

**A Study on the Promotion of Tourism between Japan and Thailand: Before- and After-Travel  
Images of Sapporo and Its Hot springs in the Viewpoints of Thai Tourists**

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**ABSTRACT**

In order to effectively promote tourism between Japan and Thailand, it is important to understand the destination images as perceived by international visitors. To date, no studies have been found which focus solely on the destination image of Thai tourists visiting Sapporo, Hokkaido in Japan, in particular its hot spring sites. This exploratory study assessed the before- and after-travel images of Sapporo, Hokkaido in Japan and its hot spring sites in the viewpoints of prospective and present Thai tourists. Their travel satisfaction assessment was also conducted as a section in the after-travel image assessment. The sample in the study includes two sample groups: Thai tourists departing to Sapporo, Hokkaido and Thai tourists after their trips in Sapporo, Hokkaido. The quantitative and qualitative methodologies were used for the image assessment, both questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The study identified the target market group profile of Thai tourists for Sapporo and its hot spring sites. Also it proposed how to improve the destinations as Thai tourists' perceptions, how to attract more new prospective Thai tourists and how to find the right marketing strategies and activities to approach them. There were recommendations provided for Sapporo's tourism managers and marketers, hot springs spa resort owners and managers, Thai outbound travel agents and further research in these areas.

**Background to the Research**

Since September 2002, the Japanese and Thai governments started exploring a possible bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2001/2002. And in December 2003, they jointly announced the collaboration action plans. In that FTA, it covers all issues including tourism that can lead to the economic growth of the both countries. The main

topics of tourism are exploring new attractive tourist sites and creating collaborative good opportunities in developing tourism of the both countries. Hot springs in the both countries were also mentioned in the agreement as one of the attractive nature tourist sites that need to be developed and promoted (bilaterals. org, 2004).

This study is one of the action plans to promote tourism of the both countries, in particular hot springs sites. Its main objectives are to assess the Thai tourists' perceptions of marketing activities that use for attracting them. Practically, it surveys the images of Sapporo in prospective Thai tourists' viewpoints and also assesses their images after traveling in Sapporo. The focuses are on marketing activities of hot springs spa sites in Sapporo.

### **Research Aims**

The aims of this study are as follows:

- 1) To find out the demographic factors of prospective and present Thai tourists for Sapporo travels
- 2) To identify the images of Sapporo, as well as its hot springs spa sites in the viewpoints of prospective and present Thai tourists
- 3) To assess the Thai tourists' satisfaction in Sapporo trips, as well as hot springs spa sites.
- 4) To identify favorable and unfavorable impressions of the Thai tourists in Sapporo trips
- 5) To identify the market strategies and activities appropriate for applying with Thai tourists for Sapporo tourism, in particular hot springs spa sites.

### **Importance of Destination Image Study**

In order to effectively promote Sapporo in the international travel market like Thai tourists, it is important to understand its destination images as perceived by international visitors. In other words, Sapporo's tourism marketers need to create or strengthen the types of images in the international travel market in order to market Sapporo more effectively.

According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), creating and managing an appropriate destination image are critical to effective positioning and marketing strategies. Gartner (1993) stressed that understanding images held by target markets is essential to avoid

moving the image into a position held by an able and strong competitor. It is generally recognized that one of the most important components of a marketing strategy is product positioning. Basically, positioning involves creating the appropriate image of the product in the minds of the consumers in the targeted markets. Because of their importance, destination-marketing organizations often devote considerable time to creating images and to channeling these through various media to targeted consumers who, it is hoped, will decode the messages and respond appropriately.

The importance of image analysis in tourism marketing has been addressed by a number of researchers such as Woodside and Lysonski (1989), Reilly (1990), Fakeye and Crompton (1991) and Schiffman and Kanuk (1991), etc. It is suggested that image is the most important aspect of a tourist attraction from a marketing point of view and an accurate assessment of product image is a prerequisite to designing an effective marketing strategy. Hence, measuring and managing destination image should be a major priority for destination marketing staff. In order to remain competitive, destination marketers must be able to understand how tourists perceive a destination's products and services. Different travel destinations may have different images specifically made to fulfill the various needs of international tourists. Locations and sites may project distinctive images as a reflection of the uniqueness of their specific local environment, culture and economy and destinations need to project their distinctive images in order to enhance tourism appeal (Shaw and Williams, 1992). Developing a competitive position among tourism destinations is usually accomplished by creating and transmitting a favorable image to potential tourists in target markets (Chon, 1990; Gartner, 1993). Tourism destinations often compete on nothing more than the images held in the minds of potential tourists (Chon, 1990; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999).

In order to develop and boost Sapporo's international tourism, a primary step and task for Sapporo's tourism managers and marketers is to identify and create a favorable destination image, which can be used to induce potential international tourists. Such an understanding will provide useful information for developing effective marketing strategies that will result in a wise investment of limited resources as well as satisfying potential tourists' expectations and needs. However, a search of previous studies and reports on Sapporo's tourism indicates that little empirical research has ever been conducted in identifying the image of Sapporo as an international travel destination, in particular for Thai tourists, albeit such an understanding is a prerequisite and necessity

in marketing Sapporo as an attractive international travel destination. Considering the importance of image study in destination marketing, it is essential for Sapporo to identify its favorable destination image prior to actual promotion and advertising campaigns.

