

# Community - Based Tourism Management of Ban Prasat, Non Sung District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Thailand

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## **Abstract**

Tourism has long been recognized for its major contribution to Thailand's economic growth. The country has continuously promoted the tourism sector for over 30 years, undertaking numerous campaigns and strategies to foster the development of tourism. More recently, efforts have been emphasizing on tourism development at the community level in which tourism is increasingly being recognized for its socio-economic benefits to the host communities. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is the approach that recognizes the social, environmental and economic impacts of tourism upon the local community and its surroundings. CBT focuses on the involvement of local community in the development process and ensures that a major share of tourism benefits remains within the community. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the development of CBT at Ban Prasat village archaeological site in Thailand, with a specific focus on its local management practices. Specifically, the paper outlines three main themes. The first is to examine the development of CBT in the village and

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the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) promotional and training programs, followed by a brief synopsis of three different periods of the development. Second, the paper will explore the management practice of Ban Prasat's community-based approach to tourism and the role of key stakeholders and their contributions to the success of CBT, The third theme will discuss issues and challenges facing CBT practices at Ban Prasat in particular, and Thailand in general.

**Keywords:** Community Based Tourism, CBT Management, Homestay, Thailand

## Introduction

Tourism has become one of the world's largest industries and one of its fastest growing economic sectors. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) estimates an annual tourism growth rate of 4.1 per cent over the period 2002-2020, with an increase number of tourist arrivals from 700 million in 2002 to 1,600 million by the end of 2020 (Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), 2001). In many developing countries, the role of tourism in socio-economic development is well-established. Tourism is seen as a strategic tool for the development as it generates new economic activities, creates more jobs and in particular, more opportunities for lower income groups (Hawkins, 2005). Tourism has long been recognized for its major contribution to Thailand's economic growth. For over 30 years, the country has continuously promoted the tourism sector, undertaking numerous campaigns and strategies to foster the development of tourism. Many regions are now experiencing rapid tourism developments and the acceleration of tourist-related businesses and establishments. This expansion looks set to continue, alongside with the growth of other tourism and hospitality related industries.

However, a decade into the new millennium, tourism now faces some more complex issues and concerns regarding the approach, its role and its relationship with the government and other institutions and various stakeholders. The advent of such global phenomenon as globalization has triggered a need for local participation to facilitate the growth of tourism and consequently engender its socio-economic, environmental and cultural impacts. Unplanned or uncontrolled tourism can result in a number of negative impacts such as environmental degradation and loss of traditional values as well as other forms of social deterioration where tourism activities take place (Inskeep, 1991). Communities do vary in terms of the nature and scale of tourism development. These aspects signify a need for a shift in the way that tourism development issues are addressed, and tourism policies, plans and practices are put forward. Tourism demands an integrated and well-balanced approach when faced with so many challenges and complex problems.

In search for a more balanced approach between conservation and tourism gains, recent efforts have been emphasizing on the concept of sustainable tourism development at the community level whereby tourism is increasingly being recognized for its socio-economic benefits to the host communities (Murphy, 2005). The concepts and practices of sustainable tourism in Thailand have been particularly active in recent years (The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), 2006), partly as a result of the growing trend of sustainable development and concern for tourism resources. Through the sustainable approach, tourism resources can be protected by the active involvement of local communities. Further, sustainable tourism helps to enhance social togetherness and preserve historical and natural values of the host communities.

Tourism and sustainable development are closely linked in many forms using different terms to describe the integration, notably sustainable tourism, nature or eco-tourism, and Community-Based Tourism (CBT). CBT, in particular is increasingly seen as a major contributor to local economic activities and a means by which sustainable tourism growth can be achieved (The Community Based Tourism Institute (CBT-I)). According to WWF International cited by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2006), the terms community-based tourism (CBT) and community-based ecotourism are generally referred to the tourism approach that recognizes the social, environmental and economic impacts of tourism upon the local community and its surroundings. CBT's core concepts highlight the involvement of the local community in the development process and ensure that tourism benefits remains within the community. Through active participation of stakeholders, CBT can help to strengthen community capacity and development, embracing both collective responsibilities and individual initiatives within the community. Particularly in less developed parts of the region or country, tourism can be used as a development strategy to alleviate poverty and reduce development disparities. It is argued that a well-planned tourism development can have a positive impact on the livelihoods and welfare of local people, particularly the pro-poor and marginal groups (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2005a).

