FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SELECTION OF SERVICED

APARTMENTS BY FEMALE BUSINESS TRAVELERS

MASTER'S PROJECT

BY

PHATCHARIN PHADUNGYAT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in Business English for International Communication

at Srinakharinwirot University

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AN ABSTRACT

OF

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The growing number of female business travelers leads the serviced apartment market to fierce competitiveness. The purpose of this study was to identify the most important factors influencing the selection of serviced apartments by female business travelers. Data were derived from the questionnaires from 47 female business travelers staying in the Ascott Group for at least one month.

The results revealed that beyond price, 'location' was the most important factor affecting female business travelers' choice of serviced apartments, followed by 'service', 'facilities', and 'brand'. The least important factor was the 'travel agent's website'. In addition, the findings showed that female business travelers tended to place an emphasis on 'safety and security facilities', which are 'electrical keycard, bright hallway, sprinkler system and closed circuit television' as important factors while choosing serviced apartments.

Furthermore, the different demographic characteristics (age levels, educational levels, and income levels) of female business travelers have an impact on their decisions in selecting serviced apartments. The female business travelers aged between 26 to 35 were more influenced by 'recommendation from company' than those aged 56 or above. Besides, the female business travelers aged between 26 to 56 placed a higher importance on 'past experience' than those aged 25 or below. In terms of educational levels, the female business travelers with lower educational levels rated 'apartment's website' as more important than those with higher educational levels. In addition, female business travelers with higher income were more influenced by 'service apartment's brand (international)' and 'airline mile point program' factors than those with lower income.

ปัจจัยสำคัญในการตัดสินใจเข้าพัก ห้องชุดพักอาศัยให้เช่า เซอร์วิส อพาร์ทเม้นท์
ของนักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิง

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จำนวนนักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิงที่เพิ่มขึ้นส่งผลให้เกิดการแข่งขันกันทางธุรกิจของ
ห้องชุดพักอาศัยให้เช่า เซอร์วิส อพาร์ทเม้นท์ อย่างมาก สารนิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมายเพื่อศึกษา
ปัจจัยสำคัญที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจเข้าพักห้องชุดพักอาศัยให้เช่า เซอร์วิส อพาร์ทเม้นท์ ของ
นักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิง ในการศึกษานี้ผู้วิจัยได้ใช้แบบสอบถามเพื่อเก็บข้อมูลจาก
นักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิงจำนวน 47 คนที่เข้ามาพักที่เซอร์วิส อพาร์ทเม้นท์ในเครือของ
ดิ แอสคอท กรุ๊ป

ผลการศึกษาพบว่านอกจากปัจจัยเรื่อง "ราคา" ปัจจัยเรื่อง "สถานที่ตั้ง" สำคัญที่สุดในการ
ตัดสินใจเข้าพักของนักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิง ตามมาด้วยปัจจัยเรื่อง "การบริการ" "สิ่งอำนวย
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ตัวแทนการท่องเที่ยว" นอกจากนี้ผลการวิจัยพบว่า นักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิงมีแนวโน้มที่จะ
ให้ความสำคัญในเรื่อง "อุปกรณ์รักษาความปลอดภัย" ซึ่งได้แก่ "บัตรเข้าห้องพักอิเล็กทรอนิกส์"
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ปัจจัยสำคัญที่มีอิทธิพลต่อการตัดสินใจเข้าพักห้องชุดพักอาศัยให้เช่า เซอร์วิส อพาร์ทเม้นท์ ของ
นักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิง นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่ากลุ่มประชากรที่มีช่วงอายุ การศึกษาและรายได้
ต่างกันจะให้ความสำคัญต่อปัจจัยในการตัดสินใจเข้าพักห้องชุดพักอาศัยให้เช่า เซอร์วิส อพาร์ทเม้นท์
ต่างกัน นักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิงอายุ 26 ถึง 35 ปี ให้ความสำคัญต่อปัจจัยเรื่อง "คำแนะนำ
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เพศหญิงอายุ 26 ถึง 56 ให้ความสำคัญต่อปัจจัยเรื่อง "ประสบการณ์" มากกว่านักท่องเที่ยวทาง

ธุรกิจเพศหญิงอายุ 25 หรือน้อยกว่า นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่านักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิงที่มีการศึกษาน้อยให้ความสำคัญต่อปัจจัยเรื่อง "เว็บไซต์ของห้องชุดพักอาศัยให้เช่า เซอร์วิส อพาร์ทเม้นท์" มากกว่านักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิงที่มีการศึกษาสูง ส่วนนักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิงที่มีรายได้มากมีแนวโน้มที่จะให้ความสำคัญในเรื่อง "ตราสินค้า"   และ "โปรแกรมสะสมชั่วโมงบิน" มากกว่านักท่องเที่ยวทางธุรกิจเพศหญิงที่มีรายได้น้อย

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the Study

Along with a rapid increasing in number of female business travelers over the last decades, hoteliers are gradually aware of the value of this growing market and develop marketing strategies to meet their needs. Meanwhile, serviced apartments have been targeted at business travelers (The Ascott Group Annual Report, 2005) and the value of female business travelers market has been recognized as a result of higher demand for accommodation. In Thailand, approximately 2,000 units of 15 new serviced apartments were opened in 2005 (Pirapat, 2006). As a consequence, the industry of serviced apartments has been increasingly competitive.

Together with the highly competitive market of serviced apartments, there is a new trend that is changing the profile of its customers. The world of business travel is no longer dominated by male business travelers, female business travelers are now playing a major role in today's business travel industry. In 1988, females represented almost fifty percent of total business travelers in the United States (Nobles & Thompson, 2001). In Asia, MasterCard Asian's Lifestyle Survey report showed that the ratio of male to female travelers in Asia/Pacific has been dramatically shifting from 90:10 in 1976, to around 60:40 in 2005. Furthermore, the figure is expected to increase with female travelers matching male travelers by 2011 and exceeding them in the long term (Pacific Asia Travel Association, 2005). In Thailand,

the number of female travelers has also significantly increased from 2,620,045 in 1995 to 4,948,162 in 2004 (Thailand Tourism Review, 2005). These figures suggest that the number of female business travelers might also increase globally. The number of female business travelers is not only increasing, but they tend to spend a larger amount of money while traveling. According to Pacific Asia Travel Association (2005), it is estimated that US$13.4 billion is spent by females in four leading Asia Pacific destinations – Seoul, Hong Kong, Singapore and Bangkok. That means that the value of female business travelers should not be underestimated, as their expenses while traveling can be regarded as a significant source of income for the countries.

Serviced apartments of the Ascott Group were chosen for this study because the Ascott Group is regarded as one of the largest international serviced apartment operators in Thailand and it was also the previous work place of the researcher. The Ascott's achievements have been recognized internationally and have gained numerous prestigious awards including the 'Best Serviced Residence Brand' awarded by Lifestyle + Travel magazine in Thailand (The Ascott Group Annual Report, 2005). For the Ascott Group, in order to gain advantage over its competitors and to maintain the leading position in this serviced apartment market, the factors influencing purchasing decisions of the customers should be focused. The study of factors influencing customers is very important so that an organization can understand the preference of the customers and develop an effective marketing plan to satisfy their needs. This study aims to explore the factors influencing the selection of serviced apartments by female business travelers.

Chan and Wong (2005) studied key factors influencing frequent independent travelers in their final selection of accommodation. The findings revealed that business travelers tended to place more emphasis on their 'previous experience', 'good service', 'convenience' and 'recommendation from company; whereas leisure travelers and those with a lower level of education valued 'recommendation from travel agent' more.

McCleary, Weaver and Lan (1994) studied gender-based differences in accommodation selection and service use preference. Their findings indicated that female business travelers considered 'safety and security facilities', 'personal services', and 'low price' to be more important hotel-selection criteria than male business travelers did. Therefore, it is interesting to study the important factors attracting female business travelers in an area of serviced apartment selection.

In addition, demographic characteristics (age levels, educational levels, and income levels) might have an impact on accommodation selection. For example, the survey of Chan and Wong (2005) found that the travelers aged between 26 to 55 indicated 'recommendation from company' as more important factor than the travelers aged 56 or above. The study of Andereck and Caldwell (1993) showed that travelers with lower educational levels rated 'media' to be more important than those with higher educational levels. McCleary, Weaver and Lan (1994) stated that female business travelers considered 'safety and security facilities', 'room service', and 'low price' to be more important, while male business travelers were more concerned with the 'availability of a fax machine' and 'suite rooms' with separate bed and office spaces.

To my knowledge, none of the research has explored the preference of female business travelers on serviced apartments which target long-term residents. This study will identify the important factors influencing female business travelers while making purchase decisions on serviced apartments. With the results of the study, the serviced apartment organization might be able to develop an effective product and marketing strategy targeted at these potential customers.

1.2   Objectives of the Study

This study covers two objectives:

1. To identify important factors of serviced apartment selection for female business travelers.

2. To explore if demographic characteristics (age levels, educational levels, and income levels) influence serviced apartment selection of female business travelers.

1.3   Research Questions

This study is aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the top three most important factors influencing the selection of serviced apartments by female business travelers?