### Destination Image's Impact on Tourist Behavior

Destination image is based on an individual's perception and attitude that is heavily influenced by external stimuli (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). For most people, tourism promotion plays an important role in distributing information stimuli. Image of the destination is also related to past experience (Chon, 1990; Hu and Ritchie 1993; Ahmed, 1994; Milman and Pizam, 1995). Litvin (2000) states an individual's perception of a destination image is reassessed by his or her each experience. Thus according to the different experiences, the destination image may not only vary between the tourists who have visited Sapporo, but also between previous tourists and those who have never visited Sapporo. Specifically, this study explores prospective and present tourists' perceived image and travel satisfaction towards Sapporo, Hokkaido in Japan.

Due to destination image's potential influence on several tourist behaviors, researchers have been trying to identify the determinants that define, modify, and strengthen this construct in an effort to help destination authorities in their image management endeavors. These determinants include: 1) information sourcing from the destination, such as promotional messages by the destination authorities, 2) information sourcing from the autonomous agents in between the destination and the perceivers, such as news articles, educational materials, movies, popular culture and word-of-mouth, 3) perceivers' characteristics including sociodemographics as well as past travel behavior, and 4) methodological factors that play a role while measuring image, such as the methodologies used and researchers themselves.

Several past studies have shown the influence of perceivers' sociodemographic characteristics including age, gender, household status, education, income, and residence/ geographic distance to the study destination (Hunt, 1975; Alhemoud and Armstrong, 1996; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). Several past travel behavior variables, including previous visitation, the amount of previous visitation, and length of stay have also been documented as important determinants of destination image by several researchers (Crompton, 1979; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu and McCleary,

1999). However, there is a lack of research on other past travel behaviors, such as overall travel experience, the season appropriate for visits and activities participated in while at the destination.

In tourist behavior studies, most concentration is focused on travel motivation studies, the travel purchase decision-making process, and the tourist destination image formation. Some researchers (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Gallarza and Gil, 2006) identify that the tourist destination image formation and motivation arousal process are the most important phases in the tourist destination selection process. Images are more important than the tangible resources and realities. This is because the perceived images really motivate an individual to act or not to act. Thus, attempting to boost the Thai tourist market segment, it is necessary to better understand the Thai traveler's destination choice behavior. The intent of this study is to explore both the Thai consumers' perceived tourist destination image of Sapporo and their travel motivation.

### Image formation and destination choice

For destination marketers, perhaps the most significant aspect of an image is its influence on travel behavior. A traveler creates an image by processing information about a destination from various sources over time. This information is organized into a mental construct that in some way is meaningful to the individual. Gunn (1972) suggests that destination images fall on a continuum beginning with the organic image followed by the induced image and ending in the complex image. The stage of an individual's image depends on his or her experience with the destination.

According to Gunn (1972), the organic image arises from a long history of non-tourism specific information, such as history and geography books, newspaper reports, magazine articles, and television reports that were not intended as tourism-specific. Thus, individuals who have never visited a destination nor have sought out any tourism-specific information will likely have some kind of information stored in their memory. At this point there might be an incomplete image, to which the traveler adds other bits and pieces. Advertising can also affect image, especially prior to the actual experience (Perry, Izraeli and Perry, 1976; Butler, 1990; Bojanic, 1991; Telisman-Kosuta, 1989). As such the suggestion implies that it will be easier for the advertiser to affect images than expectations. If the advertiser does change expectations, and does so with false or misleading advertising, this will likely result in unsatisfied customers.

Induced image is derived from a conscious effort of tourism promotion directed by tourism organizations. While the organic image is beyond the control of the destination area, the induced image is directed by the destination's marketing efforts. It depends upon colorful brochures distributed at Visitor Information Centers, information available in travel agencies, travel articles in magazines, TV advertisements, and many other activities a tourism organization might choose to promote the destination. The findings of the consumer studies in tourism (Mayo, 1973; Hunt, 1975; Goodrich, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Phelps, 1986) indicate that the concept of "product image" is even more important in tourism because the tourism product is intangible and it requires simultaneous purchase and consumption. As the traveler usually has limited knowledge about a destination which he or she has not previously visited, the traveler relies heavily on the symbolic information acquired either from media or from their social references (Gunn, 1988; Chon, 1989; Chon, 1990). The complex image is a result of an actual visitation and incorporates the experience at the destination. Because of this direct experience with the destination, the image tends to be more complex and differentiated (Chon, 1991; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991).

Images are also seen to impact upon satisfaction. The argument is that the image of the location and the expectation of the destination need to be matched or there is a risk of dissatisfaction (Ross, 1993; Botha, Crompton and Kim, 1999; Andreau, Bigne and Cooper, 2000; O'Leary and Deegan, 2002).

### **Tourist Satisfaction**

Similarly, if the individual is satisfied with the destination it is argued this can affect the image (Bigne and Zorio, 1989; Chon, 1990; Ryan, 1994) either negatively causing a change or positively causing reinforcement (Bigne, Sanchez and Sanchez, 2001). This argument does not conflict conceptually with the disconfirmation model because ultimate satisfaction could change image over time and this is consistent with the concept that image is mutable (Gunn, 1972). Research examining the influence of experience on image and perceptions could be done, that relates the outcome to satisfaction and the difference between direct and indirect demand. For example, it would be expected that positive image (perception) reinforcement from experience, following a satisfied outcome would lead to repeat visitation more strongly, than positive image (perception) reinforcement following dissatisfaction, because the latter would lead to a greater imbalance

between image and expectations because of subsequent changed expectations.

