

การเห็นการณั้ไกลของนักท่องเที่ยวที่มีต่อสัตว์ป่าและอุทยานแห่งชาติใน  
ภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย

**Tourists' Perceptions of Wildlife and National Parks  
in Northern Thailand**

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**ABSTRACT**

Using questionnaires, 967 tourists (490 foreigners, 477 Thais) were asked about their attitudes towards wildlife and national parks in northern Thailand. Both Thais and foreigners ranked wildlife conservation and protection of watersheds as more highly important functions of national parks than tourism and recreation. Most tourists thought that construction of tourist facilities such as roads and hotels should not be permitted within national parks. Tourists were prepared to pay high prices for guided day treks to see wildlife in their natural habitats. The mean prices suggested by foreigners and Thais respectively were 371 baht and 321 baht to see elephants, 280 baht and 230 baht to see gibbons and 287 baht and 260 baht to see Thailand's largest flower. Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon were the most popular parks in the North. The most preferred activities by visitors to these national parks were walking along forest trails and visiting waterfalls. Touring by motor vehicles was not very popular. More than half of visitors to Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon were satisfied with existing accommodation, transport facilities and walking trails, but most complained about the lack of information and facilities for viewing wildlife. Most visitors to both parks thought they had been spoilt by deforestation, pollution and tourism development. To satisfy the demands of tourists, no development of roads or large hotels in national parks is necessary. Instead, tourism development should concentrate on providing better information and facilities for viewing wildlife (guided treks, hides, salt licks etc.) Forest restoration and garbage removal are also priorities.

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## บทคัดย่อ

จากการออกแบบสอบถามนักท่องเที่ยวทั้งหมด 967 คน (ชาวต่างประเทศ 490 คน คนไทย 477 คน) ในเรื่องเกี่ยวกับสัตว์ป่าและอุทยานแห่งชาติในภาคเหนือของประเทศไทย ทั้งคนไทยและชาวต่างประเทศได้จัดอันดับหน้าที่ของอุทยานแห่งชาติโดยให้ความสำคัญกับการอนุรักษ์สัตว์ป่าและการป้องกันแหล่งต้นน้ำลำธารมากกว่าด้านการท่องเที่ยวและสันตนาการ นักท่องเที่ยวส่วนใหญ่คิดว่าควรให้ความสำคัญกับการสร้างถนนและโรงแรมไม่ควรได้รับอนุญาตให้กระทำในเขตอุทยานแห่งชาติ นักท่องเที่ยวพร้อมที่จะจ่ายเงินจำนวนมากต่อวันในการว่าจ้างผู้นำทางพาไปเที่ยวชมสัตว์ป่าที่อยู่ในสภาพธรรมชาติ เฉลี่ยราคาที่เสนอโดยชาวต่างประเทศและคนไทยคือ 371 บาท และ 322 บาท เพื่อดูช้าง 280 บาท และ 230 บาท เพื่อดูฝูงชนนี และ 287 บาท 260 บาท เพื่อดูดอกไม้ใหญ่ที่สุดในประเทศไทยตามลำดับ ดอยสุเทพและดอยอินทนนท์เป็นอุทยานแห่งชาติที่เป็นที่นิยมไปเที่ยวในภาคเหนือ กิจกรรมส่วนใหญ่ของผู้มาเยือนในอุทยานแห่งชาติเหล่านี้คือ การเดินไปตามเส้นทางในป่าและชมน้ำตก การท่องเที่ยวโดยรถจักรยานยนต์ ไม่เป็นที่นิยมมากนัก กว่าครึ่งหนึ่งของผู้มาเยือนดอยสุเทพและดอยอินทนนท์ได้รับความพอใจในเรื่องสถานที่พัก ความสะดวกในการคมนาคมและทางเดินในอุทยานที่มีอยู่แล้ว แต่ส่วนใหญ่บ่นเกี่ยวกับการขาดแคลนข้อมูลและความสะดวกในการชมดูสัตว์ป่า ผู้มาเยือนอุทยานแห่งชาติทั้ง 2 แห่งคิดว่าอุทยานถูกทำลายโดยการตัดไม้ทำลายป่า มลภาวะและการขยายตัวทางการท่องเที่ยว เพื่อให้เป็นที่พอใจตามความต้องการของนักท่องเที่ยว ไม่จำเป็นต้องมีการขยายถนนหรือสร้างโรงแรมใหญ่ในอุทยานแห่งชาติ การพัฒนาการท่องเที่ยวควรมุ่งไปที่การเตรียมข้อมูลและให้ความสำคัญในการดูสัตว์ป่าให้ดีกว่านี้ (ทางเดินป่า ห้างแอบดูสัตว์ แหล่งหากินของสัตว์ ฯลฯ) แทนที่จะทำอย่างอื่น การปลูกป่า และการกำจัดขยะก็เป็นสิ่งที่ควรทำเป็นอันดับแรกด้วย

