An Exploration of Push & Pull Motivational Factors: A Case Study of Indian Wedding Couples in Phuket

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Abstract

This research aims to explore push and pull factors that influence the selection process of Indian wedding couples coming to Phuket. The theories of tourist decision making and the push-pull motivation theories are used as the theoretical basis of the study. Qualitative methodology has been used as the primary form of data collection. Twenty five semi–structured interview questions were conducted with seven Indian wedding couples, five parents of Indian wedding couples, seven Indian wedding organizers and six hotel representatives. The transcripts were analyzed by thematic content analysis. The results suggested the top three push factors were novelty, positive past experience in Phuket, and limitation of number of guests to be invited. On the other hand, three leading pull factors were beautiful scenery, convenient accessibility, and reputation and hotel experience. The results also indicated that Phuket's strengths were its recognized expertise in Indian weddings and the fact that Phuket offers excellent value for money. By contrast the limited capacity of venues for larger events remains the islands major weakness. Being a value for money destination and flexible with Indian traveller's requests, these are both key critical factors in maintaining the competitiveness of Phuket as an Indian wedding destination.

Keywords: Indian wedding, push factors, pull factors

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การสำรวจปัจจัยทฤษฎีแรงจูงใจ (Push & Pull)
กรณีศึกษา: คู่แต่งงานชาวอินเดียในจังหวัดภูเก็ต

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บทคัดย่อ

     งานวิจัยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจปัจจัยแรงจูงใจที่มีผลกระทบต่อ
กระบวนการเลือกสถานที่แต่งงานสำหรับคู่แต่งงานชาวอินเดีย โดยใช้จังหวัดภูเก็ต
เป็นกรณีศึกษา งานวิจัยเป็นการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพโดยใช้ทฤษฎีแรงจูงใจ (push
and pull motivation) และกระบวนการตัดสินใจของนักท่องเที่ยวเป็นทฤษฎี
หลักในการศึกษา ผู้วิจัยได้ดำเนินการรวบรวมข้อมูลปฐมภูมิโดยใช้การสัมภาษณ์
แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างกลุ่มตัวอย่างที่เข้าร่วมการสัมภาษณ์ จำนวน 25 คน ประกอบ
ด้วย คู่แต่งงานชาวอินเดีย 7 คู่ บิดามารดาของคู่แต่งงานชาวอินเดีย 5 คน ตัวแทน
บริษัทจัดงานแต่งงาน 7 คน และพนักงานโรงแรม 6 คน ผลวิจัย พบว่าปัจจัย
ผลักดันที่มีความสำคัญต่อกระบวนการตัดสินใจประกอบด้วยความแปลกใหม่
ประสบการณ์เชิงบวกในอดีต และข้อจำกัดจำนวนแขกที่เข้าร่วมงาน ในขณะที่
ทัศนียภาพที่สวยงาม การเข้าถึงที่สะดวก และชื่อเสียง และประสบการณ์ของโรงแรม
เป็นปัจจัยชักจูงที่สำคัญที่สุด ผลการวิจัยยังชี้ว่า จุดแข็งของภูเก็ตคือทัศนียภาพ
ที่สวยงาม ความเชี่ยวชาญในการจัดงานแต่งงานอินเดียและความคุ้มค่าเงิน ทั้งนี้
จุดอ่อนที่สำคัญของจังหวัดภูเก็ตในฐานะที่เป็นแหล่งท่องเที่ยวสำหรับการแต่งงาน
นั้น ประกอบด้วยขนาดของสถานที่ ผลวิจัยพบว่าความคุ้มค่าเงินและความยืดหยุ่น
ต่อลูกค้ามีความสำคัญของภูเก็ตในการแข่งขันกับแหล่งท่องเที่ยวอื่น ๆ ในฐานะ
สถานที่แต่งงานของตลาดอินเดียได้

คำสำคัญ : งานแต่งงานอินเดีย, ทฤษฎีแรงจูงใจ (push & pull)

