

An Investigation of Long Stay International Retirement in Pattaya, Thailand.

Dr. Anyapak Prapannetivuth

Abstract—This research aims to investigate international retirees' choice of Pattaya, as a long stay retirement destination. Thailand has become one of the top destination choices, not only for vacationing or working but also as a retirement option for elderly Western retirees. The research was conducted in Pattaya, Chonburi Province. The target respondents were foreigners holding long stay retirement visas residing in Pattaya. A well-structured questionnaire was distributed to 227 respondents over a period of 2 weeks in the month February 2014. The findings revealed that respondents have no desire to make a living or to earn income, but come to pursue their own personal interests. They have regular income from their past savings or other sources of funds from their home country. Their main reasons for migrating to Pattaya were to enjoy their retirement as people, who admire peace, cleanliness and easy going on Thai lifestyle. The findings established that location, cost of living and medical back up had significant positive relationships with the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. Some recommendations based on the findings were made.

Keywords—Retirement migration, Pattaya, long stay destination,

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become a very important activity in people's lives. Tourism, however, not only describes the movement of people from one destination to the other or the means of providing a site for entertainment and leisure, but also refers to the often critical role it plays in the economy of many countries as measured in terms of GDP contribution Berenson, (1993) [3]. Many nations derive a large share of their gross earnings from tourism. The tourism industry is viewed as feeding a country's economy, stimulating the development process, restoring its cultural heritage (although it may also have adverse effects in terms of site preservation), and helping to maintain international peace and understanding. It also largely contributes to cultural integration. Asia is widely regarded as destined to be the prime destination for tourism in the near future despite economic and political driven setbacks, threats of terrorism, and the current recession in Europe which has undermined many potential tourists' ability to travel. One of the reasons for the expected rise in tourist flows to the region is its perception as a "good" place for retirement TAT (2012) [16].

Dr. Anyapak Prapannetivuth is lecturer in Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, IU-tong Nok Road, Dusit District, Bangkok, 10300, Thailand, phone: +66890284224; e-mail: anyapak.pr@ssru.ac.th, pp.anyapak@gmail.com

Up to now, people travel for relaxing relieving stress from

work, so called "Travelling for tourism" (This is especially true of Southeast Asia) where and when to retire (Chantouch, 2014) [5]. While the answer to these queries would be expected to be 'home,' surprisingly, a number of people actually choose to retire in places outside their countries; places which they think are most suited for them and their income. Take the United States, for example, many retirees move to Mexico as they cannot afford a comfortable retirement at home. Likewise, many also relocate in Southeast Asia, Thailand in particular.

Although Thailand is still somehow in the process of re-constructing its image from the October, 2011 flood and some previous political upheavals, it continues to feature among the top travel destinations right behind the "four giants" (France, the United States, Italy, and China respectively) Smith (2013) [14]. (Smith, 2013) [14] mentioned that in the year 2013, 20 million tourists are expected to flock the country. One of the challenges the country faces while continuing to restore its image is making tourists stay longer. Long stay retirement tourism lends itself to this purpose.

It can be seen that long stay retirement tourism has adapted to an ageing structure format more so than a socio-culture format. Countries worldwide are trying to adopt long stay retirement tourism by drawing the attention of ageing citizens and luring them to retire in their countries where they can match their cost of living and quality of life, all the more as people have more capital, resources and education to enjoy leisure time than in the past. Thailand has become one of the top spots for not only vacationing or working but as a place to retire, especially for older western tourists.

According to Tourism Authority of Thailand (2012) [17], Thailand was named the 9th Best Country for Overseas Retirement. Thailand is an immensely popular destination for tourists – as evidenced by the nearly 18 million who visited the country in 2012 – is also well regarded for its retirement opportunities. The "land of smiles" (as it is commonly known for) scores highly in two specific categories: cost of living and entertainment & amenities Husa & Vielhaber, (2012) [10]. A Migration Report issued in 2011 estimated the foreign population residing and working in Thailand to be 3,514,831 by the end of 2009 Huguet (2011) [9].

In 1998, Thailand introduced a limited "Retirement Visa.", its purpose is to offer a "long-stay" visa in order to spare long-stay tourists the worry about costs TAT (2012) [16]. The Government guidelines on long stay retirement visas requires among others that foreign nationals be 55 years old or above. It also requires retirees to have at least 800,000 baht

(US\$25,000) in the bank and prove a monthly income of 65,000 baht (US\$2,100). Permission to stay in the kingdom will be granted for one year upon arrival in the kingdom. Extension for one year at a time will be granted as long as the qualifications as stated above are met (Tourism Authority of Thailand (2012) [17].

