

# Special Interest Tourism, 3rd Edition



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By

Bongkosh N. Rittichainuwat

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## PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

This book relies on findings from empirical data to explain the trends of special interest tourism. Dr. Rittichainuwat provides readers with more reliable information from her research on food tourism, film tourism, shopping tourism, ghost tourism and medical tourism. Specifically, the book introduces the important role of Korean films in stimulating film tourism in East and Southeast Asia. It shows how Korean films have contributed to Hallyu, or the Korean wave, which has encouraged the flow of Asian tourists to Korea. The book also provides readers with the latest trends in special interest tourism resulting from the global rise of an ageing population.



**Kaye Chon, Ph.D.**  
**Dean and Chair Professor, School of Hotel and Tourism Management,**  
**The Hong Kong Polytechnic University**

He was honored by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) with the prestigious UNWTO Ulysses Prize, 2011.

Dr. Rittichainuwat is one of the leading tourism researchers in Thailand, her work having been published in major international tourism journals. In this book she has brought together some of her findings within a broader conceptual and empirical context. Rittichainuwat's focus is on the increasingly important topic of soft special interest tourism, which she broadly defines to include not only narrowly oriented specialized interests, such as bird or whale watching, but also popular interests, such as cuisine and shopping, which are shared by the numerous foreign tourists that travel to Thailand and other Asian countries. Dr. Rittichainuwat initiates the discussion of respective topics in general terms but also uses multiple examples, many of them taken from her own research, to facilitate the comprehension of the issues involved.

Most, but not all, of the empirical examples are taken from the studies of tourism conducted not only in Thailand but also in the Asia-Pacific, the USA, the UK, Australia, and New Zealand: a context with which international readers will be largely familiar with. The 'Discussion Topics' accompanying the chapters will assist in further focusing the readers' attention on the relevant conceptual and practical questions.

This book is the first textbook on special interest tourism studies to have been published in Thailand; hopefully it will be well received.



**Erik Cohen, Emeritus Professor  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology,  
Hebrew University of Jerusalem**

He was a founding member of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism. Cohen was awarded the World Tourism Organization UNWTO Ulysses Prize in 2012.

The book covers the travel motivations of Asian and Southeast Asian tourists who consider food, shopping, and medical tourism important. Dr. Rittichainuwat has used her 15 years of data collection to provide the evidence for the conclusions drawn. The book studies the behavior of tourists from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan, as well as those from the USA, the UK, and Australia who traveled to Thailand to participate in food and medical tourism. I strongly recommend this book to academics and industry people.



**Hailin Qu, Ph.D.**

**Regents Professor and William E. Davis Distinguished Chair  
Director of the Center for Hospitality and Tourism Research  
School of Hospitality and Tourism Management,  
Oklahoma State University, USA.**

Prof. Qu has been ranked the 15th leading researcher in publishing at three top tier hospitality and tourism journals in the world. He was the chief-editor of *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and Tourism*.

This *Special Interest Tourism* book benefits the tourism industry not only in Thailand but also abroad. Dr. Rittichainuwat has used her academic expertise and industry experience to provide many insights into special interest tourism. This book relies on the findings from various research works to explain the recent trends in special interest tourism, thus providing the reader with a body of reliable information. Since food, shopping, and medical treatment are all important tourism generators in Thailand, this book provides research data to support the theoretical analysis of these markets. The book also presents the best practice of Korea in using the Korean Wave to promote film tourism, to create destination awareness, and travel motivation. Thus, Thai tourism providers would benefit from learning from the case studies. Finally, I would like to recommend this book not only to students but also to people who work in the industry and are involved in developing strategic tourism management.



**Assistant Professor Chitsomanas Siwadit**  
Former Head of English Department, Faculty of Arts,  
Chulalongkorn University



This book concentrates on the special interest issues affecting the tourism industry. Dr. Rittichainuwat uses different disciplinary strategies to stimulate discussion from multiple perspectives, with emphasis being placed on critical thinking, strategic decision-making and the formulation of innovative solutions. Here, the readers will gain knowledge of trends in tourism as a result of the rise of a multi-generation population and affluent tourists looking for leisure, wellness and well-being, etc. The theoretical framework is used to explain special interest tourism. It creates awareness and will be useful for the global tourism community. Most importantly, the author has put a great deal of effort into data collection, enabling and contributing to theoretical and management discussions within the global tourism community.



**Suprabha Moleeratanond** is the former director of Convention at Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau. She was also the former Chairperson of the Asian Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (AACVB).

## PREFACE

The objective of this book is to provide readers with a research-based textbook on special interest tourism. The book covers the definitions, the principles, and the management of special interest groups, and provides theoretical and managerial contributions to enhance the understanding of soft and emerging issues in special interest tourism.

