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DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS: AMAZING BANGKOK VERSUS LION CITY SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

Achieving a bigger share of international tourist arrivals has led to growing intense competition between destinations. A comparison of tourism competitiveness between two popular tourist destinations, Bangkok and Singapore could be of interest to tourism planners, practitioners and researchers. This study aims to investigate and compare the competitiveness of Bangkok and Singapore as tourist destinations by examining tourism standing, contemporary tourism marketing strategies and their available features and benefits for arriving tourists. The research methodology is a qualitative interpretative approach, employing structured interviews and participant observation. Content analysis and constant comparison are applied to analyze the data. The emerging findings look at issues and perspectives related to how national tourism organizations and marketers can effectively apply tourism marketing strategies to enhance destination competitiveness.

KEYWORDS

Destination competitiveness; tourism destinations; Bangkok; Singapore.

ECONLIT KEYS

L83; M31; R41; Z32.

1. INTRODUCTION

Generally, capital cities have enormous marketing appeal from a tourism point of view and most likely remain at the top of the must-see list with plenty of accommodation, restaurants, international airline offices, money changing facilities

and embassies (Peirce and Ritchie: 2007), (Maitland and Ritchie: 2009). Ritchie and Crouch, (2003) cited in Wong (2017: 250), stated that in order to remain competitive, a tourist destination needs to provide a superior overall tourist experience to foreign visitors when compared to a competing destination. With many prominent capital cities in Asia, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore compete with one another to stay at the top in terms of international arrivals and revenue. These three destinations have their unique selling points in spite of certain cultural similarities. In this way, cities are inevitably connected to each other through a network of competition and rivalry. Before selecting a tourist destination, potential tourists fantasize in advance, based on an image created through print, electronic, social media or word-of-mouth (Urray: 2002).

Chang and Raguraman (2001: 52) observed triangles in Southeast Asia where tourism hubs Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and Singapore compete with each other to achieve not only tourism capital status or business capitals but also investment locations for tourism enterprises, air transport hubs, convention cities and centres of tourism expertise and knowledge. Recent statistics reveal that Bangkok welcomed 19.3 million international overnight arrivals above second place Singapore, which attracted 13.1 million in 2016 of the 339.2 million visits made to the 171 Asia-Pacific destinations on the MasterCard list (PATA, 2017). Interestingly, in terms of overall tourism expenditure in the region, Bangkok took second place with spending of US\$12.7 billion while Singapore topped the list with US\$ 15.4 billion in 2016. Moreover, Singapore attracted the highest spending visitors at US\$ 254 per day.

Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao (2000: 10), cited in Enright and Newton (2004: 777), stated that it is useful for the industry and government to understand where a country's competitive position is strongest and weakest. Furthermore, Kozak and Rimmington (1999) cited in Enright and Newton (2004) stressed that specific tourism destinations are not competitive or uncompetitive in the abstract but versus competing destinations. In addition, Laws (1995) maintained that as tourists gain experience in competing destinations, their perceptions of quality and overall performance play a significant role in determining repeat visit or word-of-mouth recommendations. This way implicitly or explicitly tourists make comparisons between attractions, facilities and service standards of various destinations.

Pearce (1997: 17) argued that systematic appraisal and comparison of key tourism elements among competitors can constitute a more objective basis for evaluating the strengths and weakness of the focal destination, provide a better appreciation of its competitive advantage and contribute to the formulation of more effective development policies. Comparatively few studies of this sort were undertaken in the marketing literature but focus on the demand side only, while the present study incorporates a variety of supply-side factors. With a better understanding of the needs and motivations of arriving tourists to both destinations and to facilitate the destination marketing, the study seeks to analyze and compare Bangkok and Singapore as tourist destinations by examining their available features and visitor experiences.

The initial study on destination competitiveness was restricted to a single destination but the present study compared tourism products of two competing tourist destinations: Bangkok and Singapore, useful for national tourism organizations and tourism practitioners. Accordingly, a qualitative methodology approach is followed to generate data on objective and subjective attributes to draw implications for the competitiveness of Bangkok and Singapore. Comparing competitive attributes of Bangkok and Singapore can serve as valuable indicators or in identifying what aspects or factors influence international tourists to visit other countries and to develop marketing strategies to address the “pull” that the available features of Bangkok and Singapore. Qualitative measures show the likes and dislikes of tourists. Dimensions contributing to qualitative competitiveness include those attributes which holidaymakers best liked or most disliked during their vacation in the destination. To sustain and increase its competitive performance, Both Bangkok and Singapore need to benchmark themselves against key competitors who supply similar types of tourism products.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Enright and Newton (2004: 778), for a destination to be competitive it should be able to draw and satisfy potential tourists and the competitiveness is further determined by tourism-specific factors and by factors that influence the

tourism service providers. Dwyer, (2010: 374), however, maintains that destination competitiveness is linked to the ability of a destination to deliver goods and services that perform better than other destinations on those aspects of the tourism experience considered to be important by tourists. If a destination wants to attract tourists, it has to give them reasons to visit and to demonstrate how it is different from all other destinations, or it will not be seen as distinctive and worth visiting.

