati and ancient Khmer periods (Fine Arts Department, n.d.). Given its cultural and historical value, Si Thep Ancient City has emerged as a major tourism attraction, significantly contributing to local and regional economic growth. The site has not only increased tourism revenue but has also driven economic benefits at the community and regional levels. Notably, the number of visitors surged tenfold in 2024 compared to the same period in the previous year, with an average of 2,000 tourists per day in 2023 (Prachachat, 2023). This influx has directly benefited local businesses, including restaurants, hotels, and accommodations, generating employment opportunities and boosting income within the local community (Royal Thai Government, 2024).

Moreover, UNESCO emphasises the importance of ensuring that visitors to World Heritage Sites have a positive and enriching experience (Halpenny et al., 2018a). A key factor in achieving this is fostering tourists' positive perceptions of a destination, which significantly enhances its image and, in turn, increases their motivation and satisfaction (Sun et al., 2013; Gursoy et al., 2014; Carreira et al., 2022). Beyond shaping visitor experiences, tourists' travel intentions also play a crucial role in driving economic benefits for local communities and businesses, both directly and indirectly (Jimura, 2011). However, these benefits may be compromised if heritage sites suffer from poor management practices. In particular, unsustainable or inappropriate conservation efforts —such as painting over historic structures, constructing additional buildings, altering architectural forms, or modifying structures in ways that compromise their authenticity — can have a detrimental impact on both the visitor experience and the site's perceived image (Matichon Online, 2018; Ghazi & Ammar, 2018). This concern is further supported by research findings from Byon & Zhang (2010) and Piramanayagam et al. (2021), which indicate that tourists' decisions to visit World Heritage Sites are heavily influenced by factors such as destination image, attractions, amenities, accommodation, and transportation infrastructure. Taken together, these insights underscore the complex interplay of factors shaping travel intentions, highlighting the need for strategic tourism management that balances preservation, visitor satisfaction, and local economic development.

Given these considerations, this study aims to examine the key factors influencing tourists' intentions to visit the Si Thep Ancient City. The findings will provide government and private sector stakeholders with data-driven insights to effectively promote tourism in alignment with visitor expectations. Additionally, the results will contribute to the development of tailored strategic plans that enhance the quality of visitor experiences while ensuring sustainable site management. The research objectives for the study are as follows:

However, although academic interest in heritage tourism in Thailand has been increasing (Theparat & Kongsawat, 2024), a significant gap remains in understanding how UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as Si Thep influence travel intentions through both perceptual and motivational factors (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2023). Previous studies have predominantly focused on more prominent heritage destinations in Asia, while newly designated sites, such as Si Thep, remain underexplored (Chen et al., 2024).

This study aims to address this gap by examining both destination image and tourism components and analyzing their influence on travel intentions in the specific context of Si Thep. In addition, this research incorporates a sustainability dimension—an aspect that has been largely overlooked in existing studies of Thai heritage sites (Rattanaporn & Sriwongsaa, 2024).

Literature Review

Travel Motivation

Travel motivation, a central concept in tourism research, explains why individuals choose to travel. Psychological and sociological perspectives highlight emotional and cognitive drivers, while anthropology views travel as an escape from routine in pursuit of authentic experiences (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Social psychology frames it as the desire for novelty and avoidance of monotony. Pizam et al. (1979) define travel motivation as the interplay of needs and attitudes that inspire tourism engagement, emphasising its heterogeneity due to cultural and personal differences (Kozak, 2002). Moreover, the Push and Pull Theory (Uysal et al., 2008) is particularly relevant to understanding travel intention. Push factors (e.g., desire for relaxation, personal growth) initiate the decision to travel, while pull factors (e.g., destination image, attractions) influence the choice of destination (Heitmann, 2011). In the context of the Si Thep World Heritage Site, tourism components (such as attractions, activities, and others) and destination image serve as strong pull factors, motivating Thai visitors to consider and plan their trips. Therefore, understanding these motivators is crucial for enhancing travel intention.

Perceived Destination Quality

The SERVQUAL Model is a framework for measuring service quality, comprising five dimensions: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This model aligns with Perceived Destination Quality, where SERVQUAL components can be utilised as factors for evaluating tourists' perception of destination quality. Furthermore, these components can enhance the perceived service value among tourists and increase the attractiveness of travel destinations through service quality measurement and subsequent development. Although the SERVQUAL model has been widely applied to evaluate service quality in tourism contexts, scholars have pointed out its limitations in capturing the experiential and emotional aspects of cultural and heritage tourism (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Parasuraman et al., 2024). Given the highly context-specific nature of heritage sites, the rigid dimensions of SERVQUAL may fall short in reflecting emotional experiences such as national pride or spiritual connection (Harrison & Miller, 2023).

Perceived destination quality reflects tourists' assessments of a destination's overall excellence, encompassing products, services, and experiences (Wang et al., 2009).

