

Volunteer Tourism: Motivations of Thai Tourists and Western Tourists

Raweewan Proyrungroj ^{1*}

¹ Sol International Hotel Management (SIHOM) Department, Sol International School, Woosong University, 171 Dongdaejon-ro, Dong-gu, Daejeon, 34606, Korea; Email: miss_raweewan_18@yahoo.com

* Corresponding author

Abstract

This study examines the motivations of Thai tourists and Western tourists in engaging in a volunteer tourism vacation in Bangkok, Thailand, and analyses how and why the motivations of each group are similar to or different from each other. An interpretive paradigm utilising a qualitative methodological approach was employed. The informants consisted of fourteen Thai tourists and fifteen Western tourists, all of which were selected by convenient sampling and snowball sampling. The findings revealed that there were some common motivations between these tourists including: (i) to gain new experiences; (ii) personal development and growth; and (iii) personal interest in certain volunteer activities. However, it was also found that there were differences in motivations between these groups, including: (i) to gain inner happiness; (ii) to help others; (iii) to learn/be immersed in local culture in a deeper way; (iv) to meet new friends; and (v) to visit Bangkok and Thailand. The first motivation was found only in the group of Thai tourists whereas the rest belonged to only the Western tourists.

Keywords: volunteer tourism, motivations, Thai tourists, Western Tourists

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Introduction

Volunteer tourism is a new form of tourism activity that has been experiencing significant growth on a global scale in recent years. Such growth is evidenced by an increase in the number of volunteer participants and volunteer tourism placements offered in many parts of the world (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Harlow & Pomfret, 2007; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Tomazos & Butler, 2009). This type of tourism has been particularly popular among Western people (Ackerberg & Prapasawudi, 2009; Grimm & Needham, 2012; Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Tomazos & Butler, 2009; Wearing, 2001). Based on the study of Tourism Research and Marketing (TRAM, 2008), approximately 120,000 travellers from the United States of America and the United Kingdom took at least one volunteer trip abroad per year. TRAM (2008) notes that this number is based only on tourists who undertook trips through volunteer organisations; therefore, the number could be much higher than this estimate because many people also took a volunteer trip independently.

The growth and popularity of volunteer tourism is mainly the result of a combination of many factors, including a reduction in travel barriers (Wearing & McGehee, 2013); an increase in the demand of tourists from developed countries seeking to gain more authentic, meaningful tourism experiences (Issac, 2010; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2017; Wearing & McGehee, 2013); the power of the media that makes people in these countries aware of the poverty and other problems occurring in developing countries (Callanan & Thomas, 2005); tourists becoming wary of standardised package, traditional holidays (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Richard & Wilson, 2006); and being inspired by the philanthropic works of celebrities such as Angelina Jolie, Ben Affleck, and Ricky Martin, which have been widely shown in media coverage (Mostafanezhad, 2014). Apart from these factors, terrorist attacks and natural disasters occurring in many countries also lead to the growth in such activities (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Major examples include the 9/11 incident in 2001, the Indian Ocean Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, and the Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In addition, the industry report titled 'Volunteer Travel Insights 2009' reported that these incidents have made people around the world more aware of holidays that have a component of volunteering in destinations where such incidents have occurred (Nestora, Yeung, & Calderon, 2009).

At present, volunteer tourism placements are offered in many parts of the world and take a variety of forms, including taking a gap year or a career break to do volunteer work (Lyons et al., 2012; Yates & Youniss, 1998); taking internships involving volunteering (Billig & Root, 2006; Bringle & Hatcher, 2011), being part of a school or university project; and joining an organised, package holiday arranged by tour operators. Volunteer tourism placements are generally hosted or organised by a wide variety of organisations, ranging from schools or universities, NGOs, conservation agencies, religious organisations, government agencies, and tour operators (Benson & Wearing, 2012; Broad, 2003; Guttentag, 2009; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Söderman & Snead, 2008). This type of tourism also involves different types of volunteer work, such as childcare, care for the elderly/disabled people, teaching, providing community welfare and healthcare services, construction, environmental conservation and research, wildlife rescue, and immediate rescues after natural disasters (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Guttentag, 2009).

The phenomenal growth and popularity of volunteer tourism vacations has led to an increase in the study of this topic by researchers and scholars, especially from Western countries. However, in Thailand, the study of volunteer tourism is still relatively limited when compared with the study of other forms of tourism such as leisure tourism, ecotourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism. In fact, the study of volunteer tourism in Thailand is still in its infancy, although Thailand has been listed as one of the most popular and visited destinations for volunteer tourism

(GoAbroad.com, 2018). Moreover, volunteer tourists have been identified as a group of tourists with the potential for growth in Thailand, and the promotion of volunteer tourism has been included as one of the marketing strategies for the European region of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2010). This type of tourism is regarded as 'promising future niche-marketing' for Thai tourism (TAT, 2010). For this reason, the researcher believes that more studies on volunteer tourism in the context of Thailand should be conducted because the findings of these studies could contribute to the knowledge of this type of tourism, providing an insight on how to develop and promote volunteer tourism sustainably for responsible government agencies and all related stakeholders. Moreover, previous studies on volunteer tourists' motivations have focused mainly on the motivations of tourists from wealthy developed countries, known collectively as 'the North', taking a volunteer trip in a poor developing country, or 'the South', and have paid little attention to tourists doing such trip in their own country. Moreover, less attention has been given to a comparison study of motivations of volunteer tourists from different geographical and cultural backgrounds.

Upon realising a gap in the literature on volunteer tourism as identified above, this study, therefore, aims to examine the motivations of both Thai tourists and Western tourists in participating in volunteer tourism activities in Thailand. It also examines how and why the motivations of each group are similar to or different from each other. The concept of push and pull motivational factors, proposed by Dann (1977, 1981), was used as a framework in this study because it can help the researcher analyse and understand the significant roles of push and pull factors in influencing the volunteer tourists' motivations and the relationship between these factors. This concept helps to understand both internal and external forces that influence the decision of the volunteer tourists. Push factors are useful in explaining the initial needs and desires of a tourist that lead him/her to make a decision to engage in a certain type of holiday in the first place while pull factors have been useful for understanding his/her choice of tourist activities and a destination (Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014). This concept can make a significant theoretical contribution to the field of volunteer tourists' motivations because it enables understanding of the influences of 'intangible' desires of tourists (push factors) and 'tangible' characteristics or attributes of tourism activities and a destination (pull factors) on the decision of the volunteer tourists.

Literature review

Volunteer tourism

Volunteer tourism is now one of the most popular and fastest-growing forms of alternative tourism (Brown & Morrison, 2003; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Raymond & Hall, 2008). It can be characterised as a combination of tourism or leisure activities and volunteering activities (McGehee & Andereck, 2009; Raymond & Hall, 2008). Volunteer tourism is arguably a more responsible, sustainable form of tourism. Unlike leisure tourists who tend to cause problems in the destinations they visit, the acts of the volunteer tourists are argued to be driven by goodwill or a sense of responsibility, and will potentially benefit local people at the holiday destinations (Gray & Campbell, 2007; McGehee & Santos, 2005; Wearing, 2001).

A number of scholars and researchers have attempted to define 'volunteer tourism'. Examples of widely-cited definitions include Wearing (2001:1) who states that volunteer tourism refers to

those tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or the environment.

Brown (2005: 480) states that volunteer tourism is

a type of tourism experience where a tour operator offers travellers an opportunity to participate in an optional excursion that has a volunteer component, as well as cultural exchanges with local people.

These two definitions similarly highlight the practice of volunteer tourists who spend parts of their holidays volunteering at the destination and such practice potentially benefit the local residents in that destination, but in Brown's definition, the dimension of cultural exchanges between the volunteer tourists and the host community are also emphasised.

