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Ngamsom Rittichainuwat

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# Responding to Disaster: Thai and Scandinavian Tourists' Motivation to Visit Phuket, Thailand

BONGKOSH NGAMSOM RITTICHAINUWAT

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*This study explores travel motivation on thanatourism of tourists visiting the disaster-hit beach resort of Phuket and identifies differences in tourist motivation between Thais and Scandinavians and between tourists of different age and gender. The findings reveal that curiosity about the outcome of the tsunami, desire to help local people, and safety were the most important travel motivations. Significantly, it is found that curiosity on thanatourism of tourists is not curiosity about death but about the outcome of the disaster and that it motivated only domestic tourists but not inbound tourists. In addition, the study suggests that curiosity acts as both a push and a pull motivation for domestic tourists. The findings also suggest that women are more motivated by safety and desire to help others than are men and that young tourists are the most curious regarding thanatourism.*

**Keywords:** *tsunami; motivation; thanatourism; Thai; Scandinavian; Phuket; Thailand*

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Thanatourism, or dark tourism, refers to travel associated with death, atrocity, or disaster (Seaton 1996; Lennon and Foley 2000; Dann and Seaton 2001; Seaton and Lennon 2004). During the past decade, thanatourism has become a major travel motivation topic. However, there is little information on tourist motivation to visit a destination that has just recovered from a natural disaster. What is of interest regarding travel motivation is, specifically, why people visit sites where death, especially in large numbers, has occurred.

The tourism industry has witnessed the process of disaster sites moving from death and disaster to attraction with the construction and visitation of dark sites intended to maintain memory presented in the form of museums displaying the suffering and pain of others (Lennon and Foley 1999). The combination of such a museum and a memorial in one place provides both a cogent memorial to its victims and a history for the public (Lennon and Foley 1999), especially as the media, specifically movies, have influenced tourists to visit thanatourism sites. For example, the movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, which is about the forced construction of a bridge by POWs at Kanchanaburi, Thailand, by the Japanese, drew a number of tourists to visit the bridge, cemetery, and museum (Peleggi 1996; Henderson 2000). However, Beech (2000) noted that the commercialization of dark tourism sites remains problematic because of ethical considerations. Furthermore, it is difficult to promote a thanatourism site as a tourist attraction without the support of thanatourism stakeholders: those

promoting thanatourism sites, those consuming them as visitors, those living near them, and those who belong to the subject groups and individuals featured at the sites (Seaton and Lennon 2004).

Nonetheless, because of globalization, thanatourism sites have become accessible to not only regional tourists but also international tourists. These two distinct tourist groups visit disaster sites with different travel motivations, and international tourists usually behave differently from domestic tourists because of distinct cultural backgrounds, which is one of the major focuses of this study.

## Cross-Cultural Studies

Previous cross-cultural studies have found that people from different cultures have different push-and-pull travel motivations that result in distinct tourist behavior (Cha, McCleary, and Uysal 1995; You et al. 2000). For example, Yuan and McDonald (1990) found that although Japanese, French, Germans, and British have similar push travel motivation toward an overseas trip, the pull factors of individuals from each country to visit a particular destination were different. Thus, it is evident that the culture from which the tourist originates influences travel behavior and, more specifically for this study, that Thai tourist and Scandinavian tourist motivations significantly differ because of cultural differences.

Hofstede (2001) explained that Asian societies tend to score high in collectivism and power distance and maintain a long-term orientation but are mixed in terms of masculinity and uncertainty avoidance characteristics. Conversely, Western cultures tend to score low on uncertainty avoidance

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*Bongkosh Ngamsom Rittichainuwat, PhD, is an assistant professor and program director of the International Program in Hotel and Tourism Management at Siam University in Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interests are in the areas of tourism in Thailand, destination marketing, and convention tourism. She is also on an editorial board of Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing. This project would not have been accomplished without the help of my research team: Assistant Professor Donald Sandage, Yaowanart Jantrakul, Pichayada Sukhongcharoen, Pornnipa Jaimuang, Tachamaporn Jarernsak, Chaliya Chairam, and Panate. The author thanks President Pornchai Mongkhonvanit of Siam University, Bangkok, Thailand, for funding this project.*

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and power distance and are generally individualistic and short-term oriented, with mixed scores for masculinity. Schütte and Ciarlante (1998) classified Thailand as high in uncertainty avoidance, whereas Sweden is low in uncertainty avoidance. However, both Thailand and Scandinavian are high in feminine culture, where caring for others and nurturing roles and attitudes are favored (Schütte and Ciarlante 1998). Despite the similarity in terms of feminine culture, they are different in terms of collectivism–individualism. Although individualism is an intrinsic aspect of Western Scandinavian culture, Thailand is an Asian collectivism culture (Hofstede 2001). Although young, affluent, and highly educated Thai people appear to have less of a collectivist orientation than the majority of the population because of a “loosely structured condition” normally associated with Western individualism, the majority of Thai people tend to be highly group oriented, valuing dependence and consideration of the group to which one belongs (Patterson and Smith 2001). However, as Pizam and Sussman (1995) and Dann (1993) assessed that nationality should not be the only variable in predicting variation in tourist behavior, but that lifestyle, demographics, and motivation influence tourist behavior, a variety of motivational factors must be taken into consideration.

### Push-and-Pull Travel Motivations

Push-and-pull travel motivations play an important role for individuals in determining when and where to travel. Push factors are internal drives that motivate people to travel. They are general and non-destination-specific attributes. Crompton (1979)’s “socio-psychological motives,” Dann (1981)’s “anomie” and “ego-enhancement,” and Iso-Ahola (1982)’s “escaping” and “seeking” are examples of the push factors. In addition, push factors are not only responsible for establishing a desire to travel but also determine when and where to travel (Crompton 1979) and precede pull factors, which respond to and reinforce the push motivation (Dann 1977). Snepenger et al. (2006) found that personal seeking, personal escape, intrapersonal seeking, and intrapersonal escape were salient intrinsic motivational push factors for tourism behavior. Likewise, Pearce and Lee (2005) assessed that escape, relaxation, relation enhancement, and self-development were core push travel motivations that do not change during travel career patterns.

