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Tourism Forecasting Using the Delphi Method and Implications for Sustainable Tourism Development

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Abstract: Tourism forecasting is one of the most important aspects of tourism studies in today's competitive environment. It is crucial not only for tourism businesses to understand and foresee trends and future changes, but also for government agencies to develop the competitiveness of their tourism sectors in order to stay competitive or even outperform other tourist destinations. The purpose of this research is to conduct tourism forecasting using the Delphi technique and to collect data from experts in the field of tourism and hospitality, providing useful information about the future of Thailand's tourism directions and sustainable development. The results show that Thailand could maintain its tourism strengths in many aspects, including tourism attractions for tourists from various income groups, and the cultural uniqueness of "Thai-ness". Thailand's tourism capabilities can support the growing importance of tourism development in Southeast Asia. In addition, the research findings reveal some areas for improvement for Thai tourism to support sustainable tourism development, including the necessity for improving the quality of training programs for human resources in tourism-related organizations, a less strict immigration policy, the adoption of new information technology, and more updated tourism information. The discussion of findings and practical implications for sustainable tourism development are also discussed in detail.

Keywords: tourism forecasting; sustainable tourism development; Delphi method



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1. Introduction

The tourism industry in Thailand continues to develop along with the popularity of traveling to Thailand from both Thai and foreign tourists, leading to the development of revenues and careers for the local Thai people. Moreover, tourism development also supports the preservation and restoration of tourism resources in Thailand in a sustainable manner in order to sustain their existence and preserve Thai identities [1]. The tourism industry is an essential industry for the sustainable development of the Thai economy, in the same way as many developing countries around the world are developing their tourism industries to create growth and strength their economies, societies, and communities [2,3]. The tourism industry is becoming an important industry for generating revenue in Thailand, and the Thai government has empowered the Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the Tourism Authority of Thailand to initiate strategies to develop the Thai tourism industry to attract more tourists, both first-time tourists and revisiting tourists [4].

Tourism forecasting is an important tool used in the tourism industry to examine the environment and implications of the industry's current situation, which is intensively competitive. Tourism forecasting plays an important role in the business sector as it helps businesses to understand trends and to forecast future changes in the tourism industry; moreover, tourism forecasting also provides important information for the government sector in developing the potential of the nation's tourism industry to compete with other countries. Malaysia, Singapore, and other neighboring countries in the ASEAN are the main competitors for Thailand in the tourism industry since they are in the same region and have similar tourism aspects to Thailand [5].

Sustainable tourism development has been the core focus of executives and managers at all levels of tourism-related organizations, from local to international tourism organizations, and from the private sector to the public sector and policy makers. Many areas of tourism development can result in the deterioration of both tangible resources (e.g., forests, land, and natural resources) and intangible resources (e.g., tradition, cultures, or social cohesion). It is highly important for tourism planners to consider the various impacts of tourism development and the development directions of new tourism products. Gössling and Scott [6] state that scenario planning and tourism forecasting play important roles in sustainable tourism development and tourism business planning.

Furthermore, tourism forecasting can provide data on trends related to opportunities and threats which may occur and have impacts on the tourism industry in the future. There are many techniques used in tourism forecasting, for example, time series, econometrics, and so forth. The understanding of trends, the development of new tourism themes, and the introduction of new factors in the tourism industry, such as technological advancements that reduce transaction times, are important, as they allow entrepreneurs and government agencies to prepare themselves for changes which may happen in the tourism industry. Lin, Tang, Shyu, and Li [7] and Zhang, Song, Wen, and Liu [8] indicate that there are several techniques used to forecast changes to understand factors related to the growth and development of business sectors in the tourism industry. Moreover, those techniques are used to forecast important situations such as crises. Most of the techniques used in forecasting are quantitative techniques and generally use historical data to forecast trends in the future.