In this regard, previous consumer satisfaction studies in tourism mainly involved the use of utilitarian (functional) attributes (e.g. availability of facilities for recreational activities) with little attention to value-expressive attributes of the destination. The destination product is not one product, but a package of products, services and activities that each capable of inducing feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In the tourism purchase, the vacation traveler will invest with no expectation of material and economic return on his or her purchase of an intangible experience. As a consequence, the traveler may have stronger feelings associated with the product symbols (i.e. the symbolic image of a destination). From the strategic management perspective, a tourism organization can improve its chance of designing strategies that optimize environmental opportunities by making an accurate assessment of its customer environment (Chon and Olsen, 1990). The implication is that, to take adequate strategic actions in the area of tourism marketing, one must understand how people perceive a destination and what makes them satisfied or dissatisfied with tour experiences.

If a destination area wants to enjoy the patronage by its visitors, it will be crucial for the area to identify whether or not its visitors were satisfied with their visit to the destination. According to the consumer behavior models, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the tourist experience can influence future intentions to return as they become inputs to the tourists' post-visit beliefs (Um and Crompton, 1990), preferences (Woodside and Lysonski, 1989), and image (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Chon, 1990) of the destination. Consequently, all these new cognitions and affect arising from the tourists' post-visit evaluation reinforce their preference structures and influence future decision making.

Many people have limited volitional control over future decisions to travel or return to a destination. Perceived or actual constraints, such as cost, time and the availability of travel companions limit their opportunity and ability to travel, even if they wished to do so. Even if a tourist is satisfied with a visit and does not recognize any travel constraints, other factors may inhibit a decision to return. For example, some tourists may not want to return (in the near future) simply because they want to visit and experience new places (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979).

From Dann (1978)'s leisure-oriented perspective, tourist satisfaction should be properly studied as a domain of overall satisfaction with quality of life. He held that the

tourist satisfaction was much too complex to be subject to the transactional framework of consumer satisfaction. On the other hand, Pizam, Neumann and Reichel (1978) argued that, indeed, tourist satisfaction could and should be analyzed as a form of consumer satisfaction, albeit a more complex one. The recreation, leisure and tourism literature, in particular strong marketing orientation of the tourism field has tended to encourage attribute-oriented satisfaction research (Mazursky, 1989; Pizam and Milman, 1993; Teye and Leclerc, 1998). Hence, this study focuses on Thai tourists' satisfaction in visiting Sapporo, Hokkaido and its hot springs sites.

### Sapporo, Hokkaido and its hot springs sites

Central Hokkaido, which includes Sapporo, the political and economic base of the prefecture, serves as the economic center of Hokkaido, and yet is blessed with unspoiled natural beauties. Sapporo, Japan's fifth largest city in population, is located on the western plains of Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan. More than 60% of Sapporo primarily in the southwest is mountainous, creating a concentration of urban activity focused around the Toyohira River, which runs through the city. Sapporo is located in a sub-frigid zone and enjoys cool, pleasant summers although winters are cold and snowy. First snowfalls can be expected in October but doesn't accumulate until December. Low-pressure fronts from Siberia bring heavy snow in January and February, with average temperatures of  $-4.1$  degrees in January, the coldest month (Japan National Tourist Organization, 2006).

Sapporo in western Hokkaido is divided up in a grid pattern, and is the largest city on the island. Odori Avenue Park stretches from east to west in the center of the city, and is a symbol of the city - full of art objects, fountains, lilac and acacia plants and lots of flowerbeds. To the north stand trading companies, financial institutions and local government offices, while to the south is a large underground shopping mall, which is always busy as the city's main shopping center. It is directly connected to Sapporo Station, which is the transport hub for all Hokkaido and is the place to board JR Lines, the subway, and both local and tourist buses. The city contains many essential sights, such as the Sapporo City Clock, which has been marking time for over a century; the old Hokkaido government building, a neo-baroque building known as "Red Brick" that is lit up after dark; and the poplars outside Hokkaido University (formerly the Hokkaido Agricultural College). Odori Avenue Park is more than 1,400 meters long. In summer

it is full of beer gardens, while in winter it forms the location for the Yuki-matsuri Festival (snow festival). During the Snow Festival, this big park is lined with magnificent snow statues and beautiful ice statues.