This study focuses on the push factors that contribute to the growing number of retirees electing Thailand as a retirement destination. Specifically, it looks at one of the most favored area for retirees, Pattaya, in Chonburi Province, a small and attractive beach resort about 200 kilometers south of Bangkok, known for being the summer residence of the Majesty the King of Thailand and a place that has retained some of its old-world charm. Once a sleepy fishing village, Pattaya has now a population of more than 125,000 and lots of unmarked hotels, restaurants, and high-rise condominiums. The town attracts expats who prefer a more sedated life of leisure and sports, away from Bangkok. Pattaya, perhaps the town retains a more genteel atmosphere. There also have some of the best golf courses in the country. Moreover, Pattaya boasts long stretches of beach within walking distance, royal connection, which means very good security and a very low crime rate, leisure activities, good shopping facilities, and cultural events (e.g. an annual Jazz Festival). On the contrary, Pattaya still lacks an international-standard hospital for serious medical cases, and has been seeing rising property prices. Food and public transport costs are higher than in other places TAT (2012) [16].

After reviewing the relevant literature and introducing the conceptual framework and research methodology, this article focusing on the findings of the survey which will be analyzed and discussed. It ends with concluding remarks and some recommendations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEWS

International Retirement Migration

International Retirement Migration (commonly referred to as IRM) [1] has been defined as a care-free settling down from any job for an individual. However, not everyone that retires also stops working. Clearly, the term 'retirement' is capable of several definitions. It has a broad meaning. In today's world, no single definition seems capable of encapsulating what it really means. On one hand, retirement means having no ties with any kind of job or economic activities. But, on the other hand, it no longer means that an individual chooses to be completely idle, as the notion of retirement traditionally suggests.

In today's world, a number of retirees end up working part time. That said, as Williams and Hall's (2000) [20] study entitled the Retire Migration for the Elderly states, migration of the elderly is a particular form of so called 'consumption-led migration' as opposed to 'production related migration'. As such, IRM has been a growing trend in the past decade. Research has focused mainly on the so-called "Frostbelt to

Sunbelt," that is on people migrating from cold weather to a warm climate. Far less research, however, has been conducted in Asia and the Southeast Asian sub-region.

One such study by Koch-Schulte (2008) [11] on foreign migration to Thailand focuses on the planning and decision making processes of Western aged migrants in the area of Udon Thani Province in Northeast Thailand. The research method used in this case study includes informal exploratory interviews, key informant interviews, and observations. Koch-Schulte has argued that IRM is now in a take-off stage. As it is taking off and gathering momentum though around the world, many communities are poorly prepared for it. As to the issue of who are the expat retirees, several studies have determined that the IRM population is predominantly male while many of the expat retirees fitting into "looking for love" sex tourist typology as reviewed by Garrick (2005) [6]. Another study by Cohen (1984) [4] that focused on expats in Thailand and on the lifestyles of those living in Bangkok from 1981 to 1983 led to a similar conclusion.

Howard (2009) [8] explored the motivation, experience and well-being of Western immigrants to Thailand. The findings show British people to be the most current and active in each city, a fact reflected in the local food supply (English beer and breakfast) found everywhere. Other studies emphasize the growing influx of Japanese retirees to Thailand, particularly in the Chiang Mai area and in Malaysia (Toyota, 2006; Miyazaki, 2008 and Ono, 2008) [19, 12, and 13].

This section considers several key variables are as follows;

A. Location

Location refers to the area where families, businesses and people reside and/or operate a business in. It can also be defined as a spot where an object rests. The most important part for basically any activity to take place is the location. Before any business takes place, say to start construction project or start a family, the main thing that should be focused on is the location. Tourists that tend to stay in a foreign land for a long time choose the best place to reside. After choosing such a location, they are set to move in and settle down

B. Nature and Culture

Areas that exist in or are formed by nature which are not artificial, and can include cultural aspects. For example, Nature Tourism (Nature-based tourism): Ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas (Srinivas, 2008) [15].