Accommodations, transportation, cultural attractions, and local interactions are pivotal in shaping tourism experiences (Paulauskaite et al., 2017). Cultural attractions, including

historical sites, museums, and festivals, offer enriching and educational experiences. Ultimately, positive interactions with locals, including opportunities for cultural exchange and genuine engagement, create memorable and meaningful experiences for tourists. While service quality is a key element (Gronroos, 1984), it is only a part of the broader destination quality framework, which includes both tangible and intangible aspects (Žabkar et al., 2010). Additionally, Buhalis (2000) categorises destination quality into attractions, accessibility, amenities, and ancillary services — all critical tourism components that shape destination image. A positive perception of these elements enhances visitors' travel intention. For the Si Thep World Heritage Site, factors such as historical attractions, ease of access, and supporting services contribute to the perceived quality of the destination, directly influencing visitors' intentions to explore the site.

Li et al. (2023) investigated factors affecting consumer willingness to purchase online tourism products using the concepts of Perceived Value and promotional strategies, combined with the BOCR (Benefit-Opportunity-Cost-Risk) model. The findings revealed that price discounts constitute the most effective strategy for stimulating consumers to purchase online tourism products. In contrast, risk factors and reference prices play crucial roles in perceived value.

Overall Destination Satisfaction

The Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) posits that satisfaction occurs when experiences meet or exceed prior expectations. When perceived experiences align with or surpass expectations, satisfaction increases. Conversely, when perceived experiences fall short of prior expectations, satisfaction decreases (Oliver, 1980). ECT serves as a framework for determining tourist satisfaction levels. Overall destination satisfaction refers to the cognitive and emotional evaluation of a travel experience, typically measured through models such as the Expectation-Confirmation Model (Oliver, 1980), which suggests that satisfaction occurs when a destination meets or exceeds tourists' expectations. Satisfaction is influenced by various tourism components, including accessibility, accommodations, safety, cultural activities, and price-value perception (Yu & Goulden, 2006; Hui et al., 2007). A high level of satisfaction with a travel destination strengthens positive perceptions of its image and components, which, in turn, enhances travel intention. For the Si Thep World Heritage Site, ensuring that tourists are satisfied with their experiences — ranging from site accessibility to cultural richness — can increase the likelihood of repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth, both of which are critical to boosting travel intention.

Behavioural Intention

Ajzen (1991) explained behavioral intention through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which is used to measure travel intention in tourism contexts. Positive attitudes derived from prior knowledge, national pride, and convenient accessibility to tourist destinations increase the likelihood that tourists will intend to visit those locations. Behavioural intention in tourism refers to a visitor's likelihood of revisiting a destination or recommending it to others (Ismail & Yunan, 2016). Additionally, Zeithaml et al. (1996) highlight that positive behavioural intentions are driven by satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived value. However, studies offer mixed results regarding the strength of the relationship between attitudes and behavioural intention (Rossi & Armstrong, 1999; Lam & Hsu, 2006). In the case of Si Thep, tourism components (e.g., historical attractions, amenities) and destination image play significant roles in shaping positive behavioural intentions. A well-maintained site with strong cultural appeal can enhance visitors' intentions to return or recommend the destination, contributing to the site's long-term tourism success.

The reviewed theoretical perspectives highlight the importance of travel motivation, perceived destination quality, overall satisfaction, and behavioural intention in influencing Thai visitors' travel intention to Si Thep World Heritage Site. Tourism components and destination image emerge as key drivers across these theories, underlining their critical role in attracting and

retaining visitors. By enhancing both tangible elements (e.g., infrastructure, amenities) and intangible aspects (e.g., cultural appeal, destination image), stakeholders can effectively boost travel intentions among Thai tourists.

Tourism Components and Their Influence on Travel Intentions

The concept of tourism components was introduced by Dickman (1996), who identified five fundamental elements: (1) Attractions, (2) Activities, (3) Accessibility, (4) Amenities, and (5) Accommodation. Furthermore, Dickman (1996) expanded this framework by introducing six core elements essential for a destination's development (Buhalis, 2000). These elements include (1) Attractions, which encompass artificial attractions, natural replicas, and historical sites; (2) Accessibility, referring to transportation networks, infrastructure, and modes of travel that facilitate access to the destination; (3) Amenities, which cover food and beverage services, and other essential facilities; (4) Available Packages, which consist of structured tourism programs and itineraries designed for visitors; (5) Activities, representing tourist experiences at the destination, including those that take place during the visit; and (6) Ancillary Services, which provide additional support such as banking, healthcare, and law enforcement (Niyom et al., 2022). To date, many researchers employ the six-component framework rather than the five-element model, as it is widely applicable in analysing and planning tourism development. Thus, this study also employs six tourism components.

Moreover, tourism components play a crucial role in satisfying tourists' needs and preferences. A destination that effectively incorporates the five key tourism components (5A) — Attractions, Activities, Accessibility, Amenities, and Accommodation — can significantly enhance its ability to attract and motivate tourists to visit (Chakthong & Kaewnuch, 2022). The five core components of tourism not only shape tourists' overall travel experiences but also play a vital role in driving local economic development. This relationship is underscored by the findings of Jianchatchawanwong et al. (2024), who demonstrate that improvements in these components significantly enhance both visitor satisfaction and regional economic impact. Given that the 5A framework serves as a primary consideration for most tourists when planning their trips, it is essential to understand how these factors influence their travel intentions (David & Ca, 2023). Additionally, these components play a critical role in shaping travel decisions (Arpornpisal, 2018). Given the significance of these components, it is evident that they exert a considerable influence on tourists' travel intentions and decision-making processes. Understanding these factors, the world heritage site and tourism planners can develop effective strategies that enhance tourism experiences and encourage sustainable travel behaviour.

