

Increasing the Potential of Rural Communities to Support Tourism Business in Northeast, Thailand

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วัตถุประสงค์ของงานวิจัย คือ เพื่อศึกษากระบวนการบริหารจัดการของชุมชนในการรองรับธุรกิจท่องเที่ยว และเพื่อศึกษาการใช้ศักยภาพปัจจุบันของชุมชนในการส่งเสริมธุรกิจท่องเที่ยว โดยใช้แบบสอบถามเป็นเครื่องมือในการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลจำนวน 340 ตัวอย่างในพื้นที่เป้าหมายของภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือ 4 แห่ง ทำการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลด้วยวิธีวิเคราะห์เชิงพรรณนา โดยการแจกแจงความถี่ ค่าร้อยละ ค่าเฉลี่ย และค่าส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน นอกจากนี้ยังใช้สหสัมพันธ์ Pearson Chi-Square และ F-test

ผลการศึกษาพบว่าปัจจัยทางการตลาดที่เกี่ยวข้องกับกระบวนการจัดการมีความสัมพันธ์กับความพึงพอใจของนักท่องเที่ยวที่นำมาสู่การกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำ และพบว่า ปัจจัยทางด้านราคา (5.93) มีอิทธิพลต่อนักท่องเที่ยวในการกลับมาเที่ยวซ้ำมากที่สุด ปัจจัยศักยภาพด้านการจัดการแหล่งท่องเที่ยว ด้านการจ้างงาน และการให้บริการ ด้านการผลิตผลผลิตเกษตรและสินค้าหัตถกรรม ด้านรายได้ของชุมชนพบว่ายิ่งคนในชุมชนมีระยะเวลาที่อาศัยอยู่ในชุมชนยาวนานขึ้นจะทำให้ชุมชนมีศักยภาพในการพัฒนาเพิ่มสูงขึ้น

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the process of community management to support tourism business and to study the present potential of rural communities for the promotion of tourism business. The research instrument was a questionnaire which was distributed to 340 samples from four target areas in Northeast Thailand. The descriptive method used to analyze the data was based on the commutative frequency for percentage, mean, and standard deviation. In addition, Pearson Chi- Square correlation and F- test were used for the analytical framework of this study.

The results showed that marketing factors were related to the tourists' satisfaction to return visits. The price factor (5.93) has the most influence on the tourist to return visits. Tourism management, services and employment, handicraft and agricultural products, and community incomes were the potential factors which were related to how long people had lived in the community: the longer they stayed, the higher the potential for community development.

Keywords: Rural communities, Potential, Tourism business, Northeast, Thailand

Introduction

Tourism is the most important service industry in the Thai economic system. After the economic crisis in 1997, Thailand was the target area of tourism for foreigners because the appeal of tourist areas in Thailand includes natural surroundings, special cultures and the beauty place, although terrorism in three southern provinces of Thailand, the spread of SARS, Bird Flu, Influenza A(H1N1), the December 2005 Tsunami and the global energy crisis have affected tourism.

Income from tourism businesses was the first priority in Thailand. Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia were competitors for Southeast Asian

tourism business. In 2005, foreigners who came to visit Thailand included 11.52 million people who spent approximately 368,000 million baht, equivalent to 5.20 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product). At the same time, there was also an increased growth rate of 5.33 percentages of internal tourism within Thailand.

Growth rate of internal tourism had decreased from the previous year about 4.60 percent, but more Thai citizens traveled in Thailand from 61.82 million times- people in 2002 to 79.29 million times - people in 2005. (TAT, [www](http://www.tat.or.th), 2009). Additionally, the image of the Thai tourism industry is that it has a high value added, especially regarding service quality, based on the perception of Thai social behavior. Those were the strong points of Thailand tourism business that could take the foreign currency to Thailand. Thus the network of tourism business could increase on investment and employment.

Mansfield (1992) suggests three key ingredients for industrial heritage sites that are applicable for CET (consumer experience tourism) sites as follow:

- 1) The region is experiencing positive economic growth

The operating area should offer existing tourism offerings and be experiencing positive economic growth. In essence, activity feeds off other activity.

