

A Hangout on the Edge of the Beaten Track: Backpacker Enclave on Khao San Road, Bangkok, Thailand

การสังสรรค์บนความตื่นเต้นในย่านที่ไม่ธรรมดา : ดินแดนแห่งความหลากหลายของนักท่องเที่ยวแบบสะพายเป้บนถนนข้าวสาร กรุงเทพฯ ประเทศไทย

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ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร. ประธานหลักสูตรปริญญาเอกการจัดการอุตสาหกรรมบริการและการท่องเที่ยว มหาวิทยาลัยอัสสัมชัญ

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine international backpacker travel behavior from pre-trip planning to the trip itself. In-depth interviews were conducted to collect data from 15 international backpackers who visited and stayed at locally based budget hotels and moderate priced hostels as an inexpensive accommodation option in and around the infamous Khao San Road area in Bangkok. The data are analyzed qualitatively following a content analysis.

It was noted that backpackers opined views which emphasized that Thailand is relatively cheap to travel in and around and therefore very worthwhile. They preferred the flexible multiple-destination itinerary. These views are based on the value obtained in terms of cultural experiences and recreational attractions available, vibrant nightlife entertainment, bargain shopping, and especially making new friends. They reportedly met friendly locals, support local businesses, enjoyed varied cuisines, and stayed in comfortable accommodation facilities. Unfortunately, the study respondents did not indulge in any meaningful dialogue with Thais, aside from various commercial transactions possibly because of the language barrier. Furthermore, tourists see Khao San Road as a place of rest, relaxation and recreational activities, whereas for locals, it is a place of work. Managerial implications are drawn based on backpackers' travel behavior. Within this context, this study provides insight for tourism businesses at the destination as they can direct their marketing campaigns aimed at matching a niche market with special needs and travel characteristics.

Keywords: Backpackers, Travel Behavior, Khao San Road, Thailand

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้วัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจพฤติกรรมการท่องเที่ยวของนักท่องเที่ยวต่างชาติแบบสะพายเป้จากการวางแผนล่วงหน้ากับการท่องเที่ยวจริง การสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกถูกจัดทำขึ้นเพื่อเก็บข้อมูลจากนักท่องเที่ยวแบบสะพายเป้จาก 15 ประเทศ ผู้ที่เข้าพักในโรงแรมขนาดเล็กต่าง ๆ ทั้งใน และรอบ ๆ ย่านถนนข้าวสารในกรุงเทพฯ ข้อมูลถูกนำมาวิเคราะห์เชิงคุณภาพด้วยการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา

ผลจากงานวิจัยพบว่า นักท่องเที่ยวแบบสะพายเป้เล็งเห็นว่าการเดินทางมาท่องเที่ยวในประเทศไทย ราคาค่อนข้างถูก และคุ้มค่า ความคิดเห็นเหล่านี้มาจากความพอใจที่ได้รับจากประสบการณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมและสิ่งดึงดูดใจด้านนันทนาการ ความบันเทิงยามค่ำคืนที่มีสีสัน การซื้อของที่ต่อราคาได้ โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งมิตรภาพที่ได้จากเพื่อนใหม่ ๆ จากรายงานพบว่า นักท่องเที่ยวแบบสะพายเป้ได้พบกับคนท้องถิ่นที่เป็นมิตรอาหารมีหลากหลายและอร่อย และพักในที่พักราคาที่สะดวกสบาย แต่เป็นที่น่าเสียดายว่าผู้ถูกสัมภาษณ์ไม่ได้มีการให้รายละเอียดเกี่ยวกับบทสนทนาต่าง ๆ กับคนไทยมากนัก นอกจากการทำธุรกรรมทางการเงิน เนื่องจากข้อจำกัดด้านภาษา

นอกจากนี้นักท่องเที่ยวมีความเห็นว่าถนนข้าวสารเป็นแหล่งสำหรับการพักผ่อน การผ่อนคลาย และการทำกิจกรรมรื่นเริงหลากหลาย ในขณะที่คนท้องถิ่นมีความเห็นว่าเป็นแหล่งประกอบอาชีพ ผลลัพธ์จากงานวิจัยที่นำไปประยุกต์ใช้ในเชิงบริหารได้จากพฤติกรรมนักท่องเที่ยวของนักท่องเที่ยวแบบสะพายเป้เป็นหลัก งานวิจัยนี้ได้ให้ความรู้เชิงลึกสำหรับธุรกิจท่องเที่ยวในย่านถนนข้าวสาร เพื่อให้ผู้ประกอบการดำเนินกิจกรรมทางการตลาดที่มุ่งเน้นในการจับคู่กลุ่มลูกค้าแบบเฉพาะเจาะจงกับความต้องการพิเศษและลักษณะเฉพาะของการท่องเที่ยว