In contrast, pull factors refer to the attractiveness and specific features of the destination perceived by potential tourists that attract people to travel once the decision has been made. For example, specific attributes of a tropical beach destination, such as warm weather, a relaxed atmosphere, friendliness of the local people, and environmental quality of air, water, and soil, were important pull factors in attracting inbound tourists to Caribbean destinations (Turnbull and Uysal 1995). However, common activities easily accessible in the tourist’s home environment, such as sport and entertainment, were the least important pull factors (Jamrozy and Uysal 1994). Potential tourists consider “various,” not “single,” pull factors, which adequately correspond to the motivational push factors (Dann 1981). Klenosky (2002) noted that a single pull factor of a particular destination can be driven by multiple push motivational forces. People may have multiple and possibly very different push reasons for valuing the same pull factor. Also, tourists with different demographic profiles have different

push-and-pull travel motivations in visiting a particular place. For instance, the primary push travel motivations of senior travelers were found to be visiting friends and relatives, health, and rest and relaxation (Thomas and Butts 1998; Jang and Wu 2006), whereas the major pull travel motivations of this market were hygiene, cleanliness, and personal safety (You and O’Leary 1999). In terms of gender, women are more concerned about safety than are men (Carr 2001), and so women are more likely than men to search for safety and security while traveling (Mieczkowski 1990).

Regarding the push travel motivation on thanatourism, children and young people are the most curious about atrocity (Dann 2005; Krakover 2005). What motivates them to visit a death site? The following section discusses the motivations for thanatourism.

### Thanatourism

Thanatourism is different from other types of pleasure travel because of negativity associated with death. According to Seaton and Lennon (2004), thanatourism motivation is linked to *schadenfreude* and *thanatopsis*. *Schadenfreude* refers to an aspect of ulterior fascination with representations of violence and death and misfortunes of others, whereas *thanatopsis* is contemplation on death, such as through visits to disaster sites (Seaton 1996).

Major motivations for thanatourism have been to witness enactments of death, to see the sites of mass or individual death, to visit internment sites and memorials, to view memorial evidence or symbolic representations of death (museums, exhibitions) for reenactments or stimulations of death (Seaton 1996), to go on a pilgrimage or as part of an itinerary, to have emotional involvement with the place (Porcia, Reichel, and Bira 2006), and to learn from educational mass tourism (Hartmann 1989). However, Seaton and Lennon (2004) assessed that thanatourism is not a primary motivation for travel or a major activity at a destination but is part of a vacation or business trip and is to satisfy human curiosity (Lennon and Foley 2000).

### Curiosity

Curiosity is an important push travel motivation for thanatourism. According to Crompton (1979), curiosity is a synonym of novelty, and a search for new experience, which results from actually seeing something rather than simply vicariously knowing about it. A sense of “ought to see” initiates the selection of a destination.

Likewise, curiosity about the hidden features of punishment and extraordinary disasters pushes people to travel and pulls the curious from around the world to dark sites (Strange and Kempa 2003). In addition, media stimulate curiosity for thanatourism (Seaton and Lennon 2004). News reports about the death sites of celebrities stimulate curiosity and push visitors (Seaton and Lennon 2004) to visit a crime site, which may become a short-term tourism attraction for curiosity seekers (Smith 1998). Also, unusual natural phenomenon, such as hurricanes and floods, pull tourists to experience the unusual event and satisfy human curiosity (Ashworth and Hartmann 2005) because people are born with a sense of curiosity to explore the world around them (Mayo and Jarvis 1981).

## Rational for the Research

Although curiosity is a major push factor for thanatourism, it is still unclear whether the motivation of thanatourists is solely curiosity about death or the outcome of a disaster. Despite an increased interest in thanatourism, little empirical research has actually been conducted on the topic (Lennon and Foley 2000), especially from the perspectives of tourists and service providers. What remains to be explored is what motivates tourists to visit a disaster-hit destination. As Seaton and Lennon (2004, p. 69) noted, "There has been little research into either the motives of the customers, or of the purveyors of thanatourism." Thus, the first objective of this study is to explore travel motivation on thanatourism of tourists who visited a "sun, sand, and sea" beach resort recently recovered from a natural disaster. Since tourist motivation varies by nationality, the motivation of thanatourists should not be considered homogeneous. Hence, the second objective of this study is to identify differences of motivation of tourists from different cultures, specifically domestic (Asian) Thai and inbound (Western) Scandinavian tourists in visiting the thanatourism site of Phuket, Thailand, which has just recently recovered from a natural disaster, a tsunami. This study also aims to identify differences in travel motivation on thanatourism among tourists of different gender and age.

This study focuses only on one type of thanatourism, to visit a disaster-hit beach resort, because little is known about the push-and-pull motivations for this kind of tourism. It was hypothesized that curiosity acts as both a push and a pull factor in motivating tourists to visit a thanatourism site that was hit by a tsunami. In this study, "thanatourists" refers to leisure tourists who visit a death site of a world-famous sun, sea, and sand beach resort damaged by a natural disaster. For the purposes of this study, businesspeople and relatives of the dead and wounded were excluded because their motivations are, respectively, conducting business and getting news about the victims and attending commemorative ceremonies.