Destination Image and Its Influence on Travel Intention

The destination image refers to the perceived context of a location as experienced by visitors. It encompasses individuals' perceptions formed through direct interaction, visual impressions, auditory narratives, or past experiences, which collectively shape their beliefs, thoughts, and overall impressions of the destination (Soonsan & Sungthong, 2020). The formation of a destination image is influenced by personal factors of tourists, which are further shaped by stimulus factors such as media exposure, promotional campaigns, and word-of-mouth communication (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). As tourists consume and seek information, their interest in a destination grows, ultimately leading to the decision to visit. During their visit, tourists undergo a perceptual process, gaining experiences that influence their motivations and likelihood of revisiting the destination (Soonthonsmai, 2021).

The destination image can be categorised into three dimensions: (1) Cognitive Image, which refers to tourists' attitudes and perceptions based on the information they receive through promotional media; (2) Affective Image, which encompasses the emotional responses and feelings associated with the destination, such as relaxation, excitement, and overall satisfaction; and (3) Conative Image, which relates to the decision-making process leading to actual travel behaviour (Gartner, 1994).

A study conducted by Piramanayagam et al. (2021) identified key components that shape a destination image, including attractions, amenities, entertainment, and perceived value for money. Their findings further suggest that tourists' experiences and their intention to visit World Heritage Sites significantly influence their travel decisions. Moreover, the destination image plays a crucial role in shaping tourist behavior, affecting factors such as destination selection, post-trip evaluations, and future travel intentions (Stylos et al., 2016). Thus, understanding these elements allows tourism stakeholders to develop more effective strategies in destination marketing and management, ensuring a positive and sustainable tourism experience.

Chang & Kong (2024) examined the relationship between travel motivation and two types of values: Materialism, which emphasizes the importance of material possessions with the belief that greater ownership leads to better well-being, and Family and Community Values, which prioritize good relationships with family and community. The study found that both value types correlate with travel motivation but with varying intensity levels. Materialism is often associated with the desire for relaxation in comfortable and familiar environments, including familiar food and tourist destinations. In contrast, family and community values are closely tied to interests in history, local culture, and the natural world.

Asian Context and Comparative Insights

When compared with other UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Asia, such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia (Jimura, 2011), Borobudur in Indonesia (Piramanayagam et al., 2021), and the Imperial City of Hue in Vietnam (Pike & Bianchi, 2016), many similar challenges persist, including conservation under visitor pressure, infrastructure limitations, and the tension between cultural authenticity and economic benefit (Nguyen & Tran, 2024; Wijaya et al., 2023). These regional parallels suggest that the case of Si Thep can provide broader insights relevant to the heritage tourism sector in Southeast Asia (Suansri & Phongsavan, 2024).

Hypothesised Model and Research Framework

Building upon the previously discussed tourism components and destination image, travel intention is the result of a psychological process in which an individual's motivation is translated into actual behaviour (Jang et al., 2009). Tourists develop travel intentions in response to their personal needs while considering several key factors, including (1) travel goals, (2) personal readiness such as sufficient time, physical and mental well-being, (3) favourable travel conditions, and (4) response mechanisms. Additionally, destination characteristics, such as available activities and cultural experiences, significantly influence tourists' travel intentions (Lakpetch, 2023). Research by Yen et al. (2015) also suggests that a positive destination image can stimulate travel intentions, a finding consistent with the study by Chaulagain et al. (2019), which demonstrates a positive correlation between destination image and tourists' willingness to visit. Similarly, Halpenny et al. (2018a) found in their study on heritage tourism within North American National Parks that heritage value plays a significant role in shaping tourists' travel intentions. Thus, we propose research hypotheses that serve as a foundation for understanding the relationship between tourism components, destination image, and tourists' decision-making processes, as outlined below.

H1: Tourism components influence travel intentions.

H2: Destination image influences travel intentions.

Based on a review of relevant concepts, theories, and previous research, key components have been identified, including tourism components such as attractions, accessibility, amenities, tourism activities, accommodation, and ancillary services, as well as destination image and travel intention. These elements form the basis for developing the conceptual framework for this study, as illustrated in the following figure.

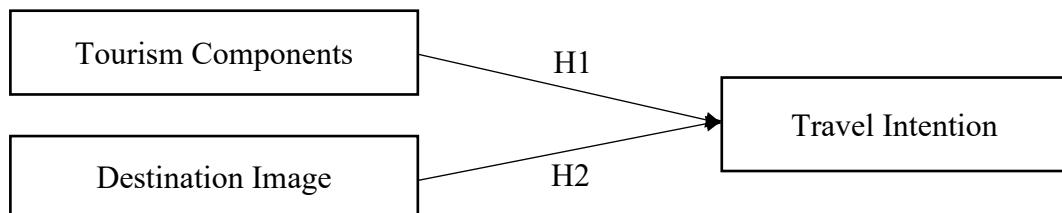


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework has been refined to illustrate the interaction among motivational push factors (e.g., desire for relaxation, curiosity), perceptual pull factors (destination image and tourism components), and sustainability-related perceptions (e.g., infrastructure adequacy, cultural authenticity). These collectively contribute to behavioral intention (Ajzen, 2020; Oliver, 2024). This integration aligns with both the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT), while also embedding elements of sustainable development as proposed in the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2023).

