

## Thai University Students' Perceptions of Factors Affecting the Thai Tourism Industry: A Case Study

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of this study was to investigate Thai university students' perceptions of the factors that would affect the tourism industry of Thailand.

**Method:** Forty-five (45) undergraduates in a university in Thailand were asked to answer the questionnaire of nine questions on the effects of selected factors affecting the Thai tourism industry. The data collection was done in March 2021. The collected data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics.

**Result:** The results showed that Covid-19 pandemic was perceived to be the factor with the greatest impact on Thai tourism (Mean = 4.86), followed closely by the internal political problems (Mean = 4.40). The lowest three factors were found to be the climate crises (Mean = 3.64), US-China trade war (Mean = 3.55), and robots/AI (Mean = 3.13). Foreign language skills, communication, and technology use were among the highly cited skills and abilities Thai people should be focusing more on.

**Contribution:** This study adds valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge in the field of tourism and hospitality management. The findings provide a perspective on the factors influencing the industry's performance, especially revealing the intricate interplay between socio-political, environmental, and economic factors.

**Keywords:** Tourism in Thailand, Thai university students, Covid-19 pandemic

### Introduction

The tourism industry has long been a cornerstone of Thailand's economy, contributing significantly to its growth, employment, and cultural exchange. Blessed with natural beauty, vibrant cities, rich cultural heritage, and warm hospitality, Thailand has attracted millions of tourists from around the world each year. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 brought the global tourism industry to a grinding halt, leaving no country untouched, including Thailand.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Thai tourism industry have been severe and far-reaching. Travel restrictions, lockdowns, and social distancing measures implemented to curb the spread of the virus dealt a devastating blow to the sector. As countries closed their borders and international flights came to a standstill, tourist arrivals plummeted, leading to an unprecedented decline in revenue and employment opportunities (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Thailand, renowned for its bustling street markets, pristine beaches, and cultural landmarks, witnessed a staggering decline in visitor numbers. In 2020, international tourist



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arrivals dropped by a staggering 83%, with only 6.7 million visitors compared to the record-breaking 39.8 million in 2019. This sharp decline in arrivals resulted in a loss of billions of dollars in revenue and had a cascading effect on various sectors closely linked to tourism, such as hospitality, transportation, and local businesses (Asian Development Bank, n.d.).

The impact of the pandemic on Thailand's tourism industry extends beyond economic repercussions. The social and cultural fabric of the country has also been significantly affected. Tourism has played a vital role in fostering cultural exchange and understanding, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in Thai traditions, cuisine, and local communities. The absence of tourists has not only deprived local communities of income but also disrupted their way of life (The Economist Intelligence Unit, n.d.).

Srisa-ard and Chieochan (2019) conducted a study on volunteer tourism development in Thailand. The study aimed to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and motivations of university students towards volunteer tourism. The researchers used a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews to collect data from the participants.

Chaiyasoonthorn (2016) investigated the key factors influencing Thai travelers to choose homestay accommodations in Chiang Mai province. The study utilized a quantitative approach and collected data through questionnaires. The findings of the study can be useful for homestay operators and tourism policymakers.

Jiraporn and Boonlua (2016) conducted an empirical study on factors affecting tourist satisfaction in the northern part of Thailand. The study used a quantitative approach and collected data through questionnaires. The researchers found that perceived quality of experience, cost of stay, expectations, perceived quality of service, and perceived value for money were significant factors affecting tourist satisfaction.

### **Factors Affecting Foreign Visitors to Thailand**

There are several factors that could affect foreign visitors visiting Thailand. According to Thai Websites, some possible negative factors include higher prices of airline flights and hotels, poor air quality (especially in the North of Thailand and in Bangkok), and the period between December and April. Statista reports that tourism receipts from foreign visitors in Thailand have shown a gradual increase. A study by Jiraporn and Boonlua (2016) found that perceived quality of experience, cost of stay, expectations, perceived quality of service, and perceived value for money were significant factors affecting tourist satisfaction. Another study by Chaiyasoonthorn (2016) identified key factors influencing Thai travelers to choose homestay accommodations in Chiang Mai province.

### **Method**

This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of Thai university students regarding the factors influencing the Thai tourism industry. The research utilized a quantitative approach, employing a questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument (Nugroho, 2022). The methodological details are outlined below. Participants: Forty-five (45) undergraduate students from a university in Thailand were selected as the participants for this study. The sample consisted of students taking a course titled "English for Tourism", an elective course. Data

**Collection:** The data collection process took place in March 2021. Participants were provided with a questionnaire comprising nine questions. The questions were designed to assess the participants' perceptions of the effects of selected factors on the Thai tourism industry. The questionnaire was administered to the participants in person in the classroom.

