



**An Exploratory of Decision Making Factors for an Overseas Wedding
Destination: A Case Study of Indian Couples, Phuket, Thailand**

Nattinee McMillan

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Business Administration in Hospitality and Tourism Management
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Thesis Title An Exploratory of Decision Making Factors for an Overseas Wedding
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Author Mrs. Nattinee McMillan

Major Program Hospitality and Tourism Management (International Program)

Major Advisor

.....
(Dr. Tatiyaporn Jarumaneerat)

Examining Committee

.....Committee
(Assoc. Prof. Manat Chaisawat)

.....
(Dr. Prateep Wetprasit)

.....
(Dr. Tatiyaporn Jarumaneerat)

The Graduate School, Prince of Songkla University, has approved this thesis as partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Master of Business Administration Degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management (International Program)

.....
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Teerapol Srichana)

Dean of Graduate School

This is to certify that the work here submitted is the result of the candidate's own investigations.

Due acknowledgement has been made of any assistance received.

.....Signature

(Dr. Tatiyaporn Jarumaneerat)

Major Advisor

.....Signature

(Mrs.Nattinee McMillan)

Candidate

I hereby certify that this work has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

.....Signature

(Mrs.Nattinee McMillan)

Candidate

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยมีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยภายในและภายนอกที่มีผลกระทบต่อกระบวนการเลือกสถานที่แต่งงานในต่างประเทศสำหรับคู่แต่งงานชาวอินเดีย โดยใช้จังหวัดภูเก็ตเป็นกรณีศึกษา งานวิจัยเป็นการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพด้วยใช้ทฤษฎีแรงจูงใจ (Push and Pull Motivation) และกระบวนการตัดสินใจเป็นทฤษฎีหลักในการศึกษาผู้วิจัยได้ดำเนินการรวบรวมข้อมูลปฐมภูมิโดยใช้การสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างกลุ่มตัวอย่างที่เข้าร่วมการสัมภาษณ์ จำนวน 25 คน ประกอบด้วย คู่แต่งงานชาวอินเดีย 7 คู่ บิดามารดาของคู่แต่งงานชาวอินเดีย 4 คน ตัวแทนบริษัทจัดงานแต่งงาน 7 คน และ พนักงานโรงแรมที่มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องกับงานแต่งงานอินเดีย 6 คน ผลวิจัยพบว่า ปัจจัยภายในที่มีความสำคัญต่อกระบวนการตัดสินใจ 3 อันดับแรก ประกอบด้วย ความแปลกใหม่ ประสบการณ์เชิงบวกในอดีต และ ข้อจำกัดจำนวนแขกที่เข้าร่วมงาน ในขณะที่ ทัศนียภาพที่งดงาม การเข้าถึงที่สะดวก และชื่อเสียงและประสบการณ์ของโรงแรมเป็นปัจจัยภายนอกที่สำคัญที่สุด ผลการวิจัยยังชี้ว่าจุดแข็งของภูเก็ตคือทัศนียภาพที่งดงาม ความเชี่ยวชาญในการจัดงานแต่งงานอินเดีย และความคุ้มค่าเงิน ทั้งนี้จุดอ่อนที่สำคัญของจังหวัดภูเก็ตในฐานะที่เป็นแหล่งท่องเที่ยวสำหรับการแต่งงานนั้น ประกอบด้วยขีดการรองรับของสถานที่สำหรับจัดงานขนาดใหญ่ ผลวิจัยพบว่าความคุ้มค่าเงินและความยืดหยุ่นต่อลูกค้า เป็นปัจจัยสำคัญในการรักษาความได้เปรียบในการแข่งขันกับแหล่งท่องเที่ยวอื่นๆ ในฐานะสถานที่แต่งงานของตลาดอินเดียได้

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Abstract

This research explores internal and external factors that influence the selection process of an overseas wedding destination for Indian couples coming to Phuket. The decision making process and push and pull motivation theory were used to explore the influential factors. Qualitative methodology was used as the primary data collection. Twenty five semi – structured interviews were conducted with seven Indian wedding couples, five parents of Indian wedding couples, seven Indian wedding organizers, and six hotel representatives related in Indian wedding business. The transcripts were analysed by thematic content analysis. The results suggested the top three push factors were 1) novelty, 2) positive past experience in Phuket, and 3) limitation of number of guests to be invited. On the other hand, three leading pull factors were 1) beautiful scenery, 2) convenient accessibility, and 3) reputation and hotel experience. The results also indicated that the strengths of Phuket are the beautiful scenery, Indian wedding expertise, and value for money while the limited capacity of the venue for larger events remains the major weakness of Phuket. Being the value for money destination, being flexible with Indian’s request are the key critical factors to maintain the competitiveness of Phuket as a wedding destination for Indian market.

Keywords: Decision making for wedding destination, push and pull factors, Indian couples, Phuket, Thailand

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Chapter Outline

This research explores the factors that influence the selection process of an overseas wedding destination of Indian couples coming to Phuket. This chapter introduces the statement of the problem, objectives of the research, significance of study, and its limitations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The island of Phuket is already renowned as one of the world's most famous tourism destinations (Indian wedding 'Pizzaz', 2010), according to its relaxing natural attractions, Thai hospitality and superior facilities, including plenty of top quality accommodation options at every level. In recent years Phuket has looked to more varieties its product to attract a broader range of travelers. The overseas wedding market was targeted by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to promote Phuket as the best wedding destination (Citrinot, 2010). The current wedding trend shows that overseas weddings have become an aspiration for the new generation of millionaires (Vinayak & Joy, 2011). Arranging wedding ceremonies in foreign country like Thailand, Macau and Bali with all the traditional Indian rituals has become fashionable among affluent Indians (Marriages in foreign locales catch Indians' fancy, 2010).

Through this emerging overseas wedding segment, the niche Indian wedding market has been the most attractive due to their high spending powers net per visitor. Today India accounts for the largest tourist segment from the region of South Asia. It is one of seven countries generating more than one million arrivals. The number of Indian travellers arriving in Thailand has been increasing since 2009; it increased 14.45% from 2008, 23.75% in 2010, 20.33% in 2011 and 11.03% in 2012. In 2013, it increased 3.61% from the year 2012 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports [MOTS], 2014). Despite Thailand facing political demonstrations, Indian travellers remained confident that Thailand would still be a welcoming tourist destination (India still on track, 2013). TAT forecasted that Indian arrivals will continue to rise magnificently because of the free trade policies between India and ASEAN countries.

Travel + Leisure India & South Asia magazine announced that Thailand was awarded the best destination for weddings. It also received runners up awards including Bangkok (as the best city), the best leisure destination and the best family destination. These awards are given to Thailand from Travel + Leisure three years consecutively. On average, there are more than 100 Indian weddings that are hosted in several fascinating Thai destinations annually. Furthermore, the wedding party and wedding guests are not only travelling from India, they are actually from all over the world. This also benefits other special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, graduation parties and family re-unions for Indians (Thailand awarded best country, 2014). In March 2014, most famous Indian wedding organisers were invited to a conference “Wedding Planner Trip and Symposium 2014” that was located at in Thailand by the TAT New Delhi and Mumbai offices. The meeting was created to discuss ways to impress Indian wedding couples and their wedding guests. TAT invited India’s leading wedding planners, event organizers and hotel wedding specialists from places like KhaoLak, Samui, Phuket, Hua Hin, Krabi, Chiang Mai and Cha-am.

In recent times Phuket has held many successful Indian weddings, which should encourage Indian service investors to expand their hotels, airlines and hospitality businesses into the area. The Indians are only waiting to see the upgrade in tourism services and products specifically for the Indian market (Sritama, 2010).

However, there is no such academic research on what motivates (push & pull) or influences Indian couple’s decision to have a wedding in Phuket. Finding out the internal and external factors why Indian couples select Phuket as their wedding destination, knowing what strengths and weaknesses Phuket has and suggestions to maintain Phuket as a competitive Indian wedding destination would be beneficial for local wedding organizers, hotels and airline services. Other provinces in Thailand also gain benefit from this study and result in total country revenue and its reputation.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 To explore internal and external factors that influence the selection process of Indian couples on Phuket as an overseas wedding destination.

1.3.2 To identify the strengths and weaknesses of Phuket as a wedding destination for the Indian market (criteria of service, atmosphere, price, location and facilities).

1.3.3 To propose suggestions on how to maintain the competitiveness of Phuket as a wedding destination for Indian couples.

1.4 Significance of the Study

In the past years the number of Indian travellers has increased in Thailand. Indian wedding events generate higher revenue and lucrative profit compared to Thai or Western weddings. To date, there is no academic research investigating or exploring Indian wedding couples' motives to have a wedding in Phuket. There are no studies on the strengths and weaknesses of the island for the wedding market from India or suggestions on how to maintain this trend. Thus, this study will be benefit to the following terms.

1.4.1 Academic terms:

1.4.1.1 Benefits for scholars to further study in Indian wedding management in overseas countries, and to understand Indian wedding couples' behavior.

1.4.1.2 Benefits for researchers to utilize these findings (push and pull motives), to further study if there is a significant correlation between push and pull factors.

1.4.2 Social terms:

1.4.2.1 To harmonize relationship between India and Thailand as the result of push and pull motives, Indian nature, and to satisfy Indian market.

1.4.2.2 Phuket's strengths are identified, so all sectors get involved, and cooperate to enrich Phuket's strength as an Indian wedding destination.

1.4.2.3 In regards to its weaknesses as an Indian wedding destination, the action plan to resolve these issues should be regulated.

1.4.2.4 The insider suggestions for Phuket remaining competitive as an Indian wedding destination would help the Indian wedding business be successful in Phuket as long as there is demand.

1.4.3 Business terms:

1.4.3.1 Benefits for wedding event organizations on understanding the main influences for prospective Indian couples so that the company can develop marketing strategies appropriately.

1.4.3.2 Benefits for Thailand to forecast and attract higher income/revenue.

1.4.3.3 Benefits for investors to project the risk investment.

1.4.3.4 Benefits for all service provider sectors in Phuket for job creation and for income distribution to Phuket.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

Research continues to emerge in response to growing innovations in the field of Indian weddings in Phuket. However, none of these have managed to totally focus on the presence of Indian weddings in Phuket, especially factors that are influencing couples to select Phuket Island for their precious once-in-a-lifetime wedding. Investigating the presence of Indian weddings in Phuket can be somewhat difficult because only a few informants are interested in cooperating with research efforts. However, this does not always convey that the current study cannot obtain essential information to meet the study's aims and objectives. Also, the study assures that sufficient and essential information will be obtained to guide future studies.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Outline

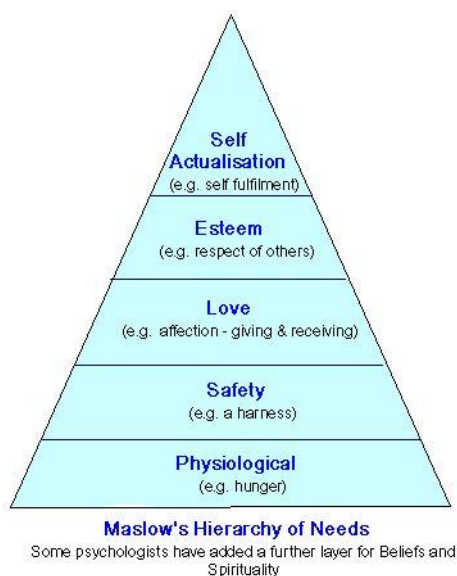
This chapter explains theories pertaining to the process of decision making, involvement levels, factors influencing the process, tourist decision making process and push and pull travel motivations. Furthermore, this study also presents some previous research and information in the area of weddings, overseas weddings, Indian weddings, and Indian weddings in Phuket. The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework of the study and adapted decision making model by Lau and Hui (2010).

2.2 Idea and Concept related to the Decision Making Process and Its Components

2.2.1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Maslow (1970) explained why individuals are driven or motivated by specific needs at certain times. Maslow first introduced a theory of human motivation (Kotler & Armstrong, 1994). He claimed that human desires were arranged in a ladder, from the basic wishes to complex desires at pinnacle of the pyramid. Needs at the base of the pyramid are the basic physical requirements and once those minor desires have been reached, people shift to the subsequently level of desires (see Figure 2.1). With reference to the wedding ceremony, it then links to level 3, "love" (Leeds, 2002), since all human beings need love and to be loved. Another link to Maslow's theory of needs is people must have satisfied their physiological needs, then their safety needs; otherwise, they are not interested in love/wedding. The wedding interests might come from a strong need for more love and affection, and then the wedding couple would like to get respect from others for their love, which links to greater esteem or more self-actualisation (Kotler & Armstrong, 1994).

Figure 2.1 Hierarchy of human needs



Source: Kotler & Armstrong (1994)

A wedding ceremony is one of the most significant social events in human's life. Not just because it is the turning point where two people start to share the rest of their lives together, but also because of the bonding from two families into one big family (Patwari, 2013). In addition, it is one way to express passion and sharing of values. A wedding is one dream that a person tries to fulfil at least once in their lifetime. People believe that when such a day comes, they will take action in order to remember that moment for all their lifetime. People have a desire to fulfil all their wishes and would rather do extra things than regret not fulfilling their wishes (Supatra, 2010).

2.2.2 Decision making process

Decision making is fundamentally a problem solving progression. Most of consumers go through a similar mental process on deciding which product to take. Despite this similarity, different customers often end up buying different products. These differences reflect the variations in individual character – their desires, past experiences, attitudes, benefits gained, values and lifestyles (intrinsic motivation), and also their social influence, their social status, reference groups.

Kotler and Armstrong (1994) explained that the consumer decision-making process is commonly described as five stages of consumer behavior. (see Figure. 2.2)

Figure 2.2 Consumer decision making process



Source: Kotler & Armstrong (1994)

1. *Problem recognition*: The decision making procedure begins with this acknowledgment of problems and needs. The needs can be triggered or influenced by internal stimulus such as hunger, security, or love. These inner needs then create the tension that stimulates conduct to satisfy the desires. Motivation, thus, can be viewed as the encouragement to fill in the desires. Additionally, according to Maslow's theory of needs, people's desires would not be totally complete but tend to grow to other desires once the current ones have been met. Additionally, the needs can also be aroused by external stimuli, such as the smell of fresh bakery when people pass by or a neighbor's new car (Kotler & Armstrong, 1994). Linking this with the push and pull motivation for Indian weddings in Phuket, Indian wedding couples may be influenced during the problem recognition stage by wedding pictures/articles in a magazine or on the internet.

2. *Information search*: Having recognised that the problem exists, the next step is to recall past information gained and search for more if needed. There are four major information sources that influence the consumer.

- Personal sources: Family members, acquaintances, colleague.
- Commercial sources: Promotion, sales representatives, dealer exhibit.
- Public sources: Group media, client - ranking organizations.
- Experiential sources: Inspecting, using the product.

Consumers are always exposed to more news by commercial sources than personal or public sources. However, the most influential source for when to purchase services, products or a brand is a personal source (Boyd, H., Larreche, J.C., Mullins, J. & Walker O., 2005). At this stage Indian wedding couples still take some time to search for more information and they either confirm the wedding in Phuket or elsewhere.

3. *Alternative evaluation*: There is no sole procedure exploited by all clients or by one consumer in all purchasing circumstance. Some essential ideas are outlined below to understand the consumer evaluation process.

