

EXPECTATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS TOWARDS SATUN UNESCO GLOBAL GEOPARK

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Abstract: An expectation is generally referred to as a prediction in the mind of the tourists about the expected outcomes of a product or service. The expectations of tourists reflect their experiences. This study aims to test the expectations of the tourists towards a particular destination. A quantitative research design was applied. The sample consisted of 300 international tourists who wished to travel to Satun UNESCO Global Geopark. Questionnaires were used to collect data. The statistics data was analysed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results showed that the international tourists at the Satun UNESCO Global Geopark had high expectations. The study found that tourists expectations were the highest with regards to the attractions, followed by the services provided, and the facilities available. Therefore, these findings can make clear what tourists expect from geoparks and can be used to improve and develop tourism services in various fields, which will enhance tourism services about service providers to go beyond the expectations of tourists and help them to make a good the impression and provide high levels of satisfaction. Moreover, the expectations of the tourists can be used to improve the development, administration, and sustainability of the Satun geopark from a geotourism perspective as well as that if the local community.

Keywords: Expectations, tourist attraction, services, Satun UNESCO Global Geopark, international tourists.

Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a significant source of income for many countries. Between 2015 and 2019, the growth and value of the tourism industry consistently outpaced the overall growth of the global economy (UNWTO, 2020). Economies in Asian countries, especially Thailand are increasingly reliant on tourism. The industry stands as one of Thailand's most crucial economic engines, directly and indirectly contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Fakfare *et al.*, 2022). It accounts for a substantial portion of foreign currency inflows, bolstering the economy's export earnings. Thailand's tourism sector has witnessed continuous and rapid growth over the past two decades, evolving into a pivotal industry until 2019, just before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2021).

As observed in Table 1, despite a few minor glitches, Thailand's tourism industry has grown steadily over the past 10 years. The latest report from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) states that the contribution of the tourism industry to the Thai land economy was US\$106.5 billion, in 2019 (WTTC, 2021). These statistics highlight the significance of tourism to the Thai land economy. International tourist arrivals in Thailand were mainly from China, Malaysia, Japan, Russia, and South Korea. However, the flow of tourists unexpectedly stopped growing in March 2020. Only 6,702,396 tourists visited in 2020, with the majority of them arriving in the first three months. From March 2020 to the end of August 2020, no tourists were allowed entry. Subsequently, a total of 10,822 tourists arrived in the last three months of 2020 under extremely strict conditions (TAT,

Table 1: International tourist arrivals with yearly growth in Thailand over the last 10 years

Year	International Tourists	Growth (Yearly)
2019	39,916,251	4.28%
2018	38,277,300	7.54%
2017	35,381,210	8.77%
2016	32,529,588	8.86%
2015	29,881,091	20.44%
2014	24,809,683	-6.54%
2013	26,546,725	+18.76%
2012	22,353,903	+16.24%
2011	19,230,470	+20.67%
2010	15,936,400	+12.63%

Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand (2021)

2021). Thailand is anticipating that more than 10 million tourists will visit by the end of the year in 2022.

Thailand is one of the countries with diverse and attractive tourism resources. It possesses tourism resources that encompass the natural environment as well as man-made attractions (Aung *et al.*, 2015). Thailand boasts numerous scenic natural locations, including white sandy beaches, palm-lined shores, tropical forests, and mist-covered mountains. One of the emerging tourist destinations in Southern Thailand is the geopark, an area comprised of geological resources within a conservation zone, encompassing three key elements: Geological diversity, biodiversity, and cultural diversity (Andrea & Santoso, 2020). According to UNESCO, Satun Geopark earned the distinction of being Thailand's inaugural global geopark on April 17, 2018, due to its abundance and array of fossil species, as well as the earliest succession of fossils (Nikolova & Sinnyovsky, 2019). Nevertheless, Satun Geopark represents a novel perspective on tourism in Thailand and there are various aspects that require development to attract more visitors. Consequently, studying the expectations within the context of Satun UNESCO Global Geopark in Thailand holds significant importance. This research aims to delve into the expectations of international

tourists visiting the geopark, encompassing their experiential needs, in order to establish effective tourism management strategies and preparations across diverse domains for both international and domestic tourists intending to visit the geopark in the future.

