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## **AWARENESS TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION OF NATURAL ATTRACTION OF TOURISTS IN KOH SAMUI**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Environmental awareness of people is one of the important drivers in environmental conservation and solutions. This study was aimed at investigating the awareness toward environmental conservation of natural attraction of tourists in Koh Samui and studying factors influencing tourists' awareness towards environmental conservation of natural attraction. The samples were 400 Thai tourists selected by the convenience sampling technique. A questionnaire with a .983 reliability index was deployed to be the research instrument. The data were analyzed by percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and one-way ANOVA. The study revealed that awareness towards environmental conservation of Thai tourists was at a high level. Gender and age factors were not related to awareness towards environmental conservation of natural attraction. Meanwhile, education and occupation factors had an effect on awareness towards environmental conservation of natural attraction.

**Keywords:** Awareness, environmental conservation, natural attraction, tourist, Koh Samui

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is one of the important drivers in economic and social development. Because it generates income, creates careers and fosters economic and social development and expansion. The tourism sector in Thailand is considered as a service industry that plays an important role in the national economy and generates a lot of income into the country each year. The beautiful landscape and many tourist attractions are the tourism potential of Thailand. In addition, Thai people are humble and friendly. Moreover, their sincere service is impressive for tourists.

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At the same time, the growth of tourism requires natural resources, art and culture resources, and labor resources, all of which are expenditures in tourism operations to attract the attention of tourists by focusing on generating as much income as possible, regardless of the possible negative effects that may destroy natural resources and the environment. Currently, some tourist attractions have been either partially damaged or completely destroyed by the rapid growth of the tourism industry. Which humans are considered one of the major causes of environmental problems and environmental crises. Natural resources were neglected and disregarded and overused that caused the decline of environmental quality (Sukwat et al., 2009).

Surat Thani province is one of the provinces on the coast of the Gulf of Thailand. There are beautiful marine attractions and natural attractions, so many tourists come to visit. At the same time, it was found that Surat Thani province is experiencing environmental problems and environmental crises. The number of tourists increasing every year caused an increased demand for resources in Surat Thani province. Koh Samui is located in Surat Thani province which encounters environmental problems such as water shortages in the hot season, problems of overflowing and foul odors of waste. Data from the pollution control department found that Surat Thani province is ranked 5th in the country that is experiencing waste management problems. It is found that personal characteristics factors have different effects on awareness and behavior in preserving natural resources and the environment. Tourism activities continuously affect the ecology and the environment and tourists are considered one of the important factors affecting tourism resources and the environment. Many people rarely participate in protecting natural resources and the environment because they do not have the knowledge and may not really understand about environmental issues and their impact. Moreover, they may lack positive awareness, attitude, and behavior in environmental protection and conservation (Phongkhieo and Teampanpong, 2018).

At present, the quality of nature and the environment have become a major problem and a challenge to the government and tourist destinations in managing sustainable tourism destinations. Environmental management in tourist destinations requires cooperation from all sectors, including the government, private and public sectors, and the participation of tourists. Therefore, it is necessary to raise public environmental awareness and strengthen their attitudes to ensure the improvement of environmental protection and conservation (Xu et al., 2012; Praneetham and Leekancha, 2015; Praneetham and Thathong, 2016). Tourists play a crucial

role to promote and support environmental conservation. The participation and involvement of tourists are essential drivers in resolving the environmental crisis and sustainable environmental conservation. Therefore, the researcher is interested to study the awareness of tourists in view of natural resources, waste management, and environmental conservation of natural attraction in Koh Samui.

### **The Purpose of the Research**

The objectives of this research were:

- 1) To investigate the awareness toward environmental conservation of natural attraction of tourists in Koh Samui
- 2) To study factors influencing tourists' awareness towards environmental conservation of natural attraction.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research design was implemented in steps by step as follows:

1. The research population for this research was 381,818 Thai tourists who traveled to Koh Samui, Surat Thani province, Thailand. The samples of the study were 400 Thai tourists. They were selected by the convenience sampling technique.
2. The 5-point-rating-scale questionnaire with a 0.983 reliability index was used for data collection. The quantitative research was done by using questionnaire as tool for data collection.
3. The frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test, and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze the data.