Consumers rarely consider all possible options, preferring to focus on those they are familiar with, such as the Hilton or Marriott hotels. The consumer will also look at the attributes of the hotel, including atmosphere, cleanliness and location. Finally, the consumer will combine the familiarity of the hotel with their analysis of the multiple attributes and decide which option is best suited for them.

The significance of attributes depends by the product nature. Some examples are;

- Hotel: Atmosphere, location, price, cleanliness.
- Restaurant: Quality of food, food taste, price, varieties of food.

4. *Purchase decision*: This is the stage when the consumer decides to purchase, which might involve who to buy from, when to buy or do not buy.

5. *Post-purchase behaviour*: This stage is very important after sales, where the consumers will compare the product to their expectations and decide if they are satisfied or not. Consumers can produce positive or negative word of mouth based on their experiences. Many firms tend to follow up after sales to ensure their consumers made the right decision and create a good reputation for their business.

The decision making procedure is not ended when the service has been delivered because the consumers may experience different levels of fulfilment and their perception of the products performance will determine their fulfilment level. (Lovelock, Patterson & Walker, 2001)

Not all transaction precedes each stage of the decision making process model. A core advantage of this model is that it acknowledge that the buying decision making procedure is possible to begin far previous to any actual purchase has occurred, encouraging that marketers to pay attention on the whole process rather than just on the decision (Kotler, Saunders & Wong, 2001).

With regards to wedding functions, the decision may not be made again with the same person, but this experience of the decision making process can be a useful reference for relatives and friends.

2.2.3 Type of buying behavior

Consumer may skip one step of the decision making model due to the level of involvement as explained by Assael (as cited in Kotler & Armstrong, 1994). A decision making procedure is various with the sort of buying decision they are making. There are immense differences between buying soap, a basketball, an expensive iPhone and a wedding ceremony function.

Table 2.1 Four types of buying behavior

	High Involvement	Low Involvement
Major differences between brands	Complex buying behaviour	Variety seeking buying behaviour
Minor differences between brands	Dissonance reducing buying behaviour	Habitual buying behaviour

Sources. Assael as cited in Kotler and Armstrong (1994)

Complex buying behavior

It is referred to a purchase where there is a significant difference between brands. This is generally referred to when the product is pricey, bought once in a while, has a high degree of economic risk and is highly self-expressive. Examples include cars, homes, computers and education. Hence, a wedding ceremony is categorized to be a complex buying behavior.

High-involvement sales include products or services that are sensitively significant to the buyer because they display social or ego desires and therefore carry social and mental risk (e.g., the risk of looking foolish to family or friend). They engage a lot of money and therefore financial risk, however, a high-involvement product for one buyer may be viewed as a low-involvement product for another.

Dissonance reducing buying behaviour

This behaviour referred to the consumer sometimes is very much caught up in a purchase because the purchase is expensive or irregular, but there are small differences in brand. The clients tend to buy the product that is less expensive.

Habitual buying behaviour

This behaviour means products are bought under low involvement. There is no significant in brand differences. Mostly, consumers buy brand names at accidental or buy the same brand over and over again to avoid making decision. Marketers must be able to identify the difference of such repeating buying behavior with the brand loyalty consumer. It is easy to lure such a consumer by offering special promotions.

Variety seeking buying behaviour

Some product purchases are low involvement, however significant in brand differences. Consumers always switch the brands. Their stimulation to switch the brand is not disappointment, but a desire for variety and novelty.

The level of involvement also plays a major role in the consumer decision making process in tourism. For complex buying behaviour, people tend to be more rational in the decision making stage. Moreover, the tourism is characterized by a superior expenditure, the absence of a tangible return of the investment and the presence of an interval between the buying and the consuming phase.

2.2.4 Factors influencing buying behavior

Consumer decisions are strongly influenced by the following factors.

1) Psychological factors. Once the needs were recognized or aroused, the four majors of psychological factors that influence consumer choices are **motivation, learning, perception and beliefs and attitude.**

Motivation. An individual usually have numerous desires at any given times. Some of the needs is not strong enough to encourage or stimulate the man at a given time. A need turn to motive when it is adequately critical to drive a person to proceed to meet satisfaction (Kotler, Saunders & Wong, 2001). Similar to the motivation theory by Maslow, which attempted to provide explanations about why at the certain point people are driven by a specific need and will not move to the next important need until the current needs are fulfilled.

Learning. It refers to all changes, situations happened through life and combine as experience through doing and learning. Kotler, Saunders and Wong claimed that learning is one of the factors that influence consumer behavior.

Perception. Once the motivated person is ready to act, the perception influence how they act. A couple that have the same needs to get married may act quite differently. People learn through the flow of five senses: hearing, sight, taste, touch, and smell. Nonetheless, each individual obtains, proceeds, and interprets this information in their own way (Kotler, Saunders & Wong, 2001). People can form different perceptions of the same stimulus because of these three perceptual processes:

- Selective attention: the trend that a person blocks out the majority of the information which they are uncovered. In other words, it is not easy for marketers to attract the consumer's attention.

- Selective distortion: the trend that people interpret information received in accordance to supports what they already believe. Therefore marketers must understand the customers' mind set and how this distortion will affect interpretations of advertising and sales information.

- Selective retention: This trend claims people will disregard as much as they experience. They tend to maintain supporting information towards their beliefs and attitude. This fact explains why marketers use so much stage show and repetition in promoting the product to their market.

Beliefs and attitudes. These beliefs and attitudes lead to the types of product and brand image that consumer will buy.

2) Personal factors. Personal factors also influence the buying behavior, such as personality, age, occupation, economic situation, life - cycle stage, self-concept and lifestyle (Kotler, Saunders & Wong, 2001). Personality is defined as unique behavior that direct to a relatively consistent and lasting response to one's own atmosphere. Personality usually includes traits such as self-confidence, power, independence, etc.

Sometimes small groups influence people's decision. The direct influencing group and which people often belongs to are referred to as 'membership groups'. Reference groups refer to those who have an indirect point of comparison. Marketers need to figure out who is the opinion leader within the reference group, who has knowledge, special skills, or the personality to exert influence over others. Family members are a very strong influencing factor to buyer behavior (Kotler, Saunders & Wong, 2001).

An overseas wedding would require a deeper information search and involved personal sources (family members, acquaintances, and colleagues) that can better convey the experience qualities (Gilbert, 1991).

3) Cultural factor. Cultural factors involve culture and social class. Culture is regarded as the fundamental foundation of an individual's wants, values, perceptions, and behaviors. Growing up in one of a society, children gain the basic values, perceptions, and behaviors from their families. Social class is categorized by multiple factors, such as title, education, income, occupation, wealth and other variables. In some social systems, members of different classes need to assume certain social roles and are unable to change their social status. In fact, within the same social class, people tend to perform similar buying behavior (Kotler, Saunders & Wong, 2001).

A family can display their financial and social status through a wedding. The couple can also convey their values and character by the wedding style (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2003). These are expressions from the inside (Intrinsic motivation) that drive human beings to do such things to satisfy the identified needs. Intrinsic motivation is bigger impact than extrinsic motivation, yet extrinsic motivation can easily dislocate intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

2.2.5 Tourist decision making

Pearce (2005) distinguish tourist behaviour from consumer behaviour, reference to the work of Clawson and Knetsch (1966) and their characteristic of five extended phases adjoining tourist activities. The phases include 1) a pre-purchase, 2) a travel to the destination, 3) an actual experience, 4) a return travel element, and 5) an extended recall. Clawson and Knetsch (1966) introduce the difference of tourist service behaviour from ordinary purchaser behaviour characteristics. In the pre-purchase phase, many travellers prepare their travel arrangement many months in advance. Similar procedure may be stimulated by luxury products, such as big bike, brand name car, but are not likely to happen with the convenience products, such as daily products. The journey to and from the destination is a unique and essential characteristic of tourist behaviour, as it adds up for a large proportion of the travellers' expenses. The actual experience is usually an intangible product and service that involves various factors. Last is the reflection phase. Travellers may replicate on their travel experiences years after their services. Other types of consumer products often disappear in consumers' mind and their contribution is often limited.

While the purchase of a tourism product has something in common with buying daily products, there are also some different attributes because of the complexity and diverse nature of the consumption experience and costs, which lead to high risk and involvement for tourists or buyers. It is suggested by many researchers (Sirakaya & McLellan, 1997) that the majority of tourism products are costly, especially when planning a leisure vacation to another country. Thus, the decision making process for a potential tourist will be more complex and difficult. One might also note the presence of an opportunity cost, if only because the decision to visit a location implies that another location is not being visited.

Early work on the decision making procedure of tourists utilized the concept of the “economic-rational man”, which assumed that tourists are rational problem solvers. Wahab, Crompton, & Rothfield (1976) proposed a model that explained tourists’ decision-making process assuming that tourist behavior is a rational assessment. The potential tourists compared the costs and benefits before making arrangements and decisions. The greatest utility alternative will be chosen. However, the destination-choice of tourists involves a degree of uncertainty (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). For example, the weather, the real quality of service and the attitudes of the hosts are sometimes unknown when decisions are being made (Mansfeld, 1992). Decrop and Snelders (2004) suggested that emotions and vision also take an vital function in shaping holiday and destination choices.

Crompton (1979) first proposed that the decision process can be categorized into two phases. The first is a general phase that answers the elementary question of going or not going on a holiday. Once the individual makes a decision to travel, the next phase is to decide on where to go and other issues like accompaniment, duration, and activities, which are called the specific sub-decisions. Furthermore, in the travel literature, the buying process is also influenced by various factors (Ankomah, Crompton & Baker, 1996).

2.3 Ideas and Concepts Related to Travel Motivation: Push and Pull Factors

Travel motivation is related to what motivates tourists to select a destination for their holiday. Pearce, Morrison and Rutledge (1998, p.215) defined travel motivation as “the global integrating network of biological and cultural forces which gives value and direction to travel choices, behaviour and experience”. Why do some Indian couples select Phuket as their wedding destination, whereas others spend their once in a lifetime experience in Khaolak, Hua Hin, Bangkok, or Chiangmai? It assumes that all tourists select the specific destinations for definite reasons. Prebensen (2007) assumes that those reasons are the influence of their motivations. Motivation in a tourism context, thus resolves stimulation factors that people travel (Prebensen, 2007). The answers will signify the key factors which could influence Indian wedding couples to select a particular destination for their wedding.

Push and pull factors

Travel motivation is among one of the useful approaches to understand a traveller’s needs and traveller behaviour (Crompton, 1979). Previous studies on tourist motivation identified the two dimensions of push and pull factors (Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Uysal & Hagan, 1993). The concept of the push and pull element is that people take a trip because they are influenced by their own internal element and attracted by the external forces of destination attributes. Push characteristics are intangible or internal desires of the individual travellers. Pull characteristics are attractive destinations as viewed by the travellers.

Crompton (1979) first developed a conceptual framework that integrates seven motivations of pleasure vacations which had significant influence on the decision making for choosing a destination: the socio-psychological, or push factors (escape, relaxation, self-exploratory, association-enhancement, prestige, social interaction and regression) and two cultural, or pull factors (novelty and education). The above attributes influence the selection of a destination. According to Crompton (1979), socio-psychological motives are the great tool in explaining the initial stimulation, or push people to take a holiday, and also have the related potential to direct the tourist in the direction of a particular destination. Later, Yuan and McDonald (1990) tried to find pull and push factors whether there are any difference amongs nationalities. They identified seven pull and five push factors. The push factors include prestige, escape, novelty, relationship enrichment, and relaxation. The pull factors consist of budget, culture, wilderness, facilities, the

ease of access, cosmopolitan environment, and opportunities for hunting. They establish major differences among travellers from different countries regarding the level of importance that individuals related to the push and pull factors. Sirakaya and McLellan (1997) asserted that additional pull factors influencing a traveller's destination choice are trip expenses, local hospitality, security, convenience, recreation activities, socialise opportunities, personal and historical links, cultural and shopping services, and unusual and distant vacation spot. Social class has important role in evaluation criteria. Attitude formation, value orientation, motivation, socialization during childhood, income, and education levels will influence one's social class. People with different level of income would have different spending holiday styles (Hsu & Power, 2002).

Lau and Hui (2010) found that reputation of the venue, married couple experiences, recommendations from friends and relatives, and popularity of the venue were the top pull attributes when selecting wedding banquet venues for Hong Kong wedding couples. On the contrary, the push factors are the first impression of a sales person, personal preferences and package attractiveness. Siri, Kennon, Josiam & Spears (2012) showed that four push factors that influence Indian travellers made the journey to Bangkok, Thailand are family visit, novelty seeking, releasing stress, and achievement, while cultural and historical attractions, a beautiful environment, close distance between India and Thailand and the valued for money are the key pull factors.

Thus, discovering the factors that influence the selection process of Indian wedding couples in Phuket will enable marketers to discover the significant characteristics that are to be promoted. It is essential to comprehend both push and pull factors for effective marketing strategies (Baloglu&Uysal, 1996). As tourist motivations are increasingly important in promoting and marketing tourist destinations, this research attempts to identify the push and pull factors of Indian wedding couples coming to have an Indian wedding in Phuket.

2.4 Ideas and Concepts Related to the Overseas Wedding Destination of Indian Couples, Phuket

2.4.1 Wedding ceremony

A wedding ceremony usually symbolizes love, and exhibit a solemn lifetime dedication and devotion. Furthermore, a wedding marks the commencement of marriage (Leeds, 2002). Consequently, wedding is the channel to precede the two individuals' relationship lawful, and is the announcement of legal marriage amongst the society (Appadurai, 1997). Weddings also signify one of the human needs for belonging (love and affection). Thus, attentions must be paid on examination of human needs theory.

On a deeper rationale, a wedding could be the display of their emotions, and consumer characteristics (Johnson & Mullen, 1990). The couple's sensual directs them to organise a wedding and then results in the unforgettable wedding. The socio-cultural background could also influence the couple to plan a wedding in a particular way (Baron & Byrne, 1987).

Within the wedding industry there are now a variety of creative ideas, including theme weddings, weddings in the garden, weddings by the beach, weddings on the cruise ship, etc. This new generation of wedding couples seek new, interesting fun things to do on their once-in-a-lifetime event. Some research has been conducted on whether there is a market needs on theme weddings in New Zealand (Krishnan, 2008). Expedia's 2014 American Altar Report claimed that Americans find traditional wedding ceremony to be massively hectic and have a preference on beach destination weddings ("Brides prefer the beach", 2014).

2.4.2 Overseas weddings

In this study, overseas weddings refer to a wedding ceremony away from the couple's home country or living country. The wedding guests and the wedding couple will have to travel away from their home country, requiring air transportation, accommodation and time off from their work. Overseas weddings have become more popular lately. The idea of an overseas wedding is that it is more meaningful for all because everyone has to take time off from their work, stay for a few days at the same accommodation and do activities together like a holiday. However, this may be a challenge for the wedding couple planning their wedding remotely. Some wedding couples are very busy working, and have no time for planning their wedding, so they hire a

wedding planner to save their time organizing this once-in-a-lifetime event. Hiring a wedding planner is quite pricy, therefore only high social class couples can afford this.

2.4.3 Indian wedding ceremonies

Gullapalli and Raju (2009) stated that Indian weddings are very dazzling festive, full with lots of religious ceremony and celebration, which continues for numerous days and includes both a pre-wedding and actual wedding day. The Indian wedding festive usually is a big event engaging number of guest from 100 to 10,000 people attending. Indian wedding customs are widespread among Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, and Jains. There was early research in the Indian wedding market in India and the trend showed that there are huge demands and potential growth in Delhi and Mumbai (Supatra, 2010).