Research Methodology

Population and Sample

This study employs a quantitative research approach, collecting data from a sample group of Thai tourists who visited the Si Thep World Heritage Site. During the 2023 fiscal year (October 2022-September 2023), the site recorded a total of 82,133 visitors (Department of Fine Arts, 2023). Consequently, this study determined the sample size using Yamane's (1967) formula, with a margin of error set at 0.05. The sample was selected using convenience sampling, with a total of 400 participants.

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + (N * e^2))}$$
$$n = \frac{82,133}{(1 + (82,133 * 0.05^2))} = 398$$

Data Collection

This study employs a questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument for analysis. The questionnaire was developed based on the conceptual framework of the research and is structured into three sections: (1) demographic information, (2) respondents' opinions on tourism components, destination image, and travel intention, and (3) suggestions and recommendations. The questionnaire follows a rating scale format, utilising the Likert scale, which consists of five levels: (5) Strongly Agree, (4) Agree, (3) Neutral, (2) Disagree, and (1) Strongly Disagree.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts to assess whether its content accurately measured the intended constructs. Additionally, the experts evaluated the language clarity to enhance the precision and relevance of the questionnaire. The selection of items was based on the Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC), with an acceptance criterion of 0.50 or higher (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977); the values obtained ranged from 0.67 to 1.00. Furthermore, a pilot test (Tryout) was conducted with 30 non-participant samples to assess the reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was calculated to measure internal consistency, yielding a value of 0.874, which exceeds the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating high reliability of the instrument.

Data Analysis

This study employs both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, are used to summarise the dataset. For inferential statistics, Pearson's correlation analysis is applied to examine the

relationships between variables. In contrast, multiple regression analysis is utilised to test the research hypotheses regarding the influence of tourism components and destination image on travel intentions. The variables used in the analysis are as follows:

$$Tl_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TC_i + \beta_2 DI_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Where Tl_i = Travel Intentions of tourist i

TC_i = Tourism Components of tourist i

DI_i = Destination Images of tourist i

In the research findings section, the TC variable will undergo a comprehensive analysis, further categorised into its subcomponents: TC1 (Attractions), TC2 (Accessibility), TC3 (Amenities), TC4 (Activities), TC5 (Accommodation), and TC6 (Services). Similarly, the DI variable will be examined in terms of its subcomponents, specifically the Cognitive Dimension (DIC) and the Affective Dimension (DIA).

Additionally, ethical considerations play a crucial role in this research project, ensuring that all procedures align with established ethical standards. Therefore, this study adheres to three fundamental principles of research ethics: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The principle of respect for persons encompasses key aspects, including ensuring informed consent by providing comprehensive information to participants so participants can make autonomous decisions free from coercion, undue influence, or incentives. Furthermore, this study emphasises respect for data privacy, as well as the confidentiality of personal information, ensuring that no identifiable details of participants are stored within the data collection tools. The principle of beneficence is upheld by minimising potential risks, with the primary concern being possible inconvenience to participants in terms of time commitment. To mitigate this, participants retain the right to withdraw from the study at any point if they feel uncomfortable. Lastly, the principle of justice is maintained through the establishment of explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria for the sample group, ensuring an equitable distribution of both benefits and risks, while eliminating any form of bias in participant selection and treatment.

In addition, qualitative data were collected through open-ended survey questions to complement the quantitative findings (Creswell & Clark, 2023). Respondents frequently mentioned the emotional value of their visits, describing feelings of pride and reflection (Smith & Johnson, 2024). Some also expressed concern about the risk of diminishing the site's authenticity.

Research Results

Analysis of Demographic Data

According to Table 1, the sample consists of 400 respondents, with the majority being female (202 individuals, accounting for 50.5%). The predominant age group belongs to Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1997), comprising 130 respondents (32.5%). Regarding educational background, 227 respondents (56.8%) hold a bachelor's degree. In terms of marital status, 180 respondents (45%) are single. The most common occupation among participants is self-employment or business ownership, with 105 respondents (26.3%).

In terms of income, the majority of respondents report a monthly income ranging from 10,001 to 20,000 THB, with 109 individuals (27.3%) falling within this range. Furthermore, a significant proportion of respondents (235 individuals, 58.8%) visited Si Thep Historical Park for the first time. The majority of participants reside in the central region of Thailand (147 respondents, 36.8%). Regarding travel purposes, most respondents (186 individuals, 43.2%) indicated that their primary motivation for visiting was leisure and relaxation. In terms of travel duration, the majority (220 respondents, 55%) visited the historical park for a single day.

