

DOMESTIC SPIRITUAL TOURISTS' PERCEIVED EXPERIENCES AND REVISIT BEHAVIOR INTENTION: NAGA SACRED SITES, THAILAND CASE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

All global industries have been affected a huge negative impact from the outbreak of COVID-19 since the beginning of 2020 until presently and struggling with the current issues caused a lot of distress and anxiety to humanity. Spiritual tourism is considered as one of a gateway to release suffering. According to Gabor (2016) a journey driven by religion faith or belief was the world first form of tourism which is currently still one of the important form of tourism industry, attracting more than 300 million people to travel each year. Spiritual tourism is now becoming a popular trend which included beliefs, customs and religions, a large number of domestic tourists in Thailand visit spiritual tourism destination and the number is still growing continuously. Spiritual tourism attractions in Thailand are not only related to religions but also exist in combination with oriental philosophy, religious ancestor worship and natural super being. Spiritual tourism is now becoming increasingly

important and contributing to the local economy, enhancing the spiritual lives of people and contributing actively to sustainable development.

This study is focus on spiritual tourism at Naga sacred sites. The critical reason for implementing this research is that firstly, there is still a lack of previous studies in Naga sacred destinations in Mekong Basin, especially for domestic tourists which are the largest portion of tourism recently. Secondly, it is difficult to find the spiritual tourism planning researches that systematically accessed the interrelationships between domestic spiritual motivations, perceive experiences, and post visit behavioral intention among the pandemic. Therefore, this research has attempted to bridge the gap through developing of revisit behavioral intention model by examining the relationships between perceive experiences towards revisit behavioral intention of domestic spiritual tourists. The flow chart showing the methodology was developed for this study as figure 1.

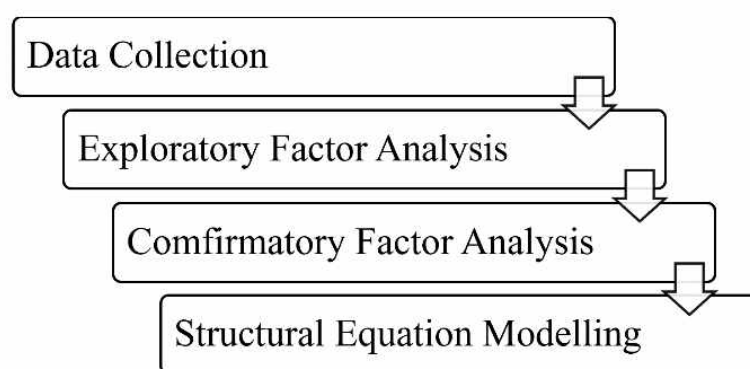


Figure 1: Flow chart showing the methodology

METHOD

Data Collecting Process

This study is mainly focused on examining the importance of tourists' perceived experiences of sacredness as the primary aspects of spiritual tourism. And aimed to explore the effect of perceived experience on revisit intention by applying a quantitative method. This study identified three main components included spiritual healing, education, and esthetic which are considered to define spiritual tourists' perception at Naga famous sacred destinations in north-east of Thailand. Through the online collecting data via 385 survey questionnaire with the criteria selection of purposive technique send through the faith-based community on various social media. The sampling for this study selected only tourists who visited three Naga sacredness sites (Naka Cave, Nakee Cave and Kham Chanod) during the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus in 2020-2023, Thailand.

Research Instrument Development

This study also justified the questionnaire via the technique of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The complex relationship between influencing factors of perceived experiences are employed Amos modelling.

The first questionnaire aimed to examine the important level of perceived experiences variables of domestic tourists for Naga tourism in Thailand. It consists of 18 questions derived from relevant literature reviews on a 5-level scale. The data were analyzed by Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using the SPSS program. After that, creating new variable groups and providing new variable groups name to be consistent with the specific context of the research

The second questionnaire consist of three parts; tourist's demographic, level of perceived experience and behavioral intention. Part 1: General information of respondents with close ended 8 questions including Gender, age, education level, average monthly income, region, travel patterns, number of overnight stays, type of transportation. Part 2: Perceive experiences of Naga tourists in

Thailand with 5 scale questionnaire including Spiritual Healing 9 questions, Education 6 questions and Esthetic 2 questions. Part3: Revisit behavioral intention it consists of 3 questions on a 5-level scale.

