

## แรงจูงใจและรูปแบบการท่องเที่ยวของนักท่องเที่ยว ช่วงปีว่างในประเทศไทย

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### บทคัดย่อ

แรงจูงใจและความพึงพอใจในการท่องเที่ยวเป็นองค์ประกอบที่สำคัญในการศึกษาพฤติกรรมนักท่องเที่ยวเพื่อใช้ในการพัฒนาสินค้าและสร้างโฆษณาทางการตลาด การท่องเที่ยวให้มีประสิทธิภาพ งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาลักษณะทางประชากรศาสตร์ แรงจูงใจ และรูปแบบการท่องเที่ยวของนักท่องเที่ยวกลุ่มช่วงปีว่างที่เดินทางมายังประเทศไทย ผู้วิจัยได้รวบรวมข้อมูลจากแบบสอบถามในกรุงเทพฯ ภูเก็ต เชียงใหม่ และเกาะสมุย ในแหล่งท่องเที่ยวสำคัญ ที่พักราคาประหยัด และศูนย์กลางการคมนาคมขนส่ง การศึกษาในครั้งนี้ใช้การวิเคราะห์ผลจากแบบสอบถาม 405 ฉบับ ผลการศึกษาพบว่านักท่องเที่ยวช่วงปีว่างส่วนมากเดินทางมาจากประเทศที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาประจำชาติและประเทศแถบยุโรปตะวันตก นักท่องเที่ยวกลุ่มนี้ส่วนใหญ่มีอายุระหว่าง 21-25 ปีและอยู่ในช่วงการว่างงาน

แรงจูงใจหลักในการท่องเที่ยวคือเพื่อเรียนรู้วัฒนธรรมอื่น รวมทั้งเรียนรู้ประสบการณ์ในต่างประเทศ และแสวงหาความตื่นเต้นผจญภัย นักท่องเที่ยวช่วงปีว่างนิยมเดินทางแบบสะพายเป้ในเมืองไทยประมาณสองถึงสี่สัปดาห์และเดินทางไปยังประเทศอื่นๆ กรุงเทพฯเป็นเมืองท่องเที่ยวที่นิยมสูงสุด นอกเหนือจากนี้แล้วสินค้าทางการท่องเที่ยวที่สำคัญคือที่พักแบบโฮสเทล ร้านอาหารริมทาง การขนส่งสาธารณะ และการเดินทางโดยเครื่องบิน

**คำสำคัญ:** นักท่องเที่ยวช่วงปีว่าง; นักท่องเที่ยวสะพายเป้; แรงจูงใจ; ประเทศไทย

## Gap Year Tourists' Motivation and Travel Pattern in Thailand

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### Abstract

Tourist motivation and preferences are important components in studying a tourists' behaviors for designing and developing tourism products and producing an effective marketing campaign. This research aims to examine demographic characteristics, main motivations and the travel patterns of a gap year tourist in Thailand. Questionnaires were distributed at major tourist attractions, budget accommodations and transportation hubs in Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai and Koh Samui. The 405 effective questionnaires were analyzed for this study. The

findings have shown that the majority of gap year tourists were from English speaking countries and of western European origins, aged between 21-25 years old and taking the gap year on employment break. The main motivations were to learn and experience another culture, to learn and experience another country, and to find thrill and adventure. These gap year tourists preferred backpacking in Thailand for around 2-4 weeks, and travelled to other countries. The most popular destination for respondents was Bangkok. In addition, the important tourism product were the hostels, street food, public transportation and plane flights.

**Keywords:** Gap year tourist; Backpacker; Motivation; Thailand

## Introduction

The gap year is an experimental year which is popular among adolescents who have already finished their high schools or bachelor degrees. However, before moving to higher education or the job market, they want to experience new things, a fresh environment as well as different cultures. During this period a gap year taker may engage in both academic courses and non-academic courses such as language studies, art studies, volunteer work, internships, and traveling. Advantages can include developing core life skills, expanding knowledge and gaining an understanding of the individual interests and passions of the gap year taker (O'Reilly, 2006: 1014). In addition, in North America and Western Europe, taking a gap year is accepted as a rite of passage before entering university. Travelling abroad is an activity that young people can enjoy and learn simultaneously other cultures. Since gap year takers have some long period of time, backpacking is one of the most popular choices for gap year travelers as it has opportunities for skill development (Pearce & Foster, 2007: 1285). Independent travelling allows far greater scope for individual decision-making and personal growth. Normally, backpackers are going to travel independently for several months and they always stay in budget accommodation (Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai, 2002: 521).