Despite the fact that the majority of Indian marriages are arranged, some couples in metropolitan areas have "love marriages", where the couples have the right to select their own partners exclusive of family involvement or approval. Indian marriage has a special significance because it is believed to bring together not only two people (bride and groom), but two families as well. It involves a lot of customs and rituals, all having deep meaning behind them.

The idea of arranged marriage seems unrealistic to a Westerner, but in India, it is normal. Even though Indians travel and study abroad, they still consider arranged marriage as the most preferred choice ("Arranged marriage", 2010). The unique concept of arranged marriage is to maintain the caste system. It is a fundamentally approach of uniting the affluent rank and retain the poor class not to blend with the rich society. It was just a tool for the upper caste people to protect their community and to keep up their social status. Consequently, the parents aim to marry their children to a person of the same social background or same society. Arranged marriages allow the parents total control over family matters and members because the parents are the decision maker for their children married partner. To conclude, arranged marriages are marketing tools to support class system and racism ("Arranged marriage", 2010). Another advantage of arranged marriages is that if the wedding couples face the financial crisis, the arranged married couples will look for help from their parents. Furthermore, if the marriage turns to be not successful, the couple will have main support from both family sides. Their parents will get involved in solving the problems between the couple, if they are getting married with their families' approval. Therefore, arranged marriage is accepted as the secure decisions for Indians. On the contrary, the

love marriages undertake all their crises on their own, because they took the marriage's decision by themselves without the parents' approval. The displeasure drives the families to be reluctant to provide support financially and morally when the couples confront some obstacles. This is a common view of love marriages in India. For this reason, many couples would not plan to get married unless they have their parent's approval.

Even though there are many advantage of the arranged marriage, one of the most crucial drawbacks of arranged marriage is that the bride and the groom do not know each other before marriage. Its concept is that it does not matter if they are familiar with each other before marriage or not. Consequently, the partner is possible to not get along well. If one of them thinks totally conflict to each other, the mutual understanding of the couple would be hard to reach, and also the lack of a compromise. The arranged marriage must be accepted between the couple, then the successful arranged marriage will be. Acceptance of each other will strike a mutual level of understanding.

The concept of arranged marriage has changed significantly. In the past, parents are anxious about their children's life and secured marriage. The parents must approve the person that their children are going to marry with. Eventually, people realize that a successful marriages will only happened when the children marry the one they love, not by what they are forced to. Good arranged marriages take place when the parents support and assist their children to find their life partners. Understanding and acceptance are the only ways a marriage can prolong.

Nonetheless, love marriages are established in many societies in India. Even though love marriage claim to be low-grade to the weddings arranged by the parents. Indians who support love marriages argue that that it is very vital to know the partner before married. By contrast, Indians who have strong beliefs in arranged marriage by their parents think that arranged marriages are long lasting.

Indian wedding function phases

Indian wedding functions are comprised of three phases. There is a pre-wedding function (engagement), the wedding function, and a post wedding function ("Gujarati", 2010).

First of all, *pre-wedding function* is required to take place before the wedding ceremony on the mandap (the venue of marriage). Pre-wedding rituals are very significant due to the belief that it will bring the auspicious and propitious for the coming wedding ceremony. Pre-

wedding rituals can take 3-4 days. In Hindu marriage ceremonies, the pre-wedding rituals start many days before the actual wedding date, with the formal pledge of both families towards marriage (“Gujarati”, 2010). It is followed by *Sagaai* (engagement), *Haldi*, *Mehndi*, *Sangeet* and several such customs that various from family to family. Even in a Muslim marriage, the rituals of *Mehandi* and *Sangeet* happen before the wedding ceremony. People of all other religions -Jain, Parsee, Christians, and Jewish in India, have different kinds of pre-wedding ceremonies to spot the commencement of the auspicious phase of marriage. Below listed are the brief descriptions of the pre-wedding stage is inclusive of.

1) The engagement formality is called *the Sagaai*. It commences when upon the arrival of the bride at the groom’s house, she needs to bring *matli*, a gift that is believed to bring fortune and luck. The *matli* is a steel container which have dessert and presents for the family of the groom. This signifies the union of the two’s families. The ceremony concludes with a brief ceremony when ten ladies, five from each side of the family give blessing to the couples and this ties the bonding the bride and groom’ sides (“Engagement ceremony”, 2010).

2) *The Garba* is a fun gathering party between both sides of the family usually organized a night before the actual wedding. The ambience is lively with dancing and partying.

3) *Puja* is a typical religious ceremony performed at the couple’s residence several days preceding to their wedding. They pray to Lord Ganesh and wish for his blessings. A *pandit* is mainly responsible for the ceremony as well as choosing the wedding date and time. He would match their horoscopes. This ceremony is attended by immediate families and relatives who pray for the couple’ happiness and peaceful lives.

4) *The Mehendi* forms an important part of the pre-wedding ceremonies. The bride’s family side will be celebrating this entertaining filled ritual. The bride's family gathers the bride’s friends and relatives to sanctify the bride. A professional henna designer utilizes mehendi to the bride’s feet and hands. The *Mehendi* function is usually happen in day time and follows with the *Sangeet* function at night time. The ceremony is full with a cheerful feeling, singing and dancing in traditional songs with the ritual of *Mehendi*. The bride would wear light colour dress with light jewelry. According to Indian custom, a bride must remain in the house after the *Mehendi* ritual until their wedding day. The beliefs imply henna stains on the bride deeper and darker, and the

bride will be much loved by her future husband and his families. Moreover the Mehendi ritual marks the solidity of their love, hence it is considered as a good sign for a bride.

5) *Sangeet* is also another most frequently practised pre-wedding a ritual that is held at the groom's place. Groom's family and his friends get together to sing wedding songs and congratulate the love of the couple.

The above are the pre-wedding functions that Indian couples may skip one another before the actual wedding. In the wedding ceremony, the groom starts **Baraat** (the intimate family and friends' parade) dancing and celebrating processing towards wedding ceremony location. Many grooms choose to arrive on horseback. Traditionally Gujarati's do not allow Indian to marry people in the same city, so the Baraat imply that the groom will be travelling to the bride's town. The ceremony officially starts when the groom (Ponkvu) arrives, and he will be welcomed by his mother-in-law. She will tease him by trying to grab his nose. The couple concludes by receiving a blessing from their elderly called Ashirwaad. Next is called the Jaimala ceremony. The bride and the groom exchange the garland to each other. By tradition, the groom lifted the garland higher than the bride during this exchange (Indian wedding day function, 2010) this ceremony is usually planned by the groom's friend where they want to show that it is not easy to take the groom from his circle of friends and family. Later, bride's mother welcome the groom to the Mandap. In the Madhuparka the groom washes his feet and is presented with honey and milk. Also, a sister-in-law would try to steal or hide his shoes. His shoes are important as according to the traditions he has to wear the same pairs of shoes both before and after the ceremony. To get his shoes back, he must offer the sister – in – law some money. After that, the bride is brought to the Mandap. There is a curtain between bride and groom at the Mandap. The Acharya, Brahmin head guide commence the ceremony by lowering the curtain and followed by the exchange of garlands. The ceremony will be led by the Pundit in front of a holy fire. The bride's saree is united to the groom's scarf, which represents the joining together of their two souls. The Acharya chant mantras to call upon the blessings of Goddess Laxmi and Goddess Parvati for the bride. Later, the relatives join to wish the couple and shower them with rose petals and grains of rice.

After the ritual, the bride's brother carries the bride out from the Mandap (called Vidadi). The couple depart to the groom's place. The bride is welcomed by the groom's father to

their home as the Goddess Laxmi, which believes to bring good fortune to the bride's new home. The mother-in-law places a box of rice at the house's entry. The bride will drop the rice from the box with her right foot. This symbolises prosperity and the commitment of bride's responsibilities to her new family. After that the couple will play a game called AekiBeki, in which a tray of water is mixed with sindoor (vermilion) and milk. Coins together with a ring are placed on this tray and with reference to the tradition the one who finds the ring first will rule the household. The conclusion of ceremony is pray to God blessing the newly married couple happiness and love.

The post wedding function is normally held at the wedding place. It is mainly blessing the newly wedding couples by the Brahmin after completing the marriage ceremony. Friends and family will shower mix of rice and rose petals on the bride and groom as a blessing. Then the bride wishes to all friends and family a fond farewell before leaving for the groom's place. This is called the Vidaai ceremony. Last is Pilucinchuanu ritual, which concludes the wedding ceremony ("Gujarati", 2010).

As previously described, Indian weddings comprise of various religious ceremonies in each sequence, which are rich with custom and deep meaning behind them. Indian weddings are also a way to display their status among communities. Families often save for decades to host a big fat one (Basu, 2006)

2.4.4 Indian wedding destinations: a competitive market

These days, the new generations have shifted to do things in their own way. Most Indians will think about going to Jaipur or Goa as hot wedding destinations; they wish to go abroad to get married (Basu, 2006). There were no requests before that.

There were so many countries that wished to host Indian weddings, as being seen in the wedding exhibition in New Delhi in 2006. Not only are Asian countries interested, but also European countries such as Austria, France, Mauritius, the Maldives, and Switzerland are keen to lure Indian weddings (Cohen, 2009). The reason why many countries want to host Indian weddings is that each one generates revenue between 300,000 and 30,000,000 US dollars (Cohen, 2009). Due to the fact that Indian weddings generate lucrative revenue, the administrative agencies try to cooperate with government agencies to pay large attention to attract as many Indian wedding functions as possible.

It was noticed by various organizations that Indian weddings make higher revenue than the Western wedding. An example of this is from one of the most famous venues for Indian weddings in Phuket. Table 2.2 displays the revenue comparison of Indian weddings and Western weddings in 2010. It shows that the number of Indian wedding guests is between 200 and 500 pax per event, whereas Western wedding guests are between 2 and 100 pax per event. In financial terms, Indian weddings in 2010 made an average of THB 3,003,284 per an event, while the Western weddings only made THB 218,405 per event. These revenues are purely the catering part, not including the rooms/accommodation (room rate per room per night, and for many nights for Indian wedding) and the miscellaneous parts of their stay in the hotel.

Table 2.2 The revenue comparison of Indian weddings vs. Western weddings in 2010

No.	Types of wedding	Minimum revenue (Thai Baht)	Maximum revenue (Thai Baht)	Average revenue (Thai Baht)
1	Indian weddings (200- 500 guests attending)	1,472,750	4,866,000	3,003,284
2	Western weddings (2 - 100 guests attending)	55,000	678,724	218,405

Source. Event Management Department, JW Marriott Phuket Resorts and Spas (2010)

Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Thailand have government agencies involved in energetically promoting their country as a wedding destination. If the government and the third party of tourism organization help, Indian weddings can be arranged anywhere in the world (Murali, 2007). There were many wedding exhibitions in India in 2006. Plenty of wedding organizers, tourism authorities of several countries focusing on promoting this market attended to compete each other. Among the Indian wedding market, Thailand and Malaysia are considered very eye-catching because the expenditure of the weddings in both countries is equivalent to one in Kerala or Goa (Basu, 2006). Thailand and Malaysia took advantage of the similarity in cultures and way of life. Indians love to have a home atmosphere, even if the locales are out of the ordinary (Murali, 2007).

2.4.5 Thailand/Phuket as an Indian wedding destination

In recent years many wedding couples chose Thailand as a place to have their weddings. Thailand is now one of most popular Indian wedding destinations because of its beautiful beaches, natural resources, variety of venues, convenience, great hospitality, value for money, affordable air fare, Many of shopping venue, and variety of international standard hotel at reasonable rates (“Indian wedding in Thailand”, 2010).

However, it is the Thai hospitality that attracts Indians the most, as suggested by Mr.ChattanKunjara Na Ayudhaya, spokesperson for Tourism Authority of Thailand in 2010. Indians intend to extend their holiday period after the wedding for travelling around and shopping (Murralli,2007).

As shown in Table 2.3 (see below), the number of Indian guests arriving in Thailand has been increasing since 2009; it increased 14.45% from 2008, 23.72% in 2010, 20.33% in 2011, 11.03% in 2012 and 2013 saw an increase by 3.61% (MOTS, 2014).

Table 2.3 Number of Indian tourist arriving in Thailand from 2009 - 2013.

Year	Number of tourists	Share in international tourist arrival	%Δ	
2009	614,566	4.34	2009/2008	14.45
2010	760,371	4.77	2010/2009	23.72
2011	914,971	4.76	2011/2010	20.33
2012	1,015,865	4.55	2012/2011	11.03
2013	1,049,856	3.93	2013/2012	3.61

Source. Ministry of Tourist & Sports [MOTS] (2014)

Thailand also makes it easier for Indians to travel and stay in Thailand. Indian citizens can acquire visa upon arrival at all international airports in Thailand and the duration of stay is 15 days. The air transportation is also a fast growing industry. At present, approximately about 125 direct weekly flight services are operated between major cities in Thailand such as Bangkok and Phuket and major Indian cities including Madras/Chennai (7), Hyderabad (4), Delhi (41), Mumbai (40), Bangalore (7), Kolkata (24), and Bagdogra (2). These flights are operated by key airlines such as Thai Airways Internationals, Indian Airlines, Cathay Pacific Airways, Air India and several others.

A lot of marketing tools have been invested in promoting Thailand, such as a three-day 'destination Thailand' festival in New Delhi in September, 2009 by TAT Mumbai, India. TAT Mumbai and Indian wedding organizer Red Events India Pvt Ltd have joined together to undertake the task of organising for more than 400 Indian couples to tie the knot in Thailand during the current Green Season. Shaadi in Thailand Company Ltd also offered the package including accommodation with breakfast, lunch and dinner, local transport, Mehendi service, and tri-lingual services, in English, Thai and Indian of the customer's choice (Murralli,2007).

In addition to weddings, Thailand has a great picture in Indian's view. During their meeting with key Indian investors, Industry Minister and the Board of Investment (BoI) attempted to strengthen businesses with India (Vaz 2012). Key industries with high investment potential include service sectors, such as tourism, education, health, entertainment and construction. According to the BoI, in 2009, Indian businesses invested 12 projects with valued over 4.66 billion baht in the country. The Ministry of Commerce has targeted \$10 billion of investment by India over the next three years.

Indian weddings in Thailand take part in assisting and giving a boost to the growing number of Indian travellers to Thailand, whose six per cent of GDP is contributed by the tourism division. In 2009, the number of Indian arrivals to Thailand was approximated at 530,000 pax, however, the actual figure was actually beyond the estimate number ("Hot new wedding", 2010)

Despite the political crisis in Bangkok in the 2009, Indians are not concerned with the events because protests are normal in India (Bulletin, 2010).Bangkok was seized by anti-governments protests between March and May 2009 that left 92 dead and parts of the city in flames.

At least one Indian wedding being held at Bangkok's five-star Dusit Thani Hotel was interrupted by the street fighting in mid-May when several rocket propelled grenades were lobbed at the establishment(Bulletin, 2010).Despite the occasional riot, well-to-do Indian families are increasingly drawn to Thailand for their weddings because of the lower costs. The price of an Indian wedding in Thailand is 30 to 40 per cent cheaper than in other South-east Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore, and more than 50 per cent cheaper than in Europe or the US (Basu, 2006).

