ABSTRACT

The extent and magnitude of political instability are the determinant factors in modulating the image of destinations in tourists’ mind. On the other hand, perceptions held by potential visitors about a situation of instability at a tourist destination have significant influences upon the viability and long-term survival of that destination on the tourism map.

In recognizing the growing trend of the international student travel market to worldwide tourism industries and the increasingly sensitive attitudes of individual tourists towards the issue of political instability, this research aims at investigating whether the perceived impact of various types of political instability incidents on travel destination choice, as well as perceived degree of instability for six selected Southeast Asian destinations, vary among international college students from different cultural backgrounds. To capture the impact, a composite index of 28 political instability indicators was developed and the questionnaire was subsequently distributed to 130 international college students from three countries, namely, United States of America, People’s Republic of China and Republic of India, at an international university in Bangkok, Thailand. A two-way ANOVA with repeated measure on one factor was used to analyze collected data in this research.

The findings from this study indicate that international college students are very much concerned about the situation of instability at a given tourist destination. However, their perceptions with regard to the impact of political instability on choosing a destination differ significantly from their national cultural backgrounds. For example, in perceptions regarding the instability events of “Mass arrests”, “Riots”, “Hijacking”, and “Assassination (political)”, significant differences were
observed. Similarly, such cross-cultural differences can be found in perceptions of the relative degree of instability at selected Southeast Asian destinations. For example, for the Philippines, while the country was perceived as unstable by both American and Chinese students, it was considered stable in the minds of Indian students.

According to the findings, the researcher suggests that: 1) Tourism authorities and policy makers in selected countries must keep a close watch on such events as “Terrorist attacks involving tourists as victims”, “Current wartime”, “Military and bombing attacks”, etc. As long as such explosive incidents occur at a particular tourist destination, active monitoring and responsive reaction should be made properly; 2) Interregional cooperation on the government level seeking preventative measures to counterbalance the negative impact of political instability should be wisely promoted and institutionalized; 3) In terms of selected destinations, for destination management and tourism marketers, either to reinforce an intensive market-oriented campaign towards a target market, or to temporarily withdraw one, the favorable/unfavorable attitudes of international student travelers should be taken into account seriously. For example, tourism enterprises in the Philippines to target Indian college students through effective marketing and advertising efforts exerted to this segment is likely to be paid back; while in opposition for Indonesia, it is recommended better to adjust to other marketplace, instead of eyeing the same niche market at the present.