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**GUIDELINES FOR ECOTOURISM PROMOTION AT BAN  
HUA TANG, LA-NGU DISTRICT, SATUN PROVINCE**

## GUIDELINES FOR ECOTOURISM PROMOTION AT BAN HUA TANG, LA-NGU DISTRICT, SATUN PROVINCE

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aims at exploring the potential and ways to promote ecotourism at Ban Hua Tang, La-ngu District, Satun Province. The samples were four key informants in the village, consisting of a village headman, a chairman, and a member of the community-based tourism group, as well as a village sage in Ban Hua Tang, by means of an in-depth interview. The results revealed that Ban Hua Tang has high potential to become an eco-tourism destination, as follows: 1) the community has abundant natural resources such as mangrove and lamphu forests which are the habitats of sea bass, river prawn, shellfish, sea crabs and Southern river terrapin (turtles) which are endemic animals of Satun Province, 2) the community has a religious leader and there are various fields of village sages such as the sage for food preservation (i.e. making pickled fish and pickled shellfish), the sage for fish cage culture, the sage for nipa palm leaves weaving, the sage for making traditional Thai desserts (i.e. egg snacks, crispy roti, and Thai fried peanut cookies), and the sage for Hua Tong ship building which is a vehicle for fishing and conducting marine tourism, and 3) the community has tourism activities related to the charming way of life, such as rafting to explore Khlong La-ngu, shellfish catching, mangrove planting to increase green space and be a habitat for fish, shrimp, shellfish, and local food cooking activities using raw materials in the community, etc. To promote eco-tourism in the Hua Tang community, there should be standardized tourism infrastructure development. The village should clearly have tourism interpretation signs and signposts. There should be public relations to promote the village and make it better known through the internet. Moreover, continuous eco-tourism activity development should also be carried out.

**Keywords:** eco-tourism, community-based tourism, Thailand

### INTRODUCTION

Tourists nowadays place importance on ecotourism, which aims to protect the environment and cultural traditions from historical sites, artifacts, and cultural performances. There are also some tourists who want to travel to experience local wisdom and the way of life. Therefore, ecotourism seems to be a global trend in tourism, and sustainability is widely known and aimed at tourism development today. Poonak (2015) stated that if the management of tourist attractions

has a good system, it can be used as a tool to conserve the environment of tourist attractions and surrounding areas. In the past, tourism destinations did not pay much attention to tourist attractions and surrounding areas until the ecotourism trend played a role globally. Many Thai parties began to see the value of tourism towards environmental conservation (Chettamas et al., 2003). Furthermore, tourism can also be a tool for community development by creating

opportunities for community organizations to play an important role in planning and directing their community development regarding the quality of life and all dimensions of local development (Intarakanerd et al., 2010).

The southern region of Thailand is located on a peninsula bordered by coastlines on both sides, namely the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. This gives communities in the south an advantage in terms of ecotourism resources. Satun, one of the provinces in the south, has a rapid growth of the tourism industry, resulting in good income for people and communities, but at the same time, the growth of the tourism industry has deteriorated the environment in many tourist destinations. Therefore, many communities have been aware of the two-side effects of the tourism industry.

Ban Hua Tang Community is a sub-district in La-ngu District, Satun Province, with a place rich in natural resources that are still abundant. The community became more involved and played a role in tourism, respectively, resulting in the development of community-based tourism. Therefore, this research seeks suitable ways to promote eco-tourism in the Ban Hua Tang community with two research objectives:

1. To study the community's potential for supporting eco-tourism in Ban Hua Tang Community, La-Ngu District, Satun Province.
2. To study the guidelines for promoting eco-tourism in Ban Hua Tang Community, La-Ngu District, Satun Province.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecotourism means travelling to natural, social, and cultural attractions to experience, learn about, and experience the natural environment, society, and culture as responsible tourism with a collaborative learning process of those involved under local participatory management to focus on the maintenance of sustainable ecology (Taweekikam, 2010). The components of eco-tourism consist of four aspects: 1) natural attractions that are unique to the local area, including art, cultural, and historical attractions; 2) communities and local

people who take part in activities such as thinking, planning, implementing the plan, and ownership of resources to participate in maintenance travel resources; 3) facilities for tourists such as public transport, accommodation, various shops, toilets, garbage bins, etc.; and 4) security by setting various standards for tourist safety at attractions and asking for cooperation from various agencies such as the tourist police, tourism volunteers, etc. (Suwanphimon, 2013: 46-51). Implementing community-based eco-tourism and conservation must consist of provision for the intact environment of the community, seeking assistance in the community, and bringing the community together to get what should be done (Pholperm, 2012).

## METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative study. The researchers used the narrative research method. It is one of the methods suitable to study human beings or society through meaningful storytelling that reflects the context of society in each period (Moen, 2006). The researchers therefore used the in-depth interview to study the actual situation, perspectives, ways of thinking, and methods for solving problems based on the direct experience of informants in order to understand the meaningful details of the Ban Hua Tang community's eco-tourism initiative. Using purposive sampling, the researchers contacted four key informants, including: 1) the village headman; 2) the chairman of community-based tourism; 3) a member of community-based tourism; and 4) a village sage. The in-depth interviews were conducted in March 2023 and lasted about 20 minutes each. The narrative data were thematically analyzed to find themes to respond to the research objectives.

## FINDINGS

### *The community's potential to support eco-tourism in Ban Hua Tang community*

- Natural resources: the Ban Hua Tang community has abundant natural resources, including mangrove forests, Nypa palms, Lamphu trees, and the La-Ngu River. There are various aquatic animals that live in the river, such as snapper, river prawns, clams, sea crabs, and turtles.

- **Human capital:** the Ban Hua Tang community consists of the village sage, the headman of the village, the chairman of the tourism group, tourism group members, members of the community administrative organization council, and non-official leaders such as religious leaders, etc. They are considered an important human capital of community diversity.
- **Tourism activities:** the Ban Hua Tang community is unique in its simple way of life and hospitable people. The tourism activities of the Ban Hua Tang community are rafting to explore the nature of the Khlong La-Ngu River and shellfish hunting, which is a unique attraction that attracts tourists to the community. It also promotes the planting of mangrove forests to increase green areas.

Nonetheless, the studies revealed issues that the community has primarily faced. The community's tourism infrastructure, particularly tourism-related signs to convey information to visitors, is still lacking. Despite the fact that the Ban Hua Tang community has been offering eco-tourism activities for over five years, few visitors have visited the village due to poor promotion and public relations. Furthermore, the eco-tourism activities available in the Ban Hua Tang community are similar to those available in surrounding communities, therefore there is no distinguishing feature to attract tourists.

Regarding the findings of the Ban Hua Tang community's potential in eco-tourism development, this research proposes guidelines for promoting eco-tourism in the Ban Hua Tang Community as follows:

#### *Guidelines for promoting eco-tourism*

1. The community needs better infrastructure to support tourism services such as transportation routes, travel safety, etc. Mainly, the community has to promote road signs because once the tourists leave the main road, the path becomes complicated and they may get lost
2. **Tourist attraction public relations:** the tourist attractions of the Ban Hua Tang community are unique but lack thorough publicity; therefore, not many tourists

know the community and their tourism activities. Communities must cooperate with government agencies or educational institutions in producing public relations media for eco-tourism activities continuously and receive academic support in the production of public relations and advertisement.

3. The community should promote eco-tourism and natural resource conservation through learning activities between villagers and tourists, having stories that convey stories of different ways of life and culture to make them look less boring, and using methods and techniques that will be a stimulus to attract more tourists.

#### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The findings of this research show that the Ban Hua Tang community has the potential to support eco-tourism development. It combines with the way of life of the local people in the community regarding the community's natural resources and tourism activities; however, they still lack facilities to support tourists. The findings are consistent with the study done by Pholperm (2012), which found that the community should have the potential to provide better services to tourists in terms of various facilities to access the community's tourist attractions. This research also points out that the community needs better public promotion and advertisement through partnerships with government agencies and educational institutions, which is in line with the research of Itthichaikul and Chansawang (2017) that the government, private sector, and community must plan together to seriously enforce ecotourism standards, give knowledge and consciousness to ecotourism stakeholders, arrange facilities, and promote eco-tourism destinations to the public. Therefore, the public and private sectors should help the community become one of the main eco-tourism destinations in Satun province by placing importance on promoting tourist attractions in the local communities.

Although insightful information is provided in this study, some limitations are needed to be addressed in future studies. Firstly, the research used in-depth interviews with a relatively small number of participants.

This limited sample size can make it challenging to generalize findings to a broader population within the community or to other communities. Furthermore, in-depth interviews focus on specific aspects of a community's life or issues, potentially missing out on a more comprehensive understanding of the community's dynamics. Future research can benefit from combining in-depth interviews with quantitative methods, surveys, or participant observation. This approach can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the community context and enhance the validity of findings. Conducting comparative case studies involving multiple communities can provide insights into similarities and differences in community dynamics, allowing for a broader understanding of community issues.

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