

Thailand and Leisure Oriented Cross-Border Mobility: Constraints and Permeability

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Abstract

Studies of tourism statistics have revealed that tourism movements worldwide are based on intraregional tourism, which includes cross-border mobility, rather than long-haul tourism. Although there have been studies on borders carried out in the past for various purposes, there remains a distinct lack of research into cross-border leisure-oriented mobility, particularly in Southeast Asia. As a result, examining constraints and permeability on leisure-oriented cross-border mobility may well help to overcome the tourist behaviour and cross-border mobility divide in literature, thus the subject of this thesis. The aims of this thesis are to investigate an identifiable sector of the population (i.e. Thai university students) and to analyze the motivations that drive, and constraints that limit their ability to travel to the neighbouring countries of Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, and Myanmar.

Using a self-administered closed-questionnaire, data was collected from 750 students in seven universities in three provinces: Assumption, Kasetsart, and Thammasart Universities in Bangkok, Naresuan, and Pibunsongkram Rajabhat Universities, in Phitsanulok, and Mae Fah Luang and Chiang Rai Rajabhat Universities in Chiang Rai. The data was collected from October to December 2005. A response rate of approximately fifty percent was achieved.

Analysis of the data showed that Thai university students were motivated by visiting heritage and historical sites to cross borders to Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar; whereas, the driving force for visits to Malaysia was to see new things and places. Interestingly, fear emerged as the constraint which most limited the students from travelling over the border to each of Thailand's neighbouring countries. Psychological constraints were reported as having more influence on the respondents' border crossings than physical constraints. Distance from the borders also influenced cross-border ability. The study showed that cross-border travel behaviour was related to gender and income, but unrelated to the respondents' age. The research revealed that the respondents felt the easiest way to overcome their constraints to travel was to gain more travel experience and search for more information on their destination of choice. Interviews were gathered from fifteen key persons employed in five different fields of the travel industry and whose work related either directly and indirectly to cross-border mobility. The interviews took place during November 2005 to February 2006 at informants' workplaces in Bangkok and Chiang Rai. It was revealed that tourism development in border areas is regarded by society as having substantial social and economic benefits to the local people and their communities. It also revealed that borders do not have any direct physical effects toward people's movement.

It was found that the tenets of people's leisure-oriented cross-border mobility were formed by both motivations and constraints; therefore, individuals must find a way to negotiate or overcome constraints before achieving the actual action. The uniqueness of the study was to illustrate the dynamic and simultaneous treatment of the fundamentals contributing to cross border mobility.

This thesis has broken new ground in analyzing the theories developed predominantly in Western contexts of travel motivations and leisure constraints in an Asian setting, particularly in the context of Thai studies. It was found that the Thai tourist behaviour especially the university students, who are an important and significant and separate population, are different from those students in the Western society in that Thai university students more concern in cross-border travelling to gain knowledge than to enjoy nightlife (sex, alcohol, and drugs).