



## Potential Thai Tourist Segmentation to Reduce Dependency on Foreign Tourists highlighted by the COVID-19 Crisis

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### Abstract

Tourism is highly vulnerable to both internal and external factors ranging from political crises, natural disasters, and disease outbreaks. The popularity of Thai tourism has substantially increased over the last decade with international tourist arrivals exceeding 40 million in 2019. However, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted Thai tourism and international travel plunged. This article studied the segmentation of potential Thai tourists to replace the downturn in foreign tourists after the COVID-19 crisis using both quantitative and qualitative research methodology. Data were collected using a questionnaire from 1,200 Thai tourists aged 20 years and over, earning more than 50,000 baht per month, and living in provinces with municipal administration and populations of more than 1 million. Data from the questionnaire were incorporated with information gained from in-depth interviews with 41 key informants who were representatives of national tourism agencies. The results of K-means cluster analysis, behavioral analysis, and crosschecking with national tourism agencies showed that high-end domestic tourists could be divided into three groups as Trend Escape, Fun Escape, and Away Escape. This research promoted quality domestic market tourism as a stabilization measure to increase tourism income, while also reducing the economic risks of relying on international tourists.

**Keywords:** Tourism Management, High-end Tourists, Tourism Resources, Tourism Products

**JEL Classifications:** M31, Z31, Z32

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## **1. Introduction**

Tourism is a major industry that generates high income and plays an important role in promoting the rapid and sustained growth of Thailand's economy. In 2009, 15,936,400 foreign tourists visited the country, generating an income of 592,794.09 million baht. In 2019, 39,916,251 foreign visitors generated an income of 1,911,807.95 million baht, representing increases of 150.47% and 222.51%, respectively (National Statistical Office, 2020). The COVID-19 epidemic spread globally toward the end of 2019, causing the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare the virus as a pandemic in 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020).

The Thai Government announced strict lockdown measures to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus within the country (Wongmonta, 2021). These measures greatly impacted Thai tourism, causing a severe downturn in the economy. In 2020, Thailand had 6,725,193 foreign tourists, generating income of 355,367.43 million baht, a decrease from 2019 of 83.15% and 81.41%, respectively (National Statistical Office, 2020). The government instigated measures to unlock the country to reduce the economic impact and relieve the tensions in society by balancing disease control with business operations and activities (Klinsrisuk & Pechdin, 2022). Local tourism within the country was encouraged but restrictions on entering Thailand for foreign tourists remained.

Domestic tourism has the potential to recover faster than foreign tourism, especially high-end market tourists or high-quality tourists with high purchasing power who are not affected by the economic slowdown. These tourists will focus more on domestic tourism, as many countries still have measures to control the spread of COVID-19 for foreign tourists. As a result, this group of tourists search for domestic tourist attractions to replace overseas travel (Pongsakornrungrasit et al., 2021). The Tourism Authority of Thailand predicted that from the third quarter (July-September 2020), tourism would gradually recover with reduced restrictions on entering the country. The Thai Government promoted various measures to revitalize and stimulate domestic tourism (Fakfare et al., 2024), following the prediction of the United Nations World Tourism Organization that domestic tourism would increase after the COVID-19 crisis.

Thus, agencies involved in the Thai tourism industry must focus on promoting domestic tourism to replace the income from foreign tourists. High-end Thai tourists should be encouraged to travel within the country (Demand Side) by developing the readiness of tourism resources and tourism products to satisfy their needs (Supply Side) and generate income to revitalize the country's economy by focusing on value and sustainability (Kitipacharadechatron & Boonjiam, 2022; Laparojkit & Suttipun, 2021). The National Tourism Development Plan 2023-2027 highlights the importance of solving the problems of tourism disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2023).

Therefore, this research studied the segmentation of potential domestic market tourists to reduce the dependency on the international tourist market and promote quality domestic tourism to maintain stability, increase income, and reduce economic risks.

