

# GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRITOURISM MARKETING

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## ABSTRACT

*Purpose* – The objectives of this research are (1) to compare perceived competitiveness dimensions and behavioral intentions of tourists from two major agritourism destinations in Prachinburi, (2) to explore whether tourists with different travel behavior (e.g., number of visits, travel companion) perceive competitive dimensions differently as well as (3) to develop guidelines for enhancing competitiveness of those destination using the results from previously mentioned objectives. The sample group consisted of 620 on-site agritourists visiting Prachinburi Province, with 310 participants allocated to each of the two destinations: Phumbhubejhr and Mai Khed Farmstay.

*Methodology* – Quota random sampling and accidental sampling methods were applied. Data was collected through questionnaires, and the hypotheses were tested using a one-sample t-test and an independent samples t-test. At Phumbhubejhr, most respondents are female (64.52%), with three-quarters (75.81%) aged 26-58. About 60% hold a bachelor's degree, and most work in government, state enterprises, or private businesses. Income levels are evenly distributed. For Mai Khed farmstay, most respondents are male (70.32%), with nearly two-thirds (65.48%) aged 26-58. Most (84.52%) have a college degree or lower, with many employed (42.58%) or running businesses (26.45%). Income levels are also evenly distributed.

*Results* – The results revealed that Phumbhubejhr demonstrates stronger competitiveness across all dimensions compared to Mai Khed. Regarding the second objective, tourists having different travel behavior significantly have different perceptions toward destination competitiveness. Repeat visitors have a stronger appreciation for its inherited resources and management, while first-time visitors to Phumbhubejhr are impressed by its created resources and infrastructure. Additionally, traveling with family/friends appears to enhance the visitor experience and competitiveness ratings across both destinations, suggesting that the social context of the visit plays a role in shaping positive perceptions and loyalty intentions. These findings can guide targeted strategies for improving visitor satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits for different visitor groups.

*Implications* – Phumbhubejhr should promote unique resources like its herb garden and historic buildings while maintaining service quality, and Mai Khed should enhance facilities and recreational offerings. Both should use loyalty programs for repeat visitors, targeted campaigns for first-time tourists, and family-friendly packages. Flexible itineraries for group tours and social-focused marketing can boost appeal and foster sustainable agritourism growth.

*Originality/Value* – This research fills theoretical gaps by focusing on destination competitiveness in non-European countries and emphasizing unique regional and industry-specific dimensions. It integrates underexplored behavioral factors, such as travel companions and visit frequency, into competitiveness models. By addressing variations between first-time and repeat visitors, it offers new insights for tailoring destination strategies to diverse visitor profiles.

**Keywords:** Destination competitiveness, Behavioral intention, Travel behavior, Agritourism

**Paper Type:** Research Article

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## INTRODUCTION

In the highly competitive tourism industry, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of destinations is crucial for maintaining and enhancing their attractiveness to travelers (Pearce, 1997). At the business level, maintaining destination competitiveness is essential for preserving market share and achieving a strong market position (Pike & Page, 2014; Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Research indicates a positive relationship between destination competitiveness and desirable outcomes, such as repeat visits and positive recommendations (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Chen & Phou, 2013). Ultimately, this fosters true destination loyalty or customer-based brand equity (Wong, 2015). Therefore, to enhance or sustain competitiveness, tourism managers must assess their competitive positions and identify their strengths and weaknesses relative to competitors (Gomezelj & Mihalić, 2008).

Agritourism allows destinations to stand out in competitive markets by introducing unique and authentic experiences. By incorporating local agricultural practices, traditional lifestyles, and regional cuisines, agritourism adds tremendous value to the destination's overall appeal (Carpio et al., 2008) as well as enhances the destination's unique identity and competitive positioning (Lane, 1994). Agritourism activities, such as farm tours, cooking classes, or harvest experiences, encourage tourists to spend more time at the destination. Visitors who connect emotionally with these experiences are more likely to return, boosting the destination's long-term competitiveness (Barbieri, 2013). By integrating agriculture and tourism, agritourism generates additional income for farmers, creates jobs, and supports rural development. These economic benefits contribute to the destination's overall competitiveness (Tew & Barbieri, 2012).

## RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE & RESEARCH PROBLEM

According to Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau. (2023), the global agritourism market is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18% from 2019 to 2023, reflecting increasing global interest in agritourism activities. Moreover, in 2016, agritourism activities generated approximately 1.86 billion baht from domestic tourists and 12 billion baht from international visitors (Responsible Tourism in Thailand, 2016).

Agriculture sector has been the main industry for Thailand as the lands are suitable for cultivation. Nowadays, many agricultural sites have been developed into tourist attractions that can support several types of tourism including rural tourism, ecotourism and agritourism. In addition, agricultural products such as tropical fruits like durian and mangosteen highlight the country's rich agricultural heritage and serve as compelling attractions for tourists (Chomchalow, & Na Songkhla, 2008). Furthermore, through an integration between traditional farming methods and local lifestyles, agritourism provides authentic experiences for tourists who seek a deeper cultural connection (Khamung, 2015). As a result, agritourism help enhance the destination's brand image as well as destination competitiveness (Madhyamapurush et al., 2021).

Prachinburi Province, located in the central region of Thailand, is characterized by diverse geography and a strong focus on agriculture and health tourism (Prachinburi Provincial Office, 2023). It is also one of four provinces designated as an herbal city by the Ministry of Public Health. The province's five-year development plan emphasizes promoting eco-tourism, eco-industry, and safe agriculture while fostering economic stability for local communities. Its vision is outlined as "Prachinburi: A livable city with eco-tourism and eco-industrial zones, safe agriculture, Thai traditional medicine, and globally recognized herbal products." Furthermore, one of its missions is to promote and maintain the quality of eco-tourism (agritourism) for sustainable outcomes (Prachinburi Provincial Office, 2023). Thus, agritourism has become a significant focus for Prachinburi.

Despite that, according to the Provincial Government Center of Prachinburi, Prachinburi has consistently ranked fifth among the five eastern provinces of Thailand in terms of its revenue from domestic tourists during the years 2019 to 2023, except for 2020. As shown in Table 1, the data indicated the needs for conducting destination competitiveness's study in Prachinburi to boost its revenues comparing to other provinces in the same geographic region.

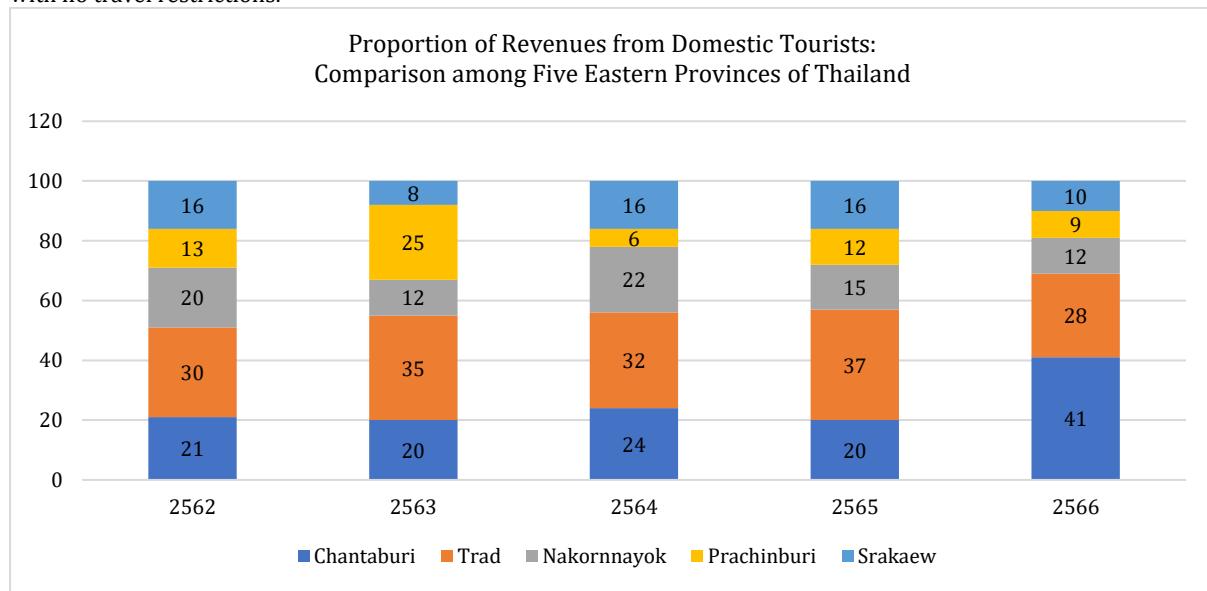
**Table 1.** Proportion of Revenues from Domestic Tourists: Comparison among Five Eastern Provinces of Thailand from 2019-2023

	Chanthaburi % (ranking)	Trad % (ranking)	Nakornnayok % (ranking)	Prachinburi % (ranking)	Srakaew % (ranking)	Eastern Provinces
2019	21(2)	30 (1)	20(3)	13(5)	16(4)	100
2020	20(3)	35(1)	12(4)	25(2)	8(5)	100
2021	24(2)	32(1)	22(3)	6(5)	16(4)	100
2022	20(2)	37(1)	15(4)	12(5)	16(3)	100
2023	41 (1)	28 (2)	12(3)	9(5)	10(4)	100

Note: (1) Data adapted the Provincial Government Center of Prachinburi (Prachinburi Provincial Office, 2023)

(2) The values outside the parentheses represent the proportion of revenue generated by domestic tourists, while the values inside the parentheses indicate the ranking based on this proportion.

