



# Applying Importance–Performance Analysis to Identify Competitive Travel Attributes: An Application to Regional Destination Image in Thailand

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## Abstract

Destination image is widely used in marketing and branding tourist destinations as image plays an essential role in tourists' destination choices. Travel attributes are considered the key factors in positioning successful destination images. However, not all attributes bring value to destinations. As such, this study seeks to explore the main competitive travel attributes that affect Thailand's regional image. A questionnaire was used to examine the importance of travel attributes for domestic tourists and to determine how domestic tourists rate travel attributes' performance. An importance–performance analysis was applied to evaluate and identify the major strengths and weaknesses of a region's key attributes for success. The findings suggest that the region must enhance service quality, create more activities and improve sanitation.

**Keywords:** Travel Attribute, Destination Image, Regional Development, Importance–Performance Analysis, Thailand

## Introduction

Tourism has been a major component of Thailand's economic growth over the most recent three decades. According to Thailand's Department of Tourism (2015), some 29.88 tourists visited Thailand in 2015, representing a 20.1% increase over 2014. The potential earnings from this growing source of revenue are likely to reach US\$67.58 billion. However, some regions in Thailand have only a very small share of the country's tourism market. The Thailand Tourism Statistics demonstrate that there are significant inequalities in income distribution among the central, eastern coastal gateway and other rural areas. Thus, it is not surprising that many destinations would like to develop the capabilities to continuously supply resources as destination-level products and services. One approach to destination development requires a destination to ensure that its overall attractiveness and tourist experience are superior to other destinations that are also available to potential tourists (Meng, Tepanon, & Uysal, 2008; Zhou, 2005). As such, destinations, especially in the regional areas, compete fiercely with one another in developing travel attributes to create a

destination image that will portray a 'must experience' for tourists.

Nonetheless, although the success of a tourist destination image depends on generic travel attributes, such as tourist attractions, activities and accessibility, not all attributes bring value to destinations. This notion is supported by a number of researchers (e.g. Bonn, Joseph, & Dai, 2005; Gartner, 1989; Klenosky, 2002) who examined image strengths and weaknesses based on specific destination attributes and found that tourists' perceptions of destination image could differ across attributes and across country of origin. For example, transportation can be understood as one of the key building blocks in the development and operation of tourist operations (Buhalis, 2000; Le-Klähna & Hall, 2015; Lew & McKercher, 2006), but it is difficult for many transportation hub destinations to encourage visitors to remain as tourists (Dabphet, 2014). On this point, Ivanovic et al. (2005) explained that destinations should provide something more for tourists to do or offer them a new attraction to encourage visitors to remain longer. More importantly, appropriate travel attributes must be highlighted to create a positive perception of the location amongst tourists because



tourists' final decision to visit a particular destination is based on its image ( Goodall, 1992; Marshalls, 2007). These have created an increased managerial focus for destination managers to understand the key strengths and weaknesses of their regions to attract tourists and develop suitable strategies for their destinations (Ferreira & Esteveao, 2009; Hornback & Eagles, 1999).

However, most regional destination managers lack experience and expertise in tourist satisfaction measurement and other types of marketing research ( Wade & Eagles, 2003) . Moreover, among the researchers that have integrated the role of travel attributes within the context of other destination development variables like destination image and tourist satisfaction (e.g. Bigné, Sanchez & Sanchez, 2001; Chi & Qu, 2007; Vareiro, Ribeiro, & Remoaldo, 2015; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) are likely to developed a tourist survey, satisfaction measurement that focuses on satisfaction ratings but not at the importance of destination attributes. Thus, an importance–performance analysis (IPA) was applied to identify important travel attributes and determine how tourists rate the performance of these attributes for a regional destination. This insight can be used as the basis for empirical studies of destination management, which can lead to practical applications for destination planners. The results of such studies can lead to significant improvements in tourists' perceptions regarding the region's competitive travel attributes and destination images.

## Literature Review

### Travel Attributes

In recent decades, tourism has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors throughout the world (Liu & Wall, 2006). Moreover, destinations are the central element of the tourism system, and any destinations without a unique tourism identity will not compete well in the tourism market. In the tourism context, it is well established that tourists' overall

perception is determined by their assessment of the performance of a destination (Alegre & Garau, 2010), which can be measured using destination travel attributes (Ragavan, Subramonian, & Sharif, 2014).

