ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the problems, moral and ethical performance of Thai tourist guides from the viewpoint of international tourists visiting Phuket. The objectives are firstly to assess the performance of Thai tourist guides based on the professional code of ethics, second, to gather and analyze the problems regarding professional ethics, and morality which international tourists have encountered while on their travel in Phuket. Lastly, to propose and suggest recommendations for promoting ethics and moral ethics of Thai tourist guides.

The study focused mainly on international tourists who have used Thai tourist guides services in Phuket. 400 questionnaires were distributed to international tourists in Phuket from America, Europe, Asia, Oceania, the Middle East and Africa. The questionnaires were collected during October to December 2011. The sampling for this study was a purposive sampling as a technique to collect the data. SPSS for windows was the statistical analysis package used to analyze the data. The statistic used were frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and one-way ANOVA.

The study of the performance of Thai tourist guides in term of meeting professional ethics found that the 3 top professional ethics performance of Thai tourist guide were performed his/her duties well , followed by dressed well, and clearly informed of all the tour details. Also found the performances of Thai tourist guide services were associated with helpfulness, friendliness, politeness, responsibleness, honesty, reliability, fairness, and punctuality. Moreover, the study also found that there were some differences between age groups, income, and region of residence which showed significantly different results on performance. Major problems of Thai tourist guide services that the tourists confronted were being taken to shops that were very expensive, being forced to jewelry shops and deceived, that it is part of the tour program, also language barriers that make it difficult for tourists to understand and communicate.

Based on the results of the survey, recommendations can be drawn for Thai tourist guides, the ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Professional Tourist Guide Association of Thailand, education institutions, and tourists. Thai tourist guides should be more concerned about the natural
environment and communicate in a foreign language fluently. Therefore, the ways to develop Thai tourist
guides are training courses that are organized by professional organizations or the Tourism Authority of
Thailand (TAT). The TAT should play more attention regarding the regulation and penalties to control
Thai tourist guides, should be carefully selected regarding their qualifications.

Keywords: Thai tourist guides; International tourist; Ethics

Introduction

The tourism industry of Thailand has changed dramatically and is now a major industry in world
tourism. Over the past decade, international tourist arrivals in Thailand have grown, especially in the past
10 years, from 8.58 million in 1999 to 14.09 million arrivals in 2009 as stated by the Tourist Authority of
Thailand or TAT (2010). Thailand has been gaining an increasing market share of international tourists.
During this period, the tourism industry has been one of the great significant sectors to the economic
growth and each year it’s confirmed that each tourist spent it about 3,000.00 baht per day (TAT 2010).
There are several factors, which are responsible for tourism growth and development in Thailand in
relation to other destinations. These are the friendliness, welcoming, and peace loving nature of the Thai
people. An important part of Thai's tourism industry success is because of the physical geographic
diversity of Thailand (TAT 2010).

Phuket being a part of Thailand, is another world class destination. This place is serenely
beautiful and is well known for the beaches and the blue seas and also one of the top ten diving
destinations in the world. There are many activities available around Phuket such as, scuba diving,
snorkeling, kayaking, parasailing, fishing, surfing beach, jet skis and an ideal place for honeymooners.
Generally Speaking, international tourists are focusing not only on the product, but also on the people who
work in the hospitality and the tourism industry and who can give the right information.

International tourists generate revenue, prosperity to local and more importantly by creating
multi-professional occupations, such as interpreting, translating, waitressing, airline officers, including
tourist guides who are close with international tourists all through the time they are stay in Thailand (TAT
2010). Therefore, tour guiding is a career which creates a lot of benefits for the country. Records show
that 22,732 tourist guides applied for tourist guide licenses from Tourist Guide and Tourism Business
Registration Office on December 31, 2010.
The Tourism Authority of Thailand in the conference of 1/1995 mentioned the tourist guides’ behaviors that may ruin the reputation of their occupation being mainly:

1. Forcing tourists to purchase optional tour by deceiving or intimidating the tourists to accept that tour beside the original deal with the tour company.
2. Taking tourist to poor quality shops so that they receive tip or commission from the shop owner.
3. Requesting some tips or special payments by convincing the tourists to be sympathetic with the management that the tourist guides have no benefits.
4. Taking the tourists’ passports or air tickets until the tourists pay some additional costs.