(3) The years 2020-2021 correspond to the COVID period, while 2022 and onwards reflect the normal period with no travel restrictions.



**Figure 1.** Proportion of Revenues from Domestic Tourists: Comparison among Five Eastern Provinces of Thailand

In this study, two major agritourism destinations were selected. First, Phumbhubejhr, a former residence for King Rama V when he visited the province. The building represents a blend of European and Thai architectural styles and now functions as a museum dedicated to traditional Thai medicine. Its distinctive design makes it a notable landmark in the region (Tourism Authority of Thailand, n.d.). Apart from the building, it has an herb garden organized by medicinal uses and provides services such as educational activities, accommodation, and a café (<https://thai.tourismthailand.org/Attraction/>). This destination focuses on wellness tourism with zones dedicated to herbal education and cultural preservation, aligning with the created resources and destination management. These features are considered one dimension of destination competitiveness and hypothesized to significantly influence tourists' satisfaction and revisiting intentions. The second destination is Mai Khed Farmstay, which was established in 2002. This destination offers visitors immersive experience in durian farming, allowing guests to stay on-site and participate in various agricultural activities which also correspond to destination competitiveness.

Both sites were selected because they align with Thailand's national tourism strategies to promote secondary cities, sustainability, and cultural preservation (National Tourism Policy Office, 2023). Their attractions also demonstrate alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). These sites preserve cultural heritage and support the local economy, making them significant attractions to be investigated (Prachinburi Tourism Guide, n.d.).

However, each site has distinct unique selling propositions (USPs): Phumbhubejhr represents cultural and historical significance with its 100-year-old wooden house museum, herb garden, and ASEAN's largest collection of jars. These features align with inherited resources, offering insights into heritage tourism and educational tourism. Mai Khed Farmstay emphasizes natural and agricultural tourism, with its durian farm and diverse tropical fruits as well as immersive farm experiences. The Durian & Fruit Buffet and farm activities cater to the growing interest in experiential tourism. This contrast between cultural and natural attractions provides a unique opportunity to study how different types of tourism products influence perceptions of destination competitiveness. Thus, comparing the competitiveness of different destinations enables researchers and policymakers to identify key strengths and weaknesses of each destination (Crouch, 2011; Dwyer & Kim, 2003). It also provides insights into how destinations perform relative to competitors, allowing for more targeted strategies to enhance market positioning (Zhang et al., 2020; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

Apart from managerial contributions, this study addresses theoretical contributions. Firstly, as highlighted by Cronjé and du Plessis (2020), most destination competitiveness studies focused on European context, nevertheless, limited research has conducted in the Asia-Pacific region or developing countries. Furthermore, as Ritchie and Crouch (2010) argued, competitiveness factors vary across destinations and previous research discovered that different countries have key different competitiveness dimensions. Thus, it is essential for non-European countries to address their unique dimensions, particularly for tourism-dependent countries like Thailand. Secondly, apart from the needs for country-specific study, Roman et al., (2020) stress the importance of industry-specific study as well. As most studies discovered different competitiveness dimensions for different types of tourism. For instance, Lee and King (2006) emphasizes destination resources, destination strategies, and the environment as key ingredients for Taiwan's hot springs tourism. Furthermore, Chi et al. (2020) discovered that infrastructure, hospitality, educational opportunities, and the rural environment significantly influence behavioral intentions in rural tourism within China.

Third, although perceived destination competitiveness has been extensively studied as a factor influencing desirable outcomes, such as the intention to revisit, limited research has explored how individual travel behavior shapes these perceptions (Jeong & Kim, 2019; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Zainuddin et al., 2023). Behavioral constructs such as travel companions and frequency of visits are rarely integrated into existing models of destination competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Chen et al., 2016). Furthermore, previous studies often generalize destination competitiveness as a uniform perception among all visitors, overlooking variations between first-time and repeat visitors. As a result, exploring the role of travel behavior can provide insights into how destinations can tailor their competitiveness strategies to different visitor profiles.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Consequently, the aim of this study is to compare competitiveness dimensions and behavioral intentions between those two destinations. The second objective is to explore whether tourists with different travel behavior perceive competitive dimensions differently. Finally, using the results from previously mentioned objectives, the guidelines for enhancing destination competitiveness for both destinations will be developed.

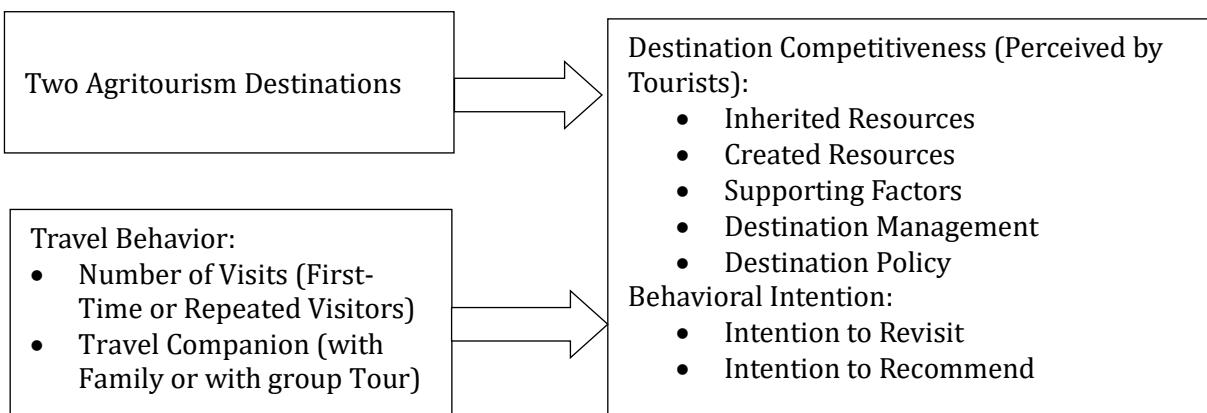
## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

Hypothesis 1: Two agritourism destinations have different levels of competitiveness as perceived by tourists.

Hypothesis 2a: There is a difference in destination competitiveness among tourists possessing different travel behaviors (number of visits).

Hypothesis 2b: There is a difference in destination competitiveness among tourists possessing different travel behaviors (travel companion).

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



**Figure 1** Conceptual Framework

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Destination Competitiveness*

Destination competitiveness has been defined in various, yet complementary ways by tourism researchers (Enright & Newton, 2004; Azzopardi & Nash, 2016; Dupeyras & MacCallum, 2013). Ritchie and Crouch (2003) define it as "the ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences, and to do so in a profitable way, while enhancing the well-being of destination residents and preserving the natural capital of the destination for future generations." Several models seek to evaluate a destination's competitiveness, with Crouch and Ritchie's (1999) framework being one of the most well-known. Crouch and Ritchie (1999) describe core resources as the fundamental attributes that define a destination's attractiveness. These resources are the primary factors that make one location more appealing than others. Dwyer and Kim (2003) further distinguish between inherited (endowed) and created resources. This model is particularly relevant to agritourism as it incorporates both natural resources (farm or garden) and created resources (educational activities).

### **(1) Inherited Resources: Natural and Cultural Resources**

According to Dwyer & Kim (2003, p. 377), the resources category is divided into two types: endowed (inherited) and created. Endowed resources can be classified as natural (mountains, lakes, beaches, rivers, climate etc.) and heritage or cultural (cuisine, handicrafts, language, customs, belief systems etc.). Created resources include tourism infrastructure, special events, the range of available activities, entertainment and shopping.

The endowed (inherited) resources encompass the natural landscape and climate of a destination, which contribute to unforgettable experiences and evoke positive emotions, thereby influencing behavioral intentions (Chang et al., 2019). Another crucial inherited resource is culture and history, these elements help enhance a destination's competitiveness. Destinations which offer a unique environment or lifestyle distinct from everyday life provide a competitive advantage by fostering memorable experiences. Research supports a positive correlation between cultural uniqueness and the competitiveness of rural tourism destinations (Aziz et al., 2011).