## INTRODUCTION

One of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry is that of "eco-tourism", whereby tourists visit undisturbed natural areas to experience spectacular scenery and view wildlife. Such tourism generates very large profits, since eco-tourists are often prepared to pay high prices for modest accommodation. Capital investment and infrastructure requirements are therefore low. It is estimated that US\$ 25 billion per year flows from developed to less developed countries through eco-tourism (Whelan, 1988).

Thailand, with its extensive national parks system, is an ideal location for such tourism. The revenue generated could potentially make national parks financially self-supporting. If local villagers had a share in the profits (perhaps by providing accommodation and guides) the standard of living in impoverished rural areas would be increased. Encroachment, logging and hunting would be deterred, since these would threaten tourism earnings and the risk of culprits being discovered would be increased in areas frequented by tourists. Eco-tourists and villagers alike would become better educated in conservation issues and would therefore be more likely to campaign for the protection of national parks, when they are threatened by destructive activities.

However, tourism development within national parks must be carried out with the greatest of care, if it is not to damage forests and wildlife or destroy the sense of wilderness which most eco-tourists seek. Many inappropriate facilities have been built or proposed in Thailand's national parks, ostensibly to promote tourism: Koh Samet's bungalow resorts; Khao Yai's golf course; the Doi Suthep cable car system etc. Such development is inconsistent with the main function of national parks which is to conserve forests, wildlife and unique scenery (Kasetsart University, 1987). Nor does it take into consideration the preferences of the tourists themselves, since little data are available about what tourists expect from national parks.

This paper provides such data. It describes the results of a survey of nearly 1,000 tourists in northern Thailand and shows that the tourists themselves believe that within national parks, conservation must take priority over tourism development.

## METHODS

The survey was carried out during public holidays in July-August over four consecutive years from 1989 to 1992. Nine hundred and sixty seven tourists (490 foreigners and 477 Thais) leaving Chiang Mai via the airport, bus or railway stations at the end of their vacation filled in printed questionnaires. The first sheet of the questionnaire dealt with general opinions concerning the functions of national parks and how much tourists would be prepared to pay to see certain types of wildlife in their natural habitats. The second sheet was completed only by those tourists who had actually visited a national park during their holiday in northern Thailand. It covered questions concerning their activities in the parks and their satisfaction with facilities provided and the condition of the park. Responses of the tourists were analyzed using the LOTUS spreadsheet package.

## RESULTS

By sampling at the airport, bus and railway stations, the survey covered all income groups fairly evenly. Both sexes were also more or less equally represented (Table. 1.). The age distribution of both Thai and foreign tourists peaked in the 20-30 years age group. Most foreign tourists came from Europe (63.2 %) followed by America (16.9 %), Australasia (9.8 %) and Asia (7.3 %).

The survey demonstrated immense public support for the concept of national parks. Ninety two per cent of foreigners and 90 % of Thais disagreed with the statement: "National parks are wasted land and should be used to grow food instead."