Commenting on the remarkable growth, Sethaphan Buddhani, Director for Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Mumbai alert on the important to evoke the niche segments as the Indian wedding market has developed over a period of time. Consequently, they now strike niche segments such as luxury holidays, golf, medical, weddings, and Bollywood tourism. TAT Mumbai focused on enlightening tour operators, travel agents, wedding planners and media on new and foreign destinations for the wedding in Thailand through ground-based marketing activities. TAT Mumbai planned to arrange workshops, seminars and educational (Vaz, 2012). The Tourism Authority of Thailand has been able to successfully position Thailand as a 'Value for Money' destination (Vaz, 2012).

There is great feedback from inside India, including newspapers in India itself, such as the India Tribune. The weekly journal for thinking Indians stated that the luxury Indian wedding has established a new overseas destination in Phuket ("Thailand – a new destination", 2010).

Indian Ambassador to Thailand, Anil Wadhwa, stated at Phuket Provincial Hall in Phuket City with Phuket Governor, Maitree Inthusut that Thai Airways (Thai Smile Flight) would launch direct flights four times a week between Phuket and two major Indian cities (New Dehli, Mumbai) from April 2013. The Indian Ambassador to Thailand also mentioned that the new direct flights would not only bring an increase in the number of Indian weddings being held in Phuket, but also revenue gained from their stay. The Indian wedding guests usually spent a week for weddings, with a holiday (Sidasathian, 2013).

Thailand has been one of the most wanted destinations among Indians to hold large luxury weddings. Phuket has been one of the hot spots for these weddings in Thailand. However, in 2011, the amount of Indian weddings at Phuket lower sharply compared to 2010. Phuket tourism community are having challenging to understand the reason for the fall. Some believe that Phuket hotels did not want to welcome and host large Indian weddings with hundreds of rituals and customs. They cannot afford to go wrong with the arrangements. Hoteliers need to further train their service staff about Indian wedding rituals in order to advance the service operation to Indian wedding group.

To date, the factors influencing the selection process for wedding couples have only been stated in magazines. A wedding is considered as planned events requiring good co-ordinations of people, venues, and other management operations (Getz, 2008). Bowdin, McDonnell, Allen,

O'Toole (2006) proposed that the choice of venue plays an important role in the planning of weddings which also influence other planning aspects. Van der Wagen (2005) identified key aspects that need careful considerations when planning a site requirement, including the provision of facilities and services, access, location and their availability.

Regardless of the importance of venue selection, a handful of previous studies focused on the choice of venue for weddings. Callan and Hoye (2000) identified the characteristics when sourcing unique locations for different types of events. The findings revealed that location, road access, availability of parking facilities, lighting, cleanliness, audio-visual equipment, rate promotion for accommodation, and beverage prices are among top important factors. While there are some existing studies investigating hotel choice selection, yet none has examined selection process of wedding venues for Indian couples.

Figure 2.3 Research design of the study

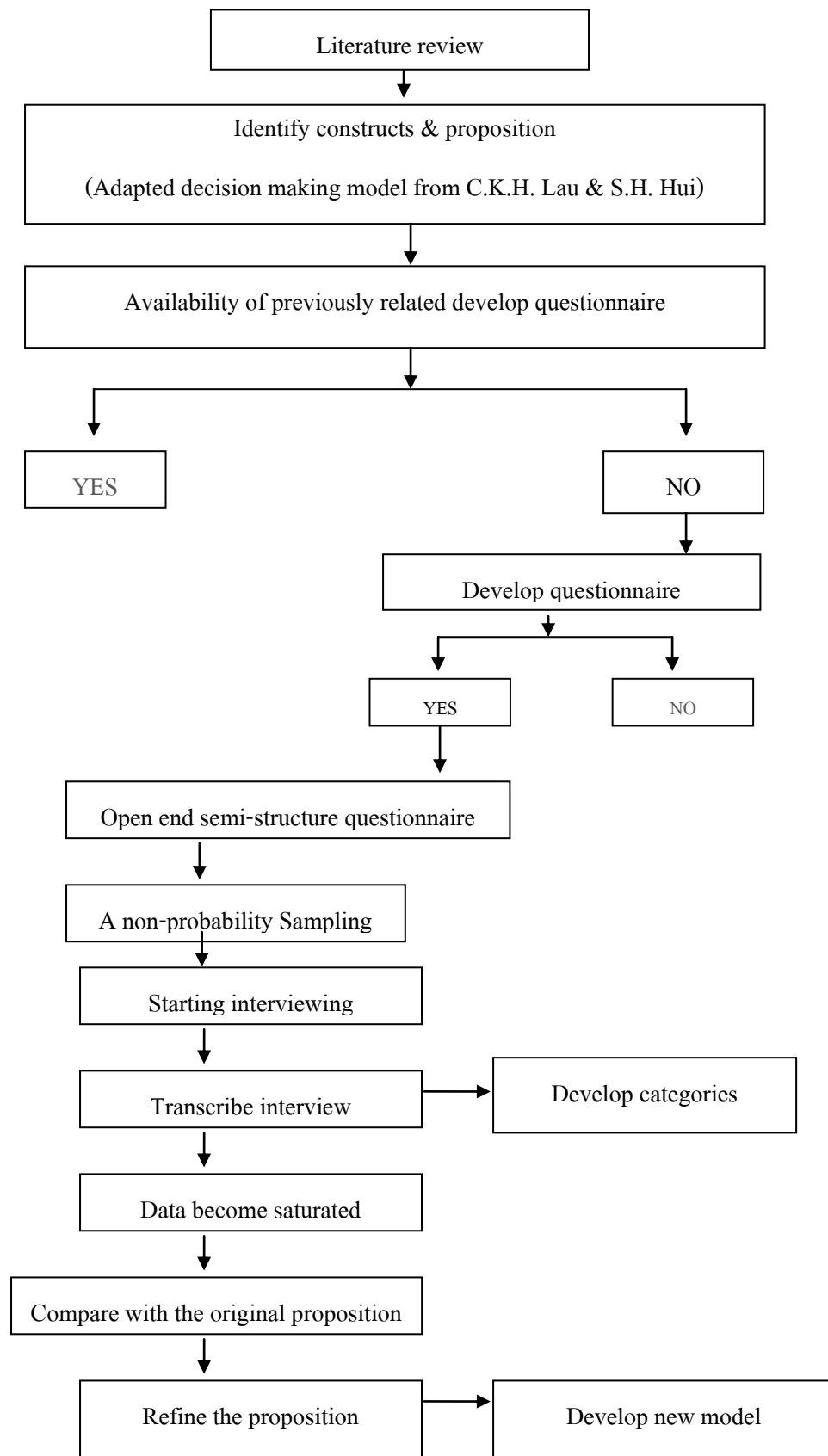
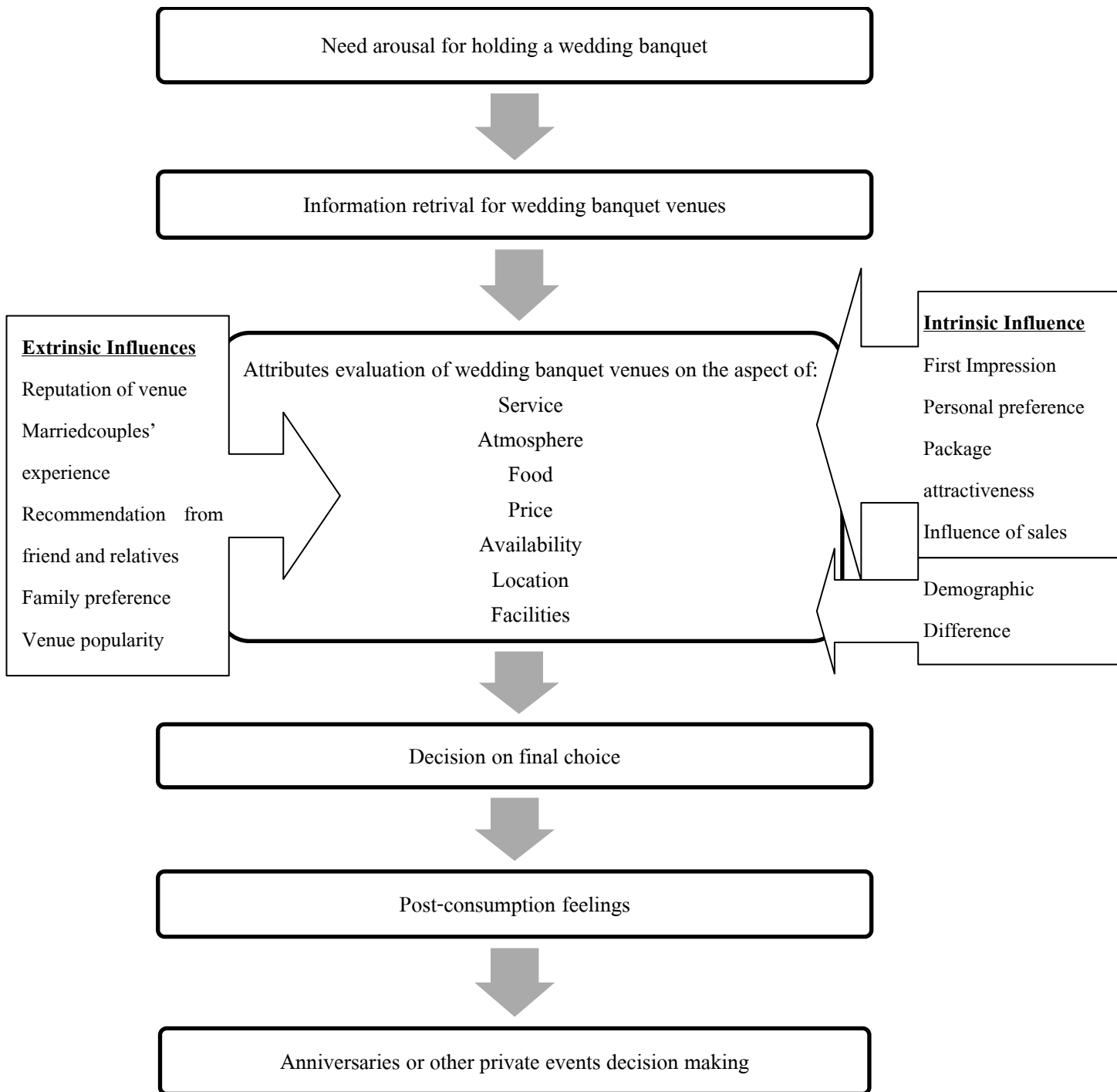


Figure 2.4A conceptual framework of the study



Adapted from Lau and Hui (2010).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter provide detailed explanations about choice of methods adopted in this study together with justification. This chapter commences with the overall research design, approach, instrument and qualitative data analysis procedures

3.2 Research Design

Qualitative method research

This research is an exploratory study. Adopting the approach by Churchill & Peter (1984) it focused on examining what is happening, seeking new insight, asking questions and assessing Phuket as an Indian wedding destination in a new light. It is flexible and adaptive to changes as a result of new data and new insights that occur while conducting the research.

A qualitative research approach was used for this study. The method is usually similar to works in clinical social-related studies because it involves the use of interviews with the study informants. This method focuses on the interview context which is thoroughly involves both researcher and participants' engagement. There are four stages involved in the qualitative research. Mankowski and Stein (2004) suggested that these stages are:

- 1) Asking
- 2) Witnessing
- 3) Interpreting
- 4) Knowing

In the first stage, target informants will be identified and selected. This is followed by approaching them and conducting interview with the selected informants. With reference to the current study, available Indian wedding couples who had or plan their weddings in Phuket are to be selected for this study.

In the next phase, researchers need to plan a meeting with the chosen informants. According to Mankowski and Stein (2004), it is highly recommended that interviews should take place in the environment where their weddings are to take place. This is largely due to the fact

that better observations can be done rather than solely make an observation on how they react to the questions probed on them.

The act of interpreting is when researchers focus on making sense and interpreting data that are obtained previously in the first two stages. Experiences of researcher may be integrated with the informants' answers to interpret the data. Finally, the act of knowing is when the interpreted data will be organised and compared with the proposed frameworks.

The current study has chosen the approach of qualitative research design for several reasons. Firstly, its main aim is to foster better understanding on human perceptions and activities (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

A qualitative method is believed to bring in more awareness of the proposed research objectives. Focusing on Indian weddings taking place in Phuket, with the adoption of qualitative research method, the researcher aimed to collect sufficient information pertaining important factors when Indian couples choose and require for their weddings. The use of qualitative could also highlight inner reasons and motives which may not be easily elicited by quantitative research methods. Nevertheless, the researcher is fully aware of Dann (1981)'s suggestions relating to problems of following this approach. Dann (1981) argued that sometimes tourists may fail to realize their true reasons for travelling, for example, they may be reluctant to reveal their real reasons, or cannot reflect or express their actual travel motives.

3.3 Research Strategy

This research used the case study to gain a rich understanding of influencing decision making factors of Indian wedding couples in Phuket claimed by Morris & Wood in 1991 (as cited in Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2000). The case study approach targets on obtaining key explanations to the question of 'why', hence the approach is one of the most used approaches in the exploratory studies.

3.4 Sampling Method Population

Sampling method

Non-probability sampling (or non-random sampling) was adopted in the study. In the exploratory stage, a non-probability sampling may be the most practical (Saunders, Lewis &

Thornhill, 2000). This sample will provide rich information of the case study. The sample size is dependent on the three research objectives, in particular, what the researcher need to find out, what will have credibility and what can be done with the available resources. With the reference to the data validity, it will be more to do with the data collection phase, analysis skills and the size of its sample (Creswell, 2003). Therefore the researcher conducted the interviews to collect primary data, until no new information or new insights arose.

More specifically, a purposive sampling technique was applied with Informants criteria as the following:

- Indian wedding couples who planned and got married in Phuket between January 2010 and January 2014.
- The parents of Indian wedding couples who planned and got married in Phuket between January 2010 and January 2014.
- Wedding planners who were familiar with Indian wedding business in Thailand for 5 – 10 years.
- Hotel representatives including the sales managers, the director of sales and the events management managers.

Scopes of study

3.4.1 Scope of time. This primary data collection was conducted from January 2010 to January 2014. Total research study period finished March 2014.

3.4.2 Scope of geography. This case study was conducted in Phuket, Thailand.

3.4.3 Scope of demography. Table 3.1 (see below) reports four types of key informants to answer research objectives.

Table 3.1 Classification of population, research method and number of informants

No.	Key informants	Descriptions	Data collection method	Number of informants
1	Indian wedding couples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informants are of Indian Nationality ● Indian couples who were married from January 2010 to December 2013 in Phuket, Thailand 	Semi- structured and in-depth interviews	7
2	Indian wedding couples' parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informants are of Indian Nationality ● Indian couples' parents whose children were married from January 2010 to December 2013 in Phuket, Thailand 		5
3	Wedding organizers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informants are either of Thai or Indian Nationality ● Informants have been in the Indian wedding business for 5 – 10 years 		7
4	Hotel representatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Informants are hotel personnel in sales or the event department ● Informants have been in the Indian wedding business for at least 5 years 		6
Total number of informants				25

Source: The researcher's own (2014)

3.5 Data Collection

This study combined both secondary data and primary data to find out answers to research questions.

3.5.1 Secondary data

The secondary data assisted in addressing statements of the problem, and also provided additional information to answer the research questions. The documented secondary data is sourced and used as follows:

1) Ministry of Tourism and Sports [MOTS], Thailand: where the researcher sources the statistics relating to Indian tourist arrivals in Thailand.