**Data Analysis:** The collected data were subjected to basic descriptive statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as mean scores, were calculated to determine the perceived impact of each factor on the Thai tourism industry.

**Ethical Considerations:** Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study, and their voluntary participation was sought. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured, and their data were handled with utmost care and privacy.

## Findings

**Table 1.** Bots and AI

Level	Frequency	Percent
Lowest	1	2.2
Low	9	20.0
Moderate	19	42.2
High	15	33.3
Highest	1	2.2
Total	45	100

This table presents data on the frequency of the impact of bots and AI, based on the perceptions of 45 individuals. The data is categorized into five groups: "Lowest," "Low," "Moderate," "High," and "Highest." The category with the least impact, "Lowest," received only one response, whereas the category with the greatest impact, "Highest," received one response as well. The data shows that a significant proportion of the respondents perceive bots and AI to have a moderate to high impact, with 42.2% of respondents indicating a "Moderate" impact and 33.3% indicating a "High" impact. The findings suggest that bots and AI are perceived to have a substantial impact, as reflected by the majority of responses in the "Moderate" and "High" categories.

**Table 2.** Covid-19

Level of Effect	Frequency	Percent
Lowest	0	0
Low	1	2.2
Moderate	0	0

High	3	6.7
Highest	41	91.1
Total	45	100

This table presents data on the perceptions of 45 individuals about the impact of Covid-19. The data is categorized into three groups: "Low," "High," and "Highest." The category with the least impact, "Low," received only one response, whereas the category with the greatest impact, "Highest," received 41 responses, indicating that the majority of respondents perceived Covid-19 to have the highest impact. The data shows that 91.1% of respondents considered Covid-19 to have the highest impact. These findings reflect the significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been widely acknowledged as a global health crisis and has caused substantial disruptions to various sectors, including the economy, education, and travel.

**Table 3:** Internal Politics

Level	Frequency	Percent
Lowest	1	2.2
Low	1	2.2
Moderate	3	6.7
High	14	31.1
Highest	26	57.8
Total	45	100

This table provides information on the perceptions of 45 individuals regarding the impact of internal politics in Thailand. The data is categorized into five groups: "Lowest," "Low," "Moderate," "High," and "Highest." The category with the least impact, "Lowest," and the category with the second-lowest impact, "Low," each received one response. The data shows that the majority of respondents perceived internal politics to have a significant impact, with 57.8% indicating the "Highest" impact, and 31.1% indicating a "High" impact. The findings suggest that internal politics are a significant factor affecting the tourism industry in Thailand, and addressing political issues is essential to ensure the growth and sustainability of the industry.

**Table 4:** Climate Change

Level	Frequency	Percent
Lowest	1	2.2
Low	5	11.1
Moderate	14	31.1

High	14	31.1
Highest	11	24.4
Total	45	100

The table presents data on the perceptions of 45 individuals regarding the impact of climate crises on the Thai tourism industry. The data is categorized into five groups: "Lowest," "Low," "Moderate," "High," and "Highest." The category with the least impact, "Lowest," received only one response, while the majority of respondents perceived climate crises to have a moderate to high impact, with 31.1% indicating a "Moderate" impact and 31.1% indicating a "High" impact. The category with the second-highest impact, "Highest," received 24.4% of the responses. The findings suggest that although climate crises are not perceived to have the highest impact on the tourism industry in Thailand, they are still a significant concern for the industry, and efforts should be made to address these issues to ensure the long-term sustainability of the industry.

**Table 5.** World Economy

Level	Frequency	Percent
Lowest	0	0.0
Low	1	2.2
Moderate	10	22.2
High	14	31.1
Highest	20	44.4
Total	45	100

The table displays data on the perceptions of 45 individuals regarding the impact of the world economy on the Thai tourism industry. The responses are categorized into four groups: "Lowest," "Moderate," "High," and "Highest." The data shows that the majority of respondents perceived the world economy to have a significant impact on the Thai tourism industry, with 31.1% indicating a "High" impact and 44.4% indicating the "Highest" impact. Only 2.2% of respondents indicated the world economy having the lowest impact on the Thai tourism industry. These findings suggest that the world economy plays a crucial role in the Thai tourism industry and that efforts should be made to monitor and address any potential impacts that may arise from changes in the global economy.

