

Udon Thani's Potential to be Thailand's Domestic Top Destination in New Normal Era

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Abstract

The academic article's objectives were to narrate Udon Thani's tourism strengths as well as identify the possible tourism ability, and describe tourism trends during the Covid-19's prevention; and notify reasons why Udon Thani has potential to be a main destination after Covid-19. This article studies information from books, articles, websites, information about Udon Thani province and tourism statistics, by compiling analysed content and summarize the essence.

The study found that: Udon Thani contains diverse tourism attractions, namely, Naga, its unique cultures, fascinating natural destinations, and well-prepared facilities. The New Normal tourism must focus on domestic tourism, it could be a crucial opportunity for the province. In addition, some technology must be added to accord to New Normal context.

Keywords: New Normal, Udon Thani Tourism, New Trend of Tourism

Introduction

Global tourism was affected during the Covid-19's lockdown, yet tourists' desires were to travel. Domestic tourism was popular and multiple hidden attractions were explored or realized because of safety. Tourists could not avoid this condition, or it was the most convenient choice. In a wrap, traveling to a nearby place was the best decision with the opportunity to discover fabulous things.

Udon Thani province, or Udon as its local name, is a high tourism potential city because it has plenty of resources, namely, world-class natural destinations, famous archaeological sites, the biggest native textiles' community in Isan, Kam Chanod: one of the most important places regarding Naga's belief and story-telling. Thailand's Buddhist temples' the 3rd highest amount, several indispensable Dhammayutika Nikaya monks has been originated, lived, and related to the city. Chronically, Udon Thani had been the frontier since Franco-Siamese War

in 1893 as well as being the US head quarter's location in the Vietnam War. And nowadays, it has been a business, transportation, and a conference center in the northeastern region (Udon Thani Province, 2019). Significantly, it currently is internationally a transportation hub with the most crowded provincial airport (Prachachat, 2019).

Provincial Airports	The Number of Tourists	Flights
1) Udon Thani International Airport	2,374,436	17,058
2) Krabi International Airport	2,278,575	15,706
3) Khon Kaen International Airport	1,782,391	13,349
4) Ubon Ratchathani Airport	1,692,462	11,372
5) Surat Thani Airport	1,646,427	10,846
6) Nakhon Si Thammarat Airport	1,395,571	14,620
7) Pitsanulok Airport	650,443	5,375
8) Trang Airport	643,117	4,152
9) Sakon Nakorn Airport	365,951	2,707
10) Roi Et Airport	361,768	2,520

Table 1: The Top 10 Thailand's Provincial Airport in 2019

Source: Prachachat, 2019

Surprisingly, Udon Thani embraces multiple attractions and facilities, and it had not been ranked as a top-10 favorite to-go destination in 5 categories after the Covid-19 prevention. And also, Udon Thani has not ever been listed in Thailand's main tourism province although the highest arrivals' provincial airport is located. For this reason, it is a confusion because it has glamorous attractions to delight every kind of tourists but no Udon's name appears in the tables below:

Overall Tourists	Couple Tourists	Family Tourists	Group Tourists	Individual Tourists
1) Huahin/Cha-am	1) Huahin/Cha-am	1) Huahin/Cha-am	1) Pattaya	1) Bangkok
2) Pattaya	2) Pattaya	2) Pattaya	2) Huahin/Cha-am	2) Pattaya
3) Bangkok	3) Bangkok	3) Khaoyai	3) Khaoyai	3) Huahin/Cha-am
4) Khaoyai	4) Khaoyai	4) Chiangmai	4) Kanchanaburi	4) Khaoyai
5) Chiangmai	5) Phuket	5) Kanchanaburi	5) Koh Kood	5) Phuket
6) Phuket	6) Kanchanaburi	6) Rayong	6) Rayong	6) Chiangmai
7) Kanchanaburi	7) Chiangmai	7) Phuket	7) Koh Chang	7) Tokyo



8) Rayong	8) Rayong	8) Bangkok	8) Seoul	8) Kanchanaburi
9) Koh Kood	9) Koh Kood	9) Koh Chang	9) Chanthaburi	9) Chonburi
10) Chonburi	10) Chonburi	10) Prachuap Khiri Khan	10) Osaka	10) Krabi