The hot springs sites in the Central Hokkaido include Noboribetsu Hot springs, Jozankei Hot springs, Niseko Hot springs and Lake Toya Hot springs (Hokkaido Tourism Association and Hokkaido Tourism Promotion Council, 2006). Noboribetsu-onsen is one of Hokkaido's best-known hot springs, and is surrounded by virgin forest 200 meters above sea level. It has over ten kinds of water, containing minerals such as hydrogen sulfide, salt, and iron. The quality of these minerals means the spa ranks among the world's most exceptional hot springs. It was ranked "the best hot springs spa in Japan" in the survey of tour magazine. This survey was given to the travel agents for the purpose of choosing the best hot springs in more than 2,000 throughout nation based on the comprehensive evaluation of services, hospitality and the quality of hot springs water. This means Noboribetsu receive a guarantee of its quality by professionals. Not only popular in Japan, but recently, Noboribetsu attracts people from outside the country like Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea and the number of visitors is growing annually. The most impressive scene at the hot springs is Jigoku-dani Valley (hell valley), where yellowish gray volcanic gas is given off from the surface of the rocks. This makes the whole place smell strongly of sulfur, and gives it an image of hell. The valley is a 450-meter diameter volcano mouth, which produces 3,000 liters of hot water a day. It is a popular tourist destination. In the northeastern part of the hot springs grow many sorts of wide-leafed trees, including oaks and a bamboo grass called kumazasa. This is called Noboribetsu Genshirin, or primeval forest, and has been designated a natural monument. To the west is Shiho-mine Peak, from which you can view Lake Kuttara-ko, whose clear water is the second most transparent in Japan (JNTO, Hokkaido).

Jozankei Spa, the "playground of Sapporo," is a resort nestled in a mountain ravine at the upper reaches of the Toyohira River, which flows on through central Sapporo. Here, the mountain trees bud and blossom to create a pale shimmer in spring. In summer, the mountain forests are a sea of fresh green leaves, and in autumn the whole ravine becomes a canvas of colorful leaves. This yields to winter, when steam rises from the hot springs amidst snow, as if drawn by ink brush. Jozankei ranks among Hokkaido's most prestigious spa resorts, attracting many visitors throughout the year

from throughout Japan and elsewhere. The hot water at Jozankei Spa takes hundreds of year to surface as it rises naturally from 2,000 meters below the Earth's crust. The water is extraordinarily clear and is slightly saline, containing sodium chloride (salt). It is famous for supplying the largest amount of such hot water in Hokkaido. The great clarity is proof that the water's various components are completely dissolved and, thus, are highly therapeutic. (Shikanoyu)

A variety of hot springs facilities have been established in the Niseko resort area. Of these facilities, outdoor baths where people can also enjoy mountain views are particularly popular.

Lake Toya-ko, which is situated in the southwestern part of Hokkaido, belongs to the Shikotsu-Toya National Park. Repetitive volcanic activity in the early 20th century created a depression in the ground, giving birth to Lake Toya-ko as a result. This wide lake lies 200-500 meters below the outer rim of the crater. The active volcano that stands proudly near the lake with white smoke rising above it is Mt. Showa Shinzan. The volcano was elevated when the ground cracked during a huge earthquake in 1943. Toya-ko-onsen which stretches out along the 43-kilometer diameter crater lake, is one of the best spa resorts in Hokkaido (JNTO, Hokkaido). For this study, the image assessment was done for the mineral bath experiences in this area.

For the services in these hot springs sites, they include outdoor large communal bathing facilities, indoor communal baths, private baths and family baths. Also sight-seeing around hot springs sites and foot soaking in hot springs water are included.

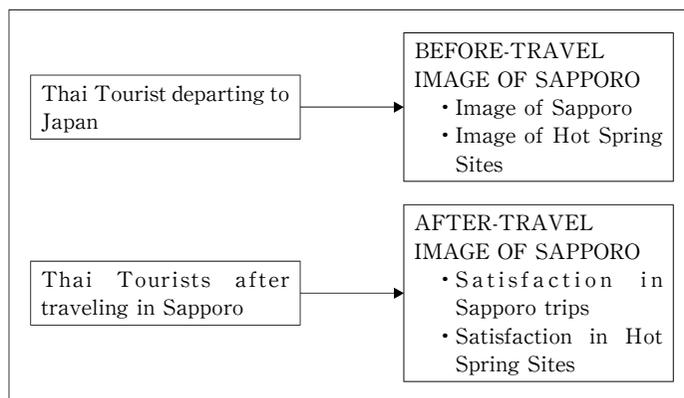
### **Type of Research Design**

This study can be described as exploratory research and aims to gain insights into the images of Sapporo before travel and after travel, in particular the image of its hot spring sites (Fig.1). It uses both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to achieve the aims.

### **Development of Before Travel Image Assessment of Sapporo**

There are two sections in this questionnaire: "Demographic Data" and "Before Travel Assessment". The first section is the tourists' profile which includes gender, age, job and possible pay for a tour program. The sequence of the questionnaire starts from general organic image items, followed by induced image items before moving to more

Fig. 1 Research Design



specific organic image items about hot spring sites. Also the marketing mix theory was used in 4Ps: price, place (channeling distribution), promotion and product. Egg boiling service is also included because it is the main service in the hot springs sites in Thailand. Since the contents were related to travel image, there are more items about timing for travel and probability to travel to Sapporo.

### Development of After-Travel Image Assessment of Sapporo

There are three sections in this questionnaire: “Sapporo’s Image Assessment”, “Tour and Hot Spring Site Satisfaction” and “Demographic Data”. In the “Sapporo’s Image Assessment” section, it starts with the tourist sample group’s experiences in Sapporo and followed by their experiences in hot spring sites. The second section includes the tourist satisfaction assessment in the main tour activities and in the hot spring site’s services. The last one, the demographic data section, is the tourists’ profile: gender, age, marital status, job and income per year. All the items in this questionnaire are all complex image items. The marketing mix theory was also used in 4Ps.