### ***Natural Resources in Agritourism, Thailand***

Research on agritourism in Thailand highlights the significance of natural beauty and local cultural experiences as major appeals for tourists. Hirankitti et al. (2014) surveyed 1,600 Thai tourists and found that fruit orchards are the most popular agritourism destinations, with tourists particularly appreciating the scenic allure of these sites. Patamaritthakil and Promlang (2024) assessed the potential and development strategies for agritourism in Wang Nam Khiao, Nakhon Ratchasima, utilizing a mixed-method approach. Their findings emphasize that clean, fresh air is a competitive advantage for this destination. Similarly, Sribenjachoti et al. (2018) studied agritourism in

Chanthaburi, finding that the province's diverse agricultural resources, particularly high-quality fruit orchards, enhance its appeal to tourists, attracting them to both visit and purchase local produce. Suwankut et al. (2021) explored agritourism management in Rayong and Chanthaburi through qualitative research, identifying the richness of local resources as a critical factor. Their study accentuates the importance of resource abundance in supporting sustainable agritourism. Finally, Pojana et al. (2024) investigated tourist behavior at the Bamboo Garden by Yai Lee Agritourism Site, finding that the primary motivation for visiting agritourism locations is the opportunity to connect with nature.

### ***Cultural Resources in Agritourism, Thailand***

Research highlights the role of cultural resources in enhancing agritourism experiences across Thailand. Suwankut et al. (2021) studied agritourism management in Rayong and Chanthaburi, utilizing in-depth interviews with local leaders and key figures. Their findings emphasize that local culture and indigenous knowledge are critical to the success of agritourism in these areas. Additionally, they recommend promoting agricultural education, preserving local traditions, and encouraging eco-cultural tourism activities, such as mangrove conservation and fishing experiences, to allow visitors to engage in the local way of life.

Similarly, Maraphot and Sombun (2023) explored agritourism route development in Phanom Sarakham, Chachoengsao. Through qualitative research with local farmers and tourism operators, they found that created resources, including hands-on experiences with community agricultural practices, significantly contribute to enriching tourists' cultural and educational experiences. Khunawut and Phinij (2017) investigated the marketing competitiveness of Nakhon Chai Burin tourism using a mixed-method approach, including surveys of 400 Thai tourists and interviews. Their research reveals that the region boasts diverse attractions, highlighted by unique cultural assets such as ancient Khmer heritage, natural sites, and renowned elephant villages. These elements together position Nakhon Chai Burin as a culturally rich and competitive tourism destination.

### ***(2) Created Resources***

As tourists nowadays are increasingly seeking active over passive experiences, the variety of activities or events offered has become crucial. These activities span recreational, educational, cultural, and natural experiences, providing tourists with diverse ways to engage with a destination. Outdoor activities, for instance, are essential resources for rural tourism (Buhalis, 2000; Maksimovic et al., 2015). Events and activities are often designed to enhance a destination's image and awareness, allowing tourists to immerse themselves in unique cultural and heritage experiences (Lee et al., 2024). In this study, activities such as "learning to plant fruits" and "exploring the benefits of herbs" are highlighted. The former focuses on enjoyment and hands-on involvement, while the latter combines engagement with learning, aligning with findings by Zhang et al. (2018), who observed that enjoyment, learning, and participation are key competitiveness factors. Similarly, Suhartanto et al. (2020) found that educational experiences significantly impact behavioral intentions, a central element of tourist behavior (Hair et al., 2019; Schmitt, 1999). According to Arizo and Apritado (2022)' study in the province of Cebu, farm activities such as fruit picking, walking in fruit and vegetable gardens, horseback riding, honey tasting, learning how to make wine and cheese, or buying local handicrafts have a direct positive influence on the intention to recommend. Furthermore, Brune et al. (2022) found that experiences created for visitors have a direct positive impact on their intention to revisit agritourism sites.

### ***Created Resources in Agritourism, Thailand***

Research on agritourism in Thailand reveals the importance of interactive and educational experiences that enhance tourists' engagement with agricultural practices. Based on a survey of 1,600 Thai tourists, Hirankitti et al. (2014) found that tourists highly value educational aspects of agritourism, indicating a strong interest in learning opportunities during their visits. Suwankut, et al. (2021), conducted a qualitative study in Rayong and Chanthaburi, interviewing community

leaders and local stakeholders. Their findings suggest promoting agricultural learning, local traditions, and environmental conservation as core activities. In Chachoengsao, Maraphot and Sombun (2023) argued that created resources, such as opportunities to engage with traditional agricultural practices (e.g., like rice planting) significantly enrich tourists' experiences by immersing them in the rural lifestyle and agricultural culture.

Pojana et al. (2024) investigated tourist behavior in agritourism Site, discovering that the primary motivations for visiting include engaging in nature and learning sustainable farming practices. In Wang Nam Khiao, Nakhon Ratchasima, Patamaritthakil & Promlang (2024) employed a mixed-methods approach, combining interviews with residents and government officials with surveys of 330 tourists. They proposed that agritourism activities focus on experiential learning, such as vegetable planting, harvesting, and cooking local dishes, to foster active tourist participation. Sarnsook (2016) conducted a study in Nakhon Nayok, using in-depth interviews and participatory observation. The research found that seasonal activities and education can enhance tourist awareness of local ecosystems, further enriching the agritourism experience. These activities align with tourists' desire for immersive experiences, enhancing their intention to revisit and recommend, which ultimately contributes to the economic sustainability of the destination.

### **(3) Supporting Factors**

This dimension is crucial to building a successful tourism industry, encompassing transportation infrastructure, amenities, and basic resources such as sanitation, water, and public facilities (Buhalis, 2000; Wilde & Cox, 2008). These elements play a significant role in influencing tourists' choice of destination (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2016). Infrastructure is especially critical in rural tourism, where it is essential for enhancing the visitor experience (Craggs & Schofield, 2011; Nam et al., 2011), which is closely linked to tourists' intentions to return (Bonn et al., 2007). Accessibility also contributes significantly to destination competitiveness, especially in rural areas (Chin et al., 2022), with accessibility and clear signage positively impacting tourists' likelihood to recommend and revisit (Prayag, 2009). Furthermore, local hospitality plays a vital role, as visitors expect to feel welcomed, and the warmth of residents can significantly impact tourists' revisit intentions. Research shows positive links between resident hospitality and tourists' behavioral intentions (Nazir et al., 2021; Žabkar et al., 2010).

#### ***Supporting Factors in Agritourism, Thailand***

Several studies highlight the need for enhanced infrastructure and community readiness to support the growth of agritourism in Thailand. According to Boonpim et al. (2020), Chumporn Province has the potential to become an agritourism destination by improving infrastructure such as road upgrades, access to drinking water, and clear signage. Since those infrastructures are necessary to create a comfortable and safe environment for tourists. Patamaritthakil and Promlang (2024) assessed agritourism potential in Wang Nam Khiao, Nakhon Ratchasima, and recommended facility improvements, including upgraded restrooms, pathways, and signage, to enhance convenience and safety for visitors. Similarly, Thonglatong & Samarak (2020) evaluated agritourism sites in Chantaburi Province, noting the need for better infrastructure and facility management to accommodate increased tourist numbers during peak seasons.

Hospitality and community adaptation are also critical. Suwankut et al. (2021), found that the ability of local communities in Rayong and Chantaburi to welcome visitors, significantly influences tourist experiences. Lastly, based on the study by Dawwiangkan & Pinta (2020) on factors influencing tourists' decision-making at ecotourism destinations in Angkhang and Inthanon, the results indicated that facilities and transportation have a direct positive influence on agritourists' decisions.

Nevertheless, Isichaiyakul and Silpa-archa (2015) examined the tourism policies needed to accommodate ASEAN tourists through interviews and focus groups with stakeholders. Their research indicates that agritourism in Thailand is not yet widely popular among international tourists due to inadequate management, limited promotional efforts, and insufficient facilities, such as signage and internet services.

#### **(4) Destination Management**

This dimension focuses on managing service quality. According to Keller and Smeral (1997), quality in tourism consists of three key elements: natural quality, material quality, and non-material quality (such as services). Perceived performance plays a major role in shaping customer satisfaction (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Patterson, 1993) and has a direct impact on behavioral intention (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Keaveney (1995) found that poor service perception led over half of customers to switch providers. Studies consistently show a strong connection between perceived service quality and behavioral intentions (Castro et al., 2007; Yacob et al., 2021). Wu and Li (2017) demonstrated that interactions with service providers affect BI, while Liu and Lee (2016) found that positive perceptions of service quality and value enhance word-of-mouth (WOM) communication among tourists. Finally, In the study by Ahmed et al. (2021) on customer loyalty in agritourism green hotels, customer service is shown to have a direct positive influence on the intention to recommend.