### **RESULTS**

The results of the study were as follows:

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	175	43.8
Female	225	56.2
Age		
Lower than 21	18	4.5
21 – 30	281	70.2

31 – 40	59	14.8
41 – 50	24	6.0
51 – 60	10	2.5
more than 60	8	2.0
<b>Education</b>		
Primary school	24	6.0
High school	20	5.0
Secondary school or equal level	37	9.3
Diploma or equal level	37	9.3
Bachelor	273	68.2
Higher than Bachelor	9	2.2
<b>Occupation</b>		
Farmers / Agriculturist	17	4.2
Business owner/self – employed	39	9.8
Employee	250	62.5
Official	12	3.0
Housewife/ Retired	13	3.2
Student	59	14.8
Tour Guide	10	2.5

From Table 1, the respondents of this study were 400 Thai tourists. Of these, there were 225 female with 56.2% and 175 male with 43.8%. According to the age of the sample group, 70.2% of them were at the age of 21 – 30. Regarding educational background of the sample tourists, more than half of them graduated with bachelor's degree. Regarding occupation, the biggest group of the tourists were employees (62.5%).

Table 2: Awareness toward environmental conservation of natural attraction

Topics	Awareness	
	Mean	SD
Natural resources	4.39	0.62
Waste management	4.35	0.68
Environmental conservation	4.35	0.61
Total	4.36	0.62

From Table 2, the results showed that the overall awareness of the respondents toward environmental conservation was at a high level (mean =4.36, S.D. =.62). The three high rated factors of the awareness were natural resources (mean =4.39, S.D. =.62), waste management (mean =4.35, S.D. =.68), and environmental conservation (mean =4.35, S.D. =.61) respectively.

Table 3: Comparison of the tourists' awareness towards environmental conservation of natural attraction by gender

	Male		Female		t-value	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Awareness	4.40	0.60	4.33	0.61	1.141	.628

As illustrated in Table 3, the results showed that male and female did not have the difference of environmental awareness with statistical significance at 0.05.

Table 4: Comparison of the tourists' Awareness towards environmental conservation of natural attraction by age

Source of Variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Group	3.465	5	.693	1.914	.091
Within Group	142.660	394	.362		
Total	146.125	399			

\* P<0.05

As exhibited in Table 4, the study found that there was no statistically significant difference on awareness towards environmental conservation of natural attraction among the tourists based on their age (p<0.05).

Table 5: Comparison of the tourists' awareness on environmental conservation of natural attraction by education level

Source of Variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Group	4.108	5	.822	2.279	.046*
Within Group	142.017	394	.360		
Total	146.125	399			

\* P<0.05

As illustrated in Table 5, the results showed that there were differences of average scores about awareness on environmental conservation of natural attraction of tourists. This meant that the level of education influenced on environmental awareness.

The LSD was used for analysis of each pair of education level to determine the mean score differences of their environmental awareness. It showed that the tourists' awareness of primary school and Bachelor were statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) (mean = 4.62 and 4.31), as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6: LSD analysis of each pair comparisons

Awareness	PS	HS	SS	DP	BC	HB
Primary School (PS)	-	.58 3	.23 4	.06 8	.01 3*	.85 9
High School (HS)		-	.59 9	.25 9	.11 6	.55 7
Secondary School or equal level (SS)			-	.47 1	.21 3	.30 5
Diploma or equal level (DP)				-	.77 3	.14 0
Bachelor (BC)					-	.07 7
Higher than Bachelor (HB)						-

\* P<0.05

Table 7: Comparison of the tourists' awareness on environmental conservation of natural attraction by occupation

Source of Variation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Between Group	7.575	5	1.262	3.581	.002**
Within Group	138.550	393	.353		
Total	146.125	399			

\*\* P<0.01

Table 7 indicated that there was significant difference on awareness towards environmental conservation of natural attraction among the tourists based on their occupations ( $p < 0.01$ ).

