

Untapped Potential: Opportunities for Maximizing the Values of Thai Festivals

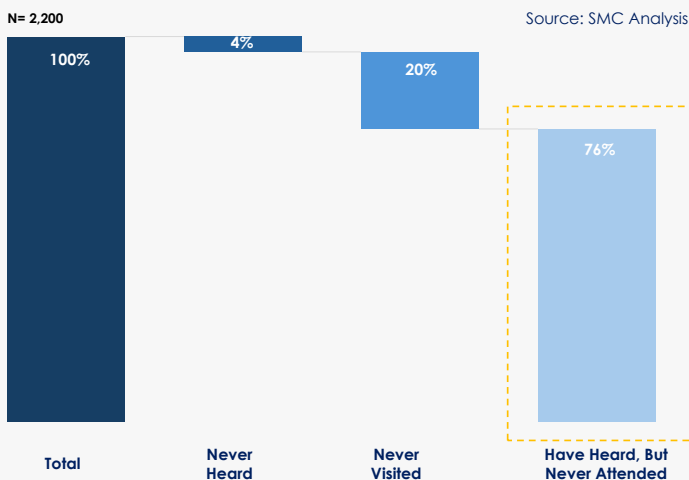
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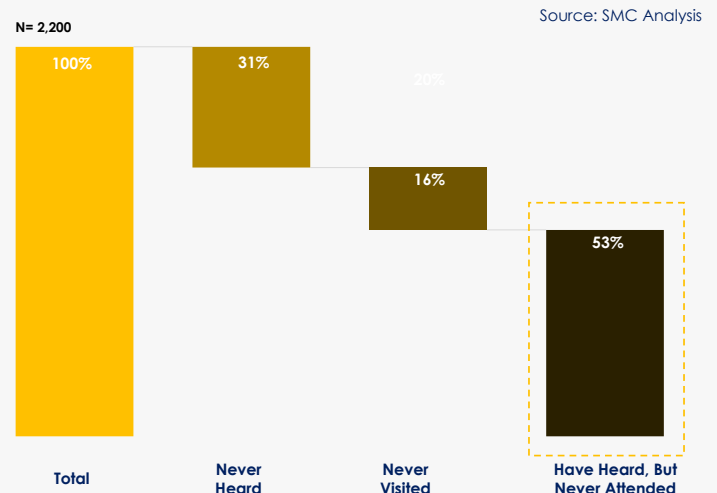
This article summarizes a partial finding from a Strategy Development to Promote Thai Festivals to Global Level for Enhancing Thailand's Soft Power, led by Associate Professor Chaipong Pongpanich, Ph.D. and conducted by the team namely Mr. Thana Siriwallop (SMC Project Director), Associate Professor Kritinee Nuttavuthisit, Ph.D., and Mr. Grasic Samitasiri (SMC Consultant). We would like to offer a special thanks to Program Management Unit for Competitiveness (PMUC) for sponsoring this project.

Songkran and Loy Krathong are well-known globally for their distinctiveness and cultural diversity. People are drawn to cultural festivals because of their entertaining and spiritual qualities. Whether water splashing during Songkran or making a wish as you float a krathong, there's something special about these traditions. Despite their fame, Songkran and Loy Krathong have not yet reached their full potential for tourism boost. Many people know about them, but relatively few actually make the trip to experience them firsthand.

