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Article

High-end domestic tourism management after the crisis: A case study in Thailand

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 heralded a downturn in the Thai economy, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sectors which rely heavily on international tourists. To decrease the dependence of international tourists, this research outlined three objectives as 1) explore and classify the high-end domestic tourism market among 77 provinces in Thailand, 2) study the potential and readiness of tourism resources and tourism products to cater to the demand of high-end domestic tourists, and 3) suggest tourism management approaches for domestic high-end tourists after the crisis. Both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies were applied to achieve the research objectives. Income was used to identify and segment high-end domestic tourists living in 77 provinces in Thailand, while a verified questionnaire collected data from 1200 respondents nationwide. Forty-one experts from different tourism-related agencies at local and regional levels were targeted using purposive sampling techniques, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to acquire qualitative data. High-end domestic tourists, classified by monthly income, were segmented into Silver (50,000–70,000 THB), Gold (70,001–90,000 THB), Diamond (91,001–110,000 THB), and Platinum groups (Over 110,001 THB). These high-end domestic tourists shared both similarities and differences in tourism needs, preferences, and behaviors. Sixteen provinces in six domestic regions demonstrated the potential and readiness of tourism resources and products to satisfy the needs, preferences, and behaviors of high-end domestic tourists.

Keywords: tourism management; high-end tourists; domestic tourism; domestic tourists; tourism crisis; Thailand

1. Introduction

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in China at the end of 2019 severely disrupted global travel and tourism activities (Allan et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2022), and countries that depended on foreign exchange income from international tourism struggled to survive. Thailand relies heavily on international tourists (Saxon et al., 2021), with the tourism industry playing an essential role in the economy (Kariyapol and Agarwal, 2020) as one of the largest contributors to gross domestic product (GDP). In 2019, Thailand welcomed 40 million foreign travelers, generating revenue of 61,571.91 million USD as 11% of the GDP. Jobs in related tourism businesses numbered over 7 million, representing 20% of the total employment in Thailand (Surawattananon et al., 2021). Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted Thailand's tourism industry, with national lockdowns and restrictions on incoming foreign tourists. In 2020, the number of foreign tourists dropped by 83.21%, with only 6,702,396 international visitors coming to Thailand. This sharp decline in tourist arrivals as a result of COVID-19 restrictions reduced tourism income by 81.56% to

11,353.59 million USD. Globally, domestic tourism was promoted to safeguard tourism-related businesses, employment, and income distribution in many countries during the COVID-19 crisis (Arbulu et al., 2021; Chan, 2021; Kvitkova et al., 2021). The Thai Government intensely promoted and supported domestic tourism to compensate for the loss of foreign travelers and tourism revenue and revive the tourism industry. Different measures were deployed to support tourism-related businesses severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic including tax reduction, utility bill reduction, and subsidies for tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs. The government and associated agencies also attempted to boost demand by promoting domestic tourism through several campaigns. These included the launch of the 'We Travel Together' campaign, with the government supporting partial accommodation and transportation expenses for domestic tourists as well as a daily allowance of 25 USD to stimulate the local economy. Advertisements promoting '12 must-visit cities' and '55 must-visit second-tier cities' were also broadly re-launched by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to revitalize the domestic tourism sector. To boost tourists' confidence, TAT, together with the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports and the Thai Ministry of Public Health established the 'Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration: SHA' to certify tourism and hospitality attractions nationwide. The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted tourist behavior, with many preferring to explore nearby destinations free from crowds as they were more concerned about life safety and security. In Thailand, the growth of domestic tourism is strongly associated with the country's middle to upper class population, which has an income surplus after expenditures. Hence, these domestic high-end tourists were targeted to replace international tourists during the crisis.

However, most tourist attractions and accommodations were designed to serve the needs and travel behaviors of international tourists, resulting in disfavor among domestic tourists (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018). Research studies addressing the market segmentation of high-end domestic tourists and their traveling behaviors are rarely found in the academic arena. To fill this research lacuna, three study objectives were set as 1) explore and classify the high-end domestic tourism market among 77 provinces in Thailand, 2) study the potential and readiness of tourism resources and tourism products to cater to the demand of high-end domestic tourists, and 3) suggest tourism management approaches for domestic high-end tourists after the crisis. This research provides useful suggestions for associated agencies to manage high-end domestic tourists. If domestic tourism was strong, Thailand would not be overly dependent on international tourists. This research segmented domestic tourists across 77 provinces in Thailand based on monthly income. Additional insightful data were analyzed to better understand domestic travel behaviors, needs, and preferences. The potential and readiness of tourism resources in each Thai region to match the needs and travel behaviors of segmented high-end domestic tourists were also evaluated. Our results can serve as a basis for developing sustainable domestic high-end tourism in Thailand.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Conceptual framework

The research objectives were to 1) classify the high-end domestic tourism market among 77 provinces in Thailand, 2) study the potential and readiness of tourism resources and tourism products to cater to the demand of high-end domestic tourists, and 3) suggest tourism management approaches for domestic high-end tourists after the crisis to decrease Thailand's dependence on international tourism. The research addressed both the demand side and the supply side. High-end domestic tourists were identified according to the demand side, with the investigation of the potentiality and readiness of tourism resources and tourism products across Thailand as the supply side. Then, the potentiality and readiness of tourism resources were matched with the segmented high-end domestic tourists. **Figure 1** illustrates the research framework.

