



## Tourist Satisfaction on Tourism Growth and Tourism Site Development in VangVieng District of Vientiane Province, Lao PDR

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**Abstract**— This study attempts to understand tourist satisfaction on their visit for recreation and leisure purposes in Vangvieng of Lao PDR. Here, tourist satisfaction is measured in tourists' perceptions and opinions on tourism site development and services they receive during their stay in Vangvieng. The data collected for purposes of this study were provided by tourists through the use of questionnaire where the tourists were asked to express their opinions and perceptions on economic, social and cultural benefits received from their stay in Vangvieng. Tourist satisfaction is one condition for achieving sustainable tourism development. In recent decades, Lao PDR has been a very attractive tourist destination, indicating that the satisfaction levels of the tourists would be high. This study will show results for this hypothesis. It is found that tourists are generally satisfied in their visits to Vang Vieng although personal characteristics of the tourists cause significant variations in the satisfaction levels.

**Keywords**— Tourism improvement management, tourism growth, communities' benefit, residents, visitor, public sectors, accommodation entrepreneur.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

VangVieng is one destination for visiting in Laos. Vangvieng tourism is composed of many activities, industries and services organized towards delivering travel experiences. Vangvieng tourism facilities involve accommodations, restaurants, bars, entertainments, local product shopping areas, transportations, activity facilities and other hospitality services.

Tourism in Vangvieng has made significant contributions to economic development and has become one of the major growth industries in Vangvieng. The advantage of Vangvieng tourism is generally referred to a good combination of its magnificent natural landscape and highly cultivated farmland mixed with rich cultural and traditional values of the local residents.

A survey conducted in 2012 by sector of culture, information and tourism of Vangvieng district involving 128,276 foreign visitors found that 50% of the visitors were from Europe, 30% from Asia and 20% from other continents (*VangVieng Tourism Office, 2012*). The survey also found that the main features attracting foreign visitors into VangVieng were natural environment mixed with unique customs of minorities. VangVieng, like other parts of Lao PDR has started to promote investment policy, focusing on promoting tourism related businesses such as hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, tour services. Thus, tourism facilities in

VangVieng have grown rapidly, and currently there are 9 hotels, 11 resorts, 111 guesthouses, 82 restaurants and 3 entertainments, 1000 tubs services, 173 Kayakings, 1 balloon service, 110 bicycle services, 150 motorbikes, 6 textile souvenir shops, 17 massage centers and 11 internet cafes. The values of investment in hotels have reached about 267 billion Kip (about US\$33.44 million) and in restaurants have reached about 3.67 billion Kip (or US\$453,611 (*VangVieng Tourism Office, 2012*)).

Theoretically, the growth of tourism sector in VangVieng described above, it should bring benefits to all concerned people including local community members, business people, public sector, and tourists. The benefits are measured in four facets such as economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits as described in Kishore Shah, Jan McHarry and Rosalie Gardiner (2003). This paper focuses only on measuring benefits of the tourists, particularly foreign tourists. Benefits are measured by subjective perceptions and opinions of foreign visitors in VangVieng, which are referred in this paper as tourists' satisfactions. The study finds that tourists are generally satisfied in their visits to VangVieng although personal characteristics of the tourists cause significant variations in the satisfaction levels.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Increased access to travel was accompanied by other developments in society, and this contributed to the growth in demand for and provision of tourism. A variety of important factors contributed to the development of tourism during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. Mason (1990) suggested five major reasons for the growth of tourism. These are as follows: (1) A rise in industrial output associated with the industrial revolution that in turn led to an increase in the standard of living. (2) Improvements in transport technology, which led to cheaper and more accessible

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travel. Railways and ocean liners appeared in the nineteenth century and cars and aircraft in the first half of the twentieth century. (3) The introduction of annual holidays towards the end of the nineteenth century. (4) Changing perceptions of the environment. Locations that were once viewed as hostile were now seen as attractive. (5) An increasing desire to travel. This was related partly to improvements in education and also to greater overseas travel, which was mainly the result of war. This created interest in foreign locations and also overseas business travel.

Responsible tourism is not a brand or type of tourism. Rather, the term refers to a "tourism management strategy embracing planning, management, product development and marketing to bring about positive economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts" (DEAT 2003). More specifically, Husbands and Harrison (1996) define responsible tourism as "a framework and a set of practices that chart a sensible course between the fuzziness of ecotourism and the well-known negative externalities associated with conventional mass tourism." To them, the idea of responsible tourism provides an effective approach to conceive social and eco-cultural tourism products in the real world.