## **2. Research Purpose**

The tourism sector and tourism-related businesses are important factors for national economic growth. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand received nearly 40 million tourists annually, generating income of 1.76 trillion baht and accounting for 12%

of total GDP. The number of foreign tourists traveling to Thailand decreased by 83% from 40 million in 2019 to 6.7 million in 2020. Tourism in Thailand relies heavily on foreign tourists (Fakfare et al., 2022). The segmentation of potential Thai tourists would help to cover the drop in foreign tourists as a safeguard and contingency plan for sustainable tourism management. By understanding the characteristics and behaviors of potential Thai tourists, stakeholders can better design tourism elements to match their needs and requirements.

This research examined the segmentation of potential Thai tourists to replace foreign tourists after the tourism downturn caused by the COVID-19 epidemic.

### 3. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

#### 3.1 Literature Review

##### 3.1.1 The concepts of tourism management

Tourism management involves setting goals and plans for tourism in terms of management, administration, control, budget allocation, evaluation, and appropriate action (Page, 2019). Tourism management consists of multiple dimensions and is named according to the number of elements. For example, the 3A tourism concept (Collier, 2011) consists of Attraction, Accessibility and Amenities. 1) Attraction refers to a site or an event which may occur naturally or result from human creation that attracts tourists, 2) Amenity refers to the tourism infrastructure that creates convenience and meets the needs of tourists such as transportation systems, telecommunications systems, and public utility systems, and 3) Accessibility refers to tourist attractions which require a transportation system to transport tourists and goods to their destination.

Later, scholars added more tourism elements. Fletcher et al. (2017) added an ancillary service element, as an activity or service that facilitates and impresses tourists, resulting in a 4A tourism concept, while Dickman (1996) added an activity element organized to attract tourists, to give a 5A tourism concept.

Some scholars and educators added other tourism elements such as administration (Sitikarn, 2014) and association and application of local wisdom (Charoensri et al., 2019) as well as elements of awareness, appearance, appreciation, assurance, action, and accountability (Morrison, 2019). Table 1 shows these tourism elements.

Table 1: The Elements of Tourism

Research The elements of tourism	Dickman (1996)	Collier (2011)	Fletcher et al.(2017)	Pike (2021)	Pelasol et al. (2012)	Sitikarn (2014)	Lee-Anant et al. (2023)	Charoensri et al. (2019)	Morrison (2019)	Total
Attraction	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Amenity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		8
Accessibility	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Ancillary service		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		5
Activity			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Accommodation			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Administration						✓				1
Availability								✓	✓	2
Association						✓		✓		2

Research The elements of tourism	Dickman (1996)	Collier (2011)	Fletcher et al. (2017)	Pike (2021)	Pelasol et al. (2012)	Sitikarn (2014)	Lee-Anant et al. (2023)	Charoensri et al. (2019)	Morrison (2019)	Total
Application of local wisdom						✓				1
Awareness									✓	1
Appearance									✓	1
Appreciation									✓	1
Assurance									✓	1
Action									✓	1
Accountability									✓	1

Source: Information obtained from the Literature Review

### 3.1.2 The concepts of forms of tourism

The Tourism Authority of Thailand has divided tourism patterns according to the importance and environment relating to the dicta of the World Tourism Organization (World Tourism Organization, 2024; Fakfare et al., 2022; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2016) as follows:

- 1) Ecotourism refers to tourism in natural places that are unique to the local area, together with a learning process guided by relevant personnel.
- 2) Natural tourism refers to visiting various natural resources such as hot springs, beaches, waterfalls, caves, and islands.
- 3) Historical tourism refers to visiting tourist sites that have historical and archaeological value.
- 4) Cultural tourism involves learning about the traditions, rituals, arts and culture, and way of life of the villagers.
- 5) Health tourism refers to staying at natural places for relaxation and health treatment.
- 6) Recreational tourism creates tourist attractions to relax, promote health, and provide fun and entertainment.
- 7) Special interest tourism involves the selection of destinations that cater to the specific requirements of tourists.

