

# THE EFFECTS OF DESTINATION AWARENESS, PERCEPTION OF DESTINATION, AND DESTINATION IMAGE ON TOURISTS' INTENTION TO TRAVEL TOWARD ASEAN COUNTRIES

Orawee Sriboonlue<sup>a\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Faculty of Business Administration, Kasetsart University, Bangkok, Thailand

\*Corresponding author's e-mail: orawee.sr@ku.th

Received: 11 June 2023 / Revised: 3 September 2023 / Accepted: 2 November 2023

## ABSTRACT

*Purpose* – The purposes of this research were to study the effects of destination awareness, perception of destination, and destination image on tourists' intention to travel toward ASEAN countries.

*Methodology* – The research methodology was quantitative research with survey method by using questionnaires for data collection. The respondents were 400 participants, who had experience of traveling to a foreign country, in Bangkok, Pathum Thani, and Nonthaburi Provinces of Thailand. Descriptive statistics used for data analysis included frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Due to hypothesis testing, inferential statistics used were Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

*Results* – The results of hypothesis testing revealed that tourists' destination awareness had positive effects on perception of destination and destination image while perception of destination had positive effects on destination image, and destination image had positive effects on tourists' intention to travel toward ASEAN countries at a significance level of 0.001. In addition, perception of destination had a partial mediating effect on the relationship between destination awareness and destination image whereas destination image had a full mediating effect on the relationship between destination awareness and tourists' intention, the relationship between perception and tourists' intention, and the relationship between destination awareness and perception on tourists' intention at a significance level of 0.001.

*Implications* – The findings present several implications for both academia and destination marketing practitioners, providing insights into crafting effective strategies to attract tourists to these destinations.

*Originality/Value* – This research sought to enhance comprehensive comprehension of the intricate interplay among destination awareness, destination perception, destination image, and intention to travel, elucidating their collective influence on tourism decisions. Also, the research can fill existing gaps in the literature and provide valuable insights for refining destination marketing strategies, particularly focusing on ASEAN countries.

**Keywords:** Destination awareness, Perception, Destination image, Intention to travel, ASEAN Countries

**Paper Type:** Research Article

## INTRODUCTION

Travel and tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world since its growth turned out to exceed that of the global economy for nine consecutive years before the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to statistics from World Travel and Tourism Council, comparing with other sectors, travel and tourism sector ranked among the fastest growing with a GDP growth rate of 3.5% in the last pre-

---

**Citation:**

Orawee Sriboonlue. (2023). The effects of destination awareness, perception of destination, and destination image on tourists' intention to travel toward ASEAN countries. RMUTT Global Business Accounting and Finance Review, 7(2), 9-22 DOI: 10.60101.gbaf.2023.267976

pandemic year of 2019. However, as the damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to the tourism sector slowly subsides, this sector was forecasted to pick up the pace again and grow by 5.8% annually during 2022 – 2032 (Hinton, 2023). This forecast growth rate is more than twice as fast as the forecast global GDP, so this sector is one of the main powerhouses of global economic growth. UNWTO recently provides information that international tourism is actually on its way to returning to pre-pandemic levels since international tourist arrivals recovered 80% to 95% of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2023 with an estimated 235 million tourists travelled internationally which was more than double in the same period of 2022. In addition, tourism has continued to show its resilience as the UNWTO's revised data showed that over 960 million tourists travelling internationally in 2022, meaning two-thirds (66%) of pre-pandemic numbers were recovered. (World Tourism Organization, 2023).

In the past before the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, tourism in Asia and the Pacific region had become outstanding. The growth in this region slowed down but still showed above-average growth, with a growth rate of 4% and international arrivals up 5% (World Tourism Organization, 2023). In 2019, about 26% of global growth was generated by Asia and the Pacific region, with the Southeast Asia subregion accounting for over 70% of growth. Nonetheless, after this region encountered the pandemic, the numbers of international arrivals greatly dropped since then. According to the recent data from UNWTO regarding recovery from the pandemic by the regions in Q1 of 2023, it showed that Asia and the Pacific region accelerated its recovery with 54% of pre-pandemic levels, but this upward trend is set to accelerate now that most destinations, particularly China, have re-opened (World Tourism Organization, 2023).

According to tourism statistics in 2019 from Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand, the growth of tourism industry affected Thailand in terms of international tourist arrivals and domestic departures. The numbers in 2019 showed that there were 39,916,251 tourists around the world travelling to Thailand. Out of the total number, the majority of tourists came from East Asian nations which was 27,669,963, and the number of tourists from ASEAN countries was 10,876,922. Nevertheless, tourism statistics in 2019 from Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand showed that departure number of Thai tourists was 10,446,496. Due to the departure number, there were five ASEAN countries, consisting of Malaysia, Laos, Singapore, Vietnam, and Myanmar, included in the top ten destination countries to which Thai tourists visited. The number of Thai tourists visited these five countries was 4,406,377 accounted for 42.18% of total departure number (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2023).

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was founded in 1967 as an organization for economic, political, social, and cultural cooperation among 10 member countries including Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. At the end of 2015, the ASEAN Community was fully established with new goals among members. ASEAN Community goals were (1) improving the lives of people that is reflected on the region's economic and cultural development, social progress, regional peace and security, collaboration, and mutual assistance in training and research, (2) improving living standards, (3) promoting of Southeast Asian studies, and (4) cooperating with regional and international organizations (ASEAN Secretariat, 2015).