Literature Review

Expectation

Expectations have long been recognised as crucial to understanding human behaviour, particularly in economic contexts. A consumer's expectation is typically defined as a prediction of an anticipated outcome or behaviour resulting from interactions with products or services at the destination in the future. In marketing literature, expectation is often seen as a benchmark used by consumers to gauge satisfaction and form perceptions of the quality of the products and services being provided (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Wang *et al.*, 2016). Expectations about tourist attractions are shaped by tourists' sentiments, involving predictions and anticipations regarding attributes such as the image, ambiance, aesthetics, facilities, and services associated with a particular destination. Expectations can significantly influence a tourist's decision-making process and shape their overall experience (Bosque *et al.*, 2009). Visitor

expectations play a pivotal role in the vacation experience. They emerge as soon as a tourist contemplates embarking on a vacation, drawing from images and details stored in their memory. Ginting *et al.* (2017) note that expectations stem from past experiences etched in our memories, as well as information from external sources like travel literature, novels, movies, and television programmes. Additionally, word-of-mouth recommendations from family, friends, and colleagues, as well as preconceived notions and background imagery, can all shape and influence the tourists' expectations. Expectations serve as a reflection of a person's present and future needs.

A review of several tourism studies (Kim *et al.*, 2003; Wang *et al.*, 2016; Ginting *et al.*, 2017) indicates that the primary focus of earlier research had been on understanding how expectations were used to evaluate the performance of real products and services, as well as the impact of expectations on satisfaction and perceptions of quality. However, only a few research papers delved into the process of how tourists actually formed these expectations. To identify image dimensions, an exploratory component analysis proves helpful. This study explicitly identifies three image factors: Tourist attractions, facilities, and services.

Tourist Attraction and Facilities

The tourist attractions and facilities can contribute to tourist satisfaction, which can attract more tourists to the destination. The development of a destination for tourists is greatly affected by institutional factors, tourist attractions, and infrastructure. Therefore, the place should offer appealing attractions and appropriate facilities to meet tourist demands. Providing suitable facilities and appealing tourism products might help travellers feel at ease and fulfil their expectations. This will provide satisfaction as expectations are realised. Providing facilities for tourists will increase interest and loyalty (Simanihuruk, 2019). The exploratory factor analysis revealed an image

consisting of two dimensions (attractions and facilities).

These dimensions include various aspects such as tourism infrastructure, signage, hotels and accommodations, service quality, food and restaurants, education, safety, security, natural landscapes, unique geological features and resources, beautiful seas, unique fossils, pleasant weather, activity programmes, cultural and traditional experiences, and friendly locals.

Klenosky (2002) states that these aspects are reflected in attractions like the natural environment, weather appeal, historical significance, low travel costs, and expenditures. Sangkakorn *et al.* (2014) added that the tourist attraction became well-known due to the variety of its tourism resources and culture. There are many ways to make these tourist attractions more sustainable, including investing more in their facilities and infrastructure, fostering relationships with local communities, preparing the locals to interact with foreign visitors by offering international language classes, providing training for tour guides and receptionists, and enhancing customer services of street vendors.

Services

Tourism service quality acts as an antecedent to image, and the latter is essential for destination expectations and loyalty. Moreover, tourism service providers operating not the destinations require an integrated model of tourism service expectations to attract more international tourists (Akroush *et al.*, 2016). The role of service quality in the context of tourism is significant during the delivery process and serves as a benchmark to evaluate the efficiency of a specific tourism service sector (Supitchayangkool, 2012). Within the tourism sector, the concept of the quality of tourism products encompasses a range of contributions and procedures from various stakeholders, encompassing both private and public entities. Ensuring safety and security forms a fundamental aspect of this notion of quality in the tourism product. Moreover, quality

entails a proficient approach to consistently perform tasks correctly and fulfil the reasonable expectations of consumers.

