

Preparing the Readiness of Tourism Activities for Destinations along the Mekong River for the ASEAN Community - A Case Study in Chiang Khan at Loei Province of Thailand

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Abstract

The purposes of this research were to study tourism potential in Chiang Khan Thailand and Sanakham in Lao PDR, to study the readiness of communities and to prepare the community with tourism activities in Chiang Khan Thailand and to study the needs of the tourism activities in Chiang Khan Thailand. The methodology used mix methodology of qualitative and quantitative research. The research findings were as follows: 1) The potential of tourism in Chiang Khan, Thailand could be classified into 3 types: Tourism oriented natural, tourism oriented culture and health tourism, in Lao PDR comprised cultural tourism, and health tourism. 2) The study of community readiness and preparing of the community with tourism activities found the preparation the landscape of the tourism attractions accommodation, food and facilities, tourism activities and souvenir products. 3) Studying needs of the community with tourism activities found that tourist needs a city of peace for most of the holidays (22.19 %) and they demand for tourism development and potentials stretching in natural resources and environment (21.25 %).

Introduction

In the future Thailand will be part of the AEC (ASEAN Economic Community: AEC), whose main goal is to provide its member Association of South-East Asia (Association of South East Asian Nations) or the ASEAN market and production single base. By initiatives to implement new mechanisms and measures to ensure the flow of goods, services, labor and investment liberalization. Reducing the gap within the group. This will lead to a stable, prosperous, competitive with other regions, which are the major challenges and changes that dramatically affect both Thailand and the remaining members in the nine countries.

Tourism is one of branch intensive service branches in Thailand has been honored to host the main coordinator of the ASEAN Economic Community. The single income amounts to Thailand each year to continue at least 2-5 billion over the spending of tourists and tourism-related business such as transportation, accommodation / transportation of food, entertainment. and recreation and other information from the Department of Trade Negotiations (2553) argues that tourists arriving in Thailand to have cost around 3,600 Thai bath per day per person and each will be in Thailand for a period of approximately 8 days.

Thailand's vital tourism sector for years. Experience in the past year after the economic crisis in 2540, the government designated the tourism sector is a key part of the economy. And declared the year 2541-2542 was a year promoting tourism Thailand (Amazing Thailand), which resulted in the number of tourists increased steadily. Although a major tourist attraction in the south (Phuket, Phang Nga, Krabi) is affected by the Tsunami disaster (tsunami) in the year 2547, and the political violence in Thailand in 2552 and 2553, but the impact on the tourism industry of Thailand and could not recover in a short time. Because of Thailand is famous for its abundance and variety of attraction many culture, history and natural attractions. Including shopping centers spread across the country. (Thailand Tourism Review, 2011) Moreover, Thailand is also known as a country with a good image of the sights and tourist activities. Seen from the rankings of the World Travel Mart. Attractions in Chiang Khan District comprising eco-nature with rocks in the middle of the Mekong River, known as the "(1) Kaeng Kud Khu" has been dubbed. "Heaven on Earth" can admire the beauty of the river and the Egret birds are flying back to the nest in the evening. The morning watch. Phu tauk a land of fog. With cultural attractions include the interesting tradition is to put a bowl of rice. Buddha image Xang. Accumulate merit and travel to the land of the Mekong River Thailand - Laos Visiting temples. Philistines worshiped practitioners like good practice. Chedi Phra Buddha and ancient People believability.

The City of Savannah in Vientiane is a city with borderland of Thailand at Chiang Khan District in Loei contact with the Mekong River between the two countries. And this river is a major transportation routes

everyday. The population of the city reflects that this threat is also used across the Mekong River in Thailand, especially tourism in Chiang Khan.

Current awareness and popularity of a visit to Chiang Khan to welcome a lot of visitors which the local have no action plan for tourism activities in a systematic manner. In the near future Chiang Khan may have been affected by the destruction and damage of the area due to lack of appropriate travel and event management effectively. It also does not provide any of the activities along the river to travel towards the ASEAN Community in the near future, especially in English skills.

All of the above, it is necessary to be prepared to become ASEAN community keen for visitors to prepare for the event to promote tourism along the Mekong. Especially in the areas of English language skills to guide households, food, accommodation, car hire, etc., which must be non-destructive to the environment and the traditional lifestyle of the local people towards conservation, but the culture of the community to get to know the world. The results of the research community is a form of tourism activities appropriate for use as a guideline to promote tourism, which generates income to the community. The community has a strong economy and a strong economy is the foundation of the country.

Objectives of the research

The research objectives are:

1. to study tourism potential in Chiang Khan at Loei province Thailand and Sanakham in Lao PDR.
2. to study the readiness of communities and to prepare the community and parties related with tourism activities at destinations along the Mekong River in Chiang Khan at Loei province Thailand.
3. to study the needs of the tourism activities at destinations along the Mekong River in Chiang Khan at Loei province, Thailand

Literature Review

Tourism is a major economic factor in Thailand, contributing an estimated 6.7% to Thailand's GDP in 2007. (Thailand Tourism Review, 2011) On June 1, 2013, *Time* magazine reported that Bangkok was identified as the most visited city in the world by the 2013 Global Destination Cities Index. (Kristene, 2013).