2) Academic journals where previous research on decision making factors and push and pull factors of wedding functions and Indian weddings were obtained.

3) Newspapers and trade journals regarding the number of Indian weddings taking place in Phuket, Thailand, and news updates involving the private sector.

4) JW Marriott Phuket Resorts and Spas with revenue generated by Indian weddings.

3.5.2 Primary data

Interview is chosen in this study as it is believed to one of the most effective instruments. One of the main advantages is that it facilitates the process of obtaining facts, ideas and suggestions from the use of carefully designed interview questions (Lowry, 1994).

Semi-structured interviews are chosen as the main interview techniques due to several reasons. Firstly, it is suitable in collecting information about people's perceptions relating specific phenomenon (Darlington & Scott, 2002). The techniques are also flexible as it allows the researcher to follow general outline of interview questions as well as making some adjustments to the sequence of the interview if necessary. It can even assist in eliciting informants' true feeling and their thinking (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

Owing to easy access to the target informants, face-to-face interview is to be conducted. Collis and Hussey (2003) claimed that face-to-face interview leads to better response rates and much insightful and rich data. In this study, questions are to be focused on the informant's knowledge and their overseas destination preferences for their weddings.

A semi-structure and in-depth interview will provide not only the source of information that can answer the research questions and objectives, but reveal the hidden details that add significance to the data gained. In-depth interview techniques allowed the researcher to collect data relating to their attitude and behaviours covering past, present and future. According to Hair, Bush, & Ortinall (2000) The in-depth interview is regarded as an approach attempting to discover people's underlying motivation, prejudices and attitudes towards sensitive issues. This interview technique can also be very useful if one aims to discover:

- 1) Individual/emotional changes or sensitive issues
- 2) Behaviour that may be influenced by socially desirable norms or when there there is a pressure to follow certain group behaviours
- 3) Situations that are complex in nature and need to be explained in details
- 4) Situations when group interviews are harder to arrange

The open-ended questions were used as these offer the informants chance to give their detailed answers as well as opportunity to explain their responses if necessary. Data analysis was complete as soon as each interview was conducted. Although Collis and Hussey (2003) asserted that data could be quantified, factors influencing Indian wedding destinations are mainly experiences and not rendered itself for quantifying. Hence, the data analysis would not involved quantifying in numbers.

Interview questions for Indian wedding couples or Indian wedding couple's parents

1. Please take me through the love story and why you decided on having a wedding outside of your country?
2. When did you make the final decisions?
3. Who did you ask for help or consult with on this wedding?
4. How would you get in contact with those people who assisted you?
5. What were your perceptions or feelings of their suggestions and opinions?
6. What could be the possible alternative venue for your wedding destination?
7. Please give me an example of a time that arranging the wedding was challenging?

8. Once you arrived in Phuket, was it similar to what you expected, in regards to sights and services?

9. Would you recommend any of your friends or relatives to have a wedding here in the future and why?

Interview questions for Indian wedding planners.

1. Please tell me about when your interests in arranging Indian weddings in Phuket began? Have you arranged any outside of Phuket?

2. Could you say more about what are the most popular Indian wedding destinations?

3. How does a prospective Indian couple get into contact with you?

4. What are most Indian wedding couples looking for when they arrange a wedding out of India?

5. What are your views or feeling about Indian weddings in Phuket? Do you think there is anything lacking?

6. As you are now in the Indian wedding destination market, please describe the current trend?

7. In your opinion, how can Phuket maintain its competitive as a top Indian wedding destination?

3.6 Data Analysis

All the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions were coded. The coding involved assigned an alphanumeric symbol (code) to represent (1) a specific response to a specific question and (2) the column position that the designated code or symbol will occupy on a data record. The coding process entails several different activities. Coding specifications for open-ended questions are much more likely to be designated after questionnaires have returned from the field (post coding). The researcher used case to refer to the units of analysis for the study, so case is a thing, object, person or whatever was interviewed or used to supply the answers to the survey question.

Coding open-ended questions that included explicit instructions were necessary to ensure consistency among orders.

- 1) Taking a sample from all informants or from each cell in the case of study
- 2) Writing down all responses in term of general overall category
- 3) Creating code from the responses (e.g. friendliness = 1, beautiful scenery = 2, wedding expertise = 3)
- 4) Most codes require what are called nets, that is basic category headings. The category headings allow the researcher to group different ways of expressing the same basic idea under a common heading.

Content analysis

Content analysis is considered as one of the most used procedures in analysis qualitative data. This is because it helps researchers to identify some patterns in the data. Systematic approaches are needed to be followed to categorize data and make observation in patterns of the phenomena under investigation.

For the current study, content analysis was adopted. Jankowicz (1995 as cited in Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2000) suggested that the use of content analysis would enable the researcher to observe and notice some patterns of respondents' responses, and then categorise their answers into a meaningful classification. In addition, content analysis would help to identify common answers emerged from the data.

3.7 Summary

A qualitative research formed the backbone of the overall research design of this study. Twenty five semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Indian wedding couples, five parents of Indian wedding couples, seven Indian wedding organizers, and six hotel representatives on Indian wedding business. The data was audio recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The transcripts were analyzed by thematic content analysis. Results of the research will be explained in great details in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Results

4.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter describes the findings of this current study. It reports the primary data collected based on semi-structured interviews. The researcher interviewed seven Indian wedding couples, five fathers of the grooms or brides, seven Indian wedding planners and six hotel representatives on Indian wedding business.

In order to maintain their anonymity, their actual names are not mentioned. Therefore, in lieu of their real names, the researcher has categorized them alphabetically with numbers. They are mentioned throughout the study as: Informant A1 to Informant A7 are Indian wedding couple Number One to Number Seven, Informant B1 to Informant B5 are the Indian wedding couple's parents Number One to Number Five, Informant C1 to Informant C7 are the Indian wedding organizers Number One to Number Seven, and D1 to D6 refer to hotel representatives Number One to Number Six.

After the interviews, the researcher found the answers to three research questions and supplementary information. The findings to each research question are presented in accordance to below points with the order of frequency and importance.

1. Internal factors that influence the selection process of an overseas wedding destination of Indian couples coming to Phuket
2. External factors that influence the selection process of an overseas wedding destination of Indian couples coming to Phuket
3. Strengths of Phuket as an Indian wedding destination
4. Weaknesses of Phuket as an Indian wedding destination
5. Suggestions on how to maintain Phuket as a competitive wedding destination.

4.2 Internal Influencing (Push) Factors

4.2.1 Novelty

Indian wedding ceremonies are full of ritual ceremonies. Indian marriage custom is carried on time after time. Indians follow their tradition and have been a wedding guest before they host their own. After the interview the results show that Indians want their once-in-a-lifetime event to be appreciative, memorable and unexpected for the couple themselves and for their guests. The Indian wedding couples seek new fresh wedding experiences with the full sense of ritual. They want to have a non-repeating wedding venue, to look for new destinations to escape from their everyday atmosphere, and to have their weddings in a different country from both their original home country and living country.

a) Memorial moments and non-repeating venue

Due to wedding ceremonies being regarded as a once-in-a-lifetime event, young affluent Indian couples in this generation wish to create a memorable wedding, not only for the couple themselves but also for the wedding guests who witness their love. Therefore, having an overseas wedding actually indirectly forces the wedding guests to move from their comfort zone to spend three or four days in another country for the whole three-day wedding celebration. Most Indians have been to a lot of wedding celebrations, they know what to expect and experience in the wedding ceremony. Even though the wedding host spent massively on decoration and catering, they mentioned that the appreciation was less when holding the wedding ceremony in their home country or in their everyday living zone. Informant A2, Informant A3 and Informant A4 claimed that travelling away from home to attend the wedding ceremony is more memorable as per the quote below.

You know, nowadays, Indians are very open for marriage function because this is once-in-a-lifetime event. Everyone wants it to be memorial. Not only for bride and groom to remember, they want other people to remember for a long time as well. That is why you have to do a wedding in a very great manner like not in your home country.

... but the fact is at the end of the day, it is a party, you go there, you come back home, maybe there is another party in the afternoon, or in the late night after another. It is like a routine. There is nothing special about it anymore. You may spend millions on it, but the

appreciation is very less. This is because people expect you to do that, it is so common now.

I want my wedding to be a great memory for everyone, for the entire guest who was there. It is not just another wedding in Delhi. It will be a memory for everyone who is here for the rest of their life time.

Indian wedding couple's parents, Informant B2 and Informant B3, agreed that one cannot repeat the same venue with their relatives who just had the wedding there. Indian societies are a big family. When they arrange a once-in-a-lifetime event, they tend to invite those same crowds for celebration. Therefore the wedding becomes less attractive and less exciting if the wedding venue is same as their relatives.

"...last month, my brother's daughter, they got married in Bali, so we cannot have as same destination as them on this month."

The only reason that we did not have a wedding in Hua Hin because there were four weddings already took place there. We do not want to continue the same place. It is the same crowd that we will invite so they will not enjoy.

Informant A1 emphasized that he was the wedding guest attending the same wedding venue for more than two occasions and for his third time visit as wedding host, he and his guests would not be interested in attending or hosting at the repeated venue.

The wedding couples want to find the different resorts so that people are more excited to the new place. For example, if I went to Hua Hin two times in Sheraton, for the third time, it is not exciting at all.

b) New locations

According to Informant A4, the Indian wedding couples love to arrange their weddings in a new exotic place where not many couples can afford to have. Informant B2 added that the parents and the wedding couple planned to bring a fresh, new wedding theme to excite the wedding guests so they would have fun time attending their wedding.

"... of course somewhere different because a lot of wedding happened in Gao all the time. So you want to do something different then."

"...another thing that we try to do is, even though it is difficult. We try to make a fresh experience."

c) Escape from everyday atmosphere

Informant B1 stated that a wedding ceremony is referred to as a special event. The feast will not happen regularly or repeatedly. The wedding couples would like to avoid their normal everyday life atmosphere place as per below quote.

"If they have it in Singapore, it is normal, it is like, and every day they are there. So when they want to have their wedding, it must be special day."

d) Neutral venue

Most people will hold the wedding ceremony in a convention hall or ballroom located in their hometown or home country so that all of their relatives and friends can attend this once-in-a-life time event. However, after the interview, the researcher found that nowadays the Indian couples do not want to arrange the wedding in the country where they live. The couples want the wedding ceremony to happen at a neutral venue, avoiding both the bride and groom's home country. They want somewhere different according to Informant A2 and Informant A5.

"I live in Dubai and the girl lives in Singapore. So we want the place that is not Singapore and not Dubai. We both looking at Bali and Phuket and we decided on Phuket."

"We decide that we want to have a destination wedding in a place that was like neutral for both of us. You know not in either of our country."

4.2.2 Positive past experience

Most informants admired Phuket as the wonderful holiday destination. Informant B3 and Informant A6 visited Phuket many times for leisure trips and they loved the place. Informant A7 and Informant A4 have attended an Indian wedding in Phuket, and they were impressed with the overseas wedding experience. Therefore they want an overseas wedding in Phuket when their time comes.

"... because we visited Phuket many times for holidays so we have already known how beautiful Phuket is. We have already had a mind set up to do marriage in Phuket. It didn't take us long time to think."

“We visited many weddings in Thailand for our friends’ and we like the idea of destination wedding. So we want to do it in Phuket.”

“We have friends married in Phuket before. That is one of the reasons that we choose Phuket, and been here as the wedding guest before.”

4.2.3 Limiting guest list

Since the wedding is a social event, the wedding hosts tend to invite almost everyone they know living in the same city with the wedding couple and their parents in accordance with etiquette. There are originally more than two thousand guests. According to the findings, Informant A3 and Informant A5 agreed that they want to invite only close friends and relatives (quality guests). An overseas wedding is a nice way to minimise the number of the guest list as quoted below.

We live in Dubai. If I do the wedding in Dubai, I have to invite maybe one or two thousand guests. It’s in the same city. If I do in another country, only the people who are close to our family [sic], that really care for us, only those people will fly to Thailand and attend the wedding.

An overseas wedding is easier to not invite everyone. In our culture, it is very difficult to not invite a whole family. For example, I invite a friend plus their husband or wife, plus their children, plus their parents [sic]. People get insulted if you didn’t invite them.

4.2.4 Showing social status

Not everybody in India is capable of having a destination wedding. Informant A4, Informant A5 and Informant B2 stressed that only the affluent Indian families can afford this kind of elaborate overseas wedding. It is also a new wedding fashion for upper class Indians. With the new trend, they always have in mind that they want to have an overseas wedding.

“Not everybody can have marriage outside India, only high class people. It is a trend for high society that have to do marriage outside India.”

“Who does wedding outside of their country? Just the top rank population who can afford something like that.”

“It is a fashion that we will be proud of, not everyone can afford this. It is prestige because it is more expensive.”

4.2.5 Combining vacation opportunities

A wedding is the occasion that all family members and close friends get together, therefore, the couple wish to take this opportunity make it a fun family vacation. The couples want to make the wedding more interesting to attend according to Informant B1, Informant A3 and Informant A4.

“We have to choose the place that friend and family can take it as a vacation out of the wedding as well [sic].”

“We want to do something different. A lot of people come from USA. and they can visit this place and enjoy the wedding ceremony.”

When you come out of your own country, you stay together in the same place for a period of time [sic]. You are not only party together. There is a free time, you can always have activities, or chit chat. It just makes the whole experience much more memorable. It becomes family get together trip.

4.3 External Influencing (Pull) Factors

4.3.1 Beautiful scenery of Phuket

Informant A1 to Informant A7, Informant B1 to Informant B3 and also Informant C1 to Informant C3 all admit that they are attracted by pleasant surroundings, a relaxing atmosphere, and a clean area (which Phuket has).

“Phuket is a beautiful place. There are many nice beaches, beautiful scenery and hotels [sic]. All the things are matching together. It is really beautiful environment.”

“Phuket is not full of crowds and only for a night time like other tourist attraction island.”

“Phuket scenery is more international. It is more developed, nicer than other islands in Thailand [sic].

Informant A2 and Informant A5 added that they also like the beautifully designed resorts, architecture of the accommodation, resort beaches and gardens.

“The resort in general is beautiful. I really like the resort structure, the pond, the layout of garden and the way resort design. This is very beautiful.”

Indian wedding couples will consult their priest for the auspicious date first, and then they will look for the wedding venue. Once the wedding date is fixed, Informant A3 and Informant A4 considered the nice weather at those venue options for their three or four day celebration. Some mentioned that it was too hot or too cold in a country on the fixed wedding date. Informant B2 admitted that weather is one of his considerations of selecting a wedding venue. Therefore, Phuket is the best option.

“Dubai has many good beautiful resorts. However, [sic] we don’t have it in Dubai because the weather in July is very bad.”

Rajasthan in India, is the popular places for a destination wedding. However, in the summer, it is very hot over there, so you cannot do it. It has to be in winter. My wedding has been planned for July, so that is already out.

“The factor is the weather, the climate; we try to find the destination that gives us everything together in one package.”

4.3.2 Accessibility

Indian wedding celebrations take a minimum of three to four days. The wedding couples take the ease of access to the venue into consideration when selecting the venue. This includes the convenience of accessing the wedding venue, visa requirements upon arrival, flight connectivity and whether the locations close to their living country.

a) Transportation: flight connectivity

With reference to overseas weddings, everyone must travel from one destination to another. Informant A4, Informant A5 and Informant C1 implied that the convenience of transportation, the flight connectivity, and direct flights are one of the factors that they take into the decision making process.

