

# JAPANESE'S INTEREST TO PARTICIPATE IN AGRO-TOURISM IN CHIANG MAI PROVINCE, THAILAND

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## **Abstract**

*This research has two main objectives: 1) to study Japanese's interest to participate in agro-tourism in Chiang Mai Province and 2) to provide suggestions for agro-tourism development in Chiang Mai to serve the Japanese' interests. The researcher conducted 3 rounds of focus group sessions. Purposive sampling technique was applied. Data was analyzed using coding technique along with recursive abstraction technique. The results showed that there were a total of 27 informants. The top three reasons to stay in Chiang Mai were married to a Thai husband, work, and study Thai language. More than half of the informants agreed to participate in 38 out of the total of 42 agro-tourism activities being proposed in the focus group sessions. The 3 activities that every informant agreed to participate in were tasting agricultural food, buying chemical free products, and eating local style food. The researcher also proposed actual thematic agro-tourism sites/events for the informants to consider. It was concluded that the Japanese had their will to travel but the top two hindrances were the crowd and their limited income. The researcher suggested that to attract the Japanese to travel to agro-tourism sites in Chiang Mai, the service providers should provide Japanese translation, sell products at reasonable price, sell local design instead of modern design, and provide special tourism package during school break.*

**Keyword:** *Japanese, Agro-tourism, Chiang Mai*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Chiang Mai is Thailand's second-largest city (Accorhotels.com, 2013). The province is located on a land of 12,566,911 Rai. In 2011, the land in Chiang Mai was classified as agricultural land (1,401,902 Rai or 11.16%); forest land (10,380,924 Rai or 82.61%); and residential and other purposes land (784,085 Rai or 6.24%) (Royal Forest Department, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2013). The majority (80%) of the Chiang Mai people earn a living through agriculture and agricultural related professions. The second largest vocation of Chiang Mai is tourism and its directly and indirectly related jobs (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2012). However, when mentioning Chiang Mai, tourists always think about its rich culture and prosperous natural resources. Their tourism activities go toward visiting temples, shopping, enjoying night life, visiting resorts, and visiting natural places such as waterfalls. It was observed that in spite of the lavish resources, visiting agricultural farms and participating in agro-tourism activities are not the very first things that come up to the tourists' minds when they visit Chiang Mai.

Hereby, the researcher would like to point out the opportunity to synthesize Chiang Mai's abundant agricultural resources with its strength of being the leading tourism destination to promote Chiang Mai to become a high quality agro-tourism destination.

As many of tourism destinations has been deteriorated due to the lack of good strategic planning and management, this research aims to study the interest of "preferable group of tourists" in order to find a way to design Chiang Mai's agro-tourism services to serve their current demand and to attract more of them. The "preferable group of tourists" in this research refers to Japanese tourists due to five major reasons.

First, number of inbound Japanese tourists to Thailand is significant and have positive trend. According to the Chiang Mai Chamber of Commerce presidents, Narong Kongprasert, there are approximately 3,000 Japanese reside in Chiang Mai in 2012 and the trend towards long-stay has grown since the tsunami and earthquake hit Japan in early March 2011. The advantages of Chiang Mai over other provinces in Thailand are its tranquility and nicer weather. In addition, when compare to Bangkok, the living expenses in Chiang Mai are significantly lower (Andy, 2012).

Second, a large number of Japanese retirees have potential to migrate from Japan to live in Chiang Mai. The past statistic record showed that at least 800,000 Japanese retire every year and many choose to have a lengthy stay abroad. The Japanese Consulate estimated that several million Japanese will retire in the next three years and they will be high-quality tourists with high purchasing power. The Japanese consulate in Chiang Mai revealed that over the past decade the number of retired Japanese who had moved to find a second home overseas had increased by 38%. About 360,000 of them chose Asian destinations with 80% deciding to reside in Thailand. Furthermore, it was reported that the majority of the Japanese residents in Chiang Mai were age over 50 years and many of them are retirees. Many of them came to stay in Chiang Mai for about one month on their first visit to see whether they can adjust to the local environment. Once they feel comfortable with the place, their second stay is usually up to three to five months. The statistics also showed that many of them decided to stay for years (Andy, 2012).

Third, Japanese tourists fall into a high quality tourist group in Thailand because of their higher spending than tourists from other countries. Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) stated that Japanese tourists are high quality market. Statistics show that Japanese tourists spent approximately of 4,472 Baht per day and usually stay for 7.6 days per trip. TAT projected that there will be 1.3 million Japanese tourists visiting Thailand in 2013 (Voice TV, 2013 and Kasemsook, 2012). Considering the Japanese residents in Thailand, this group of resident pays around 300,000 Baht per person per year for accommodation and about 30,000 Baht a month or 360,000 Baht a year for other costs such as food and home supplies. This provides revenue of more than 1 billion baht to the country each year. Besides staying as residents, this group of Japanese tends to spend their money on tourism as well (Andy, 2012).

Fourth, Chiang Mai is the top tourism destination of Japanese tourists. In 2012, Thailand ranked the world's number seventh of tourism market share of Japanese tourists after only China, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, The United States of America, and Hawaii. Thailand was also on the first place rank of Japanese tourist destination in Southeast Asia.

Fifth, Japanese were voted the best tourists by a 2009 Expedia survey of 4,500 hotels around the world. The Expedia survey's conditions of best tourist include politeness, generosity, tidiness, and behavior. Due to the aforementioned reasons of why Japanese are "preferable group of tourists," this research will begin with studying what agro-tourism services are currently being offered in Chiang Mai. Then, the researcher will study the interest of Japanese for those existing services and will also gather suggestions of their interest. Finally the researcher will analyze the data and provide suggestions to design agro-tourism services in Chiang Mai to serve the Japanese's interest.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To study Japanese's interest to participate in agro-tourism in Chiang Mai Province
2. To provide suggestions for agro-tourism development in Chiang Mai to serve the Japanese' interest.