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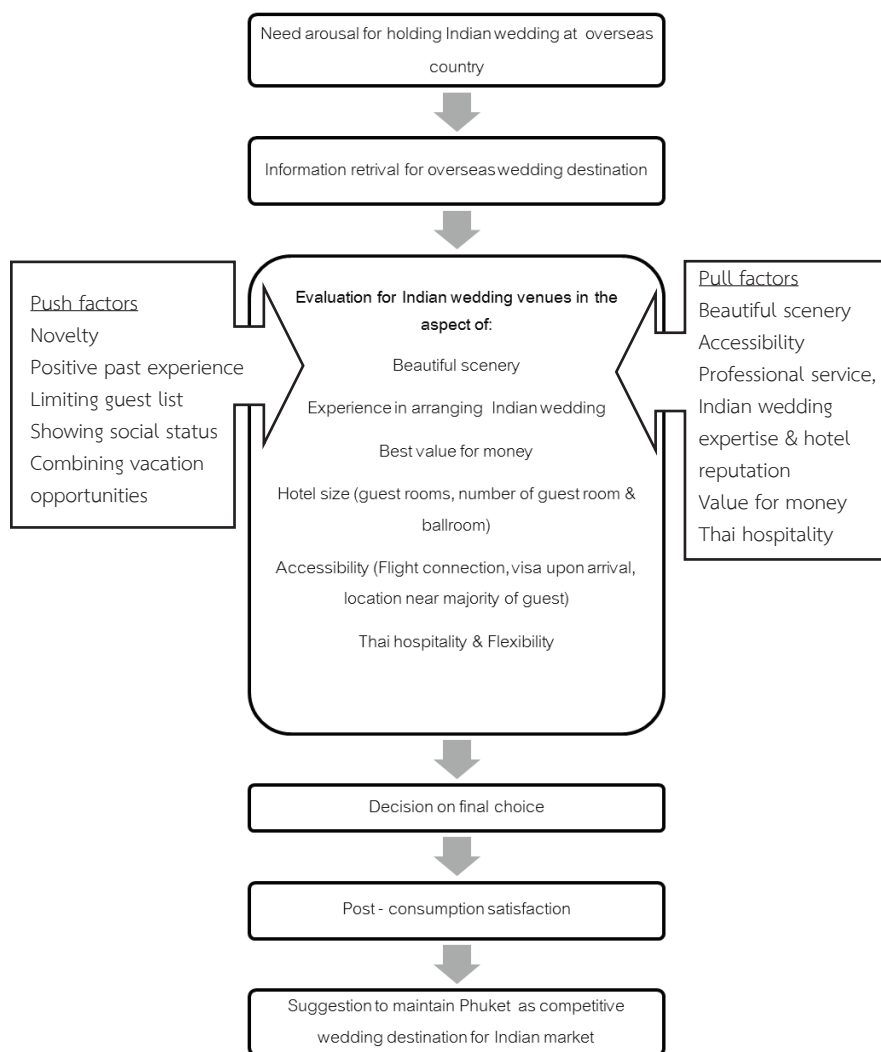มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตภูเก็ต tatiyaporn.j@gmail.com

Introduction

The island of Phuket is already renowned as one of the world's most famous tourism destinations, ("Indian wedding 'pizzaz' provide plenty of promise", 2010). In some respects, this is due to its relaxing natural attractions, world renowned Thai hospitality and its superior facilities, including plenty of top quality accommodation options at every level. In recent years, Phuket has looked to further diversify its product to attract a wider range of travelers. The overseas wedding market is targeted by Tourism Authority of Thailand to promote Phuket as the best wedding destination. (Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), 2010). At present, the wedding trend extended, overseas weddings have become an aspiration for the new generation of millionaires. Arranging marriages in overseas countries like Thailand, Macau and Bali with all the traditional rituals has become fashionable among affluent Indians. ("Marriages in foreign locales catch Indians' fancy", 2010).

Through this emerging overseas wedding segment, the niche Indian wedding group has been kept an eye on due to high spending powers net per visitor ("I do on distance shore", 2011). Thailand has the potential to earn an additional 30-40 billion baht (US$962.4 million-$1.28 billion) per year in tourism revenue through the development of the Indian wedding market. ("Indian wedding 'pizzaz' provide plenty of promise", 2010) The number of Indian guests arriving in Thailand has been increasing since 2009; it has increased 14.45% from the year 2008, 23.75% in the year 2009, 20.33% in the year 2010, 9.79% in the year 2011, 2013 saw an increase by 3.6% from 2012. (Ministry of Tourist & Sports (MOTS), 2014).

However, there is no academic research study on discovering push and pull motivational factors for Indian wedding couples in Phuket as yet. Through exploring the push and pull motivational factors of why Indian wedding couples select Phuket as their wedding destination, and in understanding the islands strengths and weaknesses, suggestions can be found to maintain Phuket as a highly sought after Indian wedding destination and would be most beneficial for wedding organizers, hotels, airlines and for the country of Thailand in terms of revenues and in terms of its world class reputation.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

Need arousal for holding Indian wedding at overseas country

Information retrival for overseas wedding destination

Push factors
Novelty
Positive past experience
Limiting guest list
Showing social status
Combining vacation opportunities

Evaluation for Indian wedding venues in the aspect of:

Beautiful scenery

Experience in arranging Indian wedding

Best value for money

Hotel size (guest rooms, number of guest room & ballroom)

Accessibility (Flight connection, visa upon arrival, location near majority of guest)

Thai hospitality & Flexibility

Pull factors
Beautiful scenery
Accessibility
Professional service,
Indian wedding expertise & hotel reputation
Value for money
Thai hospitality

Decision on final choice

Post - consumption satisfaction

Suggestion to maintain Phuket as competitive wedding destination for Indian market

Source: Adopted from C.K.H. Lau, S.-H. Hui (2010)

Literature Review

1. Tourist decision making model

Social science scholars have been focused on how individuals proceed with the making decisions. Nicosia (1966), Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell (1968), Howard and Sheth (1969) and Gilbert (1991) provided the grand models of consumer behavior. These models explain decision makings related to the tangible products. However, these grand models were used by tourism scholars as a starting point for explaining the process used to purchase tourism services.