คำสำคัญ : นักท่องเที่ยวแบบสะพายเป้ พฤติกรรมนักท่องเที่ยว ถนนข้าวสาร ประเทศไทย

Introduction

Singh (2014, p.1) states: “The global nomad crosses over physical and cultural barriers in the search of differences – a hunger for the ‘unseen’ – not just the ‘Other’ to be visited but an idealized form of travel as liberation from the constraints of modern society”. The twenty-first century is witnessing an increasing number of tourists visiting the South East Asian region and Thailand is considered as the gateway to this region. Along with this trend, many young people from all over the world now visit Thailand and its neighboring countries as backpackers to discover this part of the world to experience cultural differences. This trend is somehow encouraged by books like Across Asia on the Cheap or Lonely Planet which guides young people to travel on their own (as backpackers).

According to Richard and Wilson (2004), backpacking is a global phenomenon which significantly contributes to both developed and developing countries (cited in Cao, 2013). More importantly, backpacker spending now makes up a large proportion of the tourism industry and benefits the local economy (Schevens 2006 cited in Paris 2010). In addition, backpackers tend to spend more money in the host destination when compared to another type of tourists. This is because backpackers often use local products that positively impact the local economy with fewer leakages (Cooper & O'Mahony & Erfurt 2005 cited in Paris 2010). Therefore, backpacker style tourism significantly contributes to the community, particularly the local economy.

Khao San Road is a strategic area in Bangkok best known as a hub for backpacking travelers. Packed along this long road are countless budget guesthouses and mid-range hotels, so this study will investigate the travel behavior of international backpackers. Loker (1993) cited in Wilson and Richards (2008, p. 189) stresses that the study on the travel behavior of international backpackers can improve the marketing or management of backpacker destinations. Therefore, the result could help accommodation and service providers as well as the local government to have an overview of international backpacker travel needs so that they can continue to support travel products and services for this niche segment.

Accordingly, the research objectives are set as follows:

1. To provide insight into the common combinations of travel-related search utilized in vacation planning by international backpackers to Khao San Road in Bangkok Thailand;
2. Study international backpacker travel requirements concerning travel patterns, booking, choice of accommodation, travel-related activities, and services available in and around the Khao San Road area;
3. Understand specific international backpacker behavior within a local Thai context.

Literature Review

Backpacker Travel Behaviour

Most backpackers plan ahead for their trip despite a usual flexible schedule. The pre-trip planning uses varied information sources such as a guidebook, the internet, or recommendations from friends (Ian and Musa, 2008; Paris 2010; Cros (2014). Moreover, internet usage was considered important in order to gather travel information before the trip predominantly for

western backpackers (Paris, 2010). Research conducted by Ian and Musa (2008) indicated that backpackers from Asia required less sophisticated pre-planning arrangements through online reservations while all backpackers require well-maintained online reservation systems and telephone support. It was found that Australian backpackers tend to have higher daily expenses than Asian backpackers and their trips also last longer. Murphy (2001) supports these findings that backpackers from Asia were more budget conscious thus they tend to prefer a more modest way of backpacking (cited in Paris, 2014).

As for travel activities, Paris, Musa and Thirumoonrthi (2014) argued that Australian backpackers were willing to take part in backpacking culture such as partying, drinking, and sex. This result was supported by previous research by Howard (2007) that backpackers are involved in the consumption of drug, alcohol, and sexual encounters. Asian backpackers prefer experiences less focused on “partying”. The authors justify this behavior as Australian backpackers were younger and on long vacations far away from their domicile countries, but it could also be related to the culture in that country.

