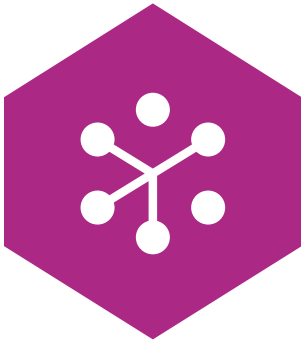




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Marketing Heritage

A Solution for the Management of a
UNESCO Heritage Site

NARAWADEE BUAKHWAN, THAWATCHAI SRIPORNNGAM, AND MUDCHALIN PHOLKLA

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Marketing Heritage: A Solution for the Management of a UNESCO Heritage Site

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Abstract: Cultural heritage sites in the developing world have the potential to boost local economies if marketed more systematically. This research proposes a marketing plan for cultural heritage in a Southern Thai Town and develops a set of marketing guidelines for cultural heritage management. Using a mixed-methods approach, data was obtained from documents, interviews, and focus group meetings with individuals involved in heritage site marketing. The heritage-marketing model is presented in the form of action plans, consisting of five strategies for promoting marketing. The short-term guidelines for cultural heritage marketing management focus on the improvement and development of heritage site infrastructure. For the longer term, development should focus on service sector personnel, activities for creative learning, and the development of marketing channels and public relations to specific groups.

Keywords: Culture, Heritage, Marketing Management, Songkhla, UNESCO World Heritage

Introduction

Thailand has enjoyed considerable economic growth from successes in the tourism industry over the last thirty years, particularly with package holidaymakers and family groups (Kerdpitak 2017). Yet times are changing, and will continue to do so as tourism recovers from the catastrophic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the outbreak, it had been predicted that tourism would become more personal, moving to niche areas, such as education and learning, ecotourism, cultural tourism, and heritage tourism (Wongtada and Krairit 2017). Visitors would want to have an authentic and sustainable experience with minimal risks, which would require full cooperation and participation from government institutions, community members, and the private sector (Ioannides and Gyimothy 2020). Indeed, tourism in cultural, heritage, and historic sites had been recognized as a, “potential tool for poverty alleviation and community economic development” (Timothy and Nyaupane 2009; UNWTO 2005). Nations were already beginning to adjust their tourism promotion policies in reaction to these changing tourism trends prior to the pandemic. Since 2011, the South African government has implemented a string of initiatives to, “facilitate further growth of cultural heritage tourism” in the country (Butler and Ivanovic 2016). Similarly, in 2014, the Tourism Authority of Thailand promoted the tourism market by enhancing the image of Thailand and creating a brand that emphasized the Thai identity and balanced tourism sustainability in three dimensions. These were, a marketing structure that promotes tourism to both the domestic and international market; a focus on adding value to tourist experiences and from tourists to the local society; supporting operations that have a positive impact on the economy, society, and the environment (Kaenhin and Batra 2016). These reform programs will need to adjust, continue, and intensify in the months to come in preparation for the restart of the tourism industry.

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The Heritage Area of Songkhla Old Town

Songkhla Old Town is a unique old town community located between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. Given its nature as an historic marina, merchants and travelers from various places came to dock and trade in Songkhla Old Town, influencing the local culture with their own customs and traditions. The town was thus transformed from an old trading community, and local people developed a unique way of life and identity that resulted in the old town area of Songkhla being declared a site of significant cultural heritage by the Rattanakosin Conservation and Development Committee on December 13, 2010 (Marangkun and Thipjumnong 2017).

The old town has unique artistic, archaeological, and historical features that have increased its value as a national heritage site and have facilitated its development as a distinctive tourism destination in the country. The buildings and elements of the city reflect the uniqueness of the old town. They have a high potential to be promoted as sources of learning that the community can be proud of. These sites can simultaneously strengthen the local economy and drive conservation and management of the old city (Thongsard 2019).