However, currently, there is one technique that combines both qualitative and quantitative research to provide more precise and reliable results. This research technique is named the Delphi technique or method. The Delphi technique is an effective forecasting tool that uses information from a group of experts in the relevant industry. Valls and Sarda [9] state that the Delphi technique helps researchers to investigate an event which may occur in the future for particular research topics by using information that was examined by a group of experts from the particular industry in order to achieve the final conclusion. Therefore, in the current study, to align with past research studies [8,9], the samples include experts with several years of experience from the tourism, hospitality, and related fields in order to better represent various dimensions of the tourism industry.

Moreover, the Delphi technique is considered to be highly effective in research environments that have high complexity or many relevant factors that are constantly changing [10]. Song, Qiu, and Park [11] and Witt and Witt [12] state that the Delphi technique provides greater forecasting compared to other forecasting techniques that were implemented under complex situations. Since the tourism industry is an industry that deals with various essential factors that are highly dynamic, including political, social, and environmental factors, the Delphi technique is therefore an appropriate tool to employ in the present research.

The contributions of the study are, firstly, to provide insights from tourism experts towards long-term future development trends of the tourism industry. Secondly, the current research can provide implications for sustainable tourism development, especially clear directions and crucial dimensions of sustainable tourism development.

2. Literature Review

The current research aims to investigate the tourism forecast by adopting the Delphi technique. The importance and role of tourism forecasting was provided earlier in the introduction. Therefore, in this part, the details of the Delphi method will be explained. In their paper, Landeta [13] describes the history of the Delphi technique: In the late 1940s, researchers at the RAND Corporation started a study on the scientific application of expert opinions. The study was published and showed the benefits of the use of individual experts' opinions and of decision-making based on expert opinions towards issues of inexact science. The Delphi technique was used for the first time by the RAND Corporation

in a military project. At present, the Delphi technique is used as a social research technique to obtain reliable group opinions from a group of experts. The Delphi technique also creates communication within a group of people to generate an essential opinion for solving the complex problem [14].

Fontanari and Berger-Risthaus [15] and Landeta, Matey, Ruíz, and Galter [16] stated that the Delphi technique is a social research technique that aims to retrieve reliable information from a panel of experts and helps to arrange structure for communication among groups of people who can solve complex problems. This technique is also implemented in order to find a consensus of opinions in uncertain situations in which other techniques may not be used or may not be able to offer a clear understanding.

The Delphi technique provides valuable information for researchers and decision makers to analyze results, make decisions, and implement these decisions in complex situations. Because of its accuracy and positive evaluation from researchers, the scientific community still trusts this technique and believes that it is an important research tool to retrieve and process information from a panel of experts. In addition, this technique can be used on its own or combined with other techniques.

Song, Qiu, and Park [11] and Czaplicka-Kolarz, Stańczyk, and Kapusta [17] stated that the Delphi technique is an important process in forecasting projects related to the study of macro-forecasting. Both studies [11,17] used a complex process in which Delphi statements were employed to provide general conditions related to the policies and economy of the nation, as well as the state of environmental protection, social aspects, and safety in the future.

According to the research of Curtis [18], the Delphi technique is a study method focusing on the expression and selection of the opinions from a group of experts, which is better than opinions from one expert. Moreover, the Delphi technique could be implemented in the development of indicators for sustainable tourism to forecast the risks that may occur in the tourism industry by structuring questions to which experts from various fields can provide answers or opinions that are beyond the specific knowledge of each individual.

Kennell and Powell [19] and Ronde [20] stated that many researchers use the Delphi technique in implementations related to national systems of innovation. This implementation of the Delphi technique focuses on the main characteristic of the technique by collecting the responses from the panel of experts at time (t) and then comparing them with the second collection of responses from the same panel of experts after the mean responses from the first round of data collection were distributed. The experts are then asked to reconsider their answers in the second round. This process shows the different behaviors of experts between the two rounds of data collection, and more shared opinions are found in the second data collection.

Steinert [21] proposed that the Delphi technique aims to decrease the variation from the panel of experts under the condition that it reduces the bias among experts. The Delphi technique is accepted as a substitute for direct experimental research that currently does not exist. This makes Delphi a technique gaining popularity in many fields, including education and business. Currently, the Delphi technique can be implemented in real time by using computers, which can decrease costs and time in conducting the research.