According to existing literature (e.g. Broad, 2003; Brown & Morrison, 2003; Lepp, 2009; McGehee & Santos, 2005; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Ooi & Laing, 2010; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Sin, 2009; Wearing, 2001), volunteer tourism can be viewed as a mutually beneficial form of tourism from which both volunteer participants and local residents in the host communities can benefit equally. The benefits that the local people can gain from the volunteer participants can be classified into three main areas including economic-, social-, and environment-related benefits. In terms of economic-related benefits, volunteer tourism can provide the local residents with unpaid workforce, financial support, supplementary revenue, local employment, and improved facilities and infrastructure in the communities (Morgan, 2010). In terms of social-related benefits, volunteer tourism not only provides funds for the development of the local communities (Callanan & Thomas, 2005; McIntosh and Zahra, 2007; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Wearing, 2001), but it can also provide an educational opportunity for local people (Sin, 2010). Moreover, this type of tourism can help promote local culture and values (Wearing, 2001). As for environment-related benefits, volunteer tourists participating in environmental-related projects can provide time and effort in the restoration and conservation of the environments in the communities (Broad, 2003; Wearing, 2001).

As for the benefits for the volunteer tourists, many existing studies (e.g. Broad, 2003; Brown, 2005; Harlow & Pomfret, 2007; Jones, 2005; Lo & Lee, 2011; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Proyrungroj, 2017a; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007; Wearing, 2001) argue that the learning nature of volunteer tourism experiences facilitates the volunteer tourists to develop their abilities and skills in several ways, such as developing or enhancing their communication skills, gaining their confidence, enhancing their relationship with others, and developing problem-solving skills. Furthermore, Harlow & Pomfret (2007) state that environmental-related volunteer tourism projects provide the volunteer tourists with an opportunity to directly and actively engage in restoration and conservation activities, which helps increase their awareness of the significance of environmental resources as well as enhance their knowledge of environmental issues.

Volunteer tourists

Volunteer tourists can be defined as travellers who look for tourism experiences that provide benefits for themselves and the host communities they visit equally (Wearing, 2001). Gray & Campbell's (2007) study reports that in the view of the volunteer tourists, the local residents, the staff members of volunteer tourism projects, and other related stakeholders, there are mixed opinions regarding the volunteer tourists, ranging from considering them as complete tourists or a special type of tourists to not being tourists at all.

Several studies support Gray & Campbell's (2007) study. For example, McGehee & Andereck (2009) state in the opinion of volunteer tourists and local residents, the volunteer tourists do not seem to be similar

to other tourists. Similarly, Lyons (2003), van der Meer (2007), and Wearing (2001) also argue that some volunteer tourists are reluctant to call themselves tourists. Moreover, the study of Lepp (2009) reports that some volunteer participants require some forms of duties and obligations to differentiate themselves from leisure tourists.

As one of the main characteristics of the volunteer tourists is 'volunteering' or 'working without pay', the question of whether they should be regarded as volunteers or a special type of tourist arises. A number of scholars and researchers (e.g. Broad, 2003; Brown, 2005; Gray & Campbell, 2007; Jones, 2005; McGehee & Santos, 2005; Mustonen, 2006; Raymond, 2007; Wearing, 2001; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007) argue that the volunteer tourists should be regarded as a type of tourist, rather than volunteers. Raymond (2007) points out that a major distinction between volunteer tourists and conventional volunteers is that the former involve a tourism component whereas the latter do not involve this component. In this sense, it can be implied that volunteer tourists are different from conventional volunteers in that they do not only work, but also engage in tourism or leisure activities. In addition, Tomazos & Butler (2009) explain the difference between volunteer tourists and conventional volunteers by stating that volunteer tourists have to pay for transportation, accommodation, and food for their opportunity to work, just as tourists pay for a holiday whereas conventional volunteers do not.

The motivations of volunteer tourists represent another aspect that can be used to differentiate them from conventional volunteers. Several researchers (e.g. Brown, 2005; Chen & Chen, 2011; Lo & Lee, 2011; Sin, 2009; Wearing, 2001) argues that volunteer tourists are generally motivated by a desire to gain authentic and cross-cultural experiences with local residents in the community they visit, by living, working, and having close interactions with local people. Such motivation is not usually found among conventional volunteers.

Tourist motivation

Tourist motivation is a concept that has been largely defined by a number of scholars and researchers. Examples of such definitions given by well-known scholars in the field of tourist motivation include: Dann (1981: 205), who states that tourist motivation is "a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or a group of actors to travel, and which is subsequently interpretable by others as a valid explanation for such a decision."; and Wearing (2004: 216), who states that "motivation is aroused when individuals think of certain activities that are potentially satisfying. Since people act to satisfy their needs, motivation is thought to be the ultimate driving force that governs travel behaviour".

Based on the review of literature, it is found that all the authors and researchers in this field agree that tourist motivation is closely connected with a person's behaviour. It can be regarded as a force that drives tourists to engage in a particular tourism activity that potentially brings satisfaction to them.

Tourist motivation is often considered synonymous with 'reasons' (Clary & Snyder, 1991) or 'purpose' of travelling (Cohen, 1972). Tourist motivation is complex and dynamic in nature (Sharpley, 2003; 2006). Generally, a tourist is not likely to be motivated to travel by a single motivation, but rather a combination of several motivations (Page & Connell, 2009; Sharpley, 2003; 2006).

Tourist motivation plays a significant role in tourist behaviour because it represents the initial point of understanding tourist behaviour (Pearce & Lee, 2005). Several scholars in the tourism field (e.g. Crompton, 1979; Holden, 2006; Lo & Lee, 2011; Sharpley, 2006) similarly agree that motivation acts as a powerful driving force behind tourist behaviour. Sharpley (2006:32) argues that tourist motivation can be regarded as "tourism's starting gun" (Sharpley, 2006: 32). This statement is supported by Holden

(2006: 63), who states that “without the desire and motivation to travel there would be no tourism system or tourism industry”.

The knowledge of tourist motivation is also important in terms of marketing as it provides valuable insights for tourism marketers in understanding the real needs and want of the tourists, which, in turn, help them to develop tourism products and services that can bring maximum satisfaction to tourists.

However, understanding tourist motivation is one of the most complex issues of tourism research (Sharpley, 2003). According to Sharpley (2006: 31), one of the major challenges in understanding tourist motivations is that tourists themselves may not be aware of what motivates them to travel, or have difficulties in explaining their real motivations.

A number of theories and concepts have been used to investigate and explain the complex nature of tourist motivations. One of the oldest theory used to understand the individuals' motivations to perform certain actions is the instinct theory (Holden, 2006). Atkinson, Atkinson, & Hilgard (1983), referring to the work of McDougall at the beginning of the twentieth century, argue that behaviors of human occur from ten inherited instincts, including acquisition, construction, curiosity, gregariousness, flight, reproduction, pugnacity, repulsion, self-abasement, and self-assertion. However, this theory is later criticised by many psychologists who point out that McDougall's list of instincts is too short, and by 1924, more than 800 instincts had been added to this list (Gross, 1992). The main limitation of this theory is that it only assumes that every action of a person is the result of an instinct, which overlooks differences in individuals.

Another theory that is used to understand people's motivations is 'drive-reduction theory', which encompasses two major concepts: homeostatic drive and incentive drive (Bernstein, 2011; Holden, 2006). This concept emphasises the significance of maintaining a biological equilibrium and a psychological equilibrium within the body. This concept remains that homeostatic and psychological imbalance motivates a person to perform certain actions to restore equilibrium (Holden, 2006). However, it was criticized by some psychologists that it overlooks the influence of expectation on human behaviour. Page & Connell (2009) point out that expectation can act as a strong motivator.

Witt & Wright (1992) propose the 'expectancy-valence model' and use it in the context of tourism. This model suggests that an individual is driven to perform a certain action by some expectations or perceived outcomes of his/her action. In this sense, expectations are viewed as a justification of such action. Yu (2008) suggests that the expectancy-valence model can serve as an alternative approach to explain tourist motivations in the modern world.