2. In order to explore if demographic characteristics have an impact on female business traveler's decisions in selecting serviced apartments, the questions are as follows:

2.1 Do different age levels have an impact on female business travelers' decisions in selecting serviced apartments?

2.2 Do different educational levels have an impact on female business travelers' decisions in selecting serviced apartments?

2.3 Do different income levels have an impact on female business travelers' decisions in selecting serviced apartments?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is significant from the perspective of advertisers and marketers to gain more knowledge about the market's major player in serviced apartment industry. The marketers of the Ascott Group can tailor appropriate marketing strategies concerning the needs of female business travelers to serve their current customers and to attract new ones in a more effective way. Furthermore, the results of the study will provide advertisers, marketers as well as business people with practical information, so that they can better understand their female business travelers' preferences while making purchase decision on serviced apartments. They can also help an organization to improve sales and profits as it is more likely that the female customers patronize the organization's facilities if the organization knows what satisfies them. In addition, other interconnected businesses of an organization such as travel, spa, massage, food and shopping, can also benefit from female business travelers' patronage.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focused on forty-seven qualified female business travelers staying in the Ascott Group apartments for at least one month. The researcher used the term 'female

business travelers' which defined as a female customer in serviced apartments whose main purpose for traveling is to attend an activity associated with business (The Northern Ireland Tourist Board, 2007). The survey was carried out during February 4, 2008 – February 25, 2008 at serviced apartments of the Ascott Group (The Ascott Sathorn, Somerset Park Suan Plu, Somerset Suwan Park View, and Somerset Lake Point). In this study, 'price' was not included because the room rate of each of the Ascott serviced apartment is set based on brands (e.g. The Ascott & Somerset) with different pricing strategies to serve the distinct needs and lifestyles of the residents (The Ascott Group Annual Report, 2005). Except 'price', the researcher intended to study other important factors, which were considered and rated by the female business travelers. The questionnaire consisted of ten important factors related to serviced apartment selection.

1.6   Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided in order to clarify particular terms that are used in this study.

Serviced Apartment is an accommodation providing facilities and services like a hotel. It provides spacious rooms with kitchen and washing facilities for personal use. Serviced apartment provides rental rooms for customers generally staying at least for one month.

Long-term Resident is a person who stays in one of serviced apartments of the Ascott Group (The Ascott Sathorn, Somerset Suwan Park View, Somerset Lake Point, and Somerset Park Suanplu) for at least one month.

Female Business Traveler is defined as a female traveler whose main purpose for traveling is to attend an activity or event associated with business (The Northern Ireland Tourist Board, 2007).

Demographic Segmentation divides customers into different groups based on demographic variables of age levels, educational levels, and income levels.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, four main areas, which are the growth of the serviced apartments, the marketing mix in the hotel industry, the impact of demographic characteristics on hotel selection and previous studies are reviewed.

2.1   The Growth of the Serviced Apartments

The demand for quality serviced apartments in Thailand has been growing steadily nowadays. Approximately 10,000 units of serviced apartments are expected to open at the end of 2007 and to exceed 12,000 units in 2008 (Pirapat, 2006). One of the main reasons for the growth of serviced apartments is due to the increasing cross border business investments and trade in Thailand (Market Overview, 2007). This increasing number of serviced apartments suggests fierce competition in the market.

A number of serviced apartments are coming up across Thailand and are being established by organized players in the hospitality industry as well as by local builders and entrepreneurs. By 2011, it is expected that there will be an investment of THB 27 billion and about 38 new serviced apartment projects are expected to open (Property Report, 2007). As a result, the business owners and investors need to position themselves well to succeed in this era of the increased supply of serviced apartments.

The key reason why serviced apartments are gaining popularity, especially among business travelers, is that they offer more cost effective and more spacious accommodation equipped with kitchen facilities and services offered like a hotel (The Association of Serviced Apartment Provider, 2007). As the core business is to serve business travelers, serviced apartments are becoming increasingly popular amongst executives who have to stay for a period of a month or longer for working.

Serviced apartments are more cost effective because prices are typically lower than equivalent hotels rooms, especially when the stay is prolonged. The cost benefit offered by serviced apartments is one of the key reasons for their success. In terms of facilities, serviced apartments are furnished properties offering more space with living rooms, fully-equipped kitchen facilities, and washing machines in the rooms. In addition, many of serviced apartments offer the services that may be expected to be found commonly in up market hotels. The services normally include daily maid services, limousine services, wake-up call services, postal services, and 24-hour security services (The Ascott Annual Report, 2005). These elements are believed to make the serviced apartments more popular than hotels for business travelers.

2.2　The Marketing Mix in the Hotel Industry

The marketing mix is the combination of marketing activities that an organization engages in so as to best meet the needs of its targeted market (Hsu & Power, 2002). Traditionally, the marketing mix consisted of four main elements: product, price, place, and promotion. All the marketing mix elements are significant in their roles for predicting the marketing strategies of the hotel industry.

In this study, the researcher focuses on ten important factors that possibly influence female business traveler's decision on serviced apartment selection based on hotel marketing mix as illustrates below:

Table1: The Hotel Marketing Mix

Product	Goods and Services
	Hotel system and individual property characteristics
Price	Pricing Policy
	Varies with demand and customer
Place	Location of Property
Promotion	Marketing Communication
	Advertising, Sales promotion, Public relations

(Source: Hsu & Powers, 2002)

2.2.1 Product

Hotel products in service industry refer to products and services that a hotel can offer to customers (Seri, 1999). Products in hotel can be either physical, tangible goods or a service that might satisfy a want or a need of a hotel customer (Armstrong & Kotler, 2003). It also consists of the customer's experience which is believed to be one of the major influences on customer purchase behavior (McCleary, Weaver & Lan, 1994). In addition, branding is regarded as a product because the brand represents the image of an organization in the mind of a customer (Hsu & Power, 2002). In this research, hotel products covered tangible elements of 'facilities', and intangible elements of 'service', 'past experience', and 'branding'.

2.2.1.1 A Variety of Facilities

A hotel usually offers various facilities to serve the needs of business travelers and the vacationers. Verma (2002) stated that 59% of travelers considered 'fitness facilities' as an important factor in their choice of hotel. However, for female business travelers, hotel room amenities such as 'hair dryer', 'makeup mirrors', and 'skirt hangers' were significant for them (Hsu & Powers, 2002). In addition, it was found that 'safety and security facilities' was among other factors ranking highest in the importance for the female business travelers while selecting hotel choice because females tended to be concerned about security issues more than males (McCleary, Weaver & Lan, 1994). Lastly, 'high speed Internet access' was another facility that hoteliers usually provide in the rooms for their customers because seventy percent of business travelers preferred to stay in hotel locations with internet connectivity available (Adams, 2001).

Hotel business industry, a variety of facilities are essential and should not be underestimated because it might be a major influence on customers' purchasing decision while selecting accommodations, especially the facility that suits the needs of business travelers.

2.2.1.2 Service Quality

The delivery of hospitality service always involves the interactions of people, in particular the interactions between customers and front line staff. Since service quality has become a great differentiator among service providers, business survival and success of service providers are dependent on the delivery of superior service quality (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1991). In hospitality services, 'staff service' was believed to be one of the most important factors in determining travelers' overall satisfaction levels and their tendency of returning to the same hotels or accommodations (Choi & Chu, 2001).

2.2.1.3 Experience

McCleary, Weaver and Lan (1994) stated that 'past experience' was also a major influence on consumer purchase behavior. If consumers are turned off the first time they walk up to the front desk in hotels, they are unlikely to return. Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithamal (1991) pointed out that 'past experiences' was important in determining the choice of hotels. This is to say that customers encountering good experiences were likely to return to use the same service again because of the impression they received before (Choi & Chu, 2001). Another related study by Hanai, Oguchi, Ando and Yamaguchi (2007) focusing on the relationship between past experience and customer's satisfaction stating that travelers who were satisfied with the hotel products and services were more likely to revisit the same hotel again, while those who were unsatisfied would never come back again.

2.2.1.4 Brand

Brand is defined as the institutionalized preferences of a consumer for a product or service based solely on a brand name or logo (Statt, 1997). 78% of business and leisure travelers in all demographic groups professed that they usually did not have time to investigate the quality of different hotels (Heskey, Sasser & Hart, 1990). They usually stayed at the same hotel brands they did last time and 56% stated that it was risky to stay at hotel brands that they were not familiar with. Another study by Chikushi (2008) indicated that 85% of business travelers and 76% of leisure travelers preferred branded hotels and accommodations over independent properties. Furthermore, the brand loyalty was important to both business and leisure travelers in their revisit intention that they tended to consume the products or services of that brand repeatedly (David & Vollmann, 1990).

2.2.2 Place

Location is a very important aspect in the hotel marketing mix (Armstrong & Kotler, 2003). Ideal hotel locations have long been at the center of travel networks and near destinations. The fastest-growing location type for hotels is downtown, serving the growing number of business-oriented destinations such as office parks and company headquarters (Hsu & Powers, 2002).