Chaitrong and Salatyoo (2017) reported that European travelers account for 70 percent of the tourists who stay in Khao San hotels, with the rest mainly from Asia. European tourists usually stay about 14 days in Thailand, leading to more spending. While spending per head of Chinese tourists is high, they typically spend less time in the country, about 6-10 days. For Thailand, it was reported by Morris (2015) that students and backpackers are seen as a dominant group as they spend a lot of time in the country and go to less-traveled areas. The average student backpacker spends 17 days in Thailand. Howard (2005) also reported that most of the tourists at the backpacker enclave on Khao San Road spend their time shopping, watching videos, and communicating with other travelers at restaurants. Even though the typical backpacker seems to meet with locals, the findings suggested just a few backpackers really did so, apart from male tourists and female Thai couples. Many studies have various definitions of a ‘backpacker’, but this study takes a flexible approach and treats a backpacker as tourists traveling independently or in a group for several weeks / months, eating in low-priced restaurants, only staying in budget accommodation, and seeking a new experience. The Backpacker Enclave on Khao San Road

Khao San Road in Bangkok is considered a western leisure area of interest for inbound tourists when they visit Thailand as well as known as one of the world's major backpacker enclaves. It is located in the Banglamphu neighborhood of Bangkok, which is a part of the 'old city'. Westerhausen & Macbeth (2003) cited in Wilson and Richards (2008, p. 190) referred "Enclaves may be located at crossroads or intersections; meeting points which 'permit backpackers to socialize with each other after traversing "alien territory" and serve to reinforce a communal ethos." Cohen (2004) cited in Howard (2005, p. 358) established that Backpackers may use an enclave for varying purposes; for inexpensive accommodation, to relax from travel, socialize with other backpackers, collect travel information, see local attractions, and make further travel arrangements. Braddock (2005) described the Thai street scene, "It nevertheless remains the world's number one spot to meet the globally footloose, drink cheap Chang beers from a street vendor and ponder getting another tattoo before heading off to the diving / chill out islands in the Gulf of Thailand". On Khao San Road, there are varieties of travel businesses including hotels, hostels, guesthouses, bars, restaurant, shops and street vendors that directly benefit from backpacker tourist spending. Scheyvens (2002) reported that backpackers bring potential benefits to the local community by promoting local development. The local people provide services and products demanded by backpacker without requiring the huge capital or investment. While locals lack skills, knowledge, and network to cater to luxury tourists, backpacker tourism encourages budget-oriented enterprises which are easier for locals to meet the demands of this niche market.

Methodology

This qualitative study uses Khao San Road as a single case study research design. Interviews were used in this case study as an appropriate approach to get a deeper understanding and meaningful response from participants. With a minimal budget and limited time, a non-probability convenience sampling approach was utilized in this study which involved 15 in-depth interviews with backpackers from different countries including China, Malaysia, South Korea, The U.K., Australia, and Germany on 26th of August to 20th of October 2018 on Khao San Road, Thailand. Study participants were asked a series of checklist questions exploring their pre-trip planning, destination information, travel requirements, on-site travel behavior and their interaction with the local community. All subjects in this study were approached while they were either checking into a budget hotel, having meals in

restaurants located at street level in various locations, or walking around Khao San road. Participation in the study was voluntary. The group was evenly composed of male and female backpackers. The backpackers' countries of origin were diverse and representative of the backpacking population. Most of the backpackers were happy to oblige to spend time with the researcher. As many interviews were conducted on the condition of anonymity, the names of all individuals quoted here are withheld in tables 1 and 2. The interviews were not recorded but detailed notes were taken in a field diary for transcribing purposes. The direction of the conversation did rely on backpackers being able to recall and narrate their travel stories in addition to checklist questions. The interview process began as a casual conversation followed by predetermined checklist questions. All interviews lasted at least 30 minutes on average, and were conducted with those who could speak English. Interviews were purposely spread over several weeks conducted on the weekends only. Participants of the study were assured confidentiality of the responses. They were asked a series of same questions that focus on the study objectives. No compensation was provided to the respondents. The interviews resulted in about 20-25 pages of transcripts. This research took the inductive approach to qualitative data analysis. No software was used and all analysis was done manually. Multiple readings were undertaken to capture a holistic picture of respondents' stories.

Study Findings

The original transcript of the interviews was analyzed using Braun and Clark's (2006) cited in Batra (2014). This research directly analyzed subjects dialogues gathered from an in-depth interview in order to extract main themes from the responses to identify and compare broad categories of their ideas. A few selected direct quotes are also incorporated along with keywords to further illustrate the meaning of the selected responses. The following discussion covers the international backpacker's travel behavior, facilitating evaluation of the opinion expressed by the participants and enabling analysis. Study participants were aged between 25 and 51 years and included seven women and eight men. All of them seem well-educated tourists.