- 2) The region has well-developed transportation systems

The region should provide well-structured transportation systems to move visitors easily to the sites. Standard road signs can also be beneficial. The United States of America such as California and Virginia have adopted standard symbols and road signage to direct wine travelers to their many wineries.

- 3) The region has existing hospitality accommodations

The region should possess existing hospitality accommodations to satisfy the needs of travelers such as food and lodging. CET tends to be something done as part of a day's activities and not the focal point of the day's activities.

According to Kruczala's study (1990), the main instruments of regional policy are the national plans for underdeveloped areas and the five year-national socioeconomic plan, both with "tourism segments". Tourism has now concentrated in 16 administrative regions, all of which are attractive destinations. Interesting notes are the positive effects of regional policy on the development of these tourist administrative regions. These are:

- 1) the concentration of tourist facilities (in conformity with the distribution of more valuable tourist areas);
- 2) the development of transport infrastructure (making these regions more accessible in national scale); and
- 3) the delimitation of areas with precious tourist values (natural and historical) for strict protection.

The important factors of contextual societal change, urban leadership, and non-rational planning in event production processes are important for understanding both event causation and also the potentially rational character of event policy making. (Roche, 1994)

Dogan (1989) notes that a community previously dominated by a particular response to tourism, a diversity of responses will emerge as tourism develops, and groups with different interests and characteristic responses to tourism will be formed within the community. A study by Ap (1992) suggests that when an exchange of resources (expressing in terms of power) between residents and tourism is high and balanced, or high for the host, tourism impacts are viewed positively by the residents. On the other hand, when an exchange of resources is low and a balanced or unbalanced exchange, the impacts are viewed negatively. Other studies on how the residents perceive tourism show different dimensions.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand was first established on 18th March 1960. In 2003, the Thai Government changed the structure of the government

sectors. At that time the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) had been changed from a Department to a full Ministry and it had also improved its administrative methods. TAT was the first organization in Thailand to be specifically responsible for the promotion of tourism. TAT supplies information and data on tourist areas to the public, publicizes Thailand with the intention of encouraging both Thai and international tourists to travel in and around Thailand, conducts studies to set development plans for tourist destinations, and co-operates with and supports the production and development of personnel in the field of tourism. Local organizations manage and make decisions for tourism by receiving and allocating of a budget from the government sector. (Auachongprasit, 2006)

In 2009, marketing plan of Northeastern, Thailand focused on the image of civilization. Besides, the important strategies of tourism business were as follow; (TAT, [www, 2009](http://www.tat.or.th))

- 1) Tourism was a part of life
- 2) To make a handbook and a roadmap of package tour.
- 3) To build an image of tourism areas.
- 4) To fight on surrounding and resource conservation in the tourism areas.
- 5) To promote learning dimension in tourism business.

As mentioned above, an increase of the potential of rural communities to support tourism business in Northeast Thailand was a very important topic to study because it is on supply side of tourism business that did not have a real formal and developing direction. Besides, tourism areas in rural communities had some problems in promoting, so that rural communities' participation is the important direction to increase the potential for supporting tourism business. The research aimed to study the process of community management to support tourism business, and to study the present potential of rural communities in promoting tourism business. To support the objectives of the study, the

hypotheses were to cover (1) the marketing mix (7Ps) (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence) affected by the tourists' return visits, and (2) the present potential factors (tourism management, services and employment, handicraft and agricultural products, and community incomes) related to the amount of time that community people lived there.

The scope of the study was to cover 4 areas; tourism management, services and employment, handicraft and agricultural products, and community incomes. The four target areas were chosen as sites of natural tourism because they have beautiful places, variety of sceneries and views for sight-seeing which were not so famous as tourist destinations managing by TAO (Tambon Administrative Organization);

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- Rock Garden Cliff (Kun Ming) in Nong Hin district, Loei;
- Nampudtamlao in Khonsan district, Chaiyaphum;
- Bang Sean Song in Ubonrat district, Khon Kaen; and
- Ecotourism in Wang Nam Khiao district, Nakhon Ratchasima.