#### ***Destination Management in Agritourism, Thailand***

Patamariththakil and Promlang (2024) conducted a study on agritourism development strategies in Wang Nam Khiao, Nakhon Ratchasima. Their recommendations include enhancing service skills among local staff and residents, ensuring they are well-informed to assist visitors. Iamkijakarn and Khwankitwisala (2018) interviewed local officials and stakeholders involved in agritourism in Rayong, finding that a comprehensive database could improve management efficiency and facilitate rapid, accurate communication with tourists. Their results are consistent with Sribenjachoti et al. (2018)' study on 411 agritourists and tourism operators. They argue that agritourism sites can enhance their service quality by training tourism staffs to provide a welcoming and supportive experience for visitors. Thonglatong and Samarak (2020) assessed agritourism potential in Chantaburi Province, noting a moderate capacity to accommodate tourists due to limitations in management and service quality. They recommend establishing standard service practices and training operators to improve their service knowledge. Dakhathok and Kaewnuch (2017) researched strategies to improve accommodation services in Nakhon Ratchasima through mixed methods, surveying 384 Thai tourists and interviewing hotel managers. They found that tourists desire assurance of quality, cleanliness, and hygiene in accommodations, with high expectations for friendly and reliable service. However, agritourism in Thailand remains less popular among international tourists due to inadequate management as mentioned by Isichaiyakul and Silparcha (2015).

#### **(5) Destination Policy**

This aspect encompasses various marketing efforts such as product enhancement, pricing tactics, distribution strategies, and service management. These efforts aim to improve essential resources, bolster supportive factors, and respond to existing limitations or emerging opportunities (Ritchie & Crouch, 2010). Important elements shaping tourist behavior include perceived value for money and product quality (Buhalis, 1998). Positive experiences of trip quality and value are shown to increase tourists' likelihood to return and recommend the destination (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Drawing on experience economy theory, Liu and Lee (2016) demonstrated that marketing strategies significantly influence consumers' willingness to make purchases, revisit, and recommend, consistent with Lee and King's (2006) findings on factors that drive destination competitiveness.

#### ***Destination Policy in Agritourism, Thailand***

Sribenjachoti, et al. (2018) conducted a survey of 411 agritourists along with in-depth interviews with operators and guides. They recommended strategic improvements in four key areas: (1) Product: Enhance the cleanliness and quality of the fruit offered at agritourism sites. (2) Price: Ensure consistent and value-driven pricing for fruit buffets. (3) Place: Improve site accessibility through better signage and travel routes, and (4) Promotion: Use social media to actively communicate information about available fruits and the agritourism sites to attract more visitors.

Isichaiyakul and Silpa-archa (2015) suggested that Thailand needs to further develop its agritourism networking and public relations to make community-based agritourism more recognizable and appealing to tourists. Sarnsook (2016) researched public relations strategies for agritourism in Nakhon Nayok through in-depth interviews and participatory observation with farmers, tourists, and local organization representatives. The study found that the province's promotional efforts were moderate, recommending an increased focus on website promotion, building a strong agritourism image, and organizing seasonal activities. Additionally, it emphasized educating tourists on the ecological impact of agritourism in the area.

In Nan Province, Champathong et al. (2020) used qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and focus groups with farmers, agritourism operators, local government, and tourism experts. Their findings highlight the value of an integrated marketing communication strategy across various channels. This approach includes creating a central website, utilizing social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), organizing promotional events (such as road shows), partnering with travel agencies (e.g., Agoda, Traveloka), and advertising on YouTube to reach a broader audience.

### ***Behavioral Intention (BI)***

Behavioral Intention (BI) refers to the likelihood that an individual will engage in a specific behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Oliver, 2014). While BI may not perfectly predict actual behavior, it is widely regarded as a strong indicator of future actions (Chi et al., 2020). Grounded in the tripartite theory of attitudes-which comprises cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions, BI is often used to assess tourist loyalty, extending beyond mere behavioral loyalty, such as repeat visitation (Ajzen, 2005; Suhartanto et al., 2020). Conative loyalty, or behavioral intention, provides a more comprehensive measure of loyalty, capturing both the intention to revisit and the willingness to recommend (Yang & Peterson, 2004).

Revisit intention, rooted in social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), represents the likelihood of a tourist returning to a destination (Gohary et al., 2020). Empirical studies support revisit intention as an effective proxy for future behavior (Maxham III, 2001). Similarly, recommendation intention, often referred to as word-of-mouth (WOM), reflects the likelihood of an individual recommending a product or service without commercial incentive (Chang et al., 2018). WOM is a particularly influential tool in tourism marketing due to its high credibility among consumers (Williams & Soutar, 2009). In sum, BI serves as a multidimensional construct, offering insights into both return intentions and advocacy behaviors, thus providing a robust framework for understanding consumer loyalty in tourism contexts.

### ***Travel Behavior and its Influence on Perceived Destination Competitiveness***

Travel behavior involves the study of how individuals make decisions regarding travel, including destination choice, travel mode, timing, frequency, and activities undertaken. Travel behavior is hypothesized to influence destination competitiveness and behavioral intention due to its impact on visitors' perception of value and experience quality, as supported by social exchange theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Understanding travel behavior is crucial for developing effective marketing strategies and enhancing destination competitiveness. This study emphasizes two kinds of behavior: one is number of visits, the other is travel companion.

### ***Number of Visits (First-Time and Repeat Visitors)***

In this study, the authors categorized the number of visits as first-time or repeated visits. **First-Time Visitor** refers to individuals visiting a destination for the first time. Literature indicates that tourists' perception and satisfaction levels are often influenced by pre-visit information and initial experiences. Managing their experiences effectively is vital for encouraging repeat visitation. **Repeat Visitor** refers to individuals who return to a destination multiple time. Repeat visitation is influenced by prior satisfaction, emotional attachment, and perceived value. Artal-Tur et al. (2019) discusses the "tourist-destination life cycle," highlighting how tourists' behaviors and experiences evolve with repeated visits.

### ***Influence of Number of Visits on Perceived Destination Competitiveness***

The number of times a tourist visits a destination significantly shapes their perception due to factors such as familiarity and emotional attachment. These dynamics have an impact on destination competitiveness. In terms of familiarity, repeat visits allow tourists to gain better knowledge of a destination, making them more familiar with its attractions and services. This often leads to more favorable perceptions as the destination becomes less intimidating and more comfortable. Familiarity often leads to a stronger emotional connection, making the destination feel welcoming and trustworthy, key attributes of a competitive destination (Chen & Gursoy, 2001). Repeated visits often foster emotional connections, creating a sense of belonging or nostalgia. This attachment can positively influence perceptions, as tourists begin to associate the destination with personal memories and feelings (Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

Previous studies also discovered the difference between first-time and repeated visitors in evaluating service quality and offerings. Tourists who are more familiar with destinations tend to develop realistic expectations, reducing the likelihood of dissatisfaction due to unmet expectations (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). As a result of a more balanced perceptions of repeated visitors, the image and perceived competitiveness of a destination can be enhanced (Oppermann, 2000). Revisiting builds a sense of loyalty and attachment to the destination. This emotional connection often translates into advocacy, where tourists actively recommend the destination to others (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Consequently, it is hypothesized that

H1a: There is a significant difference between first-time or repeated visitors in perceived destination competitiveness and behavioral intention.

### ***Travel Companion***

A travel companion refers to any individual who accompanies a traveler during their journey. Travel companions significantly influence travel behavior, destination choice, and the overall satisfaction of a trip (Ekinci et al., 2021). The type of travel companion, whether family, friends, or groups—can shape travelers' preferences, activities, and experiences during their journey (Li & Cai, 2012). The presence of travel companions can enhance tourism experiences and satisfaction. For instance, trips with spouses and friends have been associated with higher revisit intentions and destination satisfaction. The type of travel companions brings unique dynamics to the travel experience, influencing decisions and satisfaction levels (Vada et al., 2022; Su, L., et al., 2021).

### ***Influence of Travel Companions on Tourists' Perception of a Destination***

The relationship between destination competitiveness and the influence of travel companions can be explained through **social influence, group behavior dynamics, and emotional contagion theories**. The presence of travel companions significantly shapes a tourist's perception of a destination due to social, emotional, and experiential factors. The dynamics introduced by companions can enhance or detract from the overall travel experience, thus influencing how the destination is perceived (Vada et al., 2022).

**Social Influence Theory** posits that individuals' behaviors and attitudes are shaped by the people around them. In the context of tourism, travel companions play a critical role in shaping how a destination is perceived and experienced (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). For example, family-friendly destinations offering amenities for children create a perception of competitiveness for family groups. Traveling with friends or group tours may prioritize recreational activities, impacting on how the destination is perceived in terms of excitement and entertainment (Su et al., 2021).

**Group Dynamics Theory** explains how interactions within a group influence individual behavior and decision-making (Forsyth, 2018). For instance, negative interactions with companions may lead to unfavorable perceptions, even if the destination offers high-quality services (Li & Cai, 2012). In contrast, adventurous companions may push tourists to explore aspects of the destination they wouldn't have experienced alone, leading to enriched and positive perception (Vada et al., 2022). This broadens the overall experience and positively influences the perception of destination competitiveness (Prayag & Ryan, 2012).

According to **Emotional Contagion Theory**, emotional contagion occurs when individuals “catch” emotions from those around them. In tourism, travel companions’ positive or negative emotions influence each other’s perception of the destination (Hatfield et al., 1994). For example, a shared adventure like rafting or a serene family picnic enhances the overall group sentiment, improving perceptions of the destination’s competitiveness. Furthermore, positive experiences shared with companions may increase the likelihood of promoting the destination to others (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Tourists who experience positive travel dynamics with companions are more likely to recommend the destination to others, boosting its reputation and competitive edge (Su et al., 2021).