## **THEORY**

This study based on the agro-tourism theory which classified agro-tourism into 6 types according to its provided activities. Those categories can be explained in more detail as follows (Waithe, 2006).

### **Type 1: Agro-trade**

Agro tourism focuses on selling agricultural products to customers. The sellers can either be the farmers or the middle person who buy the agricultural products from the farmers and sell it to customers. The customers range from individual such as villagers and tourists, and enterprises such as restaurants, hotels, and industrial factories. Agricultural products include fruits, vegetables, flowers, fish, meat, milk, and processed-agricultural products such as cheese, jam, confectionary, sausage, wine, and more.

**Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism**

Farm based and agro-eco tourism aims to provide tourists with farming experiences in various ways depending on the resources of the village. The villagers will share knowledge about preserving environment to the tourists and may provide hands on activities for them. The activities may include planting trees, growing rice in the rice field, picking fruits from the trees, catching fish, feeding animals, etc. The villagers will encourage tourists to appreciate the scenery of the farm landscape as well as other farm-related sites such as irrigation canal, dam, and fish pond. This type of tourism will help increase farm income through tourism.

**Type 3: Community tourism**

Community agro tourism seeks to make a linkage between tourists and local community. The main purpose of this type of agro tourism is to give opportunity to the tourists to learn directly from the real locals instead of outside tour agency, which may provide incorrect information or may be too commercialize that the tourists will experience only things or services to purchase but ignore others that are not for sale. For example, instead of only paying for and watching an arranged package traditional dance show; the villagers may bring tourists to their real traditional festivals and let them experience the authentic local lives. The villagers may also share their daily experience by having tourists stay at their homes, which are set in a form of home stay. In this case, the tourists will have opportunity to observe the authentic local lifestyle and have a chance to talk to the villagers.

**Type 4: Health and wellness tourism**

The highlight of health and wellness agro tourism is its effort to provide products and services that promote the tourists' health. The products and services may include organic fruits and vegetables, herbs, traditional massages, traditional herbal medicine, comfortable home stays, and the like. The customers of this type of agro tourism are those who are concern with health and their personal wellness.

**Type 5: Culinary tourism**

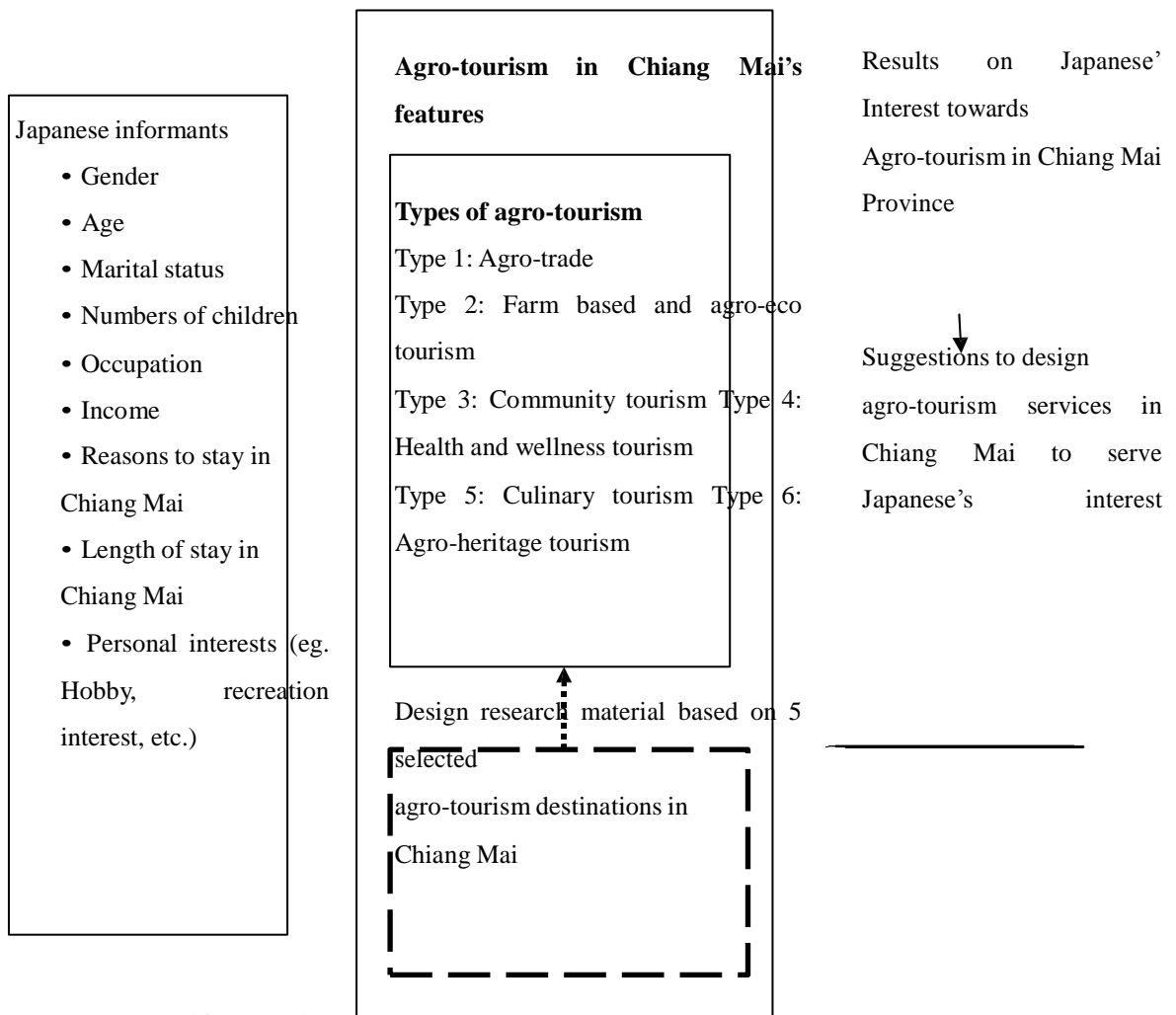
Culinary agro tourism focuses on food and drink. The sources of food and drink come from the area in which they may be grown by farmers such as tribal rice, farm fresh fruits, fish from the pond; or they may be grown in the wild such as mushroom. The villagers may use local raw material that can be found in the area to make food for the tourists. Tourists who come for culinary tourism expect to experience local food but sometime the taste may not suit their palate, therefore, the locals may adapt their recipe to allow the tourists to enjoy the food. For example, some tourists may not be able to handle food as spicy as the authentic local food, so the villagers may make the food less spicy for them.