Review of Related Literature

Lovelock, Wirtz and Keh (2002) explain service marketing in Asia by means of four basic strategic elements: product, price, place (or distribution), and promotion (or communication). Collectively, these are often referred to as the “4Ps” of the marketing mix. To capture the distinctive nature of service performances, we used the “8Ps” model of integrated service management, which highlights eight strategic decision variables facing enterprises in their service organization. The 8Ps were product elements, place, process, productivity and quality, people, promotion and education, physical evidence, price and costs of service.

Costa and Ferrone (www, 1995) analyzed key events occurring in the fields of travel and tourism during a period from 1989-1994. The reviews identified four main themes that reflect developments in: hosts; perceptions, travel and destinations, souvenirs and artifacts, and tourism planning. From the research topic “Collaborative innovation in tourism: managing virtual communities” as studied by Baglieri and Consoli (www, 2009) who found that tourism firms may strategically influence virtual communities towards building strong customer relationships; customers may provide useful information on their needs; and collaborative innovation is a useful lens to take into account internet opportunities and customers’ knowledge. According to the framework developed by Wang, Yu and Fesenmaier (www, 2002) virtual communities consist of the following elements:

1. people who interact as they strive to satisfy their own needs or perform special roles;
2. a shared purpose such as an interest, need, information exchange, or service that provides a reason for the community;
3. policies that guide people’s interactions; and
4. computer systems which support and mediate social interaction and facilitate a sense of togetherness.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (www, 2009) stated that changes in world tourism industries come from the transition from traditional traveling to sustainable tourism. This means that tourists were becoming conscious of natural resources and surrounding conservation efforts. Thus, community-based tourism was a target of sustainable tourism because of the role of the community in supporting tourism. Mobilizing rural communities to support local tourism sought to increase the income of the community and increase employment from their handicraft and agricultural products by selling them to the tourists. In addition, there had been an increase in related occupations, such as

homestay, orchard lodge, domestic handling agents, souvenirs for tourists, and domestic tourist guides.

From the literature reviews and related researches, a conceptual framework was drawn up with the purpose of increasing the potential of rural communities to support tourism in Northeast, Thailand. (Figure I) The independent variables were tourists' satisfaction with marketing factors and the potential factors for the community. The tourists' return visits and the length of residence of people in the community were dependent variables, respectively.

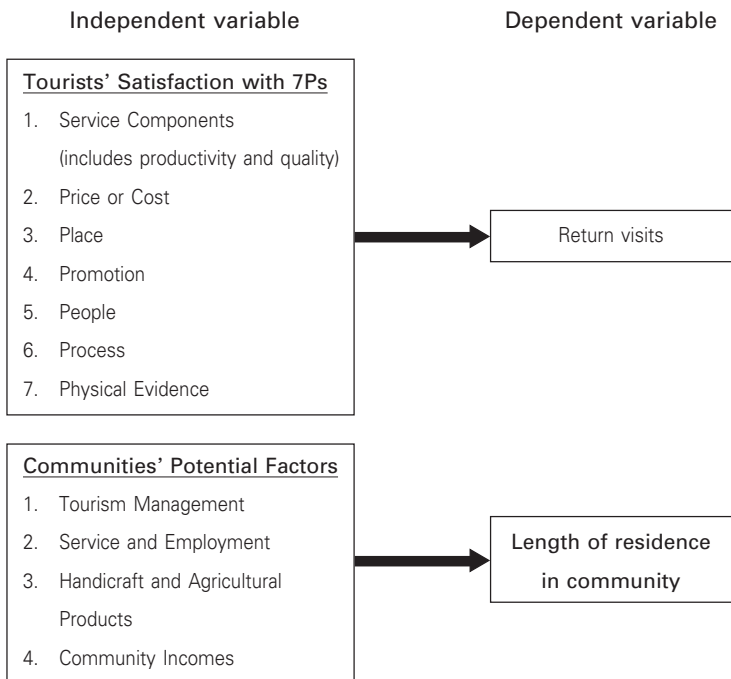


Figure I Conceptualization of the study

Materials and methods

This research was conducted by means of a survey. The collection of the qualitative and quantitative data was carried out by using questionnaires and interview forms. Three target groups were identified: tourists, local workers and enterprises, and community leaders who lived in Loei, Chaiyaphum, Khon Kaen, and Nakhon Ratchasima, respectively.