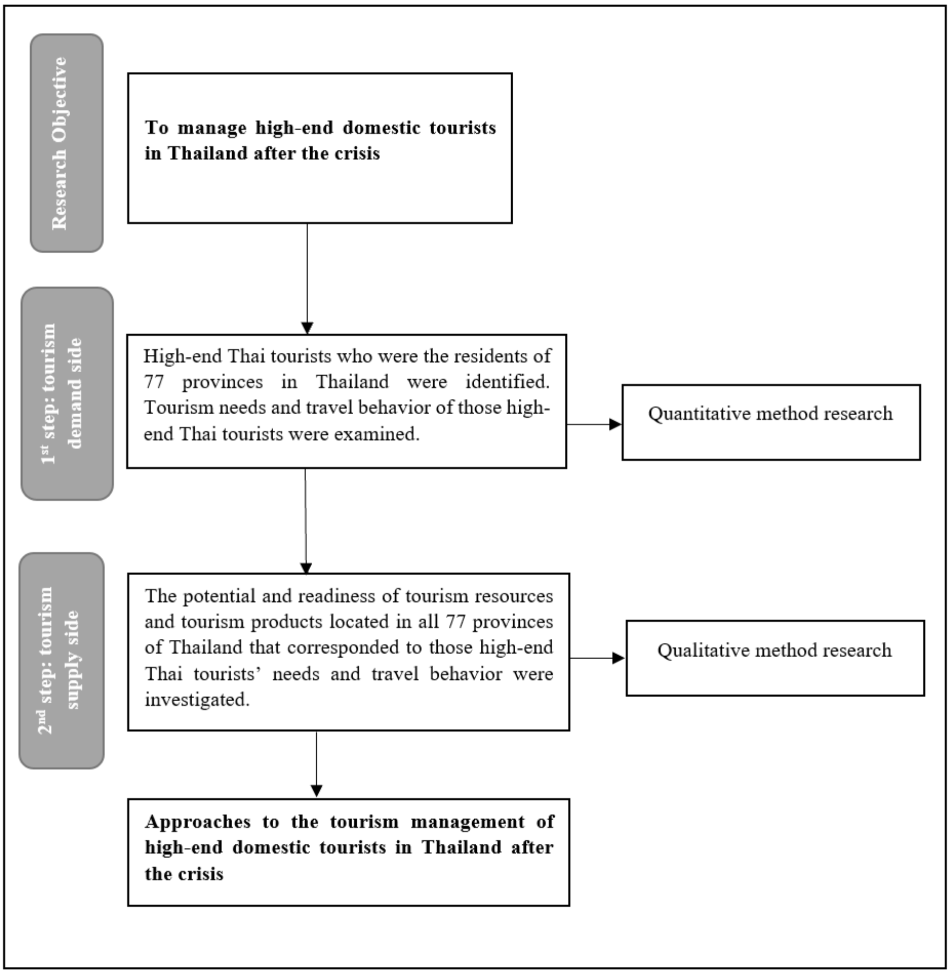

Figure 1. The research framework.

2.2. Materials and methods

The literature reviews reflected Thailand's overall tourism situation with types of tourism and domestic tourism development. Several theoretical concepts were identified and applied in this research including tourists' behaviors, tourism marketing mix, service quality model, and tourism segmentation.

2.2.1. Types of tourism

There are many different types of tourism. Giampiccoli and Saayman (2018), Yanes et al. (2019), and Mayaka et al. (2018) focused on the community-based tourism development model and community participation. Ara et al. (2022), Beksultanova et al. (2021), and Upadhyay (2020) discussed handicraft tourism, which created over one thousand jobs and immense revenues in Kyrgyzstan. Wellness tourism was studied by Andreu et al. (2021), Dillette et al. (2021), Han et al. (2020), and Moriuchi et al. (2024). Wellness tourism blends health, fitness, spirituality, and travel. Thailand has many tourist destinations with different moods and feelings. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) categorizes tourism into three broad types as natural-based tourism, cultural-based tourism, and special-interest tourism. Natural-based tourism consists of ecotourism, marine ecotourism, geotourism, agrotourism, astrological tourism, and responsible tourism. Cultural-based tourism is composed of historical tourism, cultural and traditional tourism, and rural tourism or village tourism. Special-interest tourism includes health tourism, edu-meditation tourism, ethnic tourism, sports tourism, adventure tourism, homestay and farm stay tourism, long-stay tourism, incentive travel, MICE, and mixed tourism. Based on the categorization by UNWTO and geographical strengths, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2010) classified tourism into 12 types including 1) ecotourism, 2) arts and sciences education attraction, 3) historical attraction, 4) natural attraction, 5) recreational attraction, 6) cultural attraction, 7) natural hot spring health tourism, 8) beach attraction, 9) waterfall attraction, 10) cave attraction, 11) island attraction, and 12) rapids tourism. Hence, the concept of the types of tourism determined by the Tourism Authority of Thailand was applied in this research to analyze the potentiality and readiness of tourism products and resources that satisfy the needs and preferences of high-end domestic tourists. This concept reflects the nature of Thailand's tourism environment and was utilized as part of the area categorization for this research.

2.2.2. Domestic tourism development

Domestic tourism plays a significant role in the global tourism industry, accounting for 70% of the spending and travel in the world tourism market (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018). Because of the huge number of international tourists with higher spending power, tourism-related public organizations and agencies, along with tourism marketers, have mainly focused on international tourism (OECD, 2020). Nevertheless, a shift to domestic tourism is always seen in times of crisis to compensate for the loss of international tourists. Oelkers (2007) suggested three approaches to the development of the domestic tourism market as responses to the needs of tourists, market research and forecasting, and the concept of the life cycle of tourism resources. The components of tourism marketing have been continuously developed through integration of the latest communication technologies. In the past, tourism marketing focused primarily on products and services but this has now shifted to consumer-oriented marketing (Amin and Priansah, 2019).

Tourist behavior and market insights are the main factors that can be used to identify the substitution of the tourist market. Khongharn (2017) suggested that high-end tourists could be developed using psychological characteristics based on the concept of the 4Cs. They were divided into three groups comprising reformer, succeeding, and mainstream high-end tourists. The needs of each group were different, requiring diverse marketing strategies. Medical tourism, the Thai sensation of prestige, and the experience of the local chic were marketing strategies that attracted reformers to Thailand. Conversely, the concept of exclusivity appealed to high-end succeeding tourists, while convenience and safety were factors that influenced mainstream high-end tourists to visit Thailand. This group of high-end tourists was wealthy but they did not spend their money extravagantly. The marketing mix was also reviewed because this allows tourism marketers and businesses to reach the target market, and enables companies to communicate with customers about the products or services being offered. This can push and pull customers to purchase products or services. Hence, the marketing mix, known as the 4Ps, product, price, place, and promotion, is essential for marketing activities. Product as the first element of the marketing mix offers utility and value by responding to consumers' needs, leading to customer satisfaction (Charoensettasilp and Wu, 2014). The features of products or services that must be improved and developed should be examined to create value-added services. These features include function, design, quality, packaging, and branding. Price refers to the value or selling price of a product or service, which allows consumers to compare their expectations. Pricing should be reasonable and based on the target market, the cost of production, and competitors' selling prices. The place or channel of distribution relates to the location where a service is provided. This should correspond to a product to create more value for consumers. Promotion, as the fourth element of the marketing mix, is communicated between consumers and service providers to boost sales and build positive attitudes toward a product or service. Promotion is carried out using advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, publicity, public relations, and sales promotions. Copious tourism research has applied marketing mix to explore research outputs with domestic populations including Chan (2021), Nonthapot and Thomya (2020), Noo-urai and Jaroenwisan (2017), Pholphirul et al. (2022), and Praesri et al. (2022). The 4P's marketing mix is reliable in the current context.

Additional elements of the marketing mix as the 3Ps (people, processes, and physical evidence) are needed to cover the characteristics of the services. People are always part of service activities. They interact with customers, not products. Services should be processes provided to customers in a step-by-step manner. Physical evidence, as the last element added to the marketing mix, represents things that could be experienced through the five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. In this respect, service users experience the physical evidence of receiving services. The 3Ps are widely used in tourism and hospitality research because they relate to service providers, service operations, and supporting equipment (Thabit and Raew, 2018).

Laparojkit and Suttipun (2022) investigated customer trust and loyalty on repurchase and intention of domestic tourists, while Fakfare et al. (2020) explored the motivation of domestic tourists in second-tier tourist destinations. Chansuk et al. (2022) studied the factors affecting post-pandemic travel behavior in domestic tourism. However, no marketing segmentations were mentioned among domestic high-end tourists in Thailand. Therefore, this study employed several marketing tools to accurately segment domestic high-end tourists.