**Table 6.** P.M. 2.5

Level	Frequency	Percent
Lowest	0	0.0
Low	1	2.2

Moderate	13	28.9
High	11	24.4
Highest	20	44.4
Total	45	100

The table displays data on the perceptions of 45 individuals regarding the impact of PM 2.5 on the Thai tourism industry. The responses are categorized into four groups: "Lowest," "Moderate," "High," and "Highest." The data shows that almost half (44.4%) of the respondents perceived PM 2.5 to have the "Highest" impact on the Thai tourism industry. 24.4% of respondents perceived a "High" impact, while 28.9% perceived a "Moderate" impact. Only 2.2% of respondents perceived PM 2.5 to have the lowest impact on the Thai tourism industry. These findings suggest that PM 2.5 poses a significant threat to the Thai tourism industry, and it is essential to monitor and address air pollution to ensure the sustainability of the industry.

**Table 7.** Social Problems

Level	Frequency	Percent
Lowest	0	0.0
Low	1	2.2
Moderate	10	22.2
High	17	37.8
Highest	17	37.8
Total	45	100

The data presented in the table shows the distribution of responses obtained from a sample of 45 individuals regarding their perceptions of social problems in a given context. The respondents were asked to rate the level of impact that social problems have on the context, ranging from "Lowest" to "Highest". The responses were then categorized into four levels of impact: low, moderate, high, and highest. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents (37.8%) rated social problems as having the "Highest" level of impact in the context. Meanwhile, 22.2% rated it as "Moderate", 37.8% rated it as "High", and 2.2% rated it as "Lowest". These findings suggest that social problems are perceived to have a significant impact in the context, indicating the need for further investigation and potential interventions to address such issues.

Trade row between the two powers, USA and China, was also perceived to be the factor affecting the growth of Thailand's tourism sector.

**Table 8.** US-China Trade War

Level	Frequency	Percent
Lowest	0	0.0
Low	4	8.9
Moderate	22	48.9
High	9	20.0
Highest	10	22.2
Total	45	100

The table shows the distribution of responses to a survey on the US-China trade war, in which participants were asked to rate the severity of the issue using a four-point scale: low, moderate, high, and highest. Out of the 45 respondents, 8.9% rated the severity of the trade war as low, 48.9% rated it as moderate, 20% rated it as high, and 22.2% rated it as the highest severity level. The cumulative percentages reveal that over half of the respondents (57.8%) rated the trade war as moderate or higher, while 22.2% rated it as the highest severity level. The responses suggest that a significant portion of the surveyed population perceives the US-China trade war as a serious issue with potentially severe consequences.

**Table 9.** The Eight Factors

Factors	N	Mean	S.D.
Covid-19	45	4.86	.50
Internal Politics	45	4.40	.88
World Economy	45	4.15	.92
Social Problems	45	4.11	.83
PM 2.5	45	4.08	.97
Climate Crises	45	3.64	1.04
US-China Trade War	45	3.55	.94
Bots and AI	45	3.13	.84

The data provides descriptive statistics for seven different variables: Covid-19, Internal Politics, World Economy, Social Problems, PM 2.5, Climate Crises, and US-China Trade War. For each variable, the table displays the number of observations (N), the mean, and the standard deviation.

Based on the means, we can rank the variables from highest to lowest perceived severity by the respondents: Covid-19 (4.87), Internal Politics (4.40), World Economy (4.16), Social Problems (4.11), PM 2.5 (4.09), Climate Crises (3.64), and US-China Trade War (3.56).

The standard deviation for each variable indicates the degree of variability in responses. A higher standard deviation implies greater variability in responses, while a lower standard deviation indicates that respondents' opinions were more similar.

What skills do Thai people need to improve the quality of Thailand's tourism?

- 1) Communication skills in general (3)
- 2) Etiquettes / politeness
- 3) English language skills (4)
- 4) Quality of service
- 5) Foreign language skills (3)
- 6) Management skills
- 7) Use of technology (2)
- 8) Skills that are adaptive, being able to function in many contexts
- 9) Innovative and creative skills, making ordinary things interesting and useful
- 10) Assertiveness training
- 11) Confidence in speaking or chatting with foreigners (2)

Thailand is a popular tourist destination that attracts millions of visitors every year. In order to improve the quality of Thailand's tourism, Thai people need to focus on developing specific skills. Firstly, communication skills are crucial, including good etiquette and politeness, the ability to speak foreign languages such as English and other languages relevant to their target tourists, and the ability to manage and provide quality services. With regard to English language skills, Thailand needs improvement. A study was conducted to investigate the level of readiness of English communication skills of the employees of 26 tourism companies in Bangkok areas found that most tourism companies needed to improve their English language proficiency and intercultural competence (Kuosuwan, 2016).