### 3.1.3 The concept of a tourism crisis

A crisis is an unexpected event or situation which may be natural or human-induced that has a rapid detrimental effect with serious damage to the business operations of an organization (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2022).

Ritchie & Jiang (2019) divided the crisis life cycle into three phases. 1) The pre-crisis phase is when the problem first shows warning signs; for example, the occurrence of fluctuating abnormal situations. If these are recognized early, this will help to deal with issues before the crisis occurs. 2) The crisis response phase involves recognizing the emergence of a crisis and trying to return the situation to normal as soon as possible. 3) In the post-crisis phase, problematic situations can be resolved, thereby helping the crisis to unfold and pass over.

Tourism crisis management involves the life cycles of the above crises. The pre-crisis period is spent training the relevant personnel, monitoring the situation, risk assessment, and determining the level of warning that will affect prevention and control

measures when the crisis occurs. Meetings are also conducted with internal and external agencies to assess the crisis impact and communicate the facts to provide lessons and maximize preventive measures. Plans are also made and implemented to revitalize the tourism market (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2020).

### **3.1.4 Tourism market development**

Tourism in Thailand can be divided into quality target groups for both domestic and international markets. In the foreign market, Thailand focuses on targeting individual quality groups, expanding customer groups with high purchasing power, finding customers in new areas, encouraging travel to Thailand during the low season, and focusing on offering products and services that enhance Thai identity. The domestic market target groups cover many dimensions such as millennial families, ladies, and multi-gen groups. The main target group and the joint target group of the region can be specified to focus on attracting domestic tourists with high purchasing power (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2018). Local tourism market development consists of three key elements as 1) responding to the needs of tourists, 2) identifying the needs of tourists through market research, and 3) managing the life cycle of tourism resources (Morrison, 2022).

### **3.1.5 The concepts of potential tourists**

Tourism is a large-scale industry involving accommodation, food and beverage, gift and travel businesses. Tourists in each business group have varying needs. Therefore, criteria must be used to segment the tourist market so that each business can target a tourist group that is suitable for its operation. Philip et al. (2016) identified four criteria as 1) geographic segmentation which divides groups of tourists according to countries, regions, and provinces, 2) demographic segmentation as age, gender, income, and occupation, 3) psychographic segmentation according to social and lifestyle class, and 4) behavioral segmentation according to knowledge, attitude, and usage.

Categorizing tourists using psychological criteria determined that high-end tourists have high purchasing power, travel in luxury and comfort and spend a lot of money while traveling to buy quality products and services. The tourism market of each country has a demand for high-end tourists in both the foreign and domestic markets.

Brand Matrix Research (2018) grouped high-end tourists according to psychological characteristics. Four groups of high-end tourists were identified as 1) The Happiness Blend group who want to have fun and experience the novelty of tourism, 2) The Live & Learn group who like technology and learning about traveling, 3) The Everything Everywhere group that want to discover real experiences from tourism, and 4) The Journey Up Close group who want to learn about the lifestyle of local people and gain different experiences.

After the outbreak of COVID-19, many countries enforced strict measures to control the epidemic. As a result, tourists changed their behavior by choosing to travel domestically rather than abroad. Thai high-end tourists prefer to travel within the country to places that are not crowded and not very far away. They travel by private car for security in luxury and comfort (Laparojkit & Suttipun, 2021; Wachyuni & Kusumaningrum, 2020).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand aims to expand the potential of Thai high-end tourists to seek tourist attractions or become interested in domestic attractions as an alternative to overseas tourism. Furthermore, it also aims to develop quality and valuable products and services, as well as manage tourist attractions appropriately (TAT Review, 2023).

## **4. Research Methods**

A mixed research method was employed as a combination of quantitative and qualitative research.

### **4.1 Study subjects**

#### **4.1.1 Quantitative research**

The subjects were Thai nationality tourists, aged 20 years and over, earning more than 50,000 baht per month, and residing in a municipal administrative province with a population exceeding 1 million people.