The sample size of these target groups which the research was conducted was a total population of 340 samples, and distributed as follows:

1. 200 questionnaires for tourists using purposive sampling;
2. 100 questionnaires for local workers and enterprises using purposive sampling; and
3. 40 interview forms for community leaders using purposive sampling.

The research instruments used were questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires used rating scales to judge the attitudes of the target groups. The Likert scale was the most frequently used variation of the summated rating scale. Summated scales consist of statements that express either a favorable or unfavorable attitude towards the object of interest. The target groups were given a numerical score to reflect the degree of their positive attitudes, and the scores were totaled to measure the target groups' overall attitudes. The target groups (tourists, and local workers and enterprises) chose one of five levels of agreement. (Cooper and Schindler, 2003)

There were two sources of secondary data; one was from the internet and the other came from documents related to tourism, especially the target areas controlled by TAO (Tambon Administrative Organization). This information came from the private and government sectors; the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, the Bank of Thailand, and other related sources. In addition, the results of related research were also used in this research.

Data Analysis

The collected data from the questionnaires and the interviews were analyzed by using qualitative and quantitative analysis of commutative frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. In addition, T-test, F-test, Pearson Chi-Square correlation, and discriminant analysis were used to test whether the hypotheses supported the research objectives.

The Discriminant Analysis model involves linear combinations of the following form. (Malhotra, 2004)

$$D = b_0 + b_1 X_1 + b_2 X_2 + \dots + b_n X_n$$

Where;

D = discriminant score

b_i = discriminant coefficients or weights; $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$

X_i = independent variables; $i = 1, 2, \dots, n$

The coefficients, or weights (b_i), are estimated so that the groups differ as much as possible on the values of the discriminant function. Variable D was tourists' alternative decision to revisit, and X_i was the factor of marketing mixes.

Results and Discussion

The results of this research study can be summarized as follows:

1. Community management can be used to support tourism business.

The selected four target areas in Northeastern Thailand are sites of nature-based tourism that are currently managed by the participation of local rural communities, local workers and enterprises, and community leaders. They were joined together to develop the target areas by using the market strategies of product, price, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence which were related to the tourists' satisfaction and their return visits. These marketing factors showed a high correlation with tourists' satisfaction at a level of 3.51-4.03

on the Likert scale. In particular, physical evidence showed the highest scores of satisfaction of 4.03 (Table I).

The research also found that the tourists' satisfaction and their intention to return were affected by the product and service components, price and cost, place, promotion, people, and physical environment, excluding the process of services because the tourism areas did not have public relations on multiple marketing channels, signs for tourist destinations, recommendations or a system for making suggestions, and evaluations. Thus, the tourist services were not efficient.

The results from the discriminant analysis showed that the marketing factors were related to the tourists' satisfaction and their desire to revisit the target areas. The discriminant analysis was as follows:

The discriminant function of the tourist groups who revisited the target areas.

$$D_1 = -32.575 + 2.070 (\text{Service component}) + 5.930 (\text{Cost}) + 3.040 (\text{Place}) + 0.001 (\text{Promotion}) + 0.009 (\text{People}) - 0.384 (\text{Process}) + 0.818 (\text{Physical evidence}) \dots\dots (1)$$

Table I Marketing factors related to the tourists' satisfaction level.

| Item | Mean (\bar{X}) | S.D. | Satisfaction level |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Product or Service Component | 3.83 | 0.600 | high |
| Price or Cost | 3.81 | 0.629 | high |
| Place | 3.83 | 0.627 | high |
| Promotion | 3.47 | 0.865 | high |
| People | 3.82 | 0.734 | high |
| Process | 3.51 | 0.820 | high |
| Physical Evidence | 4.03 | 0.666 | high |

Source: From calculation.