Since ASEAN Community with three pillars consisting of ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) were fully established among members, understanding the current state of Thai people toward this accomplishment needs to be addressed. This research was conducted under conditions that in the past, Thai tourists were interested in travelling to East Asian countries but had few interests in ASEAN countries. Therefore, in order to improve understanding in Thai tourists and Thai residences toward one single entity as ASEAN community, destination awareness, perception of destination, destination image, and tourists' attitudes toward ASEAN destinations must be addressed. The purposes of this research were to study the effects destination awareness, perception of destination, and destination image on tourists' intention to travel toward ASEAN countries.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Destination awareness***

Awareness of destinations can be compared to brand awareness and brand recognition in original consumer decision process; hence, it can be concluded that the first stage in tourism consumer decision process is awareness of destination (Mathilda & Saayman, 2013 cited from Cunningham et al., 2005; Kotler et al., 1996; Kotler & Keller, 2009). If awareness toward destination could be created in consumers' mind, the likelihood of travel intention to that destination is increasing.

Destination awareness could be defined as a situation in which consumers have become aware of product or destinations to travel, but still need to search for more information about the destination (Mathilda & Saayman, 2013 cited from Antimova et al., 2012; Kotler et al., 1996). Konecnik and Gartner (2007) defined destination awareness as what individuals recognize or think they recognize about a destination while Huang and Cai (2015) stated that destination awareness is not only what the tourist knows about the place or its brand name, but also the associations that the tourist makes to the place and that provide a sense of familiarity or appeal. In summary, destination awareness is the level of knowledge tourists have toward destination's product and service. Therefore, destination awareness was used as a tool to develop tourism industry in many countries.

Regarding the effect of destination awareness on destination image, the results of some studies showed that destination awareness has a direct and positive effect on destination image (Ghafari et al., 2017; Liu & Fang, 2018; Tran et al., 2019). The study of Milman and Pizam (1995) revealed that tourists who were aware of the destination did not have a more positive destination image than those who were not aware of it. Furthermore, Gartner and Ruzzier (2011) found that the link between awareness and image is important for first-time visitors. These were argued by Konecnik and Gartner (2007) in their study with a two-dimensional approach that awareness only affects cognitive image. However, awareness affects both image components for domestic tourists (San Martin et al., 2019).

Destination awareness also plays an important role in the tourists' travel intentions (Chi et al., 2020). It is crucial to form and develop brand value and induce the visit intention (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). For a place to have potential as a destination, it must be known by potential tourists to be included in the set of perceived opportunities, comprising all destinations that come to the mind of potential tourists when considering potential vacation destinations (Milman & Pizam, 1995; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Thus, greater destination awareness means potential tourists are more likely to think of one certain destination than others when planning their trips.

### ***Perception of destination***

Perception of destination is a multidimensional construct that encompasses the cognitive, affective, and evaluative aspects of how individuals perceive and interpret a particular destination. Cognitive factors, such as prior knowledge, expectations, and stereotypes, significantly influence destination perception. In other words, individuals' preconceived notions and beliefs about a destination can shape their perceptions before visiting. Some previous studies about perception of destination revealed that high levels of destination knowledge tend to have more accurate and positive perceptions (Chi & Qu, 2008), and the media plays a critical role in shaping cognitive factors, as exposure to positive or negative information influenced destination perceptions (Kim et al., 2018). Moreover, effective destination branding strategies, through consistent messaging and positioning, plays a crucial role in shaping perception of destination and creating a distinctive identity (Govers & Go, 2009).

Moreover, perceptions of safety and security significantly influence destination perception, particularly in the context of international travel. Tourists prioritize destinations that are perceived as safe and secure. Negative events, such as terrorism, natural disasters, or political instability, can severely impact destination perception and deter potential visitors (Akaateba & Altinay, 2018). In contrast, the growing awareness of sustainability and responsible tourism has led to an increased emphasis on environmentally and socially responsible practices in destinations. Sustainable destinations can be perceived more positively by travelers (Hudson et al., 2019). All in all, understanding destination image, cognitive and affective factors, safety and

security perceptions, and sustainability is crucial for destination marketers and policymakers seeking to enhance destination attractiveness and competitiveness of a destination.

### ***Destination image***

Destination image remains one of the most popular research topics in tourism (King et al., 2015). Jenkins (1999) believed that destination images were important because they influence decision making process and behavior of potential tourists (Jenkins, 1999; Mayo, 1975; Crompton, 1979). In addition, Keller (1993) and Crompton (1979) stated that destination image referred to the sum of beliefs, ideas as well as impressions tourists have associated with a destination. Huang and Cai (2015) stated that destination image refers to the set of associations linked to a destination and held by individuals in their memories.

Destination image as well as the characteristics of a destination are greatly important for tourists when making a decision on where to travel (Luo et al., 2022 cited from Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Mohsin, 2005; Stylos et al., 2016; Tan & Wu, 2016; Pike et al., 2018). Destination image and its attributes can influence tourists' behavior before, during, and after their travelling experience (Chen et al., 2013; Gannon et al., 2017). Besides, destination image can be influenced by prior knowledge of the place or recommendations from others who have visited previously (Dolnicar & Grün, 2012).