**Type 6: Agro-heritage tourism**

Agro-heritage tourism combines development of plantation and agricultural heritage site. This kind of tourism site may have rare herbs and trees that cannot be found anywhere else; such plants will be preserved by the villagers and the villagers may compile knowledge about them to share with the visitors.

**RESEARCH SCOPE**

This research studied what agro-tourism services were being offered in Chiang Mai along with concepts and theories about agro-tourism. Then, the researcher developed a focus-group questions list according to the reviewed information. Agro-tourism concepts and theories were applied to design the questions. In the focus group process, the researcher studied the interest of Japanese tourists for existing services and their suggestions toward agro-tourism in Chiang Mai based on their interests. Finally, the researcher analyzed the data in order to make suggestions to design agro-tourism services in Chiang Mai to serve the Japanese's interests. Research conceptual framework is provided in picture 1.



Picture 1: Conceptual framework

**POPULATION AND SAMPLES**

The population of this research is the group of Japanese residents in Chiang Mai of approximately 3,000 people. Since this research aimed to study the Japanese' interest towards agro-tourism in Chiang Mai Province in detail, therefore the researcher chose to conduct a qualitative research. The researcher applied purposive sampling technique to choose informants for this research. Since the majority of the Japanese in Chiang Mai are long-stayers and retirees (Andy, 2012), the researcher chose to focus this study on this particular group. The criterion were that those sample must be Japanese, able to speak English, live in Chiang Mai, willing to provide opinions and related data, and can participate in the research focus group meeting. Each round of focus group consisted of 7-10 samples. In addition, the researcher conducted 3 rounds of focus group with different informants in each round. The purpose to conduct 3 rounds of focus group is to get sufficient information for the data analysis of this research.

**DATA COLLECTION EMTHOD**

The researcher applied focus group technique as a research tool to collect data. At first, the researcher collected data of agro-tourism in Chiang Mai in a holistic picture as well as concepts and theories about agro-tourism. Then, the researcher developed a focus-group questions list according to the reviewed information. The question list developed is in a form of Powerpoint slide set in which the researcher will show it at the focus group session and use it as a tool to facilitate the focus group

discussion. In order to ease the discussion, the researcher hired a Japanese translator to translate this slide set into Japanese. In order to systematically collect the data, the researcher also developed a checklist form in relevant to the aforementioned Powerpoint slide set so that the focus group participant can jot their answers in the given form. From such technique, the researcher could group the data from the informant systematically and accurately. The researcher also had this checklist form translated into Japanese as well. The checklist forms in English and in Japanese are attached as appendix 3 and 4. During the focus group session, the researcher acted as a moderator who facilitates the discussion among the selected informants. Even though the researcher selected only the informants who can communicate in English, the researcher had invited a Japanese translator to assist in case there were language-barriers occur. In addition, the researcher also invited a second Japanese translator to assist the main translator.

To form the focus group sessions, the researcher contacted a Japanese person who is a long-stayer in Chiang Mai and also have a wide network to reach other Japanese residents in Chiang Mai to help recruit informants to the focus group sessions. The researcher informed the criterion of the applicable informants to the recruiter from the beginning so that she could recruit the informants properly. (Note: the criterion were that those sample must be Japanese, able to speak English, live in Chiang Mai, willing to provide opinions and related data, and can participate in the research focus group meeting.) Consequently, the recruiter recruited 10, 7, and 10 informants for the focus group session 1, 2, and 3 accordingly.

During the focus group session, the researcher asked the focus group organizer staff to make a voice record of the entire session. After each focus group session ended, the focus group organizer downloaded the voice file into two sets. The researcher then gave one set of the voice record to the Japanese translator 1 to make a focus group transcription in a written form. Furthermore, the researcher gave another set of voice record to the Japanese translator 2 to make another focus group transcription in a written form, which in turn this file will be used as a back-transcription to validate the first translation.

## **DATA ANALYSIS METHOD**

The researchers analyzed the data using coding technique along with recursive abstraction technique. Coding is an interpretive technique that both organizes the data and provides a means to introduce the interpretations of it into certain quantitative methods. The researcher analyzed the data and determined segments within it, which would be done at different times throughout the process. Each segment was labeled with a "code" usually a word or short phrase that suggests how the associated data segments inform the research objectives. When coding was completed, the researcher prepared reports via a mix of: summarizing the prevalence of codes, discussing similarities and differences in related codes across distinct original sources/contexts, or comparing the relationship between one or more codes.