Despite the benefits of the Delphi technique, there is a gap in the tourism research in that a limited number of studies have applied this technique in the context of tourism forecasting, especially in the context of emerging economies. Therefore, based on the above literature, the current research applied the Delphi technique to investigate the insights of tourism forecasting and their implications for sustainable tourism development in Thailand.

3. Research Methods

In this section, the use of the Delphi technique in tourism forecasting is discussed in more detail. The details of the sample group taken as representatives of the tourism industry, as well as the process of data collection, are also described.

3.1. Tourism Forecasting with the Delphi Technique

This research used the guidelines from the previous studies, including Yong, Keng, and Leng [22] and Lin and Song [23], on tourism forecasting using the Delphi technique to collect data from a group of experts in the tourism field. The results from their study revealed the changing trends and found that foreign tourists from Western countries paid more attention to travel to Eastern countries or Asian countries, which showed the changes in trends and opportunities, especially the opportunity for a continuous increase in the development of tourism products. LB Knowles [24] noted that the Delphi method is useful to help develop transformations towards sustainable tourism. Kennell and Powell [19] indicated that the Delphi method can be applied to study various types of tourism research and tourism development, including dark tourism.

In order to develop the questions used in the research, the authors adopted the guidelines from the study of Yong, Keng, and Leng [22]. A panel of experts was selected to answer three main research questions:

1. The probability that an event related to tourism may occur in the future, evaluated as a percentage, in which 0% means never and 100% means will definitely occur.
2. Indicating the year for events to occur in the future.
3. Providing the importance level of events affecting tourism development by rating the importance on scale of five levels from the least important to the most important.

This research selected the issues related to tourism forecasting by studying the information from McDowall and Choi [25], Tavitiyaman and Qu [26], and Yong, Keng, and Leng [22]. These important events or activities are as follows:

1. Thailand is becoming a major tourist center in the world;
2. Thailand's general tourism information is updated and easy to access;
3. Major technological advances lower international travel costs to prices affordable to the majority of Thai people;
4. Demand for part-time training programs for people currently employed in the hospitality industry in Thailand will increase substantially;
5. Hotel and restaurant managers in Thailand require more specialized and formal educational training;
6. The ASEAN is successfully accepted as a single travel destination;
7. Sustainable revival of traditional activities (e.g., "Floating Market", "100-Year-Old Market", etc.) in Thailand;
8. Much business travel is replaced by video-conferencing technologies and other forms of telecommunications (e.g., satellites, the Internet, etc.);
9. Political instability in this region is affecting the flow of tourists;
10. Thailand is increasing its image of being a shopping paradise in this region;
11. Border formalities (e.g., visa customs) of most countries are relaxed;
12. Liberalization of international airline agreements increases travel through the country;
13. Online social networks are becoming the major communication tools for tourism;
14. Oil prices are directly related to tourism planning;
15. Climate change is becoming a barrier of tourism activities;
16. Creative tourism is becoming a new era of the tourism industry;
17. Destination Management Organizations can protect the local environment, heritage and culture of their communities;
18. Thailand will need effective organizational structures and management systems (e.g., disaster planning, security, training, etc.) to develop and sustain the tourism industry;
19. Thailand will need effective tourism development programs with continuous improvement;

20. An effective transportation system is available throughout tourism destinations nationwide;
21. Thai tourism packages are attractive in the region;
22. Thailand is an affordable tourism destination for both low- and high-end economic groups;
23. Thailand is becoming a destination for short training courses (e.g., golf classes, cooking classes, etc.).
24. Thailand is becoming a cultural center of the region;
25. Thailand is becoming a hub for meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE);
26. Thailand is becoming an agro-tourism destination in the region;
27. Thailand is becoming a long-stay destination in the world (e.g., destination for foreign retirees).