For a business, being in a place where the customers are, is critical to the business's success especially the hotel industry (Reid, Bojanic & David, 2006). Williams (2002) stated that location was among the most important factors desired by both business and leisure travelers. Lewis and Chambers (1989) also supported that location was the most important factor influencing hotel selection by all business travelers. This could be possibly because the vast majority of business travelers chose the hotel location in relation to their purpose of visits. Therefore, serviced apartments normally located in the prime locations which had easy access to business areas, shopping centers and embassies in order to serve the needs of business travelers. In general, location of the service providers and their accessibility are very important selling point in hospitality industry (Armstrong & Kotler, 2003).

2.2.3 Price

Price is one of important marketing tools to attract customers to purchase their products (Armstrong & Kotler, 2003). Marketers normally adopt different pricing strategies to achieve their desired sales objectives (Hsu & Powers, 2002). In the fierce competitive market, price reduction strategy is also commonly employed by marketers as a result of keen competition. However, Reid, Bojanic and David (2006) argued that reducing price strategy to attract

customers may not be effective. On the other hand, hoteliers may need to focus on other areas they can improve in order to attract and retain their customers in the long run.

In this study, 'price' was not included because the room rate of each of the Ascott serviced apartment was set based on brands (e.g. The Ascott & Somerset) with different pricing strategies to serve the distinct needs and lifestyles of the serviced apartment residents (The Ascott Group Annual Report, 2005). The researcher intended to study other important factors, which were considered by the female business travelers while making purchase decision on serviced apartment selection.

2.2.4   Promotion

Promotion keeps the product in the minds of the customer and helps stimulating demand for the product. Promotion involves ongoing advertising and publicity. The ongoing activities of advertising, sales and public relations are often considered aspects of promotions (Armstrong & Kotler, 2003).   In this study, promotion covered elements of 'advertising', 'incentives', and 'recommendations'.

2.2.4.1 Advertising

Reid and Bojanic (2006) stated that advertising is a way for companies to convey their messages to customers so that they could make informed purchase decisions as it is a practice used to inform consumers about products and services. Chan and Wong (2005) stated that Asian travelers placed a higher value on the factor of 'hotel advertising on TV and travel magazines' than their Western counterparts. In addition, websites are becoming an important information source for both business travelers and leisure travelers in hotel industry (Adams, 2001).

2.2.4.2 Incentives

Incentives cover a special program or promotion of marketing campaign that a hotel offers to hotel guests such as the 'frequent traveler program' in order to encourage their return visits.

Chan and Wong (2005) mentioned that repeat travelers are more concerned about the hotel's incentive programs, such as its frequent traveler program. Examples include 'the Gold Passport Holder offered by Hyatt', 'the Starwood Preferred Guest by Sheraton & Westin', 'the Marriott Honored Guest Awards by Marriott'. These programs normally encourage return visits and thereby improve retention rates by offering incentives for hotel guests to purchase more frequently and in large volumes. However, Verma (2002) stated that business travelers placed more importance on 'price', 'location', and 'amenities' than 'loyalty program options'.

2.2.4.3 Recommendations

Consumers are influenced by other people with whom they interact, and the effect of that influence can be extremely important (Williams, 2002). When considering hospitality consumption, recommendations from others become significant. This is maybe because in general we consume hospitality as part of a social group. Especially in accommodation industry, company's recommendations play a vital role because business travelers are always traveling and staying in accommodations due to company assignments. However, recommendations from friends are also important as Assael (1995) suggested that reference groups influence customer behavior in several ways by influencing aspiration levels and playing a part in producing satisfaction or frustration.

Marketing mix: product, place, price, and promotion is a term often used in marketing that stresses the mixing of a variety of factors in marketing strategies, in ways that both targeted consumers and organizational objectives are reached (Reid, Bojanic & David, 2006). Therefore, it is important to understand the most important aspects of good marketing strategy to be sure those products or services meet targeted customer group's needs and desires.

In this study, the important factors in the hotel marketing mix theories mentioned above are employed as factors in designing the questionnaire to investigate the top three most important factors for the female business travelers while making purchase decisions on serviced apartments. The ten important factors classified into two main groups; hotel products and stimulus are presented as below:

Hotel products	*Stimulus*
1. Serviced apartment service 2. Serviced apartment location 3. Serviced apartment brand 4. Past experience (i.e. had stayed in this apartment before) 5. Varieties of basic facilities (fitness center, Internet access, etc.) 6. Varieties of safety and security facilities (dead-bolt lock, chain lock, etc.) 7. Varieties of personal amenities (hair dryer, shampoo, etc.)	1. Incentives (i.e. frequent traveler program, and airline mile points program) 2. Recommendations (i.e. from company, from friends, and from travel company) 3. Advertising channels (i.e. advertising on magazine, website, etc.)

2.3　The Impact of Demographic Characteristics on Hotel Selection

An understanding of consumer behavior depends on recognizing the importance of the characteristics of the buyer (Williams, 2002). One of the methods to describe the characteristics of buyers is demographic segmentation. Demographic segmentation deals with many ways of statistically categorizing all the people in a national population. For example, a nation's population can be divided into subgroups by age, sex, income, education, occupation, social class, family size, race and religion (Statt, 1997).

In this study, the researcher will classify three major demographic characteristics which are age level, educational level, and income level as illustrated below.

Table 2: Major Demographic Characteristics Variables

Demographic Characteristics	Examples of Subgroups
Age Levels	Adolescents, young adults, middle-aged, elderly
Educational Levels	Less than bachelor, bachelor, master, PhD.
Income levels	Destitute, poor, middle income, affluent

(Source: Armstrong & Kotler, 2003)

2.3.1　Age Levels

People change the goods and services they buy over their lifetimes. Tastes in food, clothes, furniture, and even hotels are often related to age (Armstrong & Kotler, 2003). Some companies offer different products or marketing strategies to penetrate various ages and life-cycle segments.

Peter and Olson (1996) identified and analyzed the age subculture into three subcategories: baby, teen and the mature market that are likely to have different needs. 'Baby Boomer' generation of people born between 1946 and 1964 is large in several industrialized nations, Japan, the U.K., Canada, and others. This market represents tremendous buying potential for tourism (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2006). Therefore it can be expected that most female business travelers are likely fit in this age level and they may have similar attitudes towards important factors on serviced apartment selection.

In service industry business, the age levels of travelers may directly determine their patterns of travel. The survey of Chan and Wong (2005) found that different age groups have significant impacts on accommodation selection factors. The results revealed that 'recommendation from company' was chosen more frequently by the travelers aged 26 to 55 than the travelers aged 56 or above. The factor of 'recommendation from company' considered as an important factor for 26 to 55 aged travelers mostly maybe because travelers in this age range were mainly employees for international companies and being assigned to stay in hotels accordance with companies' reference.

2.3.2 Educational Levels

Consumers' attitudes and behaviors are varied by different educational backgrounds (Assael, 1995). With regard to the service industry, Andereck and Caldwell (1993) mentioned that travelers with lower educational levels placed an importance on 'media' than those with higher educational levels. People with higher educational levels might have been in higher positions in careers and they might not have time to search service information on media channels, but from some other sources else.

It can be stated that education levels may affect the way consumers making purchase decisions.

2.3.3 Income Levels

Income has long been used by marketers to create products and services. Kotler, Bowen, and Makens (2006) stated that the hotel industry is particularly effective in using income segmentation. Levels of income may be considered as a subculture, because people with different levels of income might have different values, behaviors, and lifestyles. In addition, it is found that education has a very strong relationship with levels of income as it was stated that nearly half of the populations having higher income have completed four years of college, but only 10 percent of populations with lower income have done so (Peter & Olson, 1996).

In travel industry, the study revealed that people with higher income and education levels tended to search for more products or services information (Runyon & Stewart, 1987). Furthermore, Chan and Wong (2005) who studied factors affecting hotel selection for travelers traveling to Hong Kong found that travelers with higher income were more influenced by 'hotel brand' and 'incentive' than those with lower income.

This assumes that individual income levels may influence consumer behavior in purchase decision-making.

People from each group of different demographics such as age levels, educational levels, and income levels may have different needs and expectations on important factors while making purchase decisions on accommodations. In particular, the investigation of

important factors influencing the selection of serviced apartments by female business travelers is interesting because the number of female business travelers has increased constantly making the new segmentation in the market.

2.4   Previous Studies

This study focuses on important factors for female business travelers that motivate them to stay in serviced apartments. The researcher uses ten important factors applied from elements in the hotel marketing mix and classifies them into two main groups: hotel products and stimulus. Hotel products are covered from 'service', 'location', 'brand', 'past experience', and 'facilities'. On the other hand, stimulus offered to encourage travelers to stay in serviced apartments is included from 'incentives', 'recommendations', and 'advertising'. However, 'bar and lounge facility' and 'banquet service' are excluded in this study because there is no service availability in serviced apartments in the Ascott group.

A number of previous research projects were focused on hotel selection as follows.