Dwyer, (2010: 372) further asserted that for a tourism destination, comparative advantage means inherited or endowed resources such as scenery, climate, flora & fauna while competitive advantage include created items as the tourism infrastructure (hotels, attractions, transport network), festivals and events, the quality of management, skills of workers and government policy. There is also the need to produce a distinctive identity or 'brand' which forms the basis of the positioning (how consumers differentiate between similar products) of a destination area, providing it with a personality and differentiating it from competitors. Destinations need to identify product attributes that will appeal to different tourist segments and then ensure that the promotional campaign delivers a cohesive message. Dwyer, (2010: p. 382) stressed that the more diversified a destination's portfolio of tourism products, services and experiences the greater its ability to attract varied tourist market segments. To match and fulfil changing needs and expectations of visitors to Bangkok and Singapore, there is a need to analyze what the competing city has to offer or specifically analyze the place-product features of both cities.

Kolb (2006, p. 8) affirmed that the city as a product can be experienced or consumed by traveling to that city. Consequently, the product is also the place. The process of developing a city as a tourist destination starts differently. For tourism planners, the product already exists. The architecture style of buildings, the city-scape, the city's history, ambiance, locale and the ethnic heritage of city residents are already in place (Kolb 2006, p. 52). While these features can be enhanced, they cannot be fundamentally changed. Further, different features and benefits of the city will appeal to various visitors in the city. Marketing of the city by a multiplicity of organizations is problematic because of the composite amalgam of interests and companies represented, such as private sector (individual hotels and tour

companies) and public sector tourism (government organizations, such as Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and Singapore Tourism Board.

This study adopted a model on tourism destination competitiveness, which is determined by four main factors originally proposed by Crouch and Ritchie, (1999: 146) cited in Enright and Newton, (2004: 778). Firstly core resources and attractors of a destination constitute the primary motivations for inbound tourism which includes physiography (landscape and climate), activities, history and culture, events and tourism superstructure (accommodation, food, transportation and major attractions). Secondly, supporting factors and resources exert more of a secondary effect which include destination's general infrastructure, facilitating resources and accessibility to the destination. Thirdly, destination management, which covers marketing activities by responsible organizations as well maintenance of key tourism resources, and lastly qualifying determinants, such as overall costs, location and prevalent safety conditions. Destination management factors can enhance the appeal of the core resources and attractors, strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the supporting factors and resources and best adapt to the constraints imposed by the situational conditions (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999, p. 149). The qualifying determinants correspond to the situational conditions as identified by David (2001) cited in Dwyer (2003).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study analysed Bangkok and Singapore as two competing tourism destinations using on-site visits, reviewing the promotional literature and direct testimony. The first stage of this research was secondary data collection accomplished from various sources, mainly tourism literature available online and offline, to gain an insight into the tourism situations in Bangkok and Singapore. The second stage involved face-to-face structured interviews with international tourists.

The author has been living and working in Bangkok for the last 17 years so he has drawn upon his local understanding and observations of Bangkok since 2001, and enhanced the sense of identity with the place, changes, and development. For the latest tourism situation, the author followed online editions of the two leading English daily newspapers The Bangkok Post and The Nation in addition to day-to-day

newsroom tourism features carried by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and Travel Trade (TRR) for daily and weekly updates. The author attended a half-day research-cum-seminar in Bangkok on March 17, 2017, entitled ASEAN Travel and tourism: the next 50 years, which covered 10 ASEAN countries including tourism country reports on Thailand and Singapore (PATA, 2017).

The author maintained a travel diary that solicited information for each day of his trip upon visiting and experiencing Singapore as a tourist in April 2017 and stayed in a hotel for a couple of days on the touristic Orchard road. That assisted the author to gain an opportunity to eat at local eateries and visit popular tourist attractions. In this study, the basis of comparison is on-site visits, reviews of both online and offline Bangkok and Singapore tourism promotional material, brochures, and selected academic and tourism research articles on Bangkok and Singapore.

