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“Travel Stress and Stress-Coping Strategies Adapted by International Tourists and Travel Organization’s Awareness in Bangkok”

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Abstract

As the Tourism is increasing globally with the rise in number of International tourists every year where travelling has become an inseparable part of lifestyle but the fact cannot be ignored that it may actually cause stress, and rise in anxiety and tension at different phases of travel which may cause negative experience among International tourists. Thus, this study will contribute to the knowledge of source of travel stress, destination factors and how tourists coming to Bangkok manage and reduce it. As the awareness about the travel-related stress is still less so it is necessary to know what the role of travel organizations is in dealing with tourist’s stress problems in Bangkok. Qualitative research method is used for the collection of data and in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted during 28th February 2020 to 6th March 2020 with 10 International tourists and 2 travel organizations in Bangkok and for the data analysis constant comparison method was used. Results indicate that travel-related stress arises at the initial stage, which is pre-trip phase, continues with during trip phase, at destination and ends with post trip phase. The stress coping methods adapted by International tourists are social support, relaxation, entertainment, meditation, management of trip, and destination activities such as enjoying nightlife in Bangkok. Also, this study reveals that travel organizations provide destination knowledge, safety measures, travel alternatives, guidelines to staff, address complaints, offer compensation, to help tourist prevent from stressful situation in Bangkok.

Keywords: Travel Stress, Stress coping, International Tourist, Travel organization, Bangkok

Introduction:

Whether for leisure or for business purpose, people travel globally and according to UNWTO (2019) international tourists arrivals have grown by 5 % in 2018 and reached 1.4 billion. Despite of this growing numbers of tourists, less is known about the stress associated with travelling. Various studies have been done to identify the stress and spread awareness about the stress caused during travelling. McIntosh, Swanson, Power, Raeside & Dempster (1998) in their study have mentioned that anxiety and fear associated with travelling is quite common and a significant portion of travellers experience it which include mainly those who travel through air. People feel stressed when they are away from home in an

unfamiliar and uncontrollable environment such as airport congestion, security checks, being in enclosed space during flight etc. The stress related with travel could affect the person’s well-being and may lead to physical and mental health problems and depreciate their holiday experience and the work performance in the long term. According to Zehrer & Crofts (2012) stress associated with a vacation can be categorized into pre-trip stress, travel stress and destination stress which are more specifically pressure of holiday planning, last moment arrangements, logistics, over spending and it can create a feeling of tension and anxiety. "Travel can definitely sometimes be frustrating or even chaotic - and it seems that many travellers believe that they are having a terrible luck after too many poor experiences in the past. Wherever possible, take every step to prepare and plan ahead of



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your next trip as it will help to reduce stress and avoid running into problems when in transit,” said Alex Miller in a statement (Upgradedpoints, 2020). Travellers should be aware about the consequences of travel which can help in reduce the stress and they can fully enjoy their holiday by understanding the factors causing stress. Many travellers apply their own strategies to cope with stress such as previous experiences, travel competence, social support from family and friends, and activities at destination. The service providers should also learn about the travel-related stress of their guests and come up with extended services to ensure tourist comfort and safety to help managing their stress. The relationship between stress and travel is a growing matter of discussion. The study aims at working on following objectives: a.) to identify the source of stress which a traveller face while travelling overseas b.) to analyse the way in which the foreign tourists coming to Bangkok combat the travel stress c.) to examine the role of travel companies in dealing with problem of stress related to travel d.) to identify destination factors causing stress among international travellers.

Literature Review:

The Concept of Stress: Now a days, the life of people is filled with stress which can be originated within them and because of something externally happen to them. Stress is a familiar concept, but it is understood differently by each person and in terms of travel, people have different perceptions towards it. According to Miller & McCool (2002) Stress can be described primarily as “the product of a perceived imbalance between the demands of a person's environment and the resources available that the person has to respond to them”. Individuals use two types of strategies to manage stress and cope with it: Problem-focused approach; and Emotion-focused approach. Although problem-focused solutions are direct acts such as active coping, emotion-focused are indirect, such as finding opportunities for leisure time in response to stress. Therefore, it is always common belief that taking a holiday would minimize or mitigate stress. In contrast to the view that taking a holiday may serve to moderate stress, Yavas (1987) indicates that taking a holiday can be stressful given the high risk involving a person's time, energy and money. Schuster, Hammitt & Moore (2006) described

vacation stress as an individual's perspective, mental, behavioural and physical reactions to the different problems encountered during one or more travel phases.