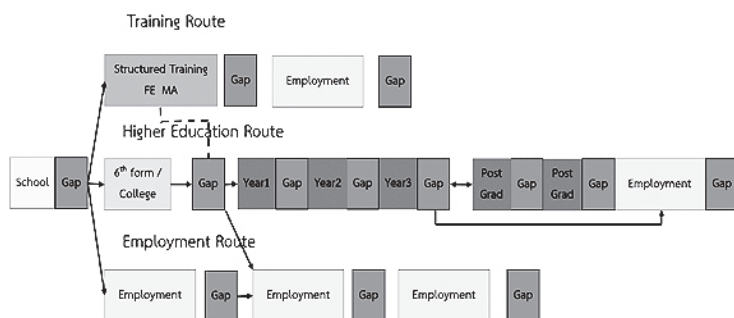
The beautiful nature with unique culture at affordable cost are some reasons for tourist visiting Thailand. Moreover, most travelers in Southeast Asian begin their journey through Bangkok (Howard, 2005: 357; Wilson & Richards, 2008: 190; Hampton & Hamzah, 2016: 568). Interestingly, backpackers tend to distribute economically benefit to multi-destinations (Hampton, 1998: 639). Thailand has many tourist destinations and provides a variety of tourism products to cater to different needs; therefore, examining gap year tourists' characteristic,

main motivation and travel pattern will help tourism organizations and the private sectors develop marketing plans and tourism products in order to attract more tourists so as to increase overall income from tourism.

## Literature review

### 1. From “Gap Year” to “a long-haul traveler”

The practice of gap year is popular in Western countries, especially in native English speaking ones (Lumsden & Stanwick, 2012: 1). Some adolescents decide to drop their education for a long period of time to do some activities in order to develop and understand more about themselves before pursuing higher education (O'Reilly, 2006: 998; Rabie & Naidoo, 2016: 138). The range of the sabbatical can start from around 2 and half months to 18 months (Jones, 2004: 8; Howard, 2005: 358; Sörensson, 2008: 46). The concept of taking a gap year was adapted from the “grand tour” in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe, which was practice by high-class society who travelled around Europe in order to learn new knowledge and culture of the countries they visited (Noy, 2004: 82; O'Reilly, 2006: 1011). Today, a gap year is not only practiced among groups of students who take a year off between their high school and their university level , but also among new bachelor graduates who take this opportunity to take a sabbatical year before entering into the employment market (Sørensen, 2003: 852). Moreover, this phenomenon does also appear in some workers who would like to take a break from their particular jobs in order to get refreshed for a longer period (Jones, 2004: 8; Paris, 2012: 1094). Figure 1 below illustrates that there are many categories of gap year takers. Each category depends on education, training, and employment breaks.



**Figure 1:** Diagram of career path breaks in relation to different categories of gap year. Source: Jones (2004: 27)

Some youths combine a gap year period with many activities during their journey (Jones, 2004: 9; Simpson, 2004: 681; Pearce & Foster, 2007: 1286). For example, many gap year travelers will choose Australia as their destination to work so as to gain capital to travel to other destinations. This is because Australia is an exotic destination, working and holiday visa are allowed and simple to acquire for many countries (Jarvis & Peel, 2013: 114) coupled with a high minimum wage rate, up to 17.70 AUD per hour which was announced in 2010 by Australia Fair Work committee. Another frequently-chosen activity that can develop young people's minds is being a volunteer. Many volunteer organizations in developing countries have become interests for gap year tourists (Ansell, 2008: 218). Volunteering is helping improve the quality of life for people and animals in need. This work is done selflessly and often at personal expense. Personal benefits are increases in self-esteem and general good feeling. Volunteer work is looked upon favorably by society (Simpson, 2004: 685). It is also a good way to meet new people they would not usually meet and learn more about different aspects of that country's culture.