## METHOD

### Research Setting and Subjects

Phuket is the largest island of Thailand, covering 543 square kilometers (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2005b). It is well known as one of the best world-class tropical beach resorts on the Andaman coast because of its beautiful beaches, crystal-clear blue sea, and mountain greenery. It provides tourists with a variety of international standard accommodations with different price ranges. Unfortunately, on December 26, 2004, Phuket was struck by a tsunami that killed 279 people (Thai Press Reports 2005). As a result, the number of tourist arrivals to Phuket decreased 50.4%, from 1,200,522 in 2004 to 594,825 in 2005 (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2005a). Nonetheless, Phuket recovered very fast. Within 6 months after the disaster, almost all hotels were ready to accommodate tourists. The speed of the recovery was a result of the efficiency of private hospitality operators in bringing business back to normal. The attractions and infrastructure were once again fully prepared to facilitate tourist arrivals. Moreover, intense marketing promotions persuading tourists

to help the local people, offering good value for money package tours and an opportunity to experience the changes that the tsunami had created in the natural surroundings motivated tourists to come to the destination.

Among the major inbound markets in Europe, Scandinavia contributes one of the fastest growing number of tourist arrivals to Phuket, as can be seen from the number of tourist arrivals to Phuket in 2004: 14,276 (Denmark), 22,129 (Finland), 13,924 (Norway), and 80,389 (Sweden) (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2005a). Nevertheless, in 2005, the number of tourists dramatically decreased as a result of the tsunami. Tourist arrivals dropped to 11,453 Danish (-19.8%), 13,414 Finish (-39.4%), and 45,789 Swedish tourists (-43.0%) (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2005a).

As for the total number of tourist arrivals to Phuket in 2006, Thailand contributes the largest number of tourist arrivals to Phuket, with 1,616,545 Thai tourists out of 4,499,324 total tourists (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2007). Nonetheless, the number of Thai tourists to Phuket decreased from 964,523 in 2004 to 824,330 in 2005, a decline of 14.5%, as a result of the tsunami (Tourism Authority of Thailand 2005a). For this study, a sample of Thai and Scandinavian tourists was chosen because they represent the two largest markets of Phuket and also the largest death tolls as a result of the tsunami, though there has been little empirical information about the effect on these two markets in Thailand.

### Research Design and Instrument

This study used a mixed-method design of qualitative and quantitative approaches with a triangulation of data collection (interviews, fieldwork, content analysis, and survey), especially as Fodness (1994) found that mixed methods results in a comprehensive measurement in understanding tourist motivation.

In the first stage of the qualitative design, the item in the questionnaire came from in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of two tour operators, two hotel managers, one staff member of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, and three tourists who had been to Phuket after the tsunami. The interviewees were asked, with an open-ended question, what they believed would motivate tourists to visit a tsunami-hit beach resort of Phuket after the disaster. The researcher recorded the motivation answers from the interviews and selected the most frequent keywords and used them as the questionnaire items. The items in the questionnaire were also the results of a content analysis of 18 news reports, 15 travel brochures, 5 tour itineraries, 3 guidebooks, and the Web page of the Tourism Authority of Thailand in promoting the Andaman coast after the tsunami. The interviews and content analysis resulted in 19 push-and-pull travel motivation attributes.

The instrument of this study was a self-administered survey questionnaire with three sections: travel behavior, travel motivation, and demographic profile. The first part of the questionnaire asked about the purpose of the trip, the number of times that the tourist had been to Phuket, the type of accommodation that the tourist had had during his or her trip to Phuket, and the length of stay in Phuket. The second part of the questionnaire was about travel motivation. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the 19 travel motivation attributes on a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to

5 (*strongly agree*). The last part of the questionnaire contained questions to establish a demographic profile. The questionnaire was written in both English and Thai. The English-language questionnaire was back translated to a Thai version. A group of faculty members and students of Siam University checked the wording and instructions of both versions of the questionnaire to ensure that the meanings of concepts, phrases, and words were equivalent in the Thai language. Then, a panel of experts—faculty members in the hospitality and marketing fields—evaluated the content validity of the questionnaire. It should be noted, however, that this study differs from the study reported by Rittichainuwat (2006), which examined motivations and sources of travel motivations of tourists in visiting three tsunami-hit tourist destinations using the same survey instrument.

A pilot test was conducted to assess internal consistency and comprehension of the questionnaire items. The sample consisted of a convenience sample of 98 tourists at Bangkok International Airport in November 2005. A Cronbach's alpha was performed to test the reliability of the travel motivation dimensions, which were obtained from an exploratory factor analysis. The factor analysis resulted in four factors, namely curiosity, nature, value for money, and tsunami help. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each dimension of the travel motivation ranged from .66 to .82, indicating a moderate to good internal consistency (Hair et al. 2003). The results of this pilot test provided valuable information about questionnaire design, wording, and measurement scales.

## Data Collection

Data collection consisted of three stages during four peak seasons in Phuket. The researcher and research assistants visited Phuket four times after the tsunami (October 19 to 23, 2005; January 18 to 23, 2006; February 20, 2006; and November 1 to 6, 2006) to observe major tourist attractions damaged by the tsunami. During the first stage of the qualitative approach, the researcher and research assistants conducted interviews with a snowball sample of 5 of the staff at a national park and three tsunami memorials, 6 villagers, and 1 policy maker in Phuket and a convenience sample of 12 Thai and 10 Scandinavian tourists and 13 food vendors to gain insight into tourists' motivation to visit Phuket after the tsunami. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was audiotaped. First, the research team interviewed the respondents by using the self-administered questionnaire and asked them about their experience during the tsunami event. Then, they were asked, with open-ended questions (1) why tourists visit the tsunami-hit beach resort of Phuket after the disaster, (2) whether or not the hospitality of the Thais who helped the foreigners during the tsunami motivated tourists to return to Phuket, and (3) what else apart from the items in the questionnaires they believed would motivate tourists to visit Phuket. The researcher recorded the answers from the interviews and chose the most frequent or unique answers and presented them as quotes in the results of the qualitative data collection. The purpose of this procedure was to gain more understanding of the respondents' reasons for giving the recorded answers.