As a result, in this study, it is hypothesized that

H2b: Tourists with different types of travel companion (family or group tours) may have different perceptions of destination competitiveness and behavioral intentions.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *Population and Sampling*

The target population are agritourists who visit either Mai Khed Homestay (Mai Khed) or Phumbhubejhr, Herbal and Health Wisdom Learning Park, Bang Decha (Phumbhubejhr). This sample size calculation assumes a 95% confidence level and a 6% margin of error to balance statistical robustness with logistical feasibility. This results in 270 sample size for each destinations. However, to buffer the incomplete questionnaire, the authors collected data from 400 respondents. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 310 were fully completed, resulting in a 77.5% response rate, aided by a small incentive. To ensure a representative sample, quota sampling was employed, dividing participants based on income groups. Thai agritourists on-site were invited to participate.

**Research Context:** This study focuses on two major agritourism sites located in Amphoe Mueang District, Prachinburi Province. One is Phumbhubejhr, which consists of three zones: (1) a 100-year-old wooden house museum, (2) an herb garden organized by medicinal uses, and (3) the largest collection of jars in Thailand and ASEAN. Services include educational activities, accommodation, and a café (<https://thai.tourismthailand.org/Attraction/>). The key attractors of Phumbhubejhr are historical building and herbal education, aligning with inherited resources and created resources, destination management. These features are hypothesized to significantly influence tourists' perception of destination competitiveness.

The other agritourism site is Mai Khed Farmstay, which is situated on a 20-rai (7.9-acre) durian farm. The property features a spacious country house, along with a lodge and homestay accommodations. The farm provides well-organized rows of longkongs, rambutans, mangosteens, kratons, and durian. The Durian & Fruit Buffet allows visitors to enjoy unlimited access to freshly harvested rambutans, mangosteens, and longkongs. Overnight guests at Mai Khed Farmstay also have the option to order a special dinner crafted from orchard produce, featuring dishes like Yam Mangosteen Salad, a spicy Durian Red Curry with coconut milk, served alongside Khanom Jeen (thin rice noodles) and vegetables <https://www.yearofthedurian.com/2022/05/mai-khed-prachinburi-durian-farmstay>. The key attractors of Mai Khed Farmstay are “durian farm and other fruits” and “Durian and Fruit Buffet” aligning with inherited resources and created resources as well as destination policy. These features are hypothesized to significantly influence tourists' perception of destination competitiveness. Since the unique features of these two sites are different from each other: one is cultural (historical building), the other is natural (farm and fruits). The author aims to explore whether these two sites have significant difference in perceived destination competitiveness.

### *Research Instrument*

The research instrument was a questionnaire consisting of three parts: (1) travel behavior of the respondents, (2) destination competitiveness as perceived by tourists and their intention to revisit and recommend, (3) demographic questions. With regards to destination competitiveness, this study utilized the model by Ritchie and Crouch (2010) and Dwyer and Kim (2003), adapted to agritourism. The key factors include core resources (inherited or created), supporting factors, destination management as well as destination policy. (1) Inherited resources refer to natural

assets like landscapes or cultural heritage. (2) Created resources include activities offering recreational, educational, and natural experiences. (3) Supporting factors cover tourism infrastructure, accessibility, and local hospitality (Buhalis, 2000; Wilde & Cox, 2008). (4) Destination management involves quality of service management. (5) Destination Policy deals with marketing strategy. Participants rated 24 items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), with items adapted from Wang and Hsu (2010) and Chi & Qu (2008).

Behavioral Intentions (BI). BI was measured through two constructs: intention to revisit (3 items) and intention to recommend (4 items) (Castro et al., 2007; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Participants rated each item from 1 (would not) to 5 (definitely would), based on scales from Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Dagger et al. (2011). Composite reliability and average variance extracted were investigated for validity and reliability as reported in Table 2. To ensure content validity, three university research professors reviewed the measurement scales, and adjustments were made to fit the destination's context. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a sample of 40 respondents. Preliminary analysis using Cronbach's alpha (0.50 or higher; Zaichkowsky, 1985) confirmed the reliability of the constructs as reported in Table 2.

## **Data Analysis**

Statistics employed include one sample test and independent sample t-tests.

## **Human research ethics**

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee from Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi RMUTT\_REC.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

At Phumbhubejhr, most of respondents are female (64.52%), two-thirds (75.81 %) are 26-58 years old. About 60% of them have a bachelor's degree. Most of them are employees in the government/state enterprise or private business. Their income is equally split at different levels. Nearly half of them (42.90%) are from the Northeastern region. Most of them are first time visitors (62.90) and travel with family or friends (65.48%).

As for Mai Khed Homestay, most respondents were male (70.32%) percent, nearly two-thirds (65.48 %) are 26-58 years old. Most of them (84.52%) have a college degree or lower. They are employees (42.58%) and business owner (26.45). Their income is equally split at different levels. Nearly half of them (58.07%) are from the central and eastern region. Most of them are first time visitors (76.77%) and travel with family or friends (85.81%). The details are illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Respondent's Profile and Travel Behavior

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Phumbhubejhr</b>		<b>Maikhed</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
1. Male	110	35.48	218	70.32
2. Female	200	64.52	92	29.68
<b>Age</b>				
1. Less than 26 yrs old	32	10.32	76	24.52
2. 26-43 yrs old	117	37.74	97	31.29
3. 44-58 yrs old	118	38.07	106	34.19
4. 59-77 yrs old	43	13.87	31	10.00
<b>Educational Level</b>				
Less than bachelor's degree	55	17.74	88	28.39
Having bachelor's degree	185	59.68	174	56.13
Higher than bachelor's degree	70	22.58	48	15.48
<b>Occupation</b>				
Employee	229	73.87	132	42.58
Students	32	10.32	77	24.84
Business owner	25	8.07	82	26.45
Retired / Others	24	7.74	19	6.13

**Table 2.** (Cont.)

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Phumbhubejhr</b>		<b>Maikhed</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Average Income/Month</b>				
Less than 20,000 Bht	85	27.42	53	17.10
20,001 - 35,000 Bht	91	29.36	49	15.81
35,001 - 50,000 Bht	51	16.45	55	17.74
50,001 - 65,000 Bht	67	21.61	44	14.19
65,001 Bht or higher	16	4.84+.32	109	22.58+12.58
<b>Residential Areas</b>				
1. North	18	5.81	44	14.19
2. Northeast	133	42.90	53	17.10
3. West	11	3.55	20	6.45
4. Central	67	21.61	103	33.23
5. East	77	24.84	77	24.84
6. South	4	1.29	13	4.19
<b>Tourist's Behavior</b>				
First	195	62.90	238	76.77
Repeated	115	37.10	72	23.23
<b>Travel companion</b>				
With group tour	107	34.52	44	14.19
With friends/family	203	65.48	266	85.81

**Destination Competitiveness as Perceived by Tourists and Their Behavioral Intentions.**

The criteria for interpreting the mean scores are as follows: a score of 4.21-5.00 indicates 'strongly agree,' a score of 3.41-4.20 indicates 'agree,' a score of 2.61-3.40 indicates 'neither agree nor disagree,' a score of 1.81-2.60 indicates 'disagree,' and a score of 1.00-1.80 indicates 'strongly disagree.' Table 3 shows that both destinations have competitiveness at the 'strongly agree' level."

**Table 3.** Destination Competitiveness of Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr and Behavioral Intentions of Tourists

