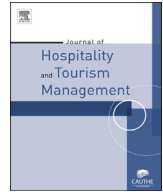




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## Does travel interest mediate between motives and intention to travel? A case of young Asian travellers

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## ABSTRACT

The rising income level of the middle class in Thailand has also raised the disposable income and interest to visit tourism destinations abroad. In last seven years the number of outbound tourists has doubled suggesting a growth rate of 15% per annum. With a population of approximately 63 million and a change in perception of the Thai people that travelling is no longer a luxury but a beneficial and productive activity has given boost to the outbound tourism. This study adapts the Leisure Motivation Scale to determine travel motives of young Thai university students towards holidaying. A conceptual model with seven hypotheses is proposed which tests the relationship of constructs experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure with travel interest and the impact of travel interest on intention to travel. Structural Equation Modelling with maximum likelihood method is used to test all relationships simultaneously from the 420 responses using Amos 20.0. The findings suggest that experiencing new culture, scenic values and adventure are positively related to travel interest. Further, findings suggest a positive relationship between the travel interest and the intention to travel. Travel interest plays a mediating role between the motives and the intention to travel. The outcomes from the study are unique in relation to travel motives of the young Thai market segment generally, and in relations to experiencing new culture, natural beauty and adventure specifically. On the theoretical front the study has adapted the Leisure Motivation Scale to develop and test constructs through a proposed theoretical model. Considering this from a marketing point of view, exploring new markets is the key for all destination marketers to sustain economic gains from tourism, the current study adds information about an unexplored market segment. Hence, suggesting implications for destination marketers to get to know about this new emerging market segment.

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### 1. Introduction

Studying travel behaviour and motives of the university students continues to be an area of interest to both tourism researchers and tourism marketers. This segment is proving to be a social group with complex and unique travel behaviour (Chen, 2012; Kim, Hallab, & Kim, 2012; Limanond, Butsingkorn, & Chermkhunthod, 2011). Travel experience amongst the students has been on the increase influenced by discounted travel and tour

packages for students, international student exchange programmes, and a general push by universities to send students abroad for cultural and educational experiences. Past travel experience to a destination could impact their future travel decision and choices (Kim et al. 2012). The literature also suggests that perceptions and interest of tourists about a destination impacts their travel behaviour and choice of destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Bonn, Joseph, & Mo, 2005; Chon, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). In examining the role of motivations, prior travel experience, social ties and destination choice in pre-trip attitude of the American university students, authors Nyaupane, Paris, and Teye (2011) find that academic motivations and social ties influence students' destination selection for study abroad programme with social motivation emerging as the most important factor that impacts attitude towards the destinations prior to the travel. Such

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information is significant in determining pre-trip perceptions of young students which could well grow into adulthood. Authors [Ballantyne, Gannon, Berret and Wells \(2012\)](#) suggest in their findings that as a university student even a short-term study related travel has shown to impact on their attitude, awareness and cross-cultural perceptions. [Morgan and Xu \(2009\)](#), [Bicikova \(2014\)](#) and [Pearce and Lee \(2005\)](#) state in their studies that seeking adventure, interest about new culture, beautiful natural environment and relaxation have an impact on students' intention to travel. The experiences they accumulate as they grow older helps build a travel career which further impacts their intention to choose more challenging destinations. For these reasons travel motives of university students continue to be an area of interest to research.

Though several studies have recently explored the travel motives and perceptions of young university students highlighting significance of the student travel segment and also uniqueness associated with their travel attitudes and perceptions, research on Asian students' travel motives is scarce and in relation to students from Thailand almost non-existent in the tourism and hospitality literature. Based on this premise the current study contributes to the literature by informing travel motives and attitudes of the Thailand university students generally and their perceptions about different activities offered by a tourist destination. The study also examines the mediating role of travel interest on the experience and intention to travel.

Several studies related to a particular destination have been published, such as American students thinking of travel beyond Europe ([Deresiewicz, 2009](#)), students travel behaviour from the UK and China ([Xu, Morgan, & Song, 2009](#)), students' travel behaviour in terms of travel/tourism preferences, transportation, housing, food and entertainment were compared between the US, South Africa and Israel by ([Shoham, Schrage, & van Eeden, 2004](#)), choice intention of students to travel to Mauritius ([Phau, Shanka, & Dhayan, 2009](#)), experiences of Norwegian students abroad ([Wiers-Jensses, 2003](#)), Chinese students' perceptions about Australia ([Wang & Davidson, 2008](#)), perceptions of international students about Malaysia ([Shan, Shah, & Suat, 2013](#)).

