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THE PATTERNS OF TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN HOT SPRING SITES IN THE WESTERN THAILAND

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the patterns of tourism management in hot spring sites in the western Thailand. The study was conducted using qualitative approach, in collaboration with participation from local communities. The fieldwork combines varied sources of data gathering techniques including in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys, and observations. The samples were stakeholders in relation to tourism development such as governmental organizations, entrepreneurs, local shop owners, community leaders and members, and individual persons relevant to management of three hot spring destinations in western Thailand. The collected data from interviews were analyzed, interpreted and reported using content analysis and descriptive explanation methods.

The results showed that:

1) There were, three sites grouped that were different from each other: 1) be managed by local community; 2) be managed by sub-district organization and 3) be managed by forestry department.

2) All of the three representative hot spring sites, in fact, were outstanding in terms of their local identities and natural resources which were suitable for developing into tourism destinations. However, they did not deeply focused to be used for health tourism at the sites.

3) In terms of tourism patterns, the three sites were considered as health tourism destination which combined health tourism activities with other tourism resources and activities both in the area and nearby the destinations in order to encourage the local to use the hot springs for tourism activities.

4) The patterns of tourism management in hot spring for health tourism development in each study sites were different depending on the organizations that managed the area. For example, some sites were took care by the national park. Some of them were controlled by the Tambon Administration Organization (TAO). And some sites were locally managed by the community members. As a result, the levels of participation in each site were different. There was only one, has been managed by local community, participation level of local residents was higher than the other authorities, for instance.

Moreover, a hot spring tourism master plan should be launch as a guideline for tourism planning and management of hot spring destinations throughout Thailand. This master plan would help all destinations to be better plan and set the appropriate directions of hot spring tourism development, which would benefit to the sustainability of the resources and the conservation of local identity and uniqueness.

Keywords

Tourism Pattern, Tourism Management, Hot Spring, Western Thailand

1. Introduction

Tourism industry plays a great role in Thailand economic development as it brings more benefits to the country: more income; more jobs; and more tourism revenue throughout the country. Tourism ingeneral promotes and encourages people to visit tourism destinations in the country and increase revenue at the sites (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 1997; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2001). It also encourages and alarms social to adapt themselves for economic and sustainability development (Sharpley, 2000). Therefore, any activities concern to tourism development and processes of strategies and planning development

in any areas have to be studied and surveyed for protecting and conserving tourism resource to develop tourism's potential appropriately in terms of ecosystem, economic, social, and community development (Chitangwattana, 2005).

However, Activities and patterns that are occurred, had positive result to economic, social and environment. But, there had some contents were negative outcomes in tourism, problem in administration, revenue management, increasing of leaving cost amongs communities in the site, conflict in the communities, invadingplubish sites and imappropriate construction to the culture and environment in the site. This is including lack of knowledgement in tourism admistration and management and it points out strategy in tourism development, especially in local participation. (Duffy, 2006; Butler, 1991; Holden, 2006)

Health Tourism is a form of tourism that provides a site visiting to see beauty of the site and also learning through local's way of life and relaxing with tourism resources. The form also focuses on some activities that helps and recovers the tourists to be healthier. In general, health tourism has conducted relaxing program during the trip in natural area. Therefore, it brings nature as ways of atreatment and promote visotors both physical and mental balance living (Sriwattananukuljij, 2003). It means that health tourism is a from of tourism that bring tourist awareness in their healthy and environmental concren among nature (Department of National Park Thailand , 2014).

Hot spring is one of tourism destinations in Thailand which is famous for tourists' body treatment and their healthy promoting. In Western Thailand there were 18 hot spring sites using for tourism (Boonchai and Thansarawiput, 2003). From the studies in the past had found that services and activities based on hot springs, were about accommodation, nature exporing, recreation, traditional massage and food and beverage services, for example. In the western Thailand, the study had also found that hot spring sites was just for relaxing, some sites were not used for tourism as they were far away from road accessing and in the deep jungle. Whereas, some sites were left without using for tourists' body treatment and tourism purposes. Some sites has been using for tourism, but there were crowded during weekend and long holidays. Moreover, some others were lack of knowledge in using and managing of facilities in the sites, including usless of hot spring water on to the ground without collecting it for tourism and household benefit purposes. Some of the local were lack of management and maintaining facilities in the area. Importantly, they had no survey for appropriate tourism management in the

area that caused the tourism unseccessful in terms of planning and development (Chuamaunghan, 2013)

Therefore, to make response to the need of visitors, it has to be a study of area management for guidelining the dimation of tourism management; tourism products and services in accordance with local participation.