Chan and Wong (2005) studied factors affecting hotel selection, except 'price'. 573 Frequent Individual Travelers (FITs) traveling to Hong Kong independently were examined. The results showed that 'convenient hotel location' was the most influential factor, followed by 'good service'; while 'hotel advertising on travel magazine' was the least influential factor. Business travelers tended to place attention on their 'previous hotel experience', 'good service', 'convenience', and 'recommendation from company'; while leisure travelers and those with a lower level of education valued 'recommendation from travel agent'. However, the researchers did not particularly focus on each factor of facilities which the respondents placed a high importance on hotel selection.

Hall (2002) reported a national survey by Atlanta-based architectural firm Joe Portman & Associates that 2,990 of 13,000 female executives valued 'location closed to their clients' as the most important factor in hotel choice, followed by 'safety and security facilities'. With reference to the survey findings, a majority of female travelers preferred to stay in chain hotels. Furthermore, 4,290 female business travelers or 33 percent reported using the Internet while traveling and in-room laptop was the most desired added facility. This is to say that female business travelers today are not only more conscious about air tickets, but also when it comes to choosing hotels.

Verma (2002) studied the topic of choice drivers for both business and leisure travelers. Twelve influential factors ranging from 'location', 'room rate', 'experience', brand', 'recommendations', 'special promotions', 'loyalty programs', 'facilities' and 'ability to make reservation via Internet' were examined. The result showed that only 2.6% of travelers chose hotels based on 'loyalty programs' (such as free rooms) and only 3.3% made hotel purchase decision based on 'special promotions'. The top reasons for picking hotels for business travelers were 'location' (28%), 'room rate' (15%), and 'previous experiences' (11.6%). From the research findings, it was also revealed that business travelers placed a higher importance on 'price', 'location', and 'facilities' than 'loyalty program' when choosing hotels.

McCleary, Weaver and Lan (1994) explored gender-based differences in business traveler's lodging preference. 250 business travelers were studied to answer the question whether there are significant differences between male business travelers and female business travelers in hotel-selection and use of services. Fifty-three influential factors relating to hotel selection included 'general criteria', 'the importance of safety and security facilities',

and 'the availability of facilities' were examined. The results of the study found that both male and female business travelers considered 'basic services', such as clean, comfortable rooms and free local phone service, to be important. Female business travelers considered 'safety and security facilities', 'room service', 'amenities' (such as hair dryers), and 'low price' to be more important selection criteria than male business travelers did.

Previous studies showed that travelers considered 'location', 'service', 'precious experience', 'safety and security facilities' and 'amenities' as the top five most important factors of hotel selection. In addition, 'advertising on TV', and 'advertising on travel magazine' seemed to be the least important factors that travelers considered while making hotel choice. The results also revealed that business travelers valued 'recommendation from company' more than 'recommendation from travel agent'. Although male and female business travelers considered basic services (clean and comfortable rooms, and free local phone service) important, female business travelers considered 'safety and security facilities', 'room service' and 'amenities' to be more important selection criteria than male business travelers did.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology of the current research which contains four sections: subjects, research instruments, procedures, and data analysis.

3.1   Subjects

The subjects of this study consisted of forty-seven female business travelers who were staying in serviced apartments of the Ascott Group in Bangkok for at least one month. Serviced apartments of the Ascott Group were chosen for this study because the Ascott Group is regarded as one of the largest international serviced apartment operators in Thailand and it was also the previous work place of the researcher. The researcher selected the qualified respondents by asking assistance from the front office managers of each apartment to help identifying the desired target respondents i.e. female guests staying at least one month. These long-term residents were asked to respond to a questionnaire by rating the importance of each factor which affects their decision making on serviced apartments. The selected serviced apartments in the Ascott Group were: The Ascott Sathorn, Somerset Suwan Park View, Somerset Park Suan Plu, and Somerset Lake Point.

3.2   Research Instruments

The questionnaire instruments consisted of three parts (see Appendix D). The first part was designed to gather general information related to the profile of the female business travelers (age levels, educational levels, and income levels). The second part included 10

important factors related to serviced apartments selection of the Ascott Group. The researcher used the important factors from the previous research by Chan and Wong (2005) who studied the important attributes in hotel selection as a guideline. Then, the researcher selected and narrowed the important factors down into the ten important factors that specifically addressed the serviced apartment industry. The female business travelers were asked to rate (on a scale of 1-5, where 1= least important, and 5 = most important) the factors that would influence them in selecting serviced apartments to stay. The third part of questionnaire was generated to ask female residents of their trip profile ranging from length of stay and frequency of visit.

In the questionnaire, the ten important factors were classified into two groups: (1) hotel products and (2) stimulus.

Hotel products

1. Serviced apartment service

2. Serviced apartment location

3. Serviced apartment brand

4. Past experience

5. Varieties of basic facilities

6. Varieties of safety and security facilities

7. Varieties of personal amenities

Stimulus

1. Incentives

2. Recommendations

3. Advertising channels

3.3   Procedures

Prior to actual carrying out the survey, the questionnaire was pilot-studied with ten long-termed female business travelers staying at Citadine apartment (one of serviced apartments in the Ascott Group) to examine questionnaire design and any misunderstanding over terms and questions. The pilot study was performed during January 7, 2008 – January 14, 2008. The results of pilot test showed that some wordings in the questions were unclear. For instance, the wording used in the ranking scale was changed to 'average' instead of 'somewhat important' in order to better reflect the meaning of the level of importance of factors. The pilot study participants also suggested that the researcher should insert lines underneath each different group of important factors in order to make the questionnaires look easier to read through. The results of the pilot study provided valuable information about the design, wording and measurement scales of the questionnaire. Then, the questionnaire was reviewed by the Ascott Group marketers for accuracy of wording and format. The results showed that the wording 'reception' was changed to 'guest service' in order to parallel with the terminology used for the Ascott group.

3.3.1 Data collection

Data collection was implemented on February 2008. The researcher asked for a permission from the Ascott head-quartered office at Somerset Lake Point for distributing the questionnaires to the qualified female business travelers staying in one of selected serviced apartments at least 1 month. After getting permission, the researcher directly contacted the front office managers of each apartment for assistance to identify the target respondents.

Then, the researcher distributed forty-seven sets of questionnaire to them and collected by February 29, 2008.

3.3.2 Data Analysis

The data gathered from the questionnaire was analyzed. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed to analyze the collected data. SPSS is a computer application providing a range of features that enable the users to manage, analyze, manipulate and display data. Descriptive statistics were used to rank the degree to which important factors influencing female business travelers while selecting serviced apartments. One-way ANOVA (One way Analysis of Variance) tests were performed to determine whether there were any significant differences in demographic groups and serviced apartment selection factors. Percentages and mean values were used to show the profile of the respondents, and important factors influencing the selection of serviced apartment by female business travelers. The results were presented in percentage numbers, figures and tables, then discussed with suggestions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings. Details of the data obtained from the completed questionnaires are divided into three parts: the major factors influencing female business travelers in selecting serviced apartments, the impact of demographic characteristics on important factors, and profile of the respondents. Tables and figures are drawn to display the findings with discussion.

The first part are presented the findings in accordance with the research question regarding the top three most important factors for female business travelers while selecting serviced apartments.

4.1 The major factors influencing female business travelers in selecting serviced apartments

With a rapidly increasing number of female business travelers, hotel operators have recognized the value of this potential market, and have directed considerable marketing effort to attracting female travelers. Understanding the preferences of these customers can help hotels/or serviced apartments design their services to better meet customer's needs. The factors influencing purchasing decisions of the customers should then be focused.

This section presents the mean values of the major factors affecting the female business travelers' serviced apartment selection. In the questionnaire, the researcher asked each of the female business travelers to state the three most important factors when selecting serviced apartments. The results are presented in Fugure1.
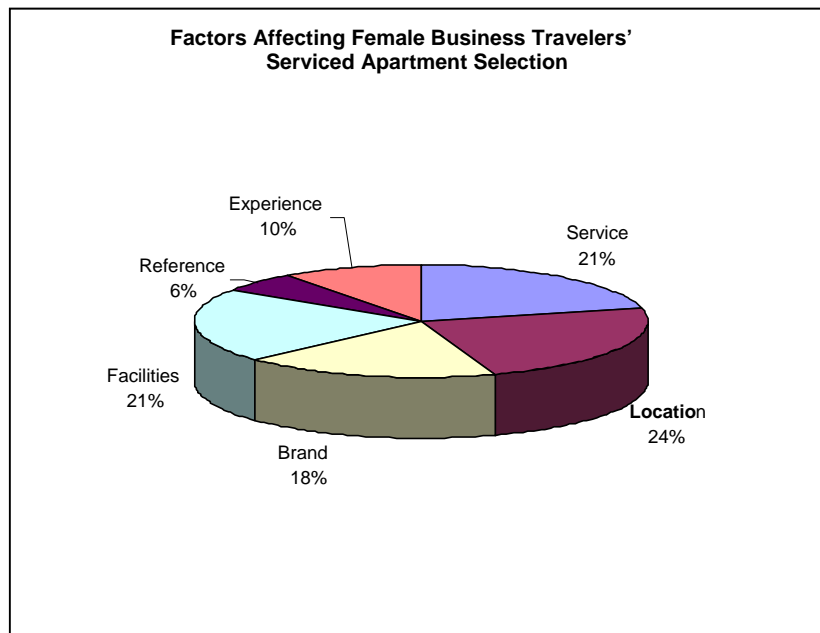
Figure 1: Factors Affecting Female Business Travelers' Serviced Apartment Selection

The findings revealed that the top three most important factors affecting female business travelers when considering serviced apartments were 'location' (23.40%), followed by 'service' (21.28%), 'facilities' (21.28%), and 'brand' (18.44%).