On the topic of travel attributes, Van Raaij (1986) noted that travel attributes can be seen as 'given' and 'man-made' features. The 'given' product (e.g., the natural features of a tourist destination such as its climate, scenery, beaches and mountains) can determine certain tourist segments, and the 'man-made' product (e.g., hotels, transportation facilities, package tours and facilities for sports and recreation) can be adapted to customer preferences. Um (1988) defined travel attributes as a set of attributes that describe a place as a travel destination, such as the destination's physical and cultural characteristics. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) observed that a destination consists of 34 major attributes or the following three key components: attribute–holistic, functional–psychological and common –unique dimensions. Laws (1995) further classified destination attributes into two main categories: primary attributes ( such as climate, ecology, culture and traditional architecture) and secondary attributes (including those developments introduced specifically for tourism, such as hotels, catering, transport and entertainment). Similarly, Buhalis (2000) observed that destinations comprise six core components: attractions, accessibility, amenities, available packages, activities and ancillary services. More simply, a number of researchers have indicated that some important travel attributes include entertainment, purchase opportunities, comfortable climate, cost ( Goodrich, 1977), visitor safety, reasonable prices, good accommodations and relaxing vacations (Shih, 1996). These findings are supported by Holloway and Taylar (2006), who argued that the success of a destination depends upon the interrelationship of three factors: attractions, facilities and accessibility to tourists.

The foregoing leads to opportunities for the future growth of tourism in regional destinations because a



region can provide a set of activities and produce an integrated destination area (scenario or environment). In reality, some regions have not become destinations in their own right as it has proven difficult to entice tourists to extend their trips to visit these areas (Dabphet, 2014). However, according to Hardy's tourist travel pattern (2003), some tourists are interested in breaking up their journeys with short stops and are more likely to seek out experiences along thematic routes. Thus, it is important to examine the specific capabilities that regional destinations must develop to attract visitors and, more importantly, that new destinations must develop to achieve future growth based on the resources available on a per-destination basis.

In addition, several studies (e.g. Alegre & Garau, 2010; Vieregge, Phetkaew, Beldona, Lumsden, & De Micco, 2007; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) in the tourism literature indicate that tourists' overall satisfaction is determined by how they evaluate those attributes related to the destination. It is also believed that tourist satisfaction influences the choice of destination and the decision to return (Huh & Uysal, 2003; Hui, Wan, & Ho, 2007; Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). For example, Vieregge et al. (2007) found that the top 10 hotel attributes influencing mature tourists' decision to return include cleanliness, value, easy access to the beach, location, personnel, pricing of accommodations, airport transfer, multilingualism, well-lit areas and luggage assistance. Haugland et al. (2011) further added that it is important for tourism destination development to understand the activities involved in developing an overall strategy for the destination. As such, an understanding of the key strengths and weaknesses of a regional destination's attributes from the tourists' perspective remains crucial to creating effective destination images and to developing strategies that counter possible threats to future visitation to the destination.

### **Destination Image**

Image is considered an important factor in destination marketing (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Di Marino, 2008), particularly for tourists' decision-making process as it forms the basis of tourists' evaluation of products and services (Aksoy & Kiyici, 2011; Goodall, 1992). O'Leary and Deegan (2005) observed that image also affects the level of satisfaction with the tourist experience, which can encourage positive word-of-mouth recommendations and influence the decision to return to the destination. The term 'destination image' became widely acknowledged in the 1970s, along with an array of related terms, including 'image perception' (Hunter & Suh, 2007; Kim, McKercher, & Lee, 2009), 'perceived image' (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chen & Hsu, 2000; Peštek & Činjarević, 2014), and 'tourist image' (Ahmed, 1991; Bramwell & Rawding, 1996). These terms all share a definition of destination image as the opinion that people have about a destination. Many researchers (Della & Micera, 2007; Kotler, Haider, & Rein, 1993; Watkins, Ahmed, & Crispin, 2006) have supported this notion and have further indicated that destination image includes the mental structures that integrate the memorable elements, impressions and values that people associate with a specific place.