Among the town's important historic attractions are three shrines (Songkhla City Pillar Shrine, Puntao Kong Shrine, and Guan Oo Shrine), two temples (Wat Yang Thong and Wat Matchimawat), the Red Mill, Ban Nakhon Nai museum, and Ban Bon Mosque (or Masjid Usasan Islam). There are clear influences from a mixture of cultures, signifying the rich multicultural past of the region. This is also visible in the most modern incarnation of Songkhla heritage: street art. At present, there are a number of tourist activities aimed at promoting and preserving the city heritage, including an old town tram ride, a walking street market, a cultural market, and cultural performances at the Red Mill. The majority of these activities present the history, culture, traditional knowledge, and way of life of the local people. However, the promotion of Songkhla Old Town is neither comprehensive nor systematic. As a result, the aforementioned attractions are not presented to tourists. There is limited provision for education at these valuable historic sites and their potential for the conservation of Songkhla is untapped. Systematic marketing management is one way to unlock the outstanding cultural capital buried within the heritage sites of Songkhla. Improvements in this area will lead to the development of markets that can create social value, build pride, and raise conservational awareness. This investigation considers the perspectives of locals and visitors to help design a strategy for the marketing management of Songkhla Old Town.

Literature Review

Since the 1990s, heritage has become a local, national, and global issue (Hoelscher 2011). Where the term once meant physical property bequeathed to an heir, it now is the notion of something more metaphysical—belonging, identity, and ethnicity. While the beginning of this trend has been attributed to the industrialized Western world in the 1960s (Handler 1988; Samuel 1994; Wallace 1996), it is certainly now an international concern. Hoelscher (2011) identifies seven features of contemporary heritage: it is produced through displays, it is linked to place, it reflects the past but is linked to the present, it is politicized, it is authentic, it holds popular appeal, and it has been subject to development strategies. Each of these features is true of the Thai heritage sites to have gained an international reputation in recent years, such as Ayutthaya (Saipradist and Staiff 2008), Chiang Mai (Murphy 1995), and Sukhothai (Pokharatsiri and Santad 2017). Definitions of heritage clearly apply to the Old Town of Songkhla.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines cultural heritage tourism as travel, “to experience the places, artefacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present” (Hmood, Jumaily, and Melnik 2018, 210). This place-based definition of cultural heritage tourism (hereafter referred to as heritage tourism to avoid confusion) subtly

differs from that of cultural tourism, which is experience-based (Leask 2008). The concept of traveling to appreciate landmarks of cultural interest is a universal activity that has been practiced for centuries, with evidence stretching as far back as Ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome (Towner 1996). Nonetheless, it has only gained acknowledgement as a standalone genre of tourism in international scholarship in recent decades as it has become more accessible to, and popular with the masses (Viljoen and Henama 2017). Although a relatively new area of recognized tourism, heritage tourism has evolved into numerous subsets and categories in a very short space of time. These include agritourism, ecotourism, geotourism, and historic tourism (Hargrove 2017). Prior to the pandemic, heritage tourism was on the rise and there was a growing trend of meaningful vacations to historically—and culturally-significant—locations worldwide (Rogerson and Van der Merwe 2016). Yet, despite increasing recognition of the importance of heritage tourism, there is a disparity in its development and management between North America and Europe, and the rest of the world. This is partly caused by the dominance of the former on the official UNESCO World Heritage list. Over 50 percent of recognized world heritage sites are to be found in the Western world, despite Africa, Asia, and South America spanning a greater territory (Adie 2019). Other explanations include a generally resentful local opinion of heritage in places throughout Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean due to its links with colonialism. In the Caribbean, for example, traditional indigenous culture has largely disappeared, with the notable exception being a small community in Dominica (Slinger 2000). As heritage tourism focuses on the colonial past (Bennet 1993), many modern communities have been reluctant to develop heritage sites and effectively legitimize former persecution (McCabe 1992). Other explanations for more systematic management of heritage in the West include the shift away from manufacturing and primary industry into service economies and the role of Western literature in romanticizing heritage destinations (Timothy and Nyaupane 2009).

There is no doubt that the nature of economics and development in many less-economically developed nations has enabled heritage sites to resist modern globalization and urbanization. Therefore, there are many heritage locations that have been unintentionally preserved, and that hold incredible opportunities for development (Throsby 2016). In their nature as living, working communities, heritage destinations in the developing world often have a continuous narrative that has evolved from their original design and purpose. This continuity can be seen in examples such as the Kasubi tombs in Uganda, the Great Mosques of Timbuktu in Mali, and the Nankani mud houses in Ghana and Burkina Faso. It is the feature that ensures communities connect with the site, care for the site, and constantly preserve and further its intangible and tangible heritage (Poulios 2014). Songkhla fits this description (Intamano and Visuthismajarn 2019). However, there are increasing pressures placed on heritage sites whose value and potential are not realized. These locations are seen as obstructive to modernization, are often overlooked as potential sources of national wealth, and do not receive the investment they need to thrive as tourist attractions, as with some of the locations identified within Songkhla. The continuity is consequently broken. This is especially true of Africa and Asia where there is a need for longer-term investment and planning in heritage destinations (Nkwanyana, Ezeuduji, and Nzama 2016). To successfully counter this threat, frameworks are needed to balance complex political, social, cultural, and economic concerns (Bui et al. 2020).