The Traveler Grapevine is Active

Based on the research findings, social media was identified as a prime source to search for information prior to departure. There are some popular review sites used by

European backpackers such as Trip Advisor, Lonely Planet, and Wiki-Travel, while Asian travelers generally use social media associated with Google or locally based websites to obtain information. Besides social media, travel diaries are also considered as a good information source for this group. European respondents preferred to review comments shared by other travelers on popular websites such as Trip Advisors, Lonely Planet, Wiki-Travel, and then reconfirm information from their friends. Wilson and Richards (2008, p. 198) noted, “Lonely Planet is the backpacker's bible” and emphasized that Lonely Planet and other guidebooks and websites are instrumental in directing travelers to locations where other backpackers congregate. For most people, these are also desirable locations, providing services needed to support the back-packer lifestyle and a ready supply of new interpersonal encounters to weave the narratives that support backpacker identities (Wilson and Richards 2008, p. 199). On the contrary, Asian backpackers generally plan their trip according to recommendations from friends, internet resources such as Google (e.g. Google maps) and travel diaries of other travelers. Recognizing these differences is important for Thai based tourist businesses as they can direct their marketing to a select group of backpackers based on their travel search behavior. Image sharing sites such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Flickr also play a decisive role.

Pre-trip Planning

For Asian respondents, boarding and lodging play an important role in organizing a trip. It was found that most of the study respondents tend to book the air ticket along with the accommodation for their whole trip in advance in an attempt to economize their package. Nevertheless, they are not truly Free Independent Travelers (FITs) because there are no fixed itineraries to follow or any necessity to meet travel representatives. In contrast, apart from booking flights in advance, most of the European respondents booked accommodation the night before travel to ensure they have a place to stay upon arrival. Once checked-in, they would talk to other backpackers or look around to find a better or cheaper place to stay. In some cases, European respondents booked accommodation upon arrival in Bangkok as they wished to view accommodation options before making a decision. Some solo female respondents preferred a pre-stay email with information on how to get around, how much transport fares are, how they are paid, and the basic routes to take.

This study found that some backpackers prefer traveling alone and make or meet friends of the same background from earlier trips in the Khao San Road area while other backpackers generally travel in groups from their home destination. According to Paris and Teye (2010), despite the intention of most backpackers to learn about and experience another culture; in reality, they tend to accompany other backpackers of the same cultural background (cited in Paris, 2014).

Table 1 International backpackers trip planning and information sources

Sr No.	Attributes	International backpackers
1	Travel related search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Common websites used were Trip Advisor, Lonely Planet, Wiki-Travel, Google maps and travel diaries ● Review tourist comments and information from friends and relatives ● Wait until the last minute hoping to get a great rate rather than booking ahead to be sure of a bed ● Flexible travel schedule ● Guidebooks and tourist promotion handouts ● Converse about travel routes and experiences with fellow backpackers sharing the same hostel accommodation
2	Online reservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Friend's recommendations ● Browse internet ● Google, Trip diary, Airbnb ● Lonely Planet ● Wiki-travel ● Trip Advisor
3	Pattern of Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tend to travel independently or in a group ● Do not confine themselves to their 'comfort zone' but make new friends and travel together with them to explore other tourist destinations. ● [Some] travel in a group with known friends

Sr No.	Attributes	International backpackers
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Travel extensively to cover the length and breadth of destination ● Preferably consider visiting Khao San Road in Bangkok and then traveling to other destinations in Thailand (such as either East Coast in the Gulf of Thailand to Koh Phangan, Koh Tao, and Koh Samui or the West Coast in the Andaman Sea to Koh Lanta and Koh Phi Phi) or head towards neighboring countries.
4	Destination choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Word-of-mouth information from friends ● Word-of-mouth information from the internet ● It may follow travel advisory issued and information obtained from the Embassy website ● It can be influenced based on information obtained through review post/ blog/ recommendation/ pictures disseminated on Social Media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube)

Source: Author

Touristic Experience

Asian backpackers tend to travel in a group of three to four and each member of the group is responsible for different aspects in the preparation of the trip. European backpackers preferred to travel individually and then socialize with other backpackers to visit special interest attractions together such as diving excursions, cooking classes, meditation, rock climbing, and group jungle hikes. Interestingly, a visit to Khao San Road was considered a must before visiting other attractions on arrival to Bangkok, especially including the Grand Palace, the temple of the Reclining Buddha (Wat Pho), the temple of the Emerald Buddha (Wat Phra Kaew), the floating market and a typically chaotic Chinatown. The Bangkok Mass Transit Authority offers public transport services at low rates to commuters and travelers alike. The S1 Line operates a special bus service connecting Suvarnabhumi International

Airport and Khao San Road and Sanam Luang making it more convenient for backpackers to transfer from the airport to their favorite downtown haunt (Ngamsangchaikit, 2017).