“Phuket has got many direct flights from mostly everywhere. There is no hustle at all.”

Phuket has the best flight connectivity for our guest, because a lot of our guests are flying from Europe.”

“It has a lot of direct flight from Hong Kong, so it is easy for our guest to come here as well.”

b) Visa requirements

Informant A3 pointed out that with the nature of weddings most of the guests will confirm at the last minute. Since the majority of wedding guests are Indian, attending the wedding in another country requires a visa to travel and enter. The convenience and ease of entry to each country is the main factor in the decision.

The main factor that helped us decided on the country is the visa requirement. For Thailand, the visa can be given to Indian passport holders on arrival at the airport. You do not need to apply earlier.

c) Destination that is close to the couples or the majority of relatives, including the guest list.

Informant A4 suggested that one of the factors is that the wedding venue must be somewhere close to where the majority of the invited guests live, because of the convenience for each guest and the guest’s budget too. Informant B2 added that having a location near the home country also helped with planning, the inspection trip and was easy for the wedding guests too.

It has to be somewhere not too far away, so guests can plan their expenses such as flight, type of transportation which they have to pay for. The wedding host will take care of everything once wedding guests are here at the wedding venue.

“We both currently live in Singapore, so we are looking for destination close to Singapore. It is easy for us to fly friends, and do the entire plan.”

4.3.3 Professional service and hotel reputation

For their once-in-a-lifetime event, they strongly request an experienced Indian wedding planner, along with professional service and a hotel with a positive reputation. They trust that if they let an experienced Indian wedding planner organise their wedding, they will know what to do. Also with their accommodation and the wedding venue, they trust a hotel with a good reputation will treat their wedding guests like a king or queen. Everyone will be satisfied and enjoy the stay.

a) Indian wedding expertise

Informants mentioned that with their once-in-a-lifetime event, they cannot afford to risk anything going wrong. By nature Indian weddings tend to be more elaborate than other kinds of weddings. Only those experienced in Indian weddings are relied on. This is the major factor when selecting the venue. The couples would like it to be stress-free with less hassle, the event run smoothly and make their dreams come true. They do not want to start by having to explain what Indian weddings are like, or what is required. The majority of informants emphasised that Indian wedding expertise is more important than the other factors. All informants mention this factor while conducting their interview.

“It is obvious that with Indian nature [sic], not every hotel can handle that well.”

“The wedding organisers are the most important part for the wedding program.”

“I think that one of the main criteria would be that Phuket has the experience in dealing with this kind of wedding before. Our wedding is not simple, it is a kind of lavish long and very demanding.”

“When we planned the wedding, we were very scared to do a wedding in a resort where they had never done an Indian wedding before. Indian wedding is very difficult to handle. It is not easy.”

“We heard the reputation and been here as the wedding guest before.”

“We like to go somewhere that people has experience arranging it for us, so they know exactly what Indian want.”

b) Reputation of hotel brand and service

Indian couples look for a quality product. This refers to tangible products such as rooms, beds, infrastructure, food and the overall resort. It also includes intangible products such as great and warm services during their stay. They believe that five star brands will deliver unique services at an international standard. Informant A3 also mentioned that even though the size of the hotel is important, but without the brand reputation they would not have a wedding there.

“The second priority is hotel reputation. Even if that hotel has 200 rooms available but I don’t recognize the hotel brand. I will not want to have the wedding there.”

4.3.4 Value for money

Indian wedding couples always look for quality service for the money spent. Informant A1, Informant A3, Informant A5, and Informant C1 to Informant C3 claimed that five-star service hotels in Phuket are worth it.

“It is the country where everything is available [sic] in a very good quality.”

“If we do this wedding in India, we have to spend three or four times more than we spend in Thailand.”

“People want to do a good marriage. They find that Thailand is the place where they can do a very beautiful marriage in such a half price from what we have in India.”

4.3.5 Thai hospitality: kind, friendly and eager to help

Thai culture influences Thai’s to always be thoughtful and show great hospitality. Tourists often feel well looked after and satisfied with their trip to Thailand.

“I think Thai people are very kind and polite. Most tourists feel really relax because Thai people are not rude. They are eager to please everybody.”

“It is great that Thai people always make sure guest are well look after.”

“Staff is very nice, they did a great job. They are not like other places that I have seen. I travelled a lot around the world and the staff and the service here are very good.”

4.3.6 Excellent venue and facilities

Arranging the wedding outside their living country is challenging. The readiness of the venue and facilities is another key driver of the flawless wedding. Indians also look for a nice environment driving from the airport to the wedding venue, a variety of locations for each celebration, the maximum seating capacity of the main ballroom for the wedding reception, and the quantity and spaciousness of the guest rooms.

a) Nice environment travelling from Phuket airport to the wedding venue

The nature of overseas wedding, most guests will travel via airplane and use the airport. Informant A4 stated that it counted from the moment the plane landed at the airport.

Indian couples consider the atmosphere from the airport onwards. They would love the wedding guests to experience a nice welcoming to a pleasant place, not a crowded dirty place.

“When you travel from the airport to the hotel, the roads are excellent. It is a pleasant environment.”

b) A Variety of locations for each individual celebration

A characteristic of Indian weddings is that they continue for three or four days with different ceremonies and celebrations. These rituals and celebrations require a variety of locations (in-door and out-door venues). Informant A2 claimed that resorts in Phuket accommodate these varieties, which they cannot find in a city.

“We need many convention halls for each of different ceremonies. I think it is very good to arrange in Phuket. Resort in Phuket [sic] has a variety of convention hall, garden, pool and beaches.”

Informant D2 agrees that Indian weddings require a variety of locations for their functions, preferably with a big capacity.

“Phuket is very suitable for Indian wedding because they need varieties and mostly they come with 200 guests. They will have many functions in different venue each day.”

c) Maximum seating capacity of the grand ballroom for dinner

Even though they choose overseas weddings to minimise the number of invited guests, there can still be between three and five hundred wedding guests per event. For the wedding reception night all guests must be seated comfortably, so Indians have to make sure of the ballroom size for their last reception and dinner.

“We expected a number of guests between three hundred and five hundred, so it is difficult to get a venue that fit this size [sic] of crowd.”

The location does matter. We do not only have function in the ballroom, but the ballroom is where we have the main wedding ceremony function, gala dinner [sic]. The other function is easy to accommodate, you can have standing cocktail set up. People can stand, sit, and walk around. However, at the gala wedding night, you must have a sit down dinner. You have to make sure that there is enough seating for all guests comfortably.

“The size of ballroom is very important for us to identify the venue, because of the number of guests we have.”

Informant D2 confirmed that Indian couples like spacious areas. A grand ballroom is one of the most attractive factors that they are looking for when having site inspections.

“One of attractive point is the grand ballroom because they love the big and high ceiling.”

d) The number of guest rooms and how spacious they are

With regards to the accommodation during their wedding, Informant A3, Informant A4, Informant B2 and Informant B3 consider the amount of guest sleeping rooms available in a hotel, the spaciousness of the guest rooms and surroundings of the hotel. Guest rooms must be comfortable and relaxing because they will spend at least 3 nights.

Indians are looking for five star resorts, not only for the quality of service but also for the number of guest rooms. Normally, the three or four star hotels cannot accommodate that many rooms.

“The room is very spacious and very nice. These are the main reason.”

“Yes, all five star. Another point we look is the maximum number of rooms, which is not available for those three star hotels.”

“...the resort structure, the rooms. The rooms are fantastic. The resort is made in the beautiful way.”

We came to this hotel because it was one of the resorts that have so many rooms. We have the crowd of about 500 people, so I need approximate 250 rooms. Not many resorts can give capacities of 200 rooms.

“The final decision factor for this hotel was the ballroom, its capacity.”

4.4 Strengths of Phuket As An Indian Wedding Destination

4.4.1 Beautiful scenery

There is not only wonderful nature, but also relaxing man-made accommodation available in Phuket. All informants admire the beautiful beaches, exquisite resorts and the cleanliness.

“Phuket has so many beautiful beaches, beautiful ocean, and the nature.”

Informant A2, Informant A5 and Informant B3 highlighted that they not only look for a nice beach or ocean, it is the pleasant atmosphere that they are also looking for.

“The beach is not so important for me; I only want to be a nice setting. I like a beautiful setting.”

“We choose specific resort, because the way resort is made. The rooms are fantastic. The resort is made in the beautiful way.”

“Even if it’s a little bit cheaper over there, it is cleaner, more organize, more expensive than Pattaya.”

4.4.2 Experience in arranging an Indian wedding

As Indians want a flawless wedding, they do not take risks with the organiser. Since the researcher has mentioned a few times that Indian weddings are more elaborate and involve many rituals. Western wedding experts will not be trusted to arrange their weddings. The couples would rather go with people who have experience delivering Indian weddings.

“It is good to work with hotel that already has experience. You know because you don’t have to go through explaining everything [sic].”

“We look at the hotel’s ability to actually handle the large size group.”

4.4.3 Best value for money

Indian couples have different budgets to spend on their wedding. They have done researches on different places and emphasize that Phuket and the services provided are value for money for an overseas wedding.

“Yeah because I did research, I wrote to hotel, and the wedding planner. I got general cost. I found that Thailand was the best for value for money.”

“It is the country where everything is available and very good quality.”

4.4.4 A sufficient number of five star resorts with the capacity to accommodate a large amount of guests and excellent services

Phuket is renowned as a world-class holiday destination, therefore many resorts, both branded and non-branded are located here. Informant A3 and Informant B1 highlighted that there are many five star resorts available on this island. Indian couples trust branded name hotels to

relieve them of all worries and stresses, starting from correspondence, planning and arrangements as well as delivering the actual wedding.

“Reputation of the hotel, even if that hotel has 200 rooms available but I don’t recognize the name of the hotel, I would not want to do it there.”

“The most famous in Thailand is Phuket [sic].”

4.4.5 Flight connectivity and visa requirements.

Being away from their home country for a three day wedding is already difficult as many people have to leave work. Phuket is ideal for those Indian guests, with direct flights and requesting a visa upon arrival. This support will encourage Indian guests and the couples to have weddings in Phuket, Thailand.

“Thailand like I said the flight, it is easy to reach here”

“And it has a lot of direct flight from Hong Kong. So it is easy for our guest to come here as well.”

4.4.6 Thai friendliness and hospitality

In the hospitality industry, Thai style service has always been well recognise. Indians are impressed with the uniqueness of Thai service, their generosity, friendliness and eagerness to help and look after guests without asking.

“Indian are used to coming to Thailand, it is easy to work with Thai people.”

“I think Thai people are very kind and very polite and everybody that come to Thailand, they feel really relax because Thai people are not rude or they are eager to please everybody so that is one good point about Thailand. The custom of Thai people, the manner is very good.”

“Thai people, I think they are fantastic, they have not change. They still very polite and very friendly.”

With Thai nature of hospitality mind, and being compromise, Thai people try to work around the Indian couples’ budget and requests. Thais always assure on Indian couples’ satisfaction.

“I think the third was the value for money. So um, you know not all the price, the

understanding that trying to work around, working to my budget. Not just giving me this.”

4.5 Weaknesses Of Phuket as an Indian Wedding Destination

4.5.1 Limitations on capacities for large events

Even though Phuket has many famous five star resorts, Informant A3 and Informant A4 insisted that there is not enough large guest room, or ballroom size rooms in Phuket.

“Phuket is lack of outdoor spaces that can accommodate number of people comfortably. For example, this hotel has no outdoor space that can accommodate that many people (pause) comfortably.”

“If we go out of the hotel to other place which is the beach destination, there is not many place that can accommodate that many number of people.”

I think the weakness in Phuket is there are not enough hotels that have a ballroom that can hold large amount of people. There are only few hotels that has big ballroom in Phuket. Over this, people have no choice.”

Informant B3 pointed out that hotel may have enough guest rooms, but the hotel didn't allow all of the rooms to be booked solely for the Indian wedding party.

We need minimum 250 rooms. Every hotels don't have so many rooms. For those which have 250 rooms, they don't offer all the room for us. However, later I get those 250 rooms. They gave us the limited number of room.

4.5.2 Limitations on the wedding items available in Phuket

If Indian couples need anything at the last minute, the Indian organizer or hotel must bring it from Bangkok. This process will take approximately one or two days delivery after the guest confirms. The process timing is not in time with the couples program according to Informant A3, Informant A4 and Informant A5.

“Second challenge was finding entertainment and decor in Phuket. I feel like everything needed to be coming into Phuket from Bangkok.”

“One disadvantage for Phuket is that if I want anything last minute from Bangkok, the truck may take 12–14 hours drive to get here.”

"...Yeah, I don't know, maybe it is not their fault, maybe our options are limited. For example, some of entertainment, like artist, DJ, percussionist, saxophone player."

Informant C3, an Indian wedding planner, also admitted that some requests from wedding couples couldn't be found in Phuket.

"And sometimes, they try to find Indian entertainment in Phuket, but we still lacking of that like an Indian DJ, band or entertainment. Like a barico, or some kind of that."

4.5.3 Flexibility of the venue: time constraints, music volume and private pool access

Informant A4 claimed that Indian wedding celebrations take place from evening until early the next day. The hotel operation should be able to deliver that outdoor. He feels that the flexibility is lesser than past events he had. Next, Informant A1 and Informant B2 advised that the loud music at outdoor venues is available only for a limited time. He claimed that the hotel and the surrounding sectors should understand that Indians are celebrating their big day and this will be noisy music until early the next day. The locals or other in house guests at the hotel made a complaint to the resident manager for not having control of the loud music at certain times. The venue owner (hotel, restaurant) informed the Indian couple of the time limit. However, in the Indian's point of view, they thought that the majority of guests staying in the resort are their guests and the amount of revenue generated for their wedding is uncountable, therefore Indian couples expect some flexibility in return. Last, Informant A1 also added in the level of flexibility of private pool access for his party that the hotel didn't allow him.

"I just feel the level of flexibility is getting lesser, I mean for the past is more flexible. I guess, as tourism is increasing, it is natural that things are becoming more rigid and more commercial."

The noise restriction. I mean, I understand that hotel have other guest in house but you know Indian, they love to party and they love to stay up. You know at this hotel, I have no choice but to have it in the ballroom. Because it is the only place that I could have a late noisy event.

Just some more of flexibility, you know we are not allow to use the main pool for our private party which we love to. We had approximately 80% of the hotel. We want to take the full hotel, but we are not allowed to do so.

4.5.4 Phuket being more expensive

Since most of the Indian couples have been to Phuket as tourists, they know the price from the past. They claimed that it is getting more expensive these days, as mention by Informant A2, Informant A4 and Informant B3.

“I would say Phuket was (emphasize) relatively cheap, now it is not. We did an event in 2007 and 2008. It was my parent’s anniversary. That time, Phuket was really good value for money. But I feel that it is getting more expensive.”

I think Thailand is becoming more expensive. We used to get very good hotel for 120, 140 US, dollar. Today for comparable hotel, we pay 250 US dollar. So it is becoming more expensive, but I think that is only the hotel. Outside on the street, it is still good value for money. And I think the big hotel is becoming very expensive.

“The transportation is very expensive and not many option.”

4.6 Suggestions on how to maintain Phuket as a competitive wedding destination

4.6.1 Attractive pricing and value for money

Informant C1 and Informant C2, both Indian wedding planners, shared their opinions that if Phuket still offered the right ‘value of money’ price to Indian wedding couples, the wedding business is sure to continue.