The Concept of Travel and Tourist encounter with Stress: According to the Leiper's model of the tourism system it is explained that the tour – which is a trip or travelling anywhere for business, leisure activities – is a vital element. The tour is a basic feature for tourism and a prerequisite element for tourism to occur under which an individual must be brought to the product or service and has to travel out and back. Transportation, and a single or multiple location are involved in it. For travel, the process starts from traveller-generating region and ends with it. In between a traveller encounters with transit routes between generating and destination areas, destination and the firms and organizations providing service product such as travel companies, airports, hotels where it is possible to face anxiety and stress. In a study conducted by McIntosh, Swanson, Power, Raeside & Dempster (1998) it is found that air travel caused anxiety among the International travellers at different level and flight delays were rated most frequently as a source of stress followed by flight landing and baggage reclaim. The study also reported that travellers experience health related problems; ear problems were the most common reported by 55% of respondents, headache (41%), swollen legs (31%) and stuffy nose (31%) were also found.

Stress and Coping:

Stress is an indication of some type of uncomfortable situation and there is some stimulus that provokes it and some response or reaction. This reaction or response is called coping and is basically the mechanism by which the person manages or responds to a stressful environment or circumstances. Usually coping is seen as a rational answer to an objective question of arising stress.

Transactional approach to stress: Richard Lazarus introduced the transactional theory of stress and coping in an attempt to explain stress as more of a dynamic process Folkman & Lazarus (1980), which describes stress as a result of a transaction between a person and his complex environment. It is also described as a result of a perceived imbalance between



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demands of an individual and the available resources to satisfy it. Stress and coping are distinguished among three levels of appraisal: a.) Primary appraisal, characterized as “the decision that an encounter is insignificant, or stressful” resulting in loss, danger, harm and challenge; b.) Secondary appraisal, relates to dealing with responses to a certain situation and requires a decision on what could be done which results in coping strategies that help to respond to a particular stress experience; c.) Coping, which is regarded as an effort by the individual to cope with a stressful situation and is chosen as a result of the assessment process (Lazarus, 1999).

The study of Zehrer & Crofts (2012) undertakes a SEM Model for vacation stress in which stress is divided into three categories where it occurs: a.) pre-trip such as travel arrangements, vacation planning, financial concern; b.) travel related stress such as commuting, travel logistics, timings, weather condition, interaction with travel party; c.) Destination stress such as accommodation, food, location of hotel, and culture shock. In the study of Batra (2011) travelling has long been considered one of the easiest ways to alleviate work-life stress. Yet uncertainties and bad interactions can actually break down the benefits and cause travellers to feel stressed out. Travel stress is the same, but the way a traveller reacts to such stress varies from individual to individual, depending on circumstance, personality, attitude, motivation, gender, age and education. It was found that travel arrangements often carry some levels of stress at the initial stages of the journey. The first thing that triggers anxiety for visitors at the start of the journey, when on their trip overseas, is the timing of the flight. In the case that the flight is delayed or cancelled, the visitors are worried because it affects their travel plans that follow. The study also shows that tourists with ‘free and independent’ FIT (50 percent) were not as stressed as tourists with ‘full package’ GIT. Tourists arriving for business purposes in Thailand were not as anxious as those who visited for sightseeing, relaxing and shopping.

Role of Travel organization in dealing with Tourist’s Stress:

Travel agents play a major role in travel industry and are often consulted by intending travellers seeking health advice before travel. The study of Flaherty, Lim

& Fry (2015) aims at establishing the level of knowledge of travel health risks among a sample of travel agents in Ireland to identify travel health educational needs in the community. More specifically, the objectives are to describe the approach of travel agents to client seeking travel health guidance and their confidence in providing such guidance; to examine the level of knowledge of travel agents regarding the geographical knowledge of major tropical diseases and their mode of spread; to identify the training needs of travel agents in relation to travel health. This study used a web-based questionnaire created on survey monkey and permission was obtained by Irish Travel Agents Association (ITAA) and anonymously distributed to its members via an emailed web link. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistical functions in Microsoft excel. The respondents were asked if they provided health information leaflets to their clients and also how frequently they advise travellers to purchase a travel medical insurance.