•   **Consumer decision making process.** The individuals or companies must go through similar mental processes in deciding which product to take. Despite this similarity, different customers often end up buying different products. Blackwell et al (1968) explained that the consumer decision-making process is commonly described as five stages of consumer behavior (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Consumer decision making process
Source: Blackwell et al. (2003); Hawkins et al. (2003)

•   **Travel-Buying Behavior.** Mathieson and Wall (1982) suggested a linear five-stage model of travel buying behavior, which is shown in Figure 3. Mathieson and Wall (1982) recognized the unique feature of tourism products. The study understands the importance of tourist destination characteristic, however, it is lack of parsimony and low explanatory and omission of relevant variables such as perception, memory and personality. Research in the tourism area concerned with travel purchase decisions has been recognized as multiphase rather than a single step process (Chon, 1990; Gunn, 1989).
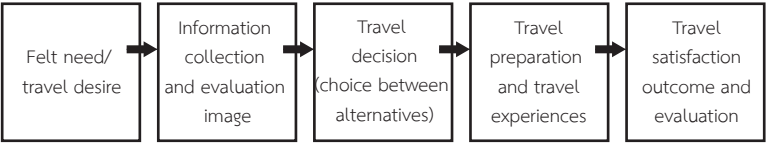
| Felt need/ travel desire | → | Information collection and evaluation image | → | Travel decision (choice between alternatives) | → | Travel preparation and travel experiences | → | Travel satisfaction outcome and evaluation |

Figure 3: Model of Travel-Buying Behavior, Source:
Mathieson and Wall (1982, p. 95)

2. Level of involvement buying behavior

One of the influencing factors in the decision making process is the level of involvement as explained by Assael (1987). Selecting a wedding destination is categorized as complex buying behavior. This refers to a case when a product is expensive and purchased infrequently. High-involvement purchases involve products or services that are psychologically important to the buyer because they address social or egotistical needs and therefore carry social and psychological risk (e.g., the risk of looking foolish to one's family or friends). They may also involve high cost, much time spent seeking information and of course evaluation of all options presented. Therefore financial risk and time are high considerations, however, one must consider that a high-involvement product for one buyer maybe a low-involvement product for another.

	High Involvement	Low Involvement
Significant Differences between brand	Complex buying behavior	Variety seeking buying behavior
Few Different between brand	Dissonance reducing buying behavior	Habitual buying behavior

Table 1: Four type of buying behavior
Sources: Assael, H. As cited in Kotler, P. & Armstrong, G. (1994).

3. Travel motivations

Motivations are the essential keys to describe the travel behavior and play a crucial role in understanding the tourist decision making process (Marshall, and Uysal, 2006). In fact, the ground motivation theory describes an active process of psychological factors namely needs, wants, and goals, which stimulate a pressing level of tension inside of human's minds and bodies (Fodness, 1994).

•   **Maslow's hierarchical theory of motivation.** Maslow's hierarchical theory of motivation was one of the most applied in tourism literature (1973). The theory consists of the physiological needs, followed by higher levels of psychological needs (safety, love and esteem) and the need for self-actualization. Maslow claimed that the basic needs must be fulfilled before one moves to the next needs.

•   **Push and Pull theories.** Travel motivation is one of the useful approaches to understanding traveler's needs and travelers' behavior (Crompton, 1979). Past literature reviews on tourist motivation identified the two dimensions of push and pull factors (Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Uysal & Hagan, 1993). The concept of push and pull dimension is that people travel because they are pushed by their own internal forces and pulled by the external forces of destination attributes. Push factors are intangible or intrinsic desires of the individual traveler. Whereas pull factors, are attractive destination as perceived by the traveler.

Crompton (1979) first developed a conceptual framework that integrated seven motivations of pleasure vacations which had significant influence on decision making for choosing a destination: the socio-psychological, or push factors (escape, self-exploration, relaxation, prestige, regression, kinship-enhancement, and social interaction) and two cultural, or pull factors (novelty and education). The above attributes influence the selection of a destination. Iso-Ahola (1982) suggested that there were two motivational forces that were the critical determinants and influence the individual. The two motivational forces are: (1) the desire to escape the everyday environments; and (2) the desire to seek psychological (intrinsic) rewards through travel in a contrasting (new or old) environment.