C. Cost of Living

Howard (2009) [8] noted that the term cost of living refers to the price of goods and services required for maintaining usual levels of standard of living. Obviously, the cost of living varies from place to place, and from time to time. Take for example Scandinavians retirees in Thailand. Since winter in Scandinavia is quite harsh, people prefer moving to Thailand

during the winter because it is more affordable than keeping them warm by continuing to stay in their home countries

D. Quality of Living

According to TAT (2013) [18], targets Japanese pensioners and is also investigating the EU market, a retirement visa category is available for those who are 50 years and older with at least 800,000 baht in a Thai bank account. TAT promotional campaigns invite prospective long-stay tourists to enjoy “Long-stay in Thailand: The trip of the lifetime. With the year-round warm weather, the friendly people, the affordability, convenient domestic travel, world-class spas and medical care, delicious and healthy food and the list goes on” (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013) [18]. A new step in Thailand’s tourism diversification seeks to take advantage of the growing ageing population in the developed world, and to bring home lifestyle migrants who move in search of a more desirable way of life

Benson & O’Reil (2009) [2] mentioned that Lifestyle migration often refers to European retirees who spend time in Spanish coastal towns to enjoy the beach and warm weather; the move has now been expanded further due to globalization and relatively affordable international travels.

E. Medical Backup

Specialized care for injuries, illnesses and diseases are available in case something goes wrong. Health care facilities, medical emergency, highly skilled doctors, top medical facility equipment’s, state-of-the-art premises and hospitals, on-time paramedics and health insurance for families are all the key criteria for long stay retirement tourism.

F. Safety

“An environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening” Williams, (2008) [21]. Today, crime rates and statistics about a large number of countries are available worldwide. It is these numbers that give an idea of whether tourists should or should not visit a particular place. Now for them to stay longer, the country should be safe enough for young children and women.

A conceptual framework is similar to a map or a guide where the researcher designs a framework adapted from previous studies with a few new contents and aspects. On the basis of Husa and Vielhaber’s (2012) [10] study (Searching for Paradise? International Retirement Migration to Thailand - A case study of Hua Hin and Cha-am) and Gustafson’s (2002) [7] study (Tourism and Seasonal Retirement Migration).

Thus, the following conceptual framework was developed on Figure 1: Conceptual framework of this research

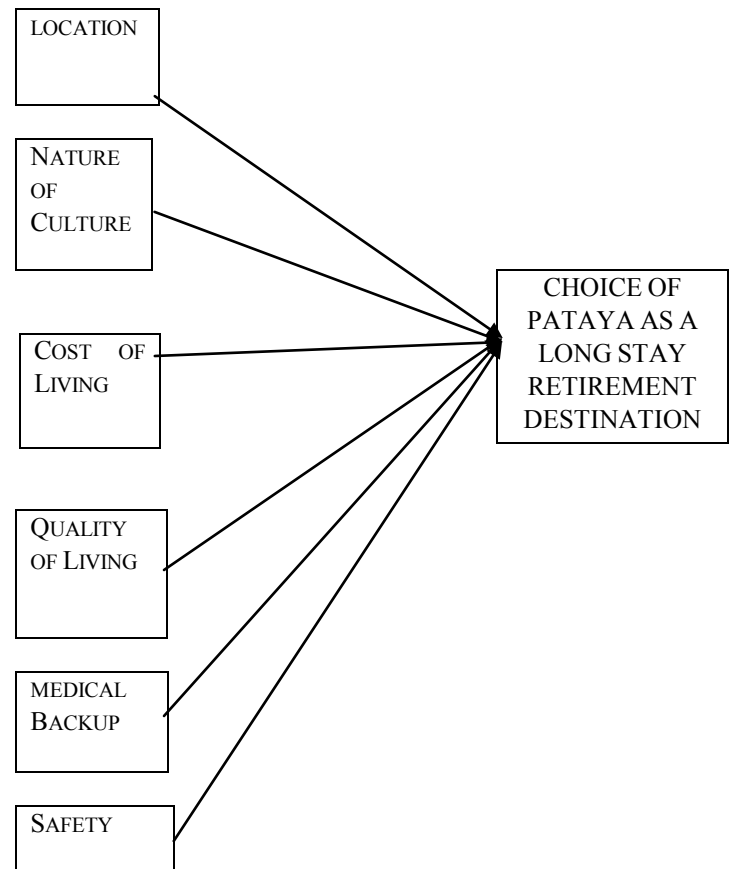


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework of this research

Leaving aside personal preferences, the main factors people research before moving to a new place are location, nature and culture, cost of living, quality of living, medical backup and safety. All these factors relate to the dependent variable. They make up the independent variables and can affect the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination because when tourists migrate to a new country, they tend to change from their natural habitat or upgrade their ways of living. The following six hypotheses test the relationships between the variables:

Ho1: *There is no significant relationship between Location and the Choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination.*

Ho2: *There is no significant relationship between Nature and Culture and the Choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination.*

Ho3: *There is no significant relationship between Cost of Living and the Choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination.*

Ho4: *There is no significant relationship between Quality of Living and the Choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination.*

Ho5: *There is no significant relationship between Medical Backup and the Choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination.*

Ho6: *There is no significant relationship between Safety and the Choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination.*

III. METHODOLOGY

Non-probability convenience sampling, which indicates that all members of the population have an equal chance of being chosen, was used to obtain data from people most conveniently available. According to Zikmund (2003) [22], the sample size can be specified by population estimated variance. 90% confidence interval is an acceptable error. Roughly 400 respondents needed to be approached to participate in the survey.

