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THE STANDARD OF COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM MARKETING: A CASE STUDY OF KLONGDAEN COMMUNITY, THAILAND

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Abstract

Community-based tourism has been identified as a sustainable alternative to mainstream tourism for not only big cities but also small communities throughout Thailand. Klongdaen community of Songkra Province in southern Thailand is not an exception. The community relies largely on tourism revenues, yet marketing research has not been a focal point of study. This study; therefore, attempts to (1) verify tourism products and services; and (2) identify the patterns of marketing relevant to the context of the community. Field survey, observation, focus group

discussion, and in-depth interview were used to collect data. The results showed that the prevalent tourism products and services consist of natural sites, cultural sites, religious sites, community history, local legends and anecdotes, local wisdoms, local arts and performances, local handicrafts, local foods, local festivals, tourism activities, homestay services, and other tourism services. In addition to this, four patterns of community-based tourism marketing namely; manufacturing local products and services; fair pricing; sustainable marketing channel; and responsible sales promotion were also found.

Keywords

Tourism Standard, Community Based Tourism Marketing and Klongdaen Community

1. Introduction

Songkra, Thailand's southern province has attracted both mainstream tourists - mostly from Malaysia – and special interest tourists for a number of decades. Such niche markets may include community-based tourism, eco-tourism, religious tourism, recreational tourism, and community livelihood tourism. (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2008). Khlong Daen Community is named after the KhlongDaen Canal which divides Rha Note District of Songkra Province and HuaSai District of Nakorn Sri Thammarat Province. (SunyaSiwiroj, 2009). The first settlement of the community was said to be merchants and people who benefited from marine trades. According to the historical evidence, KhlongDaen Community had expanded due to its juxtaposition to the Gulf of Thailand. After the completion of Highway 408, water trades and transportations had been diminished causing a number of residents to relocate and triggering the downfall of the community. (Guidelines to Sustainable tourism developmental planning. Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013)

KhlongDaen's floating houses and its livelihood were later revitalized by National Housing Authority in an attempt to give birth to the community's tourism industry. The floating market was open every Saturday in order that the villagers were able to present their locally made products to incoming tourists (JareySuwannachad et al., 2009). The number of visitors has increased since the inception of the community's tourism campaign in 2009, and gradually benefited the whole village socially and economically.

However, the community has faced with various managerial operations; for instance, tourism marketing concepts, tourist behaviors, channels of distribution, and tourism networks. It

is, therefore, the aims of this study to verify tourism products and services and to identify the patterns of marketing relevant to the context of the community in order that the community is able to remain competitive in the modern, sophisticating markets. (Pojana Sa-nguansri and SompopYeejorhor, 2009) (Community-Based Tourism Institute, 2008).

2. Literature Review

Marketing concept has been identified by a number of researchers in various ways Rawat Chatriwisit, 2006). stated that it is a social process that individuals or groups obtain what they need and want by exchanging products of value with others. In business, marketing concept refers to an attempt to satisfy customers, to create values to the products or services, and to encourage repeat transactions. In addition, it may involve the ability to expand target groups.

This concept is relevant to that of the American Marketing Association which defines marketing as a planning and management process that aims at adding values to products or services. The process may include pricing, marketing promotion, and product and service distribution in order to create exchange and satisfaction to target customers which lead to the achievement of the firms' goals (Rungruengpol, 2009).Tourism Elements. The study of tourism marketing has evolved around the so-called 4Ps, which is considered as a marketing mix.

1. Product refers to a good, idea, or service that the seller offers a buyer for purchase and responds to a buyer's needs and wants. Weaver, 2002 explained that goods and services in the tourism industry are different from those of other industries. These differences include four attributes, namely intangibility, variability, inseparability, and perishability. Details of each attributes are as follows.Intangibility:

Tourism products or services are intangible. That is to say they cannot be seen, touched, smelled, or tasted prior to the actual purchase. Customers make a decision from the information presented by sellers or agents. The data of the products or services basically include prices, photos, and perhaps provider's manners.

Thus, travel agents tend to build confidence among potential buyers by presenting attractive travel brochures, decorating ambient offices, and showing decent pictures of the destinations. Nowadays technology plays an increasing role in providing credibility, and reducing

gaps between the agents and the purchasers. Variability: Different people perceive tourism services differently, largely due to various factors.

The moods of a potential buyer may affect the decision to buy the product. The attitudes of both the customers and the firm agents also play a pivotal role in the decision-making process. The experience that a tourist has –favorable or unfavorable– influences the chance to purchase; inseparability:

Tourism products are purchased then produced and consumed at the same place and time. Airline seats are booked first and then they are occupied by the customers on the day of the departure. Meanwhile, hotel rooms are checked in on the same day that the guests arrive at the premise. Perishability: Tourism products tend to be perishable if they are not constantly purchased. In other words, they cannot be stored and sold at a later time.

For instance, a flight of 400 seats should be fully occupied at a certain time for maximum profits. Empty seats, 100 for example, on that flight cannot be sold in the following flight, causing a potential loss to the firm. Therefore, matching demand and supply is of paramount importance to the company.