The discriminant function of the tourist groups who did not revisit.

$$D_2 = -38.135 + 2.089 (\text{Service component}) + 11.948 (\text{Cost}) + 3.100 (\text{Place}) - 4.659 (\text{Promotion}) + 0.053 (\text{People}) + 1.629 (\text{Process}) + 2.186 (\text{Physical evidence}) \dots\dots (2)$$

To substitute the mean value of independent variables from Table I to equation (1) and (2); the outcome from (1) was more than (2) which is 6.35. (38.135-32.575) In addition, the price or cost factor (5.93) has the most influence on the tourists' return visits. The findings of the present study are in agreement with those of Lovelock, Wirtz and Keh (2002), but the factor of productivity and quality included the factors of product and service component. (Table II)

A comparison of the marketing factors found that price and physical evidence were very important. The first factor of price or cost (5.930) refers to the prices and setting of fees for lodging, food and beverage, and souvenirs. The higher the number, the more acceptable were the costs. Second, physical evidence factors (5.818) were the beauty of places, variety of scenery and views for sight - seeing, natural surroundings, and good weather.

Table II The size of the market factors affecting the tourists' return visits.

| Marketing Mixes | Do you want to revisit? | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| | Yes | No |
| Product or Service Component | 2.070 | 2.089 |
| Price or Cost | 5.930* | 11.948 |
| Place | 3.040 | 3.100 |
| Promotion | 0.001 | -4.659 |
| People | 0.009 | 0.053 |
| Process | -0.384 | 1.629 |
| Physical Evidence | 5.818 | 2.186 |
| Constant Value | -32.575 | -38.135 |

Source : Calculation from discriminant analysis

* Factor having the most influence on the tourists' revisits. (significant level at 95%)

2. The potential of rural communities to support tourism.

The professional tourism management, services and employment, handicraft and agricultural products, and community incomes were the potential factors which were related to the length of residence of people in the community: the longer they stay, the higher the potential for community development. Moreover, tourism plays an important role in community development, the marketing of community products, and the increase in the income of the community. The findings of this research study are in agreement with those of Wang, Yu and Fesenmaier (www, 2002) whose analysis shows that virtual communities consist of a shared purpose such as an interest, need, information exchange, or service that provides a reason for the community. These factors affected tourism management, services and employment, handicraft and agricultural products, and community incomes.

From the analysis of the 4 potential factors, it was found that services and employment were the greatest potential factors for people to develop their community (\bar{X} = 3.95), but handicraft and agricultural products, community incomes, and tourism management were at the same level of importance as services and employment; \bar{X} = 3.83, \bar{X} = 3.81, and \bar{X} = 3.71, respectively. (Table III) The mean of all potential factors showed a high level of satisfaction.

However, in order to be successful, the people in the community in each of these four target areas should receive strategies for the development of social capital, group building, support and promotion of these groups, training in marketing management, and establishment of community meetings. These activities could be supported by the local government sector.

Table III The potential of tourism areas on the opinions of the people in the community.

| Item | Mean (\bar{X}) | S.D. | Satisfaction level |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Tourism Management | 3.71 | 0.638 | high |
| Services and employment | 3.95 | 0.716 | high |
| Handicraft and agricultural products | 3.83 | 0.727 | high |
| Community incomes | 3.81 | 0.840 | high |

Source : From calculation.

Conclusions

Conclusions from the research

1. In marketing tourism as a service industry for the target areas, members of the respective communities must participate in providing satisfaction to tourists. For example, entrance fee should be exempted for tourists and adjoining locations. Public relations is most important in persuading tourists that good services are being provided. Moreover, the local should always be polite and friendly. Most importantly, there must be a person responsible for providing information to the tourists, by setting up a tourist information center. In addition, people in the areas should collaborate in looking after the environment of the tourism locations in order to show the natural attractions of the areas and to ensure there is no pollution. Roads and road signs should be renovated. Rest rooms should be adequate, clean and of a consistently high standard.

2. Locals who work, live or run businesses in such tourist areas should be allowed to express their opinions as to how they can be improved. The tourism industry can be used to improve the quality of life in the rural areas, to develop the existing amenities and to enhance the management of tourist resources and activities. Furthermore, all such developments will help with

employment and the provision of local services. In addition, tourism motivates the locals to bring their products or merchandise to sell the tourists, thus raising their incomes, and promoting collaboration. All such activities should be supported by the appropriate government departments. Particularly, regular communal forums should be held to bring continued development to these tourist areas. Moreover, the research found that the locals have the potential to develop the areas in which were born and raised. Another important issue is that entrepreneurs in the tourism areas should abide by the regulations, rules, and suggested procedures and agree upon all procedures with the other members of their communities.