Methodology:

To understand the travel related stress, stress coping methods and role of travel organizations in dealing with tourist’s stress this study conducted a qualitative research method using in-depth and semi-structured interviews with open ended questions as a tool to collect data with English speaking International tourists visiting Bangkok and travel organizations in the month of February and March. For selecting the target informants, the researcher has opted for convenience sampling of non-probability sampling method because it is convenient and most appropriate due to limited time period and easy accessibility to informants. The open-ended research questions were prepared based on the available literature to understand International Travel Stress; source of stress, stress-coping, travel organizations awareness, and destinations factors are taken into account. Data from ten tourists both male and female coming from Malaysia, Columbia, Canada, Siberia, India, England, Middle East, US and Brazil to Bangkok was collected in the form of semi-structured interview with open-ended questions during 01 March 2020 to 05 March 2020 at The Emporium Shopping Centre, Emquartier Mall Sukhumvit, Terminal 21 Asoke in Bangkok to know about their source of stress, the methods they use to tackle it and to know the destination factors which



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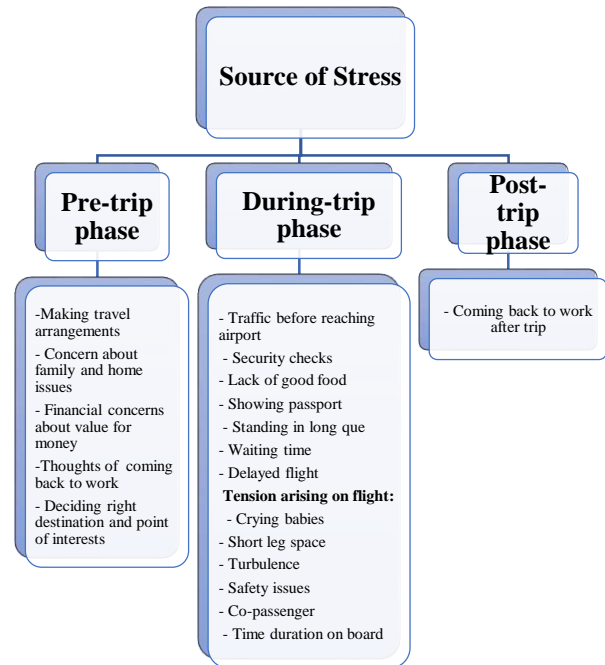
create stress; and from two travel organizations it was collected in the form of in-depth interview during 28 February 2020 to 05 March 2020 to know about their awareness on traveller's stress and the suggestions they do provide to overcome it. Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used for sample selection and for the analysis of raw data, Constant Comparison method was used by the researcher as it is most helpful method for qualitative studies. To perform this method, the researcher has read through entire data after that small meaningful parts called chunks are picked out and then compared altogether to do labelling, open coding and axial coding to draw the results.

Results and Discussion:

Source of Stress:

International tourists, when asked about the source of stress when travelling to Bangkok have reported various pre trip and during trip factors that cause stress at different phases such as pre travel arrangements, family related stress, thought of post travel work arrangements, thinking about safety. When the International tourists were asked that what tension they face when they are on a flight the answers were: "hating crying babies", "Short leg space between seats", "when it's too crowded and people make noises", "turbulence", "interaction with co-passenger" from which it can be withdrawn that International tourists feel stressed during flight by unwanted noises, lack of space, co-passengers and safety issues. When it was asked that which part of the journey do they feel most annoying and get stressed during overseas travel the answers were: "hate traffic before reaching airport", "waiting time at airport sucks", "Immigration and waiting at baggage belt", "The delayed flights", "waiting the boarding process and security control", "Lack of good food" which is enough to withdraw the conclusion that stress arises differently for different people during their overseas travel experience. Some of them have reported that they do not feel stress because they did not plan for it and they enjoy every part of travel and remain positive in every situation.

