

Factors Influencing University Students' Travel Destination Selection Decision

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The Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities 2025
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This research examines the factors influencing university students' decision-making in selecting travel destinations and how these factors affect travel behavior. This quantitative study employs survey research, with data collected from 406 university students using questionnaires. The data were analyzed using multiple regression statistics to identify key influential factors. The study found that the majority of respondents rated their opinions on travel decision-making factors at the highest average level (4.36). The top three factors agreed upon by the respondents were safety (4.48), price (4.47), and environment (4.45), respectively. Hypothesis testing revealed that culture and history, travel convenience, sustainability, worthiness, price, experience creation, and self-development travel are significant travel decision-making factors that statistically influence travel behaviour at the .05 level.

Keywords: tourism communication, tourism decision, tourism behavior

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Introduction

The significance of tourism today extends far beyond leisure and recreation; it has profound impacts on both economic and social spheres. By providing opportunities for individuals to experience diverse cultures and environments, tourism has become a vital driver of national development. In the modern era—where technology and long-distance transportation have advanced substantially—travel has become increasingly convenient and accessible. Furthermore, tourism fosters social interaction, mutual understanding, and stronger societal connections, making it a key instrument in cultivating cohesive and resilient communities.

Tourism also serves as a platform for personal growth and the acquisition of various skills, including foreign language proficiency and knowledge of history and cultural heritage across different destinations.

University student travel, in particular, has emerged as an increasingly popular form of tourism. This group often seeks meaningful travel experiences that contribute to self-development. This study focuses specifically on Thai university students who travel within Thailand.

Travel among university students typically combines learning with enjoyment. The primary objective is to develop life skills while also gaining knowledge about the culture, history, and key attractions of the places they visit. Moreover, such travel provides opportunities to strengthen social and teamwork skills, including communication, problem-solving, and collaboration.

These students often travel in groups—usually with friends or classmates—by car, bus, or train. Group travel enhances the sense of enjoyment, safety, and group cohesion. Their preferred accommodations are typically budget-friendly, such as shared rooms or low-cost hotels, allowing them to minimize expenses while practicing life skills such as bed-making, cleaning, and money management during the trip.

The students also prioritize fun and educational activities. They tend to select destinations that are both interesting and compatible with their group's budget, such as national parks (e.g., Khao Luang) or culturally significant sites. In terms of dining, they commonly choose affordable restaurants or popular local food to further reduce costs and increase the enjoyment of the overall travel experience.

This diversity and distinctiveness in travel behaviour among university students highlights the need to better understand their decision-making processes. Therefore, examining the factors influencing university students' travel decisions can provide valuable insights for tourism-related businesses. This understanding can help in developing and adapting offerings to effectively meet the needs and expectations of this demographic.

Research Objective

1. To study the factors influencing travel destination choices among university students.
2. To analyse the travel decision-making factors that affect travel behaviour.

Literature Review

Concept of Travel Decision-Making Factors

Travel decision-making factors are crucial for both tourists and tourism businesses to understand and meet the needs of service users. Recognizing these factors can lead to improvements and enhancements in tourism services to better align with traveler preferences. Key factors influencing travel decisions include:

- Price (Sirakaya et al., 2003): Offering appropriate pricing for services and attractive amenities plays a significant role in attracting tourists and influencing their decisions.
- Information and Communication (Gretzel et al., 2000): Comprehensive and clear information about tourist destinations, along with effective communication with tourists, are vital in the decision-making process.
- Culture and History (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999): Cultural and historical appeal significantly affects tourists' interest and decisions to visit particular destinations. Learning and experiencing local culture is a key attraction for many travelers.
- Safety (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005): The perceived safety of a destination is an important factor in tourist decision-making, as it enhances confidence and comfort in travel.
- Environment (Dolnicar et al., 2008): The natural and built environments' aesthetic and living conditions influence a destination's appeal to tourists.
- Travel Convenience (Lehto et al., 2004): Ease of travel—such as access to travel information, flight connections, and public transportation—affects tourists' decision-making.