2.2.3. Service quality

Service quality evaluation, known as SERVQUAL, has been widely used in a variety of service industries. Parasuraman et al. (1988) analyzed the dimensions and perceptions of service quality. SERVQUAL helps to create a better understanding of service users' needs and what they expect to receive from service providers. Zeithaml et al. (1990) stated that the SERVQUAL model developed successful services by measuring five dimensions of service quality including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tangibility is concerned with physical characteristics such as people, equipment, tools, documents, and symbols. The environment is also considered in the tangibility dimension of quality service. Reliability, as the second dimension, refers to the ability to deliver services to customers as promised and is evaluated in terms of correctness, appropriateness, and consistency. Consistency leads to service reliability, thereby resulting in consumer trust. Responsiveness is the ability and willingness to provide services promptly. Users can easily and conveniently access the service from service providers. Assurance refers to the ability to create confidence among service users. Service providers must be able to show knowledge and demonstrate service skills that respond to the needs of users in a polite and gentle manner. Finally, empathy is the ability to take good care of service users with different needs (Lovelock, 1996; Zeithaml et al., 1990). Bhasin (2021) stated that SERVQUAL can measure service quality and customer satisfaction as a tool for evaluating and developing the service quality of a business. Jaruwit (2023), Rapitasari (2023) and Wijitgomen et al. (2024) concluded that customers' satisfaction, repurchase, and revisit strongly aligned with people, processes, and physical evidence which must have been internally controlled.

2.2.4. Tourism segmentation

Tourism segmentation is a strategic tool that allows those interested in learning to examine the characteristics and needs of tourists (Kuo et al., 2012; Koc and Altinay, 2007; Reid and Bojanic, 2006). Each tourist has different needs, motivations, attitudes, behaviors, age, income, spending patterns, and lifestyles. Segmentation plays an important role in tourism marketing by classifying homogeneous tourists into similar segments. Segments that demonstrated business opportunities were selected and targeted. Segmentation helps to create a competitive advantage, improve and develop revenues, and effectively respond to the needs of tourists who possess certain characteristics that match company products or services (Robinson et al., 2016). Segmentation allows the effective allocation of limited resources by focusing on the right target market (Dolnicar, 2008; Goryushkina et al., 2019; Reid and Bojanic, 2006). Reid and Bojanic (2006) suggested that market segmentation should be substantial, measurable, accessible, and actionable. The four bases for market segmentation are geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioristic (Dolnicar et al., 2018). Geographic segmentation refers to the classification of tourists based on their locations such as country, region, and province. Age, gender, income, occupation, education, religion, and nationality are criteria widely adopted for performing demographic segmentation because different tourists have diverse needs. Psychographic segmentation categorizes tourists into social class, lifestyle, and personality, while behavioral segmentation divides tourists based on knowledge, attitude, and usage or response to a product or service. This research evaluated domestic high-end tourists and applied demographic segmentation by income to identify domestic tourists with an average monthly income of over 50,000 baht across 77 provinces of Thailand, following the definition of high-end tourists by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (Brand Matrix, 2018; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2021).

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to achieve the research objectives.

2.2.5. Quantitative research method

A quantitative research method was employed to identify potential high-end domestic tourists in Thailand to substitute international tourists in times of crisis. The needs and travel behaviors of these high-end Thai tourists were also analyzed.

Population and sample

The research population was high-end domestic tourists aged over 20 years, with monthly income exceeding 50,000 baht. A representative sample size for the study population was also determined. Tourists who qualified for this research were residents in 77 provinces under the city municipality administration comprising more than 1 million Thai people. Most areas in Thailand are considered rural; therefore, the researcher listed the most populated areas in Bangkok and the municipalities in each part of Thailand. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (Special Administration Zone and Bangkok) and 15 city municipalities were found to be eligible for this study. The provinces selected included Khon Kaen, Chonburi, Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Nakhon Ratchasima, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Nakhon Sawan, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Sakon Nakhon, Songkhla, Surat Thani, Udon Thani, and Ubon Ratchathani. The four provinces with two city municipalities were Nonthaburi, Chonburi, Songkhla, and Surat Thani. As of 10 March 2023, 24,414,332 domestic people resided in the special administration and city municipalities, as published in the Royal Gazette by the Bureau of Registration Administration.

Cochran (1977) suggested that when the population number is known, a finite population can be used to obtain a representative sample size. In this study, the sample size was determined based on the formula for a finite population as:

$$n = \frac{z^2pq}{e^2}$$

The calculation suggested 1191 respondents as an appropriate sample size and 1200 questionnaires were distributed to the research targets.

Research instrument

A verified questionnaire was used as the research instrument for data collection from the target respondents who were Thai tourists over 20 years of age with a monthly income of over 50,000 baht. The questionnaire was developed following an extensive review of the existing literature to extract variables indicating high-end domestic tourist behaviors. Then, five experts from the tourism and hospitality fields validated the questionnaire by assessing the Item Congruence Index (IOC) to ensure the tool validity. Pilot testing was performed with 40 similar respondents to guarantee clarity, reliability, and suitability. Testing with a Cronbach reliability analysis gave an alpha coefficient of 0.913. Therefore, the results were sufficiently comprehensive and the value of the instrument was validated. The variables included the respondents' demographic factors, behavioral and psychological factors, and management of the service quality of domestic tourist attractions, as listed in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Variables used in the questionnaire.

Variables	Questions
Demographic factors	1) Sex 2) Age 3) Marital status 4) Education 5) Occupation 6) Monthly income 7) Hometown
Behavioral and psychological factors	1) Tourist expenditure 2) Favorite regions and provinces of travel 3) When is your holiday? 4) What is your mode of transportation for travel? 5) How many nights do you stay? 6) What is your type of accommodation? 7) How many days do you spend planning your trip? 8) What are the channels of tourism information search? 9) How do you manage your travel? 10) Who are your accompanied persons? 11) What is your purpose for travel? 12) Factors influencing decision-making to travel 13) Factors affecting decision-making not to travel 14) Types of favorite domestic tourism 15) Favorite domestic tourist attractions 16) Knowledge gained during domestic traveling 17) Please define what type of tourist you are 18) Would you spread word of mouth toward the destination? 19) Would you revisit your destination in the future?
Service quality management of domestic tourist attractions	1) Service management of domestic tourist attractions 2) Service quality of domestic tourist attractions (SERVQUAL)

Data collection and analysis

Multistage sampling was used for questionnaire distribution, with data collection employing a purposive sampling technique followed by quota and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was employed to select provinces with city municipalities of more than one million people. Quota sampling was then used to determine the number of questionnaires distributed to the targeted respondents in each city municipality. The number of questionnaires given to the respondents varied based on the population in each city municipality, as illustrated in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Number of questionnaires distributed to the respondents by province.

Province	Number of samples (*N*)	Province	Number of samples (*N*)
Chiang Rai	51	Nonthaburi	56
Chiang Mai	71	Pathum Thani	50
Nakhon Ratchasima	113	Samut Prakan	57
Sakon Nakhon	49	Chonburi	66
Udon Thani	68	Nakhon Si Thammarat	65
Ubon Ratchathani	79	Songkhla	60
Khon Kaen	78	Nonthaburi	56
Nakhon Sawan	45	Surat Thani	45

Convenience sampling was used to distribute the questionnaires to respondents through both offline and online channels. To ensure that the respondents had a monthly income of over 50,000 baht and the residents of the city municipality had a population of more than 1 million, two screening questions were posed at the beginning of the questionnaire.