Perhaps, one of the most well-known concepts is Dann's (1977; 1981) notion of push and pull motivational factors, which is used as a base to investigate the motivations of volunteer tourists in this study. According to Dann, push factors are internal to individual, and initiate the desire to travel (e.g. a desire to make new friends; a desire to gain new experiences) whereas pull factors involve the attributes of specific tourist activities or countries that attract the tourists. This concept emphasises the significance of push factors as preceding factors, while maintaining that pull factors are the consequence of push factors. He also points out that individuals generally realise their wish to travel before choosing a destination. Sharpley (2003) emphasises the need to understand the distinction between push and pull factors. He explains that push factors are initial needs and wants of a tourist which drive him/her to take a holiday in the first place. These needs and wants determine the type of

holiday. Once the tourist has made a decision to take a particular type of holiday, the pull factors, which are specific attributes of a destination, determine his/her choice of destinations.

Grimm & Needham (2012) point out that previous studies on volunteer tourists' motivations have paid more attention to push factors than pull factors. Moreover, several studies agree that volunteer tourists are primarily motivated by push factors. For example, Benson & Seibert (2009) found that amongst the five most significant motivations of German tourists participating in a volunteer tourism vacation in South Africa (i.e. experiencing something different or new; meeting African people; learning about another country and culture; living in another country; and broadening one's mind), four represent push factors. Similarly, Brown (2005) found that all four primary motivations of the volunteer tourists (i.e. cultural immersion; making a difference; seeking camaraderie; and fostering family bonding) represent push factors.

However, Wearing (2004: 217) argues that both push and pull factors represent important motivations for volunteer tourists by stating that

The internal push motives of discovery, enlightenment and personal growth are important to volunteer tourists but features of a destination are more than simply pull motives to this group, for volunteer tourists see physical locations in developing countries as motivations in themselves

Wearing (2004) also adds that due to the differences of geographical and cultural backgrounds of volunteer tourists and a destination, pull factors may have more important roles for volunteer tourists than conventional tourists. In line with this, Grimm & Needham (2012) similarly state that volunteer tourists are strongly attracted by images of destinations shown in promotional materials.

After assessing strengths and weaknesses of various models and concepts of tourist motivations as mentioned above, and other related theories (e.g. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory and the Volunteer Functions Inventory), the researcher considers the concept of push and pull factors, proposed by Dann (1977; 1981) as a suitable framework for this study. The rationale of adopting this concept is already discussed in details in the introduction section.

Volunteer tourist motivation

A number of studies (e.g. Agyeiwaah, 2013; Ali & Rahman, 2019; Anthony & Rosenbaum, 2012; Benson & Seibert, 2009; Grimm & Needham, 2012; Li, Zhang & Cai, 2016; Otoo, 2013; Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Proyrungroj, 2017a; Wearing, 2001) similarly reported that the motivations of volunteer tourists are multidimensional, and their motivations encompass both push and pull factors. Examples of push factors for engaging in a volunteer tourism vacation include 'to help other people' (Ali & Rahman, 2019; Benson & Seibert, 2009; Chen & Chen, 2011; Otoo, 2013; Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Proyrungroj, 2017a; Proyrungroj, 2017b; Wearing, 2001); 'to give back to society' (Brown, 2005; Lo & Lee, 2011; Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014); 'to make a difference' (Freidus, 2016); 'to gain new experiences' (Chen & Chen, 2011; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Sin, 2009; Proyrungroj, 2017a); 'to make new friends' (Brown, 2005; Proyrungroj, 2017a; Wearing, 2001); 'personal development and growth' (Chen & Chen, 2011; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Sin, 2009; Söderman & Snead, 2008); and 'cultural exchange' or 'to learn/be immersed in local culture' (Agyeiwaah, 2013; Benson & Seibert, 2009; Otoo, 2013; Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Proyrungroj, 2017a; Proyrungroj, 2017b). It can be seen that the push factors encompass both altruistic and self-interested motivations. These push motivations are extensively reported in previous studies.

On the contrary to push factors, the pull factors of volunteer tourists, including characteristics of a particular volunteering activity and attributes of a specific country, have been less examined (Grimm & Needham, 2012; Söderman & Snead, 2008). Based on a review of literature, the volunteer tourists select their destinations because of factors including their perception of some countries as dangerous, unfamiliar and/or poor and in need of help; having unique scenery; having specific projects that take place in certain countries; recommendations from family or friends (Campbell & Smith, 2005; Simpson, 2005; Söderman & Snead, 2008; Wearing, 2004); a desire to learn about other social classes (Ali & Rahman, 2019); the enticement of a challenge (Ali & Rahman, 2019); and an opportunity to provide philanthropic assistance to host communities (Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014). In terms of volunteer activities, the reasons that the volunteer tourists decide to take part in certain activities or projects include recommendations from others, the location where the activities or projects take place, the opportunities available, and the attractiveness of promotional material (Broad, 2003; Caissie & Halpenny, 2003; Campbell & Smith, 2005; Grimm & Needham, 2012).

The study of volunteer tourist motivations also revolves around the issue of altruistic versus self-interest motivations, because volunteer tourism involves non-remunerative activities, which participants are required to provide labour, time and other resources. Self-interest or egoism is a broad term encompassing many aspects of motivations that involve personal benefits that the volunteer tourists expect to gain from their engagement in a volunteer tourism vacation whereas altruistic motivations involve other benefits or the volunteer tourists' expectations that they will make the lives of others better.

The questions of whether 'true altruism' do really exists in the volunteer tourists or whether the motivation to help others merely serves one's own interest is still a debate among researchers in this field. To answer these question, altruism should be clearly defined. Batson (1991: 6), one of the pioneers in the study of altruism, defines altruism as "a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another's welfare". Central to this definition is the meaning of 'the ultimate goal'. Batson (1991: 6) argues that, "For a goal to be an ultimate goal, it must be an end in itself and not just an intermediate means for reaching some other goal." The ultimate goal of altruism is to increase others' welfare. He added that sometimes an altruism may lead to an action that benefits both the aid-recipients and the helpers. In this case, such action is still regarded to be motivated by an altruistic motivation as long as the ultimate goal is aimed at the others' welfare.

Batson (2008) also proposes the 'empathy-altruism' concept which argues that altruism is evoked by empathetic concern that a helper feels for an aid-recipient that leads him/her to reduce that concern. According to this concept, even though an action of helping caused by such empathetic concern can bring benefits to the helper, such as relieving his/her empathetic concern or gaining self-reward, these benefits are not considered the ultimate goal of such action, but rather the unintended consequences. For this reason, Batson (2008) argues that true altruism with the ultimate goal of increasing others' welfare does exist.

Another related, but contrasting, concept of altruism is egoism, which, according to Batson (1991: 7), is "a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing one's own welfare". Considering this definition, self-interested motivation is aimed at the benefits to the helpers. Researchers who advocate universal egoism (e.g. Dovidio et al., 2006; Duffy, 2001; Munt, 1994) reject the existence of true altruism by stating that altruistic motivations are in fact self-serving. Dovidio et al. (2006) point out that although helping obviously benefits the aid-recipients, the main reason that people help others is in fact for the benefits of themselves. When applying the notion of altruism and egoism in the context of

volunteer tourists' motivations, the questions arising include: whether the actions of volunteer tourists are driven by pure altruistic motivations or egoistic motivations; or a combination of both.