Drawn from the research study on Community-Based Tourism (CBT) development and practices in Ban Prasat village archaeological site, the main purpose of this paper is to examine the development of CBT at Bansat village, with a specific focus on its local management practices. Four major stakeholder groups were approached including the group of villagers, community leaders, internal and external bodies involved in

the tourism of Ban Prasat, and tourists. Instruments for data collection included in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires. Conceptually, the paper attempts to underline the development paths of community involvement and participation with tourism, and to characterise Ban Prasat's community-based tourism management practices. The identification of related issues and challenges facing CBT practices at Ban Prasat hopefully might help determine a more integrated, well-balanced approach to managing this particular type of tourism more effectively.

## **Development of Community-Based Tourism (cbt) In Ban Trasat Village**

### **Ban Prasat Archeological Site**

Ban Prasat is a small village located at Non Sung district, about 45 km from Nakhon Ratchasima Province. Ban Prasat community has 213 households with a population of 1,185 consisting of 582 males and 603 females. The villagers are mostly engaged in agriculture, mainly wet-rice cultivation, in addition to raising animals and growing vegetables. When it is not the rice-growing season, villagers earn their living from making local handicrafts products from natural materials such as reed plants, palm leaves and stalks. According to an exploration by the Division of Archeology back in 1977, Ban Prasat is an enclosed site of an irregular shape with surrounding moat and mound measuring 350 x 450 meters. The area slopes southwards with its highest point rising some 5 meters from the surrounding rice fields, palm trees and vegetable patches. Towards the north, there is a natural Than Prasat stream as well as artificial reservoirs constructed to supply water for villagers throughout the year. Ban Prasat village is the home of an ancient settlement once inhabited by a prehistory to early history community. The discovery of human skeletons

and many pottery pieces from the excavation sites are the evidence of human evolution, community beliefs and culture in this area, dating back some 2,500-3,000 years ago. The archeological site is located within the 7<sup>th</sup> community of Prasat Tai village.

### **The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) promotional and training programs**

Recognizing the village potential for tourism, The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) set up the “Village Development Project” to promote Ban Prasat as a major stop on tourism route of the Northeast, focusing on the local handicrafts promotion and the “homestay” program, where villagers put up visitors in their homes and show them daily activities (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2005b). Initial TAT’s development project involved improving the local landscape, infrastructure provisions and tourist facilities. In collaboration with the Fine Arts Department of Thailand, more excavations were undertaken and excavation pits were reconstructed and improved, followed by the installation of the pit roof and the construction of tourist information centre. Moreover, TAT organized educational and training programs for the locals to help them prepare for the introduction of tourism, provide encouragement and support, and enhance their knowledge and understanding of community participation in tourism. Once the tourism was in place, TAT further launched specific skills training programs to widen the choice of tourism activities for local people. The programs included the establishment of the Homestay group in 1993, run by the elected village committee, and other career groups such as handicrafts, weaving, cooking as well as tour guide.

Since the first tourism initiative back in the late 1980s, the development of CBT has helped improve the livelihood of the locals by providing more job opportunities and sources of extra income, particularly from the sales of handmade products. The village has attracted a wider interest of both domestic and international tourists. The tourism initiatives range from visiting the archeological site and experiencing the way of life to engaging village activities such as farming, weaving, cooking and making local handicrafts such as basketry and music instrument crafts. Ban Prasat Archeological Site won two international awards; the PATA Gold award in 1994 for PATA heritage and culture and the ASEANTA award for excellence in tourism in 1996. It is Thailand's 2nd archeological site, after Ban Chiang in Udon Thani Province, to be set up as an open-site museum.

### Three development periods of CBT in Ban Prasat

#### *The 1<sup>st</sup> period (1955-1982) - the early stage of development to an award-winning village*

The early stage of development involved help and assistance from the public sector to improve the living conditions in the village and strengthen village capacity and development. Roads, basic infrastructure and facilities were developed. In 1982, Ban Prasat won the best village award of the district level and as a result, drew in a reasonable number of visitors as well as funding from various development projects. Later that same year, an extensive number of ancient objects were found in the village and this was the starting point of tourism development in this rural farming village. However, the community had no particular knowledge and understanding of tourism. The development took place without a plan or a direction.

