



THAILAND AS LGBTQ TOURISTS' A WORLD PROMISING MAIN DESTINATION

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ABSTRACT

The article attempted to point 2 objectives namely indicating the latest potentials of Thailand's LGBTQ tourism capacity and analysing the possible opportunities of Thailand's World LGBTQ Tourism destination to-be. Ones seek for someone who have same passion, instincts, tastes, and eagerness; therefore, it was resulted in LGBTQ tourism. In modern world, genders and tourism have been blended into a significant of travelling smoothly. We often see colourful and energetic activities in many famous events and festivals worldwide and enormous-amounted participants. The history of the fight for the rights has been long and glamorous. They generate tremendous of global tourism expenditures in every levels of the industry. Ergo, the category of tourism contains varied things to learn and appreciate.

Since the turn of the new millennium society has become more open to gender diversity but homosexual or cross-sexed people still have problems with the tourism industry because some have paid little respect or been being unfriendly to their homosexual clients, some people are still disgusted to accompany, or joining activities with people who reveal their homosexual preferences. As a large number of homosexuals are increasing rapidly, the media have shown more interest. Social issues and the related law have surprisingly grown affecting Thailand's economy and tourism.

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Thailand contains attributes of world's leading tourism attraction such as places, cultures, cost of living, nightlife, and so on, but there are issues to be discussed.

Keywords: LGBTQ tourists, tourism, main destination.

INTRODUCTION

Pink dollars have been rising globally for decades and in 2018 there were US\$218 billion of expenditure (IMTJ Team, Online, 2019). The LGBTQ populations are around 483 million worldwide, with 288 million LGBTQ people in Asia, or 60% of the global LGBTQ populations, while the LGBTQ populations in Thailand is about 4 million, or 6% of the global LGBTQ populations. "In view of the global LGBTQ populations, Thailand is the hub of the world's largest LGBTQ market and a haven for gender diversity." In marketing aspect, Thailand is an open country to accept gender diversity, with a wide range of businesses in terms of LGBTQ commercial products and services, as well as being the centre of LGBTQ festivals and LGBTQ world-renowned events in Thailand (LGBT Capital, Online, n.d.)

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By the way, Thailand has been ranked 53rd, 2nd of Asia, in the 150 Worst (& safest) Countries for LGBTQ + travel in 2021 (Ferguson & Ferguson, Online, 2021). Thailand exhibits protections for sexual orientations and gender identities as well as anyone can legally change gender without sex reassignment surgery. Significantly, the country has no morality law to



forbid same-sex relationship. Meanwhile, Thailand still has been lacked of important laws and actions to advance the tourists' conveniences and impressions such as adoption or protection of violence.

Notwithstanding the ranking, Thailand is suitable for LGBTQ tourists for relaxing. It presents sufficient modes of transport, types of pleasant accommodations, well infrastructures, and fair cost of living and especially, entertainments for LGBTQ service in main major cities: Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Pattaya and Phuket. In particular, Thai citizens naturally give warm-hearted hospitality and more open to foreigners. The country is an LGBTQ's favorite destination-to-visit nowadays and the numbers of LGBTQ are increasing more and more in every single year (Ferguson & Ferguson, Online, 2021), and male same-sex activities are not illegal unless it is a prostitution.

Although there is no law yet to support the same-sex marriage. Since 1956, most of people have been highly generous of gender diversity. Thus, Thailand has been described as a more LGBTQ friendly country because of its outstanding, tolerant, very warm-welcome and rapidly growing space for gender diversity. Academics and NGOs have been determined. The keystone business and commerce have begun to support LGBTQ culture especially government policy on social organizing. LGBTQ facilities have been increased in leaps and bounds. There are some international gay dance parties in Phuket, Bangkok, mostly gay and bisexual cultures that have been made more product than other genders, making Thailand known as the gay capital of Southeast Asia and East Asia but not enough in the world perspective. The article strongly preferred to discuss why Thailand should be giving more attention on LGBTQ tourism and what obstructed.

OBJECTIVES

1. To indicate the latest potentials of Thailand's LGBTQ Tourism Capacity
2. To analyze the possible opportunities of Thailand's World LGBTQ Tourism destination to-be



THE STORY OF THAILAND'S LGBTQ TOURISM

Chanan Yodhong (Online, n.d.) stated that Gay Guide 1980 Thailand as a vagaytion in 1980, an LGBTQ travel book called Spartacus International Gay Guide 1980 explained that Thailand is a gay paradise, becoming the first piece to mention Thailand as another vagaytion. Ones seek for another sexuality easily, especially in the big city and main tourist attractions in Thailand; i.e., Bangkok (Na Na alley or Pat Pong, Silom or Ratchada district), Phuket, Pattaya and Chiang Mai and even Samet island. In addition to the culture and natural environment, the quaint Southeast Asian identity that was created during the Cold War was originally capital.