To date, there is no literature that claims that the actions of volunteer tourists are motivated by pure altruistic motivations. Mustonen (2007) explains that this is probably because volunteer tourism is regarded as another type of tourism, from which the volunteer tourists seek to 'consume' benefits arising from its tourism element. Mustonen (2007) also states that volunteer tourism represents the best example of actions driven by both motivations. He argues that the motivations of volunteer tourists seem to fluctuate along the continuum of altruism and egoism, and that the border between these two motivations is blurred. Agreeing with this, Söderman & Snead (2008: 119) propose the term 'reciprocal altruistic' and arguing that volunteer tourists' motivations are rather 'reciprocal altruistic' because volunteer tourism not only involves the act of doing good for the benefits of others, but also is about doing good for the benefits of the volunteer tourists themselves.

Based on the literature review, it is noticeable that most of literature on volunteer tourists' motivations to date has mainly emphasised on the motivations of volunteer tourists who are citizens of the North countries taking such vacation in the South countries. On the contrary, a study of the motivations of people in the South countries volunteering in their own country is overlooked. Moreover, it is also found that a comparison study on the motivations of volunteer tourists from the North country and those from the South country has received little attention. Therefore, this study not only provides another piece of information on the motivations of volunteer tourists from the North countries, but it also provides an insight on the motivations of those from Thailand which is a South country. In addition, it also fills a gap in the literature on the issue of how and why motivations of volunteer tourists from the North and the South countries are similar to or different from each other.

Methodology

This study is underpinned by an interpretive paradigm using qualitative research methods because this approach enables the study to achieve its primary aim, which is to gain rich, in-depth, and holistic understanding of the motivations of Thai and Western volunteer tourists participating in a volunteer tourism vacation in Bangkok, Thailand as well as an insight of how and why the motivations of each group are similar to or different from each other.

Although a quantitative research approach is often used in the study of tourist behaviour, several researchers and scholars (e.g., Blichfeldt & Kessler, Henderson & Bedini, 1995; Hollinshead, 1996; Mehmetoglu & Altinay, 2006; Walle, 2007) argue that this approach is not especially good at providing an understanding and uncovering the 'whys' underlying the complexity and dynamic of tourist behaviour. Agreeing upon this, this study is informed by a qualitative approach because it does not seek to identify nor predict a causal relationship. Instead, it involves the investigation of how the volunteer tourists make sense of, or interpret their motivations. In addition, the researcher believes that the issue of tourist motivations is complex and dynamic, and cannot be sufficiently conveyed via numerical and statistical representations. The researcher also believes that the statistical nature of quantitative research cannot capture multiple realities of the volunteer tourists' motivations.

Before the main study was conducted, the researcher performed a pilot study for one month to test the effectiveness of the interview guides, to ensure that they could sufficiently capture the data needed to answer the research question. The main study was carried out over a period of three months between February and April 2015. The data were drawn from two groups of volunteer tourists. There are a total of twenty-nine respondents participating in this study: fourteen were Thai tourists, and the other fifteen

Western tourists. All of them were taking a working vacation in Bangkok during the time of conducting the main study. These informants were selected by purposive sampling and snowball sampling based on the following criteria: (1) participating in one of the volunteer activities in Bangkok for at least a week; (2) under taking sightseeing activities in Bangkok or elsewhere in Thailand during the time that they did the voluntary work; and (3) aged 18 years old or above for ethical reason. The total number of respondents was determined based on the saturation point of the data or when no new data emerged during the data collection and analysis.

The Thai respondents were predominantly female (ten out of fourteen people). Their ages ranged from eighteen to thirty-eight years. In terms of educational and professional backgrounds, respondents graduating with a university bachelors' degree appeared to be the norm for the group (nine people). Five of the respondents were studying at an undergraduate level, four worked for the private companies, two had their own business, two were teachers at high schools, and another participant was studying for a master's degree.

For the group of Western volunteer tourists, the composition was nine females and six males, with ages ranging from eighteen to forty-four years. The majority were from the UK (ten people). The rest included three Australian, one French, and one American tourist. The majority (nine out of fifteen) were recent graduates taking a break before starting their career. The rest consisted of two high school students, two doctors, one university student and a university lecturer.

Activities performed by the respondents included teaching at schools, taking care of orphan children, reading books and making tactile books for the blind, and cleaning public areas. Most of the volunteer tourists in both groups participated in these activities for around 1-2 weeks. They also visited tourist attractions in Bangkok. Table 1 and 2 show the profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Profile of Thai volunteer tourists

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation
L01	Female	20	High school	Undergraduate student
L02	Female	21	High school	Undergraduate student
L03	Male	36	Bachelor's degree	Private company's employee
L04	Female	32	Bachelor's degree	High school teacher
L05	Male	31	Bachelor's degree	Private company's employee
L06	Male	37	Bachelor's degree	Business owner
L07	Female	36	Bachelor's degree	Business owner
L08	Male	33	Bachelor's degree	Private company's employee
L09	Female	27	Bachelor's degree	Master's degree Student
L10	Female	23	High school	Undergraduate student
L11	Female	31	Bachelor's degree	High school teacher
L12	Female	38	Bachelor's degree	Private company's employee
L13	Female	18	High School	Undergraduate Student
L14	Female	18	High School	Undergraduate Student

Three data collection methods were used to gather the data. The principle method is semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions and participant observation were used as supplementary tools to gain additional data and for the benefit of triangulating the data. With the use of these three methods, a more complete picture can be obtained. The triangulation strategy allows the "weaknesses in one method to be compensated for by strengths in another method" (Denscombe, 2007: 134). Another

important rationale for using these three methods together was not only to gain the benefit of cross-checking the similarities in data gained from different methods, but also to identify and explain the differences in data.

Table 2. *Profile of Western volunteer tourists*

Name	Gender	Age	Country of Origin	Education	Occupation
V01	Female	23	UK	Bachelor's degree	Recent graduate
V02	Male	18	France	Primary school	High school student
V03	Female	22	UK	Bachelor's degree	Recent graduate
V04	Female	22	Australia	Bachelor's degree	Recent graduate
V05	Male	23	UK	Bachelor's degree	Recent graduate
V06	Female	18	UK	Primary school	High school student
V07	Female	23	UK	Bachelor's degree	Recent graduate
V08	Female	23	UK	Bachelor's degree	Recent graduate
V09	Male	20	USA	A-levels	Undergraduate student
V10	Male	37	Australia	Doctoral degree	Doctor
V11	Female	40	Australia	Doctoral degree	Doctor
V12	Male	22	UK	Bachelor's degree	Recent graduate
V13	Female	44	UK	Doctoral degree	University lecturer
V14	Female	22	UK	Bachelor's degree	Recent graduate
V15	Male	23	UK	Bachelor's degree	Recent graduate

Although, the same set of questions were used to explore the motivations of both groups of the respondents, the emphasis on how the respondents of each group give meaning to the context of the destination for volunteering activities is somewhat different. Specifically, for the group of Thai respondents who volunteered in their home country, the interviews aimed to explore why they chose to volunteer in Bangkok, Thailand, instead of doing abroad whereas in the group of Western volunteer tourists, apart from asking the respondents' reasons for choosing to volunteer in Bangkok, Thailand, the interviews aimed to examine the role of the overseas context of the volunteer tourism destination in motivating or pulling the respondents to volunteer in Thailand.

The questions used to ask the respondents during the in-depth interviews centred around 'why they decided to participate in volunteer tourism in Thailand'. The main topics for the investigation include: 'motivations for volunteering while holiday'; 'reasons for selecting Bangkok/Thailand as the destination for the volunteer vacation'; and 'reasons for selecting to volunteer in a certain activity/project'. All semi-structured interviews and focus groups were video-recorded upon receiving permission via a consent form from the respondents. The use of pseudonyms was adopted to ensure all the respondents that their information would be kept anonymously and confidentially.

The data were analysed using thematic data analysis, which consists of six continuous and interrelated phases including: (1) become familiar with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) creating themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) writing the report. The rationale for using this technique lies in its accessibility and flexibility because it allows the researcher to interpret the meaning of the data freely without a restriction to follow particular theoretical approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings

Following thematic data analysis, the main themes relating to the volunteer tourists' motivations were identified.

