

# Knowledge Audit for Senior Tourism Standards in Northern Thailand

Pitipong Yodmongkol<sup>1</sup>, Korawan Sangkakorn<sup>1</sup> & Napaporn Reeveerakul<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Knowledge Management Department, College of Arts Media and Technology, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Correspondence: Korawan Sangkakorn, College of Arts Media and Technology, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand. Tel: 66-89-635-0350. E-mail: korawana@gmail.com

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## Abstract

Thailand is a major tourist destination that attracts thousands of national and international tourists each year. Of these many visitors, the number of Thai and international senior tourists visiting various attractions in Thailand is also steadily increasing. Many tourist destinations lie in the Northern Thailand area, but few of these are prepared to serve the specific needs of senior tourists. The objective of this study is to audit important knowledge regarding senior tourist standards in Northern Thailand. This paper uses a Knowledge Management Assessment Tool (KMAT) to conduct a knowledge audit of senior tourist needs and behaviors. The “5 A Criteria” was then developed to evaluate the potential for meeting senior tourism standards of 14 popular tourist attractions in Northern Thailand, specifically focusing on Accessibility, Amenities, Advisory, Atmosphere, and Activities. The results found that the Night Safari, Royal Flora Ratchaphruek Gardens, and Phra Sing temple are attractions with the greatest potential for catering to senior tourism in Northern Thailand.

**Keywords:** knowledge audit, senior tourists, tourism standard

## 1. Introduction

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) estimates that the number of senior tourists will increase in the year 2020, due in part to an increase in the aging population, as well as to socio-demographic trends that predict improvement in the economic and health conditions of the senior population (Alén et al., 2012). As tourism significantly contributes to the Southeast Asian nation of Thailand, it is highly likely that this increase will impact the tourist industry there.

Tourism has brought economic and social benefits to Thailand as a major source of revenue, as well as distributed income to regions and communities. It has also encouraged local people to realize the value of their ethnic arts, culture, natural resources and environment. The government has actively promoted tourism, especially during the economic crisis, as the nation’s economic stimulus. Tourism planning and development are inextricably linked to the economic wellbeing of Thailand.

Thailand is colloquially known as the “Land of Smiles” and is one of “The World’s Top Retirement Havens in 2012” according to the Global Retirement Index. Thailand has the capacity to develop as a senior tourist destination due to Thailand’s strong reputation as an attractive travel site with hospitable people and a variety of tourist attractions and activities.

There were 3.67 million international senior tourists visiting Thailand, comprising 16.45% of the overall tourist population in 2012 (Department of Tourism, 2014) as shown in Figure 1. The number of senior tourists tends to increase every year. Hence, the Thailand tourism industry should be prepared to serve the specific needs of senior tourists.

Thailand is widely recognized as a safe tourist destination with a diversity of attractions. These include diving sites, beaches, tropical islands, night-life, archaeological sites, museums, hill tribes, palaces, Buddhist temples and World Heritage sites. Famous national festivals, such as the Thai New Year festival of Songkran and the Buddhist festival of Loykratong, also draw many tourists every year. Unique activities such as Thai cooking, Thai dancing, Thai massage and Spa, and elephant mahout courses attract tourists as well (Sangkakorn et al, 2011).

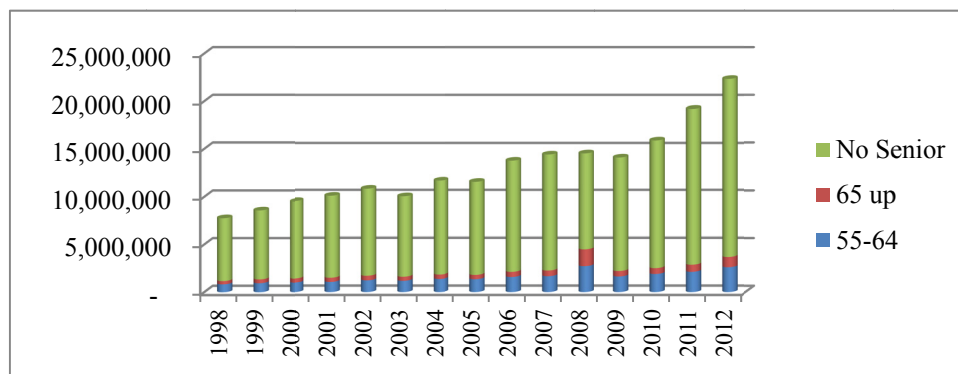


Figure 1. Statistics of International Tourists and International Senior Tourists visiting Thailand between 1998 – 2012