Table 2: Cities which has been searched the most online during 1 June-31

Source: Posttoday, 2019

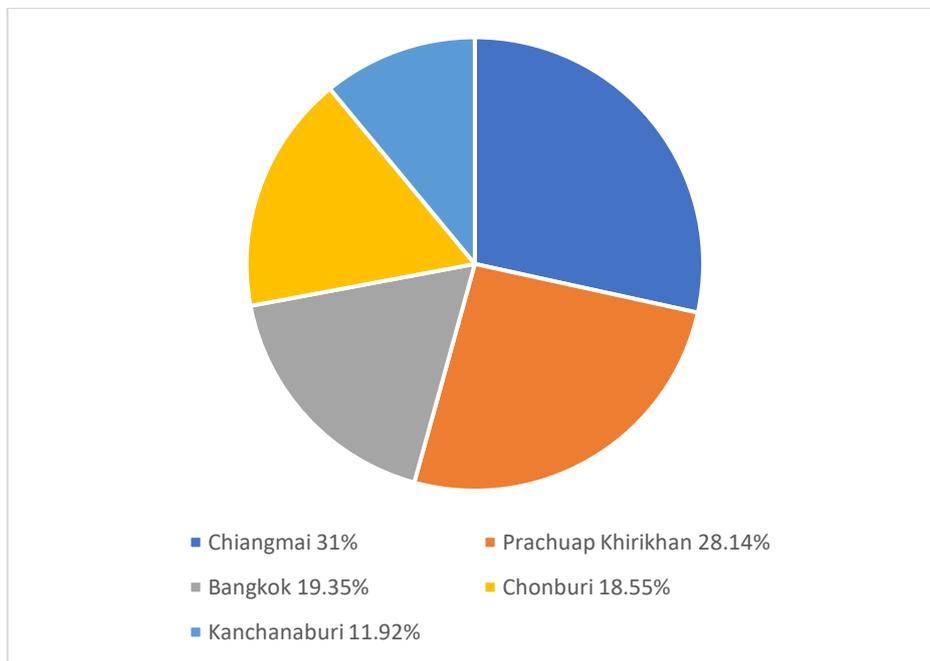


Figure 1: The Top-5 To-go Provinces after Covid-19 Prevention

Source: Posttoday, 2020

According to the pie chart above, it could refer that tourists are interested in visiting natural places plus cultural communities because it combined Chiangmai and Kanchanaburi offering the beauties of the plateau ways of lives and unique identities. In addition, table 2 shows Huahin/Cha-am, Chonburi, and Bangkok as its first places but the Chiangmai and Kanchanaburi are also stated.

It was a question that “Udon Thani has the outstanding attractions and the airport, but why it not a favorite destination?” So, it is necessary to point that why tourists should select Udon Thani as their destinations after Covid-19 prevention.

Tourism Trend during Covid 19 Pandemic

Thailand’s tourism during New Normal period was that “Traveling in Thailand, traveling nearby, and traveling safely”. Primarily, Thais chose domestic attractions to dodge the disease. Secondly, driving to a nearby place was safer than other transport modes. The last trend was to travel to a latent or unoccupied destination because famed ones were loaded and at risk of the infection. Truly, the domestic income was to be primary with the proportion of 60 percent in 2020-2021 comparing to 36 percent in 2019. Significantly, destinations were to acquire a hygienic standard such as SHA (Amazing Thailand Safety and Health Administration).

Additionally, 8 from 10 of Thais were eager to domestic tourism: 75 percent in 2020-2021 and 36 percent had planned their trip and 86 of them considered safety firstly (Marketeeronline, 2020)

According to the US and Chinese tourists, they preferred to visit an unbusy and private sites paralleling McKinsey’s survey. 44 percent of Chinese travelers favored outdoor sightseeing. In contrast, shopping became the least favorite (KrungThaiCOMPASS, 2020).