During the first phase of the quantitative approach, a single-stage cluster sampling was used to randomly select three hotels in Phuket that were hit by the tsunami. The researcher

contacted the general manager and owner of the three hotels, explained the purpose of the study, and asked for survey support. The general managers and owners of the selected hotels agreed to help by having questionnaires distributed to guest rooms and asking the front desk to invite guests to fill out the survey. The hotel survey was done from December 20, 2005, to February 28, 2006. Moreover, during the period of January 18 to January 23, 2006, the research team also visited two bus terminals and the major beaches of Patong, Kata, and Karon in Phuket to conduct the survey with a convenience sample of both Thai and international tourists. Only leisure tourists were included in this study. To exclude residents of Phuket from the study, one screening question (Are you a resident of Phuket?) was included in the survey.

The second stage of the survey was conducted at the departure gate of Bangkok Domestic Airport from January to May 2006 to also include those leisure Thai families who take summer vacation during school breaks and long weekends to beaches in Phuket. A purposive sampling was used to select flights to Phuket operated by both national carriers and low-cost airlines during long Thai national holidays (3 to 5 days). The target population was passengers who were waiting for departure flights to Phuket. Only leisure tourists with boarding passes who were about to leave for Phuket were included in this study. To exclude residents of Phuket from the study, one screening question (Are you a resident of Phuket?) was included in the survey.

The subjects came from 25 countries. Out of 800 distributed questionnaires at the three hotels, the bus terminals, and the beaches in Phuket, 506 were returned, while 91 tourists out of 200 tourists who were approached at the airport were eligible to participate in the survey. However, the respondents were limited in the entire database to those who were Thai and Scandinavian, were on vacation or a honeymoon, were visiting friends or relatives, or were staying or intending to stay in Phuket. By limiting the sample in this way, the researchers effectively reduced the entire data set to a 251 subsample for analysis.

In phase 3, to gain more insight into thanatourism motivation, the research team went to Phuket and Phang Nga again from November 1 to November 7, 2006, to interview major stakeholders of three tsunami memorial monuments in Phuket and Phang Nga. The stakeholders included a snowball sample of local government officers in charge of the tsunami memorial monument at Kamala beach in Phuket, two local residents who lived near the tsunami memorial monument at Bann Nam Kem in Phang Nga, and three Scandinavian tourists on Patong beach in Phuket. Follow-up qualitative telephone interviews with a snowball sample of two tour guides, two of the management staff of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, and one local administrator of Kamala district in charge of the tsunami memorial at Kamala beach were also conducted in Bangkok, Thailand, in February 2007. The respondents were asked, with an open-ended question, what they believed would motivate tourists to visit Phuket after the tsunami. We also asked them about their attitudes regarding plans to turn the tsunami memorials into attractions from the perspective of service providers and policy makers. The researcher recorded the answers from the interviews and presents them with the results of the qualitative data collection on thanatourism.

**TABLE 1**  
**TRAVEL MOTIVATION OF THAI AND SCANDINAVIAN TOURISTS**

Travel Motivation of Thai Tourists <sup>a</sup>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Travel Motivation of Scandinavian Tourists <sup>b</sup>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Beauty of nature	4.29	0.85	Good climate	4.57	0.75
Help local people to recover from the disaster	4.25	0.86	Relaxing atmosphere	4.43	0.82
Image of the Thais helping foreigners during the tsunami	4.23	0.74	Friendliness of the local people	4.30	0.82
Good climate	4.19	0.88	Beauty of nature	4.29	0.83
Curiosity to see the improvement and change after the disaster	4.18	0.86	Good value for money	4.28	0.81
Relaxing atmosphere	4.16	0.76	Service-minded people	4.23	0.90
Installation of tsunami warning system	4.09	0.94	A variety of foods	4.06	0.94
New travel experience	4.06	0.89	Interesting culture	3.96	0.89
Interesting culture	4.02	0.82	High quality of hotels and resorts	3.93	0.86
Safe environment	4.02	0.91	Image of the Thais helping foreigners during the tsunami	3.93	1.02
High quality of hotels and resorts	3.95	0.93	Help local people to recover from the disaster	3.78	0.96
Adequate security check at the airport	3.94	0.87	Safe environment	3.72	0.92
Friendliness of the local people	3.94	0.83	New travel experience	3.59	1.21
Easy access	3.86	1.06	Easy access	3.45	1.02
A variety of foods	3.86	0.99	Installation of tsunami warning system	3.31	1.17
Service-minded people	3.78	0.93	Low-cost tour package	3.24	0.98
Good value for money	3.72	0.96	Adequate security check at the airport	3.23	1.05
Low-cost tour package	3.64	1.04	Curiosity to see the improvement and change after the disaster	2.82	1.26
Curiosity to see the wreckage and debris after the disaster	3.32	1.37	Curiosity to see the wreckage and debris after the disaster	2.19	1.26

a.  $n = 110$ .

b.  $n = 141$ .

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results of Quantitative Data Collection

Of the 251 participants in the survey, 110 were Thai and 141 were Scandinavian. Three-fourths of the Thai (74%) were repeat travelers, whereas Scandinavian tourists were evenly distributed between first-time (49%) and repeat (51%) travelers. About 39% of the Thai tourists surveyed stayed with friends and relatives, and 38% chose budget and mid-priced hotels. In contrast, slightly more than half (53%) of the Scandinavians stayed at luxury hotels and resorts, followed by 33% who chose mid-priced hotels. Nearly all (98%) of the Scandinavian tourists were on holiday, whereas almost three-fourths (75%) of the Thai were on holiday, followed by 13% who were on honeymoon trips and 13% who were visiting friends or relatives.

As for gender distribution, equal numbers of each gender of Scandinavian tourists participated in the study, male (50%) and female (50%). However, slightly more Thai women (60%) than Thai men (40%) were included in the survey.

Regarding age distribution, the majority of Thai tourists (79%) were between 20 and 39 years old. In contrast, slightly more than half (54%) of the Scandinavian tourists were in that age range, followed by 20% who were between 40 and 49 years old and 22% who were senior travelers.