Secondly, the use of technology is important, as well as being adaptive to different situations and contexts, and having innovative and creative skills to make ordinary things interesting and useful (Shahid, 2022). Lastly, assertiveness training and confidence in speaking or chatting with foreigners can also significantly enhance the quality of the Thai tourism experience. By focusing on these skills, Thai people can ensure that tourists have a positive experience in Thailand and promote the country's tourism industry as a whole.

### **Additional Findings**

In addition to their perceptions, the students also offered suggestions on how to make Thai tourism a stronger engine of the national economy. The following themes were found in their written answers:

- 1) Solving the COVID-19 problems: Controlling the COVID-19 pandemic, such as improving testing and vaccination rates, and managing quarantine and travel restrictions
- 2) Food quality: Improving quality of food and drink available to tourists in Thailand, such as ensuring that it is safe and of high quality
- 3) Management of tourism destinations: Managing tourist destinations and ensuring that they are clean and well-maintained, and that they offer a variety of experiences for visitors



- 4) Government policies and performance: Working harder for policies and performance of tourism such as its investment in tourism infrastructure, and its marketing of Thailand as a tourist destination
- 5) Corruption: Trying to solve corruption problems in Thailand
- 6) Public transportation: Improving public transportation system in Thailand, such as its availability, cost, and efficiency.
- 7) Prices: Managing prices of goods and services in Thailand and ensuring that they are fair and reasonable for tourists
- 8) Thai people holidaying in Thailand: Encouraging Thai people to holiday in their own country, such as offering them discounts and other incentives
- 9) Thai tourism and the world economy: Dealing with the impact of the world economy on tourism in Thailand
- 10) Environment: Mitigating environmental impact of tourism in Thailand, such as pollution and - waste disposal
- 11) Careers and jobs in tourism: Creating new careers and jobs in the tourism industry in Thailand
- 12) Curriculums related to tourism: Designing curricula in schools and universities related to tourism, such as in sustainable tourism and ecotourism
- 13) Treating Thais and visitors equally: Ensuring that Thais and visitors are treated equally in Thailand, such as in terms of access to goods and services
- 14) Internal political issues: Solving internal political issues that could impact tourism
- 15) Infrastructure: Developing new infrastructure in Thailand, such as roads, bridges, and airports, that could benefit tourism
- 16) Budget spending: Spending (of the government) on tourism, such as its investment in marketing and promotion.
- 17) Safety and convenience: Making travel in Thailand safer and more convenient for tourists, such as improving security and providing better information and signage

The comments and suggestions from the students include a range of issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the quality of Thailand's tourism. These issues include managing the COVID-19 pandemic more effectively, addressing corruption problems, improving public transportation and infrastructure, promoting domestic tourism, ensuring fairness in selling products, and updating curriculums related to tourism and Thai economy. Additionally, the quality of Thai products, the environment, and development of careers and jobs

Tourism is a critical driver of Thailand's economy, and the government has invested heavily in improving the quality of tourism experiences. One example is the go green. The Thai government's promotion of the Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) economy model has prompted the Tourism Authority to encourage local tourism businesses to embrace sustainability (Economist Intelligence, 2022). To recover and grow its tourism, Thailand should follow McKinsey & Company's suggestions (Saxon et al., 2021). These include adapting offerings, bundling products, pricing strategically, partnering, expanding destinations, and digitalizing. Government support is also vital, especially in digital infrastructure and blockchain.

## Conclusion

The tourism sector plays a crucial role in driving the Thai economy, generating substantial revenue and employment opportunities. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the industry, causing a significant decline in tourist arrivals and revenue. As tourism is an essential industry, understanding its current situation and the factors that affect it is vital. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate Thai university students' perceptions of the factors that would affect the industry. The study collected data from 45 undergraduates in a university in Thailand in March 2021, who answered a nine-question survey on the effects of selected factors affecting the Thai tourism industry. The collected data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. The results showed that COVID-19 pandemic was perceived to be the factor with the most significant impact on the Thai tourism industry, followed by internal political problems. The study also revealed several skills and abilities that Thai people should improve to enhance the quality of Thailand's tourism industry. The findings of this study could be useful for policymakers and stakeholders in the tourism industry to develop strategies and policies to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and address other factors that affect the industry's growth. This paper contributes to the literature on tourism in Thailand by providing insights into the perceptions of Thai university students regarding factors affecting the industry.

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