This book focuses on the different types of soft special interest tourism, such as film tourism, food tourism, medical tourism, and shopping tourism; as well as on the emerging issues within dark tourism, ghost tourism, and suicide tourism. This book integrates the empirical research conducted by the author to explain travel motivation within the context of emerging markets in special interest tourism. The author has spent 15 years collecting primary and secondary data regarding these forms of special interest tourism, and has used surveys with multivariate data analysis, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and content analysis to study the data. Therefore, readers who are interested in special interest tourism should benefit from the empirical data contained within these pages.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE



Figure 1-1: Surveys with actual tourists who followed a Thai TV series, at Ayutthaya, Thailand

Asian and Western cultures each have their own distinct travel interests. This book is inspired by the *special interest tourism* book written by Weiler and Hall (1992). These authors highlight the need for research to investigate the impact of authenticity on the travel motivation in special interest tourism. Thus, this book seeks to explore the significance of authenticity within film tourism. Authenticity in tourist experience arises from the constructed realities that films create. The desire of tourists to connect to the fictional stories related to their interest is what informs the field of film tourism.

Weiler and Hall (1992a) call for studies to investigate the tendencies in travel motivation proposed by Iso-Ahola (1982). This book includes three

chapters revolving around dark tourism, ghost tourism, and suicide tourism. Most tourists tend to avoid these distinct avenues of tourism due to their association with death; however, there is a specific group who are drawn to such niche forms of tourism. For example, dedicated ghost tourists regard the re-enactments during ghost walks as an essential part of the tourist experience (Reijnders 2011).

Due to the limited availability of research on special interest tourism in the 1990s, Weiler and Hall (1992b) point out the limitations of their own special interest tourism book – written from the Western perspective of affluent and well-educated tourists from developed countries – demanding a more empirical approach to this under-explored area. Therefore, this book fills the above-mentioned research gap, offering readers a research-based textbook derived from surveys, interviews, and the content analysis of East Asian and Southeast Asian tourists, as well as tourists visiting Thailand from the UK, the USA, Germany, France, Australia, and New Zealand. Additionally, the author and her students have also gathered data at special interest tourism hubs, such as London and Romania (ghost tourism), New Zealand (film tourism), Las Vegas, (casino and suicide tourism), Melbourne (surfing), Seoul and Gyeongju (food and film tourism), Beijing and Guangzhou (food and shopping tourism), Hong Kong (food and shopping tourism), Macao (casino tourism), Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka (dark and suicide tourism), Kuala Lumpur (medical tourism), Singapore (medical tourism), and Bangkok, Kanchanaburi, Ayutthaya, Samutprakarn, Phuket, Phang Nga (food, film, shopping, medical, dark and ghost tourism). While living in the USA, the author also gathered data on adventure tourism and film tourism. These sources of primary data collection were used to analyze the empirical data and the literature reviews. As a result of this research, the current book is expected to fill the gap in the existing literature on special interest tourism.

Unlike Stebbins (1982) and Weiler and Hall (1992a), this book focuses on soft special interest tourism, where tourists are not required to develop any specific skills towards a career path or become experts in the special interest associated with such tourism (Trauer 2006). However, the discussion of special interest tourism in this book includes a broader perspective, one which includes those who visit the special interest tourism hubs and participate in special interest tourist activities. The motivations of these tourists range from the least interested, the moderately interested, to those highly interested in the specific activities. This is because many first-time travellers from Asian countries travel to special interest tourism hubs driven solely by their primary affinity with this specific branch of tourism. Yet, due to language barriers, time and

cost constraints, and the issue of finding compatible travel companions, they join all-inclusive travel packages to pursue their interests at the hub destinations.

However, no specific skill-set as such is required for them to become experts or develop their serious leisure into a career path. Rather, these are serious travellers who are in search of specific travel information prior to their visits. These tourists visit a hub destination in order to fulfill a particular business and/or pursue very distinct pleasures (Lickorish 1987). More importantly, special interest tourists search for unique experiences, develop a social network within this niche market, and are the specific target audience for those catering for travellers with niche interests (Weiler and Hall 1992a). Thus, soft special interest tourism falls within the overarching category of special interest tourism.

Special interest tourism is an umbrella term, within the purview of which one can locate a broad range of themes. Being a niche form of tourism, it attracts specific tourists with passionate interests, as well as serendipitous tourists with minimal interest; thus, both carry different expectations and meanings regarding their existential authenticity. This book defines special interest tourism both in relation to tourists' personal interests and individual experiences, as well as the inherent characteristics of a place or site (Light 2017). Serious leisure tourists seek to satisfy their diverse and personalized needs—such as self-actualization, self enrichment, self-renewal, self-expression, and social interaction—by participating in special interest tourism (Stebbins 1982; Weiler and Hall 1992b).

Interestingly, the emergence of an increasingly aging world population has resulted in the development of suicide tourism, at the core of which lies the pleasurable need “to die with dignity,” something that is in stark contrast to the travel motivation of most people. As with other types of special interest tourism, death is not always the sole and primary motivation for dark tourism (Lennon and Foley 1999; Rittichainuwat 2008; Seaton and Lennon 2004; Sharpley 2012).