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> period (1983-1990) – the discovery of archeological objects to the development of tourism*

Ban Prasat become an archeological site, known to be the home of an ancient settlement once inhabited by a prehistory to early history community, dating back some 2,500-3,000 years ago. Realizing the village potential for tourism, TAT launched the “Village Development Project” to promote Ban Prasat as a major stop on tourism route of the Northeast region. In collaboration with the Fine Arts Department, various government agencies, local authorities as well as community members, efforts were made to improve the infrastructure provisions and facilities such as roads, transportations, water supply, electricity, tourist information centre, parking space. The village landscape was also improved in an environmentally sound manner. Training programs were offered to support and enhance the knowledge, skills and understanding of the community in participating with tourism. With the assistance from TAT, the community started to earn extra income from tourism activities, particularly through sales of local handicraft products.

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> period (1991-2008) - the beginning of management administration to the CBT management*

The “homestay” program was introduced to the community, together with training supports. Career groups within the community such as the local handicraft group, the cooking group, the local guides group as well as the homestay group were established. The major goal of developing tourism in this period was to ensure an effective and systematic community participation in tourism activities. Management rules and regulations were set up. Specific training programs such as training for homestay operation and management, local guides, and local handicraft productions were provided. Tourist programs were developed to serve a growing number of both domestic and international tourists (see also figure 2.1).



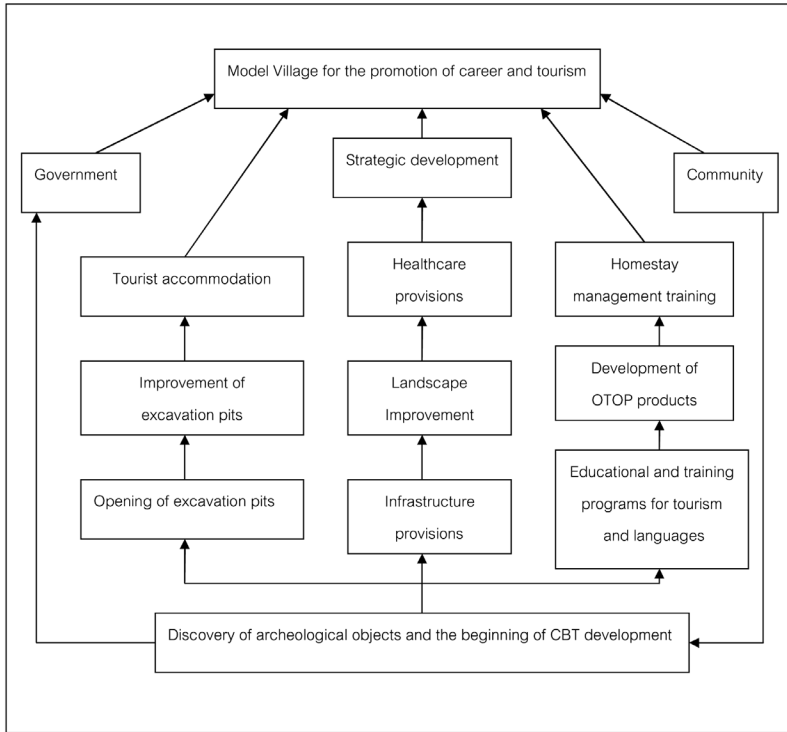


Figure 2.1 The 3<sup>rd</sup> period (1991-2008) - the beginning of tourism management administration to the CBT management

Source: Suchada Nguangchaiyapoom (2008)

### The Local Practice of Ban Prasat's Community-Based Management Approach to Tourism

The key concepts of Ban Prasat's community-based approach to tourism were community empowerment and capacity building. The approach focused on empowering the community to manage their own tourism development. Fundamentally, community-based tourism activities ensure that the local community receives a fair distribution of benefits from

tourism development and such economic gains help improve their living conditions and quality of life. There were a number of factors contributing to the success of CBT at Ban Prasat, the most important being the full collaboration among various stakeholders, both public and private, in terms of career promotion, improvement of tourism products and service quality as well as the government's tourism promotion policies which have resulted in continuous funding to support the tourism development in this village since its first development initiative launched in the late 1980s.