FINDINGS

The original questionnaire designing with a five-point Likert scale were conducted by spiritual tourists. The total of 385 respondents were recruited online and it was a valid amount (Hair ,Risher ,Sarstedt & Ringle, 2019). The finding illustrated that 73.26% of the domestic respondents were female tourists and 26.74% were male tourists. On the age profile, the respondent average age was between 40-49 years old. Individual's occupations varied widely, with the most common group being government employees (28.02%) followed by students (21.8%) and business owners (16%). Northeastern region was the majority respondents (67.87%). The data regarding traveling type disclosed that most respondents are traveling by independent trip (84.83%). Almost fifty percent fell into one day trip (43.44%). Lastly, regarding to mode of transportation exhibited the highest percent was private car (80.72%).

The model was tested using AMOS version 23 and SPSS 28 software. By and large, the analysis was undertaken in a three-step approach: this began with an Exploratory Factor analysis (EFA) and then a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Lastly, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied.

After conducting Exploratory factor Analysis, The reliability of the items used in the questionnaire was checked using the Cronbach Alpha test. The results show a Cronbach Alpha value = 0.96, which demonstrates reliability of the questionnaire. The results of Bartlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy both show a significance value = 0.917. This is evidence that the variables are suitable for factor analysis. The exploratory factor analysis resulted in 3 factors with eigenvalues more than 1, which explain 72.6 percent of the variance. For this study, items with loading greater than 0.70 were considered significant (see Table 1).

Table 1: Factor Loading of Items on the Construct

Factors	Items	Factor Loading
Spiritual Healing	Ex18	0.835
	Ex16	0.785
	Ex15	0.785
	Ex12	0.733
	Ex8	0.728
	Ex2	0.723
	Ex17	0.708
	Ex14	0.657
	Ex3	0.635
Education	Ex5	0.802
	Ex7	0.754
	Ex4	0.724
	Ex6	0.657
	Ex9	0.641
	Ex1	0.602
Esthetic	Ex11	0.765
	Ex10	0.765

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was then performed to test and confirm relationships between the variables. The measured items loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted

(AVE) for all reflective constructs are presented in Table 1 and the results of the proposed model are depicted in Figure 2.

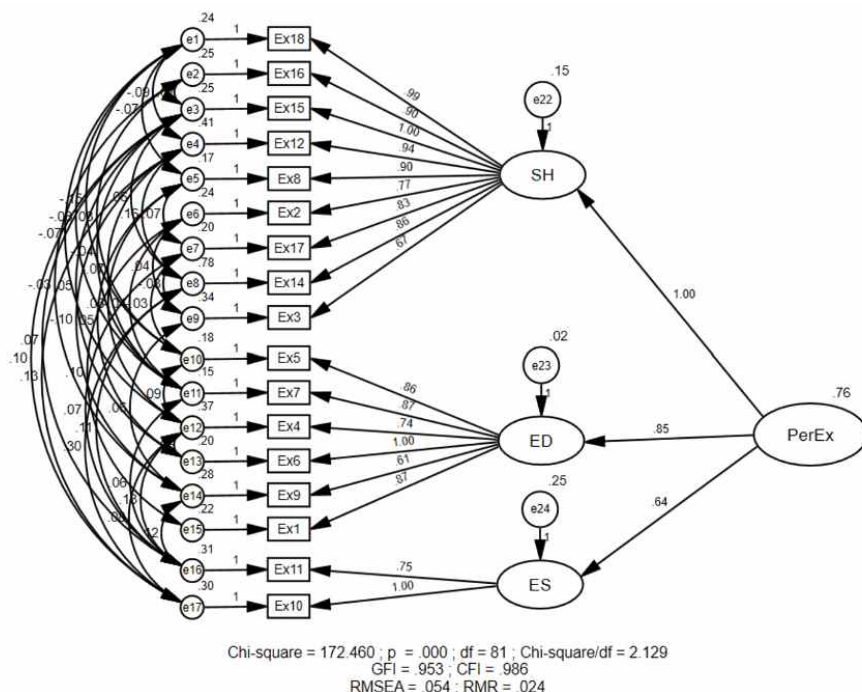


Figure 2. Result of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We considered the recommendations of Hair et al. (2009; 2017) and those of Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen (2008): CFI (comparative fit index) > 0.9; GFI (goodness of fit index) > 0.9; RMSEA (root

df mean square error approximation) < 0.08; Chi2/df (chi-square and degrees of freedom) is acceptable if its value is between 2 and 5; RMR (root Mean Square Residual), The calculated values are within

the suggested cutoff value of 0.08 (Bajpai, 2017). The result of CFA in this research CFI = 0.986; GFI = 0.953; RMSEA (root df mean square error approximation) = 0.054; Chi2/df = 2.129; RMR =