For the tourist satisfaction assessment, the literature in the area of tourist satisfaction in destinations in particular Sapporo, Hokkaido and hot springs sites was exhaustive searched, including the tourist satisfaction assessment instrument belonging to Hokkaido Tourism Promotion Council. This is to identify all possible items that might be included in this section. However, this study requires the data about Thai tourists’ satisfaction that could create the images after their travel in Sapporo; therefore, the Thai tourist sample traveling in Sapporo assessed only the tourist satisfaction in the main tour

activities and the hot springs site's services. For the hot springs site services, egg boiling in hot springs was still included as an item since this service has been the main service for hot springs sites in Thailand and maybe Thai tourists expect this service for their next visit. To enable systematic measurement, the sample were asked to rate each item, using a five-point scale ranging from "1=most satisfied" to "5=need improvement", which has been widely used in the tourism field. To reduce the potential bias of prompting forced responses, an option marked "9=no idea" was included for each item. It was acknowledged that tourists may not use every service or join every activity in tour programs.

### Development of In-Depth Interview Questions

There are 6 structured questions focusing on the tourist sample group's experiences in taking hot spring mineral baths. Therefore, these questions were used for the interview with the tourists who have taken mineral baths in this trip. These questions are:

1. *Have you had ever taken mineral baths before this time?*
2. *Please describe your feeling for the first time you have taken a mineral bath?*
3. *Why did you have a trial in taking your first time mineral bath?*
4. *Have you ever used spa services? If yes, what are they?*
5. *What do you think about joining a spa package tour in Japan?*
6. *Do you have any recommendations for hot springs spas for improvement?*

### Pilot Studies

Two pilot tests were conducted to test the validity and reliability of the survey instruments. The first pilot study was conducted with 50 Thai tourists departing to Sapporo, Hokkaido at the Bangkok Airport for the first tourist questionnaire, "Before Travel Image Assessment of Sapporo". The last pilot test was conducted with 32 Thai tourists after their travel in Sapporo for the second questionnaire, "After Travel Image Assessment of Sapporo". Since the questionnaire allowed the tourists to record "9" as "no idea", the number of respondents in each item was different. The pilot survey responses were analyzed using SPSS/PC+ software.

## Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Zikmund (1997) defined content validity as the subjective agreement among professionals that a scale logically appears to reflect accurately what it purports to measure. To achieve content validity of the two questionnaires, a group of outbound tour and spa experts were approached to review and validate them. This group consisted of 5 outbound tour business owners whose most package tours have been organized in Japan and 5 spa business owners who has ever been in business tours in Japan several times. The meeting was organized in a hotel meeting room after the monthly meeting of a tourism business owner association in Chiang Mai. Each member of the group received a copy of the two questionnaires 1 week before the meeting. As a result of the meeting, a number of changes were made in wording, phrasing and overall presentation of the questionnaires. Also the results of the two pilot tests confirmed that the two questionnaires were valid for use with the target tourists. Hence, the instruments used in the present study received professional agreement that the measures provided adequate coverage of the concept and had clear and understandable questions. Additionally, the instruments for this study were developed and designed considering the literature review; therefore, they were considered theoretical valid. Since our entire target samples are Thai, the study instruments were originally designed in Thai.

All the items in the **Before-Travel Image Assessment of Sapporo Questionnaire** and the majority of **After-Travel Image Assessment of Sapporo Questionnaire** can be measured in frequency and percentage. Therefore, they were not required to assess the reliability, except the second section of the tourist satisfaction assessment in the **After-Travel Image Assessment of Sapporo Questionnaire**. In order to measure the reliability of the second section, the Coefficient alpha was chosen. A desirable reliability coefficient is between 0.80 and 0.90, though for exploratory research such as this study, 0.50 and 0.60 is an acceptable range. The results of Coefficient Alpha values in the tourist satisfaction assessment are 0.69 in main tour activities and 0.96 in hot spring sites. This can be concluded that this section of the questionnaire was reliable.

## Sample

In order to achieve the aims of the present study, the total population investigated in this study consisted of Thai tourists both departing to Sapporo, Hokkaido and

finishing their trips in this city. The best-suited sampling technique for the purposes of the study is nonprobability sampling, where units of the sample are selected on the basis of personal judgment or convenience. Therefore, convenience sampling and judgment or purposive sampling, are used in this study. Since it was impossible to survey the entire population, sampling was confined to the tourists at the Bangkok Airport departing to Japan. For this group, the sampling was confined to the flights of 10 sample groups joining the tour packages to Sapporo, Hokkaido. The usable questionnaires after missing value analysis were 197 (attachment data1). The final sample (attachment data2) was the tourists traveling in Sapporo with a tour package selected and determined on the basis of accessibility to the targeted respondents. For this sample, the researcher joined them in the package tour. There were totally 32 completed questionnaires. After completing the questionnaires, the in-depth face-to-face interviews were given in the tour coach on the way to Tokyo.

## Discussions and Findings

### Tourism Image of Sapporo for the Thai Tourist Sample Group Departing to Japan

From the demographic data analysis, most of the tourists departing to Sapporo are businesswomen (33.5%) and female employees (30%) in the ages between 21-30 years old (35%) who prefer to buy a package tour (66.5%) and can afford to buy a package tour in the prices between 70,001-80,000 baht (30.5%). Specifically, most of the tourists traveling in Sapporo are married (62.5%) businesswomen (59.4%) in the ages between 31-40 years old (37.5%) who have the annual income not over 500,000 baht (50%). These tourists can be the prospective target group for Sapporo's tourism.