3. Most tourists visiting such tourist areas often decide not to stay overnight because of a lack of activities in the area.. Accordingly, to motivate them to stay, tourism should be organized into tourist packages in conjunction with neighboring areas. Furthermore, a network of tour companies should be formed with hotel or resort owners. Tourism should be managed in such a way the local way of life is carefully studied. Direct financial benefits come from allocating home stays for tourists. This should be accompanied by allowing the local people to share their ideas and actions among members to develop souvenirs that emphasize the specialties of each particular area. Moreover, natural resources of all attraction points should be well preserved, in order to encourage tourists to revisit and also to target new groups. It is also very important that there should be public relations by all channels and means, which are subsidized and endorsed by the appropriate government units, ranging from provincial to national levels, respectively.

4. Tourism sites established by local collaborative thoughts, functions and development that will prosper the sites in both national and international areas should concentrate on adopting website technology. The web may offer an introduction to tourist attractions in both English and Thai. Details may include

introducing locations with pictures, routes and expeditions, easily accessible information regarding centers plus lodgings and amenities to accommodate tourists. In addition, various kinds of special service should be offered. Furthermore, this website should be regularly updated so that, upon their arrival, tourists find what they expect from the information given in the website.

Conclusions from the Researcher

The findings of the research regarding the improvement of the potential of the local communities in the northeastern regions incorporate notions from the president of the Thai Tourism Industry. The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Tourist trips cannot remain in isolation. There must be lodging and restaurants of a high standard. These facilities sometimes require financial support from both local and other investors. In both cases, there will be advantages for people in the local community. The people therefore should treat these investors in a more positive way. So the hotels, restaurants or packaged tours from the firms will be available. The issue of noise disturbance from the tourists during the night can be discussed among the community and the entrepreneur to limit such problems.

2. Installment of an OTOP expo centers in a tourism site is not encouraged but should rather be uniformly distributed throughout. This is to grant tourists access to the communal prospects and also to extend the opportunity for the local people to market their own products.

3. The government should subsidize training or research and development to assist the people living in tourist areas to make local products and souvenirs which best reflect the communities' image.

4. People in the community should be persuaded to remain in farming as in the past and to consider activities supporting tourism which are

related to their regions then if there are economic problems affecting tourism, the local people will still be able to continue with their primary agricultural work.

5. An attractive nature area should not have amenities such as lodging and restaurants nearby. These facilities should rather be located further away to preserve the true character of the sites. For instance, in the United States and Switzerland, places of natural beauty are located situate more than 1 hour from the tourist accommodation.

6. In some areas, if there exists any local conflict between business people and community leaders, they should commence discussions and conciliation. This may be achieved in the form of common committee, aiming toward developing the tourist areas. If the dispute can not be resolved nor concluded, nearby regions will have to be developed new attractions by strategically motivating tourists to visit the new sites. This should only be done as a last solution.

7. At present, the act on national tourism policy retains grants subsidizing the development of tourist attractions partly in hand with local budgets, which are approved by the mayor in the form of mutual committee proposing to the center. The protocol is nevertheless obliged to the preceding plan.

8. If the community wishes to participate in developing any attractive tourist residences in the protected forests or national parks, there should be a formal plan to ask for permission since this will help the local people with their standard of living.

9. People living in the areas where tourist attractions are situated should look for other possible tourist sites. For example, natural beauty spots, such as, Wang Nam Keaw district is located on the royal provincial road, route number 304, from northeastern to eastern region, for instance, where there are popular tourist national parks, Nam Phut Thap Lao is closed to Chulabhorn dam, Pha Ngam Rocky Garden is closed to Phu Kradueng National Park, or Bang Saen

Song is closed to Ubol Ratana dam attraction. The people therefore should seek the opportunity to invite tourists to visit their own places with encouragement and supports from the government sector within the those areas.

10. Future research may consider other tourism categories, such as those of agricultural, health and culture-oriented tourism. The opted category will then be studied for contributions from the communities toward the sites to facilitate the potential for improvements and to accommodate the tourist industry efficiently.

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