These twenty-seven forecasting issues were used as the research questions to collect the data from a sample group of experts in the tourism and hospitality industry, and this data will be used for the analysis in this research.

3.2. Sample and Data Collection

3.2.1. Sample Characteristics and Sample Size

In this study, the sample group was comprised of high-level managers in tourism- and hospitality-related organizations, which were classified into seven groups: hotels, airlines, travel agencies, duty-free department stores, foreign tourism organizations, and Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing, and Exhibitions business groups (MICE). All high-level executives in this study could be considered as experts in the tourism and hospitality industry in Thailand. The sample size of the expert group should be at least seventeen people in order to minimize the deviation and to ensure that it is large enough for accuracy and reliability in the research [27]. Moreover, Galanis [28] and Habibi, Sarafrazi, and Izadyar [29] suggested that an expert group of between 15 and 20 people is acceptable in the Delphi method.

In this research, firstly, the researchers contacted top managers to invite them to participate in the survey. Twenty-six executives from twenty-six organizations in all seven groups agreed to participate. The number of participants in this study is above the minimum requirement for the sample size in the Delphi method. The sample consists of six hotels, five airlines, five travel agencies, one duty-free department store, two government tourism organizations, three foreign tourism organizations operating in Thailand, and four MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) organizations.

3.2.2. Data Collection

In this research, the Delphi technique was employed to collect data by using high-level executives working in the tourism and hospitality industry in Thailand as the respondents. After receiving their confirmation to participate in this research, the questionnaires were distributed to the participants. In the first round of data collection, twenty-six organizations returned the questionnaires. The list of those participants' profiles is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Details of Experts and Years of Work Experience.

Category	Respondent	Position	Experience (Years)
Hotel	Hotel 1	Sales Manager	12
	Hotel 2	Public Relation Senior Staff	6
	Hotel 3	Sales Senior Staff	10
	Hotel 4	Sales Manager	20
	Hotel 5	Human Resource Manager	17
	Hotel 6	Director of Marketing	8
Airline	Airline 1	Director of Marketing	15
	Airline 2	Director of Sales	12
	Airline 3	Director of Marketing	8
	Airline 4	Director of Sales	7
	Airline 5	Director of Marketing	9
Tour Operator	Tour Operator 1	Sales and Marketing Director	6
	Tour Operator 2	Sales Director	7
	Tour Operator 3	Sales and Marketing Manager	12
	Tour Operator 4	Human Resource Manager	22
	Tour Operator 5	Sales and Marketing Director	19
Duty-free Department Store	Department Store 1	Public Relation Manager	7
Government Tourism Organization	Government 1	Director	8
	Government 2	Director	14
International Tourism Organization	International 1	Human Resource Manager	7
	International 2	Public Relation Manager	10
	International 3	Public Relation Manager	14
MICE Organization	MICE 1	Director of Sales	15
	MICE 2	Director of Sales	13
	MICE 3	Director of Sales	12
	MICE 4	Director of Sales and Marketing	14

The questionnaire used in this study asked participants to rate the importance level of fifteen core and twelve supporting events or activities which may have impacts on the tourism development of Thailand in the future. The respondents can rate the score from 1 to 5, which means least important to most important, respectively. To interpret the rating data, the range of scores and their importance levels are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Range and Importance Levels of Events or Activities.

Range of Mean Score	Importance Level
1.00–1.80	Not Important
1.81–2.60	Somewhat Important
2.61–3.40	Important
3.41–4.20	Quite Important
4.21–5.00	Critically Important

Once the first-round data were returned, descriptive statistics were performed, including percentage, mode, and mean. Those results were presented in tables and sent back to the experts for the second-round evaluation. In the second round, the participants could see the mean scores of all executives' ratings, and then made a second consideration for each event or activity, rating each item again for what degree from 1 to 5 they agreed with each item (event or activity). After the second round of data collection, a consensus was achieved. The findings for the tourism forecast and direction for sustainable tourism development are shown in the results section.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Core Events or Activities in Thai Tourism Forecasting

The data collected from the sample group of twenty-six participants in the first and second rounds were analyzed by computing the mean scores of each core event or activity in tourism development in Thailand. The results of both rounds are shown in the following Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Scores of Importance Level of Core Events or Activities.