In order to successfully preserve and conserve heritage sites, it has been argued that an, “ethic of stewardship” must be instilled in the local population (Hargrove 2017). It is imperative that communities are approached, engaged, and included in the management and development of heritage destinations as museum-like initiatives. This needs to be systematic and government-initiated, which is not currently the case in many developing countries (Simakole, Farrelly, and Holland 2019). Community participation will have three consequences: a greater degree of perceived and actual authenticity of the attraction, stronger local economic impact, and improved sustainability of the attraction (Macheka 2016). It is therefore important for those involved in the planning and marketing of heritage sites to consider the role that local people

can play in conservation and management. At present, studies have found this local participation to be lacking in the Songkhla Old Town (Intamano and Visuthismajarn 2019; Jansri 2019; Thongsard 2019).

One way to improve the overall branding of Songkhla as a heritage site worthy of conservation by the local people and of value to visitors is the implementation of a specific marketing strategy. The marketing mix is the traditional set of variables monitored by companies to evaluate and affect the satisfaction of target groups (McCarthy 1964). In its most-widely used incarnation, the marketing mix contains four variables: “Product, Price, Promotion, and Place” (McCarthy 1964). This quadruple has been highly influential in the development of marketing theory (Constantinides 2006). From the 1980s, a number of new ‘P’s were proposed for incorporation into the marketing mix, which included, “People” (Judd 1987), “Participants, Physical Evidence, and Process” (Booms and Bitner 1980), “Political Power and Public Opinion” (Kotler 1986), and “Personnel, Physical Facilities, and Process Management” (MaGrath 1986). Baumgartner (1991) even suggested the concept should include fifteen Ps. Each of these various versions of the marketing mix have been criticized for a variety of reasons, not least their unsuitability for generic application (Goi 2009). For example, Popovic (2006) deemed McCarthy’s 4Ps to be too production-oriented and not focused enough on the customer. Nonetheless, for the management of a heritage site, where local and tourist needs must be considered, the 7Ps framework (product, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, process) is generally accepted as most suitable for general use (Goi 2009; Hassan and Rahman 2015) and has been used to good effect within Southeast Asia already (Luekveerawattana 2019; Li and Soulivanh 2020). Consequently, this will be the analysis approach adopted during this investigation.

Research Methodology

This investigation of marketing management in the heritage zones of Songkhla Old Town utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The objectives of the research are to propose a marketing plan for heritage sites of Songkhla and to propose guidelines for managing marketing in cultural heritage areas.

For this investigation, the researcher opted to study a representative community in Songkhla Old Town, Thailand and translate those findings into a set of general guidelines for the management of heritage site marketing. The key informants for this investigation were composed of fifteen community leaders and scholars in the tourism and history of Songkhla Old Town, twenty representatives of relevant government agencies (Songkhla Tourism and Sports Office, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)—Hat Yai Office, Songkhla Provincial Cultural Office, Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization, and Singha Nakhon Municipality) and fifteen individuals from the private sector, tourism businesses, and tour operators. Data on visitor needs and satisfaction in Songkhla Old Town was extracted from surveys with domestic and international tourists (Buakhwan 2021). These results were supplemented with interview feedback from informal interviews with randomly sampled tourists. The findings were summarized and presented to key informants to inform focus group discussions with the aim of developing marketing strategies and guidelines.