Market segmentation was applied to identify and divide the respondents into different segments of the high-end domestic tourism market. Descriptive statistics were then used to analyze the respondents' demographics, behavioral and psychological factors, and service quality management of domestic tourist attractions based on the identified segments. Results of both market segmentation and descriptive analysis yielded the respondents' tourism needs and preferences that were then used in the qualitative research method.

2.2.6. Qualitative research method

A qualitative research method was chosen to analyze the potential and readiness of tourism resources and tourism products in 77 provinces of Thailand that corresponded to the needs and preferences of high-end Thai tourists.

Population and sample

All experts in the tourism industry from both the public and private sectors in Thailand were members of the population of qualitative research methods. The public and private sectors included the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Provincial Offices of Tourism and Sports, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Central and Regional Tourism Councils of Thailand, and Provincial and National Tourism Associations.

Recruiting key qualified study informants is a useful sampling technique for acquiring specific in-depth information (Naiyaphat, 2011). Forty-one key informants from three companies involved in promoting tourism activities in 16 Thai provinces were selected. These 16 provinces were chosen based on the preferences and needs of identified high-end domestic tourists. The key informants were categorized into three groups as representatives of provincial tourism and sports (16), Provincial Offices of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (16), and provincial offices of the Federation of Thai Industries (9).

Research instrument

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain the required data and information from the 41 key informants. The interview form was validated by five experts in the tourism and hospitality fields by assessing the Item Objective Congruence Index (IOC). Only listed questions with IOC values over 0.5 were kept. To ensure that the data were accurate and reliable, interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. Open-ended questions were developed to achieve the research objectives, as listed in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Open-ended questions developed for interviews.

No.	Questions
1)	How is the current situation of the domestic tourism market?
2)	What are the trends of quality Thai tourists or high-end Thai tourists who visit your province?
3)	What are the current methods and future methods of your province to manage quality Thai tourists or high potential Thai tourists?

Table 3. (*Continued*).

No.	Questions
4)	What are the important areas of tourism resources and services in your province that show high potential for the promotion of domestic tourism and match high-end domestic tourist behavior?
5)	Please rate or evaluate the tourism resources of your province.
6)	What types of tourism in your province are considered important? How ready (potential) are they?
7)	In your opinion, what are the types of tourism resources in your province that demonstrate high readiness and low readiness?
8)	In your opinion, what are the key success factors that help manage domestic tourism and resources to support high-end domestic tourists after the crisis?
9)	What are the tourist attractions in your province that can meet high-end domestic tourist behavior? What are the factors that need development to respond to the needs and preferences of high-end Thai tourists?

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from 41 key informants including representatives of provincial tourism and sports (16), provincial Offices of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (16), and provincial offices of the Federation of Thai Industries (9). All the interviews were transcribed. The data were then conceptualized and analyzed by a thematic content analysis using a computer-based qualitative data analysis program. Three stages were executed to analyze the qualitative data including data organizing, data coding, and data clustering.

The research processes were parallelly undertaken for both quantitative research and qualitative research, with the data collection processes divided into five stages as shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4. The stages of data collection.

Stage	Quantitative research	Qualitative research
1	A questionnaire was structured for verification by five experts in tourism and hospitality fields, two from the academic sector, two from the tourism government sector, and one from the tourism private sector.	A semi-structured interview form was designed. Reliability and validity tests were performed. Then, official letters requesting assistance in providing information were sent to the selected agencies.
2	The research designs and instruments were submitted to be certified by the Ethics Committee in Human Research before collecting the data in the field.	
3	Data collection was trialed and reliability tested. In total, 1200 high-end domestics tourists from 16 provinces under set criteria were targeted as the research population.	The interviews were conducted. Then the data were interpreted and analyzed to draw conclusions.
4	The obtained data were analyzed using a statistical package for the social sciences. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were interpreted as the research outcomes.	The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were decoded and categorized using content analysis and coding analysis.
5	The results from quantitative research and qualitative research were combined to propose tourism management approaches for domestic high-end tourists after the crisis	

The research was ethically certified by the Ethics Committee in Human Research, National Institute of Development Administration, COA No. 2021/0096, Protocol ID No. ECNIDA2021/0102, dated 9 September 2021.

3. Results and discussion

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used, as detailed below.

3.1. Quantitative research results

Quantitative research identified high-end domestic tourists residing in 77 Thai provinces. Using market segmentation, results indicated that the 1200 respondents could be divided into four groups based on their average monthly income. These four groups were named silver, gold, diamond, and platinum, as shown in **Table 5**.

Silver referred to respondents who had an average monthly income of 50,000–70,000 baht (*N* = 948). Gold referred to respondents with an average monthly income of 70,001–90,000 baht (*N* = 136). Diamond referred to respondents with an average monthly income of 90,001–110,000 baht (*N* = 41). Lastly, Platinum referred to respondents who had an average monthly income of over 110,001 baht (*N* = 75).

Table 5. Segmentation of high-end Thai tourists based on average monthly income.

Group	Average monthly income	Samples
Silver	1547.5–2166.5 USD (50,000–70,000 baht)	948
Gold	2167–2785.5 USD (70,001–90,000 baht)	136
Diamond	2786–3404.5 USD (90,001–110,000 baht)	41
Platinum	Over 3405 USD (Over 110,001 baht)	75
Total		**1200**

32.31 USD = 1 THB (as of 4 March 2023).
Source: Research findings.

The silver group had the highest number of respondents, followed by gold (136), platinum (75), and diamond (41) (**Table 5**). A descriptive analysis was carried out to investigate the characteristics of the respondents, their tourism needs, and travel behavior for each group of high-end Thai tourists.

Silver: Most respondents in this group were females with an average age of 39 years. They were mostly single business owners with a bachelor degree and average monthly income of 1738 USD (56,160 baht). The most preferred tourism provinces were Chiang Mai (north), Nakhon Ratchasima (northeast), Bangkok and Ayutthaya (central), Kanchanaburi (west), Chonburi (east), and Phuket (south). This type of domestic tourist traveled on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays spending an average of three days and two nights per trip. Their average holiday was 36 days/year, and the mode of transportation to the destination was a personal car. High-end domestic tourists in the silver group stayed overnight at resorts and took 17.91 days to make a domestic tourism plan. Smartphones were used to search for tourism information. They managed their trips themselves and chose domestic tourism for their families. Their purpose for domestic travel was recreation/relaxation. Factors influencing their decision to travel within the country included the perfect environment for tourist attractions, while factors that affected their decision not to travel within the country were the spread of the pandemic and communicable diseases. The preferred type of tourism was recreational tourism. Patong Beach, Chiang Khan, Khao Yai, Samui, Pattaya, and the Emerald Buddha Temple (Wat Phra Kaew) were the most popular tourist attractions in Thailand. The feelings experienced by high-end domestic tourists in the silver group were relaxation, fun, happiness, and excitement. This group of tourists defined themselves as recreational tourists who spread information by word-of-mouth and revisited domestic tourist attractions.