Regarding recursive abstraction technique, the researcher analyzed some qualitative datasets without coding as appropriate. The implementation was that the datasets will be summarized; those summaries are then further summarized and so on. The end result was a more compact summary that would have been difficult to accurately discern without the preceding steps of distillation. This method was appropriate in this research where there were three focus group meetings and the researcher had to collect data from each meeting and integrate the results from all of the meetings.

## **RESULTS**

The research result consisted of 4 parts as follows:

### **Part 1 General information**

The researcher arranged 3 focus group sessions in which the informants were different group of informants. There were a total of 27 informants participating in these 3 focus group sessions. There were 17 female and 10 male informants, age range from 30 to 69 years old. 20 informants were married, 6 of them has no children while 14 of them has 1-4 children. There were 7 informants who were single. The majority of them work as employees in private organization and the others were teachers, self-employed, students, housewife, and advisor to an organization. There were 3 informants who already retired. Regarding to their income, the majority of them earns 20,000 – 50,000 Baht/month (11 informants) and 50,001-100,000 Baht/month (10 informants). There were 4 informants who earned less than 20,000 Baht per month and 1 informant earned more than 100,000 Baht per month. Considering their expense, the majority of them indicated that their monthly expense range

20,000 – 50,000 Baht. There were 5 informants stated that their monthly expense was less than 20,000 Baht per month. There was one informant answered that his monthly expense was more than 100,000 Baht. The top three reasons to stay in Chiang Mai of those informants were married to a Thai husband (10 informants), work (9 informants), and study Thai language (3 informants.) The majority of them have been staying in Chiang Mai for more than 10 years (12 informants) while there were 9 and 5 informants had been staying in Chiang Mai for 1-5 years and 6-10 years, respectively. Par the question of their personal interest, the top 3 answers were travelling (16 informants), cooking (14 informants), and sports (8 informants), respectively.

## Part 2: Japanese's interest to participate in agro-tourism in Chiang Mai Province

The researcher collected data resulted from the 3 focus group sessions and classified the data into 6 types of agro-tourism: Type 1: Agro trade, Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism, Type 3: Community tourism, Type 4: Health and wellness tourism, Type 5: Culinary tourism, and Type 6: Agro-heritage tourism. The results show interests of the informants in each type of agro-tourism in various levels. The following table presents the levels of informants in descending order.

Table 5.1: Summary of Japanese's interests to participate in agro-tourism in Chiang Mai Province rank in descending order

Rank	Agro-tourism activities	Type of agro-tourism	Number of informants answered and percentage
1	Tasting agricultural food products	Type 1: Agro trade	27 (100.00%)
2	Buying chemical free agricultural products	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	27 (100.00%)
3	Eating local style food	Type 5: Culinary tourism	27 (100.00%)
4	Participating in hands-on manufacturing food process in factories	Type 1: Agro trade	25 (92.59%)
5	Walking on own and read signs	Type 1: Agro trade	25 (92.59%)
6	Riding horse	Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism	25 (92.59%)
7	Buying fresh agricultural products sold at farms or road side	Type 1: Agro trade	24 (88.89%)
8	Staying at farm for relaxation	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	24 (88.89%)
9	Observing manufacturing food process	Type 1: Agro trade	23 (85.19%)
10	Walking in farm/garden	Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism	23 (85.19%)
11	Watching traditional performance	Type 3: Community tourism	23 (85.19%)
12	Buying fresh vegetables from farm	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	23 (85.19%)

Table 5.1: Summary of Japanese's interests to participate in agro-tourism in Chiang Mai Province rank in descending order (Continued)

Rank	Agro-tourism activities	Type of agro-tourism	Number of informants answered and percentage
13	Picking strawberry in farm	Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism	22 (81.48%)
14	Exploring the place led by local tour guide	Type 3: Community tourism	22 (81.48%)
15	Staying at countryside for relaxation	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	22 (81.48%)
16	Dining at restaurant style place	Type 5: Culinary tourism	22 (81.48%)
17	Learning about custom/ceremony related agriculture	Type 6: Agro-heritage tourism	22 (81.48%)
18	Buying ready-to-eat food products at shops	Type 1: Agro trade	21 (77.78%)
19	Observing local lifestyle	Type 3: Community tourism	21 (77.78%)
20	Joining cooking class	Type 5: Culinary tourism	21 (77.78%)
21	Learning about history/story of Thai/local plants	Type 6: Agro-heritage tourism	21 (77.78%)
22	Buying local products (dried food)	Type 1: Agro trade	20 (74.07%)
23	Joining school trip or club trip	Type 1: Agro trade	20 (74.07%)
24	Camping (in a tent)	Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism	20 (74.07%)
25	Milking cows	Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism	20 (74.07%)
26	Feeding baby goat	Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism	20 (74.07%)
27	Buying dried plants to be used as herbal product/medicine	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	20 (74.07%)
28	Learning history about of places related to tourism sites such as the Royal Project	Type 6: Agro-heritage tourism	20 (74.07%)

Table 5.1: Summary of Japanese's interests to participate in agro-tourism in Chiang Mai Province rank in descending order (Continued)