Cochran's sample size (Cochran, 1977) determination was used to obtain a sample of 1,200 Thai tourists.

#### **4.1.2 Qualitative research**

The subjects used in the qualitative research had special characteristics as an important demographic group. In-depth interviews were conducted to verify the quantitative data, which was subjected to coding analysis.

The 41 key informants in this research were split into three groups as:

Group 1: 16 representatives from Provincial Tourism and Sports Offices

Group 2: 16 representatives from the Provincial Tourism Authority of Thailand Offices

Group 3: 9 representatives of The Federation of Thai Industries

### **4.2 Random sampling techniques**

#### **4.2.1 Quantitative research**

This study used a purposive random sampling method to select the sample provinces, with quota random sampling used to determine the number of subjects used in the study. The total number of provinces according to the quota was 15 provinces and 19 municipalities. The 1,200 samples used in this study were split by province and region and are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Identification of Quantitative Research Samples

Regions	Provinces	Samples	Total Region Samples	Total Samples
Northern	1. Chiang Rai	51	122	1,200
	2. Chiang Mai	71		
Northeastern	1. Nakhon Ratchasima	113	387	
	2. Sakon Nakhon	49		
	3. Udon Thani	68		
	4. Ubon Ratchathani	79		
	5. Khon Kaen	78		
Central	1. Nakhon Sawan	45	274	
	2. Nonthaburi	56		
	3. Pathum Thani	50		
	4. Samut Prakan	57		
	5. Chonburi	66		
Southern	1. Nakhon Si Thammarat	65	170	
	2. Songkhla	62		
	3. Surat Thani	45		
Special Administrative Area	1. Bangkok	244	244	

Source: The Author

In the northern region, 2 provinces as Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai, had 51 and 71 samples, respectively. Five provinces in the northeastern region, namely Nakhon Ratchasima, Sakon Nakhon, Udon Thani, Ubon Ratchathani, and Khon Kaen had 113, 49, 68, 79, and 78 samples, respectively. The central region consisted of 5 provinces, namely Nakhon Sawan, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Samut Prakan, and Chonburi with 45, 56, 50, 57, and 66 samples, respectively while the southern region had 3 provinces, namely Nakhon Si Thammarat, Songkhla, and Surat Thani with 65, 62, and 45 samples, respectively. Lastly, Bangkok, the special administrative capital city, primarily exported tourists to other provinces. Therefore, Bangkok was selected as the area used in this study. The sample group comprised 244 subjects and a convenience sampling method was used to collect data according to the goals set and the characteristics of the selected group according to the research objectives.

#### 4.2.2 Qualitative research

A purposive sampling method was employed to select the key informants.

### 4.3 Data collection, data analysis and research results

#### 4.3.1 Data collection

Quantitative research

A questionnaire survey was used in this study to collect data divided into three parts:

Part 1 asked for the demographics of the respondents as a checklist and a fill-in-the-blank survey.

Part 2 asked about tourist behavior and psychology. The form of the questionnaire was also a checklist and a fill-in-the-blank survey.

Part 3 asked for opinions about the management and service quality of domestic tourist attractions, with answers rated on a 5-level Likert scale.

A score of 5 indicated strongly agree/very good comments.

A score of 4 indicated agreement/good comments.

A score of 3 indicated moderate comments.

A score of 2 indicated disagreement/fewer comments.

A score of 1 indicated strong objections/minimum objection comments.

The questionnaire was examined for content validity by checking for item object congruence (IOC) as the index of consistency between the content in the questionnaire and the objective. The correctness of the language in the questionnaire was improved to be appropriate according to the advice of five experts. The average consistency index was 0.80. The revised questionnaire was pretested with a sample group of 200 people with a similar context to the research sample. The reliability value using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.82.

