

**TOURIST SATISFACTION WITH
HOSTS: A CULTURAL
APPROACH COMPARING THAI
TOURISTS AND AUSTRALIAN
HOSTS**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the concept of tourist holiday satisfaction. Various definitions of satisfaction are presented. Reference is made to interpersonal tourist-host interaction. The cultural influences on tourist-host interaction difficulties are discussed. The paper argues that it is a necessity to analyze cultural differences between international tourists and hosts of the visited destination. The cultural differences between Thai tourists and Australian hosts were summarized in six dimensions by a principal components analysis. These were: Courtesy, Idealism, Understanding the Tourist, Display of Feelings, Greetings, and Satisfaction. These dimensions were interpreted and the key cultural differences between Thai tourists and Australian hosts, which could influence the Thai tourist satisfaction, presented. The paper concludes that utilizing cultural differences is an important requirement in the tourism industry to develop appropriate marketing strategies. **Keywords:** cultural differences, Thai tourists, Australian hosts.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to measure differences in cross-cultural interaction between Australian hosts and Thai tourists. The study suggests that these differences not only are measurable, but could lead to an explanation of why tourists may experience varying degrees of satisfaction from their holiday experience. It is initially suggested that the level of satisfaction experienced by a tourist may be expressed both directly, and indirectly as an outcome from potential cross-cultural differences between tourists and the Australian hosts with whom they interact. However, the concept of "satisfaction" is not a simple one, which is readily understood. In fact there have been many attempts to define and analyze the concept of satisfaction and as a starting point some definitions are presented below.

SATISFACTION

The main definitions of satisfaction can be summarized from six different perspectives: expectations versus experiences, expectations versus performance, expectations versus perceptions, pre-travel favourability versus post-travel evaluation, input versus output of social exchange, and complaints.

Expectations versus Experiences

According to the normative standard definition, satisfaction with the destination refers to the comparison of pre-travel expectations with post-travel experiences (LaTour and Peat, 1980; Moutinho, 1987; Mazursky, 1989; Pizam et al, 1978; Swan and Martin, 1981; Whipple and Thach, 1988). When experiences compared to expectations result in feelings of gratification, the tourist is satisfied; when they result in feelings of displeasure, the tourist is dissatisfied (Pizam et al, 1978). The greater the disparity between expectations and experiences, the greater the likelihood of dissatisfaction (Pearce, 1991). However, according to Shames and Glover (1988) and Knutson (1988), satisfaction can result only when the expectations are met or exceeded.

Expectations versus Performance

Satisfaction has also been defined as one of the measures of the difference between expectations and actual performance (Oliver, 1980; Van Raaij and Francken, 1984). However, experiences, which are not expected may be the most satisfying. Thus, it may be argued that satisfaction cannot be predicted from expectations. Consequently, definitions of satisfaction based on comparison of experiences and expectations are inadequate.

Expectations versus Perceptions

Several researchers have agreed that satisfaction derives from the differences between expectations and perceptions (Nightingale, 1986; Parasuraman et al, 1985; Moutinho, 1987; Van Raaij and Francken, 1984). Others refer to satisfaction as the "fit" between expectations and perceptions of experiences (Chon, 1989; Reisinger, 1990). The degree of "fit" depends on the ability of the environment to meet the tourists' expectations (Hughes, 1991). As the degree of fit increases, tourist satisfaction also increases (Pearce, 1991). The optimal "fit" between the tourist and the host environment is achieved when the host environment reflects the values of its visitors (Hughes, 1991). According to Pearce and Moscardo (1984), tourist satisfaction is higher if the value system of the tourist fits into the value system of the host. Where values and value orientations do not fit, mismatch can lead to feelings of stress, anxiety, uncertainty and result in dissatisfaction.

