

Characteristics of Thai Slow Tourist along the Khmer Cultural Route in Thailand : A Case of NakhonRatchasima Province

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Abstract

Tourism industry has been progressively increased in the previous decades, thus, become the major source of income and economy for a number of international countries. The growth number is expected to be doubled in the next 15 years (WTTC, 2007). [1] However, this rapid growth of tourism and infra-structure affected the environment and natural resources including the tourism vehicle that caused an increase of carbon hydroxide in the air. This led to a creation of new type of tourism called Slow Tourism. From these reasons, the researcher aimed to study characteristics of Thai slow tourists along the Khmer cultural route in Nakhon Ratchasima Province. The in-depth interview with tourists travelling in this area to find the slow tourists characteristic from trip characteristics and their demographic data was used in this study. The findings showed that trip characteristics of Thai slow tourists using car spent at least 2 nights at the attraction. They visited way of living, natural and cultural attractions e.g. museum. Concerning tourism activities, they liked to take photographs, pay respect to the Buddha image, visit local community, and taste local drinks and cuisine served at the attractions. These Thai slow tourists selected to stay at the environmental friendly accommodations.

Keywords: slow tourism, slow tourist, slow tourist characteristic, Khmer Cultural Route, Thai tourist

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of tourism and infra-structure affected the environment and natural resources including the tourism vehicle that caused an increase of carbon hydroxide in the air. Research results in tourism industry showed that transportation released the highest amount of carbon hydroxide at 87 per cent, followed by 9.1 per cent from the accommodations and 4 per cent from tourism activities respectively (Peters,2007) [2]. These causes affected the climate change, environment and sea level. From these negative tourism impacts, researcher and tourism policy

makers were interested in studying the tourism's impact on environments and inhabitants (Lea,1988) [3] by focusing on sustainable development in tourism, and this led to a creation of new type of tourism called Slow Tourism.

Slow Tourism was a result from an anti-fast food in Italy in 1986. This event aimed to protect nutritious consumption, preserve local cuisine tradition and support local livestock affecting local ecosystem, consequently, slow food trend occurred. This effort was put into stage from international supports with 100,000 members from 150 countries (Slow Food International, 2014) [4] with 2,000 low food networks. These communities followed slow food principle by preserving cuisine culture and tradition, for example cooking, and traditional cuisine production and consumption (Petrini, 2003)[5]. The integration of slowness principle with tourism created change in travel behavior and types of tourist as Rane Isichaikul and Chatchapol Songsuntornwong (2012)[6] proposed that slow tourism helped tourists to experience attractions in details which cannot be seen in the rapid case. The tourism attractions should offer, invite and create program and activities based on the route, for example trekking, cycling in rural sites, visiting ancient community and interacting with local people in the tourism activities. This slow tourism was considered new target market for tourists who needed new experience. Characteristics of this type of tourist were indicated in this research. This slow tourist had positive effect on environmental, social and economical contexts in the visited community. All tourism stakeholders should disseminate knowledge about sustainable tourism used in environment, social and economic including creating campaign in environmental friendly tourism and social responsibility.

2. OBJECTIVES

To investigate characteristics of Thai slow tourists along the Khmer cultural route in Thailand

3. RELATED RESEARCHES

Slow Tourism's definitions

Scholars defined slow tourism term as follows. Rane Isichaikul and Chatchapol Songsuntornwong (2012) viewed that slow tourism is a slow travel to relax and boost up energy. Tourists spend time and absorb experience while travelling and learning from nature, local way of living through five senses. Matos (2004) [7] focused on time spent at the accommodation while Dickinson, Robbins and Lumsdon (2010)[8] added speed referring to using the transportation. However, Caffyn (2009) [9] pointed at the limited use of technology and machine and travel in environmental friendly and sustainable way for the benefit of the tourists themselves and locals. In contrast, Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) [10] found that tourism activities must be decreased and taken direct experience instead. These authors proposed five characteristics of slow tourism 1) selection of