The motivations of the Thai volunteer tourists

For the Thai volunteer tourists, four main motivations were: (i) to gain inner happiness; (ii) to gain new experiences; (iii) personal development and growth; and (iv) personal interest in a certain volunteer activity. Amongst these four themes, gaining inner happiness was the most dominant motivational factor whereas a desire to gain new experiences was the least frequently mentioned. When applying Dann's (1977; 1981) concept of push and pull factors to explain these motivations, it can be argued that the first three motivations are push factors because they represent the inner needs of the tourists whereas the last one is a pull motivation because it involves the attractiveness of the volunteer activities. These four factors are shown in Figure 1 and discussed below.

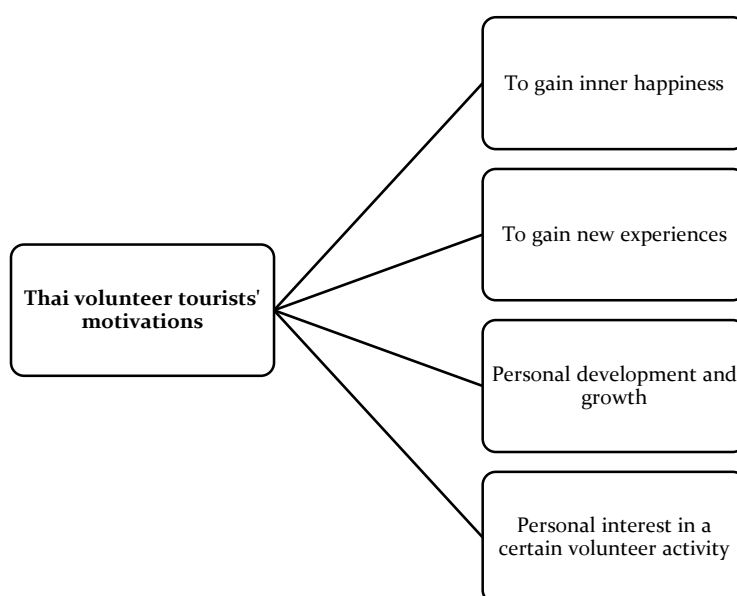


Figure 1. *The Motivations of Thai Volunteer Tourists*

(i) *To gain inner happiness.* This motivation was cited by all Thai respondents as one of their motivations. The respondents similarly stated that participating in volunteer activities during their free time could help reduce their selfishness and it was morally right to do good thing for other people and the society. Such activities could produce inner happiness for themselves at no cost. Examples of expressions used by the respondents included: “to gain real and long lasting happiness because we have done good things” (T5); “to help out other people makes me gain inner happiness which I can’t get from other activities” (T7); and “I think it is a kind of merit that I can gain from helping these people” (T8).

Moreover, the respondents also expressed their belief that doing volunteer work is a way to perform good deeds. Some respondents also quoted the Buddha’s teaching that ‘if you do good things, good things will happen to you’ to explain their motivation. According to the respondents, the satisfaction derived from doing ‘good deeds’ is long-lasting, unlike the happiness they gain from leisure activities, which they regarded as temporary.

(ii) *To gain new experiences.* For many Thai respondents, this was the first time they had done volunteer work and they did this because they wanted to have new experiences. For example, T₃ stated that for him, this volunteering experience had been an experiment so that he would know how he felt about volunteer work:

I am only doing it because I want to have an experience of volunteering. Besides, I want to know how I like it. If I didn't like it, I will just not do it again. But if I like it, I will continue. It's just like a 'taster' for me.

Some respondents said that they decided to do volunteer work during their free time because they wanted to gain an experience of being out of their comfort zone.

(iii) *Personal development and growth.* For some Thai respondents, voluntary work was a chance to prove themselves that they could do something on their own. For example, T₉ explained that she was shy and never went anywhere alone without family members or friends. She stated that she wanted to prove herself that she could make a tactile book for the blinds and work in an unfamiliar place with people she didn't know.

Additionally, for some respondents, volunteer experiences could serve them as a key addition to their CV because they could demonstrate skills and qualities to prospective employers, such as being patient, flexible and adaptable, being confident and responsible, willing to try new things, having problem-solving skills, maturity, etc., as exemplified by T₆:

It does look good to employers if you have mentioned on your CV, "I have done volunteer work before", and they can see that you're a responsible person who cares [for] others.

Moreover, some respondents mentioned that doing voluntary work helped cultivate a good 'image' of themselves because such activities involved doing good things for other people, thus distinguishing them from others, particularly as doing voluntary work is not common among Thai people.

(iv) *Personal interest in a certain volunteer activity.* This motivation is considered to be a pull factor because it involves the attributes or attractiveness of the volunteer activities that 'pull' the respondents to participate. Many Thai respondents stated that one of the main reasons for doing voluntary work is that they had a personal interest in certain activities, or particular skills or expertise. For example, T₅ stated that the reason he decided to participate in the reading for the blind project was that he was short-sighted and afraid that he might become blind in the future. He added that he felt pity for blind people and hoped that this work would help prevent his blindness, both in this life and the next. T₃ said that he chose to do voluntary work at the orphanage because he was an only child and always wanted to have younger brothers or sisters.

From the analysis of the data, it was found that this motivation was one of the main motivations found among the Thai respondents, as it was mentioned by every respondent. Many respondents stated that they would only do an activity that they really wanted to do. Some said that although they always wanted to do voluntary work, this did not mean 'any' activities, but rather an activity of the interest. This study finds that the type of volunteer activities on offer are very important for the volunteer tourists' decision-making.

The motivations of Western Volunteer tourists

Among the Western volunteer tourists, seven motivational themes were found. These included: (i) personal development and growth; (ii) to help others; (iii) to gain new experiences; (iv) to learn/be immersed in the local culture in a deeper way; (v) to meet new friends; (vi) personal interest in a certain volunteer activity; and (vii) to visit Bangkok and Thailand. The first five motivations are push factors whereas the last two are pull factors. These factors are shown in Figure 2, and each factor is then discussed.

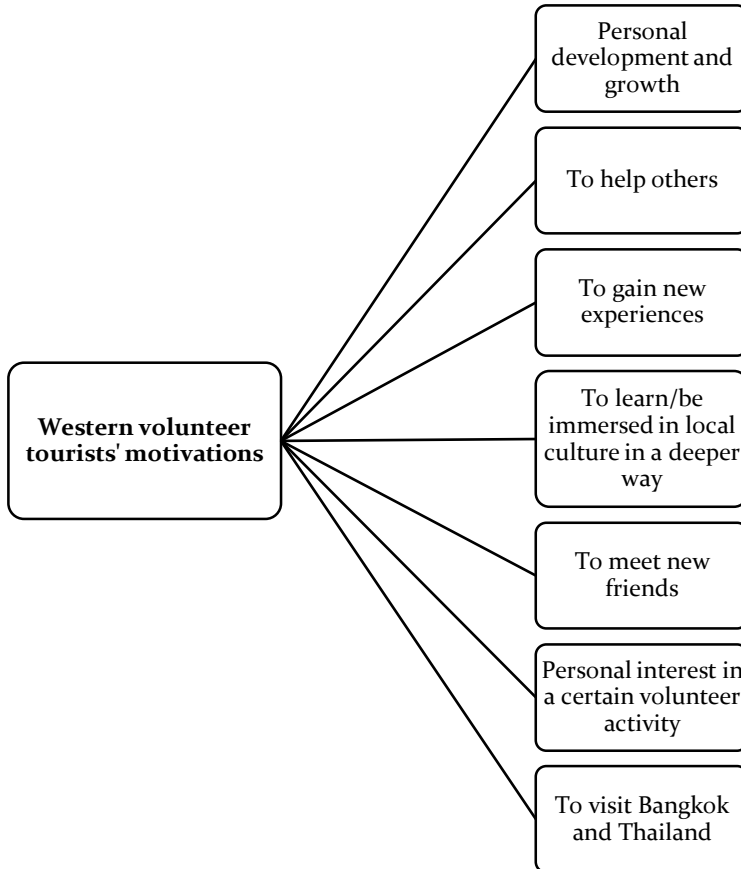


Figure 2. *The Motivations of Western Volunteer Tourists*

(i) *Personal development and growth.* This motivation was the most prominent factor driving the Western respondents to make a volunteer tourism trip. It was found that the Western respondents, especially those who worked at schools and orphanages, were mainly motivated by a desire to gain experience that could help them with their future careers, which usually involved working with children. The following statement from V₉ summarises this motivation.