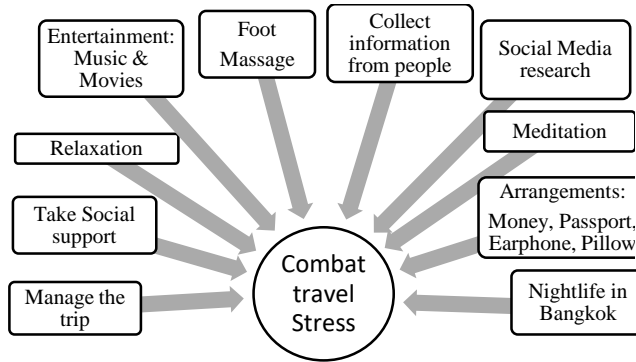
Figure 1: Summary of Source of Stress



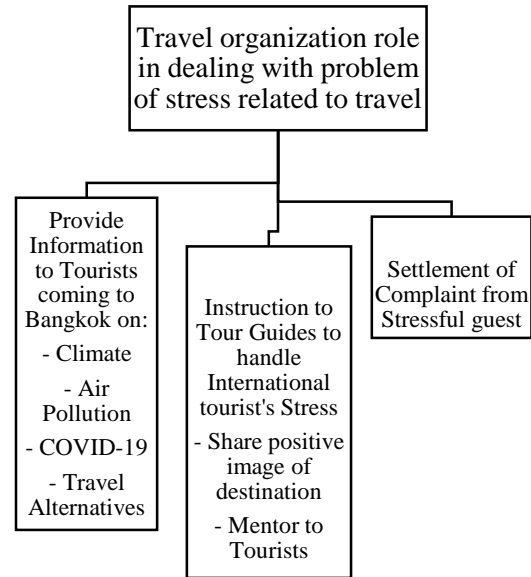
Stress Coping:

The results indicated that the International tourists coming to Bangkok combat the travel stress in different ways and the things they do are manage the trip, take social support – talking with family, friends and girlfriend, relaxation, listen music, watch films, and foot massage. The findings also show that they have pre planning on handling travel related stress; such as collecting information from people before travel, travel research on social media, meditation practices and making necessary arrangements such as carry enough money, passport, earphone, pillow to avoid anxiety. Maximum of the International tourists admitted that nightlife in Bangkok helps to reduce stress and the things they like to do is party, going pubs, loud music, eat food, soft music & drink, and meeting new people to socialize.

Figure 2: Summary of Stress Coping Techniques
 Travel organization role in dealing with problem of stress related to travel:



Findings show that the information has been provided by travel organization for precautions to be taken by tourists related to climate while travelling in Bangkok, As the travelling in Bangkok is risky now a days due to spread of COVID-19, and air pollution it was found that travel organizations play a crucial role in providing information for taking measures such as wash hands, avoid touching face, using hand sanitizers, and few travel organizations have reported providing another travel alternatives to avoid unnecessary stress among international tourists. The findings also reported that to make travel more stress-free travel organizations instruct their tour guides to be more positive and generous. Travel organizations also guide their tour guides to not to talk about corona virus again and again as it will make guest feel stressed. Travel organizations mentioned that if a guest is stressed and complaint about the service then the complaint is conveyed to the source and ask to be fixed and then compensate the guest to make them feel better and happy. The information from World Health Organization, Tourism Authority of Thailand and Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau was passed on to the staff through management related to health awareness and risks associated with the destination and guidelines are given to the International tourists related to their travel in Thailand.

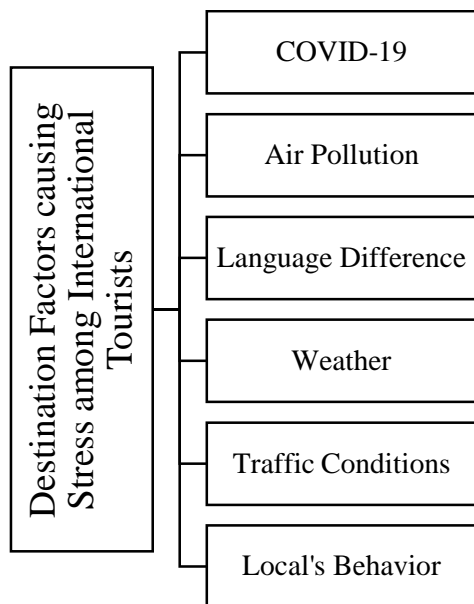


Destination factors causing Stress:

The results for destination factors causing stress among International Tourists coming to Bangkok shows that Corona virus, air pollution, language difference, weather, traffic conditions and behaviour of locals are a critical reason for causing stress at the destination. The language difference in Bangkok was found very annoying, difficult to communicate, struggle and felt cheated and regarding weather it was reported that it's too hot, create difficulty to work & enjoy, make tired, and the humidity leads to irritation. The traffic conditions in Bangkok are found very stressful, terrible, horrible, felt congested, very bad and annoying, long & slow traffic, and the alternatives are suggested such as BTS Skytrain and MRT by the international tourists.