low carbon hydroxide in mode of travel, 2) creating slowness, 3) bringing new travel experience, 4) raising environment consciousness and 5) focusing on sense of place e.g. cultural exchange through five senses. From the review of literature, Caffyn (2009) and Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) added culture and environment issues referring to slow tourism as a result of tourism collaboration including contacting people, attraction, culture, food, heritage and environment. Matos (2004) suggested that there must be relaxing move to generate the power by staying at very simple accommodation, consuming nutritious food and using slow activities. However, slow tourism from views of Blancheton and Marchi (2013)[11], Dickinson, Robbins and Lumsdon (2010)[12] and Dickinson and Robbins (2008)[13] were different. These authors viewed slow tourism as an alternative travel that decreased carbon dioxide, avoiding air and land transportation to the attractions following the concept of “slow on land, long stay and minimum travel”. This concept mainly used vehicle that released a few amount of carbon dioxide e.g. train, boat and bicycle. Considering slow tourism in Italy, the emphasis was on quality tourism experience through relaxation and thorough understanding and learning in the community under “slowness”. Characteristics of slow tourists are in four types: 1) slowness means spending time at the attraction, 2) travel experience means participating in community activities, 3) Environment Consciousness means selecting low carbon dioxide vehicle and 4) Slow Label means concentrating on local culture to attract high quality tourists. Attraction development based on slow tourism philosophy increased the quality of the attractions, environment and social image (Robinson, Povey & Heitmann, 2011)[14].

In summary, slow tourism is the tourism that has decreased number of attractions, emphasizing on tourism activities to increase high quality experience for valuable holiday. This can increase or slow travel rate, but create relationship with the locals, and learn history and highlight of the attractions in-depth in a limited time (Cook, Yale, & Marqua, 2010: 336; [15] Matos, 2004: 95-96; Ranee Isichaikul and Chatchapol Songsuntornwong, 2010: 13; Chanin Yupetch, 2012: 5)[16]. Characteristics of slow tourism are displayed in Table 1 as below.

Table 1: Characteristics of slow tourism

Theorists	Characteristics of slow tourism
Matos (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taking Time - Attachment to particular place
Dickinson & Lumsdon (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - stay longer - Low speed - Travel less
Caffyn (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decreasing travel period (at least by car/plane) - Increasing effectiveness in travel - Relaxing and mind recovering

Theorists	Characteristics of slow tourism
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In-depth survey and searching - Contacting local, culture and heritage - Connecting local communities - Food- local restaurant, local drinks market e.g. beer and wine - Children (creative and play) - Learning new skills - Using less technology and machine - Limiting only local brand products - Quality of experience and reality - Environmental friendly- decreasing carbon dioxide in the air - Good for oneself
Conway and Timm (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low carbon dioxide - Using eco transportation
Lumsdon and McGrath (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slowness and value of time - Locality and activities at the destination - Mode of transport and travel experience - Environmental consciousness
Esichaikul and Songsonthornwong (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature - Local Culture - Slow Vehicle - Interaction with Local - Participation and Support community - Intangible Product - Multi - Story - Interpretation - Passive Activity - Low Impact - Time and Opportunity
Slow Tourism Network (2556)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time - Slowness - Contamination - Authenticity - Sustainability - Emotion

Theorists	Characteristics of slow tourism
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Source: Researcher

From the documentary analysis of characteristics of slow tourism and mainstream tourism, it could be stated that trends in market change of slow tourism created type of slow tourism differed from the mainstream tourism. Dickenson and Lumsdon (2010: 75)[17] stated that slow tourism stem from an alternative tourism that combined transportation system and created different type of tourism as in the summary Table 2.

Table 2: The differences between mainstream tourism and slow travel

<i>Contemporary tourism</i>	<i>Slow travel</i>
Speed transit	Slow travel times
Prevailing modes of the car and airline	Wider range of modes including bus and train
Immediacy	Slowness
Resource intensive	Resource reduction
Journey is corridor	journey is the thing
Consumption of many attractions	Localness
Maxi zing visits	Staying awhile
High-carbon	Low carbon
Commoditization	De-commoditization
Standardized hospitality dominates	Slow food and beverage

Source: Dickinson &Lumsdon (2010: 191)

From previous researches of slow tourism, slowness philosophy was significant in development of low tourism. Researcher adopted the criteria from theory of slowness in time spent at the attraction to measure characteristics of slow tourists. The theory was also applied in construction interview questions to explained characteristics of slow tourism and the tourists to differentiate this type of tourism and tourists in different context including in the discussion part.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study applied qualitative approach to gather in-depth information from current phenomenon in Thai context to get characteristics of slow tourists from 2 groups of key informants.