[I am here] because of my job in my home country. I want to teach children at the primary or secondary school, so for me this is definitely to gain an experience of teaching, to see how good I am at teaching.

What is reflected from the above statement is that the voluntary experience was viewed as a 'training ground' where the respondents could practice their skills, acquire experience, and try out a career of interest before entering to real working life and making a long-term commitment.

Some Western respondents believed that the volunteering experience would enable them to push their limits or to 'prove themselves' in an unfamiliar setting. In the view of the respondents, an unfamiliar setting encompasses a number of challenges, including being out of the comfort zone, language barriers, lack of or limited knowledge of assigned duties and local culture, and lack of familiar facilities. These challenges forced them to rely primarily on themselves and deal with problems and difficulties without the help of their family members and/or their friends.

(ii) *To help others.* Many Western respondents stated that they decided to volunteer during their holiday because they wanted to help out. Although the respondents used different expressions to express this motivation such as "to make a difference to society", "to pay back to society", "to sacrifice my own time for the benefit of others", and "to make the lives of other people, especially those who are less fortunate, better", these expressions hold the same intentions of helping others.

Based on the data analysis, it is found that in the perception of these volunteer tourists, as citizens of high-income, developed countries, they were wealthier, more fortunate, and more capable in terms of skills and knowledge than the local people who live in a developing country. In the view of these respondents, being wealthier and more fortunate but not sharing this with other poor and less fortunate people could be interpreted as selfish and irresponsible. Some Western respondents also stated that they could not enjoy their own good fortune upon realising that there were many other people who were suffering from poverty or other troubles. In their opinion, their wealth and good fortune enabled them to assist in volunteering activities in a developing country. One issue found in the analysis of the data was that this perspective contained a sense of imperialism in which they viewed that they were educationally and economically superior to people in Thailand. However, they did not mean to show off. On the contrary, they wanted to explain their participation in volunteer activities during their holiday in Thailand.

(iii) *To gain new experiences.* According to the data, the Western respondents' desire to gain new experiences encapsulated two main notions: having different experiences out of their comfort zone or their home country; and having a volunteering experience which they had never had before. For many Western respondents, this was the first time they had visited Thailand. Some Western respondents also believed that participating in a volunteer tourism vacation enabled them to gain a new and challenging experience of Thailand in a much better and more pleasant way than traditional tourism because it provided them with an opportunity to do things they had never done before whereas traditional tourism would only provide them with similar experiences to those they are used to in their own countries. V5 said about traditional tourism that

it seems to give you a different experience, but in fact, you just experience similar things in the different country because you stay in a luxury hotel, eat food you can eat in your own country, and travel in a very comfortable vehicle, you can experience all of these things in your [home] country.

For some Western respondents, this was the first time they had taken a volunteer tourism vacation. They stated that they wanted to see what it was like, as illustrated by V1: "I just wanted to give it a go and see what it is like to volunteer."

(iv) *To learn/be immersed in local culture in a deeper way.* Many Western respondents viewed that engaging in volunteer tourism is the only way for them to gain in-depth, direct and first-hand experiences of local culture and such experiences could not be gained through other types of tourism. For example, V₂ stated that participating in other types of tourism activities such as visiting museums or Buddhist temples or seeing local performances at the theatre could not provide a true understanding of the local culture because those tourism activities presented only some parts of the culture or are 'staged experiences'. Other Western respondents expressed a similar view. For example, V₃ stated that volunteer tourism served as an effective means for her to learn the local culture from the 'inside' rather than looking from the 'outside'.

The perception of volunteer tourism vacations as providing a better opportunity for foreign tourists to learn and be immersed in the local culture came from the fact that they had to live and work with local people, and therefore they could see how these people actually live. This enabled them to enjoy an opportunity to interact with local peoples in a more direct and engaging way.

(v) *To meet new friends.* Some Western respondents viewed volunteer tourism as a means that brought together people who had something in common or who shared interests and it also served as a platform for them to meet and interact with these people. For example, V₁₂ stated that

I want meet new people and make friends because I knew that I would meet other people who like children, just like me. I think it is a very good opportunity to meet and make friends with people who have something in common with you, or you like the same thing as you.

Moreover, some Western respondents also added that participating in volunteer tourism could make a relationship with new friends sustainable and intimate, because doing voluntary work involved tasks that require patience, time, and labour. Therefore, when working together for a long time, they were likely to develop meaningful relationships. As expressed by V₁

As I have to work with these guys [other volunteer tourists] every day, so we understand each other and we become friends. I think this friendship will be sustained because we have memorable time together... We've gone through difficult time[s] together.

(vi) *Personal interest in a certain volunteer activity.* This factor is a pull factor because it represents attractiveness or attribute of 'external' factors that attract tourists to a certain tourism activity. For example, V₃ who did voluntary work at an orphanage stated that she chose to do so because she loved being with children and felt comfortable with them. She added that because she was an only child and played alone when she was young, she wanted to spend time with children.

Some Western respondents said that they wanted to volunteer as an English teacher in a non-English speaking country because it was challenging. A couple of Western respondents expressed the same view as the Thai respondents, saying that for them the types of volunteer activities are very important because they would decide to volunteer only in particular activities that they were interested in.

(vii) *To visit Bangkok and Thailand.* This is another pull factor because it relates to the unique characteristics of the tourist destination. All of the Western respondents stated that they wanted to volunteer in Bangkok because Bangkok was one of the world top tourist destinations for Western tourists. It was well-known as a centre of Thai economics and culture, had a variety of nightlife activities, offered a range of dining experiences, and was an ideal place for shopping. Moreover, doing volunteer

work in Bangkok was also convenient for them if they wished to travel to other famous tourist destinations in Thailand, nearby such as Ayutthaya, Rajchaburi, and Kanchanaburi Provinces.

Apart from the beauty and popularity of Bangkok, the notion of Thailand as a poor, developing country with many people in need of assistance was also found to be a pull factor drawing these volunteer tourists to Thailand. Many respondents stated that they chose Thailand because they believed that their contribution would be useful and could help people in need. They also believed that there were still many ways in which they could help local people, in the forms of donation, knowledge, experiences, and labour.

Comparing motivations of Thai volunteer tourists and Western volunteer tourists

When comparing the motivations of both groups of respondents, it is found that their motivations are common in some aspects. Three common motivations are found: (i) personal development and growth; (ii) to gain new experiences; and (iii) personal interest in a certain volunteer activity. The opinions of these two groups of respondents about participating in volunteer tourism were similar in many ways. For example, both groups felt that volunteering was a route to challenging and meaningful experiences that they would not gain from other types of tourism. They also believed that undertaking volunteer tourism would enable them to prove themselves that they could do things they had never done before, enhancing the understanding of themselves.