The author conducted 11 face-to-face structured interviews during the Thai festival Songkran (water splashing) holiday period in April 2017 with departing tourists on a tourist visa at the international airports as direct testimonials who have experienced traveling both cities in the last 6 months and stayed at least one night. As there is no available list of tourists who have both visited and stayed in Bangkok and Singapore, a purposive, non-probability sampling procedure was adopted to select informants who met the study criteria. At Suvarnabhumi international airport, international flights arriving from Singapore to Bangkok were targeted. There were no advance estimates of the number of arriving passengers who left through a particular gate. There were no fixed locations to intercept potential informants, but could be anywhere passengers leaving exit gate proceeding to parking areas. Therefore, international tourists either purchasing SIM cards for mobile, sitting in the food court on the ground floor of the terminal (visible from glass windows from outside) or waiting at the parking lot were approached to participate. Many tourists refused straight away to participate probably too exhausted after a journey or mentally unprepared or in a hurry to meet tour leader, hotel representative or friends or relatives. Therefore potential informants who could speak English were approached to seek participation in the study.

The ones who participated, their participation was voluntary and they were informed of the purpose of the study and assured that their identity will not be revealed. No compensation was given for participation in this study. To seek thorough analysis of both cities tourism place product offered to visitors, a structured interview checklist was used to obtain their opinion on core (tourist attractions, entertainment, shopping), supporting (souvenirs, food, transportation and lodging) and augmented (sidewalks, streets, people, parks and safety) tourism products. The data saturation stage was reached by 11 informants. Further inclusions of informants mainly resulted in similar versions of travel experience and were found not useful to contribute fresh insights. As interviews were conducted on condition of anonymity, the names of all individuals quoted here are withheld and pseudonym (T_1, 2...11) were assigned to the participants (see table 1).

Participant	Code	Gender	Nationality
1	T_1	Male	Thai-German
2	T_2	Male	Indian
3	T_3	Female	Bangladeshi
4	T_4	Female	Chinese
5	T_5	Female	Thai-Chinese
6	T_6	Male	German
7	T_7	Male	Chinese
8	T_8	Female	Indonesian
9	T_9	Female	Philippine
10	T_10	Male	Singaporean- Philippine
11	T_11	Female	Malaysia

Table 1: Informants profile (n = 11)
Source: Own elaboration

All interviews were conducted in English and interviews were not audio-recorded. Each of the interviews lasted, on average, 30 minutes. To enhance the validity of the data collection triangulation of data sources and research methods were employed. Interviews were transcribed and used for analysis. Interview transcript provided direct quotations that were used for illustrating study findings as well as for coding. Interviews were coded manually (without the use of any software program). Multiple readings were undertaken to capture a holistic picture of informants' stories, as well as experiences, while some were identified as short narratives (shown in table 2) and

illustrative quotations to capture emotions. A Constant Comparison technique was used to probe responses obtained specifically on the core, supporting and augmented tourism products of Bangkok and Singapore and contextualization. Transcribed comments were then sorted into a smaller number of groups and general themes to reflect how different subjects express their views on common experiences.