1. Organization key informants included 3 informants: director of Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Nakhon Ratchasima and Nakhon Ratchasima Provincial Office of Tourism and Sports administrator and tourism related business owners. Purposive sampling technique was employed in this study due to the appropriateness with the topic of this research on the qualitative nature that began with general questions leading to the collection of in-depth and specific data collection. Key informants thus should be information-rich case. For these reasons, sample selection was purposive and included those who could provide insights into the topic studied (Patton, 2001: 46)

2. Individual key informants included Thai tourists travelling at Nakhon Ratchasima. Researcher set the criteria that this group of tourists must stay at the attraction with the minimum duration of 2 nights, did maximum of 2 tourism activities or visited maximum of 2 attractions per day. They were selected by purposeful sampling to get the sample group that was suitable with the concept, purpose and objective of the study.

4.1 Data collection and instruments

Semi-structure interview with interview guideline was the research instrument in the data collection procedure. This instrument ensured the researcher that all the informants would follow the key questions, and simultaneously researcher could freely added sub-questions in each topic (Taweesak Nopkesorn, 2005:131) [8]. Interview guidelines are as follows.

1. Organization key informants were interviewed individually at the work place under these guideline: 1) demographic information including gender, age, education, marital status, work experience, position, organization, 2) operation of slow tourism policy at the organization, 3) plan for slow tourism trip and activity and 4) facility supporting slow tourism.

2. Individual key informants were individually interviewed from Thai tourists travelling at Nakhon Ratchasima under these guideline: 1) demographic information including gender, age, education and marital status, 2) trip characteristics: types of tourism attraction, activity, transportation, duration of stay, number of attraction per day and support for environment, local culture and community economy.

Prior to data collection, researcher contacted hotels of the target groups to send the consent form, issued by Faculty of Management Sciences, KhonKaen University, to hotel administrator to select minimum 2 night-stay guests. After that, researcher called all the informants to set up date for the interview and sending interview topics by mail and e-mail. Researcher asked the informants to provide information using snowball technique. Total of 8 Thai tourists were interviewed, first 5 informants had minimum 2 night-stay at the hotel at Nakhon Ratchasima, and the rest 3 were those who came from invitation by the first group following snowball technique.

4.2 Qualitative data analysis

Researcher analyzed the data daily, then, categorized the data based on the topic of study. Comparative analysis was employed in this study. In-depth interview data were transcribed from field note, keyed in the computer, coded the quotation, grouped the information and analyzed the content to differentiate, interpret and compared (Chai Posita, 2001).

5. RESULTS

Researcher collected interview data from Thai tourists travelling at Nakhon Ratchasima and found characteristics of slow tourists as below.

1. Trip characteristics

- Tourist transport

Tourist transport was car that can stop at the attraction as stated by one informant that

“I am very slow from driving and sometimes I would look for new attraction apart from what I have found from the Internet. If I find one I will just stop by and completely change my plan. Any good restaurants I will just stop to eat. I did not strict to my plan or hurriedly did thing.” (Interviewed on March 28, 2015).

- Length of stay

Majority of the slow tourists spent at least 3 nights at the accommodation. From a long stay, tourists had time to absorb and interact with locals; one of the informants said that

“Most of the time I will check the day of stay. This time I planned to stay 5 days, but it appeared to be 10 days. If I am happy and do not have plan I stay longer.” (Interviewed on March 28, 2015).

“I stayed for several days because I could not visit all the restaurants. Oh Gosh I wanted to eat this one. That one. Some places I just passed by, but ended up stayed there for 2 nights because I was happy with local foods and market.” (interviewed on March 30, 2015).

- Tourism activity

Tourism activities that extended length of stay were merit making, taking photograph, tasting food, feeding animals and talking to locals as said by one of the informants that

“Talking to locals helps me to understand and get more tourism information including the attraction that is not known by the tourists e.g. beautiful view point.” (Interviewed on March 29, 2015).

- Tourist attraction

Tourist attractions are natural and cultural attractions as said by one of the informants that

“If the weather is really good for example it is almost winter and that place is full of food, organic vegetables with fresh air, and not too far from Bangkok, Wangnamkeow is the place that I choose.” (Interviewed on March 29, 2015).