#### Qualitative research

A semi-structured interview was used in this study, consisting of an open-ended question about the behavior and psychology of tourists, the management and service quality of domestic tourist attractions, an interview form with expert quality checks, and improvements to the interview form to be appropriate according to the advice of five experts.

### **4.3.2 Data analysis**

#### Quantitative research

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics consisting of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

#### Qualitative research

Data obtained from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using coding analysis.

### **4.3.3 Research results**

The opinions of the respondents were analyzed by mean and standard deviation and interpreted according to the specified criteria as follows:

4.21-5.00 indicated strongly agree/very good level of comment.

3.41-4.20 indicated agreement/good level of comment.

2.61-3.40 indicated a moderate level of comment.

1.81-2.60 indicated disagreement/low level of comment.

1.00-1.80 indicated strongly disagree/very low level of comment.



## 5. Research findings and discussion

### 5.1 Research findings

Thai tourists were divided into three potential groups according to their travel objectives based on K-means cluster analysis, behavioral analysis, and cross-checking the results with 41 representatives from national tourism agencies as 1) Trend Escape tourists, 2) Fun Escape tourists, and 3) Away Escape tourists. Table 3 illustrates the comparisons between these three potential tourist groups.

Table 3: Comparisons of Potential Classified Local Tourist Groups

Details	Clusters		
	Cluster 1 Trend Escape	Cluster 2 Fun Escape	Cluster 3 Away Escape
<b>Sex</b>	Female	Male	Male
<b>Avg. Age</b>	40 Years Old	44 Years Old	45 Years Old
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	Married	Married
<b>Educational Level</b>	Bachelor Degree	Bachelor Degree	Master Degree
<b>Career</b>	Private Company Employee	Business Owner & Entrepreneur	Business Owner & Entrepreneur
<b>Avg. Income</b>	THB 60,416	THB 157,571	THB 293,750
<b>Avg. Traveling Expense</b>	THB 6,049	THB 20,000	THB 17,563
<b>Avg. Accommodation Expense</b>	THB 5,972	THB 20,000	THB 20,188
<b>Avg. Food &amp; Beverage Expense</b>	THB 4,796	THB 15,000	THB 21,045
<b>Avg. Shopping &amp; Souvenir Expense</b>	THB 4,422	THB 8,000	THB 15,162
<b>Avg. Tourism Fee Expense</b>	THB 1,420	THB 5,000	THB 8,893
<b>Avg. Tourism Activity Expense</b>	THB 2,605	THB 10,000	THB 16,488
<b>Avg. Rental Equipment Expense</b>	THB 2,342	THB 5,000	THB 5,275
<b>Avg. Insurance Expense</b>	THB 1,850	THB 3,500	THB 17,563
<b>Avg. Local Tour Guide Expense</b>	THB 1,702	THB 2,500	THB 20,188
<b>Avg. Tourism Facilitation Expense</b>	THB 3,778	THB 50,000	THB 21,045
<b>Avg. Miscellaneous Expense</b>	THB 6,152	THB 10,000	THB 15,162
<b>Preferred Traveling Provinces</b>	Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Bangkok, Kanchanaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Chonburi, Krabi, Phuket	Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Chonburi, Krabi, Phuket	Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, Nakhon Ratchasima, Bangkok, Trat, Phatthalung, Phuket
<b>Preferred Traveling Period(s)</b>	Saturday – Sunday	Saturday – Sunday	Public Holidays
<b>Preferred Mode of Transportation</b>	Private Vehicle	Private Vehicle	Private Vehicle