Accommodation Choice

The in-depth interviews conducted revealed that backpackers prefer hostel accommodation because it is cheaper. European backpackers tend to book a room for one night either in advance or on arrival in Thailand whereas Asian backpackers tend to book their rooms for their entire trip in advance. Ariyakula (2016) states, “a hostel offers low-priced accommodation where guests rent a bed rather than a room, sharing the space with other guests, some hostels include private bathrooms and kitchens, though most hostels have a common bathroom area without proper cooking facilities”. For Asian backpackers, a complete package can ease their backpacking experience as they are generally on a trip for a shorter duration (Paris, 2014). Interestingly, most of the respondents decided to pick a hostel as soon as they arrived in Thailand. For Asian respondents, cheap price and good location were two vital aspects to book a room in the hostel whereas European backpackers preferred to stay in an inexpensive hostel that offers an opportunity to mingle with other backpackers.

Activities

It was found that most of the participants generally wanted to experience a different culture by walking around and seeing different aspects of Thai culture, especially a different cuisine, in comparison to their own cultures. Those who had just arrived on Khao San Road without any activities planned preferred to take a walk around to see what they like before making a decision. Kingsley (2010) noted streets crammed with bars showing Premiership football while Britney Spears and Bob Dylan blared out of every speaker, and hawkers sold European T-shirts. The study also found that backpackers preferred to participate in partying at nightclubs. Besides, getting massages and tattoos were singled-out as suitable activities for most of the female backpackers while on Khao San Road. Paris (2014) suggested that some alternative venues are replacing the traditional enclaves aimed to cater to Asian backpackers whose preference is less focused on partying. However, this study found that apart from observing or participating in local cultural activities, Asian backpackers also like to party and drink at pubs and clubs on Khao San Road and Soi Cowboy.

A Bit of Culture Shock

It was observed that one of the main intentions of international backpackers was to develop an understanding of other cultures (Paris, 2014). While Asian backpackers place more emphasis on seeking cultural activities than making new friends, European backpackers pay more attention to new experiences with respect to culture, as well as the opportunity to forge new ties with fellow backpackers. Most expressed their openness to interact with local people on street, ready to socialize as well as have a glimpse of Thai culture. All respondents were unanimous in sharing what they learned, such as skimpy clothing (such as swimwear) is unacceptable for visiting Buddhist shrines in Thailand. They further acknowledged that monks are revered. The main barrier encountered was that of language because locals predominantly prefer to converse in the Thai Language only. Ability to converse in English (especially with Tuk-Tuk taxi drivers or motorcycle taxi drivers) was limited, thus required paralinguistic communication (body language) to aid intelligibility of messages. This was also the case when perusing menus in street shops restaurants. Some respondents found Asian ‘squat toilets’ quite odd while others enjoyed seeing and greeting monks sporting traditional orange robes in the morning. Some mentioned a day trip to Ayutthaya was fascinating in terms of a glimpse of rich Thai history, ancient temples, architecture, museums, and culture. One respondent commented on the highly unpredictable weather conditions in Bangkok: clear skies in the morning, hot and sunny around midday, followed by heavy storms and downpours mid to late afternoon, followed again by clear skies late evening.

Choosing Between ‘Risk’ and ‘Adventure’

The study found that “safety” was the most important factor that all the subjects agreed on. Personal safety was of the utmost importance followed by the security of their luggage and personal belongings. They maintained that Bangkok sight-seeing services need to have English signs and English speaking drivers so that backpackers could feel more secure. In addition, it is necessary to have English speaking Tourist Police officers stationed near the tourist destination so that tourists could report incidents of crime (including scams) in order to reduce such incidents occurring to other tourists. Moreover, participants did worry so much about being cheated by someone when they travel from one destination to another. Bike rides and Tuk-Tuk rides were found to be adventurous for some due to the

often maniacal driving habits of the vehicle operator, especially in heavier traffic conditions. The availability of convenience stores (7-11 and Family Mart) along most streets met essential daily needs (especially for females needing sanitary products) whether obtaining water bottles, general snacks and quick meals, morning tea/coffee, cigarettes, local SIM cards for internet connections, or umbrellas late at night when street vendors have begun to pack up for the day.