- Locality

Slow tourists will adapted themselves with the locals with dress, taking local drinks and food, using local dialect and follow the rules of the attractions; the informants said that

“Going to Laos, I must wear local skirt and going to Cambodia I will dress in Cambodian style to get along with locals. Going to Chaing Mai I will also dress in the way local did. I am that type.” (Interviewed on April 4, 2015).

“I am the same type as the place that I visited. It seemed like I am really a part of the locals not the tourists. As I go to Bali, I dress the way locals dress.” (Interviewed on April 1, 2015).

“I feel like I am part of that community though I may not look exactly like them. But, I think I can get there through culture, food and life style.” (Interviewed on April 5, 2015).

- Tour program

Tour program was adjusted from the tourists’ satisfaction. In the case that the place had unexpected and intriguing point, slow tourists would changed their plan on the length of stay and the attraction; the informants said that

“Some small and unexpected provinces, just want to stay for 1 night and I did review several temples. But, Oh my god! As in Lamphoon, there were not many tourists, but so slow life and I was very happy. People were nice and good food and atmosphere. You cannot see the accommodation from the Internet, but if you visit there once you will be happy. If I visit some districts in Chaing Mai, and they were beautiful, then I would just stay there.” (Interviewed on March 23, 2015).

“Most of the time, I will plan the length of stay as in this trip for 5 days and sometimes 10 day if I am happy with unexpected and intriguing things there.” (Interviewed on March 23, 2015).

- Type of accommodation

Slow tourists selected accommodation from hygiene, safe, good service and environmental friendly and community service responsibility type, the informants said that

“Some hotels gave us glass bottled water instead of plastic, we would appreciate that.” (Interviewed on March 23, 2015).

“Giving books and scholarship for children for public use were beneficial. Sometimes they called for donation, I would join, but if I do not have time I would just give my money.” (Interviewed on March 23, 2015).

- Accompany

Slow tourists travelled at least 2 persons which can be lovers, spouse, friends and family. Noticeably, most of them were lovers, spouse and family member. This was due to the change in program and length of stay. From these reasons, they needed people who had similar taste and interest to make a great trip, the informants said that

“Our group had 3-4 persons with the maximum of 9 family members.” (Interviewed on March 29, 2015).

“Just 2 of us in this trip, husband and wife could understand each other. We stop where we want do not need to disturb others. Some belongs were packed in the car. Without plan, we could just travel.” (Interviewed on March 29, 2015).

- Travel period

Slow tourists did not travel in the tourism season, they could travel during weekday and holiday. This is because they wanted to gain insight experience, the informants said that

“I like travelling in the specific place during weekday because there are not many people and I can experience the atmosphere.” (Interviewed on March 30, 2015).

“I can travel whenever I want. I can ask for vacation from my office”.

“I like travelling at weekend or long holiday because I need to wait for my family.” (Interviewed on March 31, 2015).

- Purpose of travel

Purposes of travel were mostly for a need for relaxation and learning. Tourists gained knowledge and understanding about the attractions. This included a need for new experience. Knowledge occurred during the trip.

-Relaxation

Most of the time, slow tourists travelled for relaxation, but the results might turn out for business expansion and work inspiration.

-Learning

Slow tourists liked to search for and learn new things. Searching thus took longer time. In some cases, this group of tourist called themselves “traveler” instead of “tourists”. The reason is that for traveler the purpose is on learning not just reaching the destination. , the informants said that

“I did not call myself a tourist, but a traveler instead.”

“Traveler comes with travel and my concept is not about the purpose, but about along the way.” (Interviewed on Aril 6, 2015).

“I am a traveler and I want to just travel to learn along the trip that is it. For me, it is beyond that.” (Interviewed on March 29, 2015).

“Tourism is an addition to get to know people. Sometimes, we might be tricked by someone, but it is just a spice of life. If we stay put at home we would not see thing likes this. We need to travel to see things out of our daily life.” (Interviewed on March 23, 2015).

“It is opening a world for children and giving them direct experience to develop skills in their life by travel.” (Interviewed on March 28, 2015).

2. Tourist demographic characteristics

Slow tourists aged at the minimum of 26 years, earned at least 3,000 baht per month, had minimum education of bachelor’s degree, and had various occupations: officers, financial officers, business owners, government officers and international organization officers.