In terms of domestic tourism management, ambiance received the highest level of agreement among the respondents, followed by accommodation and attractions. An analysis of service quality through marketing mix revealed that domestic tourist attractions acquired the highest level of agreement, accompanied by perfect tourism products and services and good physical presentation of tourism products and services. An analysis of service quality through SERVQUAL and SERVPERF showed that assurance (ability to provide good services and demonstrate good communication) gained the highest level of agreement among the respondents, followed by responsiveness (illustrating an interest in fixing the problems while the customers were receiving the services and providing services), and empathy (the staff were interested in providing assistance to the customers when problems occurred before the sale and after-sale services).

Gold: Most of the respondents were single females with average age of 44 years. Their educational level was a bachelor degree, and their average monthly income was 2456 USD (79,359 baht). Their preferred tourism provinces included Chiang Mai (north), Nakhon Ratchasima (northeast), Bangkok and Ayutthaya (central), Prachuap Khiri Khan (west), Chonburi (east), and Phuket (south). Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays were the days that respondents in the gold group chose to travel. On average, they spent three days and two nights per trip. Their average holiday was 24 days per year, and they used personal cars for travel. High-end domestic tourists in the gold group stayed overnight at the resorts. On average, they spent 19.50 days preparing for their domestic trip, searching for tourism information on their smartphones. They managed their trips by themselves and traveled with their families. The purpose of traveling was either for recreational or relaxation. The readiness of tourism facilities influenced their decision to travel within the country. By contrast, factors affecting their decision not to travel around Thailand did not include value for money. The main type of tourism for high-end domestic tourists in the gold group was recreational. Their favorite tourist attractions in Thailand were Phi Phi Island, Chang Island, Cha-Am Beach, Hua Hin, and Mon Chaem. The feelings gained during their domestic trips were relaxation and fun, learning new things, and experiences. Domestic trips allowed them to spend time with their families. This group of high-end domestic tourists defined themselves as recreational tourists. They spread information by word-of-mouth and revisited domestic tourist attractions.

Results showed that domestic tourist attractions in Thailand obtained the highest level of agreement among respondents, followed by amenities and appearance. An analysis of service quality through the marketing mix indicated that domestic tourist attractions had good performance of services, and perfect service provision as the top two elements with the highest level of agreement among the respondents. An analysis of service quality through SERVQUAL and SERVPERF demonstrated that assurance (ability to provide good services and demonstrate good communication) had the highest level of agreement, followed by reliability (being able to provide services as promised), and safety (tourist attractions were safe).

Diamond: Most of the respondents in this group were single females with an average age of 42 years Their educational level was a bachelor degree or a master degree. Business owners were their main occupations. Their average monthly income was 3083 USD (99,610 baht). Their favorite tourism provinces in Thailand were

Chiang Mai (north), Udon Thani (northeast), Bangkok and Phichit (central), Kanchanaburi (west), Chonburi (east), and Krabi (south). They preferred to travel domestically during public holidays (excluding Saturdays and Sundays). On average, they spent three days and two nights per trip. Their average holiday was 15 days per year, and personal cars were the main vehicles of travel. They stayed overnight at resorts and took 12.24 days on average to make a domestic trip. This group of tourists searched for tourism information on their smartphones. They managed their domestic trips independently and traveled with their families. The purpose of traveling was recreation and relaxation. Factors affecting their decision to travel around Thailand were famous tourist attractions, tourism facilities, access to tourist attractions, cleanliness, hygiene, beauty, originality of tourist attractions, and accommodation standards. Factors that influenced their decision not to visit tourist attractions in Thailand included the dirtiness of tourist attractions and not providing value for money. Cultural and traditional tourism were the favorite types. The most preferred tourist attractions in Thailand among high-end domestic tourists in the gold group were Phi Phi Island, Doi Inthanon, the Chao Phraya River, Hua Hin, Mae Rumphueng Beach, Samila Beach, Chang Island, Khao Kheow, and Cha-Am Beach. The feelings that this type of domestic tourist gained were relaxation, peace of mind, learning, new experiences, and fun. They defined themselves as simple, independent, or slow-life tourists. These high-end Thai tourists in the diamond group spread information by word-of-mouth and revisited tourist attractions in Thailand.

The first three elements that fell in the high level of agreement among the respondents with regard to domestic tourism management were amenities, domestic tourism activities, and accessibility to tourist attractions. An analysis of service quality through the marketing mix showed that the top three elements in the high level of agreement among the respondents were empathy (the staff were interested in providing assistance to the customers when problems occurred before the sale and after-sale services), readiness (tourist attraction and tourism people were ready to provide services), and responsiveness (illustrating an interest in fixing the problems while the customers were receiving the services and providing services).

Platinum: Most of the respondents in this group were married males with an average age of 44 years. Their education level was a bachelor degree. The business owners had an average monthly income of 5385 USD (174,000 baht). The most preferred tourism provinces were Chiang Mai (north), Khon Kaen (northeast), Bangkok and Ayutthaya (central), Prachuap Khiri Khan (west), Chonburi (east), and Phuket (south). This type of high-end Thai tourist traveled during public holidays (Saturday and Sunday not included). On average, they spent three days and two nights per trip. Their average holiday was 18 days/year. They traveled to tourist attractions in Thailand using their own car and stayed overnight at 4-star hotels. High-end Thai tourists in the platinum group spent on average 16.13 days making trips in Thailand and searched for domestic tourism information on their smartphones. They managed their domestic trips themselves and preferred to travel domestically with their families. The main purpose of traveling in Thailand was to relax. Factors influencing their decision-making on domestic trips were cleanliness and hygiene, while factors that affected their decision not to travel around Thailand were the spread of the pandemic, communicable diseases, and not-ready accommodation. Recreational tourism was their favorite form of tourism. The recreational destinations in Thailand were Samui, Khao Khor, Khao Tapu, Koh Tao, Koh Samet, Khao Sok, Chom Tien Beach, Doi Suthep, Grand Palace, Friendship Bridges, Phi Phi Island, Koh Lan, Koh Hong, Phanom Rung Historical Park, Khao Yai, Phu Thap Buek, Doi Suthep, Pattaya Beach, Simila Beach, Surin Beach, Phrom Thep Cape, Maya Bay, and Khai Island. This group of tourists stated that when they traveled, they felt relaxed, happy, different, delighted, and elated. Moreover, traveling was a self-reward. They defined themselves as recreational tourists who spread information by word-of-mouth and revisited domestic tourist attractions.

The respondents also stated that ambiance, domestic tourist attractions, and amenities were the three elements that received a high level of agreement with domestic tourism management. An analysis of service quality showed that reasonable prices, various channels of distribution, and perfect products and services were the first three marketing elements that the respondents agreed to. The results of analyzing service quality through SERVQUAL and SERVPERF indicated that the first three elements that received a high level of agreement among the respondents were safety (tourist attractions were safe), followed by reliability (being able to provide services as promised), and readiness (tourist attraction and tourism people were ready to provide services). **Table 6** reveals the segmentation summary of domestic high-end tourists.

Table 6. Segmentation summary of domestic high-end tourists.