To determine tourists' awareness of national parks in northern Thailand, they were asked to name up to 3 parks. Sixty eight per cent of foreigners couldn't name a single national park in northern Thailand and only 22 % could name one, whereas 43 % of Thais could name 2 and 17 % could name 3.

The tourists were asked to score four functions of national parks in order of importance with 1 = most important to 4 = least important. Foreigners thought that wildlife conservation was the most important function of national parks with protection of watersheds a close second (Table 2.). Thais ranked wildlife conservation and watershed protection as more or less equally highly important. Both Thais and foreigners ranked tourism and recreation as less important.

The tourists' belief that tourism is of secondary importance compared with conservation was confirmed when they were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "Construction of tourist facilities e.g. roads, hotels etc. should be allowed in national parks". Eighty four per cent of foreigners and 76 % of Thais disagreed.

One of several ways to determine the potential economic value of wildlife is to determine how much tourists would pay to see it. The tourists were asked how much they would be prepared to pay for a guided day trip to see i) elephants, ii) gibbons or iii) Thailand's largest flower (80 cm in diameter) in their natural habitats. Elephants were, not surprisingly, the most popular. The average price suggested by foreigners was 371 baht, whilst Thais would pay 322 baht. Unexpectedly the botanical curiosity scored higher than gibbons. Foreigners and Thais would pay on average 287 and 260 baht respectively to see it, whereas they would only part with 280 and 230 baht respectively to see gibbons (Fig. 1.). The range of prices suggested was very wide. Some tourists said they were would not pay anything to see these things, whereas others simply wrote "priceless".

Doi Suthep was the most popular national park in Northern Thailand. One in five foreigners and one third of Thais visited it during their holiday in Chiang Mai. Doi Inthanon was second most popular, visited by 5 % of foreigners and 22 % of Thais.

Most visitors went on day trips to these parks, but 13 % of Doi Suthep's visitors and 39 % of Doi Inthanon's visitors stayed for two days or longer. At Doi Suthep most visitors stayed in hotels outside the park, whereas at Doi Inthanon the most popular forms of accommodation were Forestry Department bungalows, followed by camping (27 % and 23 % of visitors respectively).

Tourists engaged in a wide variety of different activities when visiting national parks. At Doi Suthep, not surprisingly, Wat Phra That was the most popular attraction, with 68 % of Doi Suthep's visitors going there, but walking

Table 1. Composition of Tourist Sample Questioned.

	% of Total Thais	% of Total Foreigners
Location		
Airport	30.5	36.6
Railway Station	37.4	37.9
Bus Station	32.0	25.5
Sex		
Males	52.2	51.1
Females	47.2	47.1
No Answer	0.6	1.8

Table 2. Relative Importance of National Park Functions.  
1 = highest importance to 4 = lowest importance

	MEAN SCORE	
	Thais	Foreigners
Wildlife Conservation	1.75 Highly Important	1.36 Highly Important
Watershed Protection	1.73 Highly Important	1.92 Highly Important
Tourism	2.78 Moderate Importance	3.23 Low Importance
Recreation	3.55 Low Importance	3.34 Low Importance