## 2. Motivations of a gap year tourist

The classic theory about motivation is Maslow's hierarchy of needs from 1943. Maslow illustrated the hierarchy of people needs in five levels. The motivation for traveling begins in the level of 'social' need which is the third level. At this level, people make social bonding by joining trips with other people or sharing their travel experience to their friends and relatives. Traveling a long haul period of time is a thing that can lead to the 'esteem' needs as travelers can be more accepted by surrounding people and improve their abilities and decision-making process (Coetzee, & Bester, 2010: 616). Moreover, the prolonged journey can change people's perspectives, fulfilling their potentials and reach the level of 'self-actualization' needs (Kahl & Ting, 2016: 49), which is on the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

The reasons of delaying for higher education or formal employment and deciding to travel can be very simple such as relaxing, having fun or escaping fast path lifestyle (Richards & Wilson, 2004: 57). Meanwhile, some people expect this sabbatical year to be more intellectual and focus on what they will earn after completing their gap year (Pearce & Foster, 2007: 1286). Gap year takers may want to broaden their horizon on life, seek self-understanding, develop their skills, enhance abilities or even improve curriculum vitae for future education or career (Jones, 2004: 10). Motivations of gap year tourists also depend on a span of life, personal spheres, expectation desire and previous travel experiences (O'Reilly, 2006: 998; Dayour, 2013: 6). Hence, gap year takers can have mixed motivations before they decide to participate a gap year (Jones, 2004: 10; Richards & Wilson, 2004: 57).

## 3. Travel pattern of gap year tourist in Thailand

In order to make the decision for tourism products and services,

first of all, potential traveler need to consider all destination available from all of their awareness, which also termed as “total set”. The awareness destination are influenced from passive information environment. The latter include personal interest, friends and family suggestion and marketed destination information (Woodside & MacDonald, 1994:33). After receiving all destination information, tourist will consider others aspects such as tourism products and services of all destination choice. Finally, the travelers reduce destinations to make final choice of the destination(s).

Time and money available are the importance factors for choosing leisure activities (Dellaert, Ettema & Lindh, 1998: 316; Middelkoop, 2001:16). The potential individual who desire to take holiday as a leisure normally organize travelling pattern before departure, including; primary destinations, duration of stay, travel budget, date and travel companions (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 1997:36). Tourism products and services are influenced by social encouragement and personal emotions. Therefore, social and demographic factors have a crucial effect on tourist’s decision-making for tourism product (Correia & Kozak, 2010: 199). For shaping travel patterns, choices of itineraries were formed to create the holiday. Lau & Mc Kercher (2006:43) illustrated travel factors comprise of human factors (type of individual, travel companion, motivations, etc), physical factors (destination geomorphology), and the duration factor (length of stay in destination, length of whole trip)

The Association of British Travel Agent (ABTA), reported in 2016 that Thailand was the most popular gap year destinations. Thailand is considered to be the heart of South East Asia because of its location. Moreover, the accessibility from other continents is convenient via Bangkok with its two main international airports: Suvarnnabhumi and

Don Muang. As a capital city, convenient transportation includes buses, trains, planes, taxis and coaches which can provide tourists to travel to any destinations in Thailand.

Hampton & Hamzah (2016: 565) studied backpacker route and flow in Southeast Asian and created the backpacker trail's map in Southeast Asian. It is found that Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Krabi, and Koh Samui are the major backpacker's destinations in Thailand. The journey in Southeast Asian begin in Bangkok, the lower part of Bangkok is the "classic trail" which goes to south of the Thailand either into the Andaman sea on the west coast where popular destinations are Phuket and Krabi are located, or to the east coast for the Gulf of Thailand where Koh Samui is the main destination. After traveling in the south of Thailand, they cross the border to Malaysia. Another route is the "northern trail", which is a contemporary trail of a newer generation of backpackers. This route also starts from Bangkok then to Cambodia, the south-to-north of Vietnam and north of Laos, then back to Thailand again for Chiang Mai, and finish the loop in Bangkok. After that begin the "classic trail" for southern part or travelling to another region.