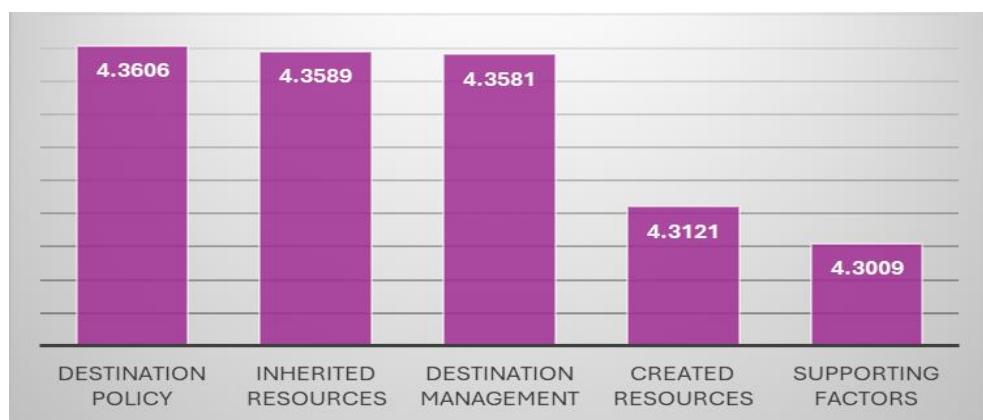
	<b>Maikhed</b>		<b>Phumbhubejhr</b>	
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Inherited Resources (Composite score)	4.359	0.519	44.53	0.507
B1.1 The herb garden is plentiful.	4.339	0.622	4.419	0.637
B1.2 The destination possesses unique characteristics (B1.2)	4.345	0.683	4.581	0.562
B1.3 The local lifestyle is intriguing.	4.361	0.652	4.526	0.595
B1.4 The natural scenery is stunning (B1.4).	4.426	0.653	4.565	0.564
Cronbach alpha =	.780		.873	
Created Resources (Composite score) (CR = .90, AVE = .76)	4.312	0.533	44.22	0.482
B2.1 The destination is famous.	4.245	0.727	4.452	0.630
B2.2 The destination provides a variety of products or services.	4.303	0.691	4.329	0.614
B2.3 Suitable tourism activities are provided.	4.316	0.690	4.406	0.565
B2.4 The destination provides a memorable and impressive experience.	4.384	0.632	4.494	0.550
Cronbach alpha =	.781		.833	
Supporting Factors (Composite score) (CR = .90, AVE = .76)	4.301	0.520	44.30	0.501
B3.1 Gas stations/restrooms are clean.	4.168	0.713	4.342	0.607
B3.2 The souvenir shop offers a diverse range of products.	4.213	0.742	4.381	0.589
B3.3 The restaurant is appetizing and of high standard.	4.326	0.733	4.319	0.616
<b>B3.4</b> Travel access is convenient.	4.361	0.709	4.465	0.572
<b>B3.5</b> The pathway to the attraction is safe.	4.316	0.651	4.503	0.544
<b>B3.6</b> There is clear signage.	4.303	0.723	4.416	0.589
B3.7 The local people are friendly and polite.	4.419	0.677	4.568	0.546
Cronbach alpha =	.858		.888	

**Table 3.** (Cont).

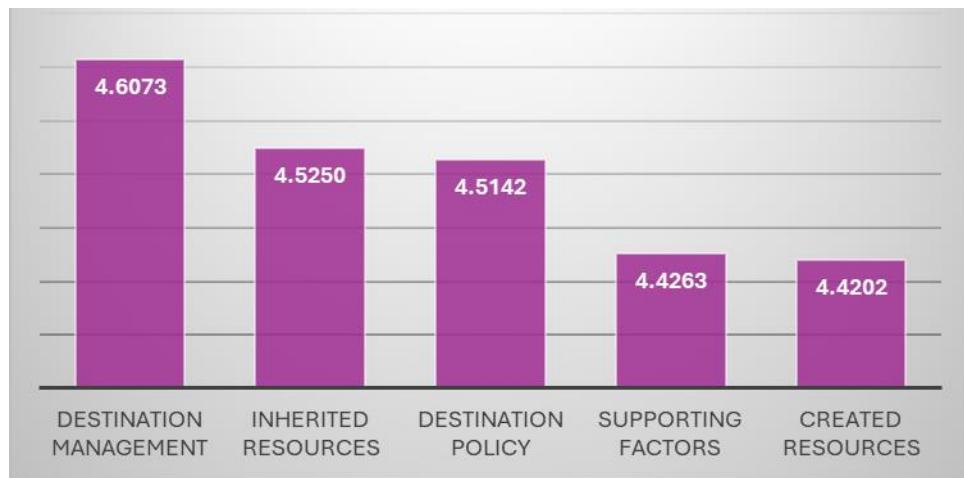
	Maikhed		Phumbhubejhr	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Destination Management (Composite score) (CR = .90, AVE = .76)	4.358	0.518	44.61	0.452
B4.1 The staff is knowledgeable.	4.290	0.638	4.558	0.547
B4.2 It is possible to make reservations via telephone or online.	4.332	0.675	4.535	0.561
B4.3 The staff is helpful.	4.390	0.638	4.655	0.503
B4.4 Interesting educational workshops (herbs usage).	4.419	0.627	4.635	0.508
Cronbach alpha =		.816		.869
Destination Policy (Composite score) (CR = .90, AVE = .76)	4.361	0.514	44.51	0.473
B5.1 Presenting information about tourist attractions.	4.277	0.659	4.487	0.590
B5.2 Sales promotion is available.	4.310	0.674	4.452	0.582
B5.3 Free site visits/product tastings are available.	4.394	0.649	4.513	0.573
B5.4 Value-adding in processed herbs/fruits.	4.426	0.668	4.587	0.519
B5.5 Accommodation is of high quality.	4.397	0.678	4.545	0.542
Cronbach alpha =		.830		.888
Intention to revisit (CR = .85, AVE = .74)	4.314	0.578	44.39	0.578
C1.1 I will revisit this place.	4.313	0.650	4.448	0.565
C1.2 The likelihood of my return in the future is high.	4.371	0.664	4.448	0.588
C1.3 In the near future, I will return to this place.	4.248	0.733	4.261	0.668
Cronbach alpha =		.873		.817
Intention to recommend. (CR = .90, AVE = .76)	4.362	0.537	44.43	0.537
C2.1 I would recommend this place to my family.	4.390	0.653	4.419	0.567
C2.2 I would recommend this place to my friends/acquaintances.	4.287	0.617	4.497	0.544
C2.3 I will say good things about my visit to this destination.	4.352	0.630	4.332	0.684
C2.4 I would encourage friends and relatives to visit this place.	4.419	0.622	4.439	0.558
Cronbach alpha =		.799		.871

Mai Khed has the highest mean value for destination policy, followed by destination management and created resources respectively. Phumbhubejhr has the highest mean value for destination management, followed by inherited resources and destination policy respectively.

The following graphs depict the mean scores for each dimension of competitiveness. Figure 2 represents destination competitiveness for Mai Khed destination while Figure 3 represents destination competitiveness for Phumbhubejhr.



**Figure 2.** Dimensions of Destination Competitiveness Arranged in Order of the Mean Value (Mai Khed)



**Figure 3.** Dimensions of Destination Competitiveness Arranged in Order of the Mean Value (Phumbhubejhr)

The high score in destination policy for Mai Khed reflects effective promotional strategies, while the lower score in supporting factors indicates areas needing improvement, such as infrastructure. The high score in destination management for Phumbhubejhr indicates effective management of service quality whereas the lower score in created resources suggests that Phumbhubejhr should improve its tourism activities and tourism products/services.

**Objective 1: To compare destination competitiveness and behavioral intention between both agritourism destinations (Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr).**

Using independent samples t-tests, the results indicated that both destinations have different levels of competitiveness at 95% significant level. However, they are not different in terms of behavioral intentions. It should be noted that the mean values of Phumbhubejhr's competitiveness dimensions are significantly higher than the mean values of Mai Khed as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Independent Sample t-tests of Competitiveness and Behavioral Intentions between Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr

Group Statistics				Equality of Variances		t-tests for Equality of means				
Destination		N	Mean	SD		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
Inherited Resources	Mai Khed	310	4.3589	0.51948	Equal variances assumed	0.000	0.996	-4.030	618	0.000
	Phumbhubejhr	310	4.5250	0.50681	Equal variances not assumed			-4.030	617.623	0.000
Created Resources	Mai Khed	310	4.3121	0.53287	Equal variances assumed	1.038	0.309	-2.648	618	0.008
	Phumbhubejhr	310	4.4202	0.48216	Equal variances not assumed			-2.648	611.921	0.008
Supporting Factors	Mai Khed	310	4.3009	0.51958	Equal variances assumed	1.700	0.193	-3.206	618	0.001
	Phumbhubejhr	310	4.4263	0.45167	Equal variances not assumed			-3.206	606.262	0.001
Destination Management	Mai Khed	310	4.3581	0.51751	Equal variances assumed	0.920	0.338	-6.386	618	0.000
	Phumbhubejhr	310	4.6073	0.45197	Equal variances not assumed			-6.386	607.004	0.000
Destination Policy	Mai Khed	310	4.3606	0.51376	Equal variances assumed	0.351	0.554	-3.870	618	0.000
	Phumbhubejhr	310	4.5142	0.47322	Equal variances not assumed			-3.870	613.872	0.000

**Table 4.** (Cont.)

Group Statistics				Equality of Variances		t-tests for Equality of means				
Destination		N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)	
Intention to Revisit	Mai Khed	310	4.3140	0.57796	Equal variances assumed	0.306	0.580	-1.631	618	0.103
	Phumbhubejhr	310	4.3860	0.52044	Equal variances not assumed			-1.631	611.331	0.103
Intention to Recommend	Mai Khed	310	4.3621	0.53681	Equal variances assumed	3.026	0.082	-1.610	618	0.108
	Phumbhubejhr	310	4.4306	0.52296	Equal variances not assumed			-1.610	617.579	0.108

**Objective 3: To determine whether differences in travel behavior resulting in differences in perceived destination competitiveness and behavioral intentions.**