Pre-travel Favourability versus Post-travel Evaluation

It has also been noted that tourist satisfaction is dependent on a pre-travel favourable disposition toward the destination visited, which, in turn, contributes to a post-travel evaluation of the destination (Pearce, 1980). If the pre-travel favourability is initially high, tourist post-travel evaluation is positive (Pearce, 1980) and may result in satisfaction. However, according to Pearce (1980), the initial favourability is not always a guarantee of satisfaction as the pre-travel favourability can change due to the travel experience. Also, the holidays, which leave the tourist a little unsatisfied, generate more return visits than holidays with the highest satisfaction scores. These concepts are similar to Oliver's (1980) notions of confirmation and disconfirmation of expectations, whereby consumers are said to purchase goods and services with pre-purchase expectations and compare outcomes of their purchase against expectations. A negative disconfirmation (when experiences do not match expectations) results in dissatisfaction, and a positive disconfirmation (when experiences match or exceed expectations) results in satisfaction.

Input versus Output of Social Exchange

The equity definition of satisfaction (Swan and Mercer, 1981) compares perceived input-output (gains) in a social exchange: if the tourist gain is less than input, dissatisfaction results. Satisfaction is, therefore, a "mental state of being adequately or inadequately rewarded..." (Moutinho, 1987, p.34). However, since people place different value on their gains, satisfaction should be assessed in relation to certain standards (Olander, 1977) e.g. values or beliefs.

Complaints

Satisfaction has also been evaluated in terms of customer complaints (Pearce and Moscardo, 1984), and particularly, the ratio of compliments to complaints (Lewis, 1983). However, such analysis is inadequate since it is very subjective and may present a bias due to high dissatisfaction rates that may not lead to complaints at all (Gronhaug, 1977). According to Roth et al (1990), the most frequent consumer response to dissatisfaction is doing nothing. However, complaints should be monitored because dissatisfied tourists complain widely to friends (Maddox, 1985). Complaints from "matched" tourists whose personalities, values and interests match a holiday setting or destination (Pearce and Moscardo, 1984), and whose expectations could be met but have not been met by the host environment, are more risky than the complaints from "mismatched" tourists who find themselves in contexts which do not match their personalities, values and interests and whose needs could not be met. The task in such a situation is to reduce the possibility of a mismatch between the expectations of tourists and the holiday environment. For instance, by being aware of the cultural influences on tourist expectations and holiday satisfaction the host environment can achieve a better "fit" between the tourist and host environment and offer holiday experiences, which match the tourist expectations.

The complaints of international tourists do not always express dissatisfaction. Complaints can be caused by misunderstanding arising out of intercultural differences encountered during an overseas trip (Hanningam, 1980) and express the intercultural difficulties encountered in a foreign country. Thus, an understanding of the cultural factors that generate international tourist complaints is vital for any international tourism study.

THE MEASUREMENT OF SATISFACTION

There are several concepts involved in the measurement of satisfaction, including relativity, attribution of course, segmentation and dimensions of components.

Relativity of the Satisfaction Concept

The concept of satisfaction is relative (Pearce, 1991; Olander, 1977). According to Pearce (1991), tourists may be satisfied even though their experiences did not fulfill their expectations. There are three levels of 'positive

satisfaction': very satisfied, quite satisfied and satisfied. Thus, again, satisfaction should be assessed in relation to certain standards (Olander, 1977) such as cultural values or beliefs.

Theory of Attribution

A disconfirmed expectation can be attributed to external forces such as environment, facilities, service, weather, information availability, or internal forces such as characteristics of an individual (Pearce and Moscardo, 1986). Tourists may attribute their satisfaction either to themselves (an internal attribution) or the environment (an external attribution) (Valle and Wallendorf, 1977). Tourists who attribute their dissatisfaction to external factors can be more dissatisfied than tourists who attribute their dissatisfaction to internal factors (Van Raaij and Francken, 1984). It can be argued that cultural influences can be treated as internal attributes. However, since culture also belongs to the external environment and determine tourist behavior, the influence of culture on tourist satisfaction can have a greater impact than just internal factors.