The results from data analysis showed that factors creating slow tourist was tourist demographic characteristics namely marital status, occupation, income, education, and age. Additionally, their trip characteristics contributed to slow tourists including travel vehicle, length of stay, trip duration, tourism activities, attractions, accompany, travel period, travel purpose, and accommodation. In general, tourist with secured job and income would be slow tourists because they were not worried about their work. In other words, security in job and income directly affected slow tourism as illustrates in Figure 1.

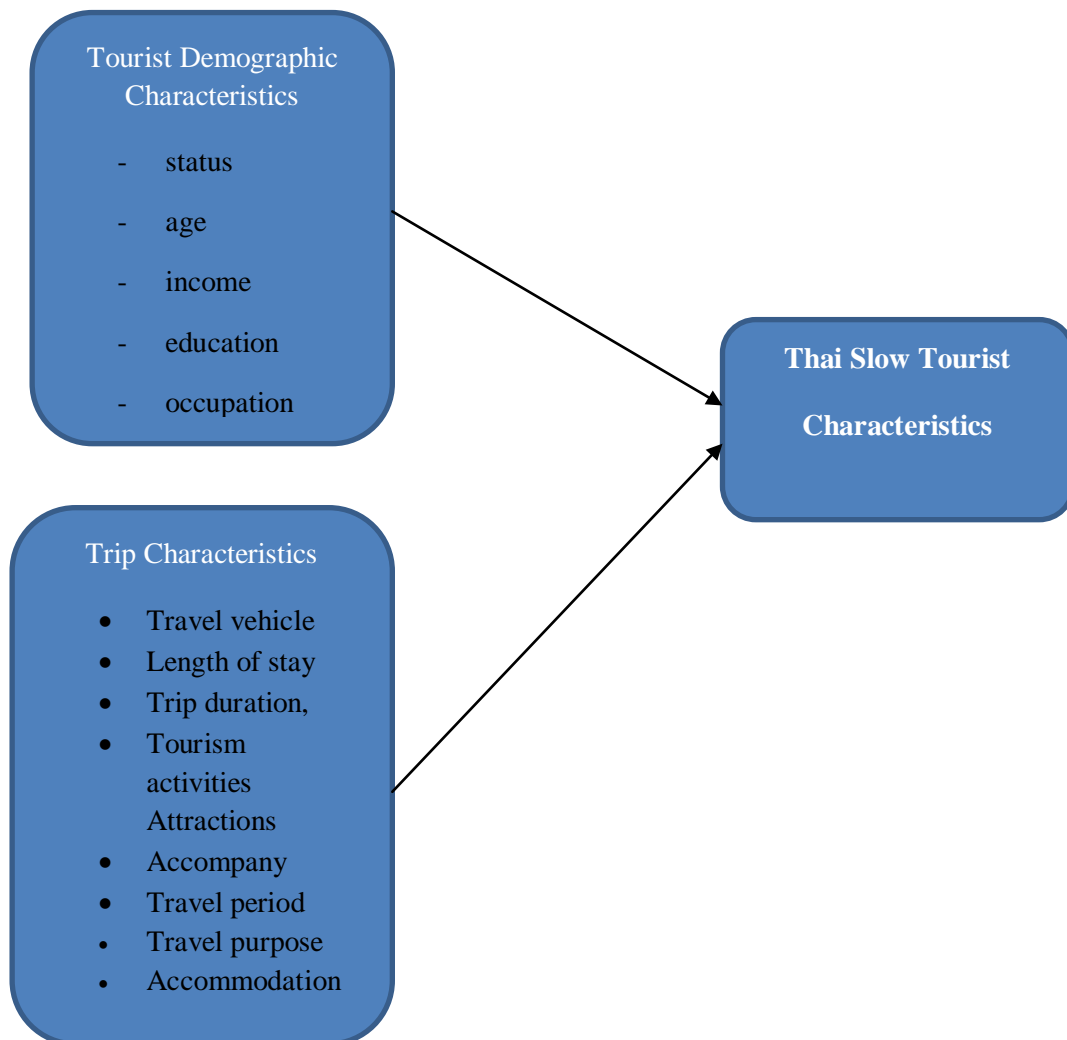


Figure1: Characteristics of Thai slow tourists

From the interview with government and private organization at Nakhon Ratchasima, it was found that these organizations had policy supporting the increase in length of stay at the attraction, for example tourism promotion for Khom cultural route at Nakhon Ratchasima. This includes nearby areas namely Buriram, Surin and Srisaket to connect to Cambodia from the collaboration between these stakeholders in creating slow tourism activity such as Phimai Light and Sound festival, Kin Khao Kam festival and Silk festival. Moreover, accommodation owners created long activities, for example mushroom center, organic farm, local food cooking class and social activities: children's day, and school equipment donation.