0.024. In conclusion, it was allowed to be intercorrelated freely that the confirmatory measurement models should be appraised and re-specified before structural equation models (SEM) are examined.

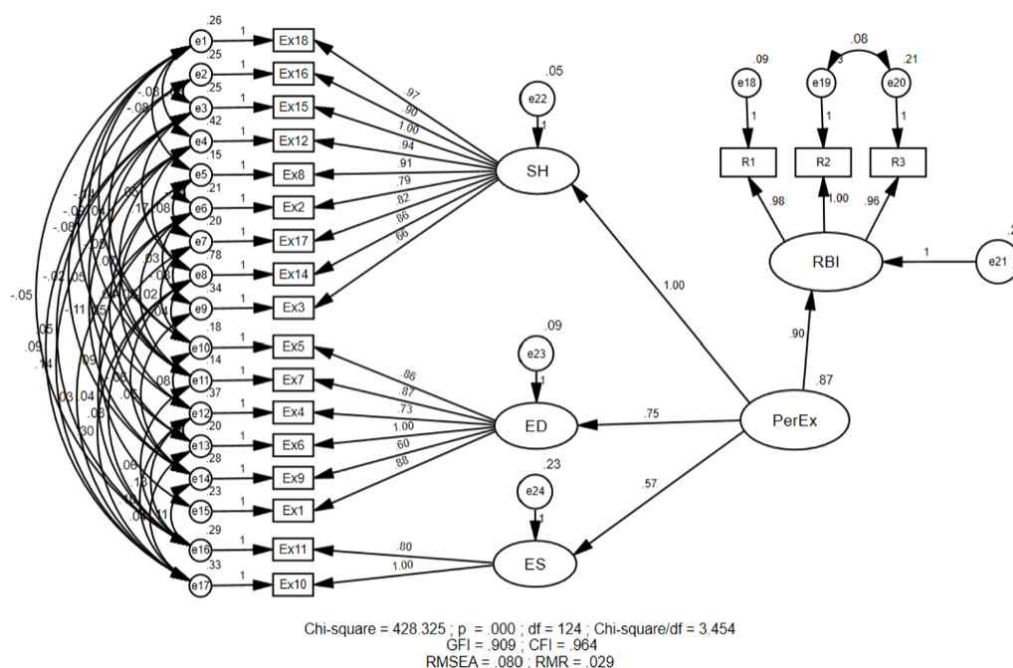


Figure 3. Modified of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

The path coefficients in an SEM model, in general, indicate the strength of direct relationships between tourist's perceived experience and revisit behavior intention. Based on the path loadings, it can be concluded that irrespective of the signs, the results indicate a significant level of association between revisit behavior intention and their underlying factor structure. Also, the present study reports the key model fit measures. All these fit indices are reported in Figure 3.

IMPLICATIONS or CONCLUSION

The current findings provide major implications for both the theoretical and managerial contribution of this study. The theoretical contribution implied more understanding of factors, strategies, and conceptual spiritual tourism offering to students, scholars, and policy planners for both private and public sectors to be the best guidance.

Additionally, the managerial contribution highlighted an intention to revisit in order to boost the business and economic areas. It also increased the potential of being a spiritual tourist destination for those who expect to experience spiritual healing,

education, and esthetic. Moreover, the result of this study indicated spiritual tourists are mostly motivated by the desire to learn new things and create spiritual memories in their lives, besides faith-based wishes and healing well-being.

Future research and provide Tourism stakeholders with practical guidance. This study shows the current status of spiritual tourism at Naga sacred sites in Mekong Basin and provides meaningful implications for tourism stakeholders and researchers who may be grappling with the future direction of spiritual tourism management.

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