As younger generations have different interests and expectations from their predecessors, understanding the travel decision-making factors relevant to this group is essential for tourism businesses seeking to adapt and effectively engage this target demographic. The following are key decision-making factors for the younger generation:

- Technology and social media (Xiang et al., 2015): Young travelers often use digital technology and social platforms to gather information, connect with others, and share their travel experiences. Effective use of these technologies is therefore critical in influencing their decisions.
- Experience Creation (Kim et al., 2012): Younger travelers seek unique, diverse, and personally meaningful experiences. The ability to offer and communicate compelling experiences is a key determinant in their travel choices.
- Sustainability (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009): The younger generation is increasingly interested in sustainable tourism practices—environmentally, culturally, and socially. Destinations that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability are more likely to attract these travelers.
- Educational and Self-Development Travel (Richards, 2011): Many young people look for travel experiences that enhance knowledge, skills, and personal growth. Therefore, offering activities related to education and self-improvement is particularly relevant.
- Value for Money (Huang & Petrick, 2010): Young travelers often seek optimal value in terms of cost, service quality, and overall experience. Their pursuit of value plays a significant role in their travel decisions.

Concept of Tourism for Adolescents

Tourism designed for adolescents typically involves activities tailored to their interests and needs. Developing tourism concepts for this age group should take into account several key factors:

- **Social Media Communication:** Tourism activities should be designed to be easily shareable on social media, fostering enjoyment and creating memorable experiences.
- **Learning and Self-Development:** Activities should aim to enhance adolescents' knowledge, skills, and provide new personal development experiences.
- **Socialization and Participation:** Activities should encourage social bonding within youth groups, promote teamwork, and facilitate interaction with local communities.
- **Adventure and Challenge:** Tourism for adolescents should include adventurous and challenging activities that build courage, resilience, and problem-solving abilities.
- **Sustainability:** Activities should align with environmental, cultural, and social sustainability to promote responsible behavior among adolescents.
- **Budget-Conscious Options:** Tourism offerings should be affordable and provide good value, allowing adolescents to enjoy quality experiences without excessive financial burden.
- **Engaging Presentation:** Tourism activities should be presented in an appealing manner, such as through multimedia storytelling and illustrative examples of each destination.
- **Adaptability to Adolescent Interests:** Tourism experiences should be flexible, allowing for customization based on adolescents' preferences in terms of duration, format, and content.
- **Long-Term Engagement:** Tourism for adolescents should aim to build lasting relationships with this group by regularly collecting their feedback, recommendations, and experiences to continually improve the tourism offerings.

In conclusion, designing tourism concepts for adolescents should focus on meeting their interests and needs through engaging, educational, social, and sustainable activities. Effective use of social media, budget-friendly options, compelling presentation, adaptability, and long-term connection strategies are essential. Integrating these elements can make tourism more appealing and relevant to adolescent travelers.

Concept of Tourist Behavior

Tourist behavior refers to the actions and expressions of individuals who use tourism services, particularly in relation to purchasing decisions and the decision-making processes that influence the acquisition of tourism-related services (Jittangwattana & Wongpantananon, 2014).

Additionally, March, Roger St George, and Woodside (2005, as cited in Khumnonchai and Chansuree, 2022) identified five key components that constitute tourist behavior:

1. Tourists' spending on travel
2. Duration of each trip
3. Travel destinations or attractions
4. Types of accommodations used
5. Tourism activities participated in

These components provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing and understanding tourist behavior.

Research Methodology

This study investigates the travel decision-making factors influencing university students' choice of travel destinations in the Bangkok metropolitan area. It is a quantitative study that collects data from university students in Bangkok who have prior travel experience. A survey method was employed, using a questionnaire based on a rating scale.