6. DISCUSSIONS

This study aimed to investigate characteristics of Thai slow tourists at Nakhon Ratchasima and the results showed that the tourists 1) used car to travel, 2) travelled with minimum of 2 persons, 3) spent at least 3 nights at the accommodation, 4) travel with unlimited time, 5) had flexible tour program, 6) flowed attractions' rules and adapted themselves with local, 7) had slow activities e.g. taking photos, visiting market and way of living, 8) visited eco-friendly and cultural attractions, 9) arranged self-made tour program and 10) stayed at eco-friendly accommodations.

In summary, slow tourism is significant from context based on the connection of way of living and social, for example slow food and slow town. The differences between mainstream tourism and slow tourism were 1) major components of tourism activity was significant to transportation, 2) slowness philosophy was integrated with sustainable tourism, 3) tourism commodity must explain value of slowness label and lastly, a need to create slow tourists and a focus on how to match the concept with consumer's need (Robinson, Povey&Heitmann, 2011). At present, the number of slow tourism research is scant (Yurtseven& Kaya, 2011)[23]. Dickinson and Lumsdon (2011) proposed that heavy slow travelers were inspired from environmental consciousness which differed from light slow travelers, forced by other factors namely travel experience and limited of transportation type.

Yurtseven and Kaya (2011) studied slow tourists at slow city under principle from Cittaslow, and found that there were three types of tourists, dedicated slow tourist, interested slow tourist, and accidental slow tourist. Characteristics of dedicated slow tourists were 1) open-minded for slow experience, looking for new things, cultural differences and local identity, 2) educated person with knowledge in culture and slowness philosophy, 3) self-traveler, 4) high-expectation on attraction and 5) eco-gastronomic. These findings correspond with the study of Chanin Yupetch (2012:6) that viewed slow tourist as 1) open-minded for slow experience, looking for new things in culture and attractions differed from their daily lives, 2) educated person with knowledge in culture and slowness philosophy, 3) independent in selecting attraction and did not tie to famous attractions, 4) high-expectation on attraction to understand and gain new experience and 5) favor for local food and products.

Additionally, Salvo (2013)[24] studied repellent tourist and slow tourist to explore results of slow tourism and potential in integration of new slow tourist. It was found that slow tourists could absorb experience better than repellent tourist. Characteristics of slow tourists were indicated in this study and showed that tourism is new type of travel affecting tourism in terms of travel and consumption. Differences between slow tourist and mainstream tourist were 1) travelers who cared for quality not quantity by looking for valuable relaxation. Holiday is private time and represents social status, 2) able to absorb tourism experience about local culture and travel in a positive way, 3)

being good consumer by searching for information before the trip and know about do's and don'ts for the trip, 4) looking for actual relations from the context and away from commercial environment, 5) being high responsible traveler for consuming fragile and product and follow norms and tradition and local environment, and 6) being differed from mainstream tourist in behavior, slow, selection in mode of travel and destination.

It can be said that slow tourist is one of an important factor driving slow tourism and thus affects development and management of attractions to be sustainable (Yurtseven& Kaya, 2011).

All of these slow tourism researches did not indicated slow tourist under demographic data using age as a criterion. However, data from previous researches showed characteristics of slow tourist that they were open-minded for slow experience, looking for new things, cultural differences and local identity, caring for quality not quantity, high responsible traveler for consuming fragile and product and follow norms and tradition and local environment, independent in selecting attraction and did not tie to famous attractions, favor for local food and products. These characteristics were applied in creating interview questions in this study to gain characteristics of Thai slow tourists. It was found in this study that car was the appropriate type of transportation in Thai context because the infrastructure were not well connected between the attractions although Thailand had all modes of transportations, train, air and land. Bicycle lanes were not available in Thailand as this vehicle is eco-friendly type which differed from other European countries.

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