4.1.1 Location

The factor 'location' was found to have the utmost importance on influencing female business travelers in the Ascott group on serviced apartment selection. This part points out the mean values of the 'location' factor rated by female business travelers as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean values of the 'location' factor

Location	Mean
Close to working place	4.47
Easy access to sky train/subway	4.13
Close to shopping center, tourist attraction	3.60
Close to embassy	2.66

In Table 3, it was found that 'location' was the most important factor for female business travelers when deciding on serviced apartments. Upon further investigation, female business travelers prefer the serviced apartments close to the working places the most (4.47), while they placed the least importance on the serviced apartments being close to embassy (2.66). This may be because the vast majority of female business travelers desired a short commute to their corporate offices or meetings at their destinations. In addition, it indicated that female business travelers valued time savings and preferred lesser time being spent when traveling to their offices. One of the results of this study was associated with the study by Reid, Bojanic and David (2006) stating that both male and female business travelers most often prioritized factors involved with their trip destinations while making purchase decisions on hotels. In this study, female business travelers mainly had stayed in serviced apartments on working purposes, therefore, they possibly considered the serviced apartment's location in close proximity to their working destinations. The findings of the study were also consistent with the previous studies by Lewis and Chambers (1989) and the study by McCleary, Weaver and Hutchinson (1993), who explored hotel selection factors relating to business travel situations. They found that location was the most important factor influencing hotel selection by all business travelers.

4.1.2 Service

In this study, it was found that 'service' was recognized as the second most important factor in serviced apartment selection for female business travelers. This part shows the mean values of how female business travelers placed an importance on the 'service' factor as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Mean values of 'service' factor

Service	N	Mean
Staff service	47	4.21
Management team service	47	3.94

The results showed that the female business travelers considered the 'staff service' factor (4.21) to be more important than the 'management team service' factor (3.94). The findings indicated that the female business travelers were more likely to encounter the service provided by staff (i.e. guest service staff, and housekeeping staff) more often than management team, particularly on checking in, checking out and any enquiry requests during the stays. Accordingly, the female business travelers might place a high importance on staff interaction and evaluate the quality of serviced apartments' performance. The findings of this study supported the notion that both male and female business travelers considered the service encounter or staff interaction as one of major factors determining their overall satisfaction and affecting their decisions of returning to the same hotels (Choi & Chu, 2001).

4.1.3 Facilities

A variety of facilities provided was found to be the third most important factor affecting female business travelers in serviced apartment's selection. The results found that 'high speed Internet access' was consistently cited as the most important facility feature when considering serviced apartments. The mean values of the 'facilities' factor rated by female business travelers are demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5: Mean values of the 'facilities' factor

Facilities	Mean
high speed Internet access	4.62
electronic key card	4.45
bright hallway	4.43
sprinkler system	4.26
closed-circuit television	4.26
dead-bolt lock	3.91
well equipped fitness center	3.91
chain lock	3.83
hair dryer	3.72
shampoo, conditioner and soap	3.57
skirt hanger	3.43
swimming pool	3.40
spa & massage rooms	3.30
business center	3.23
car parking	3.06
bathrobe	3.02
meeting rooms	2.94

In Table 5, the findings showed that the most important factor of 'facilities' affecting female business travelers' decision while selecting serviced apartments was 'high speed Internet access' (4.62), followed by 'electronic key card' (4.45), 'bright hallway' (4.43), 'sprinkler system' (4.26) and 'closed-circuit television' (4.26). The results showed that 'high speed Internet access' was the most important facility probably because apart from using Internet access at their offices, female business travelers also tended to access the Internet at their accommodations. One of the findings of this study was agreed with the previous study by Adams (2001) stating that the internet has become a mandatory facility hoteliers must provide in rooms to satisfy hotel guests, especially business travelers. In this study, female business travelers might find Internet connection necessary for them to check, send e-mails, receive files to/from their offices, and login to their corporate network even though they were at home.

In addition, the 'safety and security' issues were also major concerns, especially for female business travelers relocating in foreign countries. The findings showed that 'electronic key card', 'bright hallway', 'sprinkler system', and 'closed-circuit television' were highly considered as the important safety and security facilities. In this study, the possible explanation might be because the safety and security facilities were essential features making female business travelers feel safer and secure during their long-term stays in a foreign country. The results were also associated with the previous study by McCleary, Weaver and Lan (1994) who explored gender-based differences in business traveler's lodging preferences. They found that typical female business travelers' prime concerns were safety and securities conscious.

4.1.4 Brand

'Brand' of serviced apartments was regarded highly importance as the third most important factor when selecting accommodation for female business travelers. Table 6 presents the mean values of the 'brand' factor.

Table 6: Mean values of the 'brand' factor

Brand	Mean
Service apartment's brand (international)	3.77
Service apartment's brand (local)	3.45

The results revealed that female business travelers relied on the 'serviced apartments' brand (international)' (3.77) more than 'service apartment's brand (local) (3.45). One possible explanation for this finding was that female business travelers might prefer to stay at serviced apartment's brand name they felt familiar with to reduce the risk associated with staying at unknown serviced apartments. It showed that female business travelers who were more likely having opportunities to stay in accommodations in different countries possibly felt more confident to stay at serviced apartment recognized globally than stay at serviced apartments recognized locally only. The findings of this study may relate to the importance of the brand loyalty that both business and leisure travelers who had a high brand loyalty tended to consume the products or services of that brand repeatedly (David & Vollmann, 1990). Accordingly, it indicated that good reputation of the serviced apartment's brand may affect the decision for accommodation selection and repeat patronage.

In summary, the findings revealed that 'location' was the most important factor affecting female business travelers' choice of serviced apartments, followed by 'service, 'facilities', and 'brand' respectively. The results suggested that the serviced apartments being located close to working places was the most influencing factor on female business traveler's accommodation selection. In terms of 'service', female business travelers considered 'staff service' to be more important than 'management team service'. The most important 'facility' affecting the decision of female business travelers to stay in serviced apartments was 'high speed Internet access'. In addition, 'safety and security facilities' , which are 'electrical keycard', 'bright hallway', 'sprinkler system', and 'closed circuit television' were recognized as the important factors for female business travelers. The results also revealed that 'brand' of the serviced apartments highly affected female business travelers on serviced apartment selection.

The second part are presented the findings in accordance with the research question regarding whether demographic characteristics may have an impact on the important factors for female business travelers while selecting serviced apartments.

4.2 The Impact of demographic characteristics on the important factors

Having identified the 10 serviced apartment selection factors, this study then applied one-way ANOVA (One way Analysis of Variance). The purpose of the one-way ANOVA was to test differences in mean values of more than two groups for statistical significance. In this study, the results of this statistic method were to examine the relationship between demographic characteristics (age levels, educational levels, and income levels) and the importance of the

factors. A significant P value resulting from one-way ANOVA test would indicate the probability of getting mean differences between the groups. The lower P value (p $\leq$ 0.05) would indicate the more significant the difference between the groups.

This section is presented the findings in accordance with the research question regarding whether different age levels may have an impact on the important factors for female business travelers while selecting serviced apartments.

4.2.1 Age Levels

The results revealed that significant mean differences were found between different age levels and the important factors of 'recommendation from company' (P< 0.02) and 'past experience' (P< 0.00). This part presents the mean values of how female business travelers with different age levels placed an importance on 'recommendation from company', and 'past experience' factors significantly difference as shown in Table 7 (See Appendix A).

Table 7: Comparison of mean values of factors determined by respondents' age levels

FACTORS	*AGE LEVELS*					
	< 25 (N=3)	26-35 (N=21)	36-45 (N=13)	46-55 (N=8)	56-65 (N=2)	ANOVA (Sig. P value)
Recommendations						
Recommendation from company	3.10	5.00	4.17	4.00	3.25	0.02
Past Experience						
Having stayed at this apartment before	3.33	3.71	4.23	4.25	5.00	0.00

<u>Note</u>: Mean values based on a five-point scale, where 1= least degree of importance and 5 = highest degree of importance

* A significant P Value $\leq$ 0.05

The finding showed that female business travelers aged 26 to 35 were more influenced by their company's recommendation than the female business travelers aged 56 or above. This indicated that the majority of the female business travelers in this study aged 26 to 35 possibly traveled and stayed in serviced apartments according to their company assignments. It may be because female business travelers might rely more on what their companies recommend in serviced apartment selection than other suggestions. As a result, 'recommendation from company' was one of the top most important sources for female business traveler's making decisions on serviced apartment selections.