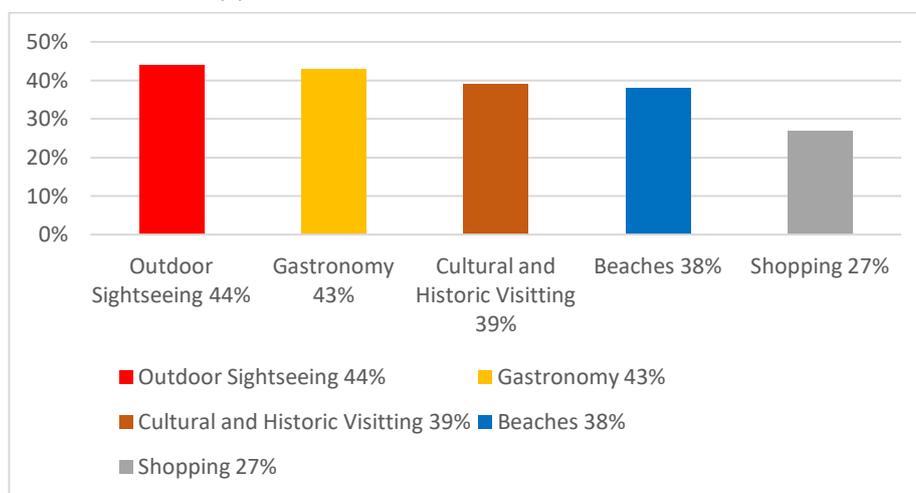


Figure 2: The Domestic Chinese’s Most Favorite Activities

Source: McKinsey in KrungThaiCOMPASS, 2020

Udon Thani’s Tourism Strengths

Chairatana, P. and Na-Thalang, C. (2017) found that Udon Thani tourism’s capability was remarkably high with resources; for example, culture, ways of life, identities, and charming scenic points which are suitable for weekends and leisure. Moreover, the accessibilities of each site were convenient with clear road signs and nearby-provincial tourist places. The strengths of Udon Thani were as follows:

- 1) Udon Thani is the center of transportation on both land and air of upper Isan.
- 2) Ban Chiang has been announced as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1992.

- 3) It contains multiple natural tourism resources.
- 4) Udon Thani is Thailand's tourism leading city.
- 5) The places are suitable for every behavior.
- 6) Noble Buddhist monks lived and used to be in Udon Thani.
- 7) Thai Puan ethnics are inherited their genuine culture and traditions.

In accordance with Zou, L. (2005)'s major tourism attributes: landscape, culture, environment, service, accessibility, welcoming attitude of locals, and safety; in particular, price, landscape and services were at the top of the list to attract international tourists to destination. Moreover, the tourists' perspective was particularly important; for world class examples, people have realized Cape Town as a well-known Gay City, so homosexual tourist usually visited Cape Town to find their sex partners. Similarly, Ginting, Nasution, and Rahman N. V. (2016) noted that uniqueness is critically a successful destination's essential component creating positive perceptions. A unique tourism attraction has strongly particular characteristics and different identifications such as activities, natures, cultures boosting tourists and folks' connection.

It could mention that Udon Thani clearly presented its critical uniqueness of both nature and culture. Currently, people generally thought of Kam Chanod, a compelling supernatural beliefs' place of Nagas' (a kind of allegorical serpent of Buddhist story) significant destination; HRH Prince of Prajak Silapakhom's statue monument; the annual royal sacrificial dance; Ban Chiang, a world class and the most crucial of primitive site in Southeast Asia; Red Lotus Sea (Talay Bua Daeng), red lotuses bloom throughout the about 600 - acre lake in December - February yearly, along with Naga's myth; a city of dhamma that many noble monks were lived and living in Udon Thani and related to the national historic Buddhist; a city in Thailand where Laotians like to visit for shopping and hanging out. In summarization, it could be assuming that Udon Thani has been outstanding at every aspect of attractions. According to the data of 2019, domestic and inbound tourists were travelling to Udon Thani more than 3,000,000 tourists at Kam Chanod, and 350,000 at Red Lotus Sea (Talay Bua Daeng), without neighboring countries' visitors counted (Thansetthakij, 2020).

By the way, unseen sites (favorites of minority) in Udon, no massed tourism, could be the below (Udon Thani Province, 2019):

- 1) Phu Phra Bat Historical Park where 3,000-year-old ancient cave paintings were found.
- 2) Phu Foi Lom is in Phu Phan Noi mountain range of scenic areas and trailing.

3) Phu Hin Jom That National Park, a 270-million -year rocky mountain with a famous pagoda - liked stone “Phu Hin Jom that abides.

4) Phuan Freshwater Lake rafting on 12,800,000 square meters with 150 servicers.

5) Kiriwongkot village, an adventure eco-tourism at a small village and plentiful forest surrounded. To get through the amazing trailing route, a visitor must ride an E-taen Thai truck and walk. The village displays local life and camping, “rafting, trailing, camping” concept.

6) Kumphawapi Saphan Hin (Stone Bridge) is Thailand’s longest natural stone bridge with homestay providers and trailing route.

7) Thai Chinese Cultural Centre is in Mueang Udon Thani district to demonstrate Thai people with Chinese descent culture elegantly.

8) Mueang Udon Thani Museum represents history, archaeology, local story, and cultural arts of Udon Thani together with HRH Prince of Prajak Silapakhom’s royal biography.