The different motivations were: (i) to gain inner happiness; (ii) to help others; (iii) to learn/be immersed in the local culture in a deeper way; (iv) to meet new friends; and (v) to visit Bangkok and Thailand. A desire to gain inner happiness was found only among the Thai respondents, and the rest belonged to the Western respondents. A desire for inner happiness was closely related to a desire to help others, which was found to be one of the Western respondents' motivations. However, based on the data analysis, a desire for inner happiness appears to be a more self-interested motivation whereas a desire to help others is an other-oriented or altruistic motivation. This is because the responses of the Thai respondents on their desire to gain inner happiness emphasised benefits to themselves as their ultimate goal while the responses of the Western respondents emphasised benefits that other people would gain when speaking of their desire to help others. This suggests that the ultimate goal of the Western respondents is to make the lives of other people better and give back to society although they may hope to also benefit from their contribution.

As for the remaining different motivations, according to the data analysis, these three motivations were closely related to the notion of unfamiliarity with the destination. In other words, it can be interpreted that these motivations are likely to occur among foreign tourists who participate in volunteer tourism in an unfamiliar country. For example, a desire to be immersed in the local culture only occurred among the Western respondents because, for them, Thai culture was new and different whereas the Thai respondents were already familiar with the local culture.

As for a desire to meet new friends, this was found only in the group of Western respondents, perhaps because they normally had to stay in a place that the host organisation arranged for them, therefore they knew that they would have an opportunity to meet and live alongside with other volunteer tourists. It was likely that such knowledge led them to expect opportunities to meet and make new friends during their volunteering. However, among the Thai respondents, it was found that they did not stay at the place arranged by the host organisations, but rather 'commuted', going back and forth. This may explain the reason why they did not expect to meet and make friends with other people.

For the motivation to visit Bangkok, it is not surprising that it was found only in the Western respondents, who selected Bangkok as a place for volunteering because of its reputation as a tourist attraction. Volunteering was not only their sole activity in Bangkok, nor their only purpose of their visit. These Western tourists also wanted to visit attractions in Bangkok when they were free from their volunteering duties. The beauty and popularity of Bangkok represented an important factor pulling them to participate in volunteer tourism there whereas for the Thai respondents, although they also visited tourist attractions or went shopping in Bangkok alongside volunteering, such a motivation had no influence on their decision to volunteer in Bangkok, as many of them lived in Bangkok or provinces nearby and were already familiar with the city.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the motivations of both groups of the volunteer tourists are multidimensional, and consist of both push and pull factors. This finding is concurrent with several other studies (Agyeiwaah, 2013; Ali & Rahman, 2019; Benson & Seibert, 2009; Grimm & Needham, 2012; Otoo, 2013; Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014), which argue that the volunteer tourists are not likely to be motivated by a single motivation, but rather, a combination of motivations where both push and pull motives are present.

Moreover, the finding also supports Dann's (1977; 1981) notion of push and pull factors which states that tourists tend to be aware of their inner needs before making a decision on the types of tourism activities and their destination. In other words, tourists are influenced by push factors before pull factors. Based on the findings of this study, when asked about their motivations for volunteering tourism, all respondents mentioned push factors before pull factors. For example, one respondent stated that she decided to take a volunteer tourism trip because she wanted to gain inner happiness from doing good deeds; then she researched voluntary opportunities; and finally decided to work for the orphanage. This is an example that shows that normally tourists become aware of their inner needs before thinking or deciding about the activities.

All the push factors found in both groups of the respondents support Otoo & Amuquandoh's (2014:52) argument that they represent "the availability elsewhere of experiences that may not be found at the generating region" and reflect "the influence of the destination in stirring volunteer tourists' desire to undertake the travel". Specifically, these motivations are "intangible" desires of the volunteer tourists or benefits that they sought to gain from the volunteer tourism experience, and they believed that they could not gain such benefits at their hometown (for a case of the Thai respondents) or their home countries (for a case of the Western respondents).

This study also finds that push factors alone do not have sufficient influence to drive a tourist to make a final decision to participate in a volunteer tourism trip, rather the final decision comes from the influence of both push and pull factors together. Upon analysing the responses of the volunteer tourists, this study argues that although the push factors appear to be very influential in the decision-making process, they are not powerful enough to lead to a final decision. The findings show that all the respondents mentioned that they would only decide to engage in a volunteer tourism vacation once they believed that a certain volunteer activity and/or a certain destination where the volunteer activity took place could satisfy their personal interests. For volunteer tourism in which the voluntary component represents the highlight of the whole trip, the characteristics or attributes of particular activities and/or destinations seem to have a very important role for tourists. Many respondents emphasised that they would not undertake a volunteer tourism trip if they could not find a specific volunteer activity and/or a destination that matched their personal interest.

The characteristics or attributes of the volunteer activities are found to play a big part in the decision-making process of the volunteer tourists. The respondents did not just take any volunteer activity available, but paid very special attention to it. For example, one respondent who was short-sighted decided to volunteer by reading a book and creating tactile books for the blinds because he hoped that such practice would be 'rewarded', and that he would somehow be protected from blindness, both in this life and the next.

For the Western volunteer tourists, the attributes of the destination were also significant. The data analysis indicates that for these tourists, not only the beauty and popularity of the destination as a tourist attraction, but also their belief that their volunteering would have a big impact for that destination also represented a significant pull factor that drew them to Bangkok. Similar to the issue of the characteristics of volunteer activities, Western volunteer tourists stated that they did not just go anywhere for volunteer tourism, but chose a destination that would allow them to benefit the locals. Moreover, this study also finds that a chosen destination should also fulfil their needs for leisure activities because these tourists also wanted to enjoy the beauty of the place as general tourists when they were free from volunteer work. This finding concurs with the study of Godfrey (2018).

It is evident that the pull factors which include characteristics of a volunteer tourism activity and attributes of a destination depict 'tangible' opportunities for the volunteer tourists to fulfil their desires or to gain the benefits they sought after. In other words, the volunteer tourists believed that the tangible attributes of a volunteer tourism activity and the destination (Bangkok, Thailand) had specific contexts that enabled them to fulfil their intangible desires.

The two common motivations found in both groups of the respondents including personal development and growth, and a desire to gain new experiences are often reported in previous studies (e.g. Broad, 2003; Chen & Chen, 2011; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Harrow & Promfret, 2007; Proyrungroj, 2017a; Wearing, 2001) due to the learning nature of volunteer tourism experiences and the powerful influence of the context in which volunteer tourism takes place. The challenging nature of volunteer tourism significantly enhances the learning impact of the volunteer tourists because these tourists have to deal with difficulties and stress during working. This finding supports an argument that volunteer tourism experiences are powerful means of learning which enable the volunteer tourists to develop a range of skills, learn new things, prove themselves; and enhance the understanding of themselves (Broad, 2003; Chen & Chen, 2011; Harlow & Promfret, 2007; Jones, 2005; Wearing 2001; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007).

The finding of this study also reports some different motivations between both groups of the respondents. The first different motivation is to gain inner happiness which was found only among the Thai respondents. This finding is a result of the influence of Buddhist teaching on Thai people. The other motivations, including to learn/be immersed in local culture in a deeper way; to meet new friends; and to visit Bangkok and Thailand, were found only in the groups of the Western respondents because they are closely related to the notion of unfamiliarity with the destination. This finding agrees with other authors (Ali & Rahman, 2009; Benson & Seibert, 2009; Pan, 2012) who argue that the overseas and unfamiliar context of the volunteer tourism destination serve as a powerful driving forces for the international volunteer tourists to participate in a volunteer vacation abroad.

The last different motivation between both groups of the respondents is a desire to help others. The main reason that this motivation was found only among the Western volunteer tourists is that these people thought of themselves as citizens of high-income, developed countries, and that it was their responsibility as global citizens to share their wealth. This finding is consistent with the studies of

Proyrungroj (2017a) and Proyrungroj (2017b) which find that the perception of the Western volunteer tourists is highly influenced by a sense of imperialism in which they viewed that they were educationally and economically superior, or better off than, people in a developing country, and such superiority enabled them to lend a hand to help people in that country.