To position a destination, it is important to create a new positive image or to strengthen an existing positive image. George (2011) observed that destination images are based on specific travel attributes including geography, standard of living, climate and natural attractions. Aksoy and Kiyici (2011) further added that the image that tourists have of a destination is the main factor that determines the future of the destination. As such, the right attribute identity can help provide a destination with a suitable point of differentiation that forms the most competitive destination image for the location and helps increase tourist satisfaction. For this reason, distinguishing travel attributes that affect a tourist's

destination choice is of great importance with respect to destination marketing. In addition, tourist satisfaction is a function of both expectations related to certain important attributes and judgements of attribute performance; therefore, the theoretical basis that underpins this research is the importance–performance analysis introduced by Martilla and James (1977) as it can be used to identify improvement opportunities as well as to guide strategic planning efforts (Graf, Hemmasi, & Nielsen, 1992; Skok, Kophamel, & Richardson, 2001).

#### Importance–Performance Analysis

Importance–performance analysis (IPA), first proposed by Martilla and James (1977), is considered a part of marketing research techniques that involve the analyses of customer attitudes towards salient product or service attributes and assist practitioners in prioritising improvement opportunities for product or service attributes and direct quality–based marketing strategies. IPA remains useful to many disciplines, such as education (Joseph & Joseph, 1997; Nale, Rauch, & Wathen, 2000; O’Neill & Palmer, 2004), management (Shieh & Wu, 2009; Wu, Tang, & Shyu,

2010), health care systems (Chen & Lin, 2013; Hawes & Rao, 1985; Miranda, Chamorro, Murillo, & Vega, 2010) and travel and tourism (Daniels & Marion, 2006; Enright & Newton, 2005; Esichaikul, 2012; Fache, 2000; Go & Zhang, 1997). It is also used by a number of researchers (e.g. Chen & Lin, 2013; Ennew, Reed, & Binks, 1993; Magal & Levenburg, 2005; Wong, Fearon, & Philip, 2009; Wu et al., 2010) to identify the most important product attributes that have the highest impact on customer satisfaction and the lowest performance measures that must be improved immediately. Meng et al. (2011) have also asserted that IPA is superior to the concept of SERVPERF and SERVQUAL because it attributes importance to items and can be plotted graphically using importance and performance for each attribute.

A typical IPA is a two–dimensional grid constructed by plotting mean ratings of performance and importance. The model is divided into four quadrants, with performance on the x–axis and importance on the y–axis (Figure 1).

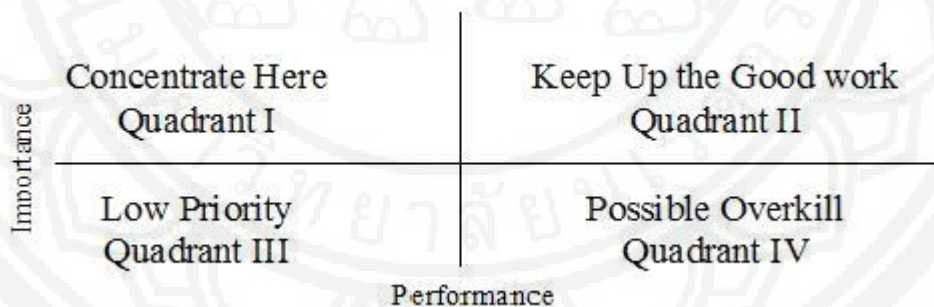


Figure 1 Importance–performance analysis

Quadrant I, labelled ‘Concentrate Here’, encompasses high importance/ low performance items, indicating that the destination attributes that fall within it have been performing poorly and require improvement as a top priority.

Quadrant II, labelled ‘Keep up the Good Work’, encompasses high importance/ high performance items,

indicating that all attributes that fall within it are the strengths and pillars of a destination.

Quadrant III, labelled ‘Low Priority’, encompasses low importance/low performance items. The attributes that fall within this quadrant are unimportant and pose no threat to the success of destinations.





Quadrant IV, labelled ‘ Possible Overkill’ , encompasses low importance/high performance items. Tourists are satisfied with the performance of the travel attributes that fall within this quadrant, but these attributes are relatively unimportant. Therefore, destination managers should allocate more resources to addressing attributes that reside in quadrant I (Daniels & Marion, 2006; Martilla & James, 1977; Shieh & Wu, 2009).