The principal objectives of the study were as follows:

- To study the potentials of tourism resources at hot spring sites in the western Thailand.
- To study the patterns of tourism management at hot spring sits in the Western Thailand.

Nowadays trends in health promoting is needed among tourists are increasing including hot spring tourism. The patterns of tourism management are also needed to focus for better and sustainable development, especially in tourism concerns. As a result, this study focuses on the patterns of tourism management for appropriate tourism management in hot spring destinations for sustainability.

2. Related Works

2.1 Community involvement in tourism decision-making

There are many tourism development studies that advocate increased community involvement and participatory planning, seeking to widen inclusion in tourism decision-making. Bramwell, and Sharman (2002) argues that structural inequalities within communities are influent local decision-making and that are trying to redress low and exclusive levels of involvement in tourism decision-making requires more radical intervention.

The issue of appropriate participation in policy decision-making is complex and culturally specific norms and societal values need to be taken into account. Only by gaining the perspectives of actors based within specific geographical case study areas can these issues be explored.

It has been identified in a number of tourism studies that the existence of power elites and connections to the most powerful can affect the ability of local people to influence tourism decision-making. Diamantis (2004) shares Bramwell, and Sharman (2002) observations of the

relevance of wider structural inequalities in their observation that 'having the least control can translate into having the least involvement'.

2.2 Tourism Potentials

Tourism Authority of Thailand TAT (1996) claims that potentials of tourism must be considered these 4 factors: 1) the main principles of tourism; 2) the support to destination ; 3) the support for tourism facilities and 4) infrastructures. The potentials in different sites are differs from others , depend on resources, their beauties, identities, histories and their esthetics. It means that the qualification of resources in the sites makes them different uses for tourism. The differences of the potential cause of variety of tourism patterns in the destination. Therefore, the more complexity of resources, the more tourism potentials that makes the destination rich of tourism patterns and worth visiting.

The Sukhothai Thammathiraj University (2009) views about tourism potential in any area that there were: 1) the physical pattern of the destination which have to be considered in body of the destination, accessibility, complexity of resources and its worth to visiting; 2) environmental conservation that have to be thought about waste, water quality, air pollution, noise and sensitively of environment management; 3) the economic and social that related to local benefits, local capability on their living and their strengthen in local cultural conservation; 4) the value of culture and history are considered in value of local identity, their wisdom, aesthetics, value of history, value to society and the risk to be destroyed; 5) value to learning and education such as benefit and worth of learning, method of giving information in tourism sites for learning and process of learning techniques improvement and 6) quality of management in tourism which is important in its potential to be used for tourism activities in appropriate ways.

2.3 Tourism Patterns

There are many sources, mentioned about tourism pattern, likewise Kangnoi (2009); Kasikorn Thai Bank Research Center (2012); Thailand Development Research Institute (1997) and Tourism Authority of Thailand (2001) mention about tourism pattern that there are plenty of tourism patterns as it depends on their resources and activities at the site. Form the variety of the patterns, ecotourism, lithotourism, community-based tourism, agrotourism, adventure tourism, homestay tourism, health and wellness tourism, for examples. They were indicated that the concept related to natural and cultural based tourism that promotes environmental education, which is managed tourism for sustainability. Similarly, Fennell (2003: 25) suggests that

ecotourism "is a sustainable form of nature resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (in terms of control, benefits, profits and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to conservation or preservation of such areas". That definition adds a locally oriented dimension. Lascrain (1996: 20) similarly defines ecotourism as "Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficial, active socio-economic involvement of local populations". From the view of all tourism patterns, can concluded that all tourism patterns related to tourism resources at the site in cooperation between local, government and private sectors set up for that and also about tourists behaviors.

2.4 Tourism Management

The fundamental requirement for effective tourism management is to have an appropriate and realistic policy and planning framework. Policy can simply be defined as a course of action that is adopted and pursued by the government (Fennell et al, 2000). Policy provides the broad guidelines that are intended to shape the development of particular sectors in a way presumed by the relevant authority to be desirable. The clear position of tourism policy and planning as a government prerogative, however, does not mean that implementation is a simple or taken-for-granted task. There is the problem of achieving compromise among all the stakeholders who constitute the tourism sector within a particular planning jurisdiction. Beyond this internal context, tourism policy can be pursued concurrently and in an often contradictory way by authorities at a local, regional, national and international level, each of which often can assiduously attempt to expand its own sphere of influence. Tourism policy makers and planners must contend not only with potentially incompatible external sectors, such as the forestry and agriculture industries, but also with tourism activities that may interfere negatively with tourism, such as hunting and mass, beach-based tourism (Fennell et al, 2000).