	Tourism Product	Bangkok	Singapore
1	Tourist attractions	T_1 Famous place (memorable) T_2 unique T_3 floating market (local Thai style) T_5 floating markets (unique) T_6 plenty of choices but time-consuming T_7 Thai temples (Wat) T_8 Mostly man-made attractions, dual pricing T_9 worthwhile and natural T_11 Top tourist attractions in Bangkok are cultural ones or entertainment	T_2 man-made attractions Tour_3 Merlion statue (mascot and landmark) T_4 Singapore flyer (fun) T_5 Merlion T_7 city tour T_8 remarkable architecture - wow factor T_9 Marina Bay Sands and Sentosa T_11 95% attractions are man-made
2	Cultural attractions	Tour_1 Thai Food (Authentic taste) Tour_3 Grand Palace and Wat Phra Kaew (graceful places for Thais to pay respect) T_7 Thai dance T_8 Buddhism related T_9 truly Thai T_11 local life of Thai people	Tour_3 Singapore Art Museum (rare collection) T_3 perfect T_5 many skyscrapers T_8 urban concrete jungle T_9 Little India and Chinatown
3	Historical sites	Tour_3 Victory Monument (Historical place) T_7 Ayutthaya T_9 educational yet needs conservation	T-2 not many as it an island T_10 Changi prison
4	Entertainment	Tour_3 Dream World T_5 cabaret shows T_7 Proximity to Pattaya, nightlife T_11 vibrant nightlife (bars and clubs)	Tour_3 Marina Bay sand (beautiful building and bridge) T_4 Sentosa island T_5 Universal studio T_9 Clark Quay
5	Sports	T-2 Muay Thai is famous and unique T_3 football T_8 Muay Thai as signature sport	T_3 Formula One race T_10 ladies table tennis
6	Shopping	T_4 Siam Paragon, Central World, Central Department stores T_6 numerous malls to suit every pocket T_8 Low to high-end shopping center (both local/international brands) T_9 paradise	Tour_3 Bugis street (buy jewelry and clothes) T_5 Mustafa shopping Mall T_8 relatively expensive, attract luxury shoppers T_9 Orchid and Somerset
7	Other	T_4 Jim Thompson museum T_5 Khaosan Road T_8 special interest tourism (attractive to niche tourists)	T_9 Raffles hotel, Bukit Timah Nature reserve
8	Souvenirs and tours	T-1 city tour T_6 mostly overpriced, scams and issues T_8 sue to elephant as iconic symbol T_9 Chatuchak and river cruise T_11 local handicraft products (elephants and Tuk-Tuk (3-wheeled taxi))	T_5 Merlion keyrings T_8 City tour (double deck bus to commute)
9	Food	Tour_3 Tom Yam Kung, Sam tum (spicy) T_5 Pad Thai T_6 Variety of Thai & international cuisine T_8 Halal food available T_8 distinctive taste (extreme food (insects)) T_9 amazing	T_1 Chinese food popular T-2 mainly Chinese food T_7 Chinese food T_8 Malay plus Indian Plus Chinese food T_9 fusion food T_11 mainly Chinese food
10	Transportation	T_1 convenient to go T_2 convenient by sky train, bad traffic by car Tour_3 Tuk Tuk T_6 BTS, MRTS well organized, most locations inaccessible by trains T_7 taxi and BTS to move around T_9 traffic jams	T_6 well organized, easily understandable for the first timer T_8 convenient to commute T_9 MRT, SMRT taxi, SBS bus transit T_10 MRT and Singapore Airlines
11	Sidewalks	Tour_3 undeveloped (unclean) T_4 poor (untidy) T_8 unsafe by motorcycle T_11 not well-organized, usually narrow and sometimes safe	T-2 clean T_3 developed T_4 tidy and safe T_5 well developed T_6 properly built, clean, accessible T_8 neat and clean
12	Streets	T_1 congestion T_2 unorganized, messy (hanging cables) T_6 busy, lots of traffic T_8 traffic jams T_9 crowded T_11 not clean, filled with people and traffic	T-1 spacious roads T-2 clean and well managed T-3 clean T_6 well organized, easy to read for foreigners T_9 Orchard Road T_11 Streets are alive commercially
13	People	T_1 friendly T_4 smiling T_8 friendly (hospitable)	T-2 Not friendly but no effect on tourists T_3 good manners T_4 stressful T_5 too quite (not open to outsiders) T_8 Frigid T_9 Very disciplined but not social at all
14	Parks/ Sidewalks	T_4 not very good T_9 many vendors and not well lit	T_1 greenery, trees all around T_6 clean, empty at daytime
15	Safety	T_1 CCTV T_6 depending on area, mostly safe, some parks require foreigners to pay to enter	T_3 safe T_6 safe T_9 safe even at night T_10 excellent

Table 2: Findings based on content analysis
Source: Own elaboration

4. DISCUSSION

This section applies four main factors by Crouch and Ritchie (1999: 146) to the findings to assess and compare destination competitiveness between Bangkok and Singapore.

4.1) CORE RESOURCES AND ATTRACTORS

Physiography (landscape and climate)

Bhati and Pearce, (2017: 17) stated that Singapore and Bangkok are two pivotal South East Asian cities. The destinations have similarities as urban tropical cities, international transport hubs with important tourism and convention industries, active government involvement and support for tourism infrastructure. Both differ in terms of styles of government and regulatory framework for managing tourism, and cultural, ethnic and religious differences.

Analysing Singapore and Bangkok cities tourism potential

All study informants listed landmark attractions based on their 'top of mind' recent visit as shown in rows 1-5 in table 2 under the labels 'tourist and cultural attractions'. Important places on international tourists' itineraries in Singapore are Marina Bay Sands (MBS), an integrated resort, three-towered complexes with a luxury hotel, a museum, exhibition and conference space. Colonial era Botanical gardens and Gardens by the Bay add to glorify existing tourism potential. Merlion is a mythical creature with the head of a lion and the body of a fish, used as a mascot and national personification of Singapore, and is the most photographed statue. The modern city skyline, illuminated at night, is a special attraction for tourists.