Later, Yuan and McDonald (1990) tried to find pull and push factors in different nationalities and identified seven pull and five push factors. The push factors include escape, novelty, prestige, enhancement of kinship relationships, and relaxation/hobbies, while the pull factors consist of budget, culture and history, wilderness, ease of travel, cosmopolitan environment, facilities, and hunting. They found significant differences among travelers from different countries in terms of the level of importance individuals attached to the push and pull factors. Sirakaya and McLellan (1997) assert that more pull factors influencing travel destination choice are local hospitality and service, trip cost and convenience, perceptions of a safe/secure environment, change in daily life environment, recreation and sporting activities, entertainment and drinking opportunities, personal and historical links, cultural and shopping services, unusual and distant vacation spots. Social class also has significant determination of purchase evaluation criteria. Attitude formation, motivation, value orientation, income, socialization during childhood and education levels will influence one's social class. People with a different level of income would have different expectations with regard to cost and style of holiday (William 2002; Hsu & Power, 2002).

Lau and Hui (2010) found that the reputation of the venue, married couple experience, recommendations from friends and relatives and popularity of the venue were the top selection pull attributes when selecting wedding banquet venues for Hong Kong wedding couples. On the contrary, the push factors are first impression of sales person, personal preference and package attractiveness.

Therefore, in knowing the factors that influence the decision making of Indian wedding couples in Phuket, thereby offering the products and services which meet those needs, this will help enable marketers to identify the attributes that are to be promoted to match Indian wedding couples' needs and wants and for the hotel and wedding planners to focus and enhance them. It is necessary to understand both push and pull factors for effective marketing strategy (Baloglu and Uysal, 1996). As tourist motivations are increasingly important in promoting and marketing tourist destination, this research attempts to explore the push and pull factors of Indian wedding couples coming to Phuket.

4.   Wedding ceremony, Indian wedding in Phuket

Wedding ceremony usually symbolizes the outcome of love, and is a display of a serious lifetime commitment and devotion (Leeds, 2002). Within the wedding industry, Expedia's 2014 American Altar Report found that Americans agreed that traditional wedding planning is hugely stressful, they prefer beach destination wedding (Brides prefer the beach, 2014). On the contrary, Jake (2009) confirmed that there is no demand for theme wedding in New Zealand yet and the most influencing factor for theme wedding is the friends and family factor. Gullapalli and Raju (2009) stated that **Indian wedding** attribute is very bright events, filled with lots of ritual and celebration, which continues for several days and with somewhat between 100 to 10,000 people attending. These days, the new Indian generation has shifted to do things differently, they think of going abroad to tie the knot (The financial daily newspaper, the Economic Times, 2006). There were no requests before that (Red Events India Pvt. Ltd., 2006). There were so many countries that wish to host Indian weddings, as being seen in wedding exhibition in New Delhi in 2006. The reason why many countries want to host Indian wedding is that each one generate revenue at least 300,000 US Dollar up to 30,000,000 US Dollar (Technopark, 2006). Due to the fact of high revenue and such a tourist magnet, the administrative agencies cooperate with government agencies to pay at large attention to attract as many Indian wedding functions as possible. It was noticed by various organizations that the Indian wedding makes higher revenue volume than the western wedding. Example is given by one of the most famous venues for Indian wedding in Phuket. Table 2 displays the catering revenue comparison of Indian wedding and western wedding in year 2010. It shows that minimum numbers of Indian wedding guests is 100 pax per event, whereas, western wedding guests are maximum at 100 pax per event. In finances term, it also shows that catering revenue from Indian wedding start at 1.4 million Thai baht per a wedding, but the western wedding revenue can only generate the maximum income at 600,000 Thai baht per a wedding.

Table 2: Comparing catering revenue of Indian wedding vs.
western wedding in year 2010

No.	Period	Wedding type	Number	Catering revenue
1	15-23 January	Indian Wedding	250	1,472,750.00
2	17 February	Western wedding	9	55,000.00
2	26 March	Western wedding	30	153,656.00
3	27 March	Western wedding	10	78,976.00
4	01-03 June	Indian Wedding	200	1,643,830.32
5	24-29 June	Indian Wedding	500	4,866,000.00
6	01-03 July	Indian Wedding	500	3,511,750.00
7	16-19 July	Indian Wedding	300	4,866,000.00
8	22-25 July	Western wedding	100	678,724.00
9	12-17 August	Western wedding	45	363,646.00
10	18-19 August	Western wedding	20	112,521.20
11	1 November	Western wedding	24	188,080
12	25-29 November	Indian wedding	275	1,659,375
13	3-December	Western wedding	2	116,641
Total Wedding Catering Revenue				19,766,949

Source: Event Management Department,
          JW Marriott Phuket Resorts and Spas, 2010

To summary, hosting only 6 Indian weddings, the hotel gains 18 million Thai baht, whereas hosting 8 western weddings, the hotel only gains 1.7 million Thai baht.