Satisfaction as a Multi-faceted Concept

Satisfaction is a multi-faceted concept which consists of a number of independent components (Hughes, 1991; Pizam et al, 1978). The overall tourist holiday satisfaction may be evaluated in terms of different dimensions, for example, the instrumental dimension (satisfaction with physical performance, e.g. loudness) and expressive dimension (satisfaction with psychological performance, e.g. comfort) (Swan and Combs, 1976). Satisfaction with hosts should be analyzed by measuring satisfaction with the hosts' physical performance (e.g. hosts' appearance, promptness) and psychological performance (e.g. hosts' hospitality). By identifying various performance dimensions of satisfaction, it is possible to analyze the causes of tourist (dis)satisfaction (Ojha, 1982) with hosts. According to Ojha (1982), there are tourists who are satisfied despite some problems with the product offered, and there are tourists who are dissatisfied with the best product. The best physical product (e.g. physical performance, physical attributes) may not compensate for psychological dissatisfaction. Therefore, the psychological dimension of satisfaction is extremely important. As Ojha (1982, p.24) pointed out, the tourist's satisfaction "does not come only from good sights but from the behavior one encounters, the help one receives, the information one gets and the efficiency with which needs are served". Similarly, Pizam et al (1978) emphasized the vital role of the psychological determinant of satisfaction such as hospitality of the host community defined as willingness to help tourists, friendliness, and courtesy toward tourists. Pearce (1982) identified many people associated with the tourism and travel industry such as hoteliers, restaurateurs, or tour guides who can contribute enormously to the tourist's psychological satisfaction. He indicated many negative and positive determinants of tourist psychological (dis)satisfaction with hosts e.g. hosts politeness, tolerance, competence in providing services, and foreign language skills. Goodwin and Ross (1989) reported that satisfaction derives from the perceptions of being treated fairly. Consequently, the expressive dimension of satisfaction (satisfaction with psychological performance) should be measured when analyzing tourist satisfaction with hosts.

Outcomes of (Dis)satisfaction

The outcomes of tourist (dis)satisfaction may be various. According to Moutinho's (1987) theory, tourists may either change destination or continue visitation, depending on the degree of their (dis)satisfaction (extremely dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, satisfied and extremely satisfied). According to Pearce (1988), tourists may either return, recommend a destination to other tourists, and express favorable comments about the destination; or not return, not recommend it to others, express negative comments and damage the reputation of the destination. For these reasons, tourism managers and marketers should be concerned with analyzing tourist satisfaction as satisfaction determines whether the tourist becomes a repeat visitor and/or recommends the holiday experiences to others.

SATISFACTION WITH TOURIST-HOST INTERACTION

The vital component of tourist holiday satisfaction is satisfaction with hosts, often referred to as service providers. Service providers are the first contact point for tourists and remain in direct contact with tourists through an entire visit. Therefore, the tourists' perceptions of service providers may significantly affect the tourist's overall satisfaction with a holiday, their repeat visitation, purchase and spending patterns, and length of stay.

The role of hosts and their influence on tourist satisfaction has been demonstrated in the tourism literature. Stringer (1981) emphasized the importance of the authentic interpersonal experience between hosts and guests and psychological comfort in satisfying visitors' needs. A poor relationship between hosts and guests in hotel establishments maybe caused by the very commercial attitudes of hosts toward guests. Argyle (1975) and Taft (1977) reported that tourists can eliminate an uncomfortable contact with foreign hosts through the help of tourist guides. However, Schmidt (1979) argued that although good guides can provide tourists with authentic tourist experiences and psychological satisfaction, poor guides can also ruin travel experiences. Holloway (1981) suggested that tour guides are culture brokers, mediators between tourists and hosts and are able to stimulate interactions between tourists and hosts, thus they are critical for tourist holiday satisfaction. According to Sutton (1967), the tourist-host contact may achieve positive results if both parties are tolerant and the host competent in providing services. However, when mistrust develops the tourist-host contact may achieve negative results.