#### Travel behavior: First Time or Repeat Visitors

Using independent samples t-tests, the results indicated that repeated visitors perceived Mai Khed higher than first time visitors in terms of inherited resources and destination management. In contrast, first-time visitors perceived Phumbhubejhr higher than repeated visitors in terms of created resources, supporting factors and intention to recommend as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Independent Sample t-tests of Competitiveness and Behavioral Intentions between First Time Visitors and Repeated Visitors. Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr

Group Statistics				Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-tests for Equality of Means				
Mai Khed		N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	
Inherited Resources	First Time Visitors	283	4.345	0.516	Equal variances assumed	0.680	0.410	-2.012	299	0.045
	Repeat Visitors	18	4.597	0.523	Equal variances not assumed			-1.991	19.172	0.061
Created Resources	First Time Visitors	283	4.311	0.518	Equal variances assumed	1.424	0.234	0.365	299	0.715
	Repeat Visitors	18	4.264	0.699	Equal variances not assumed			0.281	18.208	0.782
Supporting Factors	First Time Visitors	283	4.292	0.520	Equal variances assumed	0.049	0.826	-0.959	299	0.339
	Repeat Visitors	18	4.413	0.509	Equal variances not assumed			-0.976	19.323	0.341
Destination Management	First Time Visitors	283	4.340	0.518	Equal variances assumed	0.858	0.355	-2.171	299	0.031
	Repeat Visitors	18	4.611	0.439	Equal variances not assumed			-2.510	20.129	0.021
Destination Policy	First Time Visitors	283	4.348	0.499	Equal variances assumed	0.893	0.345	-1.509	299	0.132
	Repeat Visitors	18	4.533	0.590	Equal variances not assumed			-1.300	18.576	0.209
Intention to Revisit	First Time Visitors	283	4.304	0.567	Equal variances assumed	2.815	0.094	-0.210	299	0.834
	Repeat Visitors	18	4.333	0.723	Equal variances not assumed			-0.169	18.355	0.867
Intention to Recommend	First Time Visitors	283	4.351	0.542	Equal variances assumed	1.507	0.221	-1.147	299	0.252
	Repeat Visitors	18	4.500	0.411	Equal variances not assumed			-1.462	20.950	0.159
<b>Phumbhubejhr</b>										
Inherited Resources	First Time Visitors	166	4.529	0.506	Equal variances assumed	2.117	0.147	1.597	239	0.112
	Repeat Visitors	75	4.413	0.546	Equal variances not assumed			1.552	133.626	0.123
Created Resources	First Time Visitors	166	4.446	0.504	Equal variances assumed	0.575	0.449	2.015	239	0.045
	Repeat Visitors	75	4.307	0.479	Equal variances not assumed			2.055	149.830	0.042

**Table 5. (Cont.)**

Group Statistics				Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-tests for Equality of Means				
Mai Khed	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.		
Supporting Factors	First Time Visitors	166	4.460	0.493	Equal variances assumed	12.000	0.001	2.353	239	0.019
	Repeat Visitors	75	4.309	0.379	Equal variances not assumed		2.595	182.481	0.010	
Destination Management	First Time Visitors	166	4.559	0.473	Equal variances assumed	0.182	0.670	0.134	239	0.894
	Repeat Visitors	75	4.550	0.461	Equal variances not assumed		0.135	146.328	0.893	
Destination Policy	First Time Visitors	166	4.469	0.500	Equal variances assumed	2.862	0.092	0.386	239	0.700
	Repeat Visitors	75	4.443	0.448	Equal variances not assumed		0.403	158.262	0.688	
Intention to Revisit	First Time Visitors	166	4.396	0.579	Equal variances assumed	9.089	0.003	1.377	239	0.170
	Repeat Visitors	75	4.293	0.417	Equal variances not assumed		1.552	193.108	0.122	
Intention to Recommend	First Time Visitors	166	4.461	0.548	Equal variances assumed	6.213	0.013	1.924	239	0.056
	Repeat Visitors	75	4.320	0.473	Equal variances not assumed		2.033	163.974	0.044	

**Travel Behavior: Travel with Group Tour or Travel with Friends/family**

To determine whether these two groups of tourists have different perceptions and behavioral intentions, independent samples t-tests were conducted. The results indicated that tourists traveling with family or friends perceived the Mai Khed destination as more competitive across all dimensions. Additionally, their behavioral intentions were significantly higher than those of tourists in group tours.

For Phumbhubejhr, the results follow a similar pattern to Mai Khed. Specifically, tourists with family or friends had higher perceptions of competitiveness and stronger behavioral intentions than those in group tours, except in the dimension of created resources, as shown in Table 6."

**Table 6** Independent Sample t-tests of Competitiveness and Behavioral Intentions between Tourists Travelling with Group Tour or Travelling with Friends/family.

Mai Khed	Travel Behavior	Descriptive Statistics			Levene's test for Equality of Variances		t-tests for equality of Means			
		N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	
Inherited Resources	With Group Tour	44	4.159	0.622	4.505	0.035	-2.784	308	0.006	
	With Family/Friend	266	4.392	0.494			-2.363	52.354	0.022	
Created Resources	With Group Tour	44	4.080	0.635	3.858	0.050	-3.171	308	0.002	
	With Family/Friend	266	4.351	0.505			-2.693	52.376	0.009	
Supporting Factors	With Group Tour	44	4.042	0.588	5.376	0.021	-3.635	308	0.000	
	With Family/Friend	266	4.344	0.496			-3.216	53.572	0.002	
Destination Management	With Group Tour	44	4.148	0.645	9.514	0.002	-2.946	308	0.003	
	With Family/Friend	266	4.393	0.486			-2.409	51.367	0.020	
Destination Policy	With Group Tour	44	4.064	0.617	8.411	0.004	-4.253	308	0.000	
	With Family/Friend	266	4.410	0.478			-3.548	51.888	0.001	
Intention to Revisit	With Group Tour	44	3.962	0.679	2.991	0.085	-4.493	308	0.000	
	With Family/Friend	266	4.372	0.539			-3.812	52.345	0.000	
Intention to Recommend	With Group Tour	44	4.080	0.662	5.418	0.021	-3.853	308	0.000	
	With Family/Friend	266	4.409	0.499			-3.154	51.403	0.003	
Phumbhubejhr		N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	
Inherited Resources	With Group Tour	107	4.376	0.575	Equal variances assumed	11.665	0.001	-3.836	308	0.000
	With Family/Friend	203	4.603	0.449	Equal variances not assumed		-3.557	175.534	0.000	
Created Resources	With Group Tour	107	4.350	0.494	Equal variances assumed	0.191	0.663	-1.855	308	0.065
	With Family/Friend	203	4.457	0.473	Equal variances not assumed		-1.830	207.762	0.069	

**Table 6 (Cont.)**

Descriptive Statistics				Levene's test for Equality of Variances		t-tests for equality of Means				
Phumbhubejhr	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.		
Supporting Factors	With Group Tour	107	4.355	0.476	Equal variances assumed	0.498	0.481	-2.023	308	<b>0.044</b>
	With Family/Friend	203	<b>4.464</b>	<b>0.435</b>	Equal variances not assumed			-1.967	199.520	0.051
Destination Management	With Group Tour	107	4.460	0.492	Equal variances assumed	7.125	0.008	-4.271	308	0.000
	With Family/Friend	203	<b>4.685</b>	<b>0.410</b>	Equal variances not assumed			-4.039	<b>184.834</b>	<b>0.000</b>
Destination Policy	With Group Tour	107	4.391	0.472	Equal variances assumed	1.287	0.257	-3.393	308	<b>0.001</b>
	With Family/Friend	203	<b>4.579</b>	<b>0.462</b>	Equal variances not assumed			-3.370	211.602	0.001
Intention to Revisit	With Group Tour	107	4.246	0.571	Equal variances assumed	0.736	0.392	-3.498	308	<b>0.001</b>
	With Family/Friend	203	<b>4.460</b>	<b>0.477</b>	Equal variances not assumed			-3.311	185.291	0.001
Intention to Recommend	With Group Tour	107	4.348	0.546	Equal variances assumed	0.079	0.779	-2.027	308	<b>0.044</b>
	With Family/Friend	203	<b>4.474</b>	<b>0.506</b>	Equal variances not assumed			-1.980	202.127	0.049

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

For Mai Khed, the highest score in destination policy reflects effective marketing strategies enhancing its appeal and visitor satisfaction. That is how they value-added their products (Mean = 4.42) (fresh local produce), how they organize fruit picking activities (Mean = 4.39) as well as how they provide sales promotion (Mean = 4.31). As argued by Xu and Au (2023), competitive destinations attract and satisfy tourists by leveraging unique resources and effective policies. This result also resonates with the findings from Patamariththakil and Promlang (2024) in Wang Nam Khiao, where strategic promotions were found to contribute positively to tourist satisfaction. With regards to supporting factors, even though its mean value was significantly above 4.21, it was lowest among five dimensions. As a result, there is still room for improving tourism facilities such as restrooms, souvenir shops, restaurants and travel access.