In education, more than 60% of both groups had college or graduate degrees, followed by 20% with secondary or high school diplomas.

*Travel motivation of Thai and Scandinavian tourists.* As shown in Table 1, the major push factors that motivated the Thai tourists to visit Phuket after the tsunami were a desire to help local people to recover from the disaster and a curiosity to see improvements and changes after the disaster. The top pull factors were beauty of nature, image of Thais helping foreigners during the tsunami, good climate, relaxing atmosphere, installation of a tsunami warning system, new travel experience, interesting culture, and safe environment.

Although both push-and-pull factors motivated the Thai tourists, only the pull factors motivated Scandinavian tourists. The top pull factors for the Scandinavian tourists were good climate, relaxing atmosphere, friendliness of the local people, beauty of nature, good value for money, service-minded people, a variety of foods, interesting culture, high quality of hotels and resorts, and image of the Thais helping tsunami victims (see Table 1).

Significantly, Thai and Scandinavian tourists were markedly different regarding push factors. Curiosity to see improvements and changes after the disaster ( $M = 4.18$ ) and curiosity to see the wreckage and debris after the disaster ( $M = 3.32$ ) did motivate Thai tourists to visit the tsunami-affected area. The finding confirms statements by Strange and Kempa (2003), Seaton and Lennon (2004), and Ashworth and Hartmann (2005) indicating that push factors such as curiosity motivate tourists to visit a thanatourism site. Unlike the Thai tourists, the Scandinavian tourists said that neither curiosity to see improvements and changes after the disaster ( $M = 2.82$ ) nor curiosity to see the wreckage and debris after

**TABLE 2**  
**UNDERLYING DIMENSIONS OF TRAVEL MOTIVATION**

Attributes	Factor Loadings				CM <sup>a</sup>
Factor 1: Value for money and hospitality					
Good value for money	0.81				0.71
A variety of foods	0.78				0.63
High quality of hotels and resorts	0.63				0.44
Interesting culture	0.62				0.51
Low-cost tour package	0.61				0.67
Service-minded people	0.60				0.60
Friendliness of the local people	0.51				0.54
Factor 2: Tsunami help and safety					
Image of the Thais helping foreigners during the tsunami		0.79			0.68
Help local people to recover from the disaster		0.77			0.61
Adequate security check at the airport		0.76			0.67
Installation of tsunami warning system		0.69			0.58
Easy access		0.55			0.56
Safe environment		0.52			0.43
Factor 3: Nature					
Good climate			0.81		0.71
Beauty of nature			0.74		0.57
Relaxing atmosphere			0.74		0.66
New travel experience			0.51		0.40
Factor 4: Curiosity					
Curiosity to see the improvement and change after the disaster				0.78	0.69
Curiosity to see the wreckage/debris after the disaster				0.74	0.56
Eigenvalue	5.9	2.6	1.5	1.2	
Variance (%)	31.3	13.7	7.6	6.5	
Reliability (%)	80	81	68	60 <sup>a</sup>	
Cumulative variance (%)	31.3	45.0	53.0	59.0	
Number of items	7	6	4	2	

a. Pearson correlation.

the disaster ( $M = 2.19$ ) motivated them to visit the tsunami-affected area. This may be because of the individualistic Scandinavian culture. It may also show the unwillingness of the respondents to express their true motivation regarding curiosity because of concern about the social acceptability of visiting a site where many people have been killed. As Seaton and Lennon (2004) noted, the true motivation of thanatourism may be disguised for fear of appearing socially unacceptable and even immoral.

Furthermore, media also played an important role in constructing values and attitudes and influencing motivation. Although Scandinavian tourists were informed about the tsunami in Thailand, the content of the media coverage usually focused on the debris, loss of life, and suffering. In contrast, the Tourism Authority of Thailand had encouraged the domestic Thai media to reinforce the positive aspects in the wake of the tsunami, such as Thai hospitality and nature that had been left untouched, which stimulated a desire to help and curiosity among Thai tourists.

*Underlying dimensions of travel motivation.* Principal component factor analysis with the latent root criterion and promax rotation reduced the 19 travel motivation attributes to four factors. The four factors represented 59% of the total variance explained. These four factors are (1) value for money and hospitality, (2) tsunami help and safety, (3) nature, and (4) curiosity. The four factors are reported in Table 2.

*Travel motivations as determined by Thai and Scandinavian tourists.* One of the primary objectives of this study was to

analyze how travel motivations vary between Thai and Scandinavian tourists across each of the four dimensions of travel motivations. Summated indicators of travel motivation dimensions were formed by averaging corresponding items. (Reliabilities of each dimension are reported in Table 3.) These four summated indicators were used as dependent variables, and the country of residence (Thailand vs. Scandinavia) was used as an independent variable in the analysis. MANOVA was employed to determine whether the means for the four dimensions of travel motivations are different between the two groups of tourists (Thai vs. Scandinavian). The result of the MANOVA showed that Thai and Scandinavian visitors were statistically significant at the multivariate level on all dimensions of travel motivation considered together (Wilks's Lambda = .647,  $F = 28.49$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

The follow-up Univariate tests indicated that travel motivations associated with tsunami help and safety ( $F = 30.25$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ) and curiosity ( $F = 67.93$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ) were significantly different between Thai and Scandinavian tourists. However, the average travel motivations of value for money and hospitality and nature were not statistically significantly different. Thai tourists had higher travel motivations in tsunami help, safety, and curiosity than did Scandinavian tourists (see Table 3).

*Travel motivation difference by demographic profile.* MANOVA was also performed to identify any significant difference in the four travel motivations across tourist demographic profiles (gender, age, marital status, and education level). Due to large missing data on income, this variable was not included in the analysis.