Cultural Influences on Tourist-Host Interaction Difficulties

Interaction difficulties can be produced by cultural differences and generate tourist-host frictions (Sutton, 1967; Taft, 1977). Hofstede (1980), Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Hall (1977) and many others have identified numerous dimensions on which various cultures can be contrasted. These dimensions create major differences between cultures and they may be noticed in cultural values, social behavior, attitudes toward nature, activity, time, perceptions of obligations, shame, responsibility, expression of emotions, relationship patterns, morality, communication style, including verbal (e.g. language, intonation, crying) and non-verbal (facial expressions, gestures, physical distance), motivations, needs, eating habits, standing, looking, touching, greeting style, apologizing, and many others. Morsbach (1973) and Neustupny (1987) reported that differences in non-verbal behavior like gestures and manners may have a significant impact on tourist-host contact. Argyle (1967) reported that different patterns of communication may create serious errors and lead to misinterpretation, misunderstanding and confusion. Furthermore, if the contact participants do not conform to each other's cultural patterns and expected standards, and assume that they are culturally the same or similar, they may conclude in rejecting each other.

In the light of the above, if the cultural component of tourist satisfaction remains unexamined, the tourism industry will never be able to respond properly to international tourist holiday needs and guarantee their return visitation. Thus, it becomes a necessity to adapt a cultural approach to the analysis of tourist behavior and satisfaction. It has been estimated that approximately two thirds of all international visitors to Australia will come from Asia by the year 2004. As a result, Asian tourist holiday satisfaction, in particular, should be evaluated and the culturally influenced needs be determined.

Since the cultural approach has received little attention in the field of tourism marketing and management this paper is centered on cultural factors which determine tourist holiday satisfaction and, consequently, could be used to develop culture-oriented marketing strategies aiming at the specific tourist market. The basic assumption behind this paper is that culture determines the specific needs of various international tourists. Despite the many universal elements which exist among various national cultures, all cultures have unique characteristics which determine the tourist perceptions of the host environment and its ability to fulfill tourist expectations and needs.

THAI TOURISM

At present, there are no empirical studies done on Thai tourist satisfaction with hosts in Australia. Currently, the Asian market (excluding Japan) is the largest market generating international tourists with 28.2 per cent of market share (ABS, 1995). Among the Asian markets (excluding Japan), Thailand is the seventh largest source of visitors from Asia. Table 1 shows a breakdown of Asian tourist arrivals to Australia in 1994/95.

Insert Table 1

The Thai market will continue to be very large source of Asian visitors by 2004 (ATC, 1994) (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2

The Thai market will also be one of the major markets generating tourists to Queensland (QTTC, 1995), the major holiday destination for international tourists in Australia. The percentage of Thai tourists visiting Queensland increased to 34 per cent (BTR, 1994).

Thai tourism to Australia is used in this study to measure the dimensions of cultural differences between Australian hosts and international tourists, and further, to assess whether such cultural dimensions can be used to throw new light upon the issue of developing marketing strategies which may lessen cultural impacts and potentially improve the level of tourist satisfaction.

ANALYSIS

A sample of 102 Thai tourists visiting the Gold Coast region (Southern Queensland, Australia) were surveyed in their own language, alongside 250 Australian tourism service providers. A probability, stratified sampling design was used. The Thai respondents were approached in places of their most frequent visitation such as theme parks, restaurants, shops, hotels, bars, and airports. The Australian respondents were surveyed in a variety of sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry such as accommodation, food and beverage, retail, transportation, tourist attractions, tour wholesaling, and customs.

The survey questionnaire aimed at capturing cultural differences in each population's cultural values, rules of social behavior, perceptions of service, preferences for social interaction and satisfaction with interaction. For this purpose, the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973), Argyle's et al (1986) list of rules of behaviour, Parasuraman's modified SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman et al 1985, 1988) and Feather's (1980) direct measures of social interaction were used. Separate components of satisfaction with interaction were measured. All questions were identical for both populations to permit comparison of answers, which were measured on six-point scales from "least important" to "most important". The internal consistency of the measuring instrument was evaluated by using Cronbach Alpha coefficients for five dimensions, which ranged between 0.75 and 0.95.