The rising income level of the middle class in Thailand has also raised the disposable income and interest to visit tourism destinations abroad ([Chaipinit & Phetvaroon, 2011](#)). According to the authors in last seven years the number of outbound tourists has doubled suggesting a growth rate of 15% per annum (Thailand Development Research Institute cited in [Chaipinit & Phetvaroon, 2011](#)). With a population of approximately 63 million and a change in perception of the Thai people that travelling is no longer a luxury but a beneficial and productive activity had given boost to the outbound tourism in 2006 ([World Tourism Organisation, 2006](#)). The report suggested that the main age group of outbound Thai travellers is between 24 and 44 years old and travelling for holidays is the largest segment comprising 54.3% ([WTO, 2006](#)).

Thailand in last few years has faced challenges in form of floods and political unrest which impacted both inbound and outbound tourist flows. However, considering the dynamism of the tourism industry of being able to bounce back quickly, as is evident from different regions affected by the Asian tsunami, SARS, act of terrorism etc. it is believed that outbound tourism will continue to grow from Thailand. The outbound travel records from the Suvarnabhumi Airport, Thailand show that between 2006 and 2014 (September) 22,203,043 million Thai departed for abroad ([Immigration Bureau, Police Department 2014](#)). This reflects that even in adverse circumstances outbound travel of the Thai people did not drop extraordinarily.

Such travel pattern signifies the increasing affluence of this market which became the impetus for the current study. With scarce research on Asian students' travel motives generally in the

English literature, and almost non-existent in relation to Thai students, this study provides new and unique information. This information is obtained through proposing a new conceptual model with six hypotheses and testing relationships between the constructs in the model. Further, the outcomes from the study are expected to help the tourism marketers and destination management in planning targeted future promotion and activities to attract outbound tourists from Thailand.

## 2. Theoretical background and research hypotheses

### 2.1. Travel motives

As a psychological term motivation compels individuals and yearns for action ([Schiffman & Kanuk, 2003](#)). Several researchers have argued that travel motives is a starting point to study tourist behaviour and obtain a better understanding of their travel choice ([Fodness, 1994](#); [Jonsson & Devonish, 2008](#); [Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003](#); [Kim, 2007](#); [Kim, Jogaratnam, & Noh, 2006](#); [Pearce & Lee, 2005](#); [Rittichainuwat, 2008](#)). The current study largely draws upon the Leisure Motivation Scale of [Beard and Ragheb \(1983\)](#) as it is more of a generalised motivational scale demonstrating both stability and rigour ([Loundsbury & Hoopes, 1988](#); [Newlands, 2004](#)). The scale continues to be used either in its original form or modified form by tourism researchers ([Ryan & Glendon, 1998](#); [Klenosky, 2002](#); [Pearce & Lee, 2005](#); [Wang & Walker, 2010](#)). In studying travel motivations for the Chinese outbound market [Zhang and Peng \(2014\)](#) suggest that it has been a relatively under researched area and research done between 1999 and 2010 suggests that most common motivational factors for Chinese tourists to travel overseas were noted to be knowledge, prestige, enhancing personal relationship, relaxation, experiencing different cultures and lifestyle and shopping. Most of these factors relate to the measures used in the Leisure Motivation Scale. Additionally [Kim \(2014\)](#) also suggests that social interaction, cultural immersion, provides memorable experiences which have been widely discussed in the literature to become motives to travel.

### 2.2. Travel activity

Travel activity helps to segment the market based on holiday makers' interest in the activity and level of involvement in the activity. Examples of such activities could be cultural tourism ([McKercher, Ho, du Cros, & So-Ming, 2002](#); [Kerstetter, Confer, & Bricker, 1998](#)), natural tourism ([Lang & O'Leary, 1997](#)), adventure tourism ([Sung, Morrison, & O'Leary, 1997, 2000](#)), and tourism aiming to visit friends and family ([Moscardo, Pearce, Morrison, Green, O. ', & Leary, 2000](#)). This helps tour managers to anticipate personal expectations, the expected benefits ([Formica & Uysal, 1998](#)), and understand destination choices ([Moscardo, Morrison, Pearce, Lang, O. ', & Leary, 1996](#)), besides improving the image of a certain destination ([Beerli & Martin, 2004](#); [Trauer & Ryan, 2005](#)). Understanding tourists' interest then proposing the travel activity helps to generate meaningful interest and experience to remember from that travel ([Kim, 2014](#)). Authors such as [Morgan and Xu \(2009\)](#); [Bicikova \(2014\)](#); [Pearce and Lee \(2005\)](#) further highlight that seeking adventure, interest of new challenges in new destinations have an impact on students' intention to travel.

Current study seeks to explore holiday motives of Thailand university students and their interest in activities offered by a destination. The study adapts the Leisure Motivation Scale to identify the push and pull factors which influence the travel decisions of the young Thai students. The 'push and pull' system has been widely used to determine tourist motivations ([Dan 1977](#); [Prayag & Ryan, 2011](#)). A theoretical model is proposed to test the

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