Among the reasons for the increase in tourism in the 1960s were the stable political atmosphere and the development of Bangkok as a crossroads of international air transportation. The hotel industry and retail industry both expanded rapidly due to tourist demand. It was also boosted by the presence of US soldiers who started to arrive in the 1960s for *Rest and Recuperation* (R&R) during the Vietnam War period (Ouyyanont, 2001). Coinciding, international mass tourism sharply increased during the same period due to the rising standard of living, more people acquiring more free time *and* due to improvements in technology making it possible to travel further, faster, cheaper and in greater numbers, epitomised by the Boeing 747 which first flew commercially in 1970 (UNESCO, 2010) Thailand was one of the major players in Asia to capitalise on this then-new trend.

Tourist numbers have grown from 336,000 foreign visitors and 54,000 R&R soldiers in 1967 (Ouyyanont, 2001) to over 22 million international guests visiting Thailand in 2012. The average duration of their stay in 2007 was 9.19 days, generating an estimated 547,782 million Thai baht, around 11 billion Euro. (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2008) In 2007, Thailand was the 18th most visited country in the *World Tourism rankings* with 14.5 million visitors.

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand, (2011) 55% of the tourists in 2007 came from the Asia Pacific region, Japanese and Malaysians forming the two biggest groups. The largest groups of Western tourists come from the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, the United States and Scandinavia. The number of tourists arriving from Russia is on the rise (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2008) Around 55% of Thailand's tourists are return visitors. The peak period is during the Christmas and New Year holidays when Western tourists flee the cold conditions.

Tourism is a complex phenomenon, one that is extremely difficult to describe succinctly. Any model of tourism must capture the composition or components of the tourism system, as well as the key processes and outcomes that occur within tourism. These processes and outcomes include the very essence of tourism, the travel experience, and the supporting means by which tourism is made possible. (Goeldner, 2012)

Research Methodology

In this study, a combination of research methods is used by focusing on the qualitative research method as the main approach and the quantitative research method as a supplement. As partial of the qualitative research, the Participatory Action Research (PAR) is used by employing the combination of qualitative methods such as focus group discussion, the brainstorming meetings. Data collection bases on the analysis of the documents, in-depth interviews and participatory observation. As for the quantitative study, community profile survey and the questionnaires are used.

Research methodology of this study can be described as following.

1. Population and samples

The target populations of this study are divided according to the data collecting methods as detailed below. The populations consist of tour operators, community members and community leaders, the representatives of municipalities of Chiang Khan. and the tourist were asked to respond to the survey of the needs of the tourism activities at destinations along the Mekong River in Chiang Khan at Loei province ,Thailand altogether 100 of the tourist were responded to the questionnaire.

2. Data collecting tools

In collecting data in this study, the tools used are associated with the qualitative and quantitative methodology as described below.

- 1) Quantitative research tools include the questionnaire asking the needs of the tourism activities at destinations along the Mekong River in Chiang Khan at Loei province, Thailand.
- 2) Qualitative research tools include:
 - a) In-depth interview about the potential in Chiang Khan at Loei province Thailand and Sanakham in Lao PDR. And the readiness of communities and to prepare the community and parties related with tourism activities at destinations along the Mekong River in Chiang Khan at Loei province Thailand.
 - b) Focus group discussion.

3. Data analysis

In analyzing collected data in this study, the method used is according to the qualitative and quantitative analysis as following.

- 1) The analysis of data collected from using the survey forms and the questionnaire bases on using the software programs. Data are coded and recorded into the database. The fundamental statistics used cover the percentage, the frequency,
- 2) Qualitative data were analyzed by using content analysis. The researcher analyzed the data initially along with the data collecting for each procedure. The data were recorded carefully and then organized into categories to be classified and analyzed based on the concepts or theory to draw the conclusion. Then the research findings were presented in descriptive data in the form of the research report.

Research results

1. The potential of tourism in Chiang Khan, Loei Province and Sanakhan, Lao PDR cloud be classified into 3 types.

First, Tourism oriented natural denominations consist of: (1) Kaeng Kud Khu and (2) Phu tauk a land of fog.