Sources: Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sport (2003 – 2014)

Northern Thailand compose of 8 cities, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphoon, Lampang, Prae, Nan, Payao, Mae Hong Sone. These cities boasts beautiful natural landscapes with various religious temples, diverse ethnic groups and ways of life, unique local architecture and handicrafts, and local food, all of which attract many national and international tourists. The largest concentration of tourist attractions in Northern Thailand is located in or around Chiang Mai, which is considered a gateway city to tourist attractions in rural areas and other provinces in the area.

Tourism facilities in Northern Thailand are generally designed for common tourists, not specific groups such as senior tourists. Ministry of Tourism and Sport promote tourism service for disabilities, senior, families with young children and pregnant woman, but only for service standards and universal services for those with disabilities. This research therefore focuses on understanding the specific needs and behaviors of the senior tourist market, and identifying attractions in Northern Thailand with a high potential for meeting those needs.

Knowledge audit of the senior tourist standard is very useful for examining tourist attractions. KA help the tourism enterprise know what kind of items that they should attention and what it the standard in each items. The research gap is how local enterprise service senior tourists follows senior tourism standard.

The study covers eight cities in Northern Thailand and examines both tourist attractions and the tourism market. The study will be applied to the fields of tourism development and market conception for senior tourists in Northern Thailand. The objective of this study is to audit important knowledge regarding senior tourist standards in Northern Thailand.

## 2. Definition and Assumptions

### 2.1 Senior Tourism

In general, senior tourists have been defined at various ages, with some individuals as young as 50 being included in the senior market, and other benchmarks set at ages 55, 60, or 65. Tourist behavior of the mature market has been found to be similar to the rest of the public, with somewhat lower rates of business and outdoor recreation and higher rates of entertainment related travel (Jafari, 2000). Senior tourists defined as “golden age” (Hsu et al., 2007) or “empty nest tourists,” are retired people who have money and time to travel (Neil, Moisey and Bichis, 1999, Backman et al., 1999, Pearce, 1999, Cleaver, 1999, Astic and Muller, 1999, and Chidchi, 2007). For this paper, ‘*Senior Tourism*’ includes both Thai and international tourists aged 60 years and older who are likely to be active, healthy, and have money and time to travel, and focuses in particular on international tourists visiting Thailand. The reason for using 60 years of age as a benchmark for senior tourists is that most people retire at 60 years of age and special promotions and fees are provided for people who are 60 and older.

## 3. Literature Review

Though there is an abundance of research concerning senior citizens, most of these studies fall within the scope of healthcare, senior activities, or preparations for aging. Currently, there is limited senior tourism research.

### 3.1 Senior Tourism Concept

Senior citizens are not only living longer lives, but also lives of good quality with increased disposable incomes. Senior tourists are becoming an important market segment because of their level of wealth, higher discretionary

income, lower consumer debt, greater free time to spend traveling, and their tendency to travel greater distances and for longer lengths of time (Littrell et al., 2004). They choose to spend a greater percentage of money on travel than younger people (Tourism Queensland, 2002). Seniors are likely to be more experienced travelers and more flexible with regards to travel time, and are often able to travel in off-peak seasons. This is particularly important for those in the tourism industry, as attracting more senior tourists could possibly reduce seasonal fluctuations in tourism.

Compared with other groups, the senior tourist group is a niche market. They spend a greater amount on their travels, such as for high-quality accommodations and transportation, and a large part of their discretionary income on better consumer goods (Pallauf et al., 2004). Senior tourists tend to be more discerning, and demand higher quality services. Health issues may influence travel choices for seniors, and they may need special care and support. Other factors that could influence travel needs and preferences of seniors are gender, income, education levels, employment status, labor force participation, retirement year trends, household structure, and values and attitudes (UNWTO, 2001).