At the conference of 1/1995 there are some other behaviors that resulted in bad reputation and the loss of the honor of the code of ethics as mentioned in the second Ministerial Regulations (1996) of the Act of the Tourist Business and Guide 1993.

1. Explaining or informing some unreal or incorrect information that causes harm to the nation, religion, and the monarchy.
2. Not performing his own duties as a tourist guide who should be concerned with the benefit of tourists as the first priority.
3. Being dishonest, seeking some improper benefit or forcing tourists to do something they are unwilling to do.
4. Disobeying the moral standard.
5. Not believing in the local tradition and regulation of each travelling place.

The researcher also believes that, from the above problems as outlined the study can conclude that the case of Thai tourist Guides unsuitable behavior is due to the lack or loss of standards and the fact that they forget what the importance of their duties are. Especially the lack or loss of ethical conduct within the tourist guides.

**Literature review**

The important fulfillment of the professional tourist guide is the launching of the code of ethics for the tourist guide profession that can used as the basis to conduct all of tourist guides’ behaviors. There are many countries using code of ethics in order to control the qualities of the tourist guides. In what it mostly depends on government’s tourism policy’s development and adaptation of each country.

Codes of ethics function as messages through which corporations hope to shape tourist guide behavior and effect change through explicit statements of desired behavior (Stevens, 1994). They
represent the culture of an organization and act as a vehicle to communicate the ethical nature of this culture internally to tourist guides and externally to tourists. As a component of an organization’s communication and socialization, the existence and enforcement of codes of ethics has the potential to curb unethical conduct, to enhance the moral awareness of tourist guides, and retain the faith of the tourist (Weaver, 1995). It has been suggested that a code of ethics should serve the following functions: (1) to establish the moral values recognized by the tourist guide; (2) to communicate the tourist guide’s expectation to tourists; (3) to demonstrate to the tourists that the tourist guide in fact operates within specific ethic parameters (Montoya, 1994). In addition, codes are meant to translate the more formal philosophical theories of ethics into a set of guidelines that can be applied to the day to day decision making (Dean, 1992). These codes generally mandate behavior above that of the law, encouraging higher ideals of normative convention. They may also provide guidelines for routine operations and establish the necessary standards for monitoring performance.

Codes of ethics are designed to inform individuals of acceptable or unacceptable behavior in particular context. They are based, implicitly or explicitly, intentionally or unintentionally, upon particular ethical orientations. Analyze the content of ethical codes are based either on consequentialism or on deontology (Getz, 1990). Previously, often described as teleological centers on the consequences of an act as the basis for determining its moral appropriateness. Possibly the best known of these approaches is utilitarianism, which directs us to seek the greatest good for the greatest number or to maximize the overall good (DesJardins and McCall, 2000). The latter class of access is not concerned with outcomes. Adhere to deontologists, an action is right only if it done out of duty, and not because of what might be gained from engaging in that action. Much of recent work involving deontology has been influenced by Immanuel Kant, whose categorical imperative insists we act only in ways that we can imagine everyone else acting (Bowie, 1999).

There are the international and the local level organizations concerned with professional tourist guide. The important fulfillment of the professional tourist guide is the launching of the code of ethics for the tourist guide profession that could be used as the basis to conduct all of tourist guides’ behaviors. There are many countries that create a code of ethics in order to control the qualities of the tourist guides. Moreover, the tourist guide who is the one in the tourism business enhancing the reputation of the country. This study analyzed differences codes of ethics from World federation, European federation, America, Australia, South Africa, and including Thailand to come up with “general code” that the study will used to analyze the ethical code of Thai tourist guides from international tourists points of view. Major concept of code of ethics center’s around the common or similarities, and specific. In what it mostly depends on
government’s tourism policy’s development and adaptation of each country. Therefore, the study will be designed will be used uniquely, mainly around those cover concepts with the acceptance of those “specific” to Thailand, and not found during the analysis.