Figure 1: Tourism oriented natural in Thailand

Second, tourism oriented culture denominations consist of : (1) Tai Dam cultural village (2) Wat Phra Phutthabat Phu khwa Ngern (3)the way of life (4) tradition's namely the tradition of the end of Buddhist Lent, tradition ghost feathers water, Songkran. Tradition boat racing .Loy Krathong and the offering alms glutinous rice. The floating Pha splash overboard Mekong international film festival (5) shopping area at the walking Street Chiang Khan



Figure 2: tourism oriented culture in Thailand

Third health tourism consist of: (1) riding a bicycle to the old wooden houses, cafes and antique shops (2) massage. The potential of tourism in Sanakham in Lao PDR comprised cultural tourism, such as the Buddhist Lent Festival Boon Pra Vat including cultural attractions as the temple such as Wat Sriphomwararam, Wat Saen and Wat Phahod and health tourism such as cycling a bicycle along the Mekong River.

2. The study of community readiness and preparing of the community partners related with tourism activities along the Mekong River in Chiang Khan at Loei

Readiness and preparedness as follows.

The landscape in tourist areas by providing space to accommodate the increase. Moreover, it is preparing a tourist information center and Chiang Khan Museum. The accommodation, food and facilities. The city is preparing to design embedded with facilities such as toilets. The tourism activities. Preparation activities such as mountain bike riding adventure on Phu tauk a land of fog. Travel goods Chiang Khan City is the traditional occupation of the people in the area are producing quilts and also promote the development of

products with a loincloth to promote production and processing of products. The standard of staff. English language training is preparing to communicate to staff. Training guide kit for the youth in school.

3. Studying needs of the community tourism activities along the Mekong River in Chiang Khan at Loei found that tourist needs Chiang Khan to be a city of peace for most of the holidays (22.19 %).The detail are in Table 1.

Table 1: Need of tourist

Need of tourist	frequency	percentage
- to be a city of peace for most of the holidays	63	22.19
- As a tourist destination with its magical charm	20	7.05
- The city is ideal for elderly residents to live after retirement.	21	7.39
-A city with high security.	10	3.53
-Natural beauty.	52	18.32
- Have to maintain a good environment, no pollution.	16	5.63
- With shopping. Souvenirs and night market.	16	5.63
- There are many delicious restaurants.	11	3.87
- There are many delicious restaurants.	21	7.39
- There is a standard hotel have good service.	11	3.87
- The location and facilities are included for the seminar.	16	5.63
- Diverse in the city.	11	3.87
- Diverse in the city.	16	5.63
- Good for transportation and utilities .		
- Good for the management of tourism .		
Total	284	100

From table 1 found that the most need of tourist is Chiang Khan to be a city of peace for most of the holidays (22.19 %) and natural beauty (18.32 %)

The needs of tourism development in Chiang Khan. The details are as follows.

Management: Travelers need to maintain safety for tourists. Zoning should be consistent with the community's context and culture. The need to maintain a sustainable tourism destination.

The sights: Should develop a clean and beautiful beach along the river should also organize stores and should develop new tourist increase which should be developed outside the city increased.

Staffs: should develop awareness. Traders should not take advantage of tourists. Selling price should not be very expensive and should be shelved for more security.

Infrastructure / basic service: Should be a tourist attraction and street signs have public toilets clean and adequate. Should be clean and beautiful landscapes along the river, with fresh flowers. What is most needed to improve the water supply to the water is not flowing enough sometimes.

Public relations: Want to promote various festivals and attractions, especially through the Internet. Should increase the promotion

Recommendations

Recommendation in application of research findings

1. Promote the town of Chiang Khan is a quiet relaxing holiday. Therefore, all parties involved should try to conserve. Maintain the nice work peace and quiet
2. Government should provide support seriously. The Government will provide support to the publicity, but also access to information to all groups, so everyone involved should accelerate the development of information systems and proactive media outreach.
3. Need to improve the infrastructure / basic service. There should be signs to tourist sites and roads and public toilets clean and adequate. Should be clean and beautiful landscapes along the river. With fresh flowers.
4. Tourist need to maintain safety. So there should be zoning issues will travel to the urban context and culture. The need to maintain a sustainable tourism destination.

5. In tourism development should be clean and beautiful beaches along the river. Should organize the development of new attractions, shops and more. Which should be developed outside the city increased.

Recommendation for further study

1. There should be continuing to create innovative promotional tour to suit all audiences.
2. There should be further study on travel patterns to cover all countries in the Mekong river basin.

Conclusion

The results showed that there are the preparation of the landscape in tourist areas by providing space of accommodate to support the increase of tourist. Moreover, it is preparing a tourist information center. The banks of the Mekong. This is because all these things are necessary in the future, when the liberalization of travel seamless to become the ASEAN Community which have more tourist to visit Thailand so the local need to prepare such an unavoidable.

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Acknowledgements

This research and study was funded by a research grant from Loei Rajabhat University.

Biography

Dr. Patthira Phon-ngarm is an Associate Professor and Chairman of Ph.D. Program in Regional Development Strategies Loei Rajabhat University, Thailand. She has finished Doctoral degree in Population Education from Mahidol University, Thailand. She has published 10 journals and 6 conferences papers. Dr. Patthira has done 24 research projects. Her research interests include community development