Bangkok offers special interest tours: Thai cooking courses/food tours, Chao Phraya River dinner cruises, bicycle tours, golfing and driving ranges, canal tours, meditation, tuk-tuk urban tours, and floating market tour. Theme parks & cultural shows in Bangkok include Safari World, Siam Park, Siam Niramit Show, Siam Ocean

World and Madame Tussauds Bangkok. In Bangkok, visitors can find the best places to relax rejuvenate and refresh their mind, body, and spirit. Hands-on Thai massage is highly regarded by international tourists. Must see attractions include a visit to Grand Palace / Wat Phra Kaew (Temple of Emerald Buddha), Wat Pho (Reclining Buddha), Wat Arun (Temple of the Rising Sun) for learning about Thai culture and religion, as well as impressive statues of Lord Buddha. Khao San Road - mecca for backpackers, Yaowarat (Chinatown), Siam Discovery, Siam Square, Siam Paragon, Central World, and MBK are popular for shopping.

Moving around Singapore and Bangkok

Resource utilization in Singapore is better than Bangkok based on available space and its use of buildings and open spaces. Road infrastructure in Singapore is well developed with signboards all around the city without obstructing the general view. Taxis are plentiful and that is why traveling around Singapore is convenient and fast (author's experience) in agreement with Hui, Wan, and Ho, (2007: 970) who assert that the relatively small size of Singapore compared to other countries results in the perception that it is convenient to travel to any part of Singapore. Quality of the roads in both cities is comparable. Public transport traffic in Singapore is smooth and well-disciplined even during rush hours which put most places within a 20 minutes taxi ride. Henderson, (2015: 272) insists that Singapore has an affordable and efficient public transport system of buses and a comprehensive road network. Most of the informants echoed that Bangkok traffic is chaotic as shown in row 10, table 2 under the label 'transportation', T_2, T_6, T_8, and T_9. Gridlocks on a rainy day during morning and evening rush hours are normal. Day by day there is a multi-fold rise in motorbikes (motor taxis as often called) in Bangkok; causing traffic congestion. Bangkok lacks the proper infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists in the capital.

Cuisine

In Singapore, there are no food stalls or hawkers available on the main roads, unlike in Bangkok where all along the main roads as well as streets numerous convenience stores are available as well as street food to hip restaurants serving international cuisines are widely available. Batra, (2015) maintains that Bangkok is

famous for street food as it is readily available and freshly prepared right in front of visitors and does not require stepping into the restaurant. The street food in Bangkok resonates the Thai habit of eating many small portions throughout the day. The menu may not reveal dishes in English but there may be pictures. Informants believed the positive side is no encroachment, upon sidewalks and pollution caused by roadside cooking along the roads visible in Singapore while such developments have caused Bangkok crowded and congested as shown in row 12, table 2 under the label 'street', T_1, T_2.

Shopping in Singapore and Bangkok

One informant felt that shopping in Bangkok is really cheap while Singapore is quite expensive for budget tourists as shown in row 6, table 2 under the label 'shopping', T_8. Bangkok is recognized as a value-for-money destination for all types of visitors, from young backpackers to families and high-end travellers. Interestingly, a tourist in Singapore should expect to pay double the price for similar standard hotels in Bangkok as observed by Hui et al., (2007: 972) that good quality accommodation and food are more expensive when compared to those available in Asian countries.

The Economic Intelligence Unit (2017) in their recent ranking of world's priciest cities rated Singapore in the top of 10 most expensive cities in the world. Study informants felt low accommodation prices and cost of living in Thailand as the most valuable asset that drew them to the country as shown in table 2. One informant exclaimed "..... a 7 Thai Baht water bottle in Bangkok of similar quantity in Singapore at a 7-11 convenient store costs 2 Singapore Dollar (approximately 50 Thai Baht)" (T_8).

4.2) SUPPORTING FACTORS AND RESOURCES

Singapore today

One of the world's major oil refining and distribution centres, Singapore is a major supplier of electronic components and a leader in shipbuilding and repairing. It is also recognized as the most important financial centre of Asia. The island-state is a

striving financial centre and trading hub. It has the second highest GDP per capita in the Asia Pacific, after Japan. Singapore's wealth can be inferred from its excellent transportation infrastructure, tightly packed skyscrapers and affluent population. Singapore has no natural resources.