During the politic crisis in Bangkok in the past year, Indians maintained their travel plan, because protests are normal in India (Satish, 2010). Many of Indian weddings were due to held in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Bangkok, Pattaya, Hua Hin, Rayong, Krabi, Phuket and

Khao Lak (TAT New Delhi, 2013) To date, the motivational factors for selecting an overseas wedding venue have been addressed only in news, magazines, with the exception of studies conducted by Lau and Hui (2010) which was focused on selection attributes of wedding banquet venues in Hong Kong. Thus, there is a limitation of information available for push and pull motivational factors influencing selection process for Indian wedding couples in Phuket.

The objectives of the study

1) To explore push and pull factors that influence the selection process of an overseas wedding destination for Indian couples coming to Phuket.

2) To identify the strengths and weaknesses of Phuket as a wedding destination for the Indian market.

3) To propose suggestions on how to maintain the competitiveness of Phuket in the Indian wedding market place.

Methodology

This research is an exploratory study. It focuses on what is happening now and attempts to seek new insight, and to assess Phuket as an Indian wedding destination in a new light. (Robson 2002: 59). The research is flexible and adaptive to changes as a result of new data that appears and new insight that occurs while the research is being conducted.

Qualitative research approach was used for this study. The researcher used a four-phase research method which consists of asking, witnessing, interpreting, and knowing (Mankowski & Stein, 2004).This research used the case study as a research strategy tool to gain a rich understanding of push and pull motivational factors of Indian wedding couples coming to Phuket. Morris and Wood (1991) explained that the case study strategy also has considerable ability to generate answers to the question 'why?'

The population of this research was classified as per below table.

Table 2: Classification of population, research method and number
of informants

NO.	Group of population	Descriptions	Descriptions	Number of informants
1.	Indian wedding couples	• Informants are Indian Nationality. • Indian couples who were married from January 2010 to December 2013 in Phuket	Semi-structured & In–depth interview	7
2.	Indian wedding couples' parents	• Informants are Indian Nationality. • Indian couples' parents whose children were married from January 2010 to December 2013 in Phuket	Semi-structured & In–depth interview	5
3.	Wedding organizers	• Informants are either Thai or Indian Nationality. • Informants have been in Indian wedding business for 5–10 years	Semi-structured & In–depth interview	7
4.	Hotel representatives	• Informants have experiences in sales of Indian wedding business for at least 4 years. • Or informants have experiences in event operation for Indian wedding for at least 4 years.	Semi-structured & In–depth interview	6
	Total number of informants			25

A semi-structured open-ended interview question was developed, after reviewing literature on weddings, Indian weddings, tourist decision making processes and pushes and pull factors. The semi-structured open-ended interview question appears to be an outline of questions to be asked, that the researcher can adjust in order to satisfy the flow of the interview, with respect to the target knowledge and experience of the study (Darlington et. al, 2002). It also helps to

uncover people's underlying motivation, prejudices, attitudes towards sensitive issues (Collis & Hussey, 2003). Joseph F. Hair, JR et., al (2000) pointed out that in-depth interviews techniques allows researcher to collect both attitudinal and behavioral data from the subject that span all time frames (past, present and future).

A unique characteristic of this data collection method is that the researcher uses probing questions as the mechanism to get more data on the topic from the interviewees. By taking the interviewee's initial response and turning into a question and also creating natural opportunity for more detailed discussion.

Proposed interview questions for Indian wedding couples or Indian wedding couple's parent
1. Please take me through how you decide on having a wedding out of your country?
2. When you both did had final decision?
3. Who did you ask for help or consulting on this wedding?
4. How would you get in contact of those people who assisting you?
5. What were your perceptions or feeling of their suggestion and opinion?
6. What could be the possible alternative venue for wedding destination?
7. Please give me example of a time that arranging wedding was challenges?
8. Once you are here in Phuket, was it similar as you expect to see and services?
9. Would you recommend any of your friend or relative to have a wedding here in the future and why?

All the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions were coded. Coding specifications are to be designated after the data transcribed. Coding open-ended questions with explicit instructions are necessary. This is in order to ensure consistency among orders. Coding process are 1) taking a sample from all informants.

2) writing down all responses in terms of general overall category. 3) creating code from this responses (e.g. friendliness = A, beautiful scenery = B, wedding expertise = C) 4) most codes require basic category headings. Using category headings allows researcher to group different ways of expressing the same basic idea under a common heading.