The visual and understanding of visitor perspective are different point of view. Thus, while the term of quality tourism experience is commonly used in the sustainable tourism literature (Boyd, 2002; Moscardo, 1996; Ross & Wall, 1999; Ryan, 1998). The concept has not been explicitly defined. Generically, these studies associate quality tourism experiences with tourism based on cultural, historic and natural attractions, which involves extensive interaction between tourists and local residents and results in high satisfaction and enrichment to tourists. A key indicator of a high quality visitor experience is visitors' level of satisfaction with their experience.

Natural environment ; According to Jones and Sasser (1995) mentioned of satisfaction: there are four basic elements affect tourists ( customers) satisfaction for basic of product or service, basic support services, a recovery process for counteracting bad experience and extraordinary service. The importance of delight has additionally been recognized in the area of quality by Deming (1986) The studies have show: Swarbrooke, (1999) mentioned tourism also benefited the natural environment by providing motivation for its environment, Mathieson and wall,(1982) Tourism extends an appreciation for the natural world and heightens environment knowledge for both the host communities and visiting tourists.

Economic impact, Matarrita- Casante and Luloff. (2008) indicated the economic restructuring results from the changing direct, indirect and induced employment generated from changing conditions and often newcomers have different socioeconomic status as evidenced by their higher levels of education and income than those of long-term residents. The relationship between the tourism impact (tourists support economic) and communities they refer to the tourism growth and tourism arrival for visiting to lead the development of many things to have new version. Var & Kim,(1990)

mentioned services of all kinds are established and offered to tourist, which in turn also serve local residents and tourism the impetus to improve and further development communities infrastructure and communities service.

Many words of social impact and many rural developments were attracting destinations, the tourism growth and tourism arrival. According to many studies indicated that: the social impacts of tourism fall into three different categories. It is concerned with tourist, the host and tourist-host interrelations (Affeld, 1975, P.109). Burdge, (1998:47) mentioned the socioeconomic characteristics may result in the perceptual changes among different resident types, different socioeconomic characteristic affect how newcomers perceive the community and how the community perceives the newcomers. The relationship between the tourism impact and local \ resident in term of social support by tourism growth and tourists arrival which led to change the communities which will be the reducing poverty and contribution to sustainable development into rural area.

The tourism growth in term of cultural resident impact which was led to the positive and negative points for the patterning of development as well as Sustainable tourism development, According to the meaning of cultural tourism there are many thing to many people and herein lies its strengths and its weaknesses (ICOMOS 1996: 17). The defining cultural tourism, it can mean different things to different people such as cultural attraction/objects mean different things and have other meanings than for other people(Understanding the Behavior of cultural tourists, (Rami Isaac, 2008 P: 16). Sethna & Richmond (1978) indicated The Virgin Islanders exhibited consensus that tourists seem to respect local traditions and cultures and want to know more about them.

The tourism growth is characterized by a sort of 'Baume's disease', since the 'productivity' of natural and cultural capital hardly increases over time (Baume and Baume, 1985). Buckley (1993) identifies a systemic scenario in which tourist sector linkages with environmental and cultural capital assets and linkages between consumption (number of foreigner visitors) and investment ((Number of Hotels, Guesthouses, Resorts, Restaurants and Entertainment) as they arise in the Environment of tourism development.

### **3. STUDY APPROACH**

In order to capture tourist satisfactions on tourism growth and tourism site development in VangVieng. This study developed a questionnaire for collecting two types of data, such as the first data on personal characteristics of foreign tourists in VangVieng and the second data on their satisfactions of tourism growth and development, there in terms of economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits. The latter are measured in a Likert scale ranging from 1 through 5; where 1= strongly dissatisfied and 5= strongly satisfied. The data were collected during July 2013 involving a sample size of 200 foreign tourists. The analyses in this study are mainly based on descriptive statistics. Quantitative

statistics such as t-statistics and F-statistics are used to supplement the analyses.