TABLE 3

## MEANS OF TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS AS DETERMINED BY THAI AND SCANDINAVIAN TOURISTS

Travel Motivation Dimensions	Country of Residence	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Value for money, hospitality	Scandinavia	3.94	0.60	108
	Thailand	3.83	0.65	106
	Total	3.89	0.63	214
Tsunami help, safety	Scandinavia	3.54*	0.70	108
	Thailand	4.05*	0.64	106
	Total	3.79	0.71	214
Good nature	Scandinavia	4.19	0.66	108
	Thailand	4.15	0.66	106
	Total	4.17	0.66	214
Curiosity	Scandinavia	2.55*	1.18	108
	Thailand	3.73*	0.89	106
	Total	3.14	1.20	214

\*Significantly different between groups at .05.

Only gender and age groups showed significant differences on the multivariate and univariate tests. The multivariate test showed that gender had a significant influence on travel motivation (Wilks's Lambda = .941,  $F = 3.107$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ). The follow-up univariate test indicated that travel motivation associated with tsunami help and safety between male and female was significantly different ( $F = 3.829$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

Table 4 shows that women ( $M = 3.9$ ) were more motivated to help local residents recover from the tsunami. The sensitivity of women regardless of country of residence might be partially caused by the feminine culture of Thailand and Scandinavia (Schütte and Ciarlante 1998). In addition, women were also more motivated by safety than were men ( $M = 3.67$ ). This is consistent with a previous study showing that women travelers are more concerned with safety while traveling than are men (Mieczkowski 1990).

In addition, the multivariate test was statistically significant regarding age (Wilks's Lambda = .809,  $F = 2.172$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ). The follow-up univariate test showed a significant difference regarding the travel motivation of curiosity ( $F = 5.659$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ) among tourists of different age groups (see Table 4). The post hoc Bonferroni test showed a significant difference among all age groups except the 60 and older group. Young tourists (younger than 20) were the most curious to see the outcome of the tsunami-hit area, whereas elderly tourists (50 to 59 years old) were the least motivated by this factor. Likewise, tourists who were in the age range of 20 to 29 years old ( $M = 3.7$ ) had more curiosity than did those in the 30- to 39-year-old range ( $M = 3.09$ ), the 40- to 49-year-old range ( $M = 2.74$ ), and the 50- to 59-year-old range ( $M = 2.48$ ). It appears that as leisure tourists become more mature, they have less curiosity about disaster outcome. This finding is similar to that in the study by Krakover (2005) indicating that young tourists (age up to 20) were the most curious to learn new things while visiting the site of an atrocity.

### Results of the Qualitative Data Collection

*Curiosity.* Ten out of twelve Thai tourists interviewed indicated that they felt they ought to see a tsunami "landmark" and

TABLE 4

## MEANS OF TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS AS DETERMINED BY GENDER AND AGE

		Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Value for money, hospitality	Male		3.84	0.65	102
	Female		3.93	0.61	111
	Total		3.89	0.63	213
Tsunami help, safety	Male		3.67*	0.71	102
	Female		3.90*	0.71	111
	Total		3.79	0.72	213
Good nature	Male		4.17	0.75	102
	Female		4.18	0.56	111
	Total		4.17	0.66	213
Curiosity	Male		3.04	1.20	102
	Female		3.23	1.21	111
	Total		3.14	1.20	213
		Age Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Value for money, hospitality	Younger than 20 years old		3.52	0.51	11
	20 to 29 years old		3.91	0.62	62
	30 to 39 years old		3.85	0.59	64
	40 to 49 years old		3.97	0.66	39
	50 to 59 years old		3.85	0.72	30
	60 years old and older		4.14	0.49	8
	Total		3.89	0.63	214
	Tsunami help, safety	Younger than 20 years old		3.50	0.88
20 to 29 years old			3.93	0.64	62
30 to 39 years old			3.83	0.67	64
40 to 49 years old			3.79	0.77	39
50 to 59 years old			3.51	0.76	30
60 years old and older			3.90	0.70	8
Total			3.79	0.71	214
Good nature		Younger than 20 years old		4.07	0.61
	20 to 29 years old		4.22	0.68	62
	30 to 39 years old		4.19	0.56	64
	40 to 49 years old		4.18	0.73	39
	50 to 59 years old		4.07	0.81	30
	60 years old and older		4.19	0.32	8
	Total		4.17	0.66	214
	Curiosity	Younger than 20 years old		3.77*	0.90
20 to 29 years old			3.70*	0.96	62
30 to 39 years old			3.09*	1.23	64
40 to 49 years old			2.74*	1.17	39
50 to 59 years old			2.48*	1.09	30
60 years old and older			2.63	1.46	8
Total			3.14	1.20	214

\*Significantly different between groups at .05.

that this might be the only opportunity in their life. Some responses by Thai tourists surveyed were,

It is interesting to see changes after the disaster.

The tsunami was an unusual event that we might only be able to see once in our lifetime.

Many media reports showed the severe extent of the tsunami damage. So we wanted to see its outcome and any improvements that have been made after the disaster.

Tsunami is an unusual phenomenon for Thai people.

It can be seen that curiosity to witness the outcome of one of the most serious disasters in their lifetime stimulated visits to



disaster sites among Thai tourists. The beaches of Phuket hit by the tsunami became a short-term tourist attraction, drawing tourists who wanted to experience changes in the landscape and the quality of the sea after the disaster. This result is consistent with previous studies indicating that marketing promotions emphasizing the fact that the beach and water are much cleaner and the sand finer after the tsunami are a motivating factor (Henderson 2005) and that they thus aroused curiosity to visit Phuket (Ichinosawa 2006; Rittichainuwat 2006).