### Methodology

#### A case study

The fundamental objective of this study is to develop and empirically examine the importance of regional destination attributes for domestic tourists. The results will not only be an efficient means of predicting tourists’ overall satisfaction but also make it possible to highlight those travel attributes that have a greater proportional impact on tourists’ overall satisfaction. A case study applying importance–performance analysis was used to evaluate tourists’ perspectives on the quality of travel attributes. Many researchers ( e.g. Eisenhardt, 1989; Parkhe, 1993; Robson, 1993; Yin, 2003) have highlighted the usefulness of case studies as a research method. For Robson (1993, p.52), a case study is a research strategy that ‘involves an empirical investigation of a particular phenomenon within its real life context using multiple evidences’. As the purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of key travel attributes as contributors to regional destination development, a quantitative approach was chosen as the research methodology.

A case study of a Thailand regional destination was conducted in five provinces of the lower northern 1 region. Since 2003, the Office of Strategy Management ( OSM) has played a vital role in coordinating tourism development and promoting tourism products in developing the tourism industry at the regional level. Recent initiatives have been designed to promote historical, cultural and natural attractions.

Domestic tourism was the major contributor to the regional tourism sector. According to a study on the economic impact of tourism, approximately 2.2 million tourists visited the lower northern 1 region in 2014, with their total expenditures valued at US\$158 million compared to only 169,228 international tourist arrivals in the same year, with their total expenditures valued at US\$14 million. However, as is also the case with broader economic development in Thailand, tourist activity is heavily concentrated in the upper northern area. As seen from the Thailand Tourism Statistics, 3.2 million domestic and international tourists visited the upper northern region, resulting in earnings of US\$689 million. Moreover, although the average length of stay for the upper northern region was 4.9 days, the average length of stay for the lower northern 1 region was only 2.54 days (Department of Tourism, 2015) . These figures show that tourism managers must know how important each travel attribute is to their tourists to induce them to visit destinations and stay longer. Understanding how these attributes will be used has important implications for product development, destination planning and for planning new attractions.

#### Data Collection

The study sample was domestic tourist who have visited the lower northern 1 region during December 2012 – February 2013. The respondents were approached at selected tourist spots throughout the region. The survey was carried out using a self-administered questionnaire. Tourists visited the region with their friends or families as groups, only one member of the the party was requested to participate in the survey, with the purpose of obtaining different views and avoiding repetition and imitation among the participants. Respondents younger than age 18 were automatically excluded. Thus, 1,750 questionnaires were administered during the survey and 1,720 were retained for the data analysis after discarding 30 as not sufficiently complete for analysis.



In relation to the sample profile of the survey respondents, it showed a gender distribution with 44.78% male and 55.22% female. In terms of age, 45.27% of respondents were between 20 and 30 followed by 22.79% who were between 31 and 40. The respondents were highly educated; 51.66% of them had been to university and 27.40% of them were high-school graduates. Of the total sample, 41.11% of the respondents had visited the area more

than three times and another 31.46% had visited the area for the first time.

A list of travel attributes for the domestic tourism market in a regional destination was developed from the relevant literature, including Buhalis ( 2000) ; Echtner and Ritchie ( 1991) ; Esichaikul ( 2012) ; Goodrich ( 1977) ; Holloway and Taylor ( 2006) ; Jenkins (1999); Laws (1995) and Van Raaij (1986). Twenty-five items based on this literature are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1** List of travel attributes developed for tourists

Items	
1. Beautiful landscape/scenery	14. Transportation/accessibility
2. Friendliness/hospitality/receptiveness	15. Traditional architecture/buildings
3. Climate for comfort	16. Natural attractions
4. Reasonable prices/ good value for money	17. Hygiene and sanitation
5. Entertainment	18. Crowdedness
6. Activities/sports facilities	19. Degree of urbanisation
7. Visitor safety	20. Information available
8. Variety of food	21. Opportunity to increase knowledge
9. Relaxing/restful	22. Opportunity for adventure
10. Historic sites/museums	23. Quality of service
11. Good accommodation	24. Fairs/exhibitions/festivals
12. Culture/different customs	25. Fame/reputation/fashion
13. Amenities	

The research process involved in this study comprised three phases. In the first phase, tourists were asked to rate the importance of each attribute. In the second phase, tourists were asked to rate a regional destination’s performance regarding these attributes ( a 5-point Likert scale was used for attributes of both important and performance) . In the last phase, open-ended questions were used to capture respondents’ viewpoints towards positive and negative travel attributes that relate to the region’s image.