Sapporo and Hokkaido are not the first tourist sites and cities Thai tourists would like to travel in Japan as seen in Table 1. However, Sapporo still is in the top five tourist sites and cities in their minds (the 4<sup>th</sup> rank tourist site and the 2<sup>nd</sup> rank city) while Hokkaido is in the 6<sup>th</sup> rank tourist site and the 4<sup>th</sup> rank city. It is noted that many Thai tourists do not know that Hokkaido is an island, not a city. Therefore, it is a good opportunity to promote tourism for Sapporo and Hokkaido in the market segment of Thai tourists.

The media that should use with this target group in the tourism promotion for Sapporo are tour brochures (39.1%), press media (35.5%), words of mouths (35%), website of Japan Tourism Organization ([www.jnto.com](http://www.jnto.com)) (31%) and travel agents (29.9%). The

Table 1: The ranks of Japanese Tourist sites and the 4 top cities in the minds of Thai tourists departing to Japan (n=197, M.A.)

TOURIST SITE	NO. OF TOURISTS	%	CITY	NO. OF TOURISTS	%
<b>1. Fuji Mountain</b>	80	40.6%	<b>1. Tokyo</b>	134	68.0%
<b>2. Tokyo</b>	50	25.4%	<b>2. -Osaka -Sapporo</b>	39 39	19.8% 19.8%
<b>3. Disneyland</b>	47	23.9%	<b>3. Kyoto</b>	28	14.2%
<b>4. Sapporo</b>	29	14.7%	<b>4. Hokkaido</b>	22	11.2%
<b>5. Osaka</b>	21	10.7%			
<b>Kyoto</b>	21	10.7%			
<b>6. -Hokkaido</b>	13	6.6%			
<b>-Snow Festival</b>	13	6.6%			
<b>7. Universal Studio</b>	8	4.1%			
<b>8. Hot springs</b>	7	3.6%			
<b>9. Shinjuku</b>	6	3 %			
<b>10. Tokyo Tower</b>	4	2 %			
<b>Hakone Lake</b>	4	2 %			

Thai tourists prefer to buy a package tour (66.5%), followed by traveling alone (24.4%) and traveling with friends and relatives (16.2%). And the factors that the Thai tourists consider in buying a package tour are tour prices (68%), the number of tourist sites (46.2%), tour program details (44.2%), interesting tour programs (37.6%), travel timing (35.5%), and new and unseen tour programs (22.8%). The promotion can focus upon affordable tour value-pricing. Also the quality of tour programs should put the emphasis on the number of tour sites, tour program details and interesting tour program. This can be concluded that this target group is the value seeker group.

It is more confirmed that the tourism promotion of Sapporo should be done since the majority of the tourists revealed that they know Sapporo (79.7%) but they have never been in this city before (81.7%). Also they have future plans to travel in Sapporo (95.4%). Therefore, Sapporo can become an unseen new tourist site for this target group. Presenting and giving more information about traveling in Sapporo are needed. According to the below Table 2, their imagination about Sapporo is (20% up): Snow Festival, mineral bath, hot springs sites, scenery of Sapporo and local food. Hence, the tourism promotion activities, in particular advertisings, should focus upon their imagination.

In particular hot springs sites, most of the tourists do not have any ideas about the

Table 2: Images of Sapporo, Hokkaido for the Thai tourist sample group  
(n=197, M.A.)

IMAGES OF SAPPORO	NO. OF TOURISTS	%
1. Snow Festival	148	75.1%
2. Mineral Bath	82	41.6%
3. Hot Springs Sites	75	38.1%
4. Scenery Of Sapporo	58	29.4%
5. Local Food	43	21.8%
6. Local Culture	33	16.8%
7. Green Tea Drink	27	13.7%
8. Kimono Wear	26	13.2%
9. Souvenirs	20	10.2%
10. -Sake Drink -Riewkang Stay	11	5.6%
11. Others	11	5.6%
-Sapporo Beer	4	
-Hokkaido Crabs	3	
-Snow	1	
-Seafood	1	
-Ramen	1	
-Same In Overall	1	

names of hot springs sites in Japan, in particular in Sapporo (70.6%). This can be considered to be a good chance for Sapporo tourism to promote itself in their hot springs sites. The accommodations that they prefer to stay are hotels (45.2%), followed by spa resorts (35.5%) and Riewkangs (19.3%). And the services that most of the tourists would like to use if staying in hot springs spa resorts are as exhibited in Table 3 (p.17): private spas (67%), eating local food (49.2%), Japanese massages (33%), sightseeing in hot springs sites (31.5%) and foot soaking in mineral hot springs water (31.5%). The egg boiling in hot springs is recommended to be a new service for Japanese hot springs sites since it is the main service in hot spring sites in Thailand and it is still in the Thai tourists' minds (29 tourists=14.7%). Therefore, the hot springs spa resort industry should promote itself and put the importance on these services.