Destination images could be conceptualized in different approaches (Carvalho, 2022). Some studies proposed that destination image is conceptualized as a two-faceted construct based on cognitive and affective components (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Bigne et al., 2001; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tan & Wu, 2016). First, the cognitive component is composed of individuals' beliefs and knowledge regarding the functional/tangible attributes (e.g. landscape and cultural attractions) or psychological/abstract attributes (e.g. feelings of hospitality and atmosphere) of the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). The second component is the affective component which denotes the emotional attributes represented by the individuals' attachments to the tourist destination (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Pratt & Sparks, 2014). However, the other studies proposed that destination image could be measured by using three components consisting of cognitive, affective, and conative (Gartner, 1993; Agapito et al., 2013; Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020). The conative component results from the cognitive and affective components and can delineate the tourists' behavioral intentions about future activities. Moreover, Agapito et al. (2013) stated that the cognitive image is what an individual knows and thinks about an object while affective image is how an individual feels about that object, and conative image is how an individual responds using this information (Agapito et al., 2013 cited from Boulding, 1956).

Moreover, Kaplanidou (2006) stated that destination image is a part of building destination awareness (Kaplanidou, 2006 cited from Blain et al., 2005). Building brand for a destination is one of marketing activities, which include (1) supporting brand creation, symbol, logo, or graphics that can identify and differentiate the destination from others, (2) being consistent with expected travel experience that is unique and memorable toward the destination, (3) harmonizing tourists' emotions and feelings toward destination, and (4) decreasing information search costs for consumers. With all four components together, destination image could positively influence destination selection eventually.

### ***Intentions and destination image***

Regarding destination image and intentions, many previous studies were conducted to investigate the relationship between destination image and intentions. In tourism studies, travel intention is one of the topics that is well-known and generates both practical and academic contributions to industry. Regarding the viewpoint of intentions to travel, destination image is seen as the repository of either positive or negative connections associated with the destination. Therefore, its importance in tourists' decision-making process influences intention to visit (Pratt & Sparks, 2014) or revisit intention (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Bigne et al., 2001).

Studies with a two-dimensional approach to destination image demonstrated that the significant and positive relationship between image and visit intention is not clear. For example, Baloglu (2000) concluded that cognitive and affective components influence the tourist's

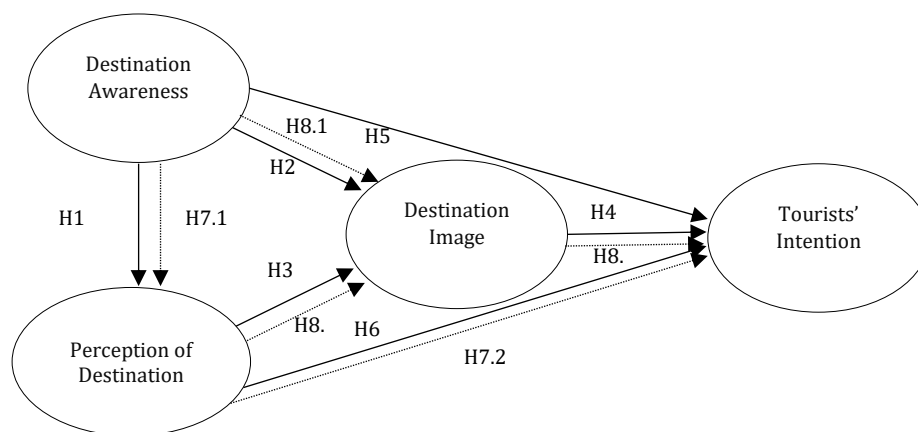
intention to visit. Even though both destination image components influence intention to travel, Afshardoost and Eshaghi (2020) found that the affective component is a more powerful predictor of intention. On the other hand, Tan and Wu (2016) found that the intention to revisit is more influenced by cognitive image (fame and activities), followed by affective and cognitive image (basic infrastructure).

Bigne et al. (2001 cited by Kaplanidou, 2006) stated that destination image, quality, and satisfaction toward the destination influenced tourists' intention to revisit the destinations. The more favorable image the tourists have toward the destination, the higher likelihood they would revisit. Court and Lupton (1997 cited by Kaplanidou, 2006) explained that positive destination image had the effects on tourist's intention to revisit, which is consistent with Blain et al. (2005) who stated that destination image had influence on tourists' destination choices, and positive destination image influenced future travel intention. Woodside and Lysonski (1989 cited by Kaplanidou, 2006) studied on destination awareness affecting destination preferences and travel intention, and the results showed that there were positive relationships among destination image, destination choice, preference, and travel intention.

All in all, the relationships among destination awareness, perception of destination, destination image, and intention to travel are intricate and significant in the context of tourism decision-making. A higher level of destination awareness tends to positively influence perception of destination. As tourists become more aware of a place, their perception of its attractions, culture, and overall appeal tends to improve. This positive perception then enhances their intention to travel to that destination. A strong and favorable destination image can strongly impact tourists' intention to travel. Positive perceptions of a destination are closely linked to the intention to travel. Tourists who perceive a destination as fulfilling their desires and expectations are more likely to express an intention to visit. In summary, the interactions among destination awareness, perception of destination, destination image, and intention to travel form a complex connection that shapes tourists' decisions. Understanding these relationships allows stakeholders to better tailor their strategies and offerings to meet the needs and desires of tourists.