Bangkok today

TAT (2017) describe Bangkok "as the political, economic, cultural, culinary, and spiritual capital of Thailand, Bangkok features both old-world charm and modern convenience, at times served up in an apparently chaotic manner, but always with a gracious smile".

The Central Business District of Bangkok boasts of many big, luxurious hotels, diverse tourist-oriented shops, and entertainment facilities, elegant restaurants serving a broad range of domestic and foreign cuisines, coffee shops, and bars (Cohen, and Neal, 2012: 579). Alongside the busy roads, after sunset, street stalls come to life, popular among both offices returning locals and budget international tourists who buy inexpensive clothes, shoes, bags, T-shirts, local handicrafts and other items.

Local hospitality

Average tourist finds it easy to adjust to local Thai customs. The majority of informants revealed that Thais good-natured friendliness is generally offered as reasons for the famous smile as shown in row 13 in table 2 under the label 'people', T_1, T_4, and T_8. One of the informants explained, "Thais are easy goers, flexible and laid back in many respects while Singaporeans are more organized" (T_9).

The English-speaking workforce is an asset to tourism and other industries (Henderson, 2015). Few taxi drivers in Bangkok can speak English, unlike Singapore. Service providers in Thailand try to overcome language barriers through a smile and remain friendlier than Singaporean counterparts as shown in table 2, T_7. Communication in Singapore is explicit (straightforward) while communication in Bangkok is implicit (avoid saying no).

4.3) DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Tourism organizations

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is an economic development agency whose mission is to develop and champion tourism, so as to build the sector into a key driver of economic growth for Singapore. Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) are apex tourism organizations specifically responsible for development and promotion of tourism in Thailand.

Tourist Information booths in both Singapore and Bangkok are readily accessible for complementary distribution to the international tourists in the form of colorful printed brochures and leaflets (author's experience).

Tourism campaigns

The TAT launched Amazing Thailand Amazing Value focuses on positioning Thailand as the perfect value-for-money destination. Thailand wants to change its tourism marketing position from offering 'Value for Money' to 'Value for Experience' by focusing on the 'Unique Thai Local Experiences' as a selling point to create valuable and memorable experiences to quality tourists. This will mean a greater emphasis on promoting creative tourism through Thai culture, experiences and way of life.

The Singapore Tourism Board launched a new positioning and identity, Your Singapore, to attract tourism, business and the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) market. The identity and advertising replaced the previous 'Uniquely Singapore' campaign. The current brand, Your Singapore in 2010 position Singapore as a vibrant and exciting global city STB, (2014) cited in Henderson, (2015: 273). A visit to www.yoursingapore.com website promotes people (cultural performances), places (such as Marina Bay, Sentosa, China town, Little India and Jalan Besar), events (exhibitions, competitions), dining (eating & drinking places) and nightlife in Singapore.

Maintenance of key tourism resources

Singapore (originally called 'Singapura', the Lion City in ancient Sanskrit), is super clean and green. All informants agreed that there is adequate space for pedestrian's

path as shown in row 11 table 2 under the label 'sidewalks', T_1, T_2, T_3, T_4, T_5, T_6, and T_8. In Bangkok, over bridges are built alongside the roads for people to cross over while in Singapore such structures are restricted where pedestrians are given priority to cross over busy traffic. Jaywalking (reckless or illegal crossing of pedestrians on roads) is not permitted in Singapore. To ease pedestrians' walk, especially tourists and locals, administration in Bangkok has come up with the urban walks around Ratchaprasong area with the construction of sky-bridges and walkways that link popular tourist spots such as shopping malls, hotels, and dining venues.

4.4) QUALIFYING DETERMINANTS

Security and safety in Singapore and Bangkok

Singapore has an acclaimed international reputation for safety and cleanliness (A maximum fine of S\$1,000 may be imposed on first-time offenders for smoking other than designated areas). Strict laws were enforced to ensure safety for the visitors. Most of the informants reportedly felt much safer in Singapore than in Bangkok as shown in row 15 in table 2 under the label 'safety', T_3, T_6, T_9.

In Bangkok, Tourist Police are stationed in popular tourist areas such as Sathorn-Silom and central Sukhumvit areas and are typically multi-lingual. There are appropriate security measures put in place at airports, train stations and at major tourist attractions. cursory security measures are in place at many western hotels and some shopping department stores to screen cars entering the premises. Tourists can call the Tourist Police Hotline 1155 to request for assistance in case of emergency.