## 4. RESULT

### 4.1 Sample profile

VangVieng is a world most famous tourism destination receiving many domestic and foreign tourists every year. A majority of the tourists are young people as they are in the age of seeking new experiences. In this current study, we also found that 67.4 percent of the samples are in the age of lower than 31 years. The oldest stratum of tourists (60 years old and older) accounted for only 4.4 percent. In terms of their income levels, about one half of the sampled tourists fall in the lowest income group (up to US\$3000 per month) and one quarter of the sampled tourists earn between US\$3000-US\$6000 per month. These results show that a majority of the tourists fall in the two low income groups, with the remaining 25 percent earn more than US\$6000 per month. Such income distribution is reasonable as about two-thirds of the sample tourists are young. In terms of their education qualification, we found that about 33 percent have completed higher diploma and 32 percent have a bachelor degree. These people are most likely in young ages and earn low incomes. About 45 percent of the sampled tourists are from Europe, 35.4 percent are from the Asia-Pacific region, about 17 percent are from America and less than 3 percent are from Africa and the Middle East. Among the tourists from each continent, we also found that a majority of the tourists are in their young ages and earn low incomes per month. For example, 41 out of 43 Asian-Pacific tourists of the up to 30 year-old group earn not more than US\$6000 per month. Likewise, such 41 persons account for about 79 percent of all Asian-Pacific tourists in the first two income groups (the up to US\$3000 group and the US\$3001-US\$6000 group). For the European tourists, 41 out of 44 tourists in the up to 30 year-old group earn not more than US\$6000 per month, or such 41 persons account for about 67 percent of all European tourists in the first two income groups (the up to US\$3000 group and the US\$3001-US\$6000 group).

### 4.2 Tourists' benefits from their visit to VangVieng

It is difficult to quantify the benefits each tourist receives from a particular tourist destination. In this study, we follow the literature reviewed in Section 2 in equating the tourists' benefits from visiting VangVieng to their satisfaction in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental satisfactions. The satisfaction on the environment includes satisfaction in both natural and built environments. Here, we also attempt to compare tourists' benefits or satisfactions by age group; 30 years old and younger, 31 – 40 years old, 41 – 50 years old, 51 – 60 years old, and 60 years old and older. We also compare the benefits across different income groups such as below or equal to US\$3000, US\$3001-US\$6000, US\$6001-US\$9000, US\$9001-US\$12000, and > US\$12000. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Mean satisfactions and statistical tests for differences in satisfaction by age and income groups**

Satisfaction factors		Sample size	Mean score	p-value for age	p-value for income
1	Total 1: Natural environment satisfaction	181	3.58	.218	.890
2	Total 2: Built environment satisfaction	181	3.42	.092	.814
3	Total 3: Economic satisfaction	181	3.80	.707	.683
4	Total 4: social satisfaction	181	3.43	.374	.425
5	Total 5: Culture satisfaction	181	3.57	.342	.644

As can be observed in Table 1 above, it can be stated that although VangVieng is one most popular world tourist destination, the tourists under study were only moderately satisfied to highly satisfy with their visits to VangVieng. Specifically, they are moderately satisfied with their natural environment benefits, built environment benefits, social benefits and cultural benefits. They showed high satisfaction only for the economic benefits, which may be due to cheap prices compared with the prices at other tourist destinations in other parts of the world. When we compare the benefits in each of the five components in the table above across tourists in different age groups and in different income groups, (based on the one-way ANOVA test for comparing more than two means) we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the tourists of different age groups or the tourists of different income groups have the same level of benefits for each of the five components.

These results suggest that local authorities concerned and local communities have to improve their tourism sites and services in order to provide more environmental, cultural and social benefits to the tourists. Such improvements are important for sustainable tourism growth and tourism site development in VangVieng. On the other hand, if the tourists continue to receive moderate benefits from their visits to VangVieng, tourism in VangVieng may decline in the future. As described in the introductory part of this paper, tourism is one main contributing factor to socio-economic development in VangVieng. Therefore, if tourism declines due to a decline in the tourist number, living conditions of local residents of VangVieng will be disturbed unless alternative livelihoods are developed.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Tourism is a very important sector contributing to socio-economic development in VangVieng, one world famous tourism site in Laos. Particularly, in recent decades, after

the announcement of Lao Tourism Year in 2000, tourism in VangVieng has grown steadily. Foreign tourists make up a majority of visitors and bringing most of the tourism-related benefits to the local community and public authorities in VangVieng. Therefore, in order to ensure sustainable tourism growth and tourism site development in VangVieng, it is important to understand and maintain high benefits or satisfactions of the tourists who visit that town. This current study attempts to quantify such tourists' benefits by collecting the data on tourists' satisfactions on tourism growth and tourism site development in VangVieng. The results show that the tourists in VangVieng are mainly young people in low income groups and most of them are from Europe, Asia-Pacific and America. The tourists are moderately satisfied with both natural and built environments, cultural and social landscape of VangVieng. They show high satisfaction only for the economic aspects which may be due to low costs. Such results show some risks of tourism decline in VangVieng. In order to prevent such risks to materialize, local communities, tourism-related entrepreneurs and local authorities need to seek ways to improve tourism services and attractions in VangVieng. Such improved services and attractions will be necessary for maintaining VangVieng as a world tourism site and ensuring that local communities and entrepreneurs continue to gain benefits from tourism development.

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