Rank	Agro-tourism activities	Type of agro-tourism	Number of informants answered and percentage
29	Buying souvenir (local handmade)	Type 1: Agro trade	19 (70.37%)
30	Chatting with villagers	Type 3: Community tourism	19 (70.37%)
31	Staying at villagers' homestay	Type 3: Community tourism	19 (70.37%)
32	Buying fresh plants to be used as herbal product/medicine?	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	19 (70.37%)
33	Buying traditional Thai massage (local)	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	18 (66.67%)
34	Buying "brand name" manufactured agricultural products	Type 1: Agro trade	17 (62.96%)
35	Buying "brand name" fresh agricultural Products	Type 1: Agro trade	17 (62.96%)
36	Planting rice in the rice field	Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism	17 (62.96%)
37	Buying local herbal medicine	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	17 (62.96%)
38	Getting traditional Thai massage (in clean/comfortable room)	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	17 (62.96%)
39	Seeing exhibition	Type 1: Agro trade	12 (44.44%)
40	Buying well-known brand name herbal Medicine	Type 4: Health and wellness tourism	12 (44.44%)
41	Buying souvenirs (modern design)	Type 1: Agro trade	11 (40.74%)
42	Playing or taking pictures at photo spot	Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism	7 (25.93%)

From table 1, the results shows that from the 42 proposed ago-tourism activities, there were 38 activities that more than half of the informants agreed that they would like to participate in. It is noted that there were 3 activities that every informant agreed to participate in which consisted of: 1) Tasting agricultural food products 2) Buying chemical free agricultural products and 3) Eating local style food. The other activities that more than 90% of the informants were interested in participating were 1) Participating in hands-on manufacturing food process in factories 2) Walking on own and read signs and 3) Riding horse.

There were, however, agro-tourism activities that less than 50% of the informants would like to participate in which were 1) Playing or taking pictures at photo spot 2) Buying souvenirs (modern design) 3) Buying well-known brand name herbal medicine, and 4) Seeing exhibition, respectively.



The results also showed that the types of agro-tourism did not have effects on interests of the informants, in other words, the informants have their interests towards different types of agro-tourism in a scattered fashion. For instance, on the one hand, 100% of the informants would like to participate in tasting agricultural food products which belongs to Type 1: Agro-trade. On the other hand, less than half of the informants (40.74%) were interested in buying souvenir of modern design which also belongs to Type 1: Agro-Trade. It may be concluded that the interests of the informants towards agro-tourism activities depended on specific activities not the entire classified type of agro-tourism.

### Part 3: Japanese' feedbacks on thematic actual agro-tourism sites/events

In order to understand the Japanese's real interests towards agro-tourism activities, the researcher offered thematic actual agro-tourism sites/interests which contain different related factors to consider as options for the informants to consider whether they would be interested in going or not. The results showed that more than 70% of the informants would like to participate in agro-tourism in Chiang Mai in different forms including Ang Khang (Royal Project), Mae Kam Pong, Annual Royal Project Fair on Nimmanhaemin Road, and Mae Klang Luang. Those 4 sites/events offered different features of agro-tourism activities for the visitors and they hold different conditions such as distance, road condition, price of accommodation and food, activities, and styles of tourism. From the discussions in the 3 focus group sessions, it could be observed that most the informants had the will to travel to agro-tourism destinations and would like to participate in the activities. However, the major obstacle was their limited amount of free time and money to spend for traveling. Most of the informants were either work or studying therefore they did not have much free time for traveling even though they would like to do so. In addition, many of them agreed that Japanese living in Chiang Mai did not make very high income and they had to be very careful in spending money especially for recreation such as traveling. Another interesting observation was that many informants said that they would travel when they have guests visiting them from out of Chiang Mai such as visiting family members from Japan. In such case, they would allocate time and budget to take their guests to agro-tourism places either close by or faraway. There were only a few informants who did not want to participate in agro-tourism sites/events. These informants provided reasons that it was their personal preferences that they either did not like countryside or had no interest in agricultural matters. From the 5 thematic actual agro-tourism sites/events proposed, there was only 1 event that less than half of the informants would like to go, the "Annual Flower Festival in Chiang Mai." The major reasons were that they did not like to be in the crowd and they thought that the fair was always the same as every past year and it got boring.

### Part 4: Informants' practices and suggestions on agro-tourism in Chiang Mai

In order to find ways to design agro-tourism activities to serve the Japanese in Chiang Mai's interests, the researchers asked 8 questions for the informants' practices and suggestions on agro-tourism in Chiang Mai. The results were concluded as follows.

Table 3: Summary of Informants' practices and suggestions on agro-tourism in Chiang Mai

Subjects	Answers	Adding explanation from focus groups
1. "Effective ways to advertise tourism to Japanese residents in Chiang Mai"	Top 3 suggestions: 1. Japanese magazine distributed in Chiang Mai such as "Chao" (of magazine) (48.15%) 2. Social media such as Facebook group among Japanese (37.04%) 3. Japanese association/ (18.52%)	1. "Chao" is a famous free magazine written in Japanese distributed in Chiang Mai. The informants in that this magazine should be considered as the best to communicate to the Japanese in Chiang Mai. 2. The majority of Japanese in Chiang Mai use Facebook to communicate with the others. Some created Facebook pages for their own purposes such as to advertise their business or to communicate with people who have the same interests. This medium is free and very effective. 3. There are several Japanese associations and clubs in Chiang Mai. They possess a significant number of members such as the Japanese language clubs in which the Japanese parents agreed to let their children to study Japanese language on the weekend. This was a good opportunity for the parents to meet and associate the other Japanese in the area.