Events/Activities	Round	Mean Score
Thailand is an affordable tourism destination for both low- and high-end economic groups.	First Round	4.85
	Second Round	4.96
Thailand is becoming a cultural center of the region.	First Round	4.69
	Second Round	4.81
Sustainable revival of traditional activities (e.g., “Floating Market”, “100-Year-old Market”, etc.) in Thailand.	First Round	4.65
	Second Round	4.85
Hotel and restaurant managers in Thailand require more specialized and formal educational training.	First Round	4.54
	Second Round	4.04
Thailand is becoming a major tourist center of the world.	First Round	4.42
	Second Round	4.31
Thailand will have effective organizational structure and management systems (e.g., disaster planning, security, training, etc.) to develop and sustain the tourism industry.	First Round	4.38
	Second Round	3.88
Creative tourism is becoming a new era of the tourism industry.	First Round	4.35
	Second Round	4.27
Thailand will have effective tourism development programs with continuous improvement.	First Round	4.42
	Second Round	4.15
Thailand is gaining an image as a shopping paradise in this region.	First Round	4.23
	Second Round	4.
Thailand is becoming a hub for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE).	First Round	4.12
	Second Round	4.19
Thailand is becoming a destination for short training courses (e.g., golf classes, cooking classes, etc.).	First Round	4.04
	Second Round	3.96
Thailand is becoming an agro-tourism destination in the region.	First Round	3.65
	Second Round	3.42
Thai tourism packages are attractive in the region.	First Round	3.46
	Second Round	3.62
Thailand is becoming a long-stay destination in the world (e.g., for foreign retirees).	First Round	3.46
	Second Round	3.23
Thailand’s general tourism information is updated and easy to access.	First Round	3.42
	Second Round	3.19

In Table 3, among the 15 items of core events or activities in the Thai tourism forecasting gained from the participants in the first round, the rankings of the most important events were the same in both rounds, whereas the rankings of the second most important ones were different. The discussions of the two most important items are as follows:

1. Thailand is an affordable tourism destination for both low- and high-end economic groups (Mean = 4.96).

From the second round of data collection, the sample group assessed the question of “Thailand is an affordable tourism destination for both economical and high-end groups” as being critically important, with a mean = 4.96, which is the highest mean in this research. The mean increased slightly from 4.85 in the first session of data collection to 4.96. Kaosa-

ard [30] stated that Thailand is a world-famous tourism destination for tourists from both low- and high-end economic groups, and there are many tourism spots and accommodations to meet the needs of each group of tourists. This can attract all groups of foreign tourists from around the world to travel to Thailand. Bangkok ranked first for the world's most visited destinations for several reasons, including its superior economic value [31]. Moreover, Thailand is famous for its good value and low travel costs; for example, Thailand was chosen by the readers of Lonely Planet India [32] to be the best value destination. This supports the result in this research that Thailand is an affordable tourism destination for both low- and high-end economic groups.

2. Sustainable revival of traditional activities (e.g., "Floating Market", "100-Year-Old Market", etc.) in Thailand (Mean = 4.85).

From the second round of data collection, the sample group assessed the question of "Sustainable revival of traditional activities (e.g., "Floating Market", "100-Year-Old Market", etc.) in Thailand" as being critically important (Mean = 4.85, increased slightly from 4.65 in the first round of the data collection. The sustainable revival of traditional activities is also very important to attract tourists to travel in the local community. For example, Samchuk Market in Suphanburi Province is considered as a traditional market, and it has faced several crises and difficulties during of the development of the country. For instance, in the past, transportation and traveling by boats in the river was popular; however, in 1967, there were new roads built to Suphanburi that allowed more people to travel by car, and this impacted the popularity of Samchuk Market [33]. Later, local people in Samchuk Market tried to restore and develop the market again in 2000 by maintaining the traditional style of the market, which won the Samchuk Market community many tourism awards [33]. The study of Suwannasi and Intarat [34] indicated that the spectacular cultural aspects of local identities, environments, and ways of life of the local people can attract a large number of tourists to Taling Chan and Bang Num Phueng Floating Markets, which are the most famous floating markets for cultural tourism in Thailand. In addition, the preservation and restoration of local cultures and traditions can develop into economic resources for the community and can develop the potential of the local community for competition at national and global levels in the future [35,36].