Table 1 Demographic Data

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	169	42.3
Female	202	50.5
LGBTQ+	29	7.2
Age Range Classification		
Baby Boomer Generation (Born 1946-1964)	72	18.0
Generation X (Born 1965-1979)	102	25.5
Generation Y (Millennials) (Born 1980-1997)	130	32.5
Generation Z (Born 1998 and later)	96	24.0
Educational Level		
Below Bachelor's Degree	107	26.8
Bachelor's Degree	227	56.8
Master's Degree or Higher	66	16.5
Marital Status		
Single	180	45.0
Married (No children)	72	18.0
Married (Children under 12 years old)	28	7.0
Married (Children over 12 years old)	40	10.0
Divorced	68	17.0
Others	12	3.0
Occupation		
Government/Public/State Enterprise Employee	86	21.5
Private Company Employee	85	21.3
Self-Employed/Business Owner	105	26.3
Student	30	7.5
Others	94	23.5
Monthly Income		
Less than 5,000 THB	37	9.3
5,000-10,000 THB	76	19.0
10,001-20,000 THB	109	27.3
20,001-30,000 THB	67	16.8
30,001-40,000 THB	61	15.3
Above 40,000 THB	50	12.5
Have you visited the Si Thep World Heritage Site?		
First visit	235	58.8
2-3 times	118	29.5
4-5 times	16	4.0
6-7 times	9	2.3
More than 7 times	22	5.5
Place of Residence		
Northern Region	98	24.5
Central Region	147	36.8
Eastern Region	62	15.5
Northeastern Region	50	12.6
Western Region	18	4.5
Southern Region	25	6.3
Purpose of Travel		
To seek relaxation and leisure	186	43.2

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
To explore historical sites and cultural heritage	137	31.8
To strengthen family relationships	41	9.5
To strengthen friendships and social connections	51	11.8
Others	16	3.7
Duration of Travel		
1 day	220	55.0
2-3 days	152	38.0
4-5 days	20	5.0
6-7 days	1	0.3
More than 1 week	7	1.8

Analysis of Opinion Levels on Tourism Components, Destination Image, and Travel Intentions

According to Table 2, tourists rated attractions (TC1) as the most significant tourism component, with an average score of 4.24. This category includes factors such as the destination's reputation, historical significance, and its designation as a World Heritage Site. Conversely, the lowest-rated component was amenities (TC3), with an average score of 3.56, covering infrastructure, food and beverage services, and souvenir shops. Interviews revealed that tourists perceived a lack of dining options and variety, as well as the absence of waste separation bins, contributing to lower satisfaction with amenities.

Other tourism components received moderate to high ratings. Tourism activities (TC4) scored 3.93, highlighting the adequacy of tram services, diverse activities, and opportunities for tourist participation. Staff interviews indicated that trams operate as soon as a sufficient number of passengers are on board, reducing waiting times and allowing tourists to maximise their visit. Service quality (TC6) was also rated highly, with an average score of 3.92, covering on-site security, guided tours, and first-aid stations, including AED devices. Accessibility (TC2) received an average score of 3.74, emphasising multiple access routes, public transportation availability, and safe, convenient access for elderly and disabled visitors. Lastly, accommodation (TC5) scored 3.69, reflecting tourists' satisfaction with the variety and proximity of lodging options, including hotels, resorts, and homestays, as well as their comfort and safety.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Opinion Levels on Tourism Components, Destination Image, and Travel Intention

Level of Opinions	\bar{x}	SD	Interpretation*
Attractions (TC1)	4.24	0.527	Very High
Accessibility (TC2)	3.74	0.825	High
Amenities (TC3)	3.56	0.998	High
Tourism Activities (TC4)	3.93	0.690	High
Accommodation (TC5)	3.69	0.779	High
Services (TC6)	3.92	0.662	High
Overall Tourism Components (TC)	3.85	0.538	High
Cognitive Dimension (DIC)	4.14	0.602	High
Affective Dimension (DIA)	4.04	0.586	High
Overall Destination Image (DI)	4.08	0.543	High
Overall Travel Intention (TI)	4.09	0.557	High

* 4.21-5.00 = Very High; 3.41-4.20 = High; 2.61-3.40 = Moderate; 1.81-2.60 = Low; 1.00-1.80 = Very Low.

According to Table 2, in the cognitive dimension (DIC), which reflects tourists' attitudes toward the destination, the findings indicate a strong sense of pride among visitors, primarily due to the site's designation as a World Heritage Site. This was followed by the destination's national recognition and its international recognition. These results suggest that tourists highly value the historical and cultural significance of the site. In the affective dimension (DIA), which captures tourists' emotional responses and experiences, the highest-rated aspect was the friendliness and politeness of the staff. This was followed by the quality of service provided by staff in assisting visitors and the effectiveness of tourism management. Additionally, tourists rated the destination's ability to evoke curiosity and a sense of learning, the reasonableness of pricing, and the availability of comprehensive amenities. These findings align with tourists' overall satisfaction with tourism components, reinforcing the notion that destination image plays a crucial role in shaping visitor perceptions and experiences. Notably, all aspects of destination image were rated at a high level, indicating a strong positive perception among tourists.

According to Table 2, tourists' overall travel intention (TI) was rated at a high level, with an average score of 4.09. When considering individual aspects, mental preparedness for travel received the highest average score, indicating that tourists feel psychologically ready for their trips. This was followed by financial readiness, time availability, pre-trip planning, and physical readiness. Lastly, engagement in planned activities received the lowest average score. All aspects were rated at a high level, suggesting that tourists generally demonstrate strong intentions and preparedness for travel.