The season that the majority of the Thai tourists prefer to travel in Sapporo is winter (74.1%). Hence, the promotion campaigns should focus upon the atmosphere in winter, Snow Festival and hot springs sites. Package tours to Sapporo for Thai tourists should organize the length of travel in 7 days (34.5%) with the tour price around 50,000 baht (24.4%).

Table 3: The services in Japanese Hot springs Spa Resorts the Thai Tourist sample group desire to use (n=197, M.A.)

SERVICES	NO. OF TOURISTS	%
1. Private Spa	132	67.0%
2. Eating Local Food	97	49.2%
3. Japanese Massage	65	33.0%
4. Sightseeing In Hot Springs Sites	62	31.5%
5. Foot Soaking In Hot Springss	62	31.5%
6. Boiling Eggs	29	14.7%
7. Other Services	5	2.5%
-No Ideas	2	
-Outdoor Mineral Bath	1	
-Mineral Water Touch	1	
-Sashimi	1	

### The Thai Tourists' Satisfaction in the Sapporo Trip

Specifically, most of the 32 tourists traveling in Sapporo are married (62.5%) businesswomen (59.4%) in the ages between 31-40 years old (37.5%) who have the annual income not over 500,000 baht (50%). These tourists are the target group for Sapporo's tourism. They have never been in Sapporo before since they were first-time travelers (84.4%). This confirms the importance of Sapporo tourism promotion for this market segment. They traveled with their families (75%) and their information sources when they planned to travel in Sapporo were travel agent contacts (37.5%), friends and relatives (34.4%) and press media (31.2%). Therefore, travel agents that organized trips to Sapporo should focus on good personal contacts and relationship with their past and present customers. Also the organizations which are responsible for Sapporo Tourism should have good and close relationship with tour wholesalers and travel agents in Thailand in order to help promoting the tourism in Sapporo. For the tourists who have been in Sapporo several times, they have good impressions in Snow Festival, city tours, hot springs spas and local seafood. The promotion contents should include these images, in particular the tourism advertisings about Sapporo.

More specifically, 56.2% of this sample group has some experiences in mineral baths before both in overseas and in Japan. And from the in-depth interviews, these people have ever used spa services and some of them are spa members. As well as the reasons they gave for taking mineral baths at their first times and in this trip, it can be concluded

that they are health concerned people. Promoting Sapporo tourism or Package tours can be done through Thai spas, health or fitness centers. In this trip, the most satisfied activity for this sample group is Odori Park that organized the snow sculpture exhibition. Snow Festival is their most liked in this trip. Snow Festival should be promoted to be the major tourism landmark of Sapporo. Since it was in winter and there was a heavy snow storm, all the streets and pathways, in particular in Makomanai (Snow Festival Site) and Odori Park, are covered with snow and so dangerously slippery. A few tourists in this group fell down because of this. Luckily, they did not get seriously hurt. Man-made pathways with rail bars can be a great help for tourists from the car parking to the main attractions. However, all the tourists in this group enjoyed the trip and most of them will return to travel in Sapporo again (59.4%).

According to the in-depth interviews, it is remarkable that most of the tourists who will join a spa package tour are women (9 of 14 tourists). So the target group for spa package tours is women who are concerned about health and beauty. For the tourists that will not join a spa package tour, they still want to have mineral baths as one activity in their tour programs.

The major improvements that hot springs spa businesses should make in order to get the interests from this target group are having private mineral baths for individuals or for groups like families, English signs everywhere, a room for a break after taking mineral baths and cleanliness of mineral baths. However, only one suggestion that was quite impossible is wearing swimsuits or trunks during taking mineral baths. Swimsuits and trunks maybe damaged because of hot mineral water and swimsuits and trunks themselves can transmit some diseases. That is why it is a must to be naked and take a shower cleanly before taking mineral baths.

### **Recommendations for Sapporo's Tourism Managers and Marketers**

To promote the tourism in Sapporo, the following marketing strategies are recommended to attract the prospective target groups (Thai tourists):

#### **Marketing Strategies for Sapporo's Tourism Managers and Marketers**

1. The promotion should focus on Thai working women and married businesswomen in the ages between 21-40 years old with the annual income not over 500,000 baht. Penetrating marketing may be used.

2. The promotion media for this target group can use tour brochures, travel agents, press media, words of mouths and the website of Japan National Tourism Organization ([www.jnto.com](http://www.jnto.com)). In particular, the focus should be upon Thai tour wholesalers and travel agents.
3. The quality of tour programs, tour guides and hot springs spa sites for Japan trips should be standardized and monitored periodically.
4. The tourism promotion activities, in particular advertisings, should include Snow Festival, mineral bath, hot springs sites, scenery of Sapporo and local seafood to reflect Sapporo's tourism images. Thai spas, health or fitness centers can be sources for promoting Sapporo tourism.
5. Snow Festival should be promoted to be the major tourism landmark of Sapporo.
6. Pathways in all the main attractions of Sapporo, in particular from car parks to entrances should be snow cleared with rail bars to protect people falling down because of slippery pathways.