Table 3: Summary of Informants' practices and suggestions on agro-tourism in Chiang Mai (Continued)

Subjects	Answers	Adding explanation from focus groups
2. "Timings that Japanese resident in Chiang Mai usually travel"	Top 3 suggestions: -When there are festivals (44.44%) -Low season (less tourists, price) (44.44%) -Children's school breaks (40.74%)	1. Many informants said that the Japanese in living Chiang usually had busy schedule. For example, during weekdays, they had to work and their children had to go to school. On the weekends, they had to take their children to study Japanese Language. Therefore, even though they would like to travel, they did not have time for it. But when there were festival, they were to be interested and would like to attend since they thought festivals were special and did not happen on a routine basis. 2. The informants pointed out that Japanese living in Chiang Mai did not earn a lot of money thus they had to be careful of their expenses. Furthermore, Japanese in general do not like to go into the crowded place. Therefore, they preferred to travel during the low season because the cost was much lower than during the high season and they could avoid the tourists' crowd. 3. As explained in #1, the Japanese parents would have time to travel when their children were willing to take their children to travel as a family during their children's school break.
3. "Factors affecting Japanese decision to travel"	Top 3 suggestions: 1. Cost (48.15%) 2. Distance to the travel destination (37.04%) 3. Road difficulty (22.22%)	1. As stated earlier, Japanese in Chiang Mai were very concerned about their expense. Therefore, "cost" became the top concern that affects their decision to travel or not. They preferred to travel when the cost is low such as in low season when accommodation price become cheaper. 2. Since the Japanese in Chiang Mai tended to have limited amount of free time, they prefer to travel where there good/convvenient transportation and not too far away from Chiang Mai. 3. Many of the informants prefer easy road. They tried to avoid traveling to places that are difficult to reach due to road difficulty.
4. "Traveling to agro-tourism sites in Chiang Mai"	Yes = 88.89% No = 11.11%	-The majority of the informants had traveled to agro-tourism sites in Chiang Mai before such as Ang Khang and Royal Project fair. However, many of them had never heard of or never been to some famous places such as Mae Kam homestay village. They said that if they had heard about it (such as Mae Kam Pong), they would want to visit those places for sure. -There were 11% of the informants who had never been to agro-tourism site in Chiang Mai, the main reasons were the lack of free time. Another reason was that some informants did not have interest in agricultural matters or rural atmosphere.
5. "Staying overnight at destination when traveling"	Yes = 51.85% No = 48.15%	-About half of the informants had ever stayed overnight at agro-tourism destinations when traveling. For those who had never experienced it said that they were not confident about the hygiene of those places.

Table 3: Summary of Informants' practices and suggestions on agro-tourism in Chiang Mai (Continued)

Subjects	Answers	Adding explanation from focus groups
6. "Numbers of nights informants stay when traveling"	Top 3 suggestions: 1. 1 night (25.93%) 2. 2 nights (18.52%) 3. More than 3 nights (7.41%)	-The majority of those informants who had stayed overnight at the agro-tourism destination stayed 1 night was because of their limited amount of traveling time.
7. "Budget set per day per head"	1. Depending on the travel destination. (25.93%) 2. 1,000-1,999 Baht (18.52%) 3. Less than 500 Baht (11.11%)	-The majority of the informants said that they set their traveling budget based on their traveling destination. However, about 30% of the informants set their budget less than 500 to about 2,000 Baht per day per head. They insisted that they had to allocate their expense and set budget for their recreation carefully.
8. "Habits of Japanese when traveling"	1. Prefer to travel with family (85.19%) 2. Prefer suburb (70.37%) 3. Need standard facilities (restaurant, etc.) (70.37%)	1. Many of the informants were parents, so they preferred to travel with family. In addition, some of them that they would like to travel when they have their family members visiting from Japan. In case of having family members visiting, they tended to make a travel plan to go to famous destinations such as Angkor Khang since they felt that this was their special occasion. 2. Many of the informants said that Japanese prefer suburbs when they traveling. They explained that in general Japanese tended to love nature and would like avoid crowded places. 3. The informants suggested that even though they would like to travel to agricultural and natural places, they were willing to eat and join the activities. However, many of them concerned about good facilities as clean western toilet, hygienic food, and accommodation.

## DISCUSSION

To be able to provide practical suggestions for agro-tourism development in Chiang Mai to serve the Japanese' interest, the researcher analyzed and discussed the related issues as follow.

### 1. Interests of Japanese living in Chiang Mai versus Japanese tourists in general

According to the article "Segmenting Japanese Tourists to Hawaii According to Tour Purpose" by Kim, S.S. and Agrusa, J. in 2008, it said that Japanese tourists often travel for the purposes of sightseeing, tour and opening their minds. This complies with the result of this research that the Japanese in Chiang Mai also would like to travel for the same purposes. As shown in table 5.1, it was found that from the 42 proposed agro-tourism activities proposed to the informants, there were 38 activities that more than half of the informants agreed that they would like to participate in. It could also be seen that the informants were willing to try agricultural food products and local style food. In addition, they were enthusiastic to learn things hands-on such as to participate in hands-on manufacturing food process in factories and to walk and read signs on own at the agro-tourism destinations. In addition, the results also showed some informants' interests in somewhat adventurous activities such as riding horse.

In addition, Kimm, S.S. and Agrusa, J. reported that Japanese tourists were against too much publicity and adventure. Japanese tourists are more interested in the cultural attractions. They are relatively passive in the tourism process. The result of this research somewhat support the prior research. For instance, the informants preferred to travel during the low season in which one of their reasons was that they would like to avoid the crowd. In addition, this research also showed some results which support the prior research that Japanese tourists were against too much adventure.

Some supported findings were that many informants in this research were willing to travel to agro-tourism destinations and would like to try local food and participate in hands-on activities such as riding horse and milking cow. However, many of them never stay overnight at the destination because they were concerned about the cleanliness of the accommodation. In addition, they also prefer that the destination provide them good facilities such as clean toilets and hygienic restaurant. Moreover, this study showed outstanding result that the informants were highly concerned about chemical substances used in agriculture. All of them would like to buy chemical-free agricultural products.