Details	**Segmentation of domestic high-end tourists**			
	Silver	**Gold**	**Diamond**	**Platinum**
Sex	Female	Female	Female	Male
Age	39 Years	44 Years	42 Years	44 Years
Marital Status	Single	Married	Married	Married
Education	Bachelor	Bachelor	Bachelor and Master	Bachelor
Profession	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur
Avg. Income/Month	56,160 Baht	79,359 Baht	99,610 Baht	174,000 Baht
Preferred Provinces by Regions	North: Chiang Mai Northeast: Nakhon Ratchasima Central: Bangkok and Ayutthaya West: Kanchanaburi East: Chonburi South: Phuket	North: Chiang Mai Northeast: Nakhon Ratchasima Central: Bangkok and Ayutthaya West: Prachuap Khiri Khan East: Chonburi South: Phuket	North: Chiang Mai Northeast: Udon Thani Central: Bangkok and Phichit West: Kanchanaburi East: Chonburi South: Krabi	North: Chiang Mai Northeast: Khon Kaen Central: Bangkok and Ayutthaya West: Prachuap Khiri Khan East: Chonburi South: Phuket
Preferred Travel Ranges	Fri, Sat, Sun	Fri, Sat, Sun	Public Holidays	Public Holidays
Avg. Traveling Days/Year	36 Days	24 Days	15 Days	18 Days
Mode of Transport	Private vehicle	Private vehicle	Private vehicle	Private vehicle
Overnight Stay	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Preferred Accommodation	Resort	Resort	Resort	4-Star Hotel
Avg. Tour Planning	17.91 Days	19.50 Days	12.24 Days	16.13 Days
Source of Information	Smart Phone	Smart Phone	Smart Phone	Smart Phone
Trip Organization	Self-administered	Self-administered	Self-administered	Self-administered

Table 6. (*Continued*).

Details	Segmentation of domestic high-end tourists			
	Silver	**Gold**	**Diamond**	**Platinum**
Travel Companion	Family	Family	Family	Family
Travel Purpose	Relax & Stress Release	Relax & Stress Release	Relax & Stress Release	Relax & Stress Release
Travel Factors	• Nice environment of tourist attractions	• Availability of Facilities	• Popularity of tourist attractions • Availability of facilities • Convenience of traveling and accessing tourist attractions • Cleanliness and hygiene • The beauty and novelty of tourist attractions • Clean and up to standard accommodation	• Cleanliness and hygiene
Non-Travel Factors	• The spread of epidemics and contagious diseases	• Unworthiness when choosing to travel	• Dirtiness and uncleanness of tourist attractions • Unworthiness when choosing to travel	• The spread of epidemics and contagious diseases • Unavailability of accommodations
Preferred Type of Tourism	Leisure tourism	Leisure tourism	Cultural and traditional tourism	Leisure tourism
Preferred Destination	Patong Beach, Chiang Khan, Khao Yai Koh Samui, Pattaya and The Emerald Buddha Temple	Phi Phi Island, Koh Chang, Cha-am Beach, Hua Hin and Mon Cham	Phi Phi Island, Doi Inthanon, Chao Phraya River, Hua Hin, Mae Ramphueng Beach, Doi Suthep, Samila Beach, Koh Chang, Khao Khiao, and Cha-am Beach	Koh Samui, Khao Kho, Khao Tapu, Koh Tao, Koh Samet, Khao Sok, Jomtien Beach, Doi Suthep, Grand Palace, Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge, Phi Phi Island, Koh Larn, Hong Island, Khao Phanom Rung Castle, Khao Yai, Phu Thap Boek, Doi Suthep, Pattaya Beach, Simiran Beach, Surin Beach, Laem Phrom. Thep, Maya Bay and Khai Island
Feeling after Traveling	Relaxed, fun, happy, comfortable and excited	Relaxed, fun, experienced, closed with family	Relaxed, calmed, learned, innovative and fun	Relaxed, happy, fresh, rewarded and fun
Self-Definition	Leisure tourists	Leisure tourists	• Simple/Freedom/Slow-life tourists	Leisure tourists
Chance of Referral	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chance of Revisit	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Top 3 Factors to Manage	1) Ambience within tourist destinations 2) Accommodation within tourist destinations 3) Attraction within tourist destinations	1) Attraction within tourist destinations 2) Amenities within tourist destinations 3) Appearance within tourist destinations	1) Attraction within tourist destinations 2) Amenities within tourist destinations 3) Activities within tourist destinations 4) Accessibilities of tourist destinations	1) Ambience within tourist destinations 2) Attraction within tourist destinations 3) Amenities within tourist destinations
Top 3 Factors of Marketing Mix	1) Particularity 2) Product and Service 3) Physical Evidence	1) Particularity 2) Productivity 3) Process of Service	1) Price 2) Product and Service 3) Place of Distribution	1) Price 2) Place of Distribution 3) Product and Service
Top 3 Factors of Service Quality (SERVQUAL/SERVPERF)	1) Assurance 2) Responsiveness 3) Empathy	1) Assurance 2) Reliability 3) Safety	1) Empathy 2) Readiness 3) Responsiveness	1) Safety 2) Reliability 3) Readiness

Source: Research findings.

3.2. Qualitative research results

The purpose of the qualitative research method was to examine the potential and readiness of tourism resources and products in Thailand to satisfy the needs and preferences of high-end domestic tourists. The results of the qualitative research were acquired from the quantitative research by asking the respondents about the tourist attractions that they had visited or would like to visit in the future. In other words, the supply side of domestic tourism in Thailand was analyzed to upgrade the tourism resources and tourism products that supported high-end domestic tourists. High-end domestic tourists were expected to substitute for international tourists to revive the tourism industry when the country could not welcome foreign travelers, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The qualitative data results revealed that the respondents had visited 16 provinces covering all six regions of Thailand and would visit again after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of interviews with 41 key informants indicated that tourism resources and tourism products in these 16 provinces had the potential and readiness to respond to the needs and travel behavior of high-end domestic tourists. Some types of tourism in these provinces needed development and alleviation, as shown in **Table 7**.

In the northern region, three provinces, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Mae Hong Son were selected. The respondents also said that Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen, and Udon Thani were the provinces located in Northeast Thailand that they had visited after the COVID-19 pandemic. Bangkok, Ayutthaya, and Phichit were the provinces in the central region of Thailand chosen by respondents. In the western region, Kanchanaburi and Prachuap Khiri Khan were visited after the COVID-19 pandemic. High-end respondents stated that they had been to and would visit Chonburi and Trat Provinces in the east of Thailand after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Results in **Table 7** were derived from the selection of high-end domestic tourists and examination by 41 key informants in terms of the potential and readiness of tourism resources and tourism products that satisfied the needs and travel behavior of high-end domestic markets. The respondents' needs and preferences for tourism activities in Thailand were recreational and relaxed. Examples of recreational and relaxing activities included exhibitions, cultural and traditional performances, and local festivals. Through the analysis and examination of 41 key informants, the tourism themes in 16 provinces varied and perfectly responded to the needs and travel behavior of high-end domestic tourists. Although tourism resources and products identified in the 16 provinces displayed high potential and readiness to serve high-end domestic tourists, there were still many tourist attractions in Thailand that needed to be upgraded to meet the needs and travel behavior of high-end domestic tourists. Natural hot spring health attractions were found in different regions of Thailand, and the results of the qualitative analysis revealed that they still lacked certain features to serve the needs and travel behavior of high-end domestic tourists.

