

VITALITIES OF SENIOR CUSTOMERS FOR TOURISM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Since the world population is moving toward aging society. The senior tourists are now so vital for any tourist destinations as well as tourism industry of Thailand. The senior tourists are the group that have high income, have time for their vacation, and often traveling in group. However, there are some special requirements for senior tourists such as special medication and health, slow moving and traveling, and special cares and attention. The objectives of this study focused on the level of satisfaction from the special needs for senior citizens from their perspectives and find ways to improve the needs and wants of the senior tourists. This study was conducted with a mixed method of study by using both quantitative and qualitative research method which aimed to obtain the results of both survey questionnaire and an in-depth interview. About 200 international senior tourists from many different nations were randomly chosen and interview at Suvarnabhumi International Airports and about 10 international senior tourists and 10 academics who were specialized in senior tourist. Each group would participate in a small focus group to explain their insight information and valuable comments. Contextual description analysis was utilized to provide the findings for this study. Both primary and secondary information are significant for the analysis. The finding of the study revealed that the senior tourists often had a high expectation and had an overall medium level of satisfaction with the mean of 3.21 and standard deviation of 0.8971. the special needs required by senior citizens included special mode of transportation, emergency assistance in health care, staff with ability in healthcare and language, and special healthy foods. It also found that Thailand is quite ready to offer all of these special needs for senior tourists.

Keyword: Senior Tourists, Special Health Care, Emergency Assistance, Medication

Introduction

Senior customers become one of the most important segments of tourism in Thailand and the rest of the world. The senior tourism is one of the lucrative business for high quality package. More importantly, they are a group of tourism with free times and high incomes in the past and still be able to afford travelling in the near future. The weakness of the senior group is their health problems that may need to use a lot of their income for regular health cares. It is important for this group to have healthy lifestyles, proper security, and have high demand for medical and wellness products. The majority of senior tourists often aim to travel in the foreign tourist destinations more than domestic destinations. They enjoy life seeking knowledge often have high interests in many knowledge, history, art, and cultures. However, this segment requires a special interest and special care. Most of them often travel in group with an agent who can provide the health care that they often needed. Tourism's program for this special group often come in a full package including flights, transfers, hotel, half-board, spas, health care, and insurance. Growth of number of seniors come from the baby boomers coming to retire from all over the world and they are affecting tourism industry and have a big influence on many spins off products and services of tourism. It is estimated that roughly 1.2 billion of senior tourism of people with the age more than 60 years old in the world in year 2025. There are external impacts and internal impacts factors. External impact factors include free time, health, financial security, and responsibility, whereas internal impact factors include wellbeing, socializing, nostalgia, knowledge, and pride.

It is an important fact that the population of many nations or the world population at large is moving toward aging society. This fact has tremendous impacts to social, economic, and politics of the globalization. Certainly, world tourism industry has affected by the coming of aging population. The impacts are near and now. Senior tourists are now so vital for any tourist

destinations as well as tourism industry of Thailand. The senior tourist group is one of the most important tourism groups of the industry due to the fact that this group have high income, sufficient budget, and have free time for their vacation, and often traveling in an organized group. However, there are some special requirements for senior tourists such as special medication and health, slow moving and traveling, and special cares and attention. Therefore, the researcher is interested in studying senior tourists and its behaviors.

Research Methodology

Senior tourism is becoming one of the most important tourist groups that are growing very fast. It is imperative to study and understand this important group in order to reap the benefits of providing them with their special needs and special requirement. The main purposes of this study were to put the focus on many different levels of satisfaction from the special needs and requirement for senior tourists travelling in foreign lands and foreign tourist destinations. Data collected from their perspectives and used it to find important ways to improve the needs and wants of the senior tourists. This research study was conducted via a mixed method of study. By employing both quantitative and qualitative research method to gain the findings and aimed to obtain the results of both survey questionnaire and an in-depth interview for data analysis and make a conclusion of the findings. The survey area was at Suvarnabhumi International Airport Thailand. A total of 200 international senior tourists from many different nations were randomly chosen and interviewed and about 10 international senior tourists and 10 academics who were specialized in senior tourist segment. Each informant group were asked to fully participate in a small focus group to explain about their experiences with senior tourists and their needs, their special requirement, and their insight information and valuable comments. In addition, contextual description analysis was utilized to provide the findings for this study. Both primary and secondary information are significant for the analysis. Test of validity and reliability were performed to ensure that the research tools pass the basic criteria.

Findings

TABLE 1. SPECIAL NEEDS FOR SENIOR TOURISTS

	Mean	S.D.	Rank
Need Factors			
1. Medicare Assistance	3.73	0.759	1
2. Healthy Foods	3.71	0.901	2
3. Organized Group Tour	3.62	0.718	3
4. Transportation Mode	3.42	0.793	4
5. Special Facilities	3.23	0.990	5

From table 1, there were five important special needs which were ranking by using mean and standard deviation. The first important factor was “Medicare Assistance” which was rated with a mean of 3.73 and 0.759 standard deviation. The second important factor was “Healthy Foods” which was rated with a mean of 3.71 and 0.901 standard deviation. The third important factor was “Organized Group Tour” which was rated with a mean of 3.62 and 0.718 standard deviation. The fourth important factor was “Transportation Mode” which was rated with a mean of 3.42 and 0.793 standard deviation. Finally, the fifth important factor was

“Special Facilities” which was rated with a mean of 3.23 and 0.990 standard deviation. The finding of the study revealed that many senior tourists often had a high expectation about the five important special needs which are Medicare assistance, healthy foods, organized group tour, transportation mode, and special facilities. Therefore, it is vital for Thai tourism industry and service providers have prepared these special needs up the international standard.

Conclusion

Due to the fact that senior tourist segment is growing very fast and will become one of the most important tourist segments in the near future. In order to reap the benefits of this special segment, it is important to understand their special needs and special requirement for them to travel comfortably. The special need required by senior citizens included special easy and safe mode of transportation, high standard of emergency assistance in health care, tour agent staff with high ability in healthcare and be able to communicate with the customers’ language, and be able to provide special healthy foods. From the study, it also found that Thailand as the foreign and unique place of tourist destinations is quite ready to offer all of these special needs for senior tourists.

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