The first gay bar in Thailand

Becoming one of Silom's global gay landmarks is considered as the product and representation of American cultural responses under the Cold War context, transforming Silom into a nightlife major entertainment business district same as Pattaya city. Charoenkrung area began its first gay bar, following by Silom district, and then gay entertainment arose up rapidly from Silom to Pat Pong and Surawongse before entering the golden age in the late 1977. Until there's a various widespread of LGBTQ communities and sub-culturalism led to Sukhumvit, Sa- Phan Kwai, Pradiphat and Ramkhamhaeng going on.

Koh Samet

Gay friendly attractions are not only concentrated in Bangkok. Koh Samet, Rayong province, is also considered to be the gay paradise island, especially Ao Phai (Silver Sand Bar) and even White Sand Beach. Many gay travelers come to socialize, relax and even seek for one night stand at the bar. During the long weekend, demand is so high that resorts and bungalows must be completely booked in advance over a month and the price is pretty pricey as well.

Due to the geographical reasons, Samet has a fine white sandy beach with a low slope, perfect for playing in the sea. Samet has plenty of reasonable



accommodations nearby Bangkok, a densely populated gay area, and because the “Silver Sand Bar” beach bar deejaying gay songs as a gay famous landmark. Its atmosphere is totally Gay friendly.

Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai is another LGBTQ tourist city that has been a product of the Thai government's tourism promotion policy since 1969 and the 4th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1977-1981), making it the center of the North. It attracts many tourists, which has various of bars, lounges and especially saunas for same-sex men led to NGOs for gender diversity until the 1st gay Pride festival was held successfully in Chiang Mai on Saturday, February 21st, 2009. However, for that incident on the 21st became the tragedy instead according to about 200 people of anti-gender diversity mobs with scolding banners and amplifier trucks. Close all the Buddhist sites main gates of Chiang Mai, which is the starting point for the Pride parade. Detain same-sex and transgender people from starting events and block those who will participate in the parade from participating in the event.

Local conservatives claimed that gay pride destroyed good traditional local culture and urban imagery, including cursing, throwing things, piece of stones, empty water bottles and even rubbishes against through LGBTQ people. Moreover, more than 100 policemen had no attempt to protect transgenders at all, in contrast, they asked for the organizers to take action by being apologized and end that event immediately. After more than four hours of lockdown in Buddhism, organizers were forced to crawl out to apologize to Chiang Mai residents for their tears and wounds. Later from the event, LGBTQ people asked for the justice and someone who take



responsibilities for the event and named it “Saturday Saud Ed” (meaning Saturday 21st).

Therefore, a Buddhist place in Chiang Mai was memorial to remember of “Saturday Saud Ed” as The Stonewall Riots from the Name of Stonewall Bar in New York in 1969 to pin a sign for the great violent riots of heterosexual government officials committed against LGBTQ people are different in that “Saturday Saud Ed” was made invisible and forgotten that there was once a violent anti-gay pride riot. To return to honor the discourse that Thailand is a gay friendly country.

“Thailand, gay paradise” is a simple irony that acts as a huge carpet that hides the problem of violence, injustice, gender discrimination, as well as the “Siam City of Smile” mask used to decorate the country to welcome travelers, which is silky enough to make foreign tourists understand that it is an acceptance of gender diversity, but it is actually just acceptable and tolerable as a tourist and consumer. Those attributes have generated national income from the tourism.

THAILAND AS A VAGAYTION

From the 1980s, Thailand has been referred to as the LGBTQ most friendly or ‘vagaytion’ destination due to its attraction for LGBTQ tourists, such as nightclubs, saunas and bars in the entertainment districts of Bangkok and major tourist cities. The event of Saturday the 21st in Chiang Mai, however, highlighted that ‘Thailand, gay paradise’ is more likely a myth to cover structural violence and injustice towards LGBTQ. LGBTQ tourism is still possible but should be promoted as a form of cultural tourism that encourages learning and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity.

With a social climate widely seen as tolerant towards non-heterosexual orientations, Thailand has been called a heaven for the gay and transgender lifestyle. The authorities are increasingly seeking to capitalize on that global reputation by encouraging more visits by foreign LGBTQ travelers, as well as the rights activists and artists who support the community.



Both the public and private sectors are preparing to host events that will appeal to that social segment. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) runs marketing campaigns aimed at LGBTQ tourism and, among many other plans, the Hong Kong-based Sunprise Foundation will next November be bringing Asia's largest LGBTQ arts exhibition to Bangkok (Department of International Trade Promotion, Ministry of Commerce, Online, 2560).