Travel activities of senior tourists are factored into outdoors, cultural, sports and entertainment tourism (Littrell et al., 2004). Senior tourism may also favor tourism sectors including slow tourism, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, meditation tourism, medical tourism, and wellness tourism. From many destination and activities of senior tourists, it's important to explicate with the knowledge management.

### 3.2 Knowledge Management in Tourism

Knowledge Management is an important tool to support organization and destination management because it is connected with the ability to create values and to generate competitive advantage. The knowledge workers in this study are tourism entrepreneurs and local administrators such as provincial local administration office, city municipality. A knowledge management approach should be the underpinning objective for future research agendas so that the increasing intellectual capital in tourism can be transformed into industry competitiveness and sustainability (Ruhanen & Cooper, 2004). The reason for using knowledge management within this study is to develop a strategic plan to enhance competitive advantage in senior tourism within Thailand.

### 3.3 Knowledge Audit

The knowledge audit is one kind of tools of knowledge management. The knowledge audit identifies the core information and knowledge needs and uses in an organization. The knowledge audit also determines gaps, duplications and flow, how they contribute to business goals, and which areas need improvement (Dalkir, 2005 and Hylton, 2004). Additionally, the knowledge audit assesses potential stores of knowledge. Capturing tacit knowledge is an important step of this process (Leibowitz, 1999).

A knowledge audit identifies several issues linked to culture, people, content and process in an organization, such as knowledge sharing bottlenecks, lacks of skills and capabilities, problems of understanding of the strategic value of knowledge and its correct interpretation, and ineffective transfer of expertise.

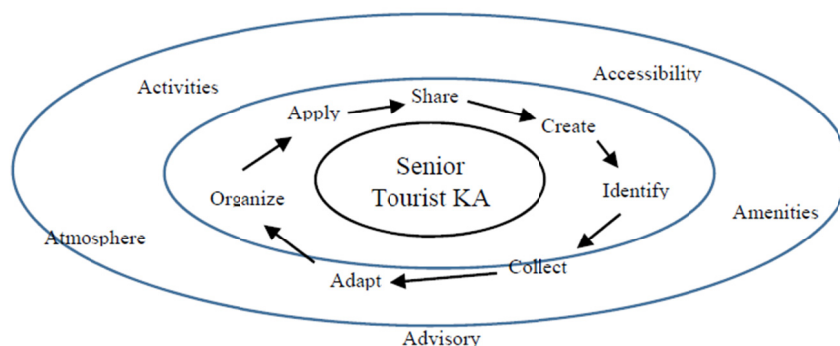


Figure 2. Knowledge Management Assessment Tool (KMAT) Concept

Knowledge audit methods and processes can be found in previous research, such as the Knowledge Management Assessment Tool (KMAT) which was developed by Arthur Anderson (Mertins et al., 2003) the Knowledge Management Diagnostic (KMD) by Bukowitz et al. (1999), and the Knowledge Management Maturity Model

(KMMM), which was developed in the competence center of Knowledge management in Siemens AG. Choy et al. (2004) developed knowledge audit related techniques into pre-audit preparation, in-audit process, and post-audit analysis. Fai et al. (2005) proposed an eight-step knowledge audit approach. It starts with orientation and background study, focused on Knowledge management readiness assessment, organizational culture, knowledge sharing, learning abilities and communication tools, conducted a survey and interviews with experts to collect more qualitative data, and building knowledge inventory. The audit result analysis, knowledge audit reporting and continuous-based knowledge re-auditing are the final steps of knowledge audit (Gourova, 2009).

In this study, a Knowledge Management Assessment Tool (KMAT) was selected as the method by which to assess the information gained through the knowledge audit. This tool was developed specifically for the purposes of this study, and is called the “5 A Criteria”.

### *3.5 Tourism Standard*

Tourism standards, norms and related regulations are strategic policy instruments for the tourism sector. They can ensure the integrity of the national tourism sector, guarantee the sustainability of tourism practices and set strategic priorities. Quality tourism can result in a high level of tourist satisfaction and, at the same time, protect the environment and culture of a destination. However, it is important to understand that the implementation of quality and sustainability standards and norms is a continuing process that needs the involvement and cooperation of all stakeholders along the tourism supply chain (UNWTO, 2015). For this study, a knowledge audit will be used to identify senior tourism standards, and the 5 A Criteria will be used to identify tourist destinations in Northern Thailand with a high potential for meeting those standards.