The responses were analyzed by the Mann-Whitney U Test, in which 64 (54.7%) out of 117 areas of measurement indicated significant cultural differences between Thai tourists and Australian hosts. Differences were found in 14 out of 36 cultural values, 20 out of 34 rules of behavior, 24 out of 29 perceptions of service, 3 out of 11 preferences for social interaction, and 3 out of 7 components of satisfaction. These differences were then analyzed by principal component analysis, for a tourist and host sample separately, with the objective of reducing the number of the significant differences and identifying a set of common underlying dimensions and their associated key variables. Factor loadings greater than 0.60 and dimensions with eigenvalues greater than 1 were considered significant. The orthogonally varimax rotated factor matrix identified six dimensions

of cultural differences between Thai tourists and Australian hosts. These were: *Courtesy, Idealism, Understanding the tourist, Display of feelings, Greetings, and Satisfaction.*

The Cronbach Alpha of each of the six dimensions ranged from 0.76 to 0.94 indicating that the six-factor solution was highly reliable. These six factors accounted for 57.9 percent of the total variance. The results of the varimax rotated factor matrix in the Thai sample are shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The six dimensions of the cultural differences between Thai tourists and Australian hosts identified in Table 3 require further explanation in order to understand both their marketing implications and potential for direct and indirect influence on satisfaction levels.

Courtesy

The Thai people place a high value on social interpersonal relationships, which must be smooth, relaxed, pleasant, and conflict-free. Harmonious social relations are achieved through being polite, friendly, respectful, humble and considerate.

The Thai forms of expressing *politeness* differ from the Australian form. The Thai rarely say "please" or "thank you" as polite Thai words already carry the "please" element. "Thank you" in Thai is reserved for situations where there is a sincere need to appreciate something that somebody has done for another. Instead of polite words the Thai use the smile. In Australia, words such as "please" and "thank you" are used very often. Thus, for Australians the Thai may appear to be ordering or even demanding something, whereas, in the Thai mind, they make a polite request.

In Thailand, consideration for feelings and respect are related to a hierarchical system of status. Respect is shown to parents, elders, teachers and others of a higher social position. In Australia respect is gained through achievement and hard work. In Thailand, humility and respect is often shown by excusing oneself and not trying to be at a higher level -something that Australians may not consider in personal relations and might find difficult to understand. Also, Australians place more emphasis on "doing one's own thing" and are not so much concerned about the consequences of their behavior on other people.

In Thailand, respect is also shown to material objects of everyday life. These include books, which bring knowledge and understanding; hats, which have association with the head; elephants and umbrellas, which are associated with royalty and religion; and rice, which gives life both for the individual and the nation. The most well known sacred symbol is the Buddha image, which teaches the Thai people to become closer to nature and eliminate suffering. In general, Thai people are very religious, they believe in super natural forces, spirits, fortune-telling, power of amulets and charms. In contrast, Australians do not have as many sacred symbols and spiritual beliefs, and are less focused on religion. Consequently, the Thai religious beliefs might not be understood by Australians and even seem odd.

In Thailand, interpersonal interactions also require being *friendly and truthful*. For the Thai people *truth* is relative and is determined upon a social situation and the necessity to conform to norms of respect and politeness, avoid unpleasantness, conflict and save face. Indirect communication is preferable. For Australians truth is absolute, does not depend on a given situation, and expectations are that everyone values directness and straightforwardness.

Idealism

Thailand has gained a reputation as the country of smiling people, where one can enjoy oneself and have a good time. Thai people do not commit themselves seriously to hard work which maybe essential for success (Komin, 1990). Achievement and task orientation are the least important values to the Thai people in relation to other values. The most important value is maintaining good relationships as a means to social recognition, prestige and success in life (Komin, 1990). Education is not treated as a value but as a means to climb the social ladder. This is in contrast to the Australian sense of achievement, competence based on the internal motivation to work hard, professionalism, self-assertion, self-actualization, self-reliance, and ambition. In Australia, these values are seen to guarantee accomplishment, wealth, power and social reputation.