In contrast to the top two events, the two least important core events or activities in both rounds of experts' rating remained the same, as presented in Table 3. These two items are the following:

1. Thailand's general tourism information is updated and easy to access (Mean = 3.19).

From the second round of data collection, the sample group assessed the item of "Thailand's general tourism information is updated and easy to access" as being important (Mean = 3.19), and the mean was decreased from 3.42 from the first round of the data collection to 3.19. Up-to-date tourism information will make the process of buying products and services more convenient. The provision of relevant and up-to-date tourism information enables tourists to use such information for their travel planning. In addition, tourists can also access tourism information from various advertisements on printed media and from information on websites. Airlines, travel agencies, hotels, and shops develop their own websites or mobile applications to serve and respond to the needs of tourists swiftly [37].

2. Thailand is becoming a long-stay destination in the world (e.g., for foreign retirees) (Mean = 3.23).

From the second round of data collection, the sample group assessed the question of "Thailand is becoming a long-stay destination in the world (e.g., foreign retirees)" as being important (Mean = 3.23), and the mean was decreased from 3.46 in the first session of the data collection. Seehawattana [38] stated that Thailand is an interesting destination for foreign tourists to stay for a short period of time or to live permanently and is more popular compared to other countries in Southeast Asia. Foreign residents from all over the world stay in the leading cities in Thailand such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai; furthermore, there was an increase in the buying of real estate in Thailand by foreigners; for example, 31% of condominiums in Bangkok were sold to foreign residents, and the nationalities that bought

the highest proportion of those condominiums are English, American, Singaporean, Hong Kong, and French, in that order. This supports the result in this research that Thailand is becoming a long-stay destination in the world (e.g., for foreign retirees).

4.2. Supporting Events or Activities in Thai Tourism Forecasting

Similar to the data collection of core events or activities discussed earlier, in both round one and two, the twenty-six participants in our sample were asked to rate the importance level of supporting events or activities. The mean scores of each supporting event or activity on tourism development in Thailand are shown in Table 4 as follows.

Table 4. Mean Scores of Importance Level of Supporting Events or Activities.

Events/Activities	Round	Mean Score
Political instability in this region is affecting the flow of tourists to this region.	First Round	4.62
	Second Round	4.81
The ASEAN is successfully accepted as a single travel destination.	First Round	4.58
	Second Round	4.81
Destination Management Organizations (DMO) can protect the local environment, heritage, and culture of their communities.	First Round	4.35
	Second Round	3.88
Online social networks are becoming the major communication tools for tourism.	First Round	4.15
	Second Round	3.65
An effective transportation system is available throughout tourism destinations nationwide.	First Round	3.96
	Second Round	4.31
Oil prices are directly related to tourism planning.	First Round	3.88
	Second Round	3.54
Much business travel is replaced by video-conferencing technologies and other forms of telecommunications (e.g., satellites, the Internet).	First Round	3.65
	Second Round	4.12
Liberalization of international airline agreements eases travel movement through the country.	First Round	3.46
	Second Round	3.23
Climate change is becoming a barrier to tourism activities.	First Round	3.38
	Second Round	3.58
Major technological advances lower international travel costs to prices affordable to most Thai people.	First Round	3.27
	Second Round	3.15
Border formalities (e.g., visa customs) of most countries are relaxed.	First Round	2.85
	Second Round	2.88
Demand for part-time training programs for people currently employed in the hospitality industry in Thailand will increase substantially.	First Round	2.81
	Second Round	2.88