International Tourists

A tourist is an individual who temporarily travels away from their place of residence to fulfill specific travel needs. According to UNWTO (2020), a tourist is defined as a domestic, inbound, or outbound visitor who stays overnight in hotel accommodations at the visited location. Understanding why people go on holiday or travel to destinations beyond their usual environment is fundamental to the study of tourism (Hall, 1998). International visitor arrivals and the revenue generated from international tourists has been used conventionally as a standard for evaluating the global and national significance of tourism.

Elevated numbers of international tourist arrivals can serve as effective elements in promotional campaigns and even political dialogues, underscoring, and validating a nation's achievements on the global stage. Similarly, substantial earnings from international tourists can offer valuable insights into the economic role played by tourism, contributing to both the gross domestic product and the generation of foreign exchange. This data might subsequently influence policymakers to support the advancement of tourism and intensify efforts to enhance the benefits derived from tourism-related activities. Many international visitors come to Satun Province because it is located on the border between Thailand and Malaysia (Nantakat & Vorachart, 2021). Therefore, only international tourists are considered in this study.

Satun UNESCO Global Geopark

UNESCO has defined a Global Geopark as sites where landscapes of international geological significance are administered with a holistic concept of protection, education, and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2022). Satun Geopark is one of only 13 geoparks worldwide that the UNESCO Executive Board officially recognised

on April 17, 2018 (11 new prospective geoparks and two delayed), for the years 2018 through 2021. Satun is one of the smallest mainland provinces in the south with a total area of 2,479 square km. In addition, the Geopark covers four of the province's seven districts comprise Thung Wa, Manang, Langu, and a portion of Muang district. It has two national parks, including famous Tarutao and one wildlife sanctuary (Nantakat & Vorachart, 2021).

Famously referred to as the "Land of Palaeozoic Fossils", the region is well-known throughout the whole of Southeast Asia for having the oldest succession of fossils, as well as a high diversity of fossil species including brachiopods, conodonts, trilobites, graptolites, tentaculites, nautiloids, and stromatolites. The Cambrian trilobite fossils are the oldest on the Thai-Malay Peninsula of Tarutao Island. And the volcanic ash layers of Tatutao Island allow for the absolute dating of the late Cambrian trilobite biostratigraphy. Five species of Cambrian trilobites, one new genus, and the intriguing red stromatolites were discovered (Han *et al.*, 2018). According to Rafferty (2010), Palaeozoic Era was a major interval of geologic time that began 542 million years ago with the Cambrian explosion, an extraordinary diversification of marine animals, and ended about 251 million years ago with the end of Permian extinction, the greatest extinction event in earth history. The major divisions of the Palaeozoic Era from oldest to youngest and the Palaeozoic takes its name from the Greek word for ancient life as follows:

- (1) Cambrian Period (542 to 488 million years ago), where Trilobite be found.
- (2) Ordovician Period (488 to 443 million years ago), where Nautiloids found Silurian Period (443 to 416 million years ago), where Graptolites have been found.
- (3) Devonian Period (416 to 359 million years ago), where Tentaculate have be found.
- (4) Carboniferous Period (359 to 299 million years ago), where Posidonomya has been discovered.

(5) Permian Period (299 to 251 million years ago), where Fusulinids have been discovered.

At present, there are 169 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 44 countries (UNESCO, 2022). In Satun, there are 28 geosites and 16 tourism sites, which can be divided into three categories: (1) Satun Karst, (2) Shoreline, and (3) Tarutao–Lipe Islands. There are the geological attractions such as Khao Thanan, Stegodon Cave, Tharn Plew Lapias, Khlong Huai Ba Rock, Taban Island, Tharn Plew Waterfall, To Sam Yot Fossil, Wang Klang Cave, Phu Pha Phet Lapias, Pa Phon Lapias, Chet Khot Cave, Malaka Formation, Mo Lae Bay, Son Bay, Pramong Beach Granite, Hin Ngam Island, Khai Island, Khuan Thang Type Section, Khao Noi, Thung Samet Stromatolite Lapias, Tharae Stromatolite Lapias, Khao Daeng Nautiloid, Urai Cave, Wang Sai Thong Waterfall, Khao To Ngai Geological Time Boundary, Lidi Lek Island, and Prasat Hin Panyod.