### *3.6 5 A Criteria for Senior Tourism Destination Standards*

There are many factors that contribute to the success of a tourist destination, such as attractions available, access, accommodations, amenities, awareness, atmosphere, attitude, affordability, authenticity, architecture, and more. Developing a suitable combination of these factors is at the heart of tourism planning.

This study focuses on five “As” by which to assess senior tourism destinations, namely accessibility, amenities, advisory, atmosphere, and activities. These are referred to throughout the paper as “5 A Criteria.”

## **4. Research Methodology**

This study is a qualitative research and utilizes a survey research design that includes document data collection, the development of criteria to determine a destination’s potential for meeting senior tourism standards, a review by field experts, and a tourist attraction survey as shown in the conceptual framework in Figure 2.

### *4.1 Knowledge Audit of Senior Tourists’ Needs and Behaviors*

A knowledge audit of senior tourist needs and behaviors was conducted by reviewing relevant literature and organizing in-depth interviews with 10 Thai and 10 international senior tourists.

### *4.2 Tourist Attractions Database in Northern Thailand*

Data was then collected from various tourist attractions in northern Thailand. Recorded data included names, locations, attractions, accessibility provisions, accommodations, restaurants and shops, and was gathered using different sources such as websites and tourist guidebooks.

### *4.3 Design of the Research Tool Following the 5 A Criteria*

A criteria based research tool was designed to select the attractions that are senior tourist-friendly in Chiang Mai. This includes taking into account senior tourists’ traveling behaviors, physical factors, and social factors, and are related to 4 enabling factors; accessibility, amenities, attractions, and support facilities in neighboring areas. Data was then collected from various tourist attractions in Chiang Mai.

Following the data collection, the 5 A Criteria research tool was designed, which focuses on the following issues:

- 1) Accessibility: ease of traveling time and conditions. Seniors may be averse to long periods of traveling, many transfers, rough and extremely adventurous routes, and uncomfortable and crowded vehicles
- 2) Amenities: availability of parking lots, roads, footpaths, activity areas, signs, rest areas, restrooms, first-aid rooms, etc.
- 3) Advisory: senior tourists need advisory more than other tourists in each step; between travel, before meals, before go to bed.

- 4) Atmosphere; the quality of the landscape, climate, activities, nature, historical attractions, and arts and culture
- 5) Activities; promoting leisure or special interest such as traditional folk activities, health activities, drawing, pottery, and religious activities.

The senior tourist standards were then rechecked with specialists from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, academics from institutes which offer courses in tourism research, delegates from tourism enterprises and service providers, local administration organizations, communities with attraction sites, and senior tourists in order to collectively deliberate and improve the criteria and prepare to evaluate.

