

## Abstract

This research is conducted after the H1N1 flu outbreak in 2009. Thailand, a famous tourist destination, also suffered from H1N1 infection. This study chooses Thailand as a focus to investigate foreign tourists' perceptions and attitudes toward local government preparedness and the effect on their travel behavior in the wake of the H1N1 outbreak. This study also examined the effect of people's personal hygiene in daily life on their travel behavior during the H1N1 pandemic. The study further investigates foreign tourists' attitudes and perceptions toward Thailand differentiate in terms of nationality, frequency of visit and purpose of visit. The research data collection was conducted by a survey used self-administration questionnaires at Suvarnabhumi Airport departure areas. Foreign tourists who had traveled in Thailand were the target respondents. The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Independent t-test are used to test the relationships and differences among the selected variables.

The findings show that foreign tourists' personal hygiene habits have been enhanced through the public promotion of self-precaution measures. A study of tourists' risk perceptions and their related changed travel behavior provides managerial implications for Thailand regarding effectively managing risk. Such management can reduce the tourists' perceived risk in traveling to areas where an infectious disease or other crisis occurs. The results reveal that foreign tourists' personal hygiene habits have a positive correlation with tourists' perception towards H1N1 control measures taken by Thailand. Tourists' good personal hygiene practices had a negative correlative with behavior such as going to crowded places, continuing social greetings and continuing to travel to places with Swine Flu outbreaks. The results found that Asian tourists have stronger awareness toward control measures taken by Thailand compared with Europeans and others. On the other hand, Australians and Canadians had the least awareness of the measures taken by

Thailand. The findings about tourists' behavior in terms of nationality indicated that European tourists are more likely to avoid social greeting or even cancel their trip due to Swine Flu. With regard to tourists' purpose of visit, the findings show that VFR (visiting friends and relatives) tourists have more awareness about Thailand's measures compared with holiday tourists. Holiday tourists are more likely to cancel or postpone their trip plans due to Swine Flu compared with business travelers.

The recommendation is that Thailand government and private sector need to work together to enhance risk management procedures by understanding tourists' perception towards Thailand's efforts. Education campaigns to promote awareness of Thai authorities' crisis management and disease control measures need to be carried out in other target markets (Australia, Canada etc.) beyond just key Asian and European markets. Travel agencies should provide extra advice and special care for first time visitors who are unfamiliar with Thailand. There needs to be more communication with holiday—as opposed to business tourists because they tend to be more likely to cancel their trip due to Swine Flu. Business travelers continue to travel for business purposes in spite of Swine Flu. Thailand media also need improve their risk communication message by being more open and frank and working closely with government agencies involved in risk management procedures.

**Keywords:** Swine flu, risk perception, personal health, precautionary measures, tourism destination risk management, infectious disease, crisis management.