The *family* and its security is most important for the Thai people. Life is centered around the extended family and very close relationships are maintained between the members of the family. Each member of the family is expected to support the family and contribute to its well-being. The family teaches obedience and respect of elders. The Thai family orientation might not be understood by Australians, who are taught independence and self-sufficiency.

Understanding the tourist

The Thai people are *group oriented* and there is a strong emphasis on being and doing things together. Community needs and well-being are more important than the interests of individuals. Peoples' needs are determined by their social status, that is, age, occupation, wage, education, family, social connections and physical appearance. Strict rules of social space between people of different status and ranking and acceptable behavior in various social situations are preserved. While the Thai accept *hierarchy of social structure* and inequality, modern Australian society favors egalitarianism. Moreover, in Australia social status and recognition is achieved through hard work and individual accomplishments rather than seniority and age.

Display of feelings

The imperative of all social interactions in Thailand is the maintenance of social harmony and the avoidance of any action and behavior which shows anger, displeasure, and impatience. The Thai are taught to be cool, avoid judgments, and not becoming involved in unpleasant situations, which create conflict. In contrast, Australians are unrestrained in their behavior, have less control over their verbal and non-verbal expressions as they place more emphasis on casual and flexible behavior, not determined by social position or age. Australian society accepts disagreements and differences in opinion as natural. The Australian focus is on solving problems and conflicts rather than avoiding them.

In Thailand, personal criticism is avoided because it is regarded as a social affront, a form of violence and a threat to social harmony. It is a sign of bad manners regardless of whether it is constructive or fair. All criticism is regarded as offensive and destructive. Differences in judgments and opinions are solved through discussion. Topics, which are socially accepted to complain about and criticize, are the food, the people, the weather or pollution. The Thai reluctance to criticize is extended to *asking personal questions*, if these might imply a criticism. The reason why public criticism and asking personal questions are unacceptable is because they can be an insult and incur loss of face. Losing face means violating one's own "self-ego", and it is avoided at all cost. In contrast, in Australia, it is more acceptable for people to disagree in public and be critical of each other. Australian people are encouraged to ask questions, employ critical thinking to challenge and disagree. However, although many Australians are not concerned with "saving face", the concept is becoming increasingly understood in Australia.

Greetings

Looking straight into one's *eyes* is against Thai rules of social behavior and most Thais agree that it is impolite to stare at people. Australians are characterized by the use of more gaze. The Thai people are also very careful about what they do with their *hands*. Rules related to hand movements are a very important element of social protocol. For instance, Thai people do not wave the hands as this is an indication of being angry. There are specific procedures in passing things by hands. The right hand should be used as it is perceived that the left hand is not as clean as the right. Hands should not be kept in pockets as this is considered bad manners. Australians feel free to use either hand, gesticulate by hand movements, and keeping hands in pockets is not always regarded as bad manners.

In Thai there is no traditional introduction protocol. A formal introduction by a third party is normally used if there is a good reason for the people involved to know each other and this formal introduction must conform to status rules. In contrast, the Australian forms of introduction are casual. The Thai people rarely say "hello" to people they see every day and everyday greetings are expressed with a smile. "Hello" is only an appropriate greeting for somebody not seen for some time. In contrast, Australians always say "hello" when greeting. In Thailand, a polite form of address also involves the use of title and *first name*, and this use of the first name does not carry the implication of friendliness or familiarity that it does in Australia.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction is related directly to the variables of satisfaction with conversation, hosts and friendship. *Conversations* require conformity to rules of social conduct. Talking about personal problems is avoided. However, questions regarding age and earnings, which are impolite to ask in Australia, are regarded as polite in Thailand because they offer a quick way of establishing a person's status.