Moreover, there are non-geological attractions such as Satun Geopark Information Centre, Thung Wa Ancient Elephant Museum, La-ngu Folk Museum, Natural Museum Kampang Wittaya School, Sino-Portuguese Style Buildings, Bo Chet Luk (Seven Wells), Ban Tha Oil Pier, Khao Daeng Viewpoint, Khaobanthad Wildlife Sanctuary Office, Wang Sai Thong Kayaking Area, Nikhom Pattana Kayaking Area, Tarutao Prison Camp, Satub Inland Aquaculture Research and Development Centre, Satun Coastal Fisheries Research and Development Centre, Thungwaworawit School,

and Panya Batik Handmade Centre (Satun Geopark, 2021). Therefore, Satun Province has many interesting tourist attractions that show traces of various eras in the past that affect tourists who come to visit.

Research Gap

From the review of the latest literature. It was found that there is enough literature on the tourist expectation. However, only a few studies comprise the context of geoparks, especially in Satun, Thailand. Therefore, this study tries to focus on tourist attractions expectations, service expectations, and facility expectations of Satun UNESCO Global Geopark. The research model derived from the literature reviews is depicted in Figure 1.

Based on the research model, the following research hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Tourist attraction is a factor that generates tourist expectations.

Hypothesis 2: Facilities are a factor that generates tourist expectations.

Hypothesis 3: Services are a factor that generates tourist expectations.

Methods

The target audience for this study consists of international tourists planning to visit the Satun UNESCO Global Geopark per the information above for various reasons, including leisure, sightseeing, business, education, health, or

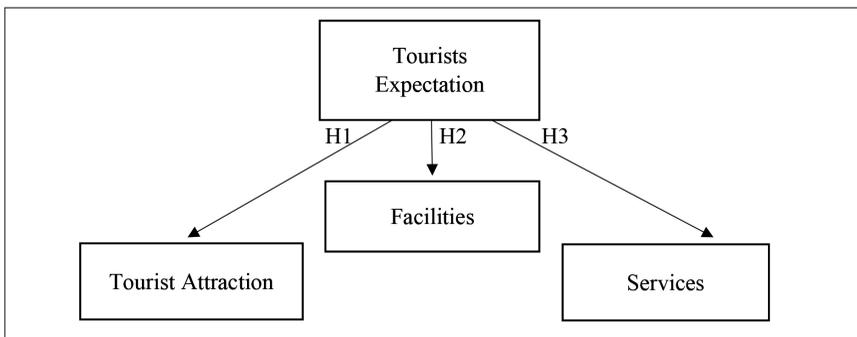


Figure 1: Research framework

study. Therefore, the respondents forming the sampling frame were international tourists. The sampling methodology used was simple random sampling. The data collection tool for this research was a quantitative approach employing questionnaires. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: Part 1 consisted of general information about the respondents while Part 2 focused on the expectations of tourists towards the Satun Geopark. Data collection took place at Pak Bara Pier, La-ngu District, Satun Province, over a one-month period.

The sample size comprised 300 international tourists who intended to visit Satun Geopark. The respondents will be chosen randomly at various locations such as Hatyai international airport, Hatyai bus station, Wang Prachan border, Pak Bara Pier, and Tammalang Pier. The Sekaran and Bougie formula was employed to calculate the sample size. Scales for the relevant variables were adapted from multiple sources.

Respondents indicated their agreement levels on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The questionnaires assessed expectations related to tourist attractions, facilities, and services (Bosque *et al.*, 2009). The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was assessed through a pilot study conducted with a convenience sample of 35 international tourists. A total of 30 completed questionnaires were collected. The reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded a value over 0.60, which is considered an acceptable indication of reliability (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). Descriptive statistics, means, and standard deviations. The data will be entered into SPSS version 26.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