2. Price: This attribute is extremely sensitive as it often affects the company's sales volume and, most importantly, survival. When setting a price of products and services, marketers should be aware of the perceived value, customers' expectation, and products' image.

3. Place: Besides product and price, place also plays a vital role in reaching company's target customers. It is also essential that the marketers take into consideration various channels of distribution where consumers can gain access to the products and services of the firm.

4. Promotion: The above elements of the marketing mix are not able to succeed without proper methods of communication. These may include advertising, public relations, or sales promotion. The main goal of promotion is to stimulate customer's needs and wants which will have a direct impact on the purchase. The four elements of marketing mix should be well organized and clearly set so that they can build trust and convince the target markets.

That is to say the company may not be successful if it fails to adopt proper strategies in each attribute (Rungtongpol, 2009). Usually most marketers respond to the company's target

groups by creating products that fit their needs, setting the prices that are satisfactory, placing the products where they can be easily accessible and selecting channels that arouse the quest for purchase. Meanwhile, the strategies of each marketing mix should be conducted under the marketing management process which includes organizational planning, marketing control and evaluation, and marketing database system.

Despite the fact that each process of the marketing management cannot be totally controlled due to some internal and external factors, it is imperative that marketers understand the environmental impacts facing the organization, namely competitors, economic situations, and legal issues.

3. Methodology

The research is qualitative in nature; therefore, the researchers divided methods of obtaining data into two main phases. The first phase was conducted through relating documents in order to study community-based tourism concepts, theories, and standards. Data were gathered from various sources; for instance, textbooks, journal articles, reports, research papers, and internet and printing media. In the second phase of the study – field research – observations, interviews, focus group interviews with local people, and affiliating tourism networks were used to collect the information.

4. Sample Population

Using purposive sampling technique, this study classified sample population into four groups: community chief representatives who take part in tourism management; tour operator representatives in Songkra province and nearby provinces; tourism network representatives from state and public sectors; and administrative representatives from Provincial Organization, Songkra Office of Tourism and Sports, Tourism Authority of Thailand Had Yai Office, and tourism experts from educational institutes.

5. Tools/Data Collection

This study used five different tools to collect data: local products/services checklist; behavioral observation form; focus group interview questionnaire; individual questionnaire; and

tourism standard evaluation form. These tools were administered to the studied populations, and the data were collected between 2013 and 2014.

6. Findings

The results of this study reveal four major tourism activities within the studied area.

1. Community tourism products include natural sites for example Dong Taan Roy Pee (ancient market), Ta Ken Seashore, and Three Canals connecting two provinces. KlongDaen riverside market appears to be the only cultural attraction of the community. KlongDaen Temple serves as the major religious tourism site. Legends and anecdotes like Look Kwaan and Chang Kom are samples of historical tourism scheme. Local wisdoms and intellects are also found prevalent; for instance, herbal expertise, and knowledge of building canal crossings, reservoirs, and creating folk performances.

2. Community learning activities consist of seven live bases. (Sin Sarobol, 2004). Each basedisplays the community's history and ways of life. Some examples of the bases are as follows: herbal medicinal cures; toy making techniques; traditional massage relieves; and palm leaves embroideries.

3. Tourist aids and services– there exist nine home-stay accommodations with the rate of 200 baht per person per night full board; one tourist information center; six local tour guides; approximately 50 eateries; six convenience stores; two medical centers; one police station; 18 public restrooms; 12 public phone booths; and 15 garbage cans.

4. Tourism marketing patterns in conjunction with local community are seen in four Elements, local product, equitable price, sustainable place, and responsible promotion. Each element contains various numbers of standard indicators which can be assessed.

5. Local product includes natural and environmental sites management with seven indicators; cultural, historical, architectural conservation and promotion with eight indicators; environmentally friendly local products with five indicators; culturally and ecologically conscious tourism activities with nine indicators; hospitable services with five indicators; food and drink services with eight indicators; trip and travel services with five indicators; and tourist safety and security with five indicators. (PeerachaiKulchai and DhananchaiMungjit, (2011). Equitable price encompasses endorsing fair price for visitors with two indicators; and equitable and proper revenue distribution with four indicators. Sustainable place is comprised of community-operated

distribution channel with five indicators; and external tourism networks with five indicators. Responsible promotion consists of actual publicity about the community with two indicators; and accessible public relations effort with three indicators. After identifying each element and its standard indicators, they then were assessed by tourism related experts. Overall, the ratings were relatively high. On a one-to-five scale, local product was approximately 3.94, equitable price 3.70, sustainable place 3.70, and while responsible promotion was around 3.20 respectively.

7. Conclusions

It is obvious that KlongDaen Community in southern province of Thailand possesses a variety of tourist attractions and services. Some of the attractions are natural, cultural, historical, and religious sites. Local arts and performances, local handicrafts, local foods, and homestay accommodations are amongst the services that the community has to offer to incoming visitors. Moreover, the community adopts tourism standards and marketing patterns in an attempt to provide the most satisfying services to its target markets. However, in order to attract more interest groups it is of paramount importance that community residents, local and state tourism administrative offices work together to achieve the goals.

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