The findings also showed that the female business travelers aged 26 to 56 were more influenced by 'past experience' than the group aged 25 or below. This may be because this aged group of female business travelers had stayed in serviced apartments before and tended to rely on their past experiences of staying. As a result, it indicated that 'past experience' related to female business traveler's satisfaction on serviced apartments. The related study by Hanai et al. (2007) who explored the importance of the relationship between past experience and customer's satisfaction also stating that both male and female travelers who satisfied with the hotel products and services were more likely to revisit the same hotel again, while those who unsatisfied would never come back again. The findings of this study clearly demonstrated the importance of 'past experience' as one of the most important factors for female business travelers determining serviced apartments choice.

The part is presented the findings in accordance with the research question regarding whether different educational levels may have an impact on the important factors for female business travelers while selecting serviced apartments.

4.2.2 Educational Levels

The results revealed that significant mean differences were found between different educational levels and the important factor of 'apartment's website' (P<0.04). This part presents the mean values of how female business travelers with different educational levels placed an importance on 'apartment's website' factor significantly difference as shown in Table 8 (See Appendix B).

Table 8: Comparison of mean values of factors determined by respondents' educational levels

FACTORS	*EDUCATIONAL LEVELS*				
	BA **(N= 24)**	**MA** **(N= 18)**	**Ph.D** **(N= 3)**	**Other** **(N= 2)**	**ANOVA** **(Sig. P value)**
Advertising Apartment's website	4.50	3.00	4.00	3.00	0.04

Note: Mean values based on a five-point scale, where 1= least degree of importance and 5 = highest degree of importance
* A significant P Value $\leq$ 0.05

The findings showed that the female business travelers with lower educational levels rated 'apartment's website' as more important than those with higher educational levels. This may be because the female business travelers with lower educational levels tended to rely more on products or services of serviced apartments over the Internet than those with higher educational levels. The female business travelers with lower educational levels probably counted on the impression of serviced apartment from online presence (content, design, and information) as the image of the organization. Therefore, it indicated

that the better presence of the serviced apartment's website attract the group of female business travelers with lower educational levels while making accommodation purchase decisions. One of the findings of this study was related to the previous study by Andereck and Caldwell (1993) stating that people with lower educational levels placed more importance on 'media' than those with higher educational levels.

The part is presented the findings in accordance with the research question regarding whether different income levels may have an impact on the important factors for female business travelers while selecting serviced apartments.

4.3.3 Income Levels

The results revealed that significant mean differences were found between different income levels and the important factors of 'serviced apartment's brand (international)' (P< 0.04) and 'airline mile points program' (P<0.01). This part presents the mean values of how female business travelers with different income levels placed an importance on 'serviced apartment's brand (international)' and 'airline mile points program' factors significantly difference as shown in Table 9 (See Appendix C).

Table 9: Comparison of mean values of factors determined by respondents' income levels

FACTORS	MONTHLY INCOME LEVELS					
	30001-50000 (N= 3)	50001-70000 (N= 12)	70001-90000 (N= 2)	90001-120000 (N= 10)	more than 120000 (N= 12)	ANOVA (Sig. Pvalue)
Brand						
Service apartment's brand (international)	3.00	3.83	3.85	4.00	4.48	0.04
Incentives						
Airline mile points program	3.67	3.50	3.00	3.00	4.00	0.01

Note: Mean values based on a five-point scale, where 1= least degree of importance and 5 = highest degree of importance

* A significant P Value $\leq$ 0.05

In Table 9, the female business travelers with the highest income range of more than 120,000 THB per month suggested that 'service apartment's brand (international)' was more important than those with the lower income range group. The findings indicated that the female business travelers with a higher income tended to rely more on the international brand recognition. This may be because this group of female business travelers relied on international branding of serviced apartments as a trustworthy property. In addition, the findings revealed that 'airline mile point program' had a higher influence on the female business travelers with a higher income than those with the lower income group. The findings were agreed with the previous study by Chan and Wong (2005) who studied factors affecting hotel selection for business and leisure travelers traveling to Hong Kong that the travelers with higher income were more influenced by 'hotel reputation' and 'incentive' than the travelers with lower income.

In summary, the results from this study revealed that three demographic characteristics (age levels, educational levels, and income levels) of female business travelers have an impact on their decisions in selecting serviced apartments. With regard to the age levels, the female business travelers aged 26 to 35 were more influenced on 'recommendation from company' than the female business travelers aged 56 or above. Besides, the female business travelers aged 26 to 56 placed a higher importance on 'past experience' than those aged 25 or below. With regard to the educational levels, the female business travelers with lower educational levels placed more importance on 'apartment's website' than those with higher educational levels. In terms of income levels, 'service apartment brand (international)' and 'airline mile point program' factors were more important to the female business travelers with higher income than those with lower income.

4.3   Profile of the respondents

Forty-seven copies of the questionnaires were distributed to female business travelers in four selected serviced apartments within the Ascott Group: The Ascott Sathorn, Somerset Suwan Park View, Somerset Park Suan Plu, and Somerset Lake Point in February 2008.

Table 10 presents the general information of the female business travelers (age levels, educational levels, and income levels).

Table 10: Profile of respondents (N= 47)

Demographic Information	Frequency	Percentage
Age Levels		
Less than 25	3	6.3
26 - 35	21	44.7
36 - 45	13	27.7
46 - 55	8	17.0
56 - 65	2	4.3
Educational Levels		
Bachelor	24	51.1
Master	18	38.3
PhD.	3	6.4
Other	2	4.3
Income Levels		
30,001 THB - 50,000 THB	3	7.7
50,001 THB - 70,000 THB	11	28.2
70,001 THB - 90,000 THB	2	5.1
90,001 THB - 120,000 THB	10	25.6
Over 120,000 THB	13	33.4

The findings showed that the majority of the female business travelers (44.7%) were aged between 26 and 35; 27.7% were aged between 36 and 45, and 17% were aged between 46 and 55. About half of the female business travelers (51.1%) obtained undergraduate degree, while 38.3% of them obtained postgraduate degree. In terms of income, the majority of female business travelers (33.4%) earned over 120,000 THB per month, and 28.2% of them earned about 50,001 THB – 70,000 THB per month.

The traveling characteristics and the frequency of visits of female business travelers are illustrated in Table 11.

Table 11: Trip profile (N= 47)

	Frequency	Percentage
Length of Stay		
1 month - 2 months	18	38.3%
3 months - 6 months	19	40.4%
7 months - 1 year	5	10.6%
more than 1 year	5	10.6%
Frequency of Visit		
First time	20	42.6%
Repeat visits	27	57.4%

The findings showed that the majority of the female business travelers (40.4%) have stayed in serviced apartments between 3 months and 6 months, while 38.3 % have stayed between 1 month and 2 months. With regard to the frequency of visits, 57.4% of the female business travelers have stayed in the serviced apartments that they are currently staying before.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1   Conclusion

Nowadays, the number of the female business travelers has risen since the eighteen century (Williams, 2002) and has played a major role in today's business market. Travel marketers and researchers have gradually recognized this increasing potential market segment. There is no exception with serviced apartment industry, which targeted at business travelers as the main customers. This study was undertaken to identify important factors for female business travelers in selecting serviced apartments, and to explore whether there were any significant differences between demographic characteristics and the important factors.

According to the profile of the female business travelers, the highest proportion was female business travelers aged 26 to 35, who obtained no lower than a Bachelor degree. In terms of income, over 60% of the female respondents earned more than 70,000 THB per month. Their average length of stay was between 3 and 6 months.

In terms of the important factors, the findings revealed that 'location' was the most important factor influencing the selection of serviced apartments by female business travelers. Besides, 'service' was ranked as the second most important factor, followed by 'facilities', and 'brand' respectively. The results suggested that the serviced apartments being located close to the female business traveler's workplace had the most influence on their serviced apartment selection. In terms of 'service' factor, the findings showed that female business

travelers considered 'staff service' to be more important than 'management team service'. Moreover, the most influential factor of 'facilities' that affected the purchase decision of the female business travelers on serviced apartment's choice was 'high speed Internet access'. In addition, 'safety and security facilities' was also one of the most important factors influencing female business travelers in selecting serviced apartments. These facilities were consisted of 'electrical keycard', 'bright hallway', 'sprinkler system', and 'closed circuit television'. Lastly, the results also showed that the female business travelers relied on the 'serviced apartment's brand (international)' the most.

The results of the study revealed the most important factors influencing the selection on serviced apartments by female business travelers. Besides, the findings showed that different demographic characteristics (age levels, educational levels, and income levels) of female business travelers have an impact on their decisions in selecting serviced apartments. With regard to the age levels, the female business travelers aged 26 to 35 were more influenced to 'recommendation from company' than those aged 56 or above. The female business travelers aged 26 to 56 placed a higher importance on 'past experience' than those aged 25 or below. In terms of educational levels, the female business travelers with lower educational levels rated 'apartment's website' as more important than those with higher educational levels. In terms of monthly income levels, female business travelers with higher income were more influenced by 'service apartment's brand (international)' and 'airline mile point program' factors than those with lower income.