The profiles of the respondents are presented in Table 2. Male respondents constituted 53% of the total, slightly outnumbering female respondents. In terms of age distribution, the majority fell between 26 and 40 years old, accounting for approximately 56%. Education-wise, 57.7% of

the respondents held degrees from universities, 21% had postgraduate degrees, 11.7% graduated from colleges, and 9.7% had completed high school or lower levels of education. Concerning annual personal income, around 40.7% of the respondents reported incomes exceeding US\$20,000 while 25% fell within the range of between US\$5,000 and US\$10,000, 17.3% earned between US\$11,000 and US\$20,000, and 17% earned below US\$5,000. More than 41% of the respondents typically travelled with family, followed by 35% who travelled with friends, 19.3% who travelled alone, and 4.7% who travelled with others. Majority of respondents were of European origin, accounting for 63.3%, followed by 23.3% from Asian countries, 9.3% from American countries, 3.3% from Australia and Oceania, and 0.7% from Africa.

The data from Table 3 indicates the ranking of tourists' expectations towards tourist attractions based on seven items. The overall expectation was at a high level, with an average of ($\bar{x} = 3.52$, S.D. = 0.718). The most important variable for tourists was the attractiveness of the beaches ($\bar{x} = 3.7927$, S.D. = 1.145), pleasant weather ($\bar{x} = 3.61$, S.D. = 0.957), the availability of cultural and traditional attractions to visit ($\bar{x} = 3.55$, S.D. = 0.885), the presence of a beautiful natural landscapes ($\bar{x} = 3.52$, S.D. = 1.102), the availability of an interesting activity programmes ($\bar{x} = 3.48$, S.D. = 1.003), the presence of unique geological features and resources ($\bar{x} = 3.46$, S.D. = 0.979), and the existence of unique fossils ($\bar{x} = 3.31$, S.D. = 0.995), which had the lowest mean score recorded in the tourist attraction expectations. Therefore, tourists' highest expectations were for attractive beaches, making Satun UNESCO Global Geopark the preferred holiday destination for many tourists.

From Table 4, it was found that the tourists expressed their facilities expectations. The overall mean score was at a high level, with an average of ($\bar{x} = 3.38$, S.D. = 0.653). The tourists expected the geopark to have good tourism infrastructure and the accommodation and hotels to have good quality, both at the same expectation level with ($\bar{x} = 3.50$, S.D. =

Table 2: Profile of the respondents

Demographic Factors	Measure Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	159	53.0
	Female	141	47.0
Age	16-25 years old	63	21.0
	26-40 years old	168	56.0
	41-55 years old	52	17.3
	56 years old and older	17	5.7
Education level	High school and below	29	9.7
	Associate college	35	11.7
	University	173	57.7
	Postgraduate	63	21.0
Yearly income	Below 5,000 US	51	17.0
	5,000 - 10,000 US	75	25.0
	11,000 - 20,000 US	52	17.3
	More than 20,000 US	122	40.7
Normally travel	Alone	58	19.3
	Family	123	41.0
	Friends	105	35.0
	Others	14	4.7
Nationality	American	28	9.3
	European	190	63.3
	Asian	70	23.3
	African	2	0.7
	Australia/Oceania	10	3.3

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of tourist attraction expectation in Satun UNESCO Global Geopark

No.	Tourist Attraction Expectations	\bar{x}	S.D.
1	I expect the geopark to have a beautiful natural landscape.	3.52	1.102
2	I expect the geopark to have unique geological features and resources.	3.46	.979
3	I expect the beaches to be attractive.	3.79	1.145
4	I expect the geopark to have unique fossils.	3.31	.995
5	I expect the weather to be pleasant.	3.61	.957
6	I expect the geopark to offer an interesting activity program.	3.48	1.003
7	I expect the geopark to have many cultural and traditional attractions to visit.	3.55	.885
Total		3.52	.718

0.959 and 1.017). Additionally, the geopark was expected to offer good food and restaurants (\bar{x} = 3.48, S.D. = 0.959), have good signage e.g., road signs, tourist spots (\bar{x} = 3.37, S.D. = 0.932), provide good education e.g., information (\bar{x} = 3.28, S.D. = 1.026), and ensure good safety and security (\bar{x} = 3.20, S.D. = 1.092), which had the lowest score in the facilities expectations.