Ensure Expenditure Stays Modest

The findings of Paris (2014) revealed that Asian backpackers are more budget conscious, take shorter holidays, and their average daily spending was much lower when compared with Australian backpackers. However, this study showed a converse trend inasmuch as Asian backpackers, despite having shorter holidays than European backpackers, on average spend more than their European counterparts. Furthermore, it was noted in our research that some European backpackers will travel onwards to other countries after visiting Thailand whereas Asian backpackers will go back to their country of origin. International backpackers found accommodation, transportation and partying (eating together, drinking together, and generally living and having fun together) as their main expenditure as food is relatively cheap and also readily available in Thailand.

Backpacker spending directly benefited the local community when backpackers stayed in local guesthouses, used public transportation (taxi, three wheeled tuk-tuk (auto rickshaw), river boats, and public bus), enjoyed street food (spicy curries, aromatic stir-fries, barbecued meats, fried crickets, and the quintessential Pad-Thai noodles) and purchased inexpensive clothes (Diesel jeans, Havaianas, quirky t-shirts) to endure hot and humid weather in Bangkok. Interestingly, an in-depth interview during this study showed that some study participants, especially Asians, planned to spend money buying gifts for family and friends. Informal conversations revealed, from a business point of view, no particular groups of backpackers were targeted (based on nationality, gender or color); instead, the local business organization welcomed all customers no matter who they were or where they came from as long as they could afford to pay for the travel services.

Travel to Thailand's Neighboring Countries

Interestingly most of the respondents began their trip in Thailand visiting popular attractions first before moving onto other places in Thailand, such as beach destinations or mountain and remote areas (see table 2 under travel patterns), and onto neighboring

countries. Most of the Asian participants who visited Thailand will stop at several known destinations before going back to their home country. This was different from the Europeans who will visit at least one neighboring country in Southeast Asia and Indochina (Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia or Vietnam) when they traveled to Thailand. However, those travel arrangements are normally made while still in Bangkok.

Changing the Face of Tourism in the Khao San Road Area

The interviews revealed a change in sentiment due to changing demographics in the Khao San district. The area is changing from a backpacker enclave to a more traditional middle-class tourist area catering to travelling families and higher yield tourists, therefore hotels are reinventing new business models and becoming more expensive. This is pushing backpackers further from Khao San Road to surrounding areas. The changing face of Khao San Road not only benefits the remaining local businesses in Khao San Road but also the nearby areas now being developed by the locals for backpackers offering lower cost services. Most of the backpacker respondents were staying in these areas that benefit locals directly. According to Polit (1991), cited in Scheyvens (2002), backpackers are by no means ‘luxury’ tourists; therefore, local businesses (travel firms, agents, booking sites, airlines, hotels, restaurants, and shops) can aptly suit their needs.

The tourism ministry is collaborating with the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration to reorganize street food merchandizing by introducing zones especially for foot traffic in the evening’s clear regular road-side pavements in tourist districts including Khao San Road. It is not an outright ban on street food as widely claimed by the media, but a campaign to improve public hygiene such as providing clean running water to wash dishes and cook, raise cooking standards and reduce pavement congestion in certain areas of the city (Ngamsangchaikit, 2017).

A summary of the International backpacker’s travel behavior is shown in table 2.

Table 2 International backpackers’ travel behavior

Travel Behavior	International Backpackers
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Favor staying in local hostels instead of branded hotels due to a more affordable price. ● Prefer hostels situated near commercial venues where essentials can be obtained (such as drinking water, food, shopping, and medicines).