In summary, the findings revealed that 'location' was the most important factor with close proximity to the workplace, followed by 'service', 'facilities', and 'brand' respectively. In terms of 'service' factor, the findings showed that 'staff service' was considered to be

more important than 'management team service'. For the importance of 'facilities', the factor that influenced female business travelers in serviced apartment selection the most was 'high speed Internet access'. In addition, female business travelers seemed to place a high importance on 'safety and security facilities', especially 'electrical keycard', 'bright hallway', 'sprinkler system', and 'closed circuit television'. In terms of 'brand' factor, 'serviced apartment's brand (international)' was trusted by female business travelers the most. With regard to the impact of demographic characteristics on the important factors, the results showed that female business travelers with different age levels, educational levels, and income levels placed the importance on the important factors influencing the selection of serviced apartments differently.

The outcomes of the study can be useful for serviced apartment organizations to better develop effective marketing strategies for this potential customer group. The results of the study indicated that the prime locations such as 'location close to office buildings' and 'location close to sky train/subway' should be highly considered as the correct location areas for serviced apartment owners and investors for future projects. Furthermore, serviced apartment management should provide customers with 'in-room high speed Internet access', and throughout business points such as the lobby, meeting rooms and recreation areas so that customers may have additional options. The findings also showed that female business travelers are very concerned with 'safety and security facilities'. Marketers and advertisers should emphasize on 'safety and security facilities' offered by serviced apartments on company websites, brochures and other advertising channels to make customers feel more comfortable and safe in their choice of accommodation. In terms of service, it is essential to provide the staff with necessary skills and knowledge through

various training programs in any effort to privileged service to retain customers. In addition, serviced apartment marketers should therefore consider putting more effort into building a good reputation as the brand name. This can be done by advertising some of the awards they received (such as the best serviced apartment of the year, the largest serviced apartment group in Asia) in their promotional materials, and training their sales people to emphasize such information when selling the products.

5.2 Limitations of the study

The study has the following limitations:

5.2.1 The subjects of this study were limited in four selected serviced apartments of the Ascott Group. The survey of respondents in other organizations or other areas could be conducted to identify any significant difference among the wider population.

5.2.2 The profiles of the respondents in this study did not include nationality and occupation nor did they included anything on national cultural differences and the business backgrounds, in particular information about the corporate cultures that they came from. This might influence decision making regarding serviced apartment selection. For example, the study of Chan & Wong (2005) found that Asian travelers placed a high value on the factor of past experience, and they were more influenced by hotel advertisements on TV and in travel magazines, etc. than western travelers.

5.2.3 The present study was focused on only female business travelers, while male business travelers are still the major number of business travelers in the serviced apartment industry. Due to the gender difference, male and female business travelers may

have different preferences toward the important factors on serviced apartment selection. For example, male business travelers rated service and facilities as more important than female business travelers did, while female business travelers considered safety and security facilities more important than male business travelers did (McCleary, Weaver & Lan, 1994).

5.3   Suggestions for Further Studies

The researcher recommends the following further studies:

5.3.1 Based on the findings of this study, an investigation of gender difference in serviced apartment selection should be addressed. Concerning the results of the study that female business travelers placed a special emphasis on 'safety and security facilities' factor, it is interesting to figure out whether male business travelers in the area of serviced apartments are more or less influenced by this factor while making decisions on serviced apartment selection. Moreover, this recommended study may address the preference and the comparison of the needs of both male and female business travelers on the selection of serviced apartments.

5.3.2 With regard to the interesting findings that 'recommendation from company' was the most important factor among factors in 'recommendation' section, a study on factors influencing decision makers of companies in using serviced apartments should be investigated. The results of this study would be significant for serviced apartment owners to evaluate what main factors influence decision makers of companies to recommend serviced apartments to the business travelers.

5.3.3 It would be of benefit to conduct research by a survey or focus group interviews. With this method, a researcher may select a group of individuals to discuss and comment on important factors influencing the selection of serviced apartments from their personal experiences and perspectives. The benefit of focus group may help a researcher gain several perspectives in details about each of important factors influencing them while choosing serviced apartments.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

Comparison of Mean Values of Factors determined

by Respondents' Age levels

FACTORS	AGE LEVELS					
	< 25 (N=3)	26-35 (N=21)	36-45 (N=13)	46-55 (N=8)	56-65 (N=2)	ANOVA (Sig. P value)
1) Service						
Staff service	4.00	4.00	4.46	4.25	5.00	0.08
Management team service	4.67	3.57	4.38	3.88	4.00	0.15
2) Location						
Easy access to skytrain/subway	3.67	4.19	4.23	3.75	5.00	0.32
Close to working place	5.00	4.38	4.69	4.00	5.00	0.06
Close to shopping center, tourist attraction	4.33	3.62	3.38	3.25	5.00	0.21
Close to embassy	3.00	2.71	2.23	3.00	3.00	0.48
3) Brand						
Service apartment's brand (local)	3.33	3.43	3.15	3.88	4.00	0.21
Service apartment's brand (international)	4.00	3.62	3.62	4.00	5.00	0.07
4) Facilities						
4.1) Basic Facilities						
Swimming pool	4.00	3.14	4.00	2.75	4.00	0.52
Well equipped fitness center	3.00	3.90	4.08	4.00	4.00	0.45
Spa & massage rooms	3.67	3.24	3.38	3.00	4.00	0.36
High speed Internet access	4.33	4.52	4.77	4.63	5.00	0.62
Meeting rooms	3.00	3.10	2.69	2.63	4.00	0.33
Business center	3.00	3.48	2.77	3.25	4.00	0.21
Car parking	2.33	3.19	2.85	3.63	2.00	0.25
4.2) Safety and Security Facilities						
Dead-bolt lock	3.00	4.19	3.85	3.38	5.00	0.32
Chain lock	3.67	3.90	3.77	3.50	5.00	0.22
Electronic key card	5.00	4.29	4.62	4.25	5.00	0.45
Bright hallway	5.00	4.38	4.46	4.38	4.00	0.51
Sprinkler system	3.67	4.00	4.23	5.00	5.00	0.06
Closed-circuit television	3.00	4.00	4.38	5.00	5.00	0.27
4.3) Personal Amenities						
Hair dryer	5.00	3.52	3.92	3.38	4.00	0.21
Shampoo, conditioner and soap	5.00	3.57	3.38	3.25	4.00	0.39
Bathrobe	4.00	3.10	2.92	2.90	2.50	0.05
Skirt hanger	5.00	3.14	3.69	3.25	3.00	0.06

FACTORS	AGE LEVELS					
	< 25 (N=3)	26-35 (N=21)	36-45 (N=13)	46-55 (N=8)	56-65 (N=2)	ANOVA (Sig. P value)
5) Recommendations						
Recommendation from company	3.10	5.00	4.17	4.00	3.25	0.02
Recommendation from travel agent	3.00	3.57	3.69	3.63	2.00	0.10
Recommendation from friends/relatives	5.00	3.62	4.38	3.75	3.00	0.24
6) Past Experience						
Having stayed at this apartment before	3.33	3.71	4.23	4.25	5.00	0.00
7) Incentives						
Frequent traveler program	4.00	3.48	3.23	3.25	4.00	0.12
Airline mile points program	4.00	3.52	3.31	3.25	4.00	0.28
8) Advertising						
Advertising on magazine, newspaper	3.67	2.76	2.38	2.88	3.00	0.15
Apartment's website	4.33	3.52	3.85	4.25	3.00	0.12
Travel agent's website	1.67	2.67	2.85	3.25	3.00	0.21

Note: Mean values based on a five-point scale, where 1= least degree of importance and 5 = highest degree of importance

* A significant P Value $\leq$ 0.05

APPENDIX B:

Comparison of Mean Values of Factors determined

by Respondents' Educational Levels

FACTORS	EDUCATIONAL LEVELS				
	BA (N=24)	MA (N=18)	Ph.D. (N=3)	Other (N=2)	ANOVA (Sig. P value)
1) Service					
Staff service	4.13	4.28	4.00	5.00	0.24
Management team service	4.17	3.67	3.00	5.00	0.12
2) Location					
Easy access to skytrain/subway	4.04	4.28	4.00	4.00	0.44
Close to working place	4.46	4.61	4.00	4.00	0.23
Close to shopping center, tourist attraction	3.63	3.61	3.00	4.00	0.39
Close to embassy	2.92	2.33	3.00	2.00	0.23
3) Brand					
Service apartment's brand (local)	3.25	3.56	4.00	4.00	0.18
Service apartment's brand (international)	3.79	3.67	4.00	4.00	0.84
4) Facilities					
4.1) Basic Facilities					
Swimming pool	3.67	3.28	3.00	2.00	0.07
Well equipped fitness center	4.08	3.67	4.00	4.00	0.51
Spa & massage rooms	3.42	3.22	3.00	3.00	0.64
High speed Internet access	4.67	4.61	4.00	5.00	0.26
Meeting rooms	3.00	3.00	2.00	3.00	0.39
Business center	3.25	3.28	3.00	3.00	0.95
Car parking	3.17	2.89	4.00	2.00	0.24
4.2) Safety and Security Facilities					
Dead-bolt lock	3.75	4.17	3.00	5.00	0.06
Chain lock	3.63	4.11	3.00	5.00	0.15
Electronic key card	4.38	4.56	4.00	5.00	0.10
Bright hallway	4.42	4.44	4.00	5.00	0.42
Sprinkler system	3.83	4.61	5.00	5.00	0.09
Closed-circuit television	3.88	4.56	5.00	5.00	0.23