### ***Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis***

Based on the review of the literatures on destination awareness, perception of destination, destination image and tourists' intention, the conceptual research framework was drawn in Figure 1. In addition, the research hypotheses were also drawn.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework

The research hypotheses were drawn as follows:

- H1: Destination awareness significantly affects perception of destination.
- H2: Destination awareness significantly affects destination image.
- H3: Perception of destination significantly affects destination image.

H4: Destination image significantly affects tourists' intention to travel toward ASEAN countries.

H5: Destination awareness affects tourists' intention to travel toward ASEAN countries.

H6: Perception of destination affects tourists' intention to travel toward ASEAN countries.

H7: Perception of destination plays a mediating role in the relationships among destination awareness, destination image, and tourists' intention.

H7.1: Perception of destination plays a mediating role in the relationship between destination awareness and destination image.

H7.2: Perception of destination plays a mediating role in the relationship between destination awareness and tourists' intention.

H8: Destination image plays a mediating role in the relationships among destination awareness, perception of destination, and tourists' intention.

H8.1: Destination image plays a mediating role in the relationship between destination awareness and tourists' intention.

H8.2: Destination image plays a mediating role in the relationship between perception of destination and tourists' intention.

H8.3: Destination image plays a mediating role in the relationships among destination awareness, perception of destination and tourists' intention.

In the next part, the researcher explains about methodology involving sample, data collection, measurements, data analysis method in order to detail how the research is done.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***For sample and data collection***

Regarding sample and data collection, the research population consisted of Thai tourists who had prior experience traveling to foreign countries and were located in Bangkok and Metropolitan Region. To estimate the total research population, the overall population of Bangkok and the Metropolitan Region in 2019 was taken into account, amounting to approximately 10,944,863 individuals (National Statistical Office, 2019). Employing the Yamane formula (1970) for sample size determination yielded a total of 400 participants. The sample selection employed a multi-stage sampling approach. Initially, probability sampling via Simple Random Sampling was employed to designate the final provinces, resulting in the selection of Bangkok, Nonthaburi, and Pathum Thani. Subsequently, a proportional quota sampling was applied, allocating 274, 65, and 61 respondents for Bangkok, Nonthaburi, and Pathum Thani, respectively. Finally, a non-probability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling, was employed to conduct personal interviews using a structured questionnaire.

The research methodology employed in this research was quantitative research, utilizing the survey method. Data collection was conducted using questionnaires comprising 5 sections. Sections 1 to 4 consisted of 7-point Likert scale items, measuring variables such as destination awareness, perception of destination, and destination image. The scale ranged from 1, indicating "strongly disagree," to 7, indicating "strongly agree." Section 5 of the questionnaire contained closed-ended questions focusing on capturing participants' personal background and travel experience. These questions encompassed variables such as gender, age, years of traveling experience, purpose of traveling, and behaviors related to traveling abroad.

Descriptive statistics used in quantitative data analysis included frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Due to hypothesis testing, inferential statistics used were Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

## **RESULTS**

The results of the research showed that most of respondents were female (63.5%), had age range between 25 - 34 years old (44.8%), obtained the bachelor's degree (57.5%), had career as employees from private sectors (33.3%), and had average income between 15,001 – 25,000 Baht per month (29.8%). Furthermore, the participants had experienced traveling abroad approximately 1-2 times. When traveling abroad, they typically spend an average of 5 days at

their destinations. The primary purpose of their travels was for vacation and sightseeing, which accounted for 58.3% of the respondents' motivations.

The research results indicated that the respondents had relatively high levels of destination awareness and destination image toward ASEAN countries. The mean scores for destination awareness and destination image were 4.85 and 5.01, respectively. This suggests that the participants had a good level of knowledge and positive perceptions of the ASEAN region as a travel destination. Regarding tourists' perception of destination, the results showed that the respondents had moderate levels of perception in terms of political, socio-cultural, and economic factors related to ASEAN countries. The mean scores for these factors were 3.77, 3.91, and 3.84, respectively. This suggests that the participants held moderately positive perceptions of the political, socio-cultural, and economic aspects of the ASEAN destinations. Furthermore, the results regarding tourists' intentions revealed that the respondents had relatively high levels of intention in information search, word-of-mouth communication, and travel. The mean scores for information search intention, word-of-mouth intention, and travel intention were 4.87, 4.77, and 5.02, respectively. This indicated that the participants had a strong inclination to seek information, engage in word-of-mouth communication, and express a willingness to travel to ASEAN countries.

### **Validity and reliability**

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were investigated to measure construct reliability. In terms of composite reliability, all factor loading values ranged from 0.84 to 0.96, which is more than the recommended value of 0.70; hence, the constructs in the research model are acceptable (Hair et al., 2016). The measurement model in table 2 showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient of each construct ranged from 0.88 to 0.96, meaning that all constructs are acceptable according to the recommended threshold value of 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

**Table 1.** Factor Loading for Measurement Model

	<b>Destination Awareness (DA)</b>	<b>Perception of Destination (PD)</b>	<b>Destination Image (DI)</b>	<b>Tourists' Intention (INT)</b>
DA1	0.94			
DA2	0.95			
DA3	0.96			
DA4	0.96			
PD1		0.88		
PD2		0.88		
PD3		0.92		
DI1			0.88	
DI2			0.85	
DI3			0.88	
DI4			0.90	
DI5			0.89	
DI6			0.93	
DI7			0.84	
INT1				0.96
INT2				0.95
INT3				0.90

**Table 2.** Reliability, Convergent Validity, Discriminant Validity and Internal Consistency Results for the CFA SEM Measurement Model

<b>Variables</b>	<b>CA</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>
Destination Image	0.95	0.95	0.78
Destination Awareness	0.96	0.96	0.90
Perception of Destination	0.88	0.89	0.80
Tourists' Intention	0.93	0.94	0.88

In table 2, AVE was in the range of 0.78 to 0.90, which exceeded the minimum threshold value of 0.50, confirming convergent validity. The discriminant validity was tested and the square roots of AVEs were more than the 0.40 minimum threshold, and all values were more than the correlations among the latent constructs (0.41 – 0.70); thus, it is valid (Henseler et al., 2015).