A backpacker enclave is a destination that gathers of backpackers together in order to exchange their travel experiences and to enjoy the place together (Wilson & Richard, 2008: 192). Many destinations in Thailand are considered as the backpacker enclave as follows: Khaosan road in Bangkok, Pai town in Mae Hong Son, Koh Phangan in Surathani, Koh Tao in Chumphon and Koh Phi Phi in Krabi (Howard, 2005: 357; Wilson & Richards, 2008: 190; Hampton & Hamzah, 2016: 568),

## Conceptual framework

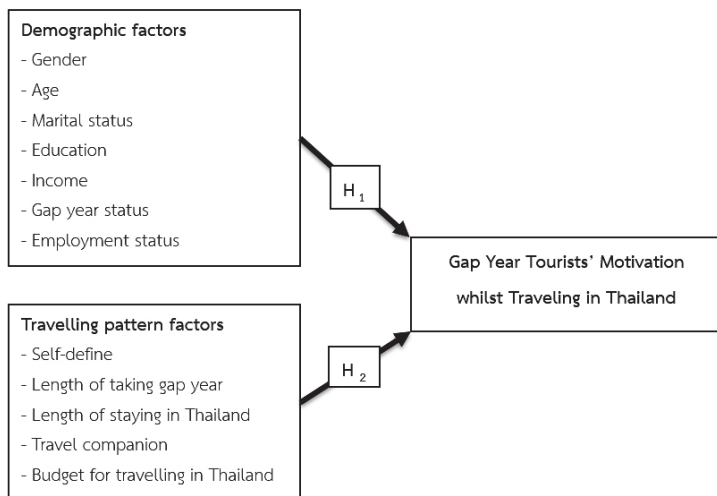


Figure 2: Conceptual framework

Hypothesis 1: Demographic factors including, gender, age, marital status, education, income, gap year status and employment status affect gap year tourists' motivation whilst traveling in Thailand.

Hypothesis 2: Travelling pattern factors including self-discovery whilst travelling, length of gap year, length of staying in Thailand, travel companion and budget for travelling in Thailand affect gap year tourists' motivation whilst traveling in Thailand.

## Methodology

Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai and Koh Samui were sampling destinations in this study as these destinations are major tourist attraction for both mass tourist and backpacker (Cohen, 2001; Hampton & Hamzah, 2016: 565). In addition, Lonely Planet: Thailand, presented

Bangkok, Phuket, Chiang Mai and Koh Samui as the key destinations. Lonely Planet guidebook which was considered as “backpacker bible” (Sørensen, 2003: 860). Using Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1973) formula with 95% confidence level, 400 are the adequate population size, 150 questionnaires were distributed in each destination, in the main tourist attractions, transportation hubs and budget accommodations during April – May and August 2017.

Many scholars use different age groups to create target demographics, this research considered age between 15 and 40. As O'Reilly (2006) claimed on his article “From Drifter to Gap Year Tourist: Main streaming Backpacker Travel” that gap year tourists are on 20s to 30s. While, Jones (2004), consider ages from 16 to 25 are the period of gap year. To identify the respondents, researcher looked for younger tourists with a backpack. Additionally, the researcher stayed as a guest in different budget accommodations and asked fellow travelers to answer a questionnaire. Moreover, permission were sought from staff in other budget accommodations for collecting data. However, each accommodation had a quota that could not exceed 10 questionnaires. All of the tourists were asked whether they had been travelling for more than two months before filling out the questionnaire. Studied of backpacker common length of the trip at two months or more (Egmond, 2007: 93).

The questionnaire consists of check-listed questions, open-ended forms and the five-point Likert scale. Motivation factors part of gap year tourist was adapted from Pearce & Foster (2007). The result of 30 pilot questionnaires' analysis had a Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient equal to 0.975. This exceeded the minimum stand (0.7) which was suggested by Nunnally (1978). There are 405 effective questionnaires analyzed in SPSS program.

## Results

Table 1 Characteristics of gap year tourists

Demography	Frequency (n = 405)	Percent (%)
<b>1. Gender</b>		
Male	215	53.1
Female	190	46.9
<b>2. Nationality</b>		
UK	113	27.9
German	56	13.8
US	39	9.6
Dutch	38	9.4
Canadian	34	8.4
French	20	4.9
Australian	15	3.7
Others	93	23.0
<b>3. Age</b>		
15-20 years old	102	25.2
21-25 years old	199	49.1
26-30 years old	85	21.0
31-35 years old	11	2.7
36-40 years old	8	2
<b>4. Marital status</b>		
Unmarried	394	97.3
Married	9	2.2
Divorced	2	.5
<b>5. Level of Education</b>		
High school	116	28.6
Diploma/ Certificate	56	13.8
Undergraduate	177	43.7
Master's degree or higher	54	13.3
Others	2	0.5