Analysis of Correlations

Table 3 Correlation Coefficients (r) Between Variables

Variables	TC1	TC2	TC3	TC4	TC5	TC6	TC	DIC	DIA	DI	TI
TC1	1										
TC2	0.280	1									
TC3	0.223	0.581	1								
TC4	0.319	0.512	0.509	1							
TC5	0.179	0.417	0.546	0.438	1						
TC6	0.244	0.388	0.413	0.444	0.451	1					
TC	0.465	0.770	0.819	0.750	0.732	0.675	1				
DIC	0.525	0.204	0.299	0.290	0.214	0.304	0.406	1			
DIA	0.429	0.287	0.363	0.367	0.240	0.492	0.492	0.649	1		
DI	0.503	0.282	0.371	0.372	0.252	0.466	0.504	0.837	0.960	1	
TI	0.367	0.407	0.373	0.457	0.304	0.403	0.532	0.473	0.585	0.596	1

Note: Bold text in the table indicates significance at the 10% level or higher.

According to Table 3, the correlation coefficients (r) between the independent variables (tourism components and destination image) and the dependent variable (travel intention) range from 0.179 to 0.649. These values indicate that there is no strong correlation between the variables. It can be concluded that all variables exhibit weak to moderate correlations, which do not pose a collinearity issue. Consequently, this ensures that the multiple regression analysis is not significantly affected, as the correlation coefficients remain below 0.80, thereby preventing concerns about multicollinearity (Gujarati, 2009; Hair et al., 2018).

Univariate Analysis of Travel Intention

To enhance the understanding of the descriptive statistics, a univariate analysis was performed using a t-test. The pooled sample was divided based on perceptions of tourism components and destination image. Two groups were established for each factor: individuals with high and low

perception levels. The mean values of tourism components and destination image from the pooled sample served as the threshold for classification.

Table 4 Univariate Comparison in Means of Travel Intention

Variables	Mean	Mean	Diff	t-value	p-value
	High Tourism Component	Low Tourism Component			
Travel Intention	4.313	3.862	0.451	-8.805	0.001
	High Destination Image	Low Destination Image			
Travel Intention	4.377	3.836	0.541	-11.056	0.001

As presented in Table 4, at a 1% significance level, individuals with a high perception of tourism components exhibited a significantly higher mean travel intention compared to those with a low perception of tourism components. Similarly, the analysis revealed that, at the 1% significance level, individuals with a high perception of destination image reported a higher mean travel intention than their counterparts with lower perceptions. When considering both variables together, individuals with high perceptions of both tourism components and destination image demonstrated a greater mean travel intention than those with low perceptions of these factors. In short, the univariate analysis indicates that differences influence variations in travel intention in the perception of tourism components and destination image. These findings provide preliminary support for the hypothesis that these factors contribute to shaping travel intention.

Regression Analysis

According to Table 5, the Tolerance (TOL) and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for the independent variables were examined. The TOL value was 0.746, while the VIF was 1.341. The assessment criteria require that TOL should be greater than 0.2 and VIF should not exceed 10. The results indicate that none of the independent variables exhibit multicollinearity (Gujarati, 2009; Hair et al., 2018), thus meeting the assumptions for multiple regression analysis. Additionally, the adjusted R-squared value was 42.4%, meaning that the independent variables collectively explain 42.4% of the variance in the dependent variable. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the overall tourism components have a significant positive influence on travel intentions, and the overall destination image also exerts a statistically significant positive influence on travel intentions at the 0.01 level, with coefficient values of 0.322 and 0.451, respectively. These results are also consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2, confirming the positive impact of tourism components and destination image on tourists' travel intentions.

Table 5 Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis on the Overall Tourism Components (TC) and Overall Destination Image (DI) Influencing Travel Intentions (TI)

Variables	Beta	S.E.	TOL	VIF
Constant	1.012***	0.180		
TC	0.322***	0.046	0.746	1.341
DI	0.451***	0.045	0.746	1.341

Adjusted R Square: 0.424

Durbin Watson: 1.805

Note: *** indicates statistical significance at 1% level

Table 6 presents the results of TOL and VIF tests for the independent variables. The TOL values for all predictor variables range from 0.304 to 0.457, while the VIF values range from 0.002 to 0.225. These results indicate that no multicollinearity issues are present among the

independent variables, satisfying the assumptions for multiple regression analysis (Gujarati, 2009; Hair et al., 2018). Additionally, the adjusted R-squared value is 43.5%, suggesting that all independent variables collectively explain 43.5% of the variance in the dependent variable. The findings further indicate that Attractions (TC1), Accessibility (TC2), Tourism Activities (TC4), and Services (TC6) have a statistically significant positive influence on travel intentions, with coefficient values of 0.216, 0.089, 0.169, and 0.151, respectively. These results are also in line with Hypothesis 1, confirming the positive impact of tourism components on tourists' travel intentions.