Therefore, infrastructure and accommodation are important variables that tourists will prioritise in their expectations for facilities.

From Table 5, it was found that the tourists expressed their overall service expectations at a high level, with an average of (\bar{x} = 3.44, S.D. = 0.708). The tourists' highest expectation was

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation of facilities expectations in Satun Geopark

No.	Facilities Expectations	\bar{x}	S.D.
1	I expect the geopark to have good tourism infrastructure.	3.50	.959
2	I expect the geopark to have good signage (e.g., road signs, signs for tourist spots).	3.37	.932
3	I expect the accommodation and hotels to be of good quality.	3.50	1.017
4	I expect the geopark to offer good food and restaurants.	3.48	.959
5	I expect the geopark to provide good education (e.g., information).	3.28	1.026
6	I expect the geopark to have good safety and security measures.	3.20	1.092
Total		3.38	.653

Table 5: Mean and standard deviation of service expectations at Satun Geopark

No.	Service Expectations	\bar{x}	S.D.
1	I expect the geopark to have good service quality.	3.45	1.051
2	I expect the local people to be concerned with service.	3.61	1.018
3	I expect the service facilities to be efficient.	3.32	.964
4	I expect the geopark to provide a good service impression.	3.41	1.039
Total		3.44	.708

that locals were concerned with providing good service ($\bar{x} = 3.61$, S.D. = 1.018), followed by the geopark having good service quality ($\bar{x} = 3.45$, S.D. = 1.051), and being able to give a good service impression ($\bar{x} = 3.41$, S.D. = 1.039). The lowest expectation level was efficient service facilities ($\bar{x} = 3.32$, S.D. = 0.964). Hence, with regards to this variable, the tourists expected concern from locals with regards to the provision of services.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to propose and examine the expectations of the tourist visiting the Satun UNESCO Global Geopark in terms of attractions, services, and facilities. The findings indicate that tourist expectations influence the number of arrivals at the destination. The study found that tourists had the highest expectations in terms of attractions, followed by expectations with regards to services and this was followed by expectations with regards to the facilities provided. As a result, understanding how a tourist perceives expectations is critical. This finding

is consistent with previous studies regarding (Hsu *et al.*, 2010; Ye & Tussyadiah, 2011). The findings of this study provide clear evidence for the notion that tourist attractions, facilities, and services are important antecedents of tourist expectations but the results can be used to improve and develop tourism services in various fields, which will enable tourism services to go beyond the expectations of tourists, and create a more impactful and satisfying experience (Bosque *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, the findings of this research paper are useful for enhancing the image of the Satun UNESCO Global Geopark.

Practical and Implications of the Research

In terms of practicality and implications, this study contributed to the body of knowledge on how expectations can impact both the level of tourist satisfaction and future behaviour. Sending the correct signals that tourists use to narrow down their selections is important. (Bosque *et al.*, 2009; Wang *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, understanding tourist expectations would allow marketers to devise a range of

efficient marketing strategies tailored to the diverse preferences of travellers visiting the destination. The uniqueness of Satun Geopark, which aligns with the tourists' interest can be used to create marketing campaigns such as biodiversity in the area, adventure activities, or cultural experiences.

Additionally, the tourists' expectations can be used to guide the improvement of the infrastructure. For example, the results from this study indicate that the tourists expected the geopark to have good tourism infrastructure. The park can invest in essential infrastructure such as a visitor centre, safety and emergency infrastructure, or environmentally friendly transportation. Local businesses and enterprises can also benefit from realising tourists' expectations because they can create jobs that meet tourists' expectations and interests. This one in turn help to stimulate the growth the local economy.

Suggestions for Future Research

- (1) The future research should consider exploring various tourist groups, including locals, to assess their engagement and familiarity with the destination. This approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding of different perspectives and experiences related to the tourist attraction.
- (2) Future studies can investigate post-visit satisfaction among foreign tourists to explore whether Satun UNESCO Global Geopark meets the expectations of foreign tourists. The results from the study will be useful for the park's improvement and later the loyalty among tourists.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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