The finding in this study regarding the altruistic and self-interested dimensions of volunteer tourism motivations challenges the existing literature, which claims that both altruism and egoism play important roles in motivating the volunteer tourist to participate in volunteer tourism experiences; that these two dimensions are closely interconnected; and that there is an unclear boundary between them (e.g. Broad, 2003; Brown, 2005; Chen & Chen, 2011; Lo & Lee, 2011; Mustonen, 2007; Proyrungroj, 2017a; Sin, 2009; Söderman & Snead, 2008; Wearing, 2001). This is because, in this study, only self-interested motivations were identified in the Thai volunteer tourists. Possible explanations for this may lie on the fact that Thailand is still a low-to-middle-income, developing country, and the majority of Thai people are still poor therefore the Thai volunteer tourists do not generally perceive themselves as being in a position to help others, and perhaps do not feel the same moral obligation or gulf of privilege. A sense of global citizenship is not the norm for Thai people, and volunteering is still new to them. Even though when the Thai respondents mentioned their desire for inner happiness, they also said that they were happy when they saw that their help could make lives of other people better. Yet, in this case, the welfare of other people was not their ultimate goal, instead, their ultimate goal was their own benefits.

The analysis of the data reveals that the 'inner happiness' motivation was largely influenced by the Buddhist teaching that 'if you do good things, good things will happen to you'. The benefits that other people may receive from such practice were the consequences of such actions, not their ultimate goal. For most Thai Buddhists, the ultimate goal of doing good deeds was to accumulate merit for the next life in the hope that this accumulated merit would make their lives better. Therefore, a desire for inner happiness is considered a self-interested motivation.

However, for the Western volunteer tourists, both altruistic and self-interested motivations were found. A desire to help others represents an altruistic motivation whereas the rest are self-interest motivations. The study finds that the benefits of others were not the respondents' sole ultimate desire because they also hoped that they would benefit from such practice, such as feeling proud of themselves, and being relieved from a feeling a guilt at being born more fortunate. In this case, their motivations cannot be identified as 'pure altruism' according to Batson's (1991) altruism/self-interest concept because the volunteer tourists' self-benefits are not unintended consequences, but rather part of their ultimate goal. This finding leads to an argument of this study that the motivation of helping others consists of multiple layers of ultimate goal in which the benefits of others and one's own benefits are both present, and (in the case of this study) the former outweighs the latter. Perhaps a concept of reciprocal altruism as proposed by Söderman & Snead (2008) is the right term to explain this.

Conclusion and implications

The findings of this study expand the knowledge of the nature and roles of push and pull factors in motivating people to engage in a vacation in the context of volunteer tourism. Moreover, they also confirm the previous studies on motivations of the volunteer tourists from the North countries taking a volunteer trip in the South country that these tourists are influenced by both push and pull factors, and their motivations are reciprocal altruistic in nature. At the same time, this study contributes to new knowledge on the motivations of people of the South country volunteering in their own country. The findings also shed light on similarities and differences of the volunteer tourism motivations of people

from the North countries and the South countries who have different geographical and cultural backgrounds.

In summary, the main contributions of this study can be contextualised into three main aspects: (i) the nature and important roles of push and pull factors in the context of volunteer tourism motivations, and the relationship of these two motivational factors in volunteer tourists' motivations; (ii) the influence of the volunteer tourists' perception of themselves on the motivations to volunteer; and (iii) the nature of reciprocal altruism in the motivation of helping others.

First, this study argues that push and pull motivational factors of the volunteer tourists are somewhat distinct from those of the conventional tourists, in that the push motives of volunteer tourists seem to represent an altruistic, learning, and meaningful nature of volunteer tourism experiences. Desires of or benefits sought by the volunteer tourists show that they decide to take a volunteer vacation because they want to do good things for either themselves or others, and at the same time, they also want to develop themselves. For the pull factors, they do not only represent an unfamiliar setting or an opportunity for the volunteer tourists to fulfil their desires/benefits sought, but also act as an attraction for them to perform other leisure activities. It is the fact that the volunteer tourists do not spend their whole holiday for only volunteering activities, but rather, they spend part of their free time travelling to other tourist spots. Furthermore, this study also reveals that push factors alone are not powerful enough to motivate volunteer tourists to engage in a volunteer tourism vacation as their final decision comes from pull factors, such as characteristics of a certain volunteer activity and/or a destination. To conclude, push and pull factors have to work together to motivate people to engage in a volunteer vacation. In the context of volunteer tourism, push factors represent 'intangible' desires or benefits that tourists believed they could not fulfil or gain from the usual environment (e.g. a desire to gain inner happiness, a desire to help others, personal development and growth) whereas pull factors act as a 'tangible' opportunity for the tourists to fulfil their desires/benefits sought.

Second, the finding on the differences in the motivations of the Thai tourists and the Western tourists reveals that the tourists' perception of themselves has a strong influence on their motivations to volunteer. Based on the finding, the Thai volunteer tourists' motivations are all self-interested because they do not perceive that they are superior to those that receive their help, since they are citizens of a poor, developing country. However, for the Western volunteer tourists who are citizens of high-income, developed countries, their motivations are a combination of altruism and self-interest. Their altruistic motivation (a desire to help others) comes from their perception that they are better off than those who receive their assistance in terms of economics, knowledge and social status and therefore, it is their responsibility to share their wealth, knowledge and skills with those that are less fortunate.

Third, this study argues that a desire to help others, which was found among the Western volunteer tourists, is not 'pure' altruistic, but rather a 'reciprocal altruistic' motivation which means that a desire to help others is a motivation that has a blurred boundary between altruism and egoism. It is evident from the findings that all Western respondents seemed to have some difficulties to tell whether their ultimate goal of such desire was for the welfare of aid-recipients or for their own benefits. In their opinion, it could be both as they explained that they wanted the aid-recipients to have better life from their helps, and at the same time, they wished that they could benefit from their action. In this case, this motivation cannot be regarded 'pure altruism' based on Batson's altruism concept because the ultimate goal of the volunteer tourists is not solely the benefit of others, instead, it consists of multiple layers in which a desire for the benefits of others and one's own benefits are both present.

In terms of practical implication, the findings of this study provide an insight for related stakeholders including the government, local people, and volunteer tourism organisations about the motivations of volunteer tourists, both Thai and Western tourists. Specifically, these findings can serve as useful information for the stakeholders in designing and promoting volunteer tourism projects so that such projects can perfectly fulfil the desires of or benefits sought by the tourists, leading them to have high satisfaction as well as continue to engage in volunteer vacations again in the future, and/or recommend to others.

Limitations and directions for future research

The limitations of this study are associated with the methodological approach used. As an interpretive paradigm utilising qualitative methods was used in this study, and the findings of the study are mainly based on data gathered from a small number of respondents selected from non-probability sampling, together with the researcher's understanding and interpretation of her encounters with the respondents, these findings are unique and cannot be generalised to other groups of volunteer tourists. However, it is not the aim of this study to generalise its findings because it is not applicable to a study of qualitative study, instead, this study aims to gain a rich, in-depth insight of the volunteer tourists' motivations.

In terms of future research, as this study focuses on identifying and comparing the motivations of Thai and Western volunteer tourists who clearly have different backgrounds, especially in terms of their geographical and cultural backgrounds and economic status of their countries of origin. Therefore, future research should examine the similarities and differences of motivations between Thai tourists and tourists from other low-to-middle-income, developing countries.

Moreover, this study looks only at the motivations driving the volunteer tourists to take a volunteer tourism vacation, which means that it studies only the factors that influence tourists' decision before the tourists make their decision. It doesn't look at what occurs after the tourists engage in volunteer tourism. Therefore, more research focusing on the experiences the volunteer tourists have gained and the impact of such practice on the volunteer tourists is needed.

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