*Desire to help.* Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, both Thai and Scandinavian tourists, from feminine cultures, were motivated to help local people to recover from the disaster. However, Thai tourists had higher motivation than Scandinavian tourists in terms of a desire to help the local community. Our interview with the staff of the Tourism Authority of Thailand revealed,

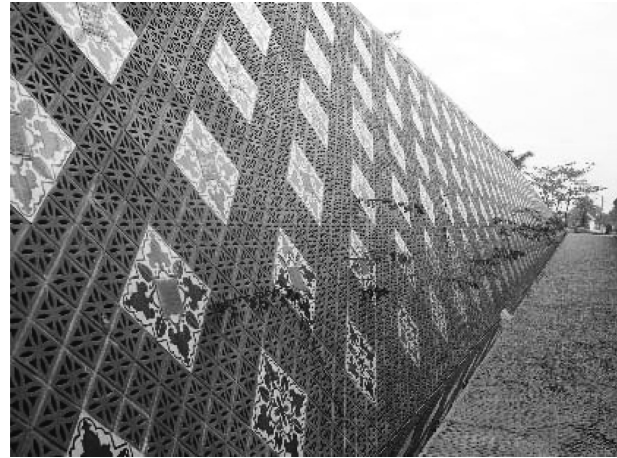
During the tsunami recovery period, the TAT [Tourism Authority of Thailand] asked for help from domestic Thai tourists to alleviate the extent of the tsunami damage while waiting for arrivals from inbound tourists. Thai public and private organizations have persuaded Thai tourists to visit the tsunami-hit provinces to support the local community.

This strong intention to help the locals recover from the disaster among domestic tourists may indicate a sense of belonging and emotional attachment to homeland by domestic tourists who share a national identity with those locals at the disaster-hit areas. This notion confirms a previous finding indicating that a shared national identity can be used for tourism and develops a symbolic bond to a unique place among domestic tourists (Hou, Lin, and Morais 2006). In addition, the willingness to help and the hospitality of the Thais may also represent an influence of Buddhist teachings to make merit or do good deeds for a better future life. According to Buddhism, the religion of the majority of Thais, helping those who are in bad circumstances is one way to accumulate good merit, enhancing your present and your future life. For example, a group of middle-aged female Thai tourists noted, "We felt very happy to make good merit by helping unlucky people." Also, as Reisinger and Turner (2002) have noted, understanding of other people's feelings is an important characteristics of Thai tourists.

Nonetheless, this finding also suggests that for some inbound respondents, the desire to help local people was relatively unimportant. Respondents did not go to the tsunami-hit destination to help local people recover from the disaster; rather, they went to a beach resort in a tropical country to escape from winter conditions at home.

*Safety and security.* As for the issue of safety and security, most Thai tourists perceived that the safety and security measures for warning of a tsunami occurrence at major beaches in Phuket were better than before the tsunami. They believed that the government was more careful about the safety and security of major tourist attractions after the tsunami. This may be due to the frequency of news reports about the tsunami warning system issued by Thailand's National Disaster Warning Centre. Tourists felt safe and had become more confident about visiting Phuket after the tsunami because of public awareness about the disaster.

**FIGURE 1**  
**BANN NAM KHEM TSUNAMI MEMORIAL PARK AT KHOA LAK, PHANG NGA**



Furthermore, domestic tourists had better information about safety and security at the site. Thai officials have frequently reported on the progress in the installation of the tsunami warning system to the Thai public. Moreover, several warnings from Thailand's National Disaster Warning Centre for surveillance on possible tsunami occurrences created an awareness of tsunami safety measures among tourists.

However, the results of the interviews revealed that tourists were not there to visit a graveyard. They had no connection to the tsunami victims, and the tsunami memorial was the site of a funeral, not a tourist site. During our third follow-up field trip to Phuket and Phang Nga, many unidentified corpses had not yet been buried, and the tsunami memorials were being used as graveyards. Our interview with villagers who live next to the tsunami memorials and a local government officer in charge of the tsunami memorials indicated that only relatives and friends of the victims had visited the tsunami memorial monuments during the first and second tsunami memorial ceremonies. Since the monuments themselves have not yet been promoted to the general public, large numbers of tourists have not visited the sites.

*Tsunami memorial: A thanatourism site?* Although it was expected that the tsunami memorial monument would draw curious people to witness human loss and learn the might of natural disasters, there were no thanatourists at the sites. During our follow-up field survey at the three tsunami memorials in Khoa Lak in Phang Nga (Figure 1), Kamala beach (Figure 2), and Patong beach (Figure 3) in Phuket, it was found that these three sites have a tsunami memorial monument. Figure 1 shows that at Bann Nam Khem Tsunami memorial, where more than 4,000 people were killed, no tourists were seen. Within a 5-minute drive, we found a Thai tsunami victim identification and repatriation center where 200 unidentified corpses were being kept. This site is a restricted zone for tourists, with a warning sign reading, Contaminated Area, No Entry. Opposite this center, a new tsunami cemetery was under construction about 10 minutes away from the beach but isolated from tourists.

However, the tsunami memorial monuments at Kamala and Patong beaches were part of the beach landscape. At

**FIGURE 2**  
**TSUNAMI MEMORIAL PARK AT KAMALA**  
**BEACH IN PHUKET**



**FIGURE 3**  
**TSUNAMI MEMORIAL AT PATONG**  
**BEACH IN PHUKET**



Kamala beach, a monument had been erected a bit removed from the beach. Tourists were to be found only on the beach (Figure 2). Our conversation with a local government officer revealed that most tourists were relatives of the victims who had come to the monument during the first 2 years after the disaster to the tsunami memorial ceremonies. Specifically, Japanese tourists had come to commemorate their lost relatives at Kamala beach, not at Patong beach. They felt that the tsunami memorial at Kamala beach was a peaceful place that allowed them an opportunity for quiet reflection, but the tsunami memorial at Patong beach was part of a noisy and touristy beach. Our visit to Patong beach confirmed that tourists there were enjoying water activities and were lying in beach chairs next to the tsunami memorial monument without notice of the monument (Figure 3). In an informal conversation with a 50-year-old American tourist, the tourist revealed that if tour operators were to combine a visit to a tsunami memorial as part of a larger itinerary to Phuket, he would visit the place, though a visit to a memorial alone would not motivate him to come to Phuket.