The ranking of the two most important supporting events or activities in Table 4 are discussed as follows:

1. Political instability in this region is affecting the flow of tourists to this region (Mean = 4.81).

From the second round of data collection, the sample group assessed the question of “Political instability in this region is affecting the flow of tourists to this region” as being critically important (Mean = 4.81), and the mean was increased from 4.62 in the first session of the data collection. Rittichainuwat, Laws, Maunchontham, Rattanaphinanchai, Muttamara, Mouton, and Suksai [39] stated that during times of political turmoil in tourism destinations, many countries issue warnings for their people to avoid traveling for tourism, business, or investment purposes. Moreover, many airlines stop flying to destinations with political problems for security reasons. Ingram, Taberi, and Watthanakhomprathip [40] also supported that the political turbulence in Thailand negatively and heavily affected its tourism and hospitality businesses. This highlights that political stability plays an

important role in tourism, especially in international tourists' destination choices for their trips.

2. The ASEAN is successfully accepted as a single travel destination (Mean = 4.81).

From the second round of the data collection, the sample group assessed the question of "ASEAN is successfully accepted as a single travel destination" as being critically important (Mean = 4.81), and the mean was increased from 4.58 in the first round of the data collection. The ASEAN has already developed the Roadmap for Integration of Tourism Sector, which aims to liberalize the trade in services to facilitate travel in the ASEAN, to develop human resources, to accelerate the liberalization of the tourism sector, to support ASEAN tourism promotion and marketing, and to support tourism investment and tourism standards among the ASEAN countries, providing more benefits to international tourists traveling to the ASEAN. For example, the launch of the ASEAN Single Visa for international travelers can help promote tourism in ASEAN countries under the concept of the ASEAN Single Destination [41]. From Promsivapallop and Kannaovakun [42], popular regions for tourists are East Asia and Southeast Asia, showing the increasing trend of global tourists visiting these regions. Furthermore, Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell [43] found that a large number of international tourists planned their trips across several countries when visiting a certain region, including Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, collaboration among countries in Southeast Asia, and flexibility and connections among these countries, can encourage tourists to travel more to these countries.

In addition, from Table 4, the ranking of the two least important events are discussed as follows:

1. Demand for part-time training programs for people currently employed in the hospitality industry in Thailand will increase substantially (Mean = 2.88).

From the second session of the data collection, the sample group assessed the question of "Demand for part-time training programs for people currently employed in the hospitality industry in Thailand will increase substantially" as being important (Mean = 2.88), and the mean was increased slightly from 2.81 in the first round of data collection. There are many short courses for hotel management and tourism services providing training for interested participants. The available programs in training are offered in both Thai and English languages and aim to increase the potential of the participants, from operators to high-level executives [44].

2. Border formalities (e.g., visa customs) of most countries are relaxed (Mean = 2.88).

The item of "Border formalities (e.g., visa customs) of most countries are relaxed" is considered to be important (Mean = 2.88), and the mean increased slightly from 2.85 in the first round. Thailand exempts the visas for forty-eight countries around the world, and foreign tourists from nineteen countries can obtain a visa on arrival when they visit Thailand, which provides greater convenience for foreign tourists. This relaxation of border formalities helps to increase the number of foreign tourists traveling to Thailand [45].

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

In this study, researchers aimed to forecast the tourism trends in Thailand by implementing the Delphi method. Moreover, the consensus among those twenty-six experts was used to reduce the deviation and obtain consensus among them. From this study, it is clear that Thailand is known as the tourism hub in the ASEAN as a result of the long-established Thai culture and other tourism attractions. Furthermore, Thailand has sufficient tourism resources which can help develop new tourism themes, such as cultural tourism and creative tourism, to attract tourists from all over the world and from both high-income and low-income groups. Furthermore, new themes of tourism can lead to sustainable tourism development in the future, for cultural and festival tourism.