**Data Analysis**

Mean scores of importance and performance were calculated for each attribute. These scores were used to create an IPA grid representing importance and performance results. The placement of each attribute on the action grid was determined using the means of

importance and performance as coordinates. The importance-performance grid positions the grand means for performance and importance that determine the placement of the axes on the grid.

Each item’s importance was evaluated by a Likert -type five-point scale, where 1 and 5 represent very unimportant and very important, respectively. In addition to importance, the performance of travel attributes with respect to each item was scored by the same instrument, where 1 and 5 mean very dissatisfactory and very satisfactory, respectively. The reliability of the survey was measured by Cronbach’s alpha, with  $\alpha = 0.8$ .

**Findings**

The study is to determine the key travel attributes that affect destination image positively or negatively in the Lower Northern 1 region, Thailand.



### Importance of Travel Attributes

Table 2 shows that tourists give consideration to culture (12), the beauty of scenery (1), visitor safety (7) and natural attractions (16). In addition, cultural attributes are considered most important for the regional's image as it is a place where there are three world heritage sites in the region; however, this ordering differs from the priorities outlined in Thailand's domestic tourism survey, which are natural attractions, visitor safety, reasonable prices, accessibility, and good accommodations (Tourism Council of Thailand, 2013).

A number of researchers (e.g. Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gartner, 1989; O'Leary & Deegan, 2003) explained at this point that image perception changes according to different influences such as personal, cultural and past experiences. Moreover, the variety of travel attributes also result in a different image for each destination (Calantone, di Benedetto, Hakam, & Bojanic, 1989). Additional factors important in selecting the Lower Northern 1 region are cleanliness (17), availability of information (20) and historic sites (10); all these attributes had mean scores higher than 4.

**Table 2** Travel Attributes' Importance and Performance Ratings

Attribute	Mean importance	Mean performance	Difference (+/-)
12. Culture/different customs	4.21	4.35	0.14
1. Beautiful landscape/ scenery	4.12	4.36	0.24
7. Visitor safety	4.11	4.24	0.13
16. Natural attractions	4.10	4.32	0.22
17. Hygiene and sanitation	4.06	3.56	-0.50
20. Information available	4.06	4.16	0.10
10. Historic sites/museums	4.02	4.22	0.20
9. Relaxing/restful	3.99	4.37	0.38
14. Transportation/infrastructure	3.97	4.00	0.03
3. Climate for comfort	3.84	4.13	0.29
4. Reasonable prices/ good value for money	3.83	3.79	-0.04
25. Fame/reputation/fashion	3.79	4.34	0.55
6. Activities/sports facilities	3.76	3.65	-0.11
2. Friendliness/hospitality/receptiveness	3.75	4.24	0.49
23. Quality of service	3.74	3.53	-0.22
15. Traditional architecture/buildings	3.70	3.74	0.04
19. Degree of urbanisation	3.67	3.72	0.05
21. Opportunity to increase knowledge	3.65	4.14	0.49
18. Crowdedness	3.64	3.67	0.03
8. Variety of food	3.50	3.87	0.37
13. Amenities	3.45	4.00	0.55
11. Good accommodation	3.25	3.75	0.50
24. Fairs/exhibitions/festivals	3.25	3.79	0.54
22. Opportunity for adventure	3.15	3.91	0.76
5. Entertainment	2.89	2.77	-0.12

### Performance of Travel Attributes

Table 2 also illustrates the travel attributes that performed best in the lower northern 1 region – relaxing (9), beautiful scenery (1), different culture (12),

reputation (25) and natural attractions (16) – all of which achieved mean ratings greater than 4.30. The key attributes undergirding the region's appeal as a tourism destination, which formed the basis of the

region’s promotional approach, were ‘historic sites, natural attractions, cultures and festivals’ (The Office of Strategy Management, 2003). According to the findings, the region’s performance corresponds to the images promoted by the OSM. However, although the image of the lower northern 1 region has been met with widespread acceptance as a tourism destination in the domestic market, there are certain areas in which tourism managers/ staff can concentrate on improving the region’s image, including cleanliness (17), quality of service (23), entertainment (5), activities (6) and reasonable prices/good value for money (4). It should be noted that the divergence between both series of

scores may have deterred other domestic tourists when choosing to visit the region.