Dark tourism is just one among the multiple facets of this emerging stream of special interest tourism. Curiosity is the main motivation for tourists to travel to dark tourist sites associated with natural disasters (Ashworth and Hartmann 2005; Rittichainuwat 2008). Curiosity about the unusual, a desire for empathy, and self-identification with the victims of atrocities are also major motivations for dark tourism (Ashworth and Hartmann 2005; Rittichainuwat 2008).

Ghost tourism is another type of dark tourism. According to Gentry (2007), ghost tourism has some similarities to dark tourism in that it usually incorporates visits to sites that are associated with death. However,

ghost tourism focuses on mixing deep reflections with entertainment, fun and educational elements that focus on tragedy (Gentry 2007). In particular, ghost tourism has been recognized as a significant form of heritage tourism, as well as being an emerging form of dark tourism (Gentry 2007).

The problem statement, definitions and scope of special interest tourism were presented in chapters 1-2. The current book presents the author's empirical research on food tourism (chapter 3), medical tourism (chapter 4), film tourism (chapters 5-6) and shopping tourism (8-9). The book presents two case studies of Korea (Chapter 7) and Thailand (Chapter 10) and research on segmentation (chapter 11). The book also addresses emerging issues in dark tourism (chapter 12), ghost tourism (chapter 13), and suicide tourism (chapter 14). The concluding remarks summarize the significance of soft special interest tourism in attracting and retaining first-time and repeat travellers.

The author hopes that this book introduces students, researchers, educators, tourist bureaus, and tour operators to the issues surrounding the increasing demand for soft special interest tourism, both from tourists in the newly industrialized countries of East Asia and Southeast Asia as well as those who travel to Thailand from the West.



Figure 1-2: This book focuses on soft special interest tourism.



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# CHAPTER TWO

## SPECIAL INTEREST TOURISM

### Chapter Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Understand the definition of different types of special interest tourism.
2. Recognize the shifts that have occurred in special interest tourism during the past several decades.
3. Be aware of new forms of special interest tourism.
4. Identify the impact of special interest tourism on local communities.
5. Understand that special interest tourism is a niche market, but also a profitable one.



Figure 2-1: Special interest tourism is a niche, but sustainable form of tourism.

## Definition of Special Interest Tourism

Special interest tourism refers to specialized tourism involving groups or individuals who want to develop certain interests by visiting sites and places connected with a specific subject (Lee and Bai 2016). It is a term used to describe recreational travel that is associated with a particular personal interest. This kind of tourism can be driven by attraction to an activity, or by interest in some feature of a destination (Weiler and Hall 1992). Special interest tourism can be motivated by a desire to immerse oneself in an existing interest (e.g., places related to a movie or television series) or the desire to pursue a new interest in a location that might be novel (e.g., place authenticity) or, indeed, familiar (Swarbrook and Horner 1999). In general, special interest tourism involves seeking customized leisure and recreational experiences (Derrett 2001), as driven by the specific interests of individuals or groups (e.g., Korean television series fan clubs).

Some special interest tourists are mainly concerned with pursuing a favourite activity, as seen in shopping tourism, while other tourists are driven by the desire to experience a particular destination. Special interest tourists are “travellers who visit a destination to pursue their special interest in a particular region or destination (Read 1980, 195).”



Figure 2-2: Special interest tourism is the opposite of mass tourism.  
Photo by Rattanaphinchai (2016)

## Scope of Special Interest Tourism

Special interest tourism emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s, at the same time as ecotourism and sustainable tourism. In the past decade, special interest tourism has focused on “hard or specialized” activities that require physical effort, such as adventure tourism, eco-tourism, sport

tourism, and cultural tourism (Trauer 2006). However, it is now apparent that service providers have diversified their products to also attract the large market focusing on “soft” or “novice” activities (Trauer 2006), such as food, film and shopping tourism. Special interest tourism is the opposite of superficial mass tourism (Trauer 2006). The term is used to describe the challenging end of serious leisure tourism, such as adventure tourism (surfing), which requires the acquisition of special skills and knowledge, and a commitment to develop such skills (Jin and Sparks 2017; Stebbins 1982; Weiler and Hall 1992).



Figure 2-3: Surfing is a hard special interest tourism.  
Photo by Rattanaphinanchai (2014)

Special interest tourism can be used to attract tourists to destinations with limited natural and cultural resources through the use of man-made attractions, such as casino tourism, film tourism and shopping tourism. Special interest tourism can generate repeat visits and, thus, increase income from tourism in rural areas. However, special interest tourism remains a niche market.



Figure 2-4: Food tourism is a soft special interest tourism.  
Photo by Rittichainuwat (2016)



Figure 2-5: A food factory is a special interest tourist attraction.  
Photo by Rittichainuwat (2016)