The main data analysis technique in this research was content analysis. According to Jankowicz (1995, p. 206), the purpose of content analysis is to enable the researcher to describe systematically the entire content of a respondents' utterances, and then classify the meanings that were recorded. Moreover, the interview transcripts have been analyzed using thematic content analysis, which focuses on investigating recurring answers in the data obtained. In addition, this analysis technique has been employed because it is relatively less expensive and more time efficient among other available data analysis methods that are qualitative in nature.

Results
1. Push Factors
1) Novelty. In recent years, Indian couples have sought out fresh, new types of wedding experiences but with a full sense of Indian wedding ritual. They want their once in a life time event to be more of appreciation with the event itself having a sense of the unexpected both for the couple themselves and for their guests.

The result shows that Indians love to make an occasion of such an event and to have non-repeating wedding venues, to look for new destinations, to escape from normal everyday atmosphere, and to have their weddings in different countries both at home and abroad. One of the informants pointed that even though Indians spent massively on venue decorations, or on the most expensive venues in India, the appreciation is much less, compared to overseas wedding where people move out from their comfort zone as below:

> *... but the fact is at the end of the day, it is a party, you go there, you come back home , maybe there is another party in the afternoon, or late night after another. It is like a routine. There is nothing special about it anymore; you may spend millions on it. But the appreciation is very less because people expect you to do that because it is so common now.*

Eight informants stressed that they prefer not to repeat the same venue with their relatives, because most of their invited guests are the same crowd and the party will be less interesting:

The only reason that we not do in Hua Hin because 4 weddings already took place there, and we do not want to continue the same place. It is the same crowd that to come the fifth time, it will not enjoy. So we decided to change the venue to come to Phuket.

2) Positive past experience. Most informants admire Phuket as a wonderful holiday destination. After visiting Phuket a few times for leisure experiences, they find that they love the island. Some of them have attended Indian wedding in Phuket, and are impressed with the overseas wedding experience. Therefore, they have a mind "set up" for overseas wedding in Phuket when their time comes. There are eighteen informants that agreed upon this.

... because we visit Phuket so times for holidays so we have already known how beautiful Phuket is. We have already had a mind-set up to do marriage in Phuket. It didn't take us long time to think.

"We have friends married in Phuket before. That is one of the reasons that we choose Phuket, and been here as the wedding guest before."

3) Limiting guest list. Since the wedding is a social event, the wedding host tends to invite people they know from the same city that they live in as a courtesy. There are generally more than two thousand guests. Nowadays, Indian couples want to invite only closed friends and relatives (quality guests). As expressed below:

..and also because we live in Dubai, if I do the wedding in Dubai, I have to invite maybe one or two thousand guests, because it's in the same city. If I do in another country only the people who are close to our family that are really interested in attending wedding....

... because an overseas wedding is easier to not invite everyone, you know. Otherwise, for us, in our culture, it is very um. It is very difficult to not invite a whole family so you know someone plus their husband or wife, plus their children, plus their parents plus you know, it become very difficult. People get insulted if you didn't invite them.

4) Showing social status. Not everybody in India is capable of providing a foreign destination wedding because only rich families can afford this kind of elaborate event and additionally it is also a new trend for high society.

5) Combining vacation opportunities. The wedding is an occasion when all family members and close friends are able to come together; therefore, the couple wish to take this opportunity to make it a fun family vacation.

2. External Influencing (pull) Factors

1) Beautiful scenery of Phuket. The results show that Indian couples are looking for pleasant surroundings, a relaxing atmo-sphere and nice weather:

> *"Phuket is a beautiful place, nice beaches, beautiful scenery, very beautiful hotels, and all the things are matching together. It is really beautiful environment."*
> *"Phuket scenery is more international, it is more, as the city itself it seem more developed, nicer, the surrounding is nice."*

2) Accessibility. Indian wedding celebration generally last a minimum of three to four days. The wedding couples take the ease of access to the venue into their consideration when selecting the venue. There is the convenience of accessing the wedding venue, visa requirement upon arrival, flight connectivity and the location is close to their country of residence. fifteen informants emphasize these points as per quotes below:

> *"Because Phuket has the best connectivity of flight for our guest, because a lot of our guests are flying from Europe."*
> *We thought of all this countries and main factor that helped us decided the country is visa requirement. For Thailand, the visa can be given to Indian passport holders on arrival on the airport you do not need to apply earlier.*

3) Professional service and hotel reputation. The majority of informants emphasize that Indian wedding expertise is clearly more important than any other wedding factor. It is also a major factor when selecting the venue. The couple would like a free-stress, less hassle, event run smoothly to enable their dreams to come true. They do not want to begin explaining what an Indian wedding is like, or what is required to create one. The reputation of the hotel brand and service is also another consideration. Informants also mention that even thought the size of the hotel accommodation is important, that without the reputation, they would not arrange the wedding there. Ten informants comment as quote, below are some samples:

> *"You know when we plan the wedding we were very scared to do a wedding in a resort where they had not do an Indian wedding before, because Indian wedding is very difficult to handle. It is not easy"*
> *"yes the 2nd priority is reputation of the hotel, the name. Even if that hotel has 200 rooms available but I don't recognize the name of the hotel, maybe I would not want to do it there."*

Other important factors include value for money, Thai hospitality: kindliness, friendliness, eagerness to help, service and excellent venue and facilities. Indian wedding couples always look for quality service for the money spent. They claim that it is worth the value for a five – stars service hotel in Phuket. In addition, Thai culture influences Thais to always be thoughtful and to offer great hospitality. Guests and visitors often feel well looked after and are satisfied with their trip to Thailand. Thai's immerse their hearts in providing impressive Thai service to all visitors. Excellent venues and facilities combined with a nice environment for travelling from Phuket airport to the wedding venues, and a variety of locations for each individual celebration of three or four days all complete the experience. In addition there is the maximum capacity of the grand ballroom for sit down dinner and the quantity of spacious guest sleeping rooms.

3. Strengths of Phuket as Indian Wedding Destination

1) Beautiful scenery. There is not only wonderful nature but also relaxing man-made accommodation available in Phuket. The respondents admire the beautiful beaches, exquisite resorts and the cleanliness of the island.

2) Experience in arranging an Indian wedding. For a flawless Indian wedding, nobody risk anything going wrong. Indian weddings are more elaborate and involve many rituals. Western wedding expertise cannot be trusted to arrange the full, complete experience of an Indian wedding. Indian couples would rather put their trust in experienced Indian wedding staff who will achieve and deliver the couples life time dreams, as below quote.

> *"It is good to work with hotel that already has experience. You know because you don't have to go through all ritual."*
> *"... the ability for the hotel to actually handle the group for very large size and especially Indian wedding."*

3) Best value for money. Indian couples have different spending budgets for their wedding events. They have often researched different places with the emphasis being that the price paid for an overseas wedding in Phuket, is worth the money spent if all services and products received meet with their expectations. They are looking for the product and services received being comparative to the price. Below are some comments:

> *"because I did research, I wrote to hotel, I wrote to wedding planner. I got general cost. And I found that Phuket was the best for value for money."*
> *"...because it is the country where everything is available and very good quality."*

4) Phuket has a great number of five star resorts which provide excellent service. Phuket Island is quite famous as a holiday destination; therefore, many branded resorts have been built. Indian couples tend to use the trust factor of the branded name hotels. This relieves all the worries and stresses starting from correspondent, planning, arranging, till delivering the actual wedding.

5) Flight connectivity and visa requirement. Phuket is ideal for Indian guests as the flight connection between both places is excellent and visas are available upon arrival. This type of support will encourage Indian guest, and couples to host their weddings in Phuket.

6) Thai friendliness and hospitality. In the hospitality industry, Thai style service has always been well admired. The Indians people are impressed with uniquely Thai service, our generosity, friendliness and our eagerness to help and look after our guests without asking.

4. Weaknesses of Phuket As an Indian Wedding Destination

1) Limitation of capacity for large events. Even though Phuket has many prestigious five-star resorts, the informants insist that there are not enough resorts with a large enough amounts of guest rooms. The majority of informants pointed out as below quotes:

> *"lack of outdoor spaces that could accommodate number of people comfortably. Like this hotel has no outdoor space that can accommodate that many people..(pause) comfortably."*
> *"Go out to other place which is the beach destination but again go out only has 2 hotels that can accommodate that many number of people."*

2) Limitation of wedding items available in Phuket. If Indian couples need anything last-minute, the Indian wedding organizer/hotel must try to find the items in Bangkok. This process will often take one or two days after the guests confirm. The process timing is not always in time with the couples program:

> *"Second challenge was finding entertainment and décor in Phuket. I feel like everything needed to be coming into Phuket from Bangkok."*
> *"One disadvantage for Phuket is that if I want anything last minute from Bangkok, the truck may take 12 – 14 hours drive to get here."*

3) Flexibility of the venue: time constraint, music volume, private pool access. Indian wedding celebrations generally take place till early morning of the next day. Loud music at an inappropriate time will often affect the people living in the surrounding area. The venue owner has in many cases informed the Indian couple of the time limits. However, in the Indian couple's point of view, they believe that the majority of guests staying within the resort are their guests and that because of this great revenues are generated from their wedding for the venue, therefore Indian couples expect some flexibility in return:

> *I just feel again the level of flexibility, is getting lesser, I mean for the past is more flexible, more outgoing there is no noise restriction, but I guess, as tourism is increasing more, obviously it is natural things are becoming more rigid and more commercial.*
> *… just some more of in term of flexibility, you know we are not allowed to use the main pool for our party which we have love to. We had approximately 80% of the hotel. We want to take the full hotel, but we are not allowed to do so.*

4) Phuket is getting more expensive. Many Indian couples have visited Phuket as tourists; as a result they know the price from the past. They claim that it is getting more expensive these days.