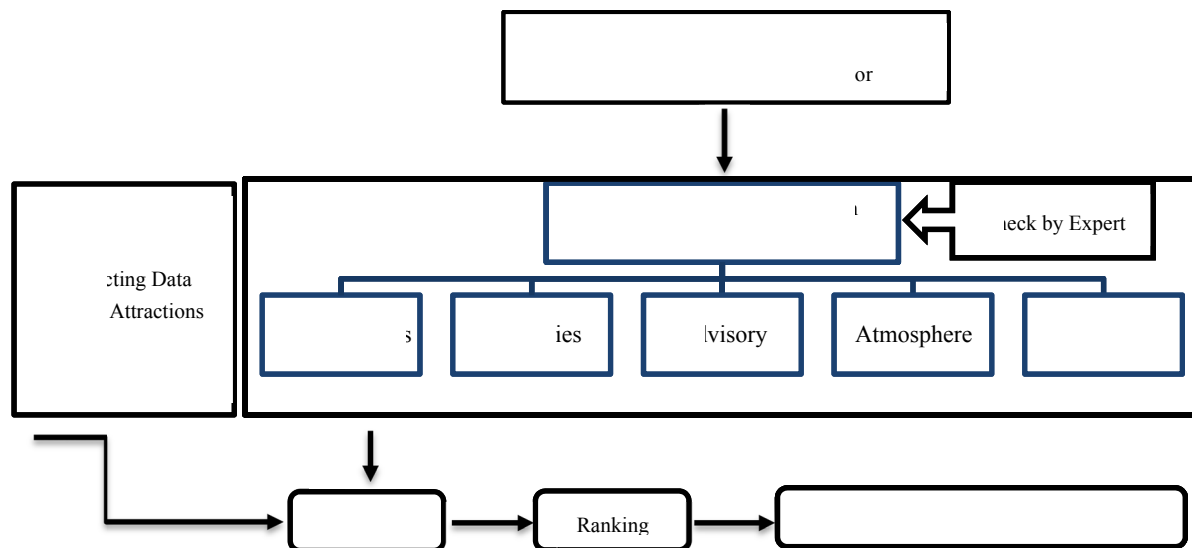


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

Field trips were taken to evaluate the potential of senior tourism attraction sites screened using the above criteria. Using this methodology will consequently find high-potential senior tourism attractions of each city.

Senior tourist attraction standard criteria form use as research tools were then used to collect data and evaluate each tourist attraction's potential. Each factor was rated using a score range of 0-5 according to the appropriateness for senior tourists.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Knowledge Audit of Senior Tourists' Needs and Behaviors

The results of knowledge audit found that the main purposes of travelling for senior tourist respondents included relaxation, enjoying nature, refreshing their minds by meditation and prayer, visiting old friends in a different environment, and learning about the culture, customs, and lifestyle of local people in tourist attraction where they travel.

In regards to chosen modes of transportation, the results found that Thai senior tourist respondents often selected private cars and vans. International senior tourist respondents tended to travel around using commercial vans and buses. Both Thai and international senior travelers prefer special accommodations such as safety belts in cars, additional steps to help in boarding a bus, and sun shades and umbrellas to provide relief from the hot weather.

Both Thai senior tourist and international senior tourist respondents needed convenient lavatory facilities, especially those with a non-slip surface with grab bars. They preferred separate beds when sharing a room, even with their spouse, as this can help alleviate sleeping problems. Respondents also reported a need for a comfortable bed and bedding, and a preference for a large room with shelves or tables. A minibar and small electric kettle are also necessary room items according to senior tourist respondents.

Thai and international senior tourist respondents often reported suffering from health problems such as high blood pressure or heart disease, and approximately 60% reported bringing their own medicine while traveling. However, Thai and international senior tourist respondents also reported that they are easily mobile. Senior

tourists expect that tour providers will help to take care of them while travelling, such as reminding them to take medicine before and after meals. Some international senior tourists reported that they knew about health and wellness tourism in Thailand, and planned to seek out those services on their travels.

*5.2 Tourist Attractions Database in Northern Thailand*

From the results found 245 tourist attractions in Northern Thailand (8 provinces; Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Lamphoon, Lampang, Prae, Nan, Payao, Mae Hong Sone) where match with senior tourism. Then, tourism entrepreneurs, including tour operators and guides, were consulted and asked to select popular tourist attractions for senior tourists. Fourteen tourist attractions were selected, including seven popular temples (Phra Sing Temple, Suan Dok Temple, Doi Suthep Temple, Che Di Luang Temple, Umong Temple, Phra Thad Sri Jom Thong Temple in Chiang Mai province and Phu Min Temple, only one temple from Nan province), two museums (Chiang Mai City Arts and Culture Center and Darapirom Museum), two man-made attractions (Night Safari and Royal Flora Ratchaphruek), Wieng Kum Kam Historical Site, San Kam Phaeng Hot Spring, and a Wat Ket community.

**6. Design of the Research Tool Following the 5 A Criteria**

After analyzing senior tourist needs and behaviors and performing the knowledge audit, an evaluation was conducted in accordance with the 5 A Criteria, as depicted in Figure 2. Specific factors within the 5 A Criteria are as follows:

- A1: Accessibility - Distance, Road Surface, Route, and Traffic Sign
- A2: Amenities - Parking, Information Center, Sign, Seat, Toilet, First Aid Room, Shop, Souvenir, Food /Restaurant, Free Wifi, Lighting, and Waste disposal.
- A3: Advisory - Tourism staff, Security, and Local Guide.
- A4: Atmosphere - Scenario, View, Nature, Traditional, Lifestyle, History, Story to tell.
- A5: Activities – Arrangement of activities for seniors, learning about local traditions and lifestyles, Learning about health and wellness, and Learning about history.