## HOW MUCH WOULD YOU PAY TO SEE.....?

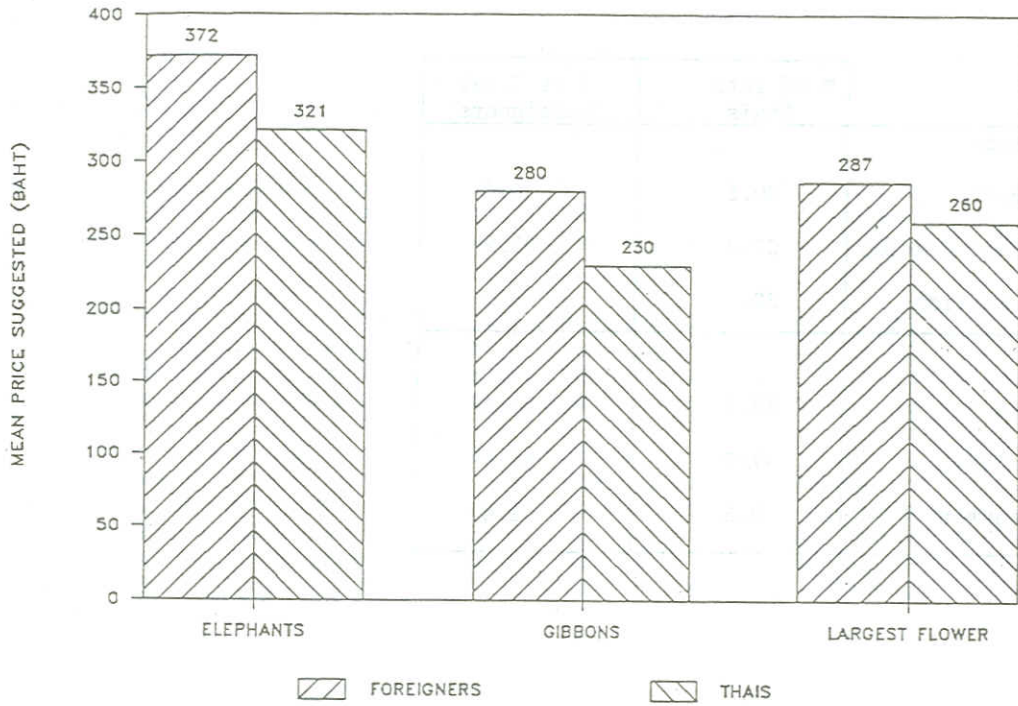
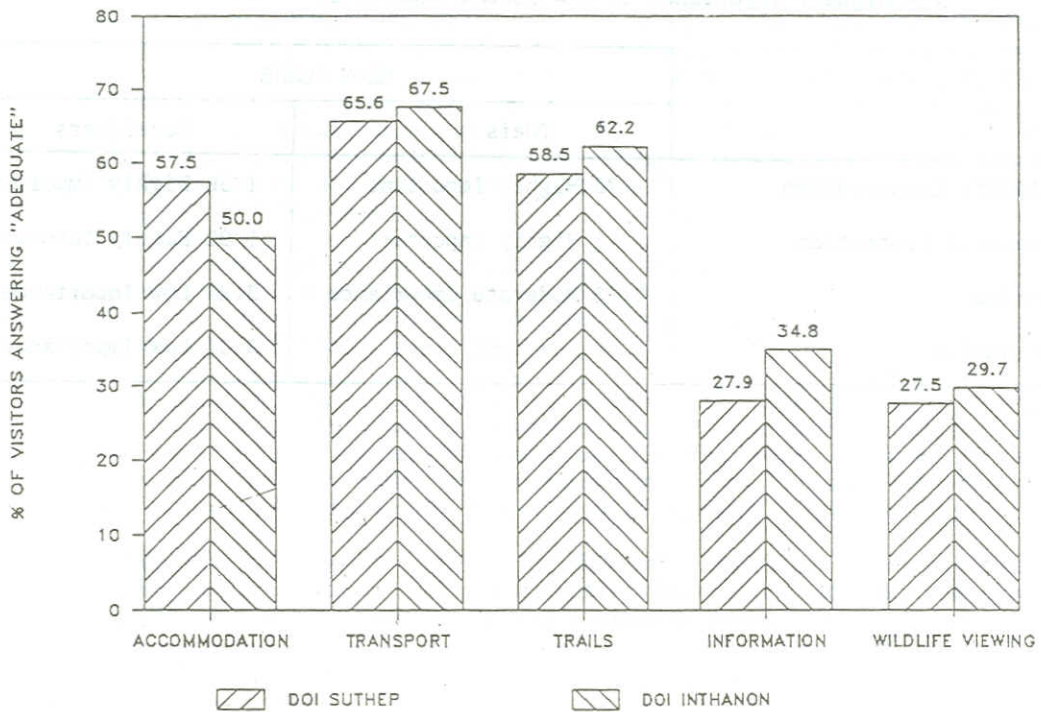


Figure 2.