Phumbhubejhr's top score in destination management highlights the efficient operations management in elevating its attractiveness and retaining visitors. That is, their staff are knowledgeable (Mean = 4.32) and helpful (Mean = 4.39). This is consistent with Chen & Tsai (2007), who show that destination can promote repeat visits by ensuring quality service. Meanwhile, the highest score of inherited resources aligns with Enright & Newton (2004) and Aziz et al. (2011), who argue that destinations with strong cultural and environmental offerings create memorable experiences that boost tourist loyalty. Phumbhubejhr's strength in inherited resources such as natural landscapes and historical building highlights how destinations can enhance their competitiveness through unique agricultural and cultural offerings. However, the mean value of created resources was lowest. Consequently, there is still room for creating memorable and immersive experience (Mean = 4.38) by providing suitable tourism activities.

While both destinations scored highly in all competitiveness dimensions, Phumbhubejhr excelled in 'Destination Management,' likely due to its focus on educational workshops and knowledgeable staff. Conversely, Mai Khed's strength in 'Destination Policy' reflects its successful marketing strategies, such as the Durian & Fruit Buffet and exclusive accommodations.

### ***Based on the results from the first objective, which is a comparison of competitiveness and behavioral intention between these two destinations.***

Phumbhubejhr consistently has higher mean scores than Mai Khed across all five dimensions, with p-values less than 0.05. Regarding the first dimension (Inherited Resources),

Phumbhubejhr's mean score is significantly higher than Mai Khed's. This suggests that Phumbhubejhr may be more effectively leveraging natural or cultural resources to enhance its competitiveness. With regards to the second dimension, Phumbhubejhr also outperforms Mai Khed in created resources. This indicates Phumbhubejhr's advantage in developing tourism-related attractions. The third dimensions (Supporting Factors), Phumbhubejhr has a stronger infrastructure and support system that enhances the overall visitor experience. The fourth dimension (Destination Management), Phumbhubejhr's mean is notably higher than Mai Khed's, reflecting effective management practices that contribute positively to its competitive standing. The fifth dimension (Destination Policy), the mean score for Phumbhubejhr surpasses Mai Khed's, suggesting that Phumbhubejhr's policy framework might better support tourism growth and visitor satisfaction. These consistent results indicate that the differences are unlikely to be due to random chances.

**Behavioral Intention Comparison:** Despite the differences in competitiveness, the two destinations do not differ significantly in terms of behavioral intentions. It can be implied that factors beyond competitiveness, perhaps related to visitor expectations or satisfaction, might play a role in shaping behavioral intentions for these agritourism destinations.

**With regards to the second objective,** the results indicate a significant difference in perceived destination competitiveness and behavioral intentions among tourists with different travel behaviors.

#### ***Comparison Between First-Time and Repeat Visitors***

For Mai Khed, repeat visitors rated these two dimensions (Inherited Resources and Destination Management) significantly higher than first-time visitors, suggesting that familiarity with Mai Khed may enhance their appreciation of the location's natural resources and management practices. These repeat visitors likely have established positive experiences and trust in the quality and consistency of the destination's offerings. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that familiarity and positive past experiences contribute to enhanced perceptions of a destination's attributes (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Managers at Mai Khed can leverage this insight by creating loyalty programs or repeat-visitor incentives to strengthen and reward this positive relationship. However, there are no statistically significant differences in behavioral intentions between first-time and repeat visitors. This suggests that both groups have similar likelihoods to revisit or recommend Mai Khed, regardless of prior experience.

For Phumbhubejhr, first-time visitors rated these two dimensions (Created Resources and Supporting Factors) significantly higher than repeat visitors. This suggests that Phumbhubejhr's unique offerings and infrastructure make a strong initial impression, which aligns with studies indicating that new visitors are often more attentive to tangible attributes such as amenities and activities (Enright & Newton, 2004). This highlights Phumbhubejhr's effectiveness in attracting first-time visitors through well-developed infrastructure and unique attractions. Managers at Phumbhubejhr might consider maintaining this initial appeal by continuing to innovate and refresh their offerings, keeping them engaging and novel for new audiences. In terms of behavioral intention, first-time visitors also rated their intention to recommend Phumbhubejhr higher than repeat visitors. This may indicate that Phumbhubejhr's unique appeal resonates particularly well with new visitors, leading them to actively promote it to others.

#### ***Comparison Between Tour Travelers and Family/Friend Travelers***

Across all 'competitiveness' dimensions, travelers with family or friends rated Mai Khed significantly higher than those traveling with a group tour. This pattern is the same as Phumbhubejhr's, suggesting that the social aspect of traveling may enhance perceptions of the destination's appeal and competitiveness. Traveling with family or friends often fosters a sense of comfort and enjoyment, allowing visitors to connect more deeply with their surroundings (Prayag, 2009). In contrast, group tour travelers might feel more constrained by structured schedules, which may limit personal engagement with the destination. Both Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr could capitalize

on this insight by tailoring experiences to family and friend groups, such as offering customizable itineraries or private group activities that allow for more meaningful and personalized experiences.

Furthermore, family/friend travelers also have a significantly higher behavioral intention compared to group tour travelers. This implies that personal connections may positively influence visitors' engagement and satisfaction, contributing to a greater likelihood of repeat visits and recommendations. This aligns with social exchange theory, which suggests that shared positive experiences among family or friends increase satisfaction and the desire to repeat the experience (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This suggests that agritourism destinations like Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr should emphasize group-friendly amenities and activities that encourage shared experiences. Additionally, promotional efforts that target families and friend groups through personalized offers, such as family packages or group discounts, could effectively boost repeat visitation and word-of-mouth referrals.

In summary, these results underscore the importance of travel behavior in shaping visitor perceptions and intentions. Repeat visitors and those traveling with family or friends exhibit stronger connections with the destination, driven by positive associations with specific destination attributes. These insights provide a foundation for tailoring management strategies for different groups of tourists to foster loyalty, and encourage positive recommendations for both Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr.

### ***Managerial Implications***

**Based on the results from the first objective,** the following are managerial recommendations for Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr to strengthen their competitiveness:

**For Phumbhubejhr** to sustain competitive advantages, management should highlight its unique resources. Phumbhubejhr's herbs garden and historical building (a 100-year-old wooden house museum) should be promoted to attract culturally motivated or health-conscious tourists. Secondly, given the high score in destination management, regular staff training and quality control processes should be continued to ensure consistently positive visitors' experiences. Phumbhubejhr can further explore feedback systems to maintain service quality and adapt to evolving visitor preferences.

With lower scores in competitiveness dimensions, Mai Khed should concentrate on enhancing specific aspects to match Phumbhubejhr's competitive standing. This can be achieved by investing in created and supporting factors such as upgrading facilities, improving visitor amenities (e.g., restrooms, pathways, signage), and expanding recreational offerings can elevate the destination's attractiveness. These improvements will make the site more convenient and enjoyable.

**Based on the results from the second objective,** both destinations should encourage repeat visits for different visitor groups.

The strategies for repeat tourists are as follows. Loyalty programs should be implemented for repeat visitors. Since repeat visitors at Mai Khed show a stronger appreciation for inherited resources and destination management, managers should create loyalty programs to encourage return visits. This could include discounts, exclusive experiences, or special events only for repeat visitors. A "frequent visitor" program could also build a sense of community and belonging, fostering deeper connections with the destination.

The strategies for first-time tourists are as follows: An initial appeal for first-time visitors should be highlighted. Phumbhubejhr's strong impression on first-time visitors, particularly with created resources and infrastructure, should be leveraged in marketing campaigns. Phumbhubejhr's well-maintained facilities, and diverse activities should be highlighted in advertisements targeting new audiences. Managers can also develop seasonal offerings and limited-time attractions to maintain the novelty and attractiveness of Phumbhubejhr, catering to the interests of first-time visitors.

For traveling with family/friend visitors, Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr could offer private tours, self-guided trails, or family-focused events that allow these groups to explore at their own pace. Management may consider creating family-friendly packages that include bundled

activities, meals, and accommodation discounts for groups, along with interactive activities (e.g., cooking classes, hands-on farming experiences) that family or friend groups can enjoy together.

Given that family/friend travel possessing higher perceptions and behavioral intentions, marketing campaigns should highlight the social aspect of the destinations. Use imagery and storytelling to depict groups, families, and friends enjoying activities together to reinforce the idea of a socially enriching experience. Encourage user-generated content on social media by promoting hashtags or creating incentives for visitors to share their experiences online. This strategy can strengthen the destination's appeal and reach new audiences through word-of-mouth marketing.

For group tour visitors, both destinations should offer a degree of flexibility in itineraries. For instance, allow for optional add-ons where group members can split off for personalized activities or experiences that cater to individual interests.

By implementing these strategies, Mai Khed and Phumbhubejhr can strengthen their competitiveness across diverse visitor groups, ultimately promoting sustainable growth in agritourism.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is a cross-sectional study that collected data during a specific time of the year, between March and May. Future research could consider collecting data each month, as there may be differences in perceived competitiveness. Additionally, future research could involve benchmarking with highly successful agritourism destinations to evaluate comparative strengths and weaknesses."

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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

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