### ***Analysis of structural model***

From the structural model in this research, the direct effects indicated that  $R^2$  of the dependent variable, or tourists' intention (INT) was 0.41 indicating that 41% of tourist's intention variance was explained by the independent variable. For the indirect effects,  $R^2$  of the mediating variable or destination image (DI) were 0.50.

**Table 3. Structural Model**

	$\beta$	T Statistics	P-value
H1: Destination Awareness → perception of destination	0.280	6.065	0.000***
H2: Destination awareness → destination image	0.611	16.255	0.000***
H3: Perception of destination → destination image	0.218	4.908	0.000***
H4: Destination image → tourists' intention	0.548	7.537	0.000***
H5: Destination awareness → tourists' intention	0.089	1.207	0.227
H6: Perception of destination → tourists' intention	0.074	1.764	0.078
H7.1: Destination awareness → perception of destination → destination image	0.061	3.952	0.000***
H7.2: Destination awareness → perception of destination → tourists' intention	0.021	1.652	0.099
H8.1: Destination awareness → destination image → tourists' intention	0.335	7.051	0.000***
H8.2: Perception of destination → destination image → tourists' intention	0.119	3.790	0.000***
H8.3: Destination awareness → perception of destination → destination image → tourists' intention	0.033	3.324	0.001***

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed test)

**Table 4. Total Effect**

Item	Perception of Destination	Destination Image	Tourists' Intention
Destination Awareness	0.280	0.672	0.478
Perception of Destination	-	0.218	0.193
Destination Image	-	-	0.548

**Table 5. Direct Effect**

Item	Perception of Destination	Destination Image	Tourists' Intention
Destination awareness	0.280	0.611	0.089
Perception of destination	-	0.218	0.074
Destination image	-	-	0.548

**Table 6. Indirect Effect**

Item	Perception of Destination	Destination Image	Tourists' Intention
Destination awareness	-	0.061	0.389
Perception of destination	-	-	0.119
Destination image	-	-	-



The results in Table 3, 4, 5 and 6 showed that destination awareness had a positive and significant effect on perception of destination ( $\beta = 0.280, p < 0.000$ ) and also on destination image ( $\beta = 0.611, p < 0.000$ ), so hypothesis 1 and 2 were supported. The results also revealed that perception of destination ( $\beta = 0.218, p < 0.000$ ) had a positive and significant effect on destination image, so hypothesis 3 was supported. The results finally revealed that destination image had a positive and significant effect on tourists' intention ( $\beta = 0.548, p < 0.000$ ), so hypothesis 4 was supported. On the other hands, the results revealed that destination awareness ( $\beta = 0.089, p < 0.227$ ) and perception of destination ( $\beta = 0.074, p < 0.078$ ) did not have significant effect on tourists' intention, so the hypothesis 5 and 6 were rejected.

The results also demonstrated that there was a significant indirect effect on the relationships among destination awareness, destination image, and tourists' intention. Since the direct effect of destination awareness and destination image was significant, perception of destination had a partial mediating effect on the relationship between destination awareness and destination image; therefore, hypothesis 7.1 was supported ( $\beta = 0.061, p < 0.000$ ). In contrast, the direct effect of destination awareness and tourists' intention and that of perception of destination and tourists' intention were both not significant, so perception of destination did not play as mediating effect on the relationship between destination awareness and tourists' intention; therefore, hypothesis 7.2 was rejected ( $\beta = 0.021, p < 0.099$ ).

Moreover, since the direct effect of destination awareness and tourists' intention was not significant, destination image had a full mediating effect on the relationship between destination awareness and tourists' intention; therefore, hypothesis 8.1 was supported ( $\beta = 0.335, p < 0.000$ ). The direct effect of perception of destination and tourists' intention was not significant, so destination image had a full mediating effect on the relationship between perception of destination and tourists' intention; therefore, hypothesis 8.2 was supported ( $\beta = 0.119, p < 0.000$ ). Finally, the direct effect of destination awareness and perception of destination on tourists' intention was not significant, destination image had a full mediating effect on the relationships among destination awareness, perception of destination, and tourists' intention; therefore, hypothesis 8.3 was supported ( $\beta = 0.033, p < 0.001$ ).