“LGBTQ are seen as a high-potential market with an above-average level of disposable income,” TAT deputy governor Srisuda Wanapinyosak told The Nation Weekend. “In tourism terms, they tend to travel more frequently than the demographic average.” In a recent report, LGBTQ Capital estimated the global LGBTQ population at 496 million, with 4.5 million LGBTQ people living in Thailand. Global purchasing power was calculated at US\$3.6 trillion and spending on tourism at \$5.3 billion (Thaiger, Online, 2019)

THAI SOCIETY ACCEPTS LGBTQ PEOPLE JUST BY PERSUASIVE MOUTH?

Is Thai society really open to sexual diversity? Nowadays, gender differences are acceptable in many countries around the world, including Thailand as well. In the meantime, foreigners see our Thai society accepting and open about gender diversity, but we can actually accepted that differences? (Infographic Thailand, Online, 2557).

LGBTQ people play integral parts of Thailand's economy. By the way, there are issues to be discussed. Previous years, Thailand attempted to support LGBTQ officially, but there were several hot potatoes. A good sign began with the Ministry of Defence turned a so-called word “Permanent Mental Disorder” identifying in Sor Dor 43, the Thailand's evidence of exemption from military service, into “Gender Identity Disorder” in 2011. Since 2012, LGBTQ have been certified to achieve service of Accessibility to Social Welfare according to the Social Welfare Promotion Act, B.E. 2546 (2003). Meanwhile, sociocultural chronic bias has caused inequality or even



marginalization of employment and society. Stigmatization, discrimination, and deprivation – the people who are noticeably in sexual orientations or gender identities have been obstructed by employment and education.

In 2020, the House of Representatives have accepted the bill in principle of same-sex marriage; it is supposed to be an origin of Thailand's sex equality as well as the discrimination's ban. In fact, it has been different from heterosexual marriage; for instance, the age of heterosexual couple are between 17 - 20 years old; LGBTQ have to be 18 - 20 under their parent acceptance, and particularly the same-sex bill is not covered the social welfare rights. To accept the rights on the spouse behalf, the same-sex married bill has been not covered Government officer's benefits: Civil Servant Medical Benefit Scheme, Social Security Scheme, and others. The question is why the Government separated the same-sex marriage from the ordinary married law.

There are so many stigmatizations for LGBTQ. They are unable to change their titles even if they have transgendered. This problem affects the LGBTQ a lot in terms of employments, social relations, and other conditions; i.e., they may get joked about their orientations and gender identities or asking the sex during job interviews. For this reason, they have to pretend they are heterosexual or tolerated from possible provocations (PPTV Online, Online, 2563). A number of Thai gay men have suffered bullyings because misunderstanding belief that “gays enjoy molestation.”

Actually, the unacceptable perspectives have accumulated through eras and social activities because of t. The LGBTQ in Thailand were categorized by so-called Thai social words as follows katoey, sao prophet song, or tut – a man who sexually/emotively prefer to a man (tut could mean faggot on the same level); tom from tomboy; di, the word is derived from lady and they typically but not always prefer a tomboy; and other words of sex discrimination (Busakorn Suriyasarn, 2014). The categorization has been done for decades in purpose, accidentally and intentionally, of



denigration. The mainstream media often launched gay comedies building a normative belief. As a result, not only Thais have seen them strange but also got homophobic misapprehension. As claimed by obsolete individuals that numerous think LGBTQ consistently seduce and like to be molested.

Nevertheless, the modernization via social media, daily lives, and surroundings have altered the norm towards LGBTQ. These days in Thailand, coming out of the closet is common in real life; yet, few still hide their preferences due to social status or etc. The majorities are familiar with and far more open up because they have experienced them the ordinary people – the heterosexual Thais found that homosexual ones are always around and take part because they are friends, relatives, colleagues, acquaintances, or even parents. Based on advanced realization, gay men lovely call one another “hey tut” among their friends and they accept the word publicly. Some say, gender diversity creates energetic delectations in classroom, workgroup, all kind of companies and in particular Thailand’s tourism industry.

THAILAND’S WORLD LGBTQ TOURISM DESTINATION TO-BE

As mentioned, Thailand was ranked 2nd in Asia as LGBTQ’s destination behind Taiwan. One of the main reason was Taiwan supports same-sex marriage law. According to Song and Hsu (2013) stated the Taiwan’s tourism capacity that its outstanding in leisure and recreation, culture, history and arts, natural resources political and economic factors, social environment and atmosphere, including infrastructures. In the other hand, Beguisi, et al (2015) presented tourists satisfaction’s level in Thailand were food price, type of foods, attitude of Thai people toward tourists, type of tourists attractions, quality of foods, service in hotels or guest house, prices of hotels or guest house (exceeded-4.00 points’ tourists’ attitudes listed). Thailand offers variety and uniqueness of tourists’ attraction but both of them are almost equal to cost of living. In 2020, Nimit Soonsan and Sirintha Sungthong advocated the evidence Thailand always presents beaches,

local gastronomy, nightlife, and friendly people. To be more specific, let's take a look at the table:

Table 1: The Comparison between Taiwan and Thailand's Tourism Capabilities

| Taiwan | Thailand |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Unique leisure and recreation | Unique leisure and recreation |
| Culture, history, and art | Culture, history, and arts |
| Natural resources | Natural resources |
| Social environment | Friendly people and nice hospitality |
| Unique atmosphere | Unique atmosphere |
| Nice infrastructure | Average infrastructure |
| Attractive cost of living | Attractive cost of living |
| Same-sex marriage law | - |

Note: Adapted from Song and Hsu (2013); Baguisi (2015); Nimit Soonsan and Sirinthra Sungthong (2563)

Launching the model “The Dimensionality of Tourist Experiences” to analyse Thailand's capacity to be a main destination of LGBTQ's tourists:

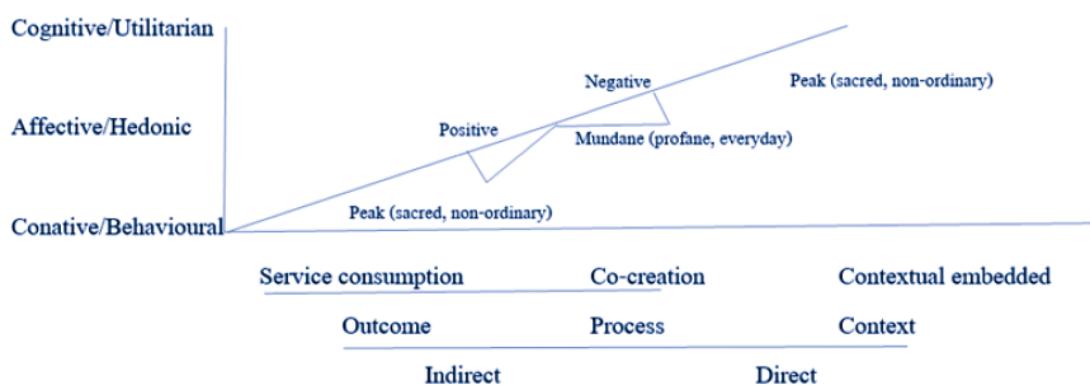


Figure 1: The Dimensionality of Tourist Experiences Source
(Prebensen, Chen & Uysal, 2018)



According to the model above, we can see the positive point between affective/hedonic, cognitive/utilitarian, conative/behavioural together with service consumption, co-creation, and context. Those could be integrated positively because of Thailand's tourism potentials such as warm-hearted hospitality, and diverse wonderful sites.

CONCLUSION

Thailand possesses all-gendered prestige attractions attracting tremendous worldwide LGBTQ visitors. The tourists have experienced famous tourists' spots and several of them continuously revisited. A great number of undiscovered charming places locates thoroughly the country waiting for LGBTQ guests to delight warmly. The grateful of Thai hospitality industry are very well prepared to assists most of all desires – it is a remarkable characteristic of Thailand's tourism.

Thailand's cultures and chronicle and of LGBTQ has been last long and they highly understand one another conveying to societies. LGBTQ tourism in Thailand is becoming more and more popular. The entrepreneurs turned to more attention to the arrangements of accommodations, restaurants and shops in order to welcome LGBTQ travelers. Gender diversity is widespread globally, but the conservative attitudes still remain as usual with us like a shadow that clinks to. Building the public understanding of its own people onto the same way is very important, especially same-sex preference.

In conclusion, with various factors supporting LGBTQ tourism, including a reputation for sexual freedom acceptance, laws of gender equality, the growth of the establishment facilitates tourists LGBTQ and government support. These things can be certainly arising up to Thailand as “Top Destination” of LGBTQ Travelers, even now it might be just at the starting level, but it is believed that if Thailand gives more serious to LGBTQ tourism development encouraging collaboration between the public and the private sector. In the next few years, Thailand will be definitely in the world top sites of LGBTQ travellers.



RECOMMENDATIONS

As an LGBTQ travelers or gender diverse group are increasingly widespread throughout Thailand, especially the main tourist destinations; Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiangmai and Phuket. Gay travelers usually come to Thailand, but how to “repeat”, “stay longer”, “words of mouth” and “sustainable”? Post COVID-19, Thai Tourism is on alert for this, whoever is in niche market and follow this market (a research focuses on: men and men) would know about Tourism Authority of Thailand, doesn't lag behind other countries, and there are some tools to capture this market such as go Thai, Be Free. A research found that foreign gay tourists are value laws that supports equality in all aspect, even Thailand doesn't yet have same-sex marriage. There are no laws on adoption, and so on, while many countries in Europe and Americas have adopted adoption laws is being progressed so far. Anyway, awareness of gay travellers Thailand is “Gay paradise”, and probably would become the 2nd country in Asia for legally gay marriage.

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