Tourism policies can relate to local and national levels, and ideally these need to be integrated. But the pattern of centralized administration in many countries, especially in the developing world, can mean that policy is focused on the national rather than the local levels. In the present study the emphasis is on the local level, and on the extent to which local community actors see tourism, especially hot spring tourism as enabling them to improve their general

quality of life, such as standards of health and education, without having to sell off their natural resources or compromise their culture (Drumm, 1998). Consideration needs to be paid to the local points of view and to any gaps between them and national government policies and priorities for hot spring tourism.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sampling Groups

The research focuses on qualitative research methods using in-depth interview and also focus groups for governors, local people, entrepreneurs and private sectors in 3 hot spring sites in Western Thailand. They are: 1) Nong Yalong hot spring in Petchaburi Province; 2) Hindard Hot Spring, in Kanchanaburi Province and 3) Huiy Namnak in Tak Province.

3.2 Research Methods

The semi-structured interviews for stakeholders were intended to assist with understanding the specific hot spring resources, tourism management, local participation and planning for tourism in the areas. The semi-structured interviews were basically semi-standardized, with a structure but with opportunities for more open discussion (Sarantakos, 1988). The technique allowed for the gathering of supplementary information about the topics being studied, by providing clear topics but also by allowing for subsequent questions to be improvised during the conversation. The method also permitted respondents' sufficient freedom of response to reflect more deeply on their views. All the questions were based on the conceptual framework and related to pattern of tourism management in hot spring sites.

As this research is a qualitative study, a purposive sampling of key informants was used in order to obtain rich information on the topic being studied. The selection of these respondents was shaped by the information gleaned from the literature review and desk research, including from literature on stakeholder analysis in ecotourism research. This technique identified representatives of stakeholder groups that were decision-maker group or who had other close relationships with tourism planning and management in these 3 sites. Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover and gain insights and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998:61) as it was adopted broadly to reflect the population, but there is no certainty that it is representative in the sense used in quantitative research with much larger samples.

After gathering all samplings, the data then was analysed using content analysis, a technique that provides new insights and increases the researcher's understanding of particular phenomena. The approach to content analysis used here was thematic analysis, where the coding scheme was based on categories designed to capture the dominant themes present in the text (Franzosi, 2004: 550). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes with data. The process starts with the analyst looking for and noticing patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data. The endpoint is the reporting of the content and the meaning of patterns or themes in the data, where "themes are abstract constructs the investigators identify before, during, and after analysis" (Ryan and Bernard, 2000: 780).

4. The Result

The study found that there were 3 main sites out come as follow:

1) The first site is Nong Ya Plong hot spring, Petchaburi province. The area was run by local village members, as it was of local community controlled. The temperature of hot spring at this site was 55 Celsius. The community set up their tourism committee, led by their village leader under consultant of the provincial governor. All members had their responsibilities to join and run the tourism activities. The province supported them at the first time by offer private baths and public pool for visitors to soak their bodies while visiting the site for health tourism. Importantly, the way to see the original hot spring spot, tourists have to walk along the natural trail to the main pond. Recently, the committee created their local-mini-bus servicing tourists to the original hot spring and charged them in a cheap way. Moreover, they provided a small canal from the original hot spring pond for tourists soaking their feet and relaxing under the tree in natural view. This site itself and their management can be of a good example of tourism managed by local people.



Figure 1: *Nong Ya Plong Hot Spring*



Figure 2: *Area for tourists' soaking their feet*

2) The second site is Hin Dard hot spring, in Kanchanaburi province. The site located at a natural river bank which believed to be used as onsen by Japanese during World WarII. The province nowadays becomes tourism destination in historical and natural destinations after World War II. For the hot spring is only 40 minutes rides from the city center. It is surrounded by forest and natural resources. It was adjusted to be zones: parking and shops of food and drinks services; ponds for health tourism; Thai traditional massage and natural trail at hill side.

The hot spring provided health tourism as public hot spring ponds for visitors to enjoy and soak their bodies in the warm natural spring ponds, near the river bank. The 3 ponds along the river services for visitors to use as soaking in the natural hot water. The pond sizes 30 meters and 1 meter depth with temperature of 41 celsius. As it lies along the river bank, it helps promoting tourism to tourists to experience soaking in natural hot spring and then move to natural cold water in the river. Together with this atmosphere, it is surrounded by natural forest and forest park closely to the area as well. There are facilities provided for tourists, car park, food and drink shops, tourism activities (soaking in both hot spring water and cold water in the river) and experiences natural and historical trail. However, the historical was not main purpose visiting for visitors as it was not developed and promoted for historical tourism.