Details	Clusters		
	Cluster 1 Trend Escape	Cluster 2 Fun Escape	Cluster 3 Away Escape
<b>Domestic Overnight Stay</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Preferred Accommodation</b>	4-Star Hotel & Above	5-Star Hotel & Above	5-Star Hotel & Above
<b>Avg. Length of Trip</b>	18 Days	17 Days	9 Days
<b>Planning Information</b>	Smartphone	Smartphone	Applications
<b>Searching Channel</b>	Self-administered	Self-administered	Self-administered
<b>Tourism Administration</b>	Family	Family	Family
<b>Traveling Companion</b>	Shopping & purchasing goods	Shopping & purchasing goods	Relaxing & stress relief
<b>Main Objective(s) of Domestic Tourism</b>	- Safety of life and property	- New tourist attractions with less crowded tourists	- New tourist attractions with less crowded tourists
<b>Primary Factors Affecting the Decision to Domestically Travel</b>	- The reputation of tourist attractions	- Unable to travel abroad	- Quality of products and services
	- Ease of access	- Quality of products and services	- Unable to travel abroad
	- Availability of facilities	- Cleanliness and hygiene	- Safety of life and property
		- Safety of life and property	- The reputation of tourist attractions
		- Availability of facilities	- Close distance with less traveling time
		- Clean accommodations with standards	- recommendations through various media channels
		- Ease of access to tourist attractions	- Availability of facilities
		- Nice environment of attractions	- Ease of access to tourist attractions
		- The referral by close people	- Nice environment of attractions
			- Variety of activities within tourist attractions
			- Cleanliness and hygiene
			- Beauty and novelty of tourist attractions
			- The referral by close people
			- Impression by previous visits

Details	Clusters		
	Cluster 1 Trend Escape	Cluster 2 Fun Escape	Cluster 3 Away Escape
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The place has an interesting story and history</li> <li>- Delicious foods</li> <li>- Clean accommodation with high standards</li> <li>- Friendliness of the local people</li> <li>- Distinction of arts, cultures, way of life and traditions</li> </ul>
<b>Primary Factors Affecting Decision to Not Domestically Travel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deterioration of tourist attractions</li> <li>- -Difficult access</li> <li>- Unavailability of facilities</li> <li>- Unpreparedness of sanitation management</li> <li>- The spread of contagious diseases within the country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deterioration of tourist attractions</li> <li>- Poor quality products and services</li> <li>- Insecurity when traveling</li> <li>- Unavailability of facilities</li> <li>- Unavailability of accommodations</li> <li>- Unpreparedness of sanitation management</li> <li>- The spread of contagious diseases within the country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deterioration of tourist attractions</li> <li>- Poor quality tourism products and services</li> <li>- Insecurity when traveling</li> <li>- Unavailability of service personnel in tourist attractions</li> <li>- Unworthiness when choosing to travel</li> <li>- Unavailability of tourism facilities</li> <li>- Unavailability of accommodation</li> <li>- Unpreparedness of sanitation management</li> <li>- Negative news about tourist attractions</li> <li>- The spread of contagious diseases within the country</li> </ul>
<b>Preferred Type(s) of Tourism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leisure Tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leisure Tourism</li> <li>- Gastronomic Tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cultural Tourism</li> <li>- Historical Tourism</li> <li>- Religious and Faith Tourism</li> <li>- Marine Ecotourism</li> <li>- Gastronomic Tourism</li> <li>- Ethnic Tourism</li> </ul>

Details	Clusters		
	Cluster 1 Trend Escape	Cluster 2 Fun Escape	Cluster 3 Away Escape
<b>Self-Definition</b>	- Leisure Tourists	- Leisure Tourists - Shopping Tourists - Foodie Tourists	- Aesthetic Tourism - Cultural and Community-based Tourists - Historical Tourists - Foodie Tourists - Leisure Tourists
<b>Tourism Referral</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Tourism Repurchase</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Derived data from the research results