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the research highlighted the significant effects of destination awareness and perception of destination on tourists' intention to travel, mediated by destination image. This implied that the way tourists perceive and become aware of a destination, so two factors together shaped their overall image of the destination, which ultimately influenced their intention to visit. The research result aligned with the previous studies which emphasized the importance of destination image in influencing tourists' travel intentions (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Khan et al., 2017; Nazir et al., 2022). It was widely acknowledged that destination image served as a cognitive representation of a destination in tourists' minds, formed through various information sources and personal experiences (Pike, 2004). Positive destination image has been found to stimulate tourists' interest and intention to visit a destination (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Khan et al., 2017, Nazir et al., 2022). In some previous studies revealed that destination image dominantly mediates the relationship between travel motivations and travel for potential visitors (Maghrifani et al., 2022), and it has been determined that the destination image has a mediating role in the relationship between festival service quality and behavioral intention (Davras & Özperçin, 2023). Furthermore, the research results supported that destination awareness and perception of destination are critical factors in shaping destination image. This was consistent with the study conducted by Kim and Richardson (2003), who found that tourists' destination awareness and perceptions significantly influenced their overall evaluation and image of a destination. Also, destination awareness and perception of destinations in term of risk had influence on both cognitive and affective destination image (Carvalho, 2022). Therefore, positive destination awareness and perception contributed to the formation of a favorable destination image, thereby influencing tourists' intention to travel.

The mediating role of destination image between destination awareness, perception of destination, and intention to travel was also supported by the study of Carvalho (2022) which

revealed that destination image on both cognitive and affective mediated the relationship between destination awareness, perception of destinations, and the intention to visit a tourist destination. Morgan et al. (2002) highlighted the significance of destination image as a psychological mechanism linking tourists' perceptions and evaluations of a destination to their behavioral intentions. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) found that destination image mediates the impact of various factors, including awareness and perception, on tourists' travel intentions. Similarly, Kim and Richardson (2003) identified destination image as a significant mediator between tourists' perceptions and their behavioral intentions. In conclusion, the research results provided empirical evidence that destination awareness and perception of destination indirectly influence tourists' intention to travel through their effect on destination image. These results were consistent with previous studies and highlighted the importance of destination image as a mediator in the relationships among destination awareness, perception of destination, and tourists' intentions.

On the other hand, destination awareness and perception of destination had a positive but not significant effect on intention on travel. The result of this research was consistent with Ervina and Octaviany (2022) who found that destination awareness did not have the effect on intention, but it had a positive and significant effect on forming tourists' attitude. This can be concluded that the higher the awareness of destination, the more positive tourists' attitude toward the destination and the stronger their intention to visit it in the future. Overall, the findings suggested that destination awareness indirectly increases the tourists' intention to visit by enhancing the destination image (Carvalho, 2022). The finding was also in line with the study conducted by Milman and Pizam (1995), which revealed that awareness generated an interest in something encouraging the intention to visit a destination. The tourist's intention was not immediately affected by destination awareness. In addition, perceptions in negative perspective, such as destination safety, travel risk, social risk, and safety concern did not show direct effects on the visit intention. In this sense, the tourists' appreciation for safety and security measures during vacation indirectly increases the affective image by enhancing the cognitive image and indirectly reduces the tourists' visit intention by enhancing the feelings of discomfort and anxiety in traveling (Carvalho, 2022). This research believes that it requires other variables to bridge the gap between destination awareness and intention to travel in order to improve their relationships through perception of destination and destination image as mediators.

Regarding the findings, the research's outcomes have academic and practical significance, highlighting the crucial role of destination image in influencing tourists' intentions to visit ASEAN countries. For practitioners, enhancing destination awareness campaigns is recommended since destination awareness plays a crucial role in stimulating and generating tourists' perceptions and attitudes toward a destination. Therefore, destination marketers shall invest in effective awareness campaigns and participate in online presence as well as form partnerships with travel agencies and international tourism fairs and events to increase tourists' knowledge and familiarity with the destination. In addition, destination marketers should focus on effectively communicating the unique selling points and attractive features of destination image to potential tourists through targeted advertising campaigns, engaging social media content, user-generated reviews and testimonials, and having collaborations with travel influencers. The research results may assist destination marketers in ASEAN nations in developing more efficient promotional strategies by prioritizing the enhancement of destination awareness and cultivating favorable impressions and images. Furthermore, this study enhances comprehension of visitor decision-making processes, a pivotal facet of tourism research.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES**

The researcher's focus in this research was the effects of destination awareness, perception of destination, and destination image on tourists' intention to travel toward ASEAN countries ignoring other countries. Since the data were collected from 400 respondents toward ASEAN countries, the generalization of the results could be limited. Other variables, such as destination personality, perceived risks toward destination, travel motivation, and demographics were not included in this research. As this research was cross-sectional, data was collected at one specific

time point. In addition, the hypotheses were tested utilizing quantitative research approach, but the qualitative approach techniques such as in-depth interview or focus group were excluded from the research. Consequently, there are more opportunities for future research. Firstly, there should be a study related to any other aspects, such as destination experiences in tourism industry, the role of customer reviews, word-of-mouth recommendations, and social media interactions influencing destination image and travel intentions. Next, further studies could focus on cross-cultural comparisons in destination awareness, perception of destination, and destination image on tourists' intention to travel from other countries or regions.