### Recommendations for Hot springs Spa Resorts in Sapporo

1. Close and good relationship with Thai tour wholesalers and travel agents is recommended.
2. Close and good connections with Thai spas, health and fitness centers are worthwhile to have in order to help promoting the businesses.
3. The cleanliness of mineral baths and the quality of mineral water should be controlled and inspected periodically.
4. Private mineral baths for individuals and family groups are highly recommended to attract more Thai tourists. Also there should be a relax room for some breaks after taking mineral baths with some refreshment and a TV. A new service, such as egg boiling in hot springs can make Thai tourists satisfied.
5. English signs and instructions are needed for Thai tourists, in particular shampoo and soap signs.
6. Close and good relationship with the tour guides leading groups of Thai tourists is recommended since they can convince the tourists to use the services and they are the key persons that can explain the benefits and how to use mineral baths or other spa services.
7. There should be at least a staff to suggest the tourists about other services and

take care of the tourists. The main services that should focus are private mineral baths, Japanese massages, sightseeing in hot springs sites, foot soaking in hot springs mineral water and eating local food.

8. There should be customer records to keep update, in particular their addresses for sending some promotion materials.
9. Some promotion advertisings in the website of Japan National Tourism Organization ([www.jnto.com](http://www.jnto.com)) are worthwhile to catch the eyes of Thai tourists, in particular young students and backpackers. Managers might be encouraged to design creative programs that harness the unique characteristics of products and services in hot springs spa resorts so that visitors are satisfied and delighted.

### Recommendations for Outbound Travel Agents

1. The target group for Sapporo package tours is working women and married businesswomen in the ages between 21-40 years old with the annual income not over 500,000 baht. The package tour promotion can focus on this group..
2. The package tour promotion can be done through the past customers, tour brochures and press media such as newspapers, travel magazines and magazines for working women and health lovers. The connections with some spas, health and fitness centers can also be a help.
3. Close and good relationship with the past and present customers is highly recommended in order to get more new customers through them.
4. Special purpose package tours for spa lovers can be organized for the target group as mentioned above.
5. The package tour price for Sapporo should be around 50,000 baht and the length of travel should be 7 days in winter. The accommodations for the package tours should be hotels and spa resorts.
6. The tour programs for Sapporo should focus on the number of tour sites, tour program details and interesting tour programs. The quality of tour brochures can attract the target group. The tour programs should include private mineral baths, Japanese massages, sightseeing in hot springs sites, foot soaking in hot springs mineral water and eating local food.

## Recommendations for Further Research

1. The tourist satisfaction assessment in this study was conducted in only one tour group, so it can not be generalized. Further research can study more number of Thai tour groups. Also tourists from other countries are also worthwhile to study in order to be able to compare tourists from different countries for the sake of Japan tourism.
2. Since there are very few studies about spas, more studies in spas are recommended, such as tourist satisfaction assessment in Japanese spa package tours, spa differentiation by cultures: Thai spas and Japanese spas and service quality assessment of Japanese spas.
3. Very few studies are conducted about Thai tourists. Their shopping behaviors during travel in overseas, in particular Japan, are worthwhile to study, for example.
4. The scope of this study did not cover the relationship or the linkage between image and satisfaction. Therefore, future studies can link these both dimensions to find the relationship.

These recommendations are based upon the results of the study. They can be good and beneficial to all the stakeholders above only when they are applied in the real world.

### Attachment Data 1

Demographic data of the Thai tourist sample group departing to Japan

(n=197)

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA	NO. OF TOURISTS	PERCENTAGE
GENDER		
Male	83	42.1%
Female	114	57.9%
AGE		
11-20 years old	14	7.1%
21-30 years old	69	35.0%
31-40 years old	48	24.4%
41-50 years old	40	20.3%
51-72 years old	26	13.2%
JOB		
Businessman	66	33.5%
Executive	6	3.0%
Employee	59	30.0%

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA	NO. OF TOURISTS	PERCENTAGE
Student	23	11.7%
Housewife	16	8.1%
Professional Jobs	20	10.2%
Government/State	4	2.0%
Enterprises Officer	—	—
Retired	2	1.0%
No answer	1	0.5%
AFFORDABLE TOUR PRICE		
10,000-30,000 Bath	27	13.7%
30,001-40,000 Bath	16	8.1%
40,001-50,000 Bath	45	22.8%
50,001-60,000 Bath	27	13.7%
60,001-70,000 Bath	20	10.2%
70,001-80,000 Bath	60	30.5%
No answer	2	1.0%

Attachment Data 2

Thai tourist sample group traveling in Sapporo, Hokkaido

Demographic data of the Thai tourist sample group traveling in Sapporo

(n=32)

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA	NO. OF TOURISTS	PERCENTAGE
GENDER		
Male	12	37.5%
Female	20	62.5%
AGE		
11-20 years old	4	12.5%
21-30 years old	6	18.8%
31-40 years old	12	37.5%
41-50 years old	6	18.8%
51-72 years old	4	12.5%
MARRIAGE STATUS		
Single	11	34.4%
Married	20	62.5%
Widowed	1	3.1%
JOB		
Businessman	19	59.4%
Employee	7	21.8%
Student	3	9.4%
Housewife	3	9.4%

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA	NO. OF TOURISTS	PERCENTAGE
INCOME PER YEAR		
-500,000 Bath	16	50.0%
500,001-1,000,000 Bath	7	21.8%
1,000,001-2,000,000 Bath	3	9.4%
2,000,000Bath<	2	6.3%
No answer	4	12.5%
NUMBER OF TRAVELS TO SAPPORO		
1	27	84.4%
2~4	4	12.5%
5≤	1	3.1%

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