Demography	Frequency (n = 405)	Percent (%)
<b>6. Gap year status</b>		
High school leaver	77	19.0
Employment break	176	43.5
University break during study	35	8.6
Undergraduate/Bachelor leaver	72	17.8
Master/ graduate/ Ph.D. leaver	29	7.2
Others	16	4.0
<b>7. Employment status</b>		
Self employed	30	7.4
Employed with organization	41	10.1
Working freelance	30	7.4
Working part-time	47	11.6
Unemployed	183	45.2
Student	74	18.3
<b>8. Latest monthly income</b>		
No any income	44	10.9
Less than 500 USD	36	8.9
501-1000 USD	73	18.0
1001-1500 USD	91	22.5
1501-2000 USD	67	16.5
2001- 2500 USD	47	11.6
2501- 3000 USD	21	5.2
More than 3001	17	4.2
Not given	9	2.2

The demography study of gap year tourist in Thailand found that there were more male than female. In descending order, the Country's most tourist hailed from are the United Kingdom, Germany, United States, Holland, Canada, France and Australia. Nearly half of the respondents were in the age range of 21-25 followed by the age

range of 15-20 and 26-30. Most of the respondent were unmarried. The Majority of respondents held Bachelor's degrees, followed by high school. For the status of the gap year taker, most of the respondents were during employment break, followed by high school leaver and bachelor leaver. The majority of gap year tourists were unemployed. Top three income range were 1001-1500 USD, 501-1000 USD and 1501-2000 USD.

Table 2 Travel patterns of gap year tourists

Gap year travel planning	Frequency (n = 405)	Percent (%)
<b>1. How they define themselves</b>		
Gap year taker	84	20.7
Backpacker	200	49.4
Flashpacker	21	5.2
Traveler	86	21.2
Tourist	5	1.2
Others	9	2.2
<b>2. Length of away from home country</b>		
2-4 months	136	33.6
4-6 months	105	25.9
6-8 months	50	12.3
8-10 months	37	9.1
10-12 months	38	9.4
More than 1 year	39	9.6
<b>3. Activities during gap year</b>		
Organized travel	49	12.1
Backpacking	381	94.1
Learning academic course(s)	21	5.2
Volunteering	85	21.1
Paid work	97	24.0
Others	6	1.5

Gap year travel planning	Frequency (n = 405)	Percent (%)
<b>4. People/agent organizing trip</b>		
Themselves	354	87.4
Travel agent	5	1.2
Volunteer foundation	5	1.2
Mix (travel agent + myself)	40	9.9
Others	1	0.2
<b>5. Travel companion</b>		
Family members	8	2.0
Friends	143	35.3
Boy/girl friend	51	12.6
Alone	203	50.1
<b>6. Other countries traveled in same trip</b>		
Southeast Asian countries	356	87.9
Non-Southeast Asian Countries	216	53.3
<b>7. S.E. Asia countries visited in same trip</b>		
Vietnam	237	58.5
Cambodia	218	53.8
Laos	164	40.5
Indonesia	153	37.7
Malaysia	150	37.0
Singapore	80	29.8
Myanmar	63	15.5
Philippines	41	10.1
Brunei	3	0.7
<b>8. Top 5 visited countries outside S.E. Asia</b>		
Australia	102	25.1
New Zealand	68	16.7
China	43	10.6
India	40	9.9
Japan	34	8.4

Gap year travel planning	Frequency (n = 405)	Percent (%)
<b>9. Booking methods for accommodation</b>		
Online	267	65.9
Travel agent	7	1.7
No reservation	45	11.1
More than one method	86	21.2
<b>10. Sources of information</b>		
Words of mouth	328	81.1
Trip advisor	255	63.0
Travel blog	231	57.0
Facebook	189	46.7
Guidebook	155	38.3
Instagram	147	36.3
YouTube	126	31.1
Past experience	90	22.2
Travel agent	66	16.3
Online Travel Agent	50	12.3
Magazine	38	9.4
Twitter	26	6.4
Television	23	5.7
Newspaper	9	2.2
Others	24	5.9

About half of respondents defined themselves as a backpacker. The majority of respondents traveled 2-4 months. Most of gap year takers did independent travel, paid work and volunteer work during their journey. About half of respondents traveled alone, followed by with friends. Almost gap year tourists in Thailand also traveled to other Southeast Asian countries and about half traveled outside Southeast Asian countries in the same trip. Further finding showed top three Southeast Asia destinations were Vietnam, Cambodia, and

Laos. Whereas, top three destinations of Non-Southeast Asian destinations were Australia, New Zealand and China. The accommodations were mostly booked online. Moreover, the top three sources of information to organize the trip were word of mouth, Trip Advisor and travel blog.