The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967), which is applicable when the population size is known. According to Thai PBS (Santhat Phothisa, 2023), the Generation Z population in Thailand—those of university age—exceeds 7,670,354 individuals. With a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, the resulting sample size for this study was 400 participants. The sampling technique used was convenience sampling.

The data collected were processed and analyzed using statistical software to fulfill the research objectives. The following statistical methods were applied:

1. **Descriptive Statistics:** This includes frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to analyze the characteristics of both independent and dependent variables.
2. **Inferential Statistics:** This was used to test the research hypothesis and identify which independent variables significantly influenced the dependent variable, using Multiple Linear Regression Analysis.

Result

The research findings revealed that the majority of the respondents were female (70.1%). In terms of travel frequency, 33.4% reported traveling 2–3 times per month, 27.4% traveled less than once a month, and 19.7% traveled weekly. Regarding travel experience across various areas, the highest percentage had traveled in the metropolitan outskirts (79.1%), followed by travel within Bangkok (71.1%), and travel to different regions across Thailand (65.3%), respectively.

Figure 1*This Is an Analysis Table of Multiple Linear Regression of Travel Decision Making Factors*

ตัวแปร	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.522	.116		4.506	.000
Price	.082	.029	.102**	2.809	.005
Information and Communication	.014	.030	.017	.472	.637
Cultural and historical factors	.106	.021	.184***	5.147	.000
Safety	-.003	.029	-.003	-.091	.928
Environment	.060	.037	.062	1.617	.107
Travel convenience	.111	.026	.144***	4.220	.000
Technology and social media	.042	.033	.049	1.296	.196
Experience creation	.093	.028	.115**	3.252	.001
Sustainability	.144	.027	.201***	5.347	.000
Self-development travel	.083	.027	.111**	3.065	.002
Value for money	.150	.030	.183***	5.012	.000

 $R = .878, R^2 = .771***$

From Figure 1, the hypothesis testing, conducted using multiple regression analysis, confirmed the acceptance of H1—indicating that travel decision-making factors significantly influence the travel behavior of university students at the statistical significance level of .001. Specifically, the following factors were found to have a statistically significant impact which included Cultural and historical factors ($B = 0.148, p < .000$), Travel convenience ($B = 0.144, p < .000$), Sustainability ($B = 0.201, p < .000$) and Value for money ($B = 0.138, p < .000$).

Additionally, at the .01 significance level, the following factors were also significant included Price ($B = 0.102, p < .005$), Experience creation ($B = 0.115, p < .001$) and Self-development travel ($B = 0.111, p < .002$). These independent variables collectively explained 77.1% of the variance in travel behavior ($R^2 = .771$).

Conclusion

This research represents a significant exploration of the complex relationship between travel decision-making factors and travel behavior among university students. The findings revealed seven key factors that significantly influence the travel behavior of Generation Z included Cultural and historical factors, Travel convenience, Sustainability, Value for money, Price, Experience creation and Self-development through travel.

These decision-making factors collectively account for 77.1% of the variance in travel behavior, indicating their substantial influence. The results highlight that younger generations, particularly university students, place importance on travel as a means of personal development—seeking experiences that align with their stage in life, while also considering affordability and value. Environmental awareness also plays a critical role, reflecting the growing trend toward eco-conscious and sustainable travel.

These findings are consistent with previous studies, such as Dolnicar et al. (2008), who found that the aesthetic and environmental quality—both natural and manmade—significantly impacts tourist interest. Similarly, Kim et al. (2012) observed that younger travelers often seek diverse, non-repetitive experiences that allow them to express their identity, making engaging and personalized experiences a central factor in their travel decisions.

For university students—a group in a formative life stage—travel serves as a vehicle for self-discovery, the exploration of interests, and identity development.

Beyond deepening the understanding of factors affecting university students' travel behavior, the research offers practical implications for marketers and tourism communication professionals. The results can inform targeted communication strategies and help design more effective messaging aimed at this specific segment.

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