Table 7. Types of tourism with potential, readiness, improvement, and alleviation.

Region	Province	Types of tourism	
		Potential and readiness shown	**Improvement and alleviation needed**
North	1) Chiang Mai	Historical attraction	Natural hot spring health attraction
		Recreational attraction	
		Natural attraction	
		Cultural attraction	
	2) Chiang Rai	Ecotourism	Cave attraction
		Natural attraction	Rapid attraction
		Historical attraction	Recreational attraction
		Cultural attraction	Arts and sciences education attraction
	3) Mae Hong Son	Ecotourism	Arts and sciences education attraction
		Natural attraction	
		Rapid attraction	
	4) Phichit	Historical attraction	Natural hot spring health attraction
		Cultural attraction	
Northeast	5) Nakhon Ratchasima	Historical attraction	Natural hot spring health attraction
		Recreational attraction	
		Cultural attraction	
		Waterfall attraction	
	6) Udon Thani	Ecotourism	Waterfall attraction
		Arts and sciences education attraction	Rapid attraction
		Historical attraction	
		Natural attraction	
		Cultural attraction	
	7) Khon Kaen	Historical attraction	Waterfall attraction
		Cultural attraction	Rapid attraction
Central	8) Bangkok	Historical attraction	Natural attraction
		Recreational attraction	
		Cultural attraction	
	9) Ayutthaya	Historical attraction	Waterfall attraction
		Cultural attraction	Rapid attraction
West	10) Kanchanaburi	Ecotourism	Rapid attraction
		Natural attraction	Cave attraction
		Historical attraction	Natural hot spring health attraction
		Recreational attraction	Arts and sciences education attraction
		Cultural attraction	

Table 7. (*Continued*).

Region	**Province**	**Types of tourism**	
		Potential and readiness shown	**Improvement and alleviation needed**
East	11) Chonburi	Ecotourism Natural attraction Recreational attraction Beach attraction	Cave attraction
	12) Trat	Natural attraction Beach attraction Island attraction	Historical attraction
South	13) Prachuap Khiri Khan	Ecotourism Natural attraction	Natural hot spring health attraction Rapid attraction
		Beach attraction Island attraction	Cave attraction
	14) Phuket	Ecotourism Natural attraction Historical attraction Recreational attraction Cultural attraction Beach attraction Island attraction	Arts and sciences education attraction Waterfall attraction
	15) Krabi	Cultural attraction	Arts and sciences education attraction
		Beach attraction	Natural hot spring health attraction Natural attraction Rapid attraction
	16) Phatthalung	Ecotourism Natural attraction	Natural hot spring health attraction Rapid attraction
		Cultural attraction	Beach attraction Island attraction

Source: Research findings.

3.3. Suggestions of tourism management approaches for domestic high-end tourists after the crisis

To fulfill the final research objective, suggestions for tourism management to cater to domestic high-end tourists after the crisis were presented. Although crises are external factors that cannot be controlled, the readiness to respond to uncertainties must be established as useful guidelines. After combining the first and second objectives, five approaches were formulated as follows: area-based management, high activity and experience-based management, product and service technology-based management, high value management, and human resource-based management.

3.3.1. Area-based management

Firstly, the approach to develop related tourism resources and products in 16 provinces in Thailand by upgrading resources and products to satisfy the needs and behaviors of high-end domestic tourists must be implemented. By doing so, domestic tourists would pay high consideration to visit domestic destinations. The concept of creative community-based tourism should also be promoted. The research results revealed that these concepts increased the enjoyment of high-end domestic tourists when they visited the attractions. Secondly, strong focus on the development of full-service tourism and travel in the chosen provinces should be executed. Full-service facilities include the availability of flights to 16 provinces, and sufficient available car rental services for high-end domestic tourists, especially when tourists arrive at airports to connect with tourist attractions. High-end domestic tourists are willing to pay extra for the safety and security of their health and belongings. Thirdly, the development of urban design for tourism must be developed in the identified 16 provinces in Thailand. High-end domestic tourists prefer to visit historical and cultural sites along with full facilities allowing them to rest with peace of mind and safety. Activities at tourist attractions should be created. High-end domestic tourists are highly sensitive to contagious deceases, hence, well-structured policies in dealing with possible contagious deceases are necessary. Tourist attractions must be designed to support the accessibilities of all vehicle types as tourists usually travel by personal vehicle with their family members. Fourthly, high-end domestic tourists differ in terms of gender, age, income, needs, and behaviors. Consequently, facilities must be developed to respond to all domestic tourists. Investments in up to 4-star hotels and resorts at major tourist attractions are recommended. Based on the results of the quantitative analysis, all segments of high-end domestic tourists preferred to stay overnight at four-star hotels and resorts in the 16 provinces. Tourists perceive that 4-star hotels and resorts offer a private environment with high service quality values. Tourist attractions with popularity are first selected by domestic high-end tourists. Also, most high-end domestic tourists continue traveling to famous tourist attractions. Providing knowledge about tourism marketing to tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs within the areas would increase the strengths of the locations and also promote local people to consider domestic tourism. The development of high service quality domestic tourist attractions in the 16 provinces to support high-end domestic tourists in a sustainable manner should also be considered. Local foods should be redesigned and adjusted to match the tastes of high-end domestic tourists, as well as cleanliness, safety, and creativity. To achieve area-based management that supports high-end domestic tourists, all tourism-related public and private agencies at central, regional, and local levels must join hands in an integrative manner.

3.3.2. High activity and experience-based management

The second approach is the promotion of measures to expand the length of stay among high-end domestic tourists. The research results indicated that high-end domestic tourists traveled to destinations nearly but tended to spend more days on holiday if the destinations provided proper on-site activities to increase the tourist experience. High activities and experience-based management will help to recover the tourism economy by attracting local tourists. Diverse tourism activities organized during weekends and public holidays must be promoted. High-end domestic tourists are entrepreneurs with tight schedules, while some are private company executives and employees. Hence, it is not convenient for them to travel on weekdays. Based on the results of the quantitative analysis, the purposes of traveling among high-end domestic tourists are to relax at recreational attractions. Therefore, tourism activities with recreational concepts could entice high-end domestic tourists to visit domestic attractions.

3.3.3. Product and service technology-based management

Based on the results of the quantitative analysis, high-end domestic tourists prefer to manage their own travel arrangements. Thus, self-bookings for accommodations, flights, car rentals, and tourism activities must be promoted among high-end domestic tourists in an easier, faster and flexible manner. After the crisis, the behaviors of high-end domestic tourists shifted. They now prefer bookings with flexible conditions as they believe that situations are habitually unpredictable. Smartphone-oriented tourism marketing and channels for tourism information should be developed. High-end domestic tourists usually search for tourism information and manage their reservations for accommodations, flights, and other related tourism products and services on their smartphones.