Udon Thani is indeed high potential to be a main tourism province with fascinating resources. Besides, 4-star hotels and 2 sufficient convention centers locate. The information indicated how the city is well prepared and diverse. Anyway, Covid-19 altered tourists’ behaviors and perceptions. To serve tourists in the Covid-19 context, tourism public and private sectors must understand and their attitudes. Ergo, Udon Thani is truly ready for this situation.

Udon Thani’s Tourism after Covid-19

“The world will be balanced once again but perhaps cannot be 100% as it was. Anyhow, tourism industry is going to revive, then the over-tourism may be right back making destinations insufficient. The close coordination and cooperation are the most essential issues.” (Sookprecha, 2020) “New experience or unique refreshing involvements are supposed to be the priority before pricing that tourists make their purchase decision, especially Millennial tourists, a group of people who love seeking unseen places, determining unfamiliar activities, and fear of missing out (FOMO). In consequence, tourism providers are going to be able to answer what products or services to delight these buyers, e.g., storytelling interpretation instead of island or diving tour packages’sale including F&B to increase market shares” (Pechrak, 2020)

At the first stage after Covid-19 prevention, tourists will be planning to travel not far away from their homes, accomplish local cuisines and accommodations, or even domestic travelling but outbound tour would be inferior. By the same token, tourists are increasingly



focusing on hygiene and sanitizer; for example, Omer Rabin, a CEO of Guesty (a software company concerning property) claimed that the company added an application door for remotely close-open or postponing another booking after the current one check-out (MGRonline, 2020).

Why and How Udon Thani is Suit for Visiting after Covid-19 Pandemic

Tourists' perception towards Udon Thani, the land of Dhamma and archaeological sites, were outstanding than other attributes (Chairatana, & Na-thalang, 2017). They met with tourists' needs and behaviors for travelling after the prevention. The attributes of Udon Thani tourism could be divided into:

- 1) Resources management was high with appropriate sustainable landscape management, tourist service, convenient amenities and the carrying capacity measurement.
- 2) Locals' participation was high with tourism development connections and cluster to benefit economically the locals and supporting funds from public sectors.
- 3) Activities, learning for tourism awareness creation was high. Udon Thani has diverse of attractions and interpretation.

The New Normal concept from Covid-19 caused Thai tourists being main tourism income. The experts predicted that in 2020 the domestic tourism expenditure was around 64 percent and 70 percent in 2021. Due to Thailand's well pandemic control, the domestic tourism was being generated including the postpone of outside arrivals (KrungThaiCOMPASS, 2020). The domestic tourism was the light at the end of the tunnel.

Although Udon Thani was not considered as a top list Thailand's destination but it was centered of the northern Isan highlighted by education, graceful nature, pre-historic sites, intercultural communities, mystic Kamchanod, fabulous red lotus sea, complete transportation hub, Land of Dhamma containing famous monks' story-to-tell, plus unknown and hidden stunning places. Visitors and citizens were to be delighted with Udon Thani's charm when the trend was altered to the outdoor activities namely sightseeing. Tons of delicious cuisines were in the city and pleasing local souvenirs. It embraced top tourism attractiveness.

Recommendation: The Necessary Technologies for Tourists' Hygiene

The hygiene technology, proximity sensor or contactless, the technology that determine for users' safety objectives. For example, Kasikorn Business Technology Group (KBTG), has developed 6 inventions in New Normal era (Siamrath Online, 2020):

1) Face Check-in which could scan a user's face to identify appearance while wearing a mask and warn the user to mask.

2) KLox is a locker cabinet with face check-in provided. It has been used already at K+Sanyan Building.

3) Eat by Black Canyon, KBTG cooperated with Black Canyon to build contactless automatic box to order dishes. Via the box, clients do not communicate to any servicers.

4) Contactless Menu, a client orders a meal via tablet monitor scanning hands' moving without touching.

5) Face pay, a face-scanned system for bill checking out of the user's banking account.

6) ReKeep, a digital receipt for shop or stall via QR Code, it strengthens paperless policy and reduces global warming.

Conclusion

Udon Thani province, the factor conditions have abundant natural re-sources, infrastructures, activity, culture, history, exhibition and festivals well as natural and cultural attractions. It is also center of various kinds of large wholesale and retail. Cooperation of all related sectors to develop the potential of Thailand's domestic top destination in Udon Thani Province. It's emphasizing the need to plan for developing the potential of tourism resources such as activity, culture and history, exhibition, festival nature, and service to lead to sustainable tourism development. In the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, to operate under the policy to promote tourism in 4 items: safety, cleanliness, fairness and income distribution to the community to reduce inequality for sustainability.

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