### Graphical Plotting of Travel Attributes on the IPA Grid

The major strengths and weaknesses of travel attributes are represented by an IPA plot in Figure 2; the x-axis represents the perception of attributes’ performance, and the y-axis represents the perception of their importance. The intersection in the IPA is obtained using the mean values for overall importance at 3.72 and the mean values for overall performance at 3.95. The following paragraphs describe each IPA quadrant in detail.

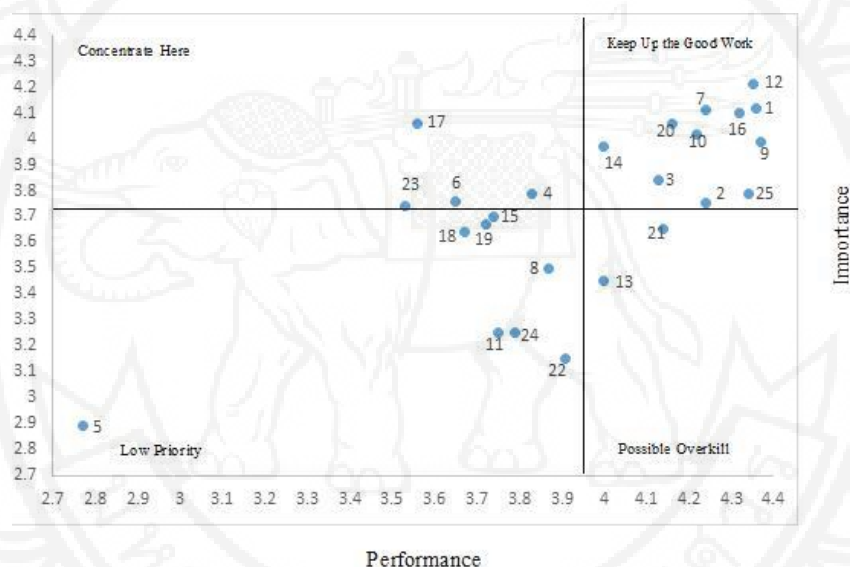


Figure 2 The IPA grid

The ‘Concentrate Here’ quadrant: Items that fall into this quadrant represent key areas whose improvement is both a necessity and a top priority. Four items (Items 4, 6, 17 and 23) are located in this zone, indicating that tourists had relatively modest expectation regarding the region’s performance on these attributes, however, the regional destination does not perform well from the perspective of tourists regarding these critical success factors. For this reason, these attributes are discussed further in the next section.

The ‘Keep Up the Good Work’ quadrant: All items that fall within this quadrant are the major strengths of

the regional destination. Tourists believed these specific attributes to be important and were satisfied with the region’s performance with respect to them. This quadrant, comprising 11 items (Items 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 20 and 25), suggests areas in which the region is doing well and must continue its good work. As noted above, these items correspond to the key elements of the region’s promotional tourism image: historic sites, natural attractions and cultural attractions and festivals.

The ‘Low Priority’ quadrant. Any item that falls into this quadrant is not important and does not pose a





threat to the region. Eight items (Items 5, 8, 11, 15, 18, 19, 22 and 24) are located in this zone. Although there is room for improvement, it is unnecessary for management to focus additional efforts here.

Items in the 'Possible Overkill' quadrant have been overly emphasised in the region, which should allocate more resources to manage items that reside in the 'Concentrate here' quadrant. This quadrant reflects a misuse of destination attributes. Two items (Items 13 and 21) belong to this quadrant.