Tourism initiatives in Singapore and Bangkok

To compete with its many Asian rivals such as Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Shanghai, the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore transformed the city into a more vibrant and exciting place with more buzz by lighting up the city completely. The purpose is to create a captivating night scene to increase Singapore's appeal and high ranking status in the world. The most prominent transformation is to light up the city skyline with bright and colorful neon lights in the Central Business District (CBD).

Brand building in Thailand is through word-of-mouth and based on tourists prior experiences. TAT continues to reinforce the essence of Thailand brand image, with focus on authenticity, value for money, entertaining experience (going out, celebrating and having fun), relaxed Thai lifestyle, 'Friendly', easy going relationships among the diverse people, places, and situations in Bangkok and Thai hospitality.

5. TOURISM COMPETITIVENESS BETWEEN SINGAPORE AND BANGKOK

1. Both rely on their open-door policy towards international investment from multinational chain group of hotels.

2. Liberal VISA policy – the Royal Thai Government recently approved the extension of the visa fee waiver and reduction for visas on arrival for tourists from 21 countries (TAT, 2017).

3. Open skies' policy – Both Singapore and Bangkok claim to be established as the travel and tourism gateway to all the major urban centres in Southeast Asia for long haul travellers. The capitals serve as the landing port for numerous international airlines, most with direct flights from their destinations. Bangkok's main Suvarnabhumi International airport and low-cost hub Don Mueang International Airport's combined annual capacity is 75 million as opposed to Changi Airport in Singapore, with a capacity of about 60 million annually reported Jagtiani, (2017).

4. Generating tourist markets

Most visitors' to Singapore in 2013 were Asians from key markets such as China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, India, and Japan based on STB (2014) cited in Henderson (2015). For Thailand, in 2016, the top five source tourist markets were China, Russia, Malaysia, the UK and South Korea (TAT, 2017). Interestingly, according to MasterCard Asia Pacific Destinations Index (2017), the Chinese market was the top source market for both Singapore and Bangkok in 2016.

5. Purpose of visit to Singapore and Bangkok

As a regional hub for companies and industries, business people's travel to Singapore counted as high-yielding tourists. An increasing number of tourists' in Singapore come from neighbouring ASEAN countries as revealed by Khan, (1998). Pure holidaymakers (i.e. pleasure/vacation travellers) constitute the bulk of tourists

coming to Singapore (Khan, 1998). VFR – Many Indonesians visit under visiting friends and relatives category and do not require accommodation (Koh and King, 2017). Relatively only a small percentage of tourists visit Singapore for the sole purpose of shopping, probably due to growing strength of the Singapore dollar while international tourists hailing from countries with a higher cost of living than Thailand like the United States of America, England, and Japan find it quite affordable (Sereetrakul, 2012).

6. Accommodation

Singapore's hotel classification system consists of four-tiers – luxury, upscale, mid-tier and economy (Koh and King, 2017). According to Chan, Leng, and Yean, (2017, p. 6) who further quoted STB, in 2015 that there were 398 gazetted hotels with a total of 60, 908 available room while updated figures at the end-2016 report Singapore had 413 hotels with 63,850 rooms, TTR Weekly (2017). The vast range of accommodation in Bangkok (unconfirmed figure quotes 86,687 hotel rooms) includes some of the worlds most acclaimed five-star hotels, family-friendly mid-range accommodation, and a number of budget guesthouses as well as budget backpacker hostels (TAT, 2017).

7. Average length of stay

Chan, Leng, and Yean, (2017: 5) affirmed that historically the average length of stay for travellers to Singapore was 3.6 days. For many tourists, Singapore is treated as a stopover point on their way to Bali or Chiangmai. The average length of stay in Thailand is 4 days based on slide presentations on Thailand country report as part of media briefing ASEAN Tourism Forum 2017 by TAT Governor revealed by PATA, (2017).

6. NEW CHALLENGES FACING SINGAPORE AND BANGKOK AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

The value of the Singapore dollar has less buying power for an average international tourist visiting on a limited budget which makes them feel the price in Singapore is higher than their own countries as shown in row 8 in table 2 under the label 'shopping', T_8.

While Wong, (2017: 253) felt Singapore as a good example of a destination which is relatively less endowed with core resources and attractors but has consistently outperformed some of its regional competitors in the development of its tourism industry because of its strong supporting factors and resources. This observation is in line with Sirakaya-Turk et al., (2015) cited in Wong, (2017: 253) found supporting factors such as the reputable shopping facilities in Singapore plays an important role in influencing revisit intentions to a destination. The small size and lack of natural resources puts Singapore at a disadvantage while contending with its culturally-rich and naturally –blessed neighbours in line with the findings of Hui et al., (2007, p. 971) that Singapore is highly constrained by land availability and thus the development of tourist spots is affected. Insufficient variety of attractions; in approval to Hui et al., (2007: 971) that tourists from Asia probably realize that their home countries can offer more in terms of attractions (both natural and man-made) which reiterate similar opinion expressed by study informants as shown in rows 1 and 2 in table 2, T_2, T_5, and T_8.