The main purpose of domestic travel was to relax and relieve stress, and the main factors that affected potential tourists to decide to travel domestically were new tourist destinations, less crowded areas, quality of products and services, inability to travel abroad, life and property safety, the reputation of tourist attractions, short time to travel, advertising and recommendation through various media channels, availability of facilities, ease of access to tourist attractions, the good environment of tourist attractions, variety of activities within tourist attractions, clean, hygienic, beauty and novelty of tourist attractions, introduction and persuasion of close people, the place is impressive and interesting, delicious food, standard clean accommodation, the friendliness of the locals, and the distinction of arts and culture, way of life, and traditions. The factors that prevented this group of tourists from choosing to travel in the country were the deterioration of domestic tourist attractions, tourism products, and poor-quality services, insecurity when traveling, the unavailability of service personnel in tourist attractions, the unavailability of tourism facilities, the unavailability of accommodation, the unpreparedness of sanitation management, negative news about tourist attractions and the spread of epidemics and contagious diseases within the country. The favorite forms of domestic tourism for this group of tourists were cultural and traditional tourism, historical tourism, religious and faith tourism, marine ecotourism, food tourism, ethnic tourism, and tourism that sees the beauty of art, defining them as cultural and community tourists, traditional history tourists, food tourists, and leisure tourists who often choose to travel repeatedly.

### 5.2 Segmentation of potential Thai tourists

The groups of potential Thai tourists were divided using psychological criteria as social level, lifestyle, and purpose of traveling (Philip et al., 2016). The in-depth interviews with 41 representatives from national tourism agencies affirmed the accuracy of segmentations based on the insights from behavioral profiles. The defined segmentations were divided into three groups as 1) Trend Escape groups, travelers who like to travel according to popular trends for leisure, 2) Fun Escape groups, tourists who like to travel for leisure, shopping, and travel, and 3) Away Escape groups, tourists who travel for leisure that emphasizes luxury, sightseeing, art, culture, history, community, way of life, and ecological food.

These high-end tourists chose domestic travel because they could use private cars and the tourist destinations were not crowded, corresponding to the change in tourism behavior of potential Thai tourists after the outbreak of COVID-19. However, this group of tourists still demanded high-quality leisure tourism, focusing on luxury,

comfort, and security when traveling, consistent with Amadeus (2023) who found that the tourism industry was trending toward luxury travel to meet the needs of people with increasing wealth in many parts of the world. From 2018 to 2021, the trend of luxury tourism grew at an average annual rate of 4.5% and continues to grow steadily. The popularity of luxury travel is increasing (Amadeus, 2023).

The qualitative results revealed that the 41 national tourism representatives mutually agreed on the segmentation. Various comments were suggested, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Suggestions from the In-Depth Interviews with 41 Tourism Representatives

<b>Respondents (R)</b>	<b>Agencies</b>	<b>Comments</b>
R4	Provincial Tourism and Sports Office	“We agree with the three classified tourist target markets but do not forget to employ different marketing strategies due to different behaviors.”
R7	Provincial Tourism and Sports Office	“I totally agree with these three groups, which show the changing behaviors of the modern tourist. As a result, the management of tourism resources and supplies should be well prepared to cater to different demands.”
R12	Provincial Tourism and Sports Office	“Although we know the clear target markets, we need to make tourism products, including tourism destinations, ready to welcome them. Now, we are not so sure if we are ready or not.”
R17	Provincial Tourism Authority of Thailand Office	“Presently, we have too many tourism strategies, and we seem to focus on all target markets. We are a little bit confused.”
R18	Provincial Tourism Authority of Thailand Office	“Although you can identify the tourist target markets by looking at behaviors, we should also consider some other market segmentation techniques, for example, demography and geography.”
R34	The Federation of Thai Industries	“Tourist behaviors are very diversified and we should not forget service innovations to satisfy these needs.”
R38	The Federation of Thai Industries	“We must rely on marketing research, and we must join forces and call for participation in success. These are the two main conditions that we need to be concerned about.”
R40	The Federation of Thai Industries	“To be successful in reaching these mentioned target markets, governmental support is a must and needs to be put into reality.”