### Discussion

According to the results analysed by importance-performance analysis, the travel attributes that the regional destination should maintain are the 'Reasonable prices/Good value for money', 'Activities', 'Hygiene and sanitation' and 'Quality of service'. These attributes highlight the particular vulnerabilities of the region which implies that the Lower Northern 1 region is not generally seen as a reasonable price and clean destination. Moreover, it is relatively uninteresting and provides poor service. Clearly, significant efforts must be made to protect these four attributes, especially on cleanliness feature because it is an attribute with the high importance rating and with the most negative performance mean. Generally, most tourists expected the regional destinations to live up to the standards set by other leading destinations. Swarbrooke (2001) has attributed this issue to cultural differences between hosts and guests as tourists expect the same standards of comfort and hygiene as they have at home. Therefore, destination managers must maintain destination facilities and environment; otherwise, tourists may reject destinations.

In the 'Quality of service' item, it is perhaps one of the most important constructs in destination loyalty as it has a beneficial effect on bottom-line performance for the destination. In general, quality of service depends on output and process quality. Grönroos (1984) referred to output quality as what is delivered to the tourists such as the meals in a restaurant and process quality is

concerned with how the service is done, for instance, how the waiters perform their task. Caruana (2000) further viewed that the quality of service has an impact in the organisations' image. Many tourism studies (Chi & Qu, 2007; Chon, 1990; Jang & Feng, 2007; Rajesh, 2013) have also shown that improved service quality will contribute to increased tourist satisfaction and both of them influence destination image and revisit intention. In other words, the quality of service results in a positive image of a destination and overall satisfaction with a performance does lead to destination loyalty. As such, it is crucial for the regional destinations to establish benchmarks for the constructs under consideration in both the output and process performance and to monitor staff's performance among tourists.

The 'Activities' attribute is another area where management should concentrate their efforts. Although the region has a good reputation in historic sites, natural attractions, cultures and festivals, these attractions seem to have unattractive activities for the domestic market. Moreover, Crompton (1979) and Dann (1981; 1996) viewed that there were significant differences for tourists when choosing an activity. As can be seen from Wang's study (2004) that repeat tourists tended to avoid some of the major tourist attractions and were less likely to participate in iconic activities because they had already been there from earlier visits. This finding is similar to Dabphet (2014) who found that first-time tourists mostly enjoyed iconic tourism activities, while repeat tourists were likely to participate in a wider range of activities. This is challenging for the region to continue to provide attractive activities because tourists normally choose activities that they believe will best satisfy their desires and/or needs.

Finally, the focal point for the regional management is to ensure that tourists are satisfied with travel attributes and the price of travel in the region, especially that all feel they receive good value for money they spend. A number of researchers (e.g. Haider & Ewing, 1990; Siderelis & Moore, 1998; Stevens, 1992; Williams



& Soutar, 2009) agreed that price is a key element in travel decision making and the pleasure of tourists depends on the price and quality of tourism products. Masiero and Nicolau (2012) further viewed that price not only be considered an attraction factor for tourists' destination choice but also becomes a salient attribute for tourists in terms of their predisposition to pay for a set of activities at the destination. For the region, this would mean destination managers continuing to develop appropriate tourism products with the right set of activities and fair prices.

### Conclusion

The study examined 25 travel attributes that are important to Thailand's domestic tourists when choosing regional areas as a holiday destination. In focusing on evaluating and rating regional destinations and drawing upon the full range of destination attributes, the study applied the IPA technique to measure travel attribute scores from tourists' perspectives and to identify focus areas to determine resource allocation. According to the findings, core travel attributes such as beautiful scenery, cultural differences, and natural attractions were located in the 'Keep Up the Good Work' quadrant of the IPA grid, whereby the region is well managed and tourists are knowledgeable and aware. The findings confirmed that the OSM promotes a positive and accurate image. As such, tourism managers should continue to advertise the region on the natural and cultural imagery.

However, the most notable discrepancies between the importance-performance ratings concern cleanliness, quality of service, entertainment and activities. Moreover, cleanliness, quality of service, and activities fall within the 'Concentrate Here' quadrant, which suggests that tourists perceived the lower northern 1 region as not being particularly clean, offering poor service and appearing to be relatively uninteresting as a holiday destination which can be implied that the region is not worth the money. To penetrate the marketplace, the

regional destination needs to take immediate action to improve these critical factors.

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