Table 6 Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis on the Tourism Subcomponents (TC1-TC6) Influencing Travel Intentions (TI)

Variables	Beta	S.E.	TOL	VIF
Constant	1.444***	0.218		
TC1	0.216***	0.047	0.367	0.225
TC2	0.089***	0.037	0.407	0.122
TC3	0.039	0.032	0.373	0.061
TC4	0.169***	0.043	0.457	0.193
TC5	0.001	0.038	0.304	0.002
TC6	0.151***	0.042	0.403	0.179

Adjusted R Square: 0.435
 Durbin Watson: 1.861

Note: *** indicates statistical significance at 1% level

Table 7 presents the results of the TOL and VIF analysis. The TOL value is 0.579, and the VIF is 1.727, indicating that no multicollinearity issues exist among the independent variables, thus meeting the assumptions for multiple regression analysis (Gujarati, 2009; Hair et al., 2018). The adjusted R-squared value is 35.4%, suggesting that the independent variables explain 35.4% of the variance in the dependent variable. Moreover, the analysis reveals that both the Cognitive Dimension (DIC) and the Affective Dimension (DIA) — subcomponents of Destination Image — have a statistically significant positive influence on travel intentions at the 0.01 significance level, with coefficient values of 0.150 and 0.456, respectively. These results are also consistent with Hypothesis 2, confirming the positive impact of destination image on tourists' travel intentions.

Table 7 Results of the Multiple Regression Analysis on the Subcomponents of Destination Image (DIC and DIA) Influencing Travel Intentions (TI)

Variables	Beta	S.E.	TOL	VIF
Constant	1.621***	0.172		
DIC	0.150***	0.049	0.579	1.727
DIA	0.456***	0.050	0.579	1.727

Adjusted R Square: 0.354

Durbin Watson: 1.752

Note: *** indicates statistical significance at 1% level

Conclusion and Discussion

The results of this study support Research Hypothesis 1, which posits that tourism components have a direct influence on travel intentions. Specifically, four key dimensions were found to have a statistically significant positive impact: Attractions, Activities, Ancillary Services, and Accessibility. The discussion of these findings is presented in detail below.

1) Attractions: The Si Thep World Heritage Site serves as a compelling attraction due to its rich historical and cultural heritage, which reflects the area's former prosperity, trade networks, and religious significance spanning from the prehistoric period through the Dvaravati and Khmer civilisations. This historical importance contributed to its designation as a World Heritage Site in 2023. The park's serene and lush environment appeals to visitors interested in both relaxation and historical exploration. Architecturally, the site is well-preserved, offering multiple points of interest, including an archaeological excavation site that showcases a 1,000-year-old elephant skeleton and a 1,700-year-old human skeleton. Prang Song Phi Nong, a Hindu shrine dedicated to Shiva, is estimated to be around 1,000 years old and is notable for its authentic lintel, called "Umamahesvara," which is still in place. Khao Khlang Nai, a Dvaravati Buddhist monument dating back approximately 1,400 years, features distinctive stucco designs around its base. Prang Si Thep, another Hindu shrine dedicated to Shiva, is also around 1,000 years old. These features contribute to high levels of tourist perceptions of the attractions, as confirmed by the descriptive statistical analysis.

2) Tourism Activities: The Si Thep World Heritage Site offers well-organised tourism activities, such as tram tours that operate efficiently to accommodate visitors. Trams run regularly without requiring full capacity before departure, allowing tourists the flexibility to explore and take photographs at their own pace. A typical tram tour lasts between 1 and 1.5 hours, providing an immersive experience that enhances visitor engagement with the site's history and architecture.

3) Ancillary Services: The park offers a range of support services to enhance the tourist experience, including On-site security personnel to ensure visitor safety, Knowledgeable tour guides who provide historical insights, and First-Aid facilities, including Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs), to address any medical emergencies. These services contribute significantly to overall visitor satisfaction and safety.

4) Accessibility: Accessibility to the Si Thep is convenient and versatile. The site is reachable via multiple routes, with public transportation options available. Tourists can also access the park using various types of private vehicles, including cars and motorbikes. The park is designed to be inclusive, featuring ramps and designated pathways that cater to elderly visitors and individuals with disabilities, ensuring a safe and accessible experience for all.

The findings of this study are consistent with prior research. David & Ca (2023) examined the impact of tourism components on travel intentions and concluded that tourists often prioritise destinations with strong attractions and engaging activities. Similarly, Arpornpisal (2018) found, in a study on tourism at Phra Pathom Chedi in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, that tourism components significantly influence travel decisions and contribute to the success of tourism initiatives. The study highlighted the importance of accessibility, amenities, tourism activities, and attractions in shaping travel intentions. Additionally, research by Kokkhangplu & Kaewnuch (2021) on tourism in Southern Thailand emphasised the significance of safety and security, noting these as primary concerns for tourists. The study also identified service quality as a critical factor influencing tourist satisfaction and decision-making.

The findings of this study support Research Hypothesis 2, which posits that the destination image has a significant influence on travel intentions. The results indicate a positive relationship between destination image and travel intention, aligning with Baloglu (2000), who developed a destination image model. According to this model, the cognitive dimension of destination image comprises tourists' beliefs, knowledge, perceived atmosphere, and service quality. In contrast, the affective dimension reflects tourists' emotional responses, which both positively influence travel intentions.