5. Suggestions on How To Maintain Phuket As The Competitive Wedding Destination

1) Being value for money. Indian couples realize the uniqueness of product & service that Phuket has to offer, therefore, they are generally happy to pay whatever price is offered. However, if the prices in Phuket are increasing, the product value must increase accordingly. The nature of Indian purchasing is to shop around for price and product before purchasing. Thus pricing strategy and packaging of the product and service for the client should always be analyzed thoroughly.

2) More experienced Indian wedding specialist staff. Informants suggest hotels/resorts appoint their own Indian wedding specialist

staff so that Indian wedding couples don't have to hire/ source independent Indian wedding planners.

3) More options with resorts that have a greater number of rooms in Phuket. Informants suggest that there should be more resorts with two hundred rooms or more that have large banquet halls. If this was the case the Indian wedding market would be more competitive and the costs more reasonable.

4) Maintenance. Indian weddings are only a somewhat recent thing in Phuket. Only a small amount of potential guests have experience the island's hotels. Older resorts should be renovated and better maintained so to look than the past visit.

5) Adding a little bit of Indian touch. The fact that an Indian wedding is full of ritual and culture, venues should add Indian history to the decorative aspects of the wedding.

6) Suggestions for marketing tool to attract right Indian group. Phuket venues should target those high-profile travelers, send invitation card for a get together party for approximately one hundred guests in a nice hotel and provide a banquet. The guest list would be people who provide overseas weddings; they may well know about the place and have probably been to Phuket a few times.

Discussion

India is today the biggest source market for visitors from South Asia and one of Thailand's fastest growing source markets. In 2013, Indian visitors to Thailand totaled 1,049,856, up 3.61% over 2012; it is one of seven countries generating more than one-million arrivals (TAT Media released 2014). It also becomes a source of income to the country by providing employment to airlines, hotel and local people. Thus from the findings, it will help to identify various attributes of Phuket that attract Indian couples to have their weddings here. It will also help to understand the Indian's internal point of view (push), to realize Phuket strengths and weaknesses as an Indian wedding destination, and lastly the suggestion to maintain

Phuket as a competitive Indian wedding destination in the market place.

Based on the findings, the results show that the top three push factors are novelty, positive past trip experience and limitation of guests (quality guest). In fact, novelty has been identified as a push factor to travel in previous studies (Crompton 1979; Yuan and McDonald 1990, Bagolu and Uysal 1996). The positive past experience and limiting guest number to invite are new forces for overseas wedding destinations. Other push variables are showing wedding couple's social status which has been agreed by Crompton (1979); Yuan and McDonald (1990). And combining vacation opportunities is also been a study by Uysal and Jurowski (1994) and Turnbull and Uysal (1995). The results further highlight that choosing a wedding destination is one of complex buying behaviors as the decisions are affected by many push and pull factors.

For pull factors, some similarities were identified and comparable to previous literature which are for example the beautiful scenery of Phuket, excellent venues and facilities, accessibility, professional service and hotel reputation and Thai hospitality: kindliness, friendliness and eagerness to help and quality of service (Sirakaya and McLellan 1997). When considering promotion by Thailand's tourism organizations, both public and private, these factors are often included in their promotional strategies and further support the importance of these factors in tourist's decision-making.

Despite the numerous strengths of Phuket, relevant organizations should pay more attention to resolving problems and weaknesses of Phuket as an Indian wedding destination. In business terms, if those wedding items are new high profit market, Phuket should consider providing more facilities and being more flexible to meet the needs of this lucrative market. For example, venues should be flexible in terms of time constraint on music volume and exclusive pool access for the wedding guests. Open-communication throughout the planning process is critical to clearly explain what is provided for the group. As value for money is one of the pull factors, therefore negotiating the price and marketing new wedding packaging must be taken into consideration.

Limitations and future research

Evidently, research continues to emerge in response to growing innovations in the field of Indian weddings in Phuket. However, none of these have managed to totally focus on the presence of Indian weddings in Phuket, especially, factors that are influencing couples to select Phuket Island for their precious once in a life time wedding. Investigating the presence of Indian weddings in Phuket can be somewhat difficult because only a few informants are interested in cooperating with research efforts. However, this does not necessarily mean that this study will not be able to gather necessary information to perform its objectives. This study can ensure that quality information is produced so that anyone in the future can use it as a reference for similar research.

Further studies may increase sampling data population, or perhaps by completing a case study in other venues within Thailand such as Hua Hin, Pattaya, Bangkok, or other famous beach destination. Future studies should emphasize the relationship of push and pull factors, and examine level of importance of each motivational force.

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