3.3.4. High value management

'Value for the price paid' is a significant factor when high-end domestic tourists consider domestic travel. Nowadays, outbound tourism is more reachable due to inexpensive travel costs such as flight tickets and accommodation. Some international destinations in Asia such as Malaysia, China India, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Myanmar offer a similar atmosphere and traveling costs, shifting the high-end domestic tourists' mind to travel abroad. To prevent such events, the related tourism agencies must carefully regulate and control fair trades with reasonable prices for tourists. Tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs should ethically conduct businesses with fully hospitable minds. The research results implied that tourists would revisit destinations if they were satisfied with their first trip. The development of infrastructure and facilities at destinations would greatly enhance the service quality both tangibly and intangibly. The research results also indicated that revenues from independent high-end domestic tourists are greater than from regular group tours because travel packages are tightly compressed to make the cheapest offers. High-end domestic tourists are financially capable and are looking for holidays at reasonable prices.

3.3.5. Human resource-based management

The development of highly specialized human resources and manpower is urgently required, especially in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Experienced staff are crucial for tourist satisfaction. In the service industry, service providers are an influential factor determining user satisfaction. Tourism products and services are similar and high-quality service by experienced staff makes a difference. Service-oriented staff must be highly professional with both soft and hard skills. Communication skills as well as safety and security knowledge are crucial for service personnel. Intensive training in both soft and hard service skills should be arranged by hospitality professionals. The development of tourism management is dependent on the preparation and readiness of human resources and manpower. The quantitative analysis suggested that high-end domestic tourists are concerned about the safety and reliability of domestic destinations. Therefore, creating a safe destination image with reliable highly trained and specialized human resources and manpower in different fields is paramount for success. Upgrading human resources and manpower through advanced upskills, reskills, and new skills must be implemented. Each segment of high-end domestic tourists demonstrated varied needs and travel behaviors. Thus, highly specialized human resources and manpower in the tourism industry are needed to respond to these requirements under the current 'V-U-C-A', volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, global situation.

4. Discussion

The first research objective segmented high-end domestic tourists by monthly income into four groups: Silver, Gold, Diamond, and Platinum. Phengkona and Monpanthong (2022) followed a similar research methodology by classifying homogeneous segments of domestic tourists who traveled to community-based tourist destinations in Thailand using travel motivation segmentation. The findings of the first objective also agreed with Birdir (2015), Sung et al. (2016) and Waqas-Awan et al. (2021), and who determined that segmentation by financial capability was the most effective way to explore potential customers, specifically for valuable products and services. This research offers new knowledge concerning the behavior of domestic tourists; specifically Thai high-end tourists. Vargas et al. (2021) clustered general tourists based on personal lifestyles, with personality traits identified and clustered into four groups. However, specific behavioral studies were not addressed, while Pérez-Priego et al. (2019) segmented international tourists according to gastronomic motivations, similar to Lwoga and Muturo (2020) who segmented general tourists based on push and pull motivational forces. By using the marketing mix to explore tourist behaviors, results revealed that the particularity of domestic high-end tourists was significant. Similarly, Moscardo (2020), Noo-urai and Jaroenwisan (2017) and Thabit and Raewf (2018), recognized particularity as the most effective actions that attract potential tourists by offering exclusive tourism products and services. Hence, tourism particularities such as design compatibility with the modern digital era are relevant. In terms of service quality, the findings indicated that assurance, empathy, and safety were the primary factors that concerned high-end domestic tourists. Han et al. (2021) and Sharma and Srivastava (2018) concurred that tourists prefer quality standards of products and services to ensure a smooth tourism journey, with emotional connection and safety and security for their health and belongings.

In terms of the potential and readiness of tourism resources and tourism products to receive high-end domestic tourists, 16 provinces including Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, Phichit, Nakhon Ratchasima, Udon Thani, Khon Kaen, Bangkok, Khon Kaen, Bangkok, Ayutthaya, Kanchanaburi, Chonburi, Trat, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Phuket, Krabi, and Phatthalung covering all six regions of Thailand were assessed. These provinces matched tourist preferences according to the destination characteristics that included ecotourism, natural attraction, recreational attraction, beach attraction, waterfall attraction, natural attraction, cultural and historical attraction, and island attraction. All the segmented high-end domestic tourists sought leisure tourism and cultural and traditional tourism. Some domestic destinations were second-tier tourist destinations and factors affecting intention to visit were previously investigated by Fakfare et al. (2020). They indicated that pride, price, tax deduction policy, attraction, local food, ego enhancement, and knowledge-seeking attributes significantly impacted the intention to visit second-tier cities in Thailand. Tangvitoon and Chaiwat (2023) found that coastal as well as cultural attractions and heritage sites attracted Thai domestic tourists. Finally, the approaches were formulated by combining the second and third research objectives. Area-based management, high activity and experience-based management, product and service technology-based management, high value management, and human resource-based management should all be improved to discover and rectify areas where the satisfaction of high-end domestic tourists could be found wanting.

5. Conclusions

This study suggested approaches to improve the tourism management of high-end domestic tourists in Thailand after the crisis to attract them to travel within the country. During any crisis, domestic tourism can sustain Thailand's tourism industry and compensate for the loss of international tourism revenues. This market segmentation analysis classified high-end domestic tourists into four groups as silver, gold, diamond, and platinum. Each group shared similarities and differences in characteristics, travel needs, and behaviors. Sixteen provinces in the six regions of Thailand demonstrated their potential and readiness for tourism resources and products to satisfy the needs of high-end domestic tourists. These 16 provinces chosen by high-end domestic tourists were further examined by 41 key informants who were experts in the field of tourism in Thailand at both regional and provincial levels. Some tourist attractions in these 16 provinces needed improvements to fulfill the needs and travel behaviors of high-end domestic tourists in Thailand. Five approaches to the management of tourism resources and products in the 16 provinces were suggested to attract high-end domestic tourists including area-based management, high activity and experience-based management, product and service technology-based management, high value management, and human resource-based management.

The 4Ps are extensively used, with 'promotion' a significant driver to attract the four groups of domestic tourists; silver, gold, diamond, and platinum to travel across domestic regions. The main responsibility falls under the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS). TAT should promote tourism according to each group's preference and lifestyle. To shape the right promotions, authorities must also ensure that tourism resources and tourism products are well prepared to serve the demands of domestic high-end tourists. All 16 provinces showed the potential and readiness to respond to the needs and travel behavior of high-end domestic tourists. However, there was room for improvement in enhancing the tourists' experiences. By following the research suggestions, Thai tourism could become firmly resistant to any unexpected future crisis.

This study contributes to knowledge of the tourism industry in Thailand and to those involved in tourism-related businesses and government agencies at all levels to tap the market of high-end domestic tourists. These people should be encouraged to travel more within the country, thereby helping to develop and recover tourism revenue after the crisis. A high standard of tourism should be established to alleviate international tourism revenue losses in times of crisis by encouraging high-end domestic tourists to travel in Thailand. The implementation of such policies will reduce the country's reliance on international tourism. Five approaches to cater to the tourism management of high-end tourists in Thailand after the crisis were suggested. Future research should examine the tourism management of other groups in the domestic tourism market, for example, retired or aging people in Thailand. This research framework can also be applied to other segments of high-end domestic tourists in Thailand.

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