Table 1. 5 A senior tourism standard criteria

Accessibilities	Amenities	Advisory	Atmosphere	Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distance</li> <li>• Road Surface</li> <li>• Route</li> <li>• Traffic Sign</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parking</li> <li>• Information Center</li> <li>• Pathway</li> <li>• Sign</li> <li>• Seat</li> <li>• Toilet</li> <li>• First Aid Room</li> <li>• Shop, Souvenir, Food restaurant</li> <li>• Free Wifi</li> <li>• Lighting</li> <li>• Waste</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism staff</li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Local Guide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scenario, View, Nature</li> <li>• Tradition, Lifestyle</li> <li>• History, Story to tell</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrangement of activities for seniors</li> <li>• Learning about local traditions and lifestyles</li> <li>• Learning about health and wellness</li> <li>• Learning about history</li> </ul>

**7. Senior Tourism Potential of Selected Attractions in Northern Thailand**

Using the 5 A Criteria, 14 tourist attractions were evaluated and ranked on their potential as a popular senior tourist destination. The result found that Chiang Mai Night Safari ranked first, with high scores in all factors due to this is a new man made destination and good for universal design. Ranked in second place was the Royal Flora Ratchaphruek Gardens where man made destination, and in third was the Phra Sing temple. In fourth place were the Chiang Mai City Arts and Culture Center, Suan Dok Temple, and Doi Suthep Temple as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Potential of senior tourism destinations in northern Thailand

Destination	Rank	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	Total
Chiang Mai Night Safari	1	38.0	43.5	15.0	16.0	13.0	125.5
Royal Flora Ratchaphruek	2	37.0	39.5	13.0	16.0	11.0	116.5
Phra Sing Temple	2	38.5	38.0	9.0	16.0	15.0	116.5
Chiang Mai City Arts and Culture Center	3	34.5	41.0	9.5	14.5	16.5	116.0
Suan Dok Temple	4	34.5	41.0	9.5	14.5	16.0	115.5
Doi Suthep Temple	4	34.0	40.5	9.5	15.5	16.0	115.5
Wat Ket Community	4	34.5	40.5	9.5	14.5	16.5	115.5
Darapirom Museum	5	34.0	41.0	9.5	14.5	15.5	114.5
Wieng Kum Kam Historical Site	5	34.0	40.5	9.5	14.5	16.0	114.5
Phu Min Temple, Nan	5	34.0	40.5	9.5	14.5	16.0	114.5
Che Di Luang Temple	6	37.0	37.0	9.0	16.0	15.0	114.0
Umong Temple	7	31.5	34.0	6.5	15.5	14.0	101.5
Phra Thad Sri Jom Thong Temple	8	29.5	31.0	7.0	17.0	15.5	100.0
San Kam Phaeng Hot Spring	9	27.5	32.5	7.0	16.0	16.0	99.0

## 8. Discussion

This study showed that a knowledge audit employing a Knowledge Management Assessment Tool (KMAT) is useful in understanding more about senior tourist services and need. This study find the standards and the potential of various destinations in meeting those standards. The major findings of this study included the needs and behaviors of Thai and international senior tourists, which is critical knowledge for effective tourism management. Senior tourists need easy access to their chosen destination via a good road and not far from their accommodations. They need more amenities than others tourists, such as sitting areas, pathways, toilets, and first aid rooms. Advisory factor, such as guide and tourism staff, are necessary for senior tourists due to they need special care, special service, remind them for take drug and take care them when travelling. The destination's atmosphere is also significant, particularly in serving the nostalgic tendencies reported by some senior tourists. Activities are important, especially those that involve learning about the local traditions and lifestyle, health and wellness, or history.

## 9. Conclusion

Follow the purpose of this study, the 5 A Criteria was developed as a tool to evaluate how well tourist destinations respond to the needs of senior tourists. The utilization of the 5 A Criteria allowed for the identification of several tourist destinations in Northern Thailand with a high potential for meeting senior needs. The novelty of this study are 5 A Criteria, which could also be used to assess tourist destinations in other areas to begin to prepare for and draw in the increasing senior tourist market. Further research should focus on how to develop the potential of these tourist destinations to ensure their attractiveness to the senior market.

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