

THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON
THE TOURISM INDUSTRY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA WITH A SPECIFIC ANALYSIS OF THE
CASE OF PATTAYA, THAILAND

Name

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Course

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Abstract

Climate change has already made an impact which is expected to worsen in coming decades, with repercussions that will be felt intensely in Southeast Asia. Tourism has been a thriving economic force in the region; however, climate change may disrupt its further growth. General studies regarding the impact of climate change on tourism, as well as quantitative studies of the potential relationship between temperature and tourism demand, have not incorporated the detail or complexity involved, and this is needed for the development of mitigating strategies. This study used a conceptual framework of pragmatism and Integrated Assessment rooted in complexity and systems theory in order to determine potential scenarios, identify greatest risks and propose recommended strategies using PESTLE and SWOT analysis. The research questions which guided this study were aimed at understanding the various scenarios that are predicted with regard to the impact of climate change on tourism, both generally and specifically, with an emphasis on Thailand and the resort destination of Pattaya. This was done for the purpose of understanding the most serious risks, posed by climate change that could impact the tourism industry, and its future opportunities to avoid potential disaster. The main findings of the study were that the known impacts of both tourism and moderate climate change posed serious risks to coastline features such as coral reefs. There is no mitigating strategy in place; in fact, current policies and strategies focus on continuing to increase tourist numbers while promoting green and environmentally friendly practices which reduce carbon emissions. While the reduction of carbon emissions is a laudable goal, a failure to proactively manage the threats to local ecosystems could be disastrous for the tourism industry and local economies. Furthermore, diversification of tourism offerings away from the sun, sea and sand is highly recommended.



Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Climate is a major factor which influences tourism (World Tourism Organization Network, 2015). Tourism is a major business activity especially for small islands and developing nations in the Global South (Suarez, 2011). A sudden or gradual change in the demand for tourism could be catastrophic to local and national economies. Furthermore, in regions where tourism is the main source of revenue, a decline in the tourist trade can leave developed capital unproductive, wasting the investment. This can limit further increases and development of the standard of living. There is little debate in academic circles that climate change is real, and that it therefore poses danger to the nations of Southeast Asia that are heavily dependent on tourism for their economy as well as government revenues.

1.2 Problem Statement

A motivation for travel to the Global South is particularly acute during the winter in the Global North, particularly at higher latitudes. Global warming will have multiple impacts on this trend, as the higher latitudes become warmer, and those closest to the equator, such as developing island nations in the Global South, will become hotter, which may lead to increased risks of extreme weather events and disasters. Climate change will most certainly cause adjustments to the area's attractiveness to travelers and their motivation – which will in turn have an impact on tourist numbers and demand. While it can be generally acknowledged that climate change is likely to affect the tourism industry in the Global South, Southeast Asia and Thailand in particular, studies require integration of findings in order to understand the effect of climate change on tourism numbers and economic outcomes.

Many studies have provided quantitative estimates of temperature change, as well as regression analysis to identify changes in demand, however, these studies have been criticized for their linear determinations which have not been accurate in the past or proven to have predictive value (Chu, 2004; Gosling & Hall, 2006; Sanchez, 2010). Both climate change and tourism are complex systems, and this complexity is increased by interactions with external influences.

Further exploration of the factors and possible outcomes are needed in order to plan or prepare for worst-case and best-case scenarios through informed decision-making. This will require an improved, more inductive and exploratory approach which takes all these factors into account.

1.3 **Research Approach**

The research approach to this study uses a qualitative method, while the topic itself is studied in the framework of Integrated Assessment Models and pragmatism. In other words, the guiding principle is the question itself, rather than theoretical constructs. Complexity and Systems Theory provide the needed grounding in theory which facilitates this pragmatic approach. Two research methodologies are used to further analyze and determine possible strategies. These are the PESTLE and SWOT frameworks. First, six distinct areas with regard to the impact of tourism on climate change: political, economic, social, technological, land and environmental factors – will each be a focus of study based on PESTLE analysis. This will integrate the findings of different studies, and potentially contribute to a new understanding of possible scenarios in the future. A further step will be to organize the findings of the PESTLE analysis by using SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) to further elaborate on the impact of climate change on tourism. The information to be used in this study will come from a review of current data on climate change, statistics published by reliable agencies, predicted outcomes of climate change, etc.

The PESTLE and SWOT research frameworks will be applied generally to tourism in Southeast Asia, to tourist destinations in Thailand broadly and Pattaya specifically. This provides for a broader scope of inquiry which can help to determine the range of possible impacts of complicating variables. By looking at possibilities in terms of the impact of climate change on tourism, we can improve our capacity to understand the range of potential outcomes, which in turn requires looking broadly and studying that which may have an effect on the outcomes.