Thailand lacks English speaking skills which need to be improved to avoid language barriers between the local people and international tourists. One informant mentioned that “.... tourists do hold the image of Bangkok as a night-life and entertainment destination which deters first-time family tourists from visiting Bangkok” (T_7).

Thai massage, on one hand, has earned Thailand, especially Bangkok the privilege of offering unique service as well as masseurs an opportunity to earn directly from international tourists. On another hand, erotic services offered in the name of ‘Thai massage’ have given the nation a bad name through cheap publicity.

7. CONCLUSIONS

As poor destination management can erode the destination competitiveness, therefore, both Bangkok and Singapore can identify which competitiveness attributes reach tourist expectations and can work towards strengthening that particular element stressed Wong (2017: 250). Such competitive destination analysis will be a

valuable addition to the existing tools and techniques for tourism planning and marketing (Pearce, 1997).

In summarising the main findings of the study, the majority of the informants unanimously agreed that Bangkok presents well in terms of natural endowments, value for money, and shopping experience, but needs improvement in the areas of movement of traffic, especially the downtown district. In addition, local service providers' conversation skills in the English language with non-Thais must improve. The main qualitative areas where Singapore is most competitive in terms of man-made resources, safety and security aspects of international tourists and cleanness as one of the important aspects sought by informants but the major concern is the high price for accommodation felt by tourists. Bangkok is vibrant, famous for nightlife, amusement and recreational oriented while Singapore is more close to nature, clean, environment-friendly, but a bit expensive. Therefore, the two destinations are neck and neck in the competition to win over tourists.

Tourism planners in Bangkok can highlight these findings to the Bangkok Local Administration to come up with strategies to ease traffic congestions on roads, to have a more stringent enforcement of laws covering local vendors on the streets and to disseminate family-oriented messages to help improve the image perception for Bangkok. Likewise, the Singapore Tourism Board can initiate campaign by introducing tourist-friendly awareness among local residents. Furthermore, local travel agencies and hoteliers in Singapore may need to review price structure, or alternatively offer concessional tour packages to accommodate international tourists who can hardly afford to stay in Singapore.

No doubt both Singapore and Bangkok have the ability and tremendous potential to continue to pull international tourists provided they revitalize their core tourist attractions so as to gain repeat visits. It needs to be recognized that regional tourism competition will increase in coming years, as other destinations such as Myanmar and Vietnam offer increasingly improved tourist experiences, international connectivity, and value. For both Bangkok and Singapore, there is a need for more market diversification (Waseema, 2017) as 'weaknesses' of the existing tourist product (natural, historical and cultural attractions were being sacrificed to the need for rapid urbanization and industrialization). To continue enhancing its

competitiveness, Singapore should focus on enhancing its limited digital marketing and online presence to increase interest in digital demand on both natural and cultural resources opined Misrahi, (2017).

Tourism has played a significant positive role in the economic development of Singapore while to a greater extent the Thai economy depends on tourism. Therefore, to achieve the economic benefits of tourism, tourism planners should chalk out plans to increase an inbound tourist's average length of stay as well as average spending per day by targeting first-time potential tourists residing in secondary cities in the main generating markets. Both Bangkok and Singapore aim to attract quality tourists instead of quantity tourists though current tourists' arrival figures indicate that Bangkok gets the traffic, Singapore gets the bucks (Bangkok Post, 2017). Additionally, Misrahi, (2017) stressed that systematic efforts need to be undertaken by respective national public and private tourism agencies in Singapore to ensure sustained growth of tourist arrivals and receipts, and the same applies for Thailand.

8. LIMITATIONS

In a qualitative study, the interpretation of the text is a form of subjective analysis as the conclusions drawn are the result of personal opinion and observation, therefore, it is difficult to generalize the results of qualitative research methods to the wider population. Finding international tourists who have experienced traveling to both cities in the last 6 months and stayed at least one night was challenging at Suvarnabhumi International airport and Changi International airport, and seeking participation from those who met the criteria was another challenge as they did not want to be disturbed while on holiday. Another limitation was the inclusion of English speaking international tourists as informants which might not be truly representative of all international tourists arriving into Bangkok and Singapore.

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