Travel Behavior	International Backpackers
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Socialize with other backpackers to get an idea of places to visit and things to do ● Visit well-known places ● Like to eat, drink and party ● [Female] like Thai massage venues and tattoo parlors. ● Enjoy nights out with friends ● Place emphasis on experiencing new things and making new friends. ● Buy daily need products from local shops
Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoid walking the many dark alleys and interconnecting streets alone after a late night out ● Are aware of pick-pocketing ● Aware of personal / property safety ● Have a fear of being cheated by people when traveling
Expenditures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Daily expenses are in proportion to the duration of stay/ holidays ● Avoid temptations and stay economical ● Accommodation, transportation, party costs main expenditures ● Solo [European] backpackers did visit well-known chain restaurants serving western favorites such as Starbucks, Burger King, and McDonald's. ● Average daily spending moderate to high ● Duration of stay can be short or long depending on quality of experience
Live like a local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pick up few local phrases such as '<i>Sawas dee</i>' (Thai greeting) <i>Mai pen rai</i> (no worries) and <i>Khop Khun</i> (thanks) learned <i>Wai</i> (to show respect and greet) ● <i>Feast at Street</i> (3-course meals in a day are quite affordable) ● Foot massages for relaxation ● Nightlife entertainment (social drinks, cheer Live band performances)

Travel Behavior	International Backpackers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shopping / merchandise (clothes, salon services, sleepers, umbrella, sunglasses)
Come out of the shell or ‘tourist bubble’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Willing to converse with others ● Making eye contact with strangers as appropriate ● Maintain a smile in the “Land of Smiles” ● Try to make new friends and learn from their travel experiences

Source: Author Conclusion and Implications

Conclusion and Implications

True to the characteristics of backpacker tourism, backpackers are normally motivated to explore the cultures of their destinations and pursue authentic experiences, which is the common motivation of backpackers on Khao San Road. Most international backpackers tend to congregate and stay in the Khao San Road area and become familiar with the different sights and delights. Based on the series of interviews conducted with backpackers, they were unanimous in sharing personal travel experiences and places visited. Study respondents [groups] voiced concerns regarding their safety as well as the security of their possessions while traveling as well as being cheated by strangers. They all used local services, enjoyed their stay and had a memorable experience. Some opined that speaking the local language (Table 2: Live like a local) not only shows an inherent interest in the place and its culture, but enabled travelers to connect with locals. The study found that [European] backpackers tend to visit one or two ASEAN countries after they traveled to Thailand while most of the Asian backpackers traveled around Thailand and returned to their home countries. This pattern is considered an opportunity for ASEAN countries. The appropriate strategies should be applicable in terms of visa relaxation policies for all travelers to Thailand. In addition, businesses must recognize that most of the backpackers pre-plan their trips through online booking systems. They need to create a simple and friendly online booking system so that backpackers can make online reservations easily.

Social media platforms and recommendations from friends were two key information sources that most backpackers rely on for planning a trip (Ian and Musa, 2008). In a world where social media and blogs are influencing people’s travel plans and destinations, it is

advisable to use technology to go for blogging travel trips to promote particular destinations. It is suggested that the service provider should encourage more reviews on social media as well as recommendations from other backpackers by offering good services, facilities, friendly and helpful staff so that experienced backpackers could have left positive recommendations for others who follow in their footsteps.

To tap this growing market, there is a scope for ‘capsule’ hotels, such as seen in Singapore and Australia which can offer backpackers cheaper accommodation options to conventional hotels and hostels in and around Bangkok (Sorgiovanni, 2016). Furthermore, it is suggested that backpacker hostel accommodation should offer a guest lounge and host regular social events to facilitate communication among guests. It is high time to sell “experience” instead of mere tangible staying facilities, and hostel staff being more down-to-earth and welcoming to guests is a trend that needs to be exploited and marketed to budget travelers.

Additionally, solo female travelers are undeniably a lot more vulnerable and every hostel must acknowledge this. It is sensible to encourage reviews from previous solo female travelers to give others a better idea of what to expect (Wilkins, 2018). Furthermore, travelers should post more blog articles on accommodation websites about an area’s positive and negative characteristics, especially safety and security. This will protect travelers from the danger of misinformation or wandering into an unsafe area.

Although this study did not invite locals, such as street vendors and local business owners to gain a broader view of the socio-cultural impact of backpacker tourism due to language restrictions, it is hoped that it will foster further opportunities for cultures to mix and learn from one another to create a common ‘culture of harmony’. Further research of a longitudinal nature is also needed, where backpacker interaction with locals over a period of time are discussed. During in-depth interviews, respondents were not asked if they see themselves as backpackers or not. Moreover, the exclusion of non-English speaking international tourists as respondents who might exhibit different travel behavior was also one of the limitations of the study; however, it is unknown whether a much wider study would reveal vastly different results. Further studies could also investigate more discreet social activities and issues such as sexual behavior, alcohol consumption, and drug use which were not studied here.

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