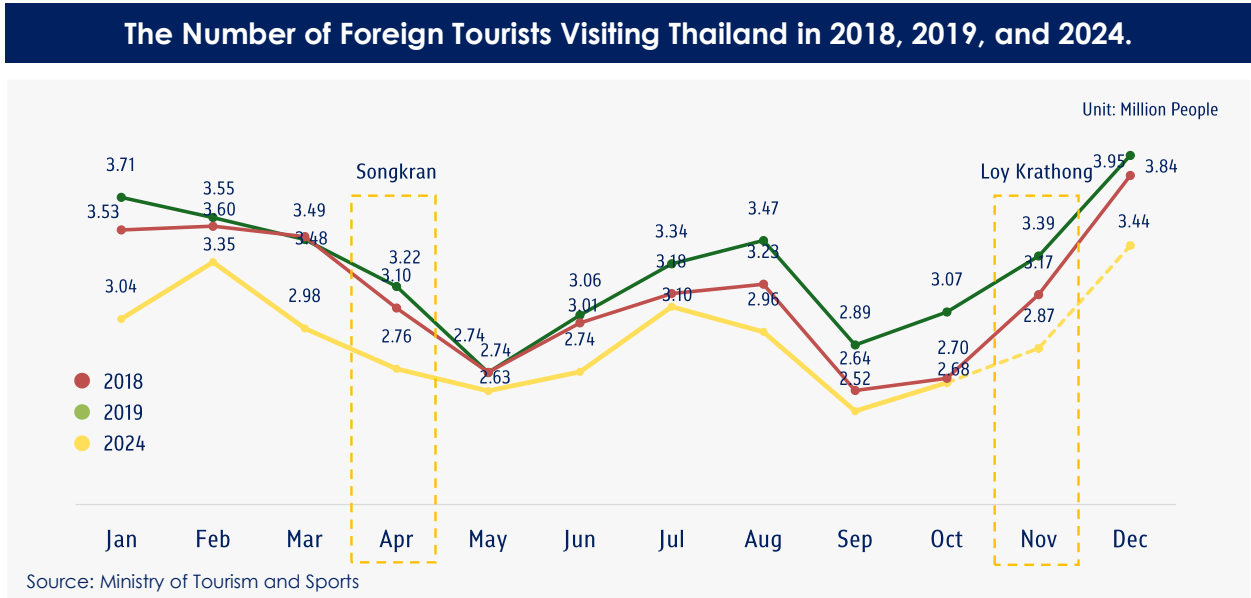
Songkran Awareness and Engagement Rate



Loy Krathong Awareness and Engagement Rate



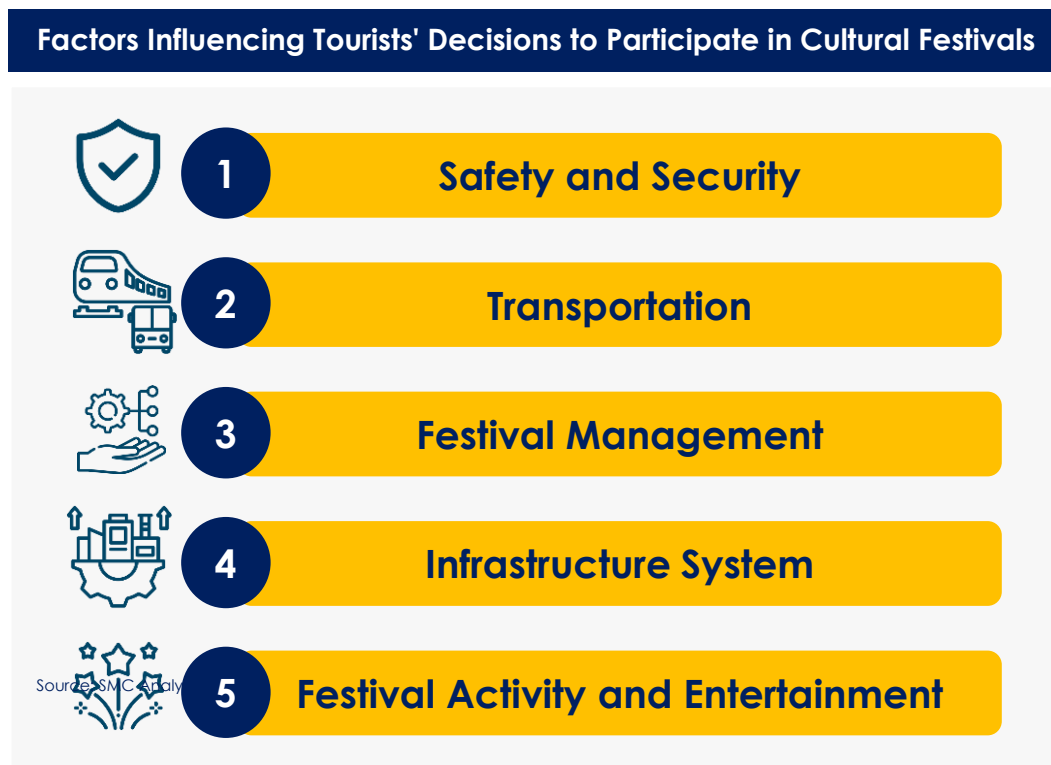
A study of 2,200 potential foreign tourists conducted by Sasin Management Consulting (SMC) revealed a significant gap between awareness and participation in Thailand's Songkran and Loy Krathong festivals. While three quarters of respondents had heard of Songkran, only 20% had actually visited. A similar pattern emerged for Loy Krathong, with only 16% having visited despite an over half awareness level.



An analysis of inbound international tourism trends in Thailand from 2018, 2019, and 2024 (excluding the COVID-impacted years) reveals no significant change in tourist arrivals during April (Songkran) or November (Loy Krathong). Of those who did travel to Thailand during Songkran and Loy Krathong, the majority (63%) were primarily motivated by general travel to Thailand, not the festivals themselves. Only a third of these travelers specifically planned their trips to participate in the festivals.