FACTORS	EDUCATIONAL LEVELS				
	BA (N= 24)	MA (N= 18)	Ph.D (N= 3)	Other (N= 2)	ANOVA (Sig. P value)
4.3) Personal Amenities					
Hair dryer	3.42	4.11	3.00	5.00	0.11
Shampoo, conditioner and soap	3.17	4.06	3.00	5.00	0.06
Bathrobe	2.96	3.22	3.00	2.00	0.44
Skirt hanger	3.21	3.61	3.00	5.00	0.10
5) Recommendations					
Recommendation from company	4.33	4.39	4.00	4.00	0.59
Recommendation from travel agent	3.58	3.39	4.00	3.00	0.56
Recommendation from friends/relatives	3.96	3.89	3.00	5.00	0.07
6) Past Experience					
Having stayed at this apartment before	3.79	4.11	4.00	5.00	0.09
7) Incentives					
Frequent traveler program	3.29	3.61	3.00	4.00	0.07
Airline mile points program	3.25	3.78	3.00	4.00	0.14
8) Advertising					
Advertising on magazine, newspaper	2.75	2.78	3.00	2.00	0.59
Apartment's website	4.50	3.00	4.00	3.00	0.04
Travel agent's website	2.75	2.72	3.00	3.00	0.96

Note: _Mean values based on a five-point scale, where 1= least degree of importance and 5 = highest degree of importance_

* A significant P Value ≤ 0.05

APPENDIX C:

Comparison of Mean Values of Factors determined

by Respondents' Income Levels

FACTORS	MONTHLY INCOME LEVELS					
	30001-50000 (N= 3)	50001-70000 (N= 12)	70001-90000 (N= 2)	90001-120000 (N= 10)	more than 120000 (N= 12)	ANOVA (Sig. Pvalue)
1) Service						
Staff service	4.33	4.00	3.00	4.40	4.50	0.13
Management team service	4.00	3.67	3.00	4.20	4.17	0.07
2) Location						
Easy access to skytrain/subway	4.33	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.42	0.28
Close to working place	5.00	4.00	5.00	4.40	4.92	0.08
Close to shopping center, tourist attraction	4.67	3.83	4.00	3.20	3.58	0.14
Close to embassy	3.33	2.83	3.00	2.80	2.75	0.06
3) Brand						
Service apartment's brand (local)	3.00	3.50	4.00	3.20	3.42	0.61
Service apartment's brand (international)	3.00	3.83	3.85	4.00	4.48	0.04
4) Facilities						
4.1) Basic Facilities						
Swimming pool	3.67	3.50	3.00	3.60	3.33	0.92
Well equipped fitness center	3.55	3.83	3.00	4.40	4.00	0.23
Spa & massage rooms	3.67	3.50	2.00	3.20	3.17	0.08
High speed Internet access	3.67	4.33	5.00	4.80	4.75	0.09
Meeting rooms	4.00	3.17	2.00	2.40	3.00	0.06
Business center	4.00	3.33	2.00	3.00	3.17	0.28
Car parking	3.00	3.17	4.00	3.40	2.42	0.26
4.2) Safety and Security Facilities						
Dead-bolt lock	4.00	3.83	4.00	3.80	4.33	0.53
Chain lock	4.00	3.67	4.00	3.80	4.17	0.64
Electronic key card	4.33	4.50	4.00	4.40	4.58	0.62
Bright hallway	4.67	4.17	4.00	4.40	4.58	0.50
Sprinkler system	4.00	3.67	4.00	4.20	4.50	0.24
Closed-circuit television	3.00	4.00	3.00	4.40	4.50	0.22
4.3) Personal Amenities						
Hair dryer	4.67	3.33	5.00	3.20	4.42	0.06
Shampoo, conditioner and soap	4.67	3.50	5.00	3.00	4.17	0.11

FACTORS	MONTHLY INCOME LEVELS					
	30001- 50000 (N= 3)	50001- 70000 (N= 12)	70001- 90000 (N= 2)	90001- 120000 (N= 10)	more than 120000 (N= 12)	ANOVA (Sig. Pvalue)
Bathrobe	4.33	3.17	5.00	3.21	3.00	0.24
Skirt hanger	4.67	3.17	5.00	3.50	3.67	0.18
5) Recommendations						
Recommendation from company	4.67	4.17	4.00	4.00	4.92	0.07
Recommendation from travel agent	3.67	3.50	4.00	3.60	3.33	0.90
Recommendation from friends/relatives	4.00	3.83	4.00	4.00	4.00	0.98
6) Past Experience						
Having stayed at this apartment before	3.51	3.67	4.00	4.20	4.17	0.06
7) Incentives						
Frequent traveler program	4.00	3.33	3.00	3.00	3.83	0.09
Airline mile points program	3.67	3.50	3.00	3.00	4.00	0.01
8) Advertising						
Advertising on magazine, newspaper	4.00	2.67	3.00	2.60	2.50	0.08
Apartment's website	4.33	3.33	4.00	4.00	3.42	0.18
Travel agent's website	3.33	2.17	4.00	3.20	2.25	0.11

Note: Mean values based on a five-point scale, where 1= least degree of importance and
 5 = highest degree of importance

* A significant P Value $\leq$ 0.05

APPENDIX D:

Questionnaire

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is a part of Master's Project, Srinakharinwirot University. The objective of the research is to explore the important factors concerning female business travelers in choosing serviced apartments. Your answers would be a very valuable contribution to my research.

Direction: Please answer the questions below by marking (×) in front of the alternatives which most match you.

The questionnaire is divided into three parts.
Part I: General Information
Part II: Important factors related to purchase decision
Part III: Trip profile

Part I: General Information

1. Age Levels

❑ Less than 25　　　　❑ 26- 35　　　　❑ 36 - 45
❑ 46 - 55　　　　❑ 56 - 65　　　　❑ Over 66
❑ Not answer

2. Educational Levels

❑ Less than Bachelor Degree　　　　❑ Bachelor Degree
❑ Master's Degree　　　　❑ PhD. Degree
❑ Other (please specify)_____

3. Monthly Income Levels

❑ Less than 30,000 Baht　　　　❑ 30,001 THB - 50,000 Baht
❑ 50,001 THB – 70,000 Baht　　　　❑ 70,001 THB – 90,000 Baht
❑ 90,001 THB – 120,000 Baht　　　　❑ Over 120,000 Baht
❑ No answer

Part II: Important factors related to purchase decision

4. Please rate the level of importance on the following factors when you choose a serviced apartment:

Factors	Level of Important Factors				
	5 **Most** **Important**	**4** **Important**	**3** **Average**	**2** **Less** **Important**	**1** **Least** **Important**
1) Service					
Staff service	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Management team service	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
2) Location					
Easy access to skytrain /subway	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Close to working place	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Close to shopping centers, tourist attractions	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Close to embassy	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
3) Brand					
Serviced apartment's brand (Local)	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Serviced apartment's brand (International)	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
4) Facilities					
4.1) Basic Facilities					
Swimming pool	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Well equipped fitness center	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Spa & massage rooms	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
High speed Internet access	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Meeting rooms	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Business center	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Car parking	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Factors	Level of Important Factors				
	5 Most Important	**4** Important	**3** Average	**2** Less Important	**1** Least Important
4.2) Safety and Security Facilities					
Dead-bolt lock	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Chain lock	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Electronic key card	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Bright hallway	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Sprinkler system	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Closed-circuit television	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
4.3) Personal Amenities					
Hair dryer	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Shampoo, conditioner and soap	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Bathrobe	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Skirt hanger	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
5) Recommendations					
Recommendation from company	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Recommendation from travel agent	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Recommendation from friends/relatives	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
6) Past Experience					
Having stayed at this apartment before	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
7) Incentives					
Frequent traveler program	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Airline mile points program	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
8) Advertising					
Advertising on magazine, newspaper	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Apartment's website	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Travel agent's website	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

5. Please rank three most important factors when you choose a serviced apartment

(1) Service   (5) Recommendations

(2) Location   (6) Past Experience

(3) Brand   (7) Incentives

(4) Facilities   (8) Advertising

1)_____

2)_____

3)_____

6. Additional comments…………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………….…………….…………
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Part III: Trip Profile to Bangkok

7. Length of Stay

❑ 1 month -2 months   ❑ 3 months – 6 months

❑ 7 months – 1 year   ❑ more than 1 year

8. Frequency of visit

❑ First time   ❑ Repeat visits

Thank you very much for your kind cooperation.

Kindly return the filled in questionnaire to the guest service.

VITAE

VITAE

Name: Ms. Phatcharin Phadungyat

Date of Birth: 2 May 1981

Place of Birth: Angthong

Address: 573/12 Lumpini Center Sukhumvit 77,Onnuch 3-5 Suanluang,

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Position: Customer Relations Executive

Company: Transpo International Co.,Ltd.

Educational Background:

      1999   Angthong Patthamaroj Withayakhom School

      2003   B.A. (English), Prince of Songkla University,

                                Pattani campus

      2008   M.A. (Business English for International Communication)

                                Srinakharinwirot University