

## Abstract

The aim of this research is to study the foreign tourists' perception of beaches in Phuket as sun and sand destination and to investigate the attributes of natural attractions, atmosphere and social ambience, tourism facilities, environment conditions and activities in Phuket beaches, as held by foreign tourists based on selected trip characteristics. In this research, the data was collected by a set of questionnaires distributed to 384 foreign tourists, who visited the beaches in Phuket from February to May 2010.

The findings revealed that sun and sand destination on beaches in Phuket possessed tropic warm climate condition, beautiful scenery, clean water and mature tourism infrastructure systems. However, some shortcomings indicated that beaches were crowded, some places were polluted by trash and litter, inadequate garbage bins designated bathing areas and warning alarm system were insufficient.

The results of the research showed that there was a difference in foreign tourists' perception of Phuket (natural attraction, atmosphere and social ambience, tourism infrastructures and facilities, environmental condition and open air recreational activities) as sun and sand destination classified in terms of nationality, repeat visit and purpose of travel. For instance, European tourists and American considered the beaches in Phuket present beautiful scenery and crystal clear water. However, Asian tourists pay more attention to sandy beaches, vegetation and coral, fish under the sea world instead of crystal clear water and scenery. Recommendation based on the findings suggested that relevant tourism departments need to enhance the infrastructure, strengthen beach environmental management, such as Thai local government can increase bathing facilities, garbage bins, alarm systems at the beaches; furthermore, they can give more detailed information about variety of water activities or marine life using multi languages to foreign tourists.

**Key words:** Foreign tourists, sun and sand, Phuket, Patong beach, perception.