

**Responsible Behaviour amongst Backpacker Tourists  
in Less Developed Countries: A case study of  
Thailand**

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## Abstract

Backpacker tourists frequently express “anti-tourist” attitudes and are confident that they contribute positively to their destinations. Ironically, they are sometimes characterised by stakeholders in destinations in less developed countries as neo-colonial invaders. In spite of their anti-tourist attitudes, in reality, backpacker tourists tend to stay in backpacker enclaves where the cultural and moral values of backpackers are dominant. This happens because they encounter many obstacles to enjoying the backpacking experience in an unfamiliar interregional (intercultural) environment. Given such contradictory phenomena surrounding backpacker tourists in less developed countries, one question is how they manifest their responsible behaviour. Therefore, this research aims to explore the nature and degree of responsible behaviour amongst backpacker tourists in Thailand, which is one of the most popular backpacker destinations in the world. Through mixed method research, this principally explores (1) the frequency levels of backpackers’ behavioural intentions, their actual responsible behaviour, and the gap between them based on a series of items representing responsible behaviour, and (2) their definitions and perceived experiences of responsible behaviour.

The research found that whilst backpacker tourists tend to report their frequent responsible behaviour and perceive themselves as “responsible” tourists, in reality, they experience many difficulties in behaving responsibly in an unfamiliar interregional (intercultural) tourism setting in spite of their intention to do so, and while being well aware of the importance of behaving responsibly. There is a propensity among backpacker tourists to exaggerate the importance of small and fleeting experiences of responsible behaviour outside backpacker enclaves (e.g. a moment of demonstrating a respectful attitude towards local people). Also, cultural experiences within backpacker enclaves, which are staged authentic manner (e.g. participation in a cultural or cookery class), tend to be exaggerated in importance and regarded as highly responsible behaviour. Moreover, whilst backpacker tourists appreciate themselves as “responsible” tourists and during their travels they respect others and behave so as not to disturb others which are required to do so regardless of place, culture and custom even in the home in daily life, they represented their reluctance to “engage” in responsible behaviour, especially altruistic and philanthropic activities (i.e., engagement in volunteering work or donating to local communities). These propensities were common to all types of backpacker tourists in this study; even those who reported their own outstandingly frequent intention and actual responsible behaviour (i.e., backpacker tourists who travel extensively with the strong motivation to explore destination countries). The principal conclusion in this research is that, whilst the behaviour reported by the backpacker tourists was never harmfully irresponsible, there are several contradictions between their evaluation of their responsible behaviour and their actual behaviour patterns. Moreover, there is a gap between their behavioural pattern of responsible behaviour and the concept of “responsible tourism” for backpacker tourists. The declared good intentions and instances of actually behaving in a responsible manner by backpacker tourists do not necessarily mean that they behave altruistically and philanthropically that the concept of responsible tourism aims to engender.

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