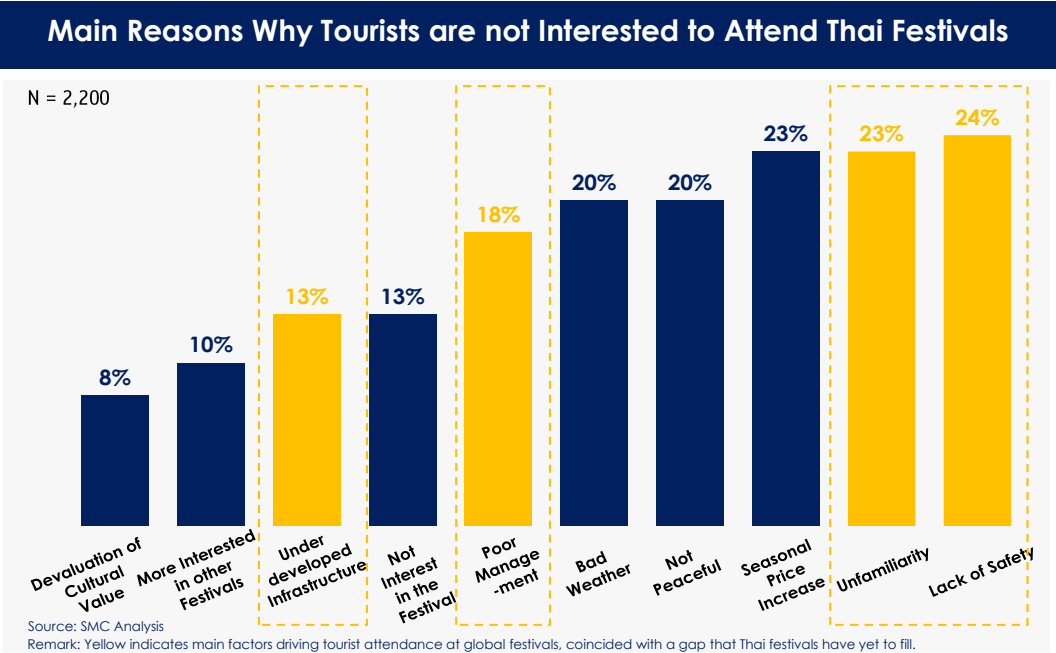


The study also looked into what influences travelers' choices to attend cultural festivals. The results suggested that the primary drivers, ranked by importance, are Safety and Security, Transportation, Festival Management, Infrastructure System, and Festival Activities.



Meanwhile, when asking about main reasons why foreign visitors are reluctant to attend **Thai cultural events**, 24% of participants raised concerns about the unpredictability of Thai festival security measures. Moreover, almost a quarter said unfamiliarity with the **Thai festivals**, causes them uninterest. Furthermore, a significant barrier was found to be the festival's poor management, which made the journey to visit harder for the targeted tourists. Finally, 13% of those respondents explained their lack of interest in inadequate facilities that fell short of global standards.

The study reveals a clear disconnect between the key factors driving foreign tourists to attend cultural festivals and the current state of Thai cultural events. While infrastructure, festival management, safety, transportation, and festival activities are top priorities for attracting international visitors, Thai festivals struggle to deliver on these factors. This gap between valued quality and existing limitation hinders Thailand's ability to fully capitalize on its cultural festival and attract international audience.



One significant untapped potential of Thai festivals lies in their rich cultural heritage. While Songkran, for example, is globally recognized for its vibrant and fun-filled water fights, its deep cultural roots are often overlooked. Thailand has yet to effectively showcase this cultural dimension internationally. This reflects a significant opportunity for Thai tourism, especially given that 70% of targeted foreign tourists respondents in the study praised the cultural value. Instead of viewing entertainment and cultural aspects as mutually exclusive, Thailand should strive to blend these two elements, maximizing the opportunity to reach a broader range of tourists.

Target Audience Research Results for Songkran and Loy Krathong Festivals

Source: SMC Analysis

Current
Songkran Market

Entertainment
Seeker

Cultural Explorer

Tourists seeking in-depth experiences from the cultural values and beauty of traditions at festivals.

New Growth
Opportunity



Over 70% of target tourists value the cultural aspects of the festival.

Opportunity to Shift 'Worth' to 'Value'

Develop and leverage untapped cultural heritage to enhance value and expand the unique identity of the festival, making it even more prominent on the world stage.

Underleveraged Festival Cultural Asset

Tha Loeng Sok

Rod Nam Dum Hua

Making
Merits

Water Fight

Miss
Songkran

Partying

Temple
Fair

Entertainment

Folk Plays

New Beginning

Family Day

Sand Pagoda

Song Nam Phra

Source: SMC Analysis

In short, Songkran and Loy Krathong, while already popular, have significant untapped potential as there is a gap between awareness and actual participation, with concerns about safety, infrastructure, and a lack of focus on the rich cultural heritage. To reach their full potential, these festivals need a

better blend of entertainment and cultural elements, an international standard for the implementation of infrastructure and festival management.

By addressing these issues, Thailand could position its festivals as world-class cultural events, attracting significantly more international visitors and solidifying their place among the best cultural celebrations globally.