## SATISFACTION WITH FACILITIES



along forest trails was a close second (66 %) and visiting waterfalls a close third (63 %). Only 43 % of Doi Suthep's visitors included touring by car or motorcycle as among their activities in the national park.

At Doi Inthanon, walking along forest trails and visiting waterfalls were equally the most popular, with 75 % of visitors enjoying these activities. Next came visiting hill tribes at 54 %. Like at Doi Suthep, motoring was not very popular, with only 40 % of visitors including it on their list of activities.

Visitors to national parks were asked to state whether various facilities were "adequate" or "should be improved". More than half of visitors were satisfied with accommodation, transport and the walking trail system at Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon. However, most were clearly dissatisfied with the provision of information (maps and guidebooks) and facilities for viewing wildlife (hides etc.). At Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon respectively only 28 % and 35 % of visitors thought that information provided was adequate and only 27 % and 30 % were satisfied with facilities for viewing wildlife (Fig. 2.).

Tourists were clearly aware of environmental degradation at both parks. The most serious complaint was against garbage dumping. Seventy seven per cent of Doi Suthep's visitors and 80 % of Doi Inthanon's visitors thought that the parks had been spoilt by garbage. Forest loss was also seen as a problem. Sixty nine per cent of Doi Suthep's visitors and 79 % of Doi Inthanon's complained about deforestation. More than half of visitors also felt that the parks had been spoilt by too much tourism development (58 % at Doi Suthep and 56 % at Doi Inthanon).

#### CONCLUSIONS

The above results show widespread support for the concept of national parks. Tourists seem to show great understanding and appreciation of the fact that the primary goal of national parks is conservation and that tourism and the provision of tourist facilities must not interfere with that goal. In fact nearly all tourists believe that construction of tourist facilities e.g. roads and hotels should not be permitted within national parks.

Tourists seem satisfied with existing accommodation facilities at Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon and prefer camping, staying in simple bungalows or in hotels outside the parks. Construction of large or high class hotels at these parks is clearly unnecessary and would probably repel tourists rather than attract them. The data show clearly that there is little demand for such accommodation.

Expansion of road and transport facilities at both Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon is also unnecessary. Road improvement or expansion projects have recently been proposed at both parks, but such projects cannot be justified in terms of satisfying tourist demand. The data show that more than half of visitors (65.6 % at Doi Suthep and 67.5 % at Doi Inthanon) are satisfied with the existing road system. Touring by motor vehicle was far less popular activity than walking along forest trails.

In general, tourists seem to want an educational rather than recreational experience when they visit a national park and tourism development plans for national parks should reflect that demand. The provision of high quality information is clearly necessary. Visitors' centres have been constructed at both Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon but they contain very little information. The provision of maps, guidebooks, audio-visual presentations, exhibitions and competent information officers would go a long way towards satisfying the

demand for better information. The sale of such information could also generate revenue for conservation activities in the parks.

The most serious complaint was the total lack of facilities for viewing wildlife at both Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon. Facilities such as nature trails, short walks with informative guides, hides, salt-licks etc. (MacKinnon et al. 1986) would not only satisfy this demand with low capital investment, but they would have minimum impact on the environment.

Furthermore it seems that many tourists are willing to pay quite a high price to see more wildlife, not only spectacular large mammals but also unusual plants. Nature treks with experienced guides have proved popular at Khao Yai (Brockelman & Dearden, 1990). They have improved the standard of living of villagers and helped to reduce encroachment. Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon may lack the large mammals of Khao Yai, but treks could be devised which concentrate on their diverse bird and plant communities, which already have an international reputation amongst botanists and bird watchers.

Above all, however, tourists want to see an improvement in the condition of the environment at both Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon. Since tourism is one of Chiang Mai's biggest industries and Doi Suthep and Doi Inthanon are main tourist attractions, any further degradation of these parks could have a major impact on the local economy. Projects must be implemented urgently to protect all remaining areas of forest, restore the natural forest ecosystem to degraded areas and remove garbage from the national parks.

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