The same report by Kimm, S.S. and Agrusa, J. pointed out that Japanese tourists significantly become more interested in eco-tourism. This research showed that almost 90% of the informants had traveled to agro-tourism sites in Chiang Mai. In addition, when given 5 thematic actual agro-tourism sites/events, more than 70% of the informants agreed that they would like to go to 4 sites/events. For the event that less than half of the informants would like to go to was the annual Flower Fair in which they said they did not want to go because they did not like to be in the crowd and they were concerned about bad traffic and parking spots.

Regarding to Kozak, M. (2002)'s article titled "Destination benchmarking," it said that during their travel, they like to dine in the restaurant with Japanese style in the diet. The result of this study was different from Kozak's finding. This research found that Japanese in Chiang Mai were willing to try agricultural food products and local style food. However, the research results also revealed some similarity that the Japanese put food hygiene as the very top level of their concerns.

In addition, Kozak (2002) reported that Japanese liked to buy souvenirs, and they think it was the method to retain memories. This finding was conflicted with this research result. This research found that the Japanese in Chiang Mai neither want to buy souvenir of modern design nor well-known brand name herbal medicine. Moreover, the least voted activities that the informants would like to do was playing or taking pictures at photo spot. This could be explained that the Japanese in Chiang Mai may perceived agro-tourism destinations in Chiang Mai as "close-to-home" places and was not excited to buy souvenirs or take photos to retain their memories.

## **2. Prior studies' suggestions on ways to improve agro-tourism versus the preferences of Japanese in Chiang Mai**

Gordean (2009) suggested in the article "Agrotourism - A Viable Alternative of County Development" several requirements to develop agro-tourism. Those requirements include: a largely authentic natural or small-scale, richly structured cultural landscape; the attractions of large-scale monocultures; the beauty of the landscape itself; other cultural, historical or natural attractions; good transportation links (because even attractive regions can be almost impossible to market for tourism if they are not easily accessible from the population centers); a certain level of infrastructure must be in place: e.g. transport, accommodation and catering facilities; constant political conditions; and acceptance among the population (local people must be in favor of tourism). The result of this research showed that the Japanese in Chiang Mai would also appreciate the same requirements as the prior research suggested. The supporting results were, for example, about 82% of the informants were interested in learning about custom/ceremony related to agriculture and about 78% of them would like to observe local lifestyle, joining cooking class to learn about local ingredients and local food recipe, and to learn about history/story of Thai/local plants. In addition, this research also showed aligned result with the previous research that Japanese in Chiang Mai would also appreciate good transportation to get to and from the agro-tourism destination. The research also pointed out that the informants also prefer good infrastructure such as accommodation and catering facilities. One interesting point from the prior research suggested that one of the necessary requirements was that the local people must be in favor of tourism. Some of the informants in this research said in the focus group session that they would not want to participate in the local activities or talk to them unless they were asked to join by the locals.

Gordean (2009) also suggested that to improve agro-tourism, there should be supporting businesses to help promote agro tourism business such as outlets/exhibitions of agro-tourism products; agro-tourism catering and recreation centers; tourist offices organizing or implementing programs offering outdoor activities and tours of eco-tourist and cultural interest; farms; businesses producing traditional products; and traditional art workshops. In this research, the results showed that the Royal Project acted as one of the organizations that had the capability to enhance agro-tourism in Chiang Mai and the Japanese's feedback to the organization's event and activities was positive.

Regarding to Ciolac, R. (2011)'s article titled "Research on the Features Which Customize Areas with Developed Agritourism from Central Region of Romania," it was suggested that in order to improve agro-tourism in Romania, the service providers should provide traditional activities to the tourists; offer tourists accommodation and gourmet specialties in rural areas; and set product and service price at tourists' affordable level. These suggestions would also be effectively applied to the case of Japanese in Chiang Mai. The current research results showed that the Japanese in Chiang Mai were highly concerned about the expense of the agro-tourism activities in which implied that the service providers should provide their agro-tourism services and products at reasonable price to be able to attract this group of clients.

## FINDINGS

Besides the results of this research that directly serve the objectives of this study, the researcher would also like to capture and present the interesting findings which would be useful to design suggestions to this research. The findings are categorized into 4 parts based on the structure of this research as follows.

### Part 1: General information of informants

- As many as 74% of the informants were married and 56% of them have 1-4 children. This information implies that when developing plan on agro-tourism in Chiang Mai, the fact that many of the Japanese staying in Chiang Mai had children, therefore, Japanese families should be considered as the target group of agro-tourism in Chiang Mai. The activities or products to be marketed to them should be designed accordingly.
- About 78% of the informants earned around 20,000 – 100,000 Baht per month while their monthly expenses were around 20,000 – 50,000 Baht. This finding would be helpful for the agro-tourism service providers to design their pricing to match the interests and their capability to pay for the recreation.
- It is interesting to find that as high as 37% of the informants were female who married Thai husbands. This data would be useful to design ways to effectively communicate to the Japanese in Chiang Mai. Since the prior research suggested that the decision to travel of Japanese in general usually depended on the "opinion leader" in which in this case might applied to the Thai husband. In other words, to promote agro-tourism in Chiang Mai to the Thai husband (of Japanese wives) group could be an effective way to attract the Japanese in Chiang Mai.
- It was noted that about 37% of the informants had been staying in Chiang Mai for more than 10 years. This could imply that Chiang Mai was attractive enough for the Japanese to stay for a long time and did not move to other places. This could be viewed as a very good opportunity to get in touch with these people and inquire them to help promote the good things about Chiang Mai especially about agro-tourism. From the prior research, it suggested that word-of-mouth was an effective ways to communicate and convince the Japanese.
- Another interesting finding was that about 60% of the informants said that their personal interest was traveling. This finding implied that the Japanese in Chiang Mai had potential to have their mind open to agro-tourism in Chiang Mai.