Unlike the bridge on the River Kwai, the three tsunami memorials do not attract any tourists as such. The local government has used the monuments for commemoration ceremonies for the victims' relatives. At the time of our field trip, there was no consensus as to whether it was appropriate to open the sites as tourist attractions while relatives of the victims and tsunami survivors were still attending religious ceremonies. This also concerns ethical and political issues, whether or not the relatives of the victims are sensitive to the commercialization of a cemetery into a tourist destination. Hence, local government and service providers were reluctant to promote the three tsunami memorial monuments for mass tourism. However, at some point in the future, the sites might be marketed as an excursion trip for mass tourism.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored the motivation of tourists in visiting a thanatourism site, which is a destination recovering from

a natural disaster. The mixed method of quantitative and qualitative design with triangulation of data collection provided a better insight into understanding push-and-pull travel motivations. In this study, curiosity was found to serve as both a push and a pull factor for the domestic market. The push curiosity factor was the tourists' desire to see the disaster outcome, whereas the pull curiosity factor stemmed from a marketing promotion from the national tourist bureau and tour operators in inviting tourists to see change after the tsunami.

This study contributes to literature on tourism by providing empirical findings about the impact of curiosity in influencing travel motivation on thanatourism. The results show that thanatourism motivation is not limited to a visit to a cemetery but also includes a visit to a "death site," where the magnitude of the unusual natural disaster may be perceived as being possible to experience only once in a tourist's lifetime. This study also shows that thanatourism to the sun, sand, and sea beach resort of Phuket was motivated by different travel motivations as compared to previous studies conducted at museums, battlefields, and concentration camps (Seaton 1996; Beech 2000; Lennon and Foley 2000; Slade 2003). Unlike the study by Seaton (1996), this study found that thanatourists were not motivated by death but were curious to see the magnitude of a natural disaster in changing nature (landscape and quality of sea and beach). Similarly, Slade's (2003) research showing that Australians' and New Zealanders' visits to the Gallipoli battlefield were motivated by a sense of patriotism, not thanatourism. Likewise, Beech (2000) noted that the motivation of tourists to visit a concentration camp was personal connections to the site, not death itself. Nonetheless, this study provides an empirical finding to support the pioneer works by Seaton (1996) and Seaton and Lennon (2004) that curiosity is a core push travel motivation factor for a specific group of tourists and that thanatourism is not a primary or sole motivation for travel.

Although Thailand is classified as high in uncertainty avoidance, visiting a disaster-hit site was perceived as sufficiently safe since the disaster had already passed. The findings also confirm a previous study indicating that curiosity to visit the scenes of natural disasters after the danger has past is a major motivating factor for some tourists (Ahmed 1991).

The findings also suggest that although domestic Thais and inbound Scandinavian tourists had traveled to the same place, their push-and-pull travel motivations were heterogeneous. Thus, marketers should differentiate tour itineraries and activities at the sites for these two markets. The results of this study indicate that only the domestic tourists were motivated to visit the disaster-hit area by the factors of curiosity and an opportunity to help local residents. Hence, a promotional message offering an opportunity to see cleaner beaches and sea as a result of the tsunami and emotional support to the suffering community would be appropriate for the domestic Thai market. Also, a zoning allocated as a disaster scene showing disaster traces, such as boats dragged by the waves or marks on trees showing the height of the tsunami waves, could be used to attract tourists. Moreover, it is extremely important to keep the beach and quality of sea in good condition because this was the major pull factor attracting domestic tourists to the destination.

While curiosity should be used for the domestic market, it is not appropriate for the inbound market. Rather, advertising stressing nature, good value for money, and friendliness of people at a destination recovering from the tsunami disaster would be suitable when targeting inbound Scandinavian tourists. Furthermore, multiple travel benefits are critical in pulling inbound tourists, especially Scandinavian tourists, to make a long-haul pleasure trip.

It is also important to note that the specific attraction of nature for a beach destination (beauty of nature, good climate, and relaxing atmosphere) was the main and common pull travel motivation for both domestic and inbound markets, both prior to and after the tsunami disaster. Thus, careful environmental planning to preserve the natural beauty should be a priority during the recovering process and should be emphasized in a destination development action plan.

The study also found that the youngest tourists, younger than 20 years old, were the most curious to see the outcome of the disaster. Thus, a science museum at the tsunami site with interactive multi-sensory exhibits displaying facts about the tsunami and the Thai hospitality during the disaster would allow young tourists to learn more about the unusual natural disaster.

Finally, the findings suggest that it does not matter whether a destination has just recovered from a disaster. Tourists choose a destination primarily on the multiple benefits to satisfy their push-and-pull motivations. Hence, marketers must take age, gender, culture, degree of curiosity, and perceived opportunities to help victims into consideration while developing thanatourism products to meet the multiple needs of the distinct markets.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While this research adds to the current literature on thanatourism, the results should be treated cautiously due to its limitations. One limitation of this study is the small sample size of only leisure Thai and Scandinavian tourists, who may not be representative of the whole populations. Future studies on travel motivations of tourists of other nationalities may provide a broader perspective in understanding travel motivation of tourists who visit a destination that has just recovered from a natural disaster. Another limitation is that

social acceptability played a role in tourist response and may not indicate the true motivation (in this case, curiosity) when visiting a site where many people were killed. For, as Dann (1981) noted, tourists may not wish to express real travel motivations. Moreover, as the article was written only 2 years after the disaster, any conclusions as to the success of the local government and service providers in promoting the tsunami memorials as tourist attractions are still up for debate. Future research on thanatourism at the tsunami memorials after the sites have been open to the public would provide better insight into the motivation of thanatourists. Despite these limitations, the findings of this exploratory study hopefully shed some light on and contribute to research on thanatourism.

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