Therefore, the researcher came up with a standard or general code that tourist from all walks of life relate too. This code will be used to assess the level quality and behavior of Thai tourist guides from the tourist perspective. From the basic concept, the researcher has created the conceptual framework in this study as show in Figure 1.
Figure 1 Ethical code process

- Provide quality services.
- Adhere to the tour itinerary.
- Available at all times
- Update the tourist guides skills.
- Understanding the place visited.
- Protect the reputation of tourism in the country.
- Tourist guides have good representatives to tourists.
- Promote a good image of their country.
- Perform their duties well.
- Follows the rules and regulation at all times.
- Improve professional respect to tourist guide.
- Good working relationship with all service providers.
- Good cooperation with follow guides.
- Good presentation skills.
- Good attitude.
- Follows the policies of the company.
- Dresses appropriately.
- Politeness
- Punctual
- Friendly
- Fairness
- Helpfulness
- Present the true facts which clearly and distinctly differentiate between truth and fiction.
- Free from prejudice.
- Maintain the natural, cultural, and environmental aspects.
- Honestly
- Reliability

- Sincerely adore the nation, religion, and monarchy. (Thailand)
- Believe in democracy. (Thailand)
- Have own religion and do not disdain other religion. (Thailand)
- Maintain a good level behavior. (Thailand)
- Faithful and do not seek improper income. (Thailand)
- Enthusiastic and courteous. (USA)
- Also will be prepared for any unforeseen circumstance. (USA)
- Protects the confidentiality of proprietary information. (USA)
- Accepts each tour as a serious commitment. (USA)
- Do not share their own personal views on controversial subjects such as religion, politics, and lifestyles. (USA)
- Do not force tourist to purchases. (Australia)
- Abide by all national, state or territory legislation governing the operation. (Australia)
- Uphold the principles of the constitution. (South Africa)
- Deal with the conflict in a sensitive manner. (South Africa)
- Do not discriminate in rendering service to any tourist, e.g. color, gender, nationality, age, etc. (South Africa)
- Not provide the tourists with misleading information. (South Africa)
- Do not request gratuities or tips. (South Africa)
- Clearly inform the tourists of all the tour details. (South Africa)
Therefore, can conclude that the tourist guide’s ethical code is based on the inner individuality of each tourist guide who should have responsibility, honesty, and good attitude towards his or her own duties and occupation. Moreover, the tourist guide should have hospitality and keep in mind about the tourism business of ethics including the reputation of our country. However, none of these has examined in the context of tourist guide. The current study attempts to explore problems, moral, and ethical that the tourists have encountered with and assess performance of Thai tourist guides from the views of international tourists.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to explore the problems, moral and ethical performance of Thai tourist guides from the viewpoint of international tourists visiting Phuket. The objectives are firstly to assess the performance of Thai tourist guides based on the professional code of ethics, second, to identify and analyze the problems regarding professional ethics, and morality which international tourists have encountered while on their travel in Phuket. Lastly, to propose and suggest recommendations for promoting ethics and moral ethics of Thai tourist guides. The study focused mainly on visitors who have used Thai tourist guides in Phuket. The sampling for this study was a purposive sampling as a technique to collect the data.

The 400 questionnaires were distributed in 3 main areas of Phuket based on the density of international tourists. These were hotel and resorts at Patong Beach, Phuket International Airport, and Port of Phuket. This enabled the researcher to observe and monitor tourists who are able to complete the questionnaires unhindered and not in a rush. The questionnaires were collected from international tourists who used Thai tourist guides services in Phuket from 6 regions that the study wants to concentrate on: America, Europe, Asia, Oceania, Middle East and Africa. Purposive sampling was chosen to collect data from international tourists in Phuket in October to December 2011.