1) Affective Dimension of Destination Image: The affective dimension of destination image emerges from tourists' experiences and post-visit evaluations. Findings from this study suggest that visitors perceive the Si Thep World Heritage Site as well-managed, relaxing, and

informative, offering historical insights at multiple points of interest. Furthermore, the hospitality and professionalism of the site's staff contribute positively to the overall visitor experience. These findings align with Echtner & Ritchie (2003), who found that travel experiences influence the formation of affective destination images. Similarly, Afshardoost & Eshaghi (2020), using inferential analysis, demonstrated that the affective dimension serves as a predictor of travel intention. Additionally, Regan et al. (2012) found that the affective image of a destination significantly influences travel intentions for participating in major events.

2) Cognitive Dimension of Destination Image: The cognitive dimension of Si Thep's destination image is shaped by promotional efforts from various organisations, including the Department of Fine Arts and the Tourism Authority of Thailand, through platforms such as Facebook, websites, and television media. As a result, tourists recognise Si Thep as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, reinforcing a sense of national and international prestige. This finding is consistent with Poria et al. (2001), who argued that recognition of heritage sites through visual, auditory, and informational exposure significantly influences travel decisions. Furthermore, Piramanayagam et al. (2020) found that the cognitive image of a destination includes attractiveness, entertainment value, and perceived price-worthiness, all of which positively impact travel intentions for World Heritage Sites. The designation as a UNESCO site further enhances tourist motivation and intention to visit, in line with Baloglu & McCleary (1999) and Sharma & Nayak (2019), who found that cognitive destination image significantly influences travel intention, particularly in niche tourism sectors such as yoga tourism.

3) Tourist Demographics and Travel Intentions: The study also found that the majority of visitors were female, belonging to Generation Y, with a bachelor's degree. Most tourists travelled for leisure and historical interest, reflecting a strong connection between destination image, tourism components, and travel intentions. This aligns with research by Pike & Bianchi (2016) and Pratt & Sparks (2014), which suggests that destination image plays a crucial role in shaping tourist decision-making processes.

Furthermore, Gibson et al. (2008) emphasised that destination image is a key determinant in understanding how tourists select travel destinations.

Although the findings highlight a positive relationship between tourism components and travel intentions, the study also reveals sustainability concerns—particularly since Si Thep was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2023 and has since experienced a surge in visitation. Respondents noted issues such as inadequate waste management, the lack of recycling infrastructure, and insufficient eco-friendly mobility services (Thanakit & Somchai, 2024). These issues are especially significant in light of UNESCO's emphasis on site conservation and sustainable practices (Halpenny et al., 2018b; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2024).

Overall, the results confirm that tourism components, particularly attractions, activities, ancillary services, and accessibility, play a vital role in shaping tourists' travel intentions. This study also reinforces the significant impact of destination image — both cognitive and affective — on travel intentions. These findings align with existing literature and provide valuable insights for tourism planners and policymakers, emphasising the importance of enhancing tourism infrastructure, services, and activities to attract and satisfy visitors.

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for tourism management and promotion strategies at Si Thep World Heritage Site. Relevant authorities are encouraged to leverage these insights to enhance the site's appeal by emphasising its historical significance, distinctive features, and inclusive tourism activities suitable for all age groups. Such efforts are expected to increase visitors' travel intention and promote repeat visitation. Effective communication through various media channels should also highlight the site's value as both a recreational destination and a cultural learning experience, particularly its reflection of Dvaravati-era heritage through ancient architecture and sculptures. Socially, this research

promotes community participation and creative tourism activities led by local stakeholders, contributing to a more inclusive tourism development model. Economically, increased tourist awareness of the Si Thep World Heritage Site has the potential to generate income through accommodation services, local restaurants, and job creation within the surrounding area.

For future research, several directions are recommended. Firstly, an exploration of additional behavioural factors influencing travel intention, such as tourism attitudes, perceived value, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), is needed to deepen the understanding of tourist decision-making processes. Secondly, the inclusion of international tourists as a study group to examine differences in intention and perception across cultural contexts. Lastly, the application of qualitative research methods in future studies can provide more in-depth insights or validate the findings from this quantitative study, thereby enhancing the clarity and robustness of conclusions regarding visitors' intentions to travel to the Si Thep World Heritage Site.

To align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production), Si Thep's management should consider implementing ecotourism measures (Petersen & Kumar, 2024). These could include waste segregation, sourcing food and materials locally, and educating visitors on cultural sensitivity and environmental responsibility (Sustainable Tourism Foundation, 2024; World Tourism Organization, 2023).

For future research, several directions are recommended. Firstly, an exploration of additional behavioural factors influencing travel intention, such as tourism attitudes, perceived value, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), is needed to deepen the understanding of tourist decision-making processes. Secondly, the inclusion of international tourists as a study group to examine differences in intention and perception across cultural contexts. Thirdly, the application of qualitative research methods in future studies can provide more in-depth insights or validate the findings from this quantitative study, thereby enhancing the clarity and robustness of conclusions regarding visitors' intention to travel to the Si Thep World Heritage Site. Lastly, longitudinal follow-up studies should be conducted to track changes in tourist perceptions, destination image, and travel intentions over time. Such studies would provide valuable insights into the sustainability of tourism development efforts and the long-term effectiveness of promotional strategies. Additionally, longitudinal research could examine how major events, infrastructure improvements, or policy changes affect tourist behavior and destination attractiveness.

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