## CONCLUSION

Destination awareness plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions and attitudes toward a destination. It represents the level of knowledge and familiarity tourists have about a particular destination. As tourists become more aware of a destination, they develop a mental image of it, which influences their perception of the destination's attractiveness and desirability. Furthermore, positive perceptions of a destination could lead to a more favorable destination image. The concept of destination image has received significant attention in tourism research. It represents the overall impression and perception of a destination held by potential tourists. A positive destination image can create a strong desire and intention to visit the destination. In conclusion, the findings of the research provide evidence that destination awareness and destination perception of ASEAN countries indirectly influence tourists' intention to travel through their effect on destination image. Understanding the interplay between destination awareness, perception of destination, and destination image could help destination marketers and managers in developing effective strategies to enhance tourists' intention to visit a destination. If each and every destination successfully creates a promotional campaign to communicate the value and benefits of travel to that destination, it may lead to decision to travel and become loyalty to the destination eventually.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my beloved family and Faculty of Business Administration, Kasetsart University for encouraging me to able to complete this research paper.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest found in this research.

## REFERENCES

- Afshardoost, M., & Eshaghi, M. S. (2020). Destination image and tourist behavioural intentions: A metaanalysis. *Tourism Management*, 81, 104154.
- Agapito, D., Valle, P., & Mendes, J. (2013). The cognitive-affective-conative model of destination image: A confirmatory analysis. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 30(5), 471-481.
- Akaateba, M. A., & Altinay, L. (2018). Destination image and event perception: The case of Ghana. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 9, 14-22.
- Al-Gasawneh, J. A., & Al-Adamat, A. M. (2020). The relationship between perceived destination image, social media interaction and travel intentions relating to Neom city. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 19(2), 1-12.
- Antimova, R., Nawjin, J., & Peeters, P. (2012). The Awareness/Attitude-Gap in Sustainable Tourism: A Theoretical Perspective. *Tourism Review*, 67(3), 7-16.
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2015). *ASEAN Services Integration Report*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/60c2517b-ff43-5db1-965f-22913e1c2b4c/content>
- Baloglu, S. (2000). A path analytic model of visitation intention involving information sources, sociopsychological motivations, and destination image. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 8(3), 81-90.
- Baloglu, S., & Brinberg, D. (1997). Affective images of tourism destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 35(4), 11-15.

- Baloglu, S., & McCleary, K. W. (1999). A model of destination image formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(4), 868-897.
- Beerli, A., & Martin, J. (2004). Tourists' characteristics and the perceived image of tourist destinations: A quantitative analysis – a case study of Lanzarote, Spain. *Tourism Management*, 25(5), 623-636.
- Bigne, E. J., Sanchez, I. M., & Sanjez, J. (2001). Tourism image, evaluation variables and after purchase behavior: Inter-relationship. *Tourism Management*, 22(6), 607-616.
- Blain, C., Levy, S. E., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2005). Destination branding: insights and practices from destination management organizations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 43(4), 328-338.
- Boulding, K. (1956). *The image-knowledge in life and society*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Carvalho, M. A. M. (2022). Factors affecting future travel intentions: Awareness, image, past visitation and risk perception. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 8(3), 761-778.
- Chen, H.J., Chen, P.J., & Okumus, F. (2013). The relationship between travel constraints and destination image: A case study of Brunei. *Tourism Management*, 35(C), 198-208.
- Chi, C. G. Q., & Qu, H. (2008). Examining the structural relationships of destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty: An integrated approach. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 624-636.
- Chi, H. K., Huang, K. C., & Nguyen, H. M. (2020). Elements of destination brand equity and destination familiarity regarding travel intention. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 52(C), 101728.
- Crompton, J. L. (1979). Motivations for pleasure vacation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 6(4), 408-424.
- Cunningham, L. F., Gerlach, J. H., Harper, M. D., & Young, C. E. (2005). Perceived risk and the consumer buying process: Internet airline reservations. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 16(3), 357-372.
- Davras, Ö., & Özperçin, İ. (2023). The relationships of motivation, service quality, and behavioral intentions for gastronomy festival: the mediating role of destination image. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 15(4), 451-464.
- Dolnicar, S., & Grün, B. (2012). Validly measuring destination image in survey studies. *Journal of Travel Research*, 52(1), 3-14.
- Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, J. B. (1991). The meaning and measurement of destination image. *Journal of Tourism Studies*, 2(2), 2-12.
- Ervina, E. & Octaviany, V. (2022). The role of tourist attitude toward destination awareness, destination personality and future visit intention. *Asia-Pacific Management and Business Application*, 11(1), 1-18.
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 18(1), 39-50.
- Gannon, M. J., Baxter, I. W., Collinson, E., Curran, R., Farrington, T., Glasgow, S., & Yalinay, O. (2017). Travelling for Umrah: Destination attributes, destination image and post-travel intentions. *Service Industries Journal*, 37(7-8), 448-465.
- Gartner, W. C. (1993). Image formation process. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 2(2/3), 191-215.
- Gartner, W., & Ruzzier, M. (2011). Tourism destination brand equity dimensions: Renewal versus repeat market. *Journal of Travel Research*, 50(5), 471-481.
- Ghafari, M., Ranjbarian, B., & Fathi, S. (2017). Developing a brand equity model for tourism Destination. *International Journal of Business Innovation and Research*, 12(4), 484-507.
- Govers, R., & Go, F. M. (2009). *Place branding: Glocal, virtual and physical identities, constructed, imagined and experienced*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hair, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Matthews, L., & Ringle, C. M. (2016). Identifying and treating unobserved heterogeneity with FIMIX-PLS: Part I – method. *European Business Review*, 28(1), 63-76.
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(1), 115-135.