The area had been run by sub-district organization and local participation in tourism planning and management by allowed the local people to share their idea on hot spring development and also allowed the local people to open shops and showed their local products to sell to tourists. Moreover, some cooperation had been set up amongst the administrative team to

produce mineral water in bottle for sell to visitors and in the region. Moreover, the planning was about zoning and developing for international visitors to visit as the present there were Russian, Korean and Japanese visited the site.



Figure 3: *Hin Dard hot spring site*



Figure 4: *Changing cloth area*

3) The last site is Hauiy Nam Nak, Tak province. It is in cooperation of tourism management between a National park, sub-district organization and local community in the area. The village in cooperated work with the tourism management was tribal people. Therefore, they had their unique culture, way of life, handicraft products and their particular livelihoods. These could show to tourists for their cultural tourism as well.

About the hot spring in the area, there were 3 main ponds with temperature between 59-63Celsius. The site provided public pond for body soaking in hot spring water, but separated male and female rooms. They also had private bathtubs for visitors for 3 rooms. It seems worth and progress in terms of tourism services. But, it was not, since the place was based on National department, which was lack of staff in tourism services. Therefore, the local community wanted to join with, but it was in negotiation. As the past, the site was in control of the sub-district organization, local people from the village became staff and serviced for health tourism and also provided and showed their local products to tourists. Later the department had found the area was in boundary of the National Park department, it became a conservation site, rather than promote for tourism.



Figure 5: *Original Hot Spring Site*



Figure 6: *Heart-Shape-like hot spring*

5. Conclusion and future works

5.1 Potential of Hot Springs

The potential of hot spring in the 3 sites were different in terms of using hot springs for tourism. The first site (Hin Dard Hot Spring, Kanchanaburi Province), the tourism data has been gathered. They were developed for tourism purpose for both domestic and international tourists but face with tourism management between local government and local people in the area, in terms of benefits and management. The second (Nong Ya Plong Hot Spring, Petchaburi Province) which was some tourism details had been gathered. From an initial assessment, they were potential to be an attraction and they were being developed to be new attractions. It run by local people, but they needed some advises and funding supported by the nation. The last was (Hauiy Nam Nak, Tak province) where tourism data has been gathered. They were potential to be attractions and the development had already been applied, but in terms of tourism management had not been cleared in cooperation between National Park, local administrative and local villagers. It had been left for conservation purpose rather than tourism way. The development of these hot spring areas should concern about the suitable and appropriate patterns for tourism resource uses in areas. Tourism resources have to be linked with all attractions in areas. Moreover, the participation of the communities was a key to a success of development and sustainability.

5.2 Health Tourism and Sustainable Development

The notion of health tourism is discussed and evaluated, while many authors suggest varied definitions of health tourism and nature based tourism (all hot spring sites are in nature based), there are often common elements or principles. Cater (1997), Blamey (2001) and Orams (2001) indicate that the concept relates to nature based tourism that promotes environmental education and that is managed for sustainability. Similarly, Fennell (2008) suggests that nature based tourism "is a sustainable form of nature resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (in terms of control, benefits, profits and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to conservation or preservation of such areas". That definition adds a locally oriented dimension. Lascrain (1996: 20) similarly defines nature based tourism as "Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying features – both past and present) that promotes conservation in hot springs, have low visitor impact, and provide for beneficial, active socio-economic involvement of local populations". This definition also provides some emphasis on local benefits for residents Cooper and Cooper (2009).

5.3 Tourism Patterns in Hot Spring Site

Tourism management in hot spring sites in western Thailand can be categorized to be 3 patterns:

- 1) The pattern of tourism management by local community, like Nong Ya Plong in Petchaburi Province. This site, was run by local community in the site on their hot spring tourism management. This management seems to be worked in terms of tourism management by the local people. It can say that local people have been completely involved in tourism benefits and management.
- 2) The pattern of tourism management by local government, like Hin Dard hot spring in Kanchanaburi Province. This site was manage and operated hot spring tourism by local government and part of local community. The management seems to be progress in management (Kangnoi, 2009). But, there were lacked of local participation in terms of tourism management.
- 3) The Pattern of tourism managed by government as the National park. It was lack of local participation and also lack of service staff, in terms of tourism and hospitality

services. However, in the way of conservation, it seems to be completely done for natural and environmental conservation. However, it is still investigated for whom are exactly to be controlled and how could local people be involved in tourism development and management.

For sustainable tourism, all hot spring sites should have been planned and applied guidelines for tourism planning and management of hot spring destinations throughout Thailand. The master plan would help all destinations to be better improvement in appropriate directions of all hot spring tourism sites. These would be benefit to local people, organisations, the private sectors and of course, the sustainability of the resources and its conservation for sustainability.

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