A well-structured questionnaire was used to gather data from tourists visiting Pattaya. The first part contained five questions about the general demographic factors of the respondents and their reasons for migrating to Thailand and how many times they had visited Thailand before. Part two focused on the drivers of the long stay retirement destination. It included 26 questions that hinged on the six independent variables considered in this study. Part 3 included 11 questions related to the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. Parts two and three used a five-point likert scale. 400 questionnaires were distributed to long stay retirees in Pattaya. They were first asked screening questions before they were handed over a copy of the questionnaire.

A total of 227 self-administered questionnaires were collected. Several reasons account for the fact that the survey was short of 173 questionnaires. Firstly, there weren't many international tourists in Pattaya holding a long stay retirement visa. Most of the international tourists there were tourists visiting the area on a vacation/holiday for a short period (foreigners on a business trip with their companies from Bangkok). Secondly, not all the foreign retirees had a 'Western' look, which made it hard for example to identify Asians from Greece and Asians from Sweden. Thirdly, some couldn't understand English very well so obtaining data from them was quite challenging. Fourthly, many of the sites selected for obtaining data were not ideal seek their participation in this study. Some also refused to take part in the survey. Finally, in many hotels, resorts and restaurants, access was prohibited. In the end, it was decided that the results of the study would not be significantly altered by simply increasing the sample size.

The researcher used the SPSS program to analyze and explain the data and a Pearson correlation was used as a statistical test to examine the factors.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results revealed that a majority of the respondents were males (67.6%) who far outnumbered women (32.4%). A large majority of them (69.1%) were between 55 and 64 years old. For 36.8% of them, the main reason for migrating to Pattaya was to "enjoy retirement." 32.4% settled in Pattaya because of the lower cost of living, 16.3% for occupational possibilities, 10.2% to have Thai spousal and 4.3% as a result of recommendation by friends and relatives. 27.3% of the respondents had visited Pattaya only once and 39.4% more than once (21.3% more than five times, and 11.9% more than

three times).

TABLE I
SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

Hypothesis.	Significance (2-tailed test)	Correlation Coefficient (R-value)	Result
Ho1	0.000	0.312	Rejected
Ho2	0.720	-0.024	Do not reject
Ho3	0.000	0.575	Rejected
Ho4	0.949	0.004	Do not reject
Ho5	0.000	0.417	Rejected
Ho6	0.05	-0.130	Do not reject

As can be seen from Table 1 above, the testing results for Ho1 show a significant value of 0.000, which is less than 0.01 ($0.000 < 0.01$) and means that the null hypothesis (Ho1) is rejected. It can thus be concluded that there is a significant relationship between Location and the Choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. The Coefficient of Correlation is 0.312, which means that there is a weak positive relationship between location and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. From these findings, it can be inferred that the two variables move in the same direction but location has a weak effect on Pattaya as a choice for retirement area. The significant value for Ho2 is 0.720, which is more than 0.05 ($0.000 > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho2) failed to reject. There is no significant relationship between nature and culture and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. A Pearson Correlation of -0.024 means that there is a very weak negative relationship between nature and culture and choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. From these findings, it can be concluded that the two variables don't move in the same direction at all or that Nature and culture has a very weak effect on Pattaya as a Choice for retirement area. Ho3 has a significant value is 0.000, which is less than 0.01 ($0.000 < 0.01$), therefore the null hypothesis (Ho3) is rejected. It can thus be concluded that there is a significant relationship between Cost of Living and the Choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. The 0.575 coefficient of correlation means that there is a moderately positive relationship between cost of living and choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination.

The results of Ho4 indicate a significant value of 0.949, which is more than 0.05 ($0.000 > 0.05$), which means the null hypothesis (Ho4) failed to reject. There is no significant relationship between quality of living and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. The coefficient of

correlation is 0.004, which means that there is a very weak positive relationship between quality of living and choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. From these findings, it can be stated that the quality of living has a very weak effect on Pattaya as a choice for retirement area.