- Hinton, T. (2023, April 3). Travel and tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors [Infographics]. *Statista*. <https://www.statista.com/chart/29637/travel-and-tourism-gdp-growth/>
- Huang, Z., & Cai, L. (2015). Modeling consumer-based brand equity for multinational hotel brands-when hosts become guests. *Tourism Management*, 46(C), 431-443.
- Hudson, S., Becken, S., & Vernoooy, R. (2019). Understanding and managing overtourism: A review of existing literature. *Sustainability*, 11(21), 5966.
- Jenkins, O. H. (1999). Understanding and measuring tourist destination images. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 1(1), 1-15.
- Kaplanidou, K. (2006). *The Impact of Sport Tourism Event Image on Destination Image and Intentions to Travel: A Structural Equation Modeling Analysis*. (Order No. 3236343, Michigan State University). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, 167-167.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, And Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1-22.
- Khan, M. J., Chelliah, S., & Ahmed, S. (2017). Factors influencing destination image and visit intention among young women travelers: Role of travel motivation, perceived risks, and travel constraints. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 22(11), 1139-1155.
- Kim, S. S., & Richardson, S. L. (2003). Motion picture impacts on destination images. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(1), 216-237.
- Kim, S. S., Li, X., & Zhang, H. Q. (2018). Destination image, involvement, and revisit intention: A case study of Beijing. *Journal of Travel Research*, 57(6), 815-832.
- King, C., Chen, N., & Funk, D. C. (2015). Exploring destination image decay: A study of sport tourists' destination image change after event participation. *Journal of Hospitality Tourism Research*, 39(1), 3-31.
- Konecnik, M., & Gartner, W. (2007). Customer-based brand equity for a destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(2), 400-421.
- Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2009). *Marketing Management* (13<sup>th</sup> ed.). Prentice-Hall.
- Kotler, P., Bowen, J., & Makens, J. (1996). *Marketing for Hospitality and Tourism*. Prentice Hall.
- Liu, C. H., & Fang, Y. P. (2018). Conceptualizing, validating, and managing brand equity for tourist satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 42(6), 960-978.
- Maghrifani, D., Liu, F., & Sneddon, J. (2022). Understanding potential and repeat visitors' travel intentions: The roles of travel motivations, destination image, and visitor image congruity. *Journal of Travel Research*, 61(5), 1121-1137.
- Mayo, E. J. (1975). Tourism and national parks: A psychographic and attitudinal study. *Journal of Travel Research*, 14, 14-18.
- Milman, A., & Pizam, A. (1995). The role of awareness and familiarity with a destination: The Central Florida case. *Journal of Travel Research*, 33(3), 21-27.
- Ministry of Tourism and Sports. (2023). *Tourism Statistics 2019*. [http://www.mots.go.th/download/article/article\\_20201104090605.pdf](http://www.mots.go.th/download/article/article_20201104090605.pdf)
- Mohsin, A. (2005). Tourist attitudes and destination marketing – the case of Australia's northern territory and Malaysia. *Tourism Management*, 26(5), 723-732.
- Morgan, N., Pritchard, A., & Pride, R. (2002). Destination branding and the role of the stakeholders: The case of New Zealand. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 8(3), 193-206.
- National Statistical Office. (2019). *Number of Population from Registration by Age Group, Region and Province: 2012 – 2022*. [http://statbbi.nso.go.th/staticreport/Page/sector/EN/report/sector\\_01\\_11102\\_EN.xlsx](http://statbbi.nso.go.th/staticreport/Page/sector/EN/report/sector_01_11102_EN.xlsx)
- Nazir, M. U., Yasin, I., Tat, H. H., Khalique, M., & Mehmood, S. A. (2022). The influence of international tourists' destination image of Pakistan on behavioral intention: the roles of travel experience and media exposure. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 23(6), 1266-1290.
- Pike, S. (2004). Destination image analysis: A review of 142 papers from 1973 to 2000. *Tourism Management*, 25(6), 709-722.
- Pike, S., Kotsi, F., & Tossan, V. (2018). Stopover destination image: A comparison of salient attributes elicited from French and Australian travelers. *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, 9, 160-165.

- Pratt, M., & Sparks, B. (2014). Predicting wine tourism intention: Destination image and self-congruity. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 31(4), 443-460.
- San Martin, H., Herrero, A., & Garcí'a de los Salmones, M. D. M. (2019). An integrative model of destination brand equity and tourist satisfaction. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 22(16), 1992-2013.
- Stylos, N., Vassiliadis, C.A., Bellou, V., & Andronikidis, A. (2016). Destination images, holistic images and personal normative beliefs: Predictors of intention to revisit a destination. *Tourism Management*, 53, 40-60.
- Tan, W., & Wu, C. (2016). An investigation of the relationships among destination familiarity, destination image and future visit intention. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 5(3), 214-226.
- Tran, V., Nguyen, N., Tran, P., Tran, T., & Huynh, T. (2019). Brand equity in a tourism destination: A case study of domestic tourists in Hoi An city, Vietnam. *Tourism Review*, 74(3), 704-720.
- World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2023). *Tourism on Track for Full Recovery as New Data Shows Strong Start to 2023*. <https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-on-track-for-full-recovery-as-new-data-shows-strong-start-to-2023>
- Yamane, T. (1970). *Statistics: An introductory analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Harper & Row.