The aspects to be further improved include the provision of education to the new generation of Thai people on contemporary methods in tourism and hospitality management in order to improve the capabilities of the Thai tourism industry. This should be

developed into course syllabi, including diplomas or bachelor's degrees. Additionally, more relaxed policies in visa applications and immigrant investigations would help to increase the revenue from the tourism industry in Thailand. For the technological aspect, improvements in technologies leading to travel cost reductions may increase the number of tourists. New technologies can support the process of airline ticketing or hotel reservations by using social media or mobile applications. It is necessary to develop programs to help personnel gain a better understanding of the use of new technologies and to promote the dissemination of those technologies to the people working in the tourism and hospitality industry.

5.2. Practical Implications

The recommendations in this study are divided into two parts, which are recommendations for business applications and recommendations for government organizations for their supporting policies.

The results in this study provide recommendations for executives in the tourism industry. The opinions from the experts showed that Thailand is a tourism destination for both high-income and low-income tourists. Furthermore, management in the tourism industry in Thailand should consider and initiate various marketing and sales models such as lower tourism package prices in the low season to respond to the tourists' needs and to capture all segments of tourists.

At the government level, the Thai government should support tourism in terms of policies and implementations, such as the human resource development of careers related to tourism in Thailand. There is a large number of foreign tourists traveling to Thailand, however, there is a low number of Thai people who can fluently communicate in English. Even though many Thai people have studied English from kindergarten to degree level, only a small proportion of Thai people can communicate fluently and effectively in English with foreign tourists. Hence, the Thai government should support the study of English language for real-life situations. Moreover, the Thai government should support infrastructure for transportation and communication in Bangkok and other provinces. Transportation in Thailand is still an obstacle for foreign tourists. Providing a variety of transportation modes for international tourists can encourage tourists to visit different parts of the country. In addition, the fast-growing number of low-cost airline services and several mobile platforms to support the movement of tourists, such as Grab, can also help tourists to efficiently travel throughout the country. Furthermore, as the results indicate, greater policy support from government agencies and public organizations is needed, including energy policies, not only for oil prices but also for alternative energies, such as solar or wind energy, to promote the trend of sustainability in the long run. Additionally, liberalization in other types of laws and regulations, including air transportation and ease of obtaining a visa, should be increased to allow for the effective flow of tourists and the efficient usage of resources. Finally, the Thai government should focus on the restoration of Thai culture and promotion of the Thai people to realize their value and continue to maintain Thai culture, since Thai culture is a very important attraction for foreign tourists. In addition, sustainable cultural tourism appears as one of the main aspects of Thai tourist attractions and, therefore, Thai governments and local communities should emphasize the traditions and cultures and promote the celebration of festivals and cultural events. More importantly, promoting cultural tourism can greatly increase the importance of this category of tourism.

5.3. Directions for Future Research

Although this research offered several contributions for managerial implications, some limitations remain. The current research did not study each type of tourism product in detail, only the overall views of tourism activities. Therefore, new and emerging themes of tourism in Thailand may not be captured in the study, such as the areas of virtual tourism. In addition, the nature of this research was cross-sectional and thus the findings

and contributions may not be able to reflect the ever-changing environments in the tourism industry in the next decades.

As described earlier, one limitation in the present study was the lack of in-depth study of specific areas of tourism development. The results of this study reveal that Thailand has a large pool of resources and that those resources are not only in cultural or traditional aspects but also in other aspects, such as MICE. Consequently, the new themes in tourism in Thailand should also be examined; for example, currently, many foreign tourists travel to Thailand for annual physical check-ups in what is called medical tourism, and researchers should conduct more research in forecasting health and medical tourism in order to develop new tourism products and to attract more foreign tourists. In addition, new areas of research, such as creative tourism and medical tourism, should be further investigated. It could be suggested that personal interviews with the group of experts for a more in-depth analysis should be implemented to find more in-depth information about the key concepts of tourism development and growth.

Additionally, future researchers could also conduct quantitative research to investigate the relationships between the concepts identified in the current study, identifying cause–effect relationships among those factors for greater understanding.

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