

# UNDERSTANDING THE DRIVERS OF LONG STAY RETIREMENT IN HUA HIN

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates international retirees' choice of Hua Hin, Thailand as a long stay retirement destination. Thailand has become one of the top spots, not only for vacationing or working but also as a retirement option for elderly Western retirees. The research in this study was conducted in Hua Hin, in the Prachuap Khiri Khan province, Thailand which is known as the "retirement haven" of Thailand. The target respondents were foreigners holding long stay retirement visas residing in Hua Hin. A well structured questionnaire was distributed to 239 respondents over a period of four days in the month January 2013. 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 Hua Hin were to enjoy their retirement as people, who admire peace, cleanliness and easy going Thai lifestyle. The findings established that location, cost of living and medical back up had significant positive relationships with the choice of Hua Hin as a long stay retirement destination. Some recommendations based on the findings were made.*

**Key words:** *Retirement migration, Hua Hin, long stay destination, retirees, location.*

## 1. 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. 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. This is especially true of Southeast Asia.

One of the top concerns for ageing

parents and singles is where and when to retire. 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). This 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.

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

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