Homestay program- in 2008, there were 35 houses registered in the homestay program, run by the village's homestay committee. Allocation of accommodation was on a rotating basis. The committee held pre and post visitor arrival meetings to reassure that guests receive the best homestay experience and culture exchange. Specific training courses for homestay group members were offered to guarantee service quality and standards i.e. cleanliness, and safety. Participating in the homestay program gave villagers an opportunity to meet new people, learn new culture, earn extra money and travel to other places around the country as part of the training courses. In 1999, the Thai government initiated an OTOP project (One Tambon One Product) to help promote hand-made items and folk handicrafts of each district and also to extend their market shares and channels of distribution in which local products of Ban Prasat were part of this project.

Tourism activities- tourism options included observing the village daily life, participating with the host family's activities which reflect the way of life in the rural Thai village, visiting Ban Prasat archeological site and community learning centers to observe the production of local handicrafts such as reed plants and palm leaves products, silk, paper and other local crafts, as well as other activities such as cooking and food preservation.

Youth tour guide training- children were encouraged to participate and attend training courses for youth tour guides. Some children in the village were now being trained to work as a local guide during weekends or school holidays. Tourism offered them an opportunity to earn extra money and appreciate the value of their heritage site, culture, traditions and local ways of life.

In terms of tourist safety, community policing arrangement was on guard to give tourists a better sense of security and safety. Ban Prasat was equipped with a medical centre but health services were also offered by a health volunteer group.

A range of jobs available locally kept the villagers from migrating to bigger cities of the country to earn their living, therefore, helping to reduce problems caused by migration and urbanization. Moreover, having an archeological site as a tourist attraction also encouraged the local to appreciate their hometown, own culture, traditions, ways of life, as well as natural resources and the environment. Related trainings and seminars which were regularly provided by the responsible authorities also helped to enhance knowledge and understanding of those locals involved with tourism. Ban Prasat also attracted people from other nearby villages to support the growing tourism demands. A major impact of tourism development in Ban Prasat has been the creation of the local handicraft products which helps local people earn extra income and improves the local community's welfare.

With an increasing number of tourists visiting the village each year, tourism has become an important issue and management concern. The village community needs to be well equipped with knowledge and understanding of tourism. More infrastructure provisions would be a welcome improvement for both locals and tourists. However, development

projects in the future should reassure that the provision of infrastructure and facilities is not only for tourism but the local life improvement. The management of the village would also benefit from re-assessing the area's carrying capacity to ensure the expansion in the future will not cause damage to physical heritage as well as the local community.

Further, local people should be fully involved in decision-making on new projects. The responsible authorities should protect the interests and rights and privileges of local people in the development of tourism. Traditional culture, ethics and morals should be preserved for future generations, as well as to provide a cultural experience for visitors. Local participation in the planning of tourism is crucial and should be encouraged at every step of the process. The archeological site management should comply with rules and regulations, setting a good example for the residents of Ban Prasat village. Nevertheless, not all tourist activities provide equal potential for community participation (Inskeep, 1991). Some activities require specific skills training before a community can be involved.

#### **The role of key stakeholders and their contributions to the success of CBT**

The management of CBT at Ban Prasat clearly points out the importance and dependence of stakeholder involvement in the development of community-based sustainable tourism. The implication is that failing to recognize and include essential stakeholders in the tourism development process may prove problematic in the longer term. The key principles of stakeholder approach are to recognize stakeholder awareness and meet their requirements. It requires the identification of the needs of related stakeholders and methods for assuring their requirements are taken into account in the design and implementation of the plan (Mitchell, 1997).

The stakeholder concept emerged in the 1980s when Freeman (1984) suggested that a new theory was needed to reduce uncertainty in the period of rapid change and increased complexity. He defined stakeholders as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984). The idea of stakeholders allows organizations to take into account both external and internal factors affecting their functions. The individuals, groups, institutions and governments with which an organization deals in the course of its activities are referred to as stakeholders.