Thai interpersonal contacts are expected to be humorous and light in nature. However, although the Thai people have a great sense of *humor*, they do not appreciate sarcasm, which is accepted in Australia. The Thai do not encourage intensely exclusive *relationships*, particularly with a stranger (*farang*). Thus, a polite and cool start to a relationship is preferred. When lasting friendships are developed the Thai feel free to ask for favors, which should be granted. Real friends become family members. In Australia, stronger, exclusive personal relationships are encouraged. However, since other people's privacy is respected, solitude is also accepted.

Thai interpersonal relationships are characterized by *superficiality* defined as surface behavior of individuals. Superficiality is seen to guarantee harmony in a society. According to Komin (1990), the Thai people have important reasons for maintaining superficiality of relationships. Firstly, personal contacts between those who live in villages often require co-operation. Secondly, Buddhism dictates avoiding extremes and detachment. Thirdly, spirit beliefs teach that anger offends and brings bad luck. Fourthly, since the community well-being is more important than individual needs, there are social pressures to conform to norms of conflict-avoidance which are expressed in written law and punishment. In contrast, although Australians tend to accept superficiality, they often look for a deeper meaning in relationships.

Determination of friendship in Thailand depends on who one is, whom one knows, one's wealth, and one's social status rather than principles, personal values, interests and activities. Thai people believe that principles and laws should be adjusted to fit people and situations. Thus, often Thai people are regarded by foreigners as irresponsible, selfish and unpredictable (Komin, 1990). This might be a reason why the Thai people are cautious about developing inclusive and strong relationships with foreigners. In contrast, Australians believe that people's behavior should be adjusted to law, regulations and a system of principles. Thus, Australians might be regarded by the Thai people as inflexible and non-human, which might generate huge misunderstanding and dissatisfaction with each other.

In addition, self-presentation is a very important indicator of a person's status and success in life. Physical appearance, mannerism, speech and actions must reflect a person's ranking. Modest clothes are required for

the respectable Thai. The color black is avoided as it is associated with death. In contrast, Australians do not assign such importance to self-presentation. Their clothing style is more casual and depends less on social position or age.

Table 4 summarizes the major cultural differences discussed above between Thai tourists and Australian hosts.

Insert Table 4

These identified cultural differences between Thai tourists and Australian hosts should be taken into account when developing marketing strategies aiming at the Thai tourist market.

CONCLUSION

The study results showed that there are significant measurable cultural differences between Thai tourists and Australian hosts. These differences can be grouped into six cultural dimensions distinguishing both populations. The variables, which significantly loaded on those dimensions, are the key indicators of the cultural differences between Thai tourists and Australian hosts. The study implies that the identified cultural dimensions and their key indicators should be used to develop effective culture-oriented marketing strategies aiming at the Thai tourist market. Those dimensions should also be used to influence the Australian host market in their decision-making in regard to marketing.

The significance of the study lies in recognizing the need for measuring cultural differences between international tourists and hosts of a destination visited and the development of culture-oriented marketing strategies aiming at the culturally different tourist markets. By implication, customer orientation is essential in achieving high levels of satisfaction and repeat visitation. Consequently, cultural factors are important contributory explanatory variables of tourist holiday satisfaction. Cultural factors should also be used in identifying international tourist profiles, their expectations, motivations and, consequently, in segmenting, targeting and positioning. Marketing strategies incorporating cultural differences would be more successful, effective and cost efficient than marketing strategies not assuming cultural differences between the tourist markets.

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Table 1 Asian tourist arrivals to Australia excluding Japan by major countries of origin
1994/1995

Ranking	Country	Arrivals	Asian market %	International market %
1	Singapore	193,400	19.6	5.5
2	Taiwan	146,400	14.9	4.2
3	Korea	133,600	13.5	3.8
4	Indonesia	121,300	12.3	3.5
5	Hong Kong	116,700	11.8	3.3
6	Malaysia	104,600	10.6	3.0
7	Thailand	76,400	7.7	2.2
8	China	33,800	3.4	1.0
9	Philippines	23,300	2.4	0.7
10	Other Asia	23,000	2.3	0.7
11	India	14,100	1.4	0.4
Total		987,000	100.0	28.2