Figure 3: Summary of Travel organization's role in dealing with problem of stress related to travel

Figure 4: Summary of Destination Factors causing Stress among International Tourists



Implications:

As travelling has become a necessary part of the lifestyle whether for business, or leisure it is important to become aware of the travel environment as the chances of getting stress are at each stage from beginning of the trip till end of the trip if not managed properly. The study finds out the reasons of travel related stress of which the tourists should prepare themselves and plan ahead to manage it. There are ways to tackle stress which are applied by tourists differently and it is discussed in the study, the future travellers can become aware and utilize the same ways to cope with travel stress. While travelling in Bangkok it was found that tourists face public problems which create stress such as traffic, language difference, pollution of which if government take proper action then it can be managed. As tourism contribute to a major part of Thailand's economy the government can correct these problems for a stress-free experience among foreign tourists which will further bring more tourism and leads to generation of good image of the destination and ultimately revenue.

The study suggests that the travel organizations can learn about the factors causing stress among International tourists and come up with plans to

effectively manage and provide stress-free travel programmes. As they already provide information about the destinations and precautionary measures to be taken for convenient travel but still there are more chances to enhance their service with the help of this study. The service providers will also learn more about the travel related stress and can come up with solutions to provide to International tourists for a stress-free and convenient travel experience.

Conclusion:

It was found out that the International travel do bring stress and it starts at the initial stage during pre-trip phase, continues with during trip phase, at destination and ends with post trip phase. The tourists from different countries coming to Bangkok encounters with different situation which cause stress and it is perceived differently among individuals. Majority of the participants reported that travel related stress includes doing travel arrangements, Financial concerns about value for money, airport experiences such as immigration process, on board tension, destination factors; language, weather, traffic, pollution, local's behaviour and for the current situation COVID-19 outbreak. The stress coping methods adapted by International tourists are social support, relaxation, entertainment, meditation, management of trip, and destination activities. The study also concluded that travel companies do play a role in dealing with problems of tourists related to stress and they provide destination knowledge, safety measures, travel alternatives, guidelines to staff, addressing complaints, offer compensation, to help tourist prevent from stressful situation.

Recommendations:

Recommendations for Foreign Tourists:

The study discusses the reasons for stress and how to overcome it which will provide knowledge and suggestions to overseas tourists, their family, friends and colleagues for measures to be taken to avoid it. It is recommended that they should recognize the ways in which travelling can affect them and they can prepare their personal programme accordingly to address to the self-created stress issues such as work and family arrangements. It is suggested that foreign tourists should pack smartly and keep travel necessary items such as pillow, earphone, toiletries to avoid situational stress and to tackle stress during long hauls

they should plan entertainment and engage themselves in watching movies, listening to music. To avoid language issues at destination, it is recommended that they use google translate app and learn basic language words to become familiar with locals. To avoid travel stress, it is also recommended that foreign tourists should engage with their family and talk with them as it is an effective way to reduce stress. They should also ask people who have already been to a destination that what needs to be arranged to avoid any negative experience during trip. To avoid being cheated financially at the destination it is recommended that search about the prices of transportation, accommodation, and sight-seeing before starting the trip.

Recommendations for Thai Government:

It is recommended that the Government should improve its tourism infrastructure to facilitate stress free tourism such as capacity should be increased at airports to efficiently manage crowd. Measures should be taken by the Thai Government to manage traffic conditions in Bangkok and the English standards should be developed among Thai society by making amendments in education system for meeting the standard of an International tourism destination. During the time of study, the COVID-19 outbreak is very stressful situation so it is recommended that the Government should increase measures to prevent it for the safety of tourists.

Recommendations for stakeholders:

More destination awareness can be spread by travel organizations related to stress related conditions so that tourists can be prepared in advance while coming to Bangkok. The service providers such as airlines, hotels and restaurants can enhance their service by looking at problems which the tourists face and take corrective measures.

Limitations:

There are many limitations regarding the interpretation and generalisation of the results published in this study. As, the study is conducted only for International tourists experiencing travel stress and the domestic travellers are neglected which might also face travel stress. It is conducted only during a limited timeframe of four months from January 2020 to April 2020 which is a short period for a research. As the

tourism is low during data-collection period due to spread of Coronavirus the researcher found it difficult to approach many tourists and also because of personal preservation from disease. Most of the literature for this study have used quantitative method besides the nature of study being qualitative so the researcher faced difficulty while setting questions of qualitative nature. Further studies could use questionnaire to understand the stress at a wide scale using larger sample size.

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