Findings and discussions

The results from questionnaires were divided into five main parts. These include the personal information of respondents, travelling experience in Phuket, opinion on Thai tourist guides ethics, Thai tourist guides behavior and recommendations. Demographic profile of international tourists who have used Thai tourist guides in Phuket. Most of the respondents were female accounting for 53.50 percent and 46.30 percent of the respondents were male. The majority of the respondents were 74.80 percent in the age group of 15 – 39 years old, and 25.30 percent in the age group of over 60 years old. Most of the respondents had an education level in the bachelor degree (55.30 percent). Other groups were those with
the education level of up to diploma level (39.80 percent), and master’s degree and above level (4.80 percent). The major occupation of respondents was employees (62.30 percent). The last two occupations were retired, and unemployed, accounting for 1.30 percent and 0.30 percent respectively. Most of the respondents had income per month of less than 3,000 USD (39.00 percent), followed by 3,001 – 4,500 USD (32.00 percent), and more than 4,501 USD (28.00 percent). The majority of respondents came from Australia & New Zealand, with 115 (28.80 percent) samples. The next two regions were Europe and Asia with 104 (26.00 percent) persons and 69 (17.30 percent) persons, respectively. Other two regions included 65 (16.30 percent) from America & Africa and only 46 (11.50 percent) from Middle East. Those samples were not originally representative samples in term of the proportion of visitors grouped by region of residence. This might have been because the expected samples came from all-year statistics but the data was collected in October to December 2011.

Most of the respondents were 306 (76.50 percent) first time visitors to Phuket while 94 (23.50 percent) had travelling experienced to Phuket before. Of those that had been to Phuket before, 37 (9.30 percent) visitors had traveled to Phuket twice times. 29 (7.30 percent) persons and 28 (7.10 percent) persons had traveled in Phuket for 3 and more than 3 times. This statistic, can said that fewer visitors had travelling experienced to Phuket before.

Most of Thai tourist guides, 215 (53.80 percent) were males and 184 (46.00 percent) were females. Regarding visitors’ regions, of origin most of them were Australian & New Zealanders, European, and Asian. Therefore, 339 (84.80 percent) respondents from all 400 samples used English as the main language in communicating with Thai tourist guides.

Respondents who used other language were German (5.30 percent), Russian (2.80 percent), French & Japanese (2.00 percent), Chinese (1.50 percent), Korean (1.00 percent), and Spanish (0.30 percent). Besides these languages, some of respondents used other languages, which were not specified in the questionnaires. The two respondents who used other languages were Italian and Swedish.

The results indicated that over 50 percent of respondents who had used Thai tourist guide services in Phuket, the main activity was sea – boat trip. 176 (44.00 percent) of the respondents were city tour, followed by show or entertainment (32.30 percent), forest trekking (30.30 percent), shopping (20.80 percent), art & culture tour (17.30 percent), and health and spa (6.30 percent). 23 respondents used Thai tourist guide services in Phuket for other activities: airport transfers, white water rafting, elephant trekking, and learn about Thai culture. Most of Thai tourist guides take the tourists to reliable shops (73.00 percent) which cheat or set the higher price than the quality and Thai tourist guides will get some commission. 66 (16.50 percent) respondents Thai tourist guides had request tips from tourists, 42 (10.50
percent) respondents force tourists to make purchase that they did not want, 26 (6.50 percent) respondents force to purchase optional tour by deceiving tourists, and 10 (2.50 percent) respondents some Thai tourist guide hold passport or air tickets until tourists pay additional cost and seek improper income from them.

The common problem of Thai tourist guides that the respondents had confronts most were taken to the shop that the price it was very expensive (33.82 percent), forcing to the jewelry shop and told us this is the compulsory program (21.09 percent), language barriers (15.27 percent), speak very fast and hard to understand (14.18 percent), not give more detail as another Thai tourist guides did (7.64 percent), punctual (5.82 percent), and not hidden costs we like to pay for a good service (2.18 percent).

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to access the performance of Thai tourist guides. Results were from international tourists to Phuket. The results showed that the mean scores for performance were high mean, at 4.07 and 4.05, respectively. Most of tourists referred to Thai tourist guide ethics for overall, performed their duties well and dressed well. For the performance of Thai tourist guide services most of the behaviors were related as moderately important. Especially, helpfulness was rated very highly (mean = 4.40), followed by friendliness (Mean = 4.38), politeness (Mean = 4.28). For the assessment, it could identify that Thai tourist guides their performed very well. These included helpfulness, friendliness, and politeness, while the common problems of Thai tourist guides needed improvement were taken to the shop that the price it was very expensive, being forced to go to jewelry shops and deceived that it is the compulsory program. Lastly problem were language barriers that was the tourists unable to understand and difficult to communicate with the Thai tourist guides.
References