*Source: Australia Bureau of Statistics Catalogue No 3401.0
year ended May 1995 (e.g. June 1994 to May 1995)*

Table 2 Asian tourist arrivals to Australia excluding Japan by major countries of origin
2004

Ranking	Country	Arrivals	Asian market %	International market %
1	Taiwan	501,987	16.9	6.0
2	Korea	448,836	15.1	5.3
3	Indonesia	419,331	14.1	5.0
4	Singapore	321,633	10.8	3.8
5	Thailand	311,224	10.5	3.7
6	China	310,074	10.5	3.7
7	Hong Kong	275,944	9.3	3.3
8	Malaysia	240,432	8.1	2.9
9	Other Asia	71,201	2.4	0.8
10	Philippines	64,733	2.2	0.8
Total		2,965,396	100.0	35.3

Source: Australian Tourist Commission (1994) Tourism Market Potential Targets 1994-2000

Table 3 Results of the varimax rotated factor matrix in the Thai sample for the variables which differed between Australian hosts and Thai tourists (significant factor loadings only)

Variable	Significant factor loadings
<i>F1. Courtesy</i>	
provide accurate information	0.80241
treat tourists as guests	0.78261
polite	0.76811
considerate	0.75905
trustworthy	0.75245
respectful	0.73429
friendly	0.67962
confident	0.67670
Reliability Cronbach's Alpha	0.9435
<i>F2. Idealism</i>	
happiness	0.82903
family security	0.81500
freedom	0.80993
world of beauty	0.76735
Reliability Cronbach's Alpha	0.9073
<i>F3. Understanding the tourist</i>	
understand tourists' needs	0.80599
anticipate tourists' needs	0.77863
give adequate explanations	0.74098
offer individual attention	0.73973
listen to tourists	0.62238
	0.9061
<i>F4. Display of feelings</i>	
swear in public	0.73116
criticize in public	0.72506
ask personal questions	0.72041
show emotions in public	0.66772
	0.7558
<i>F5. Greetings</i>	
look in the eye	0.71310
Shake hands	0.71310
address by first name	0.67936
Reliability Cronbach's Alpha	0.8009
<i>F6. Satisfaction</i>	
with conversation	0.85028
with hosts	0.83453
with friendship	0.79088
Reliability Cronbach's Alpha	0.8873

Table 4 Cultural differences between Thai tourists and Australian hosts

Thai tourists	Australian hosts
Smooth interpersonal relationships	Exclusive interpersonal relationships
Smile as an expression of politeness	Verbal expression of politeness
Concern about others' feelings	No concern about others' feelings
Respect to elders	No respect to elders
Focus on religious and spiritual beliefs	Focus on logic and science
Truth is relative	Truth is absolute
Focus on fun and pleasure	Focus on hard work
Focus on social relationships	Focus on assertion and task
Success perceived in social and religious terms	Success perceived in terms of achievement and money
Family orientation	Independent, self-sufficient
Group orientation, interdependence	Individual orientation
Importance of status, seniority, hierarchy	Egalitarianism
Risk avoidance	Risk taking
Self-control and self-restrain	Unreserved behavior
Criticism avoidance	Acceptance of constructive criticism
Avoidance of questions	Frequent critical questioning
Face saving	No face saving
Strong sense of self-ego	Weak sense of self-ego
Eye contact not frequent	Frequent eye contact
Restrained use of left hand	Free use of either hand
Formal introduction conforming to status	No formal introduction protocol
Greetings with a smile	Greetings with "hello"
Frequent smiling as a social function	Smiling used to express genuine pleasure
Addressing by title and first name	Addressing by first name
Enquiries about age and earnings accepted	Enquiries about age and earnings impolite
Inclusive personal relations	Exclusive personal relations
Superficiality	Need for a deep meaning
Humility	Self-confidence
Gratefulness and reciprocation	Selfishness
Situation orientation	System and principles orientation
Importance of self-presentation	Self-presentation less important
Importance of external presentation	External presentation less important

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