I think it will last as long as the price is right. As long as the new hotel keep coming up. As long as the food is good and great service. As long as Thailand welcome them. I think they love Thailand for what they have to offer.

I think they just not raise their price. I think people understand that it should be a bit higher but should not be too much. As long as the price is affordable, people will always come. Like I told you, if the price is right, the people will come.

4.6.2 Flexibility

All parties asserted that wedding couples expect more flexibility on handling Indian weddings. One of the wedding couples, Informant A4 mentioned that wedding couples did pay a lot and brought in a great amount of business. The hotel should provide more flexibility with their requests.

“I mean it is very difficult for the couples, because obviously we were giving hotel a lot of money. We did guarantee a lot of rooms, so we expected some flexibility.”

On the other hand, Indian wedding planners, Informant C1, Informant C2 and Informant C3, stated in their past experiences Phuket should be more flexible on price, and negotiate services. They try to work around any special requests to deliver great service. Therefore they mention that hotels and all concerned sectors in Phuket should be able to do the same.

“Indian wedding couples look for the places that compromise them. The service providers that know what they are doing. Be more flexible on pricing, so that they make the decision.”

“I mean not to say yes to everything, but at least accept Indian wedding couples’ request. You know like the possibility to do it.”

One of the Indian couples requested to party over night, therefore, my team look for the venue that far away from people’s residence. Therefore, the wedding group can party longer as they wish.

One of the compliments by the wedding planner was the flexibility of Thai hotels to meet the demands and requirements of the Indian wedding market. They have noticed that general managers of some hotels in Phuket are now willing to ease up some of the hotel policies to serve the needs of this lucrative market.

It is great that Thai people always make sure guests are well look after. Even now the hotel GM also realizes the potential in the Indian wedding. Now, a lots of GM has changed. Some of the policy has changed to accept more for Indian wedding. In the past they not allow taking the whole hotel for the wedding but now we are able to buy out the hotel for 3 days. People just stay at hotel and enjoy them.

However, some of the informants argued about the flexibility that hotels offered to Indian wedding couples. For example, no permission to private pool party, no DJ at outdoor function with very loud music. Indian wedding host commented that with the amount of bills they paid and the number of Indian guests within the resort, more flexibility is expected from hotel’s permission.

I would say the only one thing that Indian wedding couple complained was the flexibility. For example, they want to have DJ set up at beach front, the resort allow them with no subwoofer with limited decibel. So they feel like resort is not flexible.

4.6.3 More experienced staff/Indian wedding specialists in hotels

Informant A4 and Informant A5, Indian wedding couples, suggested resorts appoint their own Indian wedding specialist so that Indian wedding guests don't have to outsource an Indian wedding planner.

“If Phuket want to increase business for future, more experienced staff would be great [sic]. Some Indian guest have limited budget, so it would be better if hotel has Indian wedding organizer itself. So all are in one.”

The wedding planner is helping to facilitate everything, but I think the hotel itself could possibly be more involved with the couple. I feel sometimes the wedding planner helps but it should not be the only point. It should be more effort made by the hotel to help with the client.

“The resort should provide an Indian wedding planner offer along with other service.”

4.6.4 More options of resorts with lots of rooms in Phuket

Informant A4 and Informant B1 suggested that there should be more resorts with two hundred rooms and a large banquet hall in Phuket. This would make the Indian wedding market more competitive and the prices between hotels become more reasonable.

I mean the hotel rooms that has capacity, with the two hundred plus rooms with large banquet space. So if there are more option, automatically there is competition and pricing become better, automatically level of service will go up even more, and automatically flexibility increase as well because, hum, the hotel knew that if people find other options, there is always a nice little challenging over there for them to make sure for them that they grab a business.

“More options of big size hotels, which can accommodate large amount of guests.”

4.6.5 Maintenance

Since there have been Indian weddings in Phuket market for a while, some guests have already experienced the hotel. Informant B1 mentioned that the resort should be renovated, applying some maintenance so it presents a different look to their past visit.

“You know when we visited this resort for the wedding 2 years back, the resort look stunning [sic]. Every year the resort look a bit older as the time pass by. The resort need a little bit of refurbishment.”

One of the informants, Informant D2, stated that even though the hotel did renovations in some areas of the resort, when conducting their inspection the Indian guests commented that the reason they didn't take some hotels are because the hotels look old.

“I would say the condition of the hotel. When I walked them through the lobby, they always said that our hotel look worn out and old fashion. Indian couples want to host new hotel and modern.”

4.6.6 Suggest adding a little bit of an Indian touch

Informant A7 suggested that due to the fact that Indian weddings are full of rituals and culture, the wedding planner or hotel should add in a little bit more of an Indian touch to venue decorations and the overall event.

“Yeah, I think the planner and hotel should come with Indian touch into it. Like adding in peacock, the national bird of India, It is a symbol of grace, joy, beauty and love. This will be more meaningful.”

4.6.7 More effective marketing tools to attract people

Informant A4 mentioned that the type of people that are going to do an overseas wedding have been to the place a few times. Introducing the trade show in the exhibition hall will not work. He suggested inviting the high class Indian family to a cocktail/dinner and showing some highlights of the hotel or Phuket.

“You have to target the type of Indian. Phuket may invite approximately a hundred of the target type for nice dinner. Those people who do destination wedding, already knew about the place, probably either been to Phuket few times. I think that is how they decide this is the final

destination for me.”

4.6.8 Be smarter with their negotiation skills

While discussing the deal with the Indian wedding couple, Informant C2 advised that Phuket should be firm, proactive and smarter with their negotiating skills, otherwise they will take advantage of all good deals (price and service), which leads to more pressure on the operation team without much reward in return.

“Indian always take advantage from you. Yeah, they will ask so many thing and ask so many things for complimentary. They always do that. We have to really understand them. Be strong to them, sometimes. Don't be too nice, otherwise, they will take advantage of you, yeah.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions, Discussions and Recommendations

5.1 Chapter Outline

This chapter comprises of conclusion, discussions, and recommendations for further studies and limitations. This chapter starts with the conclusion of the results. It briefly highlights the key findings in relation to the objectives of the study. Three research questions will be discussed in this chapter: push and pull factors influencing the decision making process for Indian wedding couples in Phuket; strengths and weaknesses of Phuket as an overseas wedding destination for Indian couples; and suggestions for Phuket to maintain its competitiveness as an overseas wedding destination for the Indian market. The chapter concludes with highlights of the study and the recommendations for the further research.

5.2 Conclusion

Today India is the biggest source market for visitors from South Asia and one of Thailand's fastest growing source markets. In 2013, Indian visitors to Thailand totalled 1,049,856, up 3.61% from 2012. It is one of seven countries generating more than one-million arrivals (MOTS, 2014). It also becomes a source of income to the country by providing employment to airlines, hotels and local people. The findings will help to identify various attributes of Phuket that attract Indian couples for their weddings, to understand Indian internal and external points of view, to realize Phuket's strengths and weaknesses as an Indian wedding destination, and lastly the suggestions to maintain competitiveness as an Indian wedding destination in the market.

Every customer has their own personal characteristics, especially in selecting the venue for their once-in-a-lifetime wedding ceremony. With the revenue expansion of Indian wedding market in Phuket, it is important to explore push and pull motivation factors of their selection process.

From the findings, it was noticed that the influencing (push) factors are novelty (a memorable moment and a non-repeating venue, new location, escape from everyday atmosphere and a neutral venue), positive past experiences, limiting the guest list, showing their social status

and combining vacation opportunities. The top three external (pull) factors are the beautiful scenery of Phuket, accessibility (flight connectivity, visa requirements and a destination close to the couples living country or where the majority of guests live), and professional service and hotel reputation (Indian wedding expertise and reputation of the hotel brand and service). The other remaining external factors are value for money, excellent venue and facilities (a nice environment travelling from the airport to the wedding venue, a variety of locations for each individual celebration, the maximum seating capacity of the grand ballroom for dinner and the quantity and spaciousness of guest rooms), and Thai hospitality.

Secondly, the findings show that the strengths of Phuket as an Indian wedding destination are; the beautiful scenery, the great amount of five-star resorts providing quality service, experience in arranging Indian weddings, flight connectivity and getting a visa upon arrival, being great value for money and Thai friendliness and hospitality. The weaknesses are; there are not many options with large ballrooms together with a hotel and resort, the limitation of wedding items available in Phuket and the rising costs in Phuket.

The results suggest that to maintain Phuket as a competitive overseas wedding destination for the Indian wedding market it should have attractive pricing and value for money, remain flexible, have more experienced Indian wedding staff, create more options for resorts with many rooms and a large ballroom available, add more of an Indian touch, use the right marketing tools to attract the right people, maintain resorts and be smarter with negotiation skills.

5.3 Discussions

5.3.1 Push and pull factors

Based on the findings, the results show that the top three push factors are novelty, positive past trip experiences and limiting the number of guests invited (quality guests). In fact, novelty has been accepted as the most influential push factor to travel in previous studies (Crompton 1979, Yuan & McDonald 1990, Baloglu & Uysal 1996, Mohammad 2010, and Yousefi, & Marzuki, 2012). Novel meant a new experience, but not necessarily entirely new knowledge (Crompton, 1979). From the findings often the informants knew a lot about Phuket, yet having their wedding ceremony out of their living country is new and different for Indian couples. The novelty resulted from actually seeing or doing something different rather than

simply knowing of it vicariously. With the high level of involvement and importance of marriage, Indian wedding couples choose to escape the mundane home scenery to somewhere special for their own and their guests' memories. Firstly, they do not want a situation where they get up and go to work and see their wedding venue every day. This does not make their wedding occasion notable. Arranging the wedding outside their own country introduces a whole new wedding experience because everyone stays at the same place for three or four days. There are times in the ceremony that people can mingle and catch up, unlike a wedding in their own country where guests join and then leave at the end of the wedding. They may be late to some ceremonies because they are busy with work or their personal lives, or they may skip some ceremonies because they cannot take time off from work. Secondly, since Indian society is a large family, they tend to invite the same crowd as wedding guests. If wedding hosts arrange the wedding in the same venue with their relatives, the wedding will be less exciting for the same crowd. The similar wedding guests will claim that they have already been to that place, and assume that it will not be fun or interesting anymore. The host then will regret that the close relatives are unable to attend, or that their wedding was boring. Thus, Indian wedding couples seek a fresh, new wedding experience place.

Positive past experiences and limiting the number of guests invited are new forces for overseas wedding destinations. Most of the informants confirmed that they went to Phuket for a leisure trip two or three times before and were fascinated with the place and services. Within those leisure trips, one-third were invited as Indian wedding guests. They were all impressed with Phuket and love the idea of having an overseas wedding in Phuket. They all keep in mind that one day they may have their wedding in Phuket too. From the findings, wedding couples, the parents, the wedding planner and hotel representatives can confirm that wedding couples were either a guest of a past wedding in, or fascinated with, Phuket.

The final top three push factor is limiting the wedding guest list. Indians figure that overseas weddings are also a nice way to not invite any acquaintances in the same community to their wedding. The original number of Indian wedding guests is around a thousand to two thousand. Thus, limiting the number of guests means the wedding couples only invite between two hundred fifty to five hundred guests per wedding. That is, however, still the great amount of wedding guests. When catering for a Western wedding, the maximum number of guests is about

one hundred. The smaller number of wedding guests helps to reduce the wedding cost for the host too.

Other push variables are showing the wedding couple's social status, which has been agreed by Crompton (1979), and Yuan and McDonald (1990). They may not be from the high class society; yet the informants proudly stated that overseas weddings can only be afforded by certain groups of people. They are clearly proud of having a different once-in-a-lifetime event. The results further highlight that choosing their wedding destination is one of the complex buying behaviours, as their decisions were affected by many internal and external factors and require reliable information sources (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2003).

For pull factors, some similarities were identified and comparable to previous literature, such as the beautiful scenery of Phuket, excellent venues and facilities, accessibility, professional service and hotel reputation, Thai hospitality (kind, friendly and eager to help) and service (Sirakaya and McLellan 1997), and good value for money (Vieregge, Phetkaew, Beldona, Lumsden, & DeMicco, 2007). Yuan and McDonald (1990) argued that value for money and budget are one of the most important pull factors to influence selecting a holiday destination.

In terms of the ease of access, this may be due to the availability of direct flights from many destinations to Phuket and the ease of visa applications upon arrival. In addition, Phuket is geographically located in close proximity to many of their guests. Siri, Kennon, Josiam and Spears (2012) stated that Indian tourists were comfortable visiting Thailand where there was less geographical and cultural distance.

Having Indian wedding experts available overseas is a new and important decision making factor for Indian wedding couples in Phuket. Indian wedding ceremonies are lavish and long lasting (three days). Indian wedding couples emphasize that they would not risk working with a resort that has no experience in handling Indian weddings. By nature Indian weddings are very demanding, and one particularly experienced hotel staff is not enough. It requires a great amount of man power, staff at each ceremony, experienced event staff checking the completion of one event after another. There are ceremonies or parties happening from six o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the morning of the next day, for three days. Without the Indian wedding specialists and event teams, Indian couples are scared and have little trust.

The “best value for money” should also be emphasized. With economic growth, there are more middle class Indians who have greater purchasing power than ever before. They are well educated and knowledgeable in English, so travelling to foreign countries is more feasible (“the world’s playground”, 2007). This implies that Indians can afford quality services and products at a reasonable price. They are not looking for the cheapest deal, otherwise they would have gone to Laos, Vietnam or Myanmar. Thus, packaging quality products and services with a reasonable deal will attract Indian wedding couples.

Buhali (1998), and Werthner and Ricci (2004), stated that the Internet is becoming important in the information search stage of the decision making process, since tourism was a unique and intangible product and travellers could not see the actual product during the pre-purchasing stage. Indian wedding couples do search for information from the internet at the finding information stage. However, they will not trust that information, they have to see and visit the place themselves before making a decision. The findings state that many times the information shown on websites is either out of date, has an incorrect size for the ballroom capacity or the place is older than the picture. On the other hand, Siri, Kennon, Josiam & Spears (2012) supported that the internet influences the decision making of Indian tourists visiting Bangkok. However, the findings do not agree on relying on internet sources, as Indian couples must come to visit the venue before making it their final wedding destination. Selecting a wedding ceremony venue is a complex buying behaviour. The wedding host is investing time and money which cannot be taken back.

Receiving value for money is one of the pull factors, therefore when launching the price or marketing new wedding packages this must be taken into consideration. Adding value to the wedding package and increasing the price is fine, as long as the value added is what the Indian couples want. It was confirmed that Indian couples were not looking at the cheapest possibility, but the fairest quality service and price. Otherwise, they would consider and select Vietnam, a few islands in the Philippines, or Laos. Indians are happy to pay for any value added for their convenience, aiming for a flawless event with less stress in the planning phase.

This study revealed that “novelty, past experiences” and “beautiful scenery, accessibility and having professionals handling Indian weddings” were the most important push and pull motives of Indian wedding couples coming to Phuket. Phuket should focus on enriching the

novelty locally. For example, Phuket should invest in building five star resorts for these Indian weddings, which will help if they have a variety of big ballrooms to select from. In addition, Indian wedding experts can also extend their career path and shift to the new, larger sized resorts. On the contrary, if wedding venues in Phuket are restricted in their ballroom capacity and the number of guest rooms, the experienced Indian wedding staff would get hired elsewhere, such as KhaoLak, Krabi, or Hua Hin. KhaoLak has been mentioned as a competitive destination since there are some new resorts with bigger ballrooms, nice outdoor spaces and few more new five star resorts available. The distance from Phuket airport to KhaoLak is only an hour and a half. This is acceptable for Indian wedding guests.