**Table 3** Choices of tourism products in Thailand

Tourism products in Thailand	Frequency (n = 405)	Percent (%)
<b>1. Top 10 destinations choices</b>		
Bangkok	396	97.8
Chiang Mai	310	76.5
Koh Phi Phi	265	65.4
Phuket	255	64.0
Koh Tao	239	59.0
Koh Phangan	236	58.3
Krabi	220	54.3
Pai	210	51.9
Koh Samui	189	46.7
Chiang Rai	119	29.4
<b>2. Top 5 transportation choices</b>		
Ferry	333	82.2
Taxi	296	73.1
Public(local)bus	288	71.1
Tuk Tuk	279	68.9
Plane	261	64.4
<b>3. Top 5 preferred activities choices</b>		
Visiting temples	312	77.0
Sightseeing	302	74.6
Snorkeling	266	65.7
Night life	268	66.2
Thai massage	227	55.0

Tourism products in Thailand	Frequency (n = 405)	Percent (%)
<b>4. Top 5 accommodation choices</b>		
Hostel	349	86.2
Guest house	237	58.5
Hotel	125	30.9
Home stay	89	22.0
Bed & breakfast	67	16.5
<b>5. Choice of food choice</b>		
Thai food	347	85.7
Local food in destination	330	81.5
International food	120	29.6
Fast food	64	15.8
Others	9	2.2
<b>6. Choice of places to dine</b>		
Street food	344	84.9
Market	314	77.5
Restaurant	277	68.4
Convenience store	123	30.4
Department store	39	9.4
Others	4	1.0

A review of the top tourism destinations, products and services found that the top five destinations for respondents were Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Koh Phi Phi, Phuket, Koh Tao. While, top five activities were visiting temples, sightseeing, snorkeling, nightlife and Thai massage. The most common choices of transportation were, ferry, taxi, public transport, and plane. Almost all of the respondents preferred staying in hostel and more than half chosen guesthouse. The majority of respondents preferred Thai and local food while travelling. Street food was the most popular choice of food for dining, followed by market.

Table 4 Motivation for taking gap year

Motivation of gap year tourist	Mean	S.D.
To learn about/experience another country	4.65*	.5215
To learn about/experience another culture	4.68*	.5137
To interact with people of the host country	4.31*	.7623
To explore and ask questions	4.17	.7759
To develop my skills and abilities	4.01	.9091
To accomplish achieve something	3.92	.9833
To develop my personality	4.04	.9929
To understand myself more	3.85	1.1350
To relax (physically/emotionally)	4.02	.9798
To escape familiar things (home life/work)	3.73	1.2344
To socialize with other travelers	4.15	.8060
To play, party and be entertained	3.52	1.0889
To have romantic relationships	2.45	1.1690
To visit famous sites and environments	4.21*	.8401
To find thrills/excitement/adventure	4.41*	.7070
To pursue special interests	3.72	.9626
To make money while travelling	1.99	1.3001
Others	4.19	1.2896

n = 405, \*Top 5 Motivation factors

Table 4 shows that “to learn about/experience another culture” (mean = 4.68, S.D. = 0.51) is the top satisfied reason of motivation, followed by “to learn about/experience another country” (mean = 4.65, S.D. = 0.57), “to find thrills/excitement/ adventure” (mean = 4.41, S.D. = 0.71), “to interact with people of the host country” (mean = 4.31, S.D. = 0.76) and “to visit famous sites and environments” (mean = 4.21, S.D. = 0.84).