Ho5 has a significant value of 0.000 which is less than 0.01 ($0.000 < 0.01$). Since the null hypothesis (Ho5) is rejected, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between medical backup and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. The coefficient of correlation is 0.417, which means there is a moderately positive relationship between medical backup and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. It can therefore be concluded that medical backup has a moderate effect on Pattaya as a choice for retirement area. Lastly, the results for Ho6 show a significant value of 0.050 which is equal with 0.01 ($0.000 = 0.05$) and means that the null hypothesis (Ho6) is not rejected. There is no significant relationship between safety and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. The coefficient of correlation (-0.130) means that there is a very weak negative relationship between safety and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. Safety has a very weak effect on Pattaya as a choice as a retirement area.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this research was to examine the main factors for choosing Pattaya as a "long stay retirement destination". To this end, six hypotheses were developed and tested using Pearson Correlation. Three null hypotheses (H1, H3, and H5) were rejected. At 0.312, H1 coefficient of correlation shows a weak positive relationship between location and choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. It can be inferred that the two variables move in the same direction but location has a weak effect on Pattaya as a choice for a retirement area.

The -0.024 Pearson Correlation of H2 means that there is a very weak negative relationship between nature and culture and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. The inference is that the two variables do not move in the same direction at all and nature and culture have a very weak effect on Pattaya as a retirement choice. With a coefficient of correlation of 0.575, H3 points to a moderately positive relationship between cost of Living and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. The coefficient of correlation in H4 is 0.004, which means there is a very weak positive relationship between quality of life and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. Based on this study, it can be stated that quality of life has a very weak effect on Pattaya as a retirement choice. At 0.417, H5 coefficient of Correlation means that there is a moderately positive relationship between medical backup and choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. It can therefore be concluded that medical backup has a moderate effect on Pattaya as a retirement choice. There is a moderately positive relationship between 'medical backup' and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination (Ho5). Finally,

there is no relationship between 'safety' and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination. H6, with a coefficient of correlation of -0.130, points to a very weak negative relationship between safety and the choice of Pattaya as a long stay retirement destination.

From these findings, it can be inferred that Safety has a very weak effect on Pattaya as a choice for retirement. In their study of Hua Hin and Cha Am as destinations of choice for International Retirement Migration to Thailand, Husa and Vielhaber, (2012) [10] analyzed the socio-demographic characteristics of migrants and examined the relevance of previous tourist experiences in those areas. They concluded that high quality living, warm climate, and a low cost of living are the main reasons to migrate to Hua Hin and Cha Am. The respondents stated that the reason they retired in Hua Hin and Cha Am was the peace and security of these two places. They also indicated that the availability of attractive partners played a very low role in their decisions to move in that area.

Another study by Williams and Hall (2000) [20], which explores the main reasons people migrate to Thailand and Mexico, concluded that legal rights, land ownership, medical rights and pension plan play a major role as to where people would choose to retire. Likewise, this study also found out that the availability of medical back up impacted the respondents' choice of Hua Hin as a place for them to retire. High satisfaction rates were shown by those who said that it was hard to afford medical care in their countries. Most respondents also mentioned they enjoyed the recreational activities and attractions that Hua Hin offers.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTHER STUDIES

Since four of the variables considered in this study (location, cost of living, medical backup and safety) have been determined to play a large role in the respondents' decisions to move to Pattaya for retirement, the government should focus on reinforcing these aspects of Pattaya so as to attract more foreigners to reside in the kingdom for a longer period of time. Contrary to a common - and false - perception, most respondents did not rank 'a Thai spouse and intimacy', high on their list of priorities. The respondents also didn't enjoy dealing with Thai immigration. The latter is a common complaint among foreigners and one which should be addressed as it may deter some potential retirees to move to Thailand. That said, the Tourism Authority of Thailand and the local government should focus on keeping enhancing Pattaya infrastructure, and natural heritage. It should also keep improving traffic and public transportation in Pattaya to continue to satisfy current tourists and attract more as many of them are reluctant to drive or ride a motorcycle.

Furthermore, real estate developers in Pattaya looking to build condos or houses should also pay attention to maintaining some harmony in the development of Pattaya. Additionally, given the growing elderly population; the local authorities should find ways to keep improving the medical standards in Pattaya. Apart from acquiring state-of-the-art equipment, they could for example recruit more skilled doctors

and have government or royal officials use these services so that other people grow more confident that the services are adequate.

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