The LSD was used for analysis of each pair of occupation to determine the mean score differences of their environmental awareness. It showed that the tourists' awareness of farmers / agriculturist and tour guide were statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) (mean = 4.34 and 4.83), of employee and official were statistical different ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Mean = 4.27 and 4.70), and of employee and student were statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.01$ ) (mean = 4.27 and 4.52), also including of employee and tour guide were statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.01$ ) (mean = 4.27 and 4.83), as illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8: LSD analysis of each pair comparisons

Awareness	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Farmers / Agriculturist	-	.575	.612	.113	.628	.283	.040*
2. Business owner/self – employed		-	.092	.187	.961	.519	.065
3. Employee			-	.014*	.282	.004*	.003**
4. Official				-	.294	.339	.606
5. Housewife/ Retired					-	.702	.128
6. Student						-	.126
7. Tour guide							-

\* P<0.05, \*\* P<0.01

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The result indicated that the tourists' awareness towards the environment was at a "good" level. Tourists had a positive attitude in natural resources, environmental management, and environmental conservation of natural attraction. This is consistent with the research of Bamrungsuk (2012) that the respondents' attitude towards the environment was at a "good" level. This finding is also aligning with Chikuakul et al.'s (2017) research and Praneetham et al.'s (2018) research. They confirmed that the overall awareness towards the environment of the sample was found at a high level. Nowadays, consumers realize that the world's resources are limited. Consumers began to consider the effects of consumption on environmental problems. Awareness is therefore very important in changing the behavior of consumers to pay attention to products for the environment. Kaewnuch (2017) and Phongkhieo and Teampanpong (2018) found that tourists are aware of the environment, problems and impacts on tourist sites and believe that they are the main factor in creating environmental impacts. They have received environmental information and environmental problems from various media continuously. Therefore, they have knowledge, understanding, and awareness of the importance of environmental conservation.

The result revealed that the difference in the tourists' awareness towards the environment was highly statistical significance at the level of 0.05. Education and occupation factors had an effect on awareness towards environmental conservation of natural attraction. Xu et al. (2012) mentioned that people's knowledge level correlates with environmental conservation. Education is a necessary process that can help people gain knowledge and raise awareness of environmental conservation. In most of the studies conducted earlier noted that public awareness of the environment can ensure improving effective environmental protection and conservation (Sukwat, 2012; Xu et al., 2012; Praneetham et al., 2018). Increasing knowledge about the environment will help people to perceive environmental attitudes and behaviors in a good way. Therefore, it is necessary to promote environmental knowledge, to have a positive attitude and awareness towards environmental problems which will lead to a positive change in behavior. Hence, encouraging everyone to have awareness and a positive attitude towards the environment will help stimulate the conservation of resources and the environment and resulting in a greater commitment to participate in environmental activities.

Currently, Koh Samui is experiencing a lot of garbage on the island. Koh Samui municipality is still unable to take care of solving the problem (Sridokmai, 2014).



It was found that most people in Koh Samui lack the opportunity to participate in activities or express opinions with government agencies. Most of the participation in activities is performed as far as opportunity is provided such as cleanliness, no littering in tourist attractions, and garbage collection (Jarujittipant, 2015). It can be said that inappropriate behavior and environmental unfriendliness, and the lack of participation affect the ecosystem's natural resources and environment.

The use of natural resources and the environment lavishly and lack of awareness, understanding, and awareness of environmental conservation are important problems and obstacles in preserving the environment (Praneetham and Monpanthong, 2019). Therefore, creating awareness for everyone to pay attention to the environment is an important issue that must be taken urgently. Especially the cultivation of participation in preserving the environment for children and young people can lead everyone to participate in good environmental protection. If everyone collaborates and helps to restore the environment, they will help to reduce pollution. Participation in environmental protection is therefore very necessary. In addition, the law or measures to punish those who destroy the environment in Thailand are not violent that causes a small number of people to follow the rules to help protect the environment. In order to allow everyone to help conserve natural resources and the environment, everyone needs to be aware of the value of the environment as common property and must help to conserve the environment.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations for further studies, it is recommended to study factors affecting participation and involvement in environmental activities in natural tourist attractions, conducting a study on awareness, behavior, and participation in environmental conservation and natural attractions with other sample groups, including local people, officials, and entrepreneurs since this study is a sample study of Thai tourists only. Since the main problem with the Samui tourist attraction is waste, therefore, waste management behavior and ways to get rid of waste in Koh Samui most efficiently should be studied.

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