### Part 2: Japanese tourists' interest to participate in agro-tourism in Chiang Mai

#### Type 1: Agro trade

- It was found that 100% of the informants would like to participate in tasting agricultural food products and some added that they would enjoy it more if those products were provided for free-tasting.
- It was found that the informants preferred hands-on or interactive activities than static activities. The result showed that only about 44% of the informants were interested in seeing exhibition while about 93% would like to simply walking on own and read signs and participating in hands-on manufacturing food process in factories and around 85% would like to observe manufacturing food process.
- The informants preferred local-designed than modern design products. About 70% preferred to buy local handmade souvenir while only about 40% of the informants would like to buy souvenirs of modern design.
- The informants preferred local than brand name agricultural products. Around 89% would like to buy fresh agricultural products sold at farms or road side and 74% would like to buy local products (dried food). Only 63% would like to buy "brand name" manufactured and fresh agricultural products.

#### Type 2: Farm based and agro-eco tourism

- Informants accept farm-based agro-eco tourism activities well in both passive (such as walking in the garden) and more active activities (such as riding horse, milking cows, camping, and even planting rice in the rice field.) Almost all of the proposed farm based and agro-eco tourism activities were accepted by more than 63% of the informants.
- The unpopular activity was playing or taking pictures at photo spot. Only about one fourth of the informants would like to do this activity.

**Type 3: Community tourism**

- Community tourism activities were in favor of the informants. More than 70% of the informants agreed to participated in all proposed community tourism activities such as watching traditional performance, exploring the place led by local tour guide, and observing local lifestyle.

**Type 4: Health and wellness tourism**

- It was an interesting finding that 100% of the informants would like to buying chemical free agricultural products.
- There were more informants who would like to buy local herbal medicine (63%) than to buy well-known brand name herbal medicine (44.44%)
- As many as 74% and 70% of the informants would like to buy dried and fresh plants to be used as herbal product/medicine.

**Type 5: Culinary tourism**

- Culinary tourism activities were well accepted by the informants.
- 100% of the informants would like to eat local style food.

**Type 6: Agro-heritage tourism**

- Agro-heritage tourism activities were well accepted by the informants. More than 74% of the informants were willing to learn about custom/ceremony related to agriculture, history/story of Thai/local plants, and history about of places related to agro-tourism sites such as the Royal Project.

**Part 3: Japanese tourists' feedbacks on thematic actual agro-tourism sites/events**

- When suggesting 5 different thematic actual agro-tourism sites/events wherein each choice contained different conditions including distance from Chiang Mai, condition of the road, prices of accommodation and food, service providers, things to see and activities to do at the destination, and types of the destination, the results showed a significant finding. The informants' interests were not the main factors affecting their decision to travel to agro-tourism destinations; instead, the main factors were the informants' free time and their habit of avoiding the crowded places.
- Many of the informants said that they would like to take their guests to visit those proposed agro-tourism sites/events since they thought that it was a special occasion to have guests visiting and they would take their time and effort to bring their guests out. For some places/events, the informants did not want to go on their own but would be willing to bring their guests there.

**Part 4: Informants' practices and suggestions on agro-tourism in Chiang Mai**

- "Chao" is a well-known free magazine written in Japanese widely distributed in Chiang Mai, especially among the Japanese.
- Japanese in Chiang Mai preferred to travel to agro-tourism destinations when there are festivals, low season, and during their children's school break. They tended to plan ahead of time and manage their travel expenses carefully.
- The highest concern of the Japanese in Chiang Mai on their decisions to travel or not travel was cost.
- Many of the informants set their agro-tourism traveling budget from less than 500 to about 2,000 Baht per day per head. This finding supported the results that the Japanese in Chiang Mai prefer 1-day roundtrip (not stay overnight at destination) or if they stay, they usually chose to stay for 1-night.
- Almost 90% of the informants had traveled to agro-tourism destination in Chiang Mai before. Furthermore, they liked it and would like to re-visit the same places as well as explore the new places as their time and budget allowed.
- Only about half of the informants had stayed overnight at destinations when traveling. The main reason was their concern about the hygiene of the accommodations at destinations.
- The Japanese in Chiang Mai preferred to travel with their family.

## SUGGESTIONS

### 1. Aim at Japanese in Chiang Mai as a proper target group for agro-tourism in Chiang Mai

Japanese in Chiang Mai would be a proper target group for agro-tourism in Chiang Mai since they are currently living in Chiang Mai and tended to stay in a long-term. They have interests in agro-tourism and agro and eco-tourism are the raising trend among the Japanese. A significant of those who live in Chiang Mai had visited agro-tourism destinations before and they would like to re-visit the same sites as well as willing to explore new destinations. The number of Japanese moving into Chiang Mai is increasing and the positive attitudes of current Japanese residents in Chiang Mai towards agro-tourism would help increase the number of this target group in a long term. In addition, from the finding that many of the Japanese staying in Chiang Mai had children, therefore, Japanese families should be considered as the main target group of agro-tourism in Chiang Mai. Additionally, their guests from outside Chiang Mai such as their family members from Japan would also be a good target group as well.

### 2. Design products and services to be offered to the Japanese in Chiang Mai to serve their interests

From the research results and findings, the researcher would like to suggest ways to design products and services to be offered to the Japanese in Chiang Mai to serve their interests based on the 6 types of agro-tourism as follows.

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