Basically, the stakeholders of community-based tourism in Thailand make up of different groups, and quite often, they have different purposes. Whilst it is not difficult to produce a list of stakeholders for an organization, identifying legitimate tourism stakeholders and determining their influences may not be an easy task as tourism is multi-faceted and one of the most complex and dynamic sectors. Moreover, their roles and the magnitude of their participation in tourism development can be somewhat ambiguous, overlapping, contradictory and difficult to measure. This poses real challenge in determining a well-balanced approach for the development of community-based sustainable tourism.

Undoubtedly, there are many obstacles to these changes and the current system seems to allow a certain degree of authority to people who are most influential in public decision making. Recent studies in the area of tourism development have emphasized a commitment to the integrated sustainable approach involving views of various stakeholders from both public and private sectors (Hawkins, 2005). There is clearly a need to strengthen capacity of government tourism agencies, local communities, tourism education and training institutes, and private sector in taking effective actions to foster sustainable tourism development and enhance tourism’s contribution to community development.

## Issues and Challenges Facing the Community-Based Tourism Management

Changes in tourism in recent years have been largely characterized by the impact of globalization. This phenomenon has an impact on people, society, socio-economic structure, organizations and institutions, and environment which are central to development. The development agenda including tourism is therefore, subject to social diversity and profusion of socio-economic conditions. Tourism development can serve as an opportunity to the community and if badly managed, become a threat (Hawkins, 2005). Traditionally, economic factors play a key role in tourism development and one of many challenges facing the subject of tourism development in Thailand is how to achieve a balanced approach between conservation and economic gains? Is tourism development increasingly seen as just challenging the nature of tourism development?

The debate over tourism impacts upon the community still exists. Tourism initiatives may place enormous pressure on communities if they are not properly managed. For instance, with the sudden proliferation of tourism activities and exposure to a more sophisticated lifestyle, the cost of living of local people tends to increase. Similarly, in terms of non-economic impacts, tourism development projects aimed at promoting natural and cultural resources may, indirectly transform local traditions and ways of life towards modern styles. Major changes in their lifestyle may cause great concern and lead to deterioration of the environment and eventually, displacement of the traditional residents (Murphy, 2005).

Sustainable development is one of the major challenges facing tourism, particularly at the local scale (Murphy, 2005). Current practices of tourist operation clearly highlight a commitment to sustainability; it is particularly apparent and significant in the form of community-based

tourism (CBT). This cannot be achieved simply by devising the effective tourism plan and development strategies. It requires fundamental changes in the way tourism is interpreted and how solutions to its problems are identified, evaluated and implemented. There is a clear need to explicate these changes and their implications for tourism development. It demands more comprehensive and integrated approaches to capture tourism impacts and consideration of a broader range of problem-solving methods. Given the Ban Prasat's successful case, a well planned and managed CBT might prove to be one viable and favourable option. However, it must be noted that the scale of tourism in Ban Prasat is small and local-oriented, hence not making much of the profit. It is important that local people participated in tourism recognize the nature of tourism in the rural area which is highly seasonal, therefore employment in tourism can only be their extra source of income, not a replacement for their main occupation.

## Conclusion

To achieve a true community-based approach, a broader participation of the community stakeholders must be reinforced and it must ensure that the community really shares in the benefits derived from the integration of tourism in their community. The significance of people participation and community involvement is clearly emphasized in Ban Prasat's approach to tourism development and its management practices. The main objective of CBT is to empower local people and their community to play a pro-active role in the management process and receive a fairly distribution of the benefits derived from tourism. As mentioned earlier, communities are not homogenous and the interests of community stakeholders are diverse and quite often contradictory, both ideologically and practically. Moreover, communities are different in terms of the nature

and scale of tourism development. The importance of local management practices may not always been recognised in development planning. Consequently, this has led to development initiatives unsuitable for the local context and may provide only limited benefits to limited numbers of people, and that would put additional pressures on the resources. Some communities may have better experience and knowledge in managing their resources than others. In the case of Ban Prasat, community members have exemplified their willingness and capacity to manage their resources for tourism successfully through full control and shared ownership, involving in all stages of making decisions about the nature and direction of tourism development planning and management.

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