Based on the results of push and pull factors within this study, Phuket tourism marketers need to tie the motivational drivers with pull factors that Phuket can offer, then package them to better satisfy this lucrative Indian wedding market. They should try to develop a product that can satisfy the novelty needs with a product with beautiful beaches and an Indian wedding specialist.

5.3.2 Strengths and weaknesses of Phuket as an overseas wedding destination

From the findings, the strengths of Phuket as Indian wedding destination are the beautiful scenery, experienced staff, best value for money, a great amount of famous resorts, flight connectivity, a visa upon arrival and Thai hospitality. All parties should recognise these strengths and aim to maintain and enrich them. The Thai government, Tourism Authority of Thailand, and airline businesses have done their parts with visa's upon arrival and various direct flights to Phuket. The Phuket Provincial office and the locals must keep an eye on maintaining the beautiful setting and cleanliness in Phuket.

According to the impressive past experiences in Phuket, the locals also influence the Indian couples' decision making stage. The highlight is Thai hospitality towards Indian wedding market requests. In this study, Thai hospitality does not only refer to their kind and polite nature, but also refers to a willingness to say yes to requests. The last is having experienced staff in Indian weddings. This group of staff may move to other destinations out of Phuket. With their knowledge and capability of handing Indian weddings, they may move to hold Indian weddings in KhaoLak, PhangNga, Hua Hin, or Krabi (Thailand).

Despite the numerous strengths of Phuket, relevant organizations should pay more attention to resolving problems and the identified weaknesses of Phuket as an Indian wedding

destination. The major weakness is that there are only a few resorts with a big ballroom in Phuket. The findings infer that of all the famous five star branded resorts available in Phuket, only a few have a large ballroom. Even if there are big ballrooms, that resort may have no staff with experience in Indian weddings. As mentioned earlier, the experienced staff may go off to another destination if the Indian wedding couple hires them there. Thus, providing more options with large ballrooms in resorts in Phuket, together with producing more experienced Indian wedding staff, will keep Phuket as an Indian wedding destination for Indian wedding couples.

From a business point of view, if those wedding components are in strong demand, service providers in Phuket should not be reluctant to invest in those wedding components. For example, Henna lady, High technology light and sound system, Indian decoration items in creative themes and Indian culture entertainment (pool toys, wedding gift related to Indians). The service provider will gain the return on their investment in a very short period of time. As for flexibility, hotels and experienced wedding planners should be able to be proactive and reduce the causes of this issue. For example, venues should be flexible in terms of time constraints on music volume and exclusive pool access for the wedding guests. Open communication throughout the planning process is critical to clearly explain what is provided for the wedding group. The findings show that Indian couples require understanding and a positive attitude to work things out. Thus, being proactive on their requests and offering solutions instead of refusing will give Indian couples satisfaction. Also hotels may do research of auspicious Indian wedding dates for the next year, set up meeting with the management, sales and revenue teams for that period of the year, aiming for the Indian wedding market. The other period of the year hotels can target other markets. This will benefit Indian wedding guest's needs, hotel revenue, and other non Indian wedding guests in the resort.

Phuket should improve on Indian cuisine (especially pure vegetarian Indian), Indian entertainment, the quality of the DJ., and have more attractive Thai things to do in Phuket. Currently there is Phuket Fantasy, Siam Niramit and Hanuman Show Dinner.

The staff of hotels, resorts, and wedding planners should be trained on their attitude when servicing Indian wedding guests. The head manager should educate them on Indian nature, behaviour, and conclude with how much revenue they will earn from these pieces of business. The staff and team will then understand and will mutually work as a team towards success. From

the findings, Indian weddings require extra manpower, need to service for 24 hours. Therefore, manpower and shift planning must be discussed ahead of time, after their wedding plan set.

Direct flights to Phuket and flight connectivity help Indians to reach Phuket early in the morning, but the check-in time of most hotels and resorts in Phuket is at 2pm. Findings claim that Indians complain that they have to wait for a long time while they are tired and hungry. The resort must then provide options with a resting room and food for those early arrivals if the guest room is not ready for check-in.

Based on the findings, there are two points of view that have been raised and need immediate attention. The first is the increasing rates of services, which should not be overpriced. However, this may be challenging as operating costs for hotels are increasing as well. The second is that the hotel and wedding planners know Indian behaviour requires great negotiating skills and are hard work to service. Indian wedding events always change and can confirm things last minute, which causes the staff to work overtime and may try to find anything to complain about so that they get a discount or free service. However, the bright side is if Indian couples are impressed and satisfied with the service, they are very complimentary and spread how great the service and stay was to everyone they meet. To conclude, hotels and event companies should provide price options for the Indian wedding couples. For example, price A for normal quality, price B for best quality. Since Indian couples are looking for quality products and services, quoting the high price with a detailed explanation would be acceptable for most Indians. Knowing Indians' nature is negotiation skills, the service provider should then offer some discount or adding the valued to the service product. Indians would feel that flexibility is being given from the hotel or service company. There should not be a second huge deduction from the first quotation; otherwise Indians would feel that the hotel/event company are overcharging from the beginning.

5.3.3 Suggestions to maintain Phuket as the competitive wedding destination for Indian couples

a) Phuket segment

Improve accessibility (faster immigration and public transportation)

The majority of Indian wedding guests are top class and prefer to get good quality and fast service. Even though Indian citizens are allowed to apply for a visa upon arrival, it would be ideal to add the extra value for Indian wedding guest arrival. Offering to fast track India wedding guests through immigration at the airport would be convenient and motivate them to come.

The availability and price of public transportation in Phuket should also improve. Many direct flights from India to Phuket are convenient, however once the Indian guests arrive, they find it is challenging and pricy to get public transportation to the wedding ceremonies. Sometimes Indians want to take all their guests out for a welcome party. This requires transportation. If the price for public transportation is reasonable, this will distribute even more revenue in Phuket.

Opportunities for a relaxing and spacious outdoor venue

Indian wedding couples not only look for the hotel to stay and party at, but also cool chic restaurants and beach clubs for the welcome party and a party before the wedding. They would like to buy out that location for a night for a fair price. There is an opportunity to open up more relaxing and spacious outdoor venues that are capable of catering the weddings and being privately closed for Indian functions.

b) Service provider segment

Partnership with an Indian wedding planner

Currently, Indian couples search for their own wedding destination. However, there are still some couples that acquire an Indian wedding planner from India to look for a destination in Phuket. The resort and local event company should keep a good relationship with overseas Indian wedding planners. The more welcome and comfortable Phuket is to work with, the more overseas Indian wedding planners will come.

Cooperation of five star resorts and event companies

It is in Indians nature to negotiate on pricing and shop around before making a final decision. They will always do the research. Therefore, within Phuket, all selected five star resorts and event companies should be cooperating in terms of pricing. There should be blue ocean, where all service providers compete on quality of service, not price. Even though Indians are looking for value for money products, Phuket does not need to let it go to Red Ocean, where the service providers keep lower prices to gain business and, in the end, there is no profit at all.

Appoint an in - house Indian wedding expert

Five star resorts that have big ballrooms should consider hiring an in house Indian wedding expert and form a team, so that Indian wedding couples have more choices, which increases competitiveness in the Indian market in Phuket. If the resort has all products and services, including the personnel, the resort will gain more profit.

Practical recommendations for handling Indian wedding business

- At the point of issuing the contract with Indians, the service provider should close all deals with criteria and options in detail that include price and time. If there is an area that is open or unclear, the Indian will take advantage of complimentary service.

- To understand Indian behavior and be proactive when serving them. An open mind and positive attitude is a must in the Indian wedding business. Explain any reasons with the Indians and be firm with them.

5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Studies

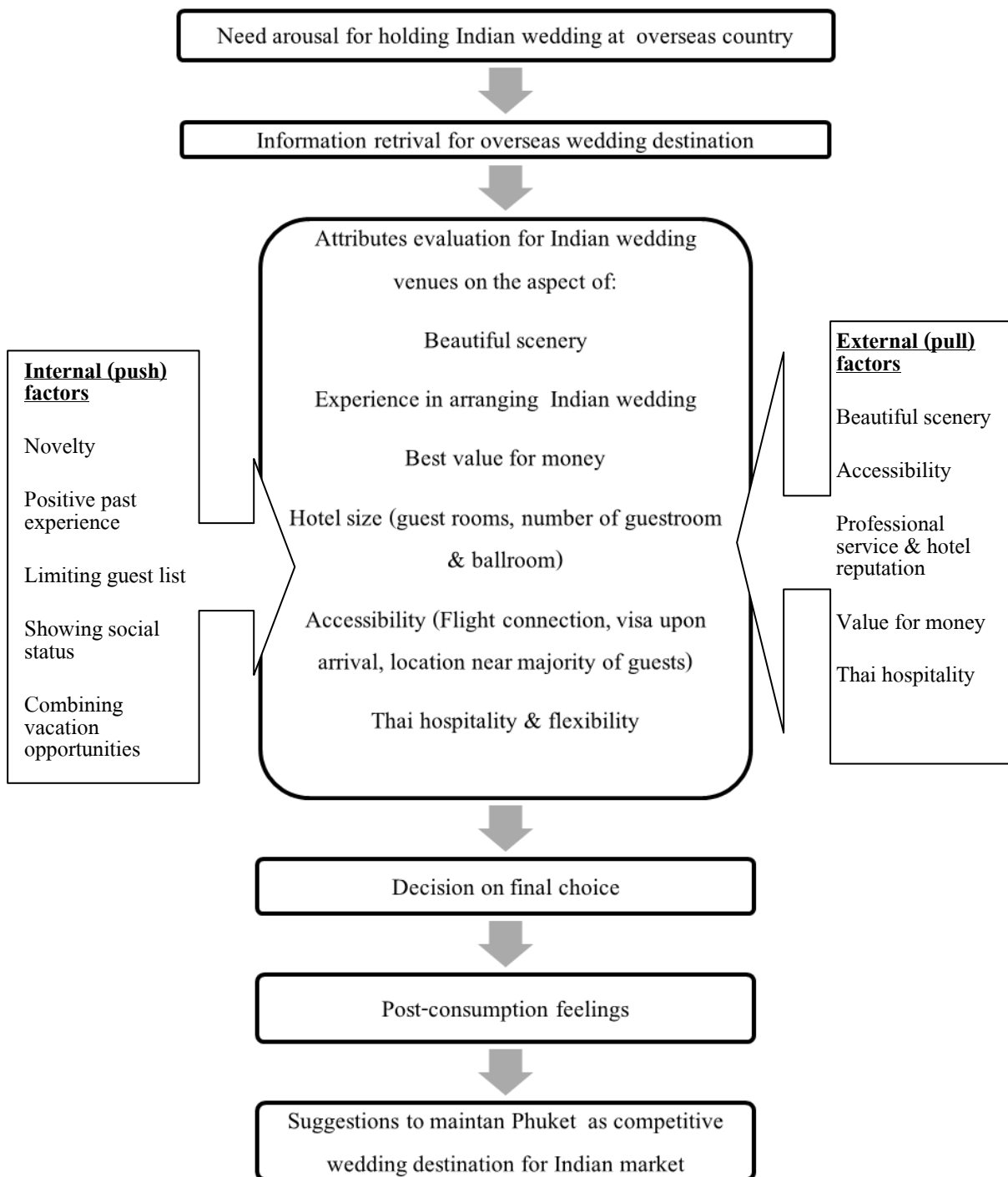
This research has taken an essential step in exploring the factors influencing overseas wedding destinations of Indian couples in Phuket by directly interviewing the wedding guests. However, due to the privacy of wedding ceremonies amongst the high class society, there are some difficulties in gaining access to informants, especially the wedding couples. The researcher took a long time to collect data from the wedding couples. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that this study will not be able to gather all the necessary information to perform its objectives. The other categories of informants, which were wedding parents, wedding organizers and the hotel representatives, were willing to cooperate.

The focus of this study is solely on Phuket. Nonetheless, the approach can also be applied to other competitive venues in Thailand such as KhaoLak, Hua Hin, Krabi (as found in the research) or other countries that experience dramatic growth in the Indian wedding market. Comparative studies may unearth a new understanding of tourist behaviour and motivation factors in different domains and various stages of progression.

Another recommendation for further studies is to carry out the research with other nationality groups.

5.5 Proposed Decision Making Model for Indian Weddings Coming to Phuket

Figure 5.1 Proposed decision making model for Indian weddings coming to Phuket



Source: Adopted from Lau and Hui (2010) and the findings

Figure 5.1 exhibits the proposed decision making model for Indian wedding couples coming to Phuket, which integrates the findings with Lau and Hui's model (2010). The researcher found that all push factors are new from the previous models (novelty, positive past experiences, limiting the guest list, showing social status and combining vacation opportunities). As for the pull factors, the researcher found that there are many similarities except the value for money, accessibility and Thai hospitality. Indian couples also considered the auspicious date for the wedding, however this is not a new push factor for having weddings in Phuket. The demographic difference is omitted in this model because the paper focuses on the population of Indian wedding couples coming to Phuket. From the findings, it shows that all Indian wedding couples are either business owners or millionaires. The researcher also found that experience in handling Indian weddings and accessibility are new attributes for selecting Phuket as an Indian wedding destination.

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Appendix



FACULTY OF
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
PRINCE OF SONGKLA UNIVERSITY | PHUKET CAMPUS

November 24, 2014

Letter of Acceptance

MANUSCRIPT NO: 6

AUTHOR: Miss Nattinee McMillan

**TITLE: An Exploratory of Decision Making Factors for an Overseas Wedding Destination:
A Case Study of Indian Couples, Phuket, Thailand**

Dear **Miss Nattinee McMillan**,

The Editorial Team of Journal of International Studies (JIS), is pleased to inform you that your manuscript entitled '**An Exploratory of Decision Making Factors for an Overseas Wedding Destination: A Case Study of Indian Couples, Phuket, Thailand**' has been accepted for the publication.

Your manuscript is scheduled to be published in the upcoming journal issue **Journal of International Studies, Prince of Songkla University, Vol. 4 No. 2 July – December 2014.**

Kind regards,

Asst. Prof. Sontaya Anakasiri
Editor in Chief (Journal of International Studies)
Dean of Faculty of International Studies

FIS

The Editorial Team of Journal of International Studies (JIS), Faculty of International Studies,
Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus
80 Moo.1 Vichitsongkram Road, Kathu, Phuket 83120
Telephone: 076-276-627 | Fax: 076-276-263 | E-mail: pichai.ja@phuket.psu.ac.th | Website: www.fis.psu.ac.th

VITAE

Name: Mrs. Nattinee Mcmillan

Student ID: 5330 120010

Education Attainment

Degree: Business Administration, International Program, Faculty of Service Industries, Major in Hotel and Tourism Management.

Name of Institution: Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Educational Region

Year of Graduation: 2005

Last work position and Address:

Assistant Event Manager, JW Marriott Phuket resorts and spas.

231 Moo.1 Mai Khao, Thalang, Phuket, 83110 Thailand

Home Address: 1/50 Soi 20, Rajuthit Road, Hatyai, Songkla 90110 Thailand

Mobile: 66 (0) 81 738 6076

Email: nattinee.pm@gmail.com