Further Post hoc test on T-test and One-way ANOVA in SPSS program found that female found the item “to learn about/experience

another culture”, “to explore and ask questions”, “to develop their skills and abilities”, “to accomplish achieve something”, “to develop their personality”, “to understand themselves more”, “to relax (physically/emotionally)” and “to pursue special interests” had significantly important more than male. Whereas, male find the item “to escape familiar things (home life/work)” and “to have romantic relationships” had significantly important more than female. In term of age, the result indicate that younger age group (15-20 years old) had significantly higher motivation than middle age group (20-25 years old) and older age group (26-40 years old), including, “to develop their personality”, “to understand themselves more”. In addition, younger age group had significantly higher motivation than older age group, including “to develop their skills and abilities”, “to play, party and be entertained”, “to find thrills/excitement/ adventure”. Whereas, older age group had significantly higher motivation on “to make money while travelling” and their “personal reason”.

The Post hoc test of income, it revealed that lower-income earners (less than 1000 USD) and middle-income earners (between 1000-2000 USD) had significantly higher motivations than higher-income earners (more than 2000 USD) in term of, “to learn/experience another country”, “to learn about/experience another culture”, “to interact with people of the host country” and “to play/party and be entertained”. In addition, lower-income earners had significantly higher motivation than higher-income earner in items of “to develop skill and abilities”, “to develop a personality”, “to understand themselves” and “to find thrills/ excitement/ adventure”.

In term of duration of taking a gap year, the result inferred that longer duration gap year had significantly higher motivation than shorter length gap years in terms of “to develop my skills and

abilities”, “to accomplish achieve something” and “to understand themselves more”. In addition, longer length gap year had significantly higher motivation on “to make money while travelling” than shorter length gap year and medium length gap year. Furthermore, the Post hoc test of length that tourists stayed in Thailand revealed that longer length of stay in Thailand had significantly higher motivation than shorter length of stay in Thailand for two factors including “to interact with people in host country” and “to explore and ask questions”.

## Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine demographic characteristic, main motivation and travel patterns of gap year tourists in Thailand. The study found that gap year tourists who visited Thailand were mostly from English speaking countries (Sørensen, 2003: 852; Dayour, 2013: 4), who were largely unmarried with high level of education (Richards and Wilson, 2004: 57). It was also noticed that gap year tourists belonged to different age categories; however, the majority were between 21-25 years, as gap year tourists are more diverse, which gradually shift from youngster segment (Dayour, 2013: 5). As leaving jobs for the longer period to participate the prolong journey are popular in recent workers (Paris, 2012: 1095). The respondents prefer being called as a traveler or a backpacker (Hampton & Hamzah, 2016: 569). While, gap year taker was often called in the UK (O'Reilly, 2006: 1009).

The fact of the study revealed that the most important reason to travel to Thailand was to learn about and experience the culture and country, as cultural knowledge is the core of gap year tourist motivation (Paris & Teye, 2010: 244), it is recommended that govern-

ment pays special attention to the development of these sites in order to increase gap year tourists visitation to Thailand. Another importance reason was, finding thrills/excitement/adventure, as many youth tourist prefer “off the beaten track” and down-to-earth experience (Sørensen, 2003: 856). It is also recommended that local travel agents should focus attention on packaging tailored tours that will sell the country’s historical, cultural and natural attractions to gap year tourists. People on a longer length of gap year have significantly higher motivation on, to develop their skills and abilities, to accomplish achieve something and to understand themselves more. Those on a longer stay in Thailand had more motivation to interact with people, explore and ask questions of Thais’ residents. It would likely be of interest to gap year tourists if the Thai government can provide longer stay visas.

The most popular destination is Bangkok which is the hub for Southeast Asian backpacker (Howard, 2005: 357), it is an opportunity for Thailand to join marketing campaign with other Southeast Asian countries because gap year tourist often travel to multiple destinations.

Another fact that gap year tourists are young age groups and travel on limited budgets. Therefore, the Tourism Authority of Thailand should formally recognize and incorporate budget accommodations, local transportations and street food facilities into the tourism subsector in the country, and also regulate monitoring activities in these facilities in order to maintain quality standards for patronage by gap year tourists, these practice will be of great benefit to small businesses in the country (Hampton, 1998: 657).

### Limitations and suggestion for further research

1. This study may slightly misrepresent wealthy tourists as budget accommodations were the main sampling for collecting data in the part of accommodation.

2. This study selects respondents who travel over two months. Some respondents may not in this period of the gap year. Those who are on college annual holiday might have also answered the questionnaires.

This research employs a quantitative research approach for collecting data from the respondents; therefore, the researcher suggests that the further study of the gap year tourists should conduct the in-depth interview so as to confirm the detailed findings of quantitative results.

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