

Abstract

The aquarium industry is gradually developing in Thailand from the government's effort to promote education and tourism, and foreign investors seeking opportunities. Since there is limited information on the aquarium market in Thailand, it is a good time to conduct research relating to this developing industry for future reference. By determining visitor expectation will enable the aquarium developers to generate marketing strategies for different segments of the target group.

This research is performed at the Underwater World Pattaya, a relatively new aquarium in Thailand. The purpose of the study is to determine if there are any significant differences between the expectations of residents and tourists as well as the expectations of experienced and inexperienced visitors on various aquarium offerings. Within the differences, the research will determine what aquarium offerings will attract these different market segments.

This study focuses on the expectations of the aquarium visitors on various aquarium offerings. The visitors' expectations are believed to be determined by the visitors' origins (as local residents or foreign tourists), and their experience as aquarium visitors. The origin and the experience of the visitors are the independent variables. The dependent variables are the expectations of visitors in terms of the seven major aquarium offerings: (1) educational program, (2) regional aquatic theme, (3) special collection, (4) dangerous fish, (5) gift shop, (6) marine mammal shows, and (7) outdoor exhibits and activities.

The data is collected by self-administered questionnaire given out at Underwater World Pattaya in the month of February 2004, a high season for tourism in Thailand. The data is later analyzed by the Mann-Whitney U-Test. This test is performed to test the relationships of the status of visitors and the expectations of these visitors on the seven aquarium offerings.

The results show that there are significant differences of visitor expectations on several aquarium offerings between residents and tourist. The results show no significant differences of expectations between residents and tourists on education programs, special collection, and dangerous fish. This shows that these aquarium offerings are crucial in the success of attracting both residents and tourists. However, the tests show that there are significant differences in expectations on regional aquatic theme, gift shop, marine mammal show, and outdoor exhibits and activities. Of the

differences in expectations, foreign tourists tend to expect more out of those aquarium offerings. Therefore, different aquariums may offer different exhibits depending on the aquarium operator and developer's target visitors.