Source: Derived data from the qualitative results

By integrating both qualitative and quantitative research data, Table 4 shows that, firstly, to successfully attract the mentioned target markets, a variety of marketing strategies should be utilized by multi-stakeholder corporations. Secondly, the tourism supply side including products, destinations, and services, needs to be very well prepared and managed. Lastly, changing behaviors and circumstances lead to changing marketing strategies, which need to be based on knowledge and research. To sum up, attracting the market for potential Thai tourists to travel domestically instead of abroad during the post-crisis period will help to generate income for the country, substitute income from foreign tourists, and revive the country's tourism economy.

## **6. Conclusions**

Tourism plays an important role in the economy of Thailand by continuously generating both foreign and domestic market income. However, growth was halted during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the government enacting lockdown measures. When the epidemic abated, the government announced relaxation measures. As a result, businesses in the tourism and service industries encouraged tourists to travel within the country, while restrictions remained on traveling abroad. Domestic tourism can recover faster than international tourism, especially for the group of tourists with high potential, quality, and purchasing power.

This study surveyed and studied the segmentation of potential Thai tourists to replace foreign tourists after the downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The potential Thai tourists were divided into three groups as Trend Escape, Fun Escape, and Away Escape. Our results provide important guidelines for promoting quality domestic market tourism to raise tourism income and reduce the country's reliance on international tourists. Creating knowledge and understanding in local communities about existing tourism products and resources will further develop quality tourism products or new tourism products to attract local tourists to spend more within the country. This is also an important guideline for policy formulation and strategic planning to promote domestic tourism and focus on encouraging potential Thai tourists to travel more within the country to help boost domestic tourism after the spread of COVID-19.

The government, private sectors, communities, educational institutions, teachers, students, and related fields should upgrade their knowledge of domestic tourism to better respond to the needs of all groups of domestic tourists. The relevant agencies should also better understand the behavior of potential Thai tourist groups and the new resource base provided by the central government such as the Ministry of Tourism and Sports Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Department of Tourism, which must focus on promoting tourism income enhancement from potential Thai tourists. Provincial or local government sectors such as local government organizations, Sub-district Administrative Organizations (SAO), Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAO), municipalities, and provincial chambers of commerce, need to have the knowledge and ability to think, analyze, and synthesize academic information, leading to appropriate actions according to the area context.

The agency should create knowledge and understanding for the community or society about the strengths and weaknesses of tourism products or the resource base available in the community for people in society and communities to see the value of resources, products, and the local way of life in their own communities. This can then be further developed into tourism products to meet the needs of potential Thai tourists as well as encourage business creativity in the development of new tourism products or new tourism activities to improve the quality of life and promote more income and new

careers. This will generate income and improve the quality of life for the local people. Further studies on other groups of tourists, such as retirees or senior citizens are also recommended.

Central government agencies such as the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, the Tourism Authority of Thailand Provincial Office, the Tourism Council of Thailand, and the Chamber of Commerce can use data from this research to assist in policy formulation and plan strategies to promote domestic tourism and encourage potential Thai tourists to travel more within the country. Policies should be promoted to develop domestic resources to meet the needs of high-end potential tourists to spend more domestically.

Provincial agencies such as the Sub-district Administrative Organization (SAO), the Provincial Administrative Organizations (SAO), municipalities and provincial chambers of commerce can use the information obtained from this research to create measures or promote tourism to find new tourist market groups. This will meet the tourism development goals of the central government that focus on economic development at the grassroots level and promoting more Thai-style tourism, by traveling in Thailand as well as designing policies and strategies that can encourage the high-income Thai tourist market to travel within the country to improve the quality of life of people in the community after the spread of the COVID-19. The Tourism Authority of Thailand can use the information obtained from this research to create campaign marketing to promote tourism among potential Thai tourists to help boost domestic tourism after the outbreak of COVID-19.

Based on the research results, the supply side as tourism entrepreneurs can better understand the demands of local potential groups so that the 16A tourism elements can be well prepared to match potential tourist behaviors. This will involve developing the attraction, amenity, accessibility, ancillary service, activity, accommodation, availability, association, application of local wisdom, awareness, appearance, appreciation, assurance, action, and accountability to entice more Thai potential tourists.

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