The researcher used an integrated research methodology, combining qualitative research and quantitative research. Related documents from cultural heritage sites across the world were first studied to gather preliminary information and theories on the research topic, including local government documents, books, articles, and internet sources. General strategies and guidelines were developed and then focus group discussions were held with community leaders, government agency representatives, private sector agents, and assorted local experts. In-depth interviews were also held with specific experts in the field: scholars in tourism and marketing, travel agency business representatives, tour guides, and representatives from tourism-related

service sectors, such as hotels, restaurants, souvenir vendors, and transport operators. The observations and ideas of these individuals were used to further inform and develop the strategies and guidelines for marketing in heritage areas. One additional research round of discussions was held to enable the researcher to listen to opinions from all relevant sectors, including government agencies, the private sector, and the public sector on the overall concept of market development for heritage sites.

Data analysis from this research is divided into two parts: Qualitative data obtained from document studies, observations, interviews, and small group meetings in the field were verified, validated, and classified into categories according to the research objectives. Content analysis was then carried out for each category using an inductive analysis method; Quantitative data obtained from research documents detailing tourist questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically percentage and mean average. The validity of all data was assessed using a methodological triangulation technique. Data collected in different ways (such as observation and interview) were compared to verify the consistency of the information. Additionally, data collected from different sources were also subjected to a triangulation test.

Results

Data collected from documentary analysis, observations, interviews, and focus group discussions revealed the potential for conservation programs in heritage areas. The findings are presented in Table 1 below as a descriptive analysis. From initial observations within the study area, the researcher recorded the following observations using the 7Ps marketing mix.

Table 1: Advantages and Drawbacks of the Current Management of Cultural Heritage in Songkhla Old Town, Categorized According to the 7Ps Framework

	<i>Advantage</i>	<i>Drawback</i>
<i>Product</i>	Tourist attractions in the area are diverse There are continuous activities and local festivals Community products are good quality	Some attractions lack proper tourism interpretation Activities promoting tourism lack internationalization Some activities lack connection with local history and culture Community products lack an interesting and unique identity
<i>Price</i>	The price of most tourism products is at a level that allows easy purchase decisions	Prices are not standardized Prices of some products are inappropriate for the quality and quantity of the goods
<i>Distribution Channel (Place)</i>	Sales are conducted directly and through single channels, which is not complicated	There is no distribution diversity or response to changing conditions of the tourism market Lack of connection with outside tourism marketing distribution channels Most of local operators lack links with online marketing channels

<i>Promotion</i>	Government agencies in the area follow central guidelines for tourism marketing Agencies directly responsible for tourism in the area have discussed and promoted marketing	Most promotion is done holistically, without a clear selling point Lack of proactive marketing promotion to specific customers who are interested in tourist attractions in the old city Marketing promotion of the old town is unclear and sporadic
<i>People</i>	Knowledgeable tourism personnel work in the area There are educational institutions in the area producing graduates and tourism personnel Personnel are alert and interested in self-development	Lack of tourism personnel with specific skills and expertise in certain fields, such as history, culture and foreign languages There are not enough tourism personnel who have been upskilled to meet international standards Some tourism personnel lack ethics and a true service mind
<i>Physical Evidence</i>	The physical area of Old Town Songkhla is located in a beautiful location with natural integrity The Old Town of Songkhla has beautiful scenery due to the vista of the Songkhla Lake	Physical development in some parts of the old city lacks authentic design to fit and match the natural and historical context At certain times, there is environmental and manmade damage to the old city, such coastal erosion, drought, and the over-construction
<i>Process</i>	Relevant agencies give importance to the continuous development of Songkhla Old Town There are community gatherings to establish local organization for the preservation and development of Songkhla Old Town, such as the Songkhla Old City Lovers Association	The process of tourism management is unclear and disjointed Lack of organization to manage tourism in a holistic way that develops in the same direction Lack of new knowledge in line with the development of modern tourism marketing

Public Opinion of Songkhla Old City

Surveys were conducted with visitors to gather opinions on the attractions and activities available in Songkhla Old Town, including any existing tourist routes. The surveys were presented to domestic and foreign visitors (Buakhwan 2021) and results were then shared with a focus group of respondents for further comments and suggestions. Individuals present during these discussions included community representatives, travel agency representatives, and representatives of government agencies. The discussions began with information obtained from

the surveys and led to recommendations that could supplement program development (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: Domestic Tourist Needs in the Cultural Heritage Area of the Old City of Songkhla

<i>Tourist Needs</i>	<i>Level of Need</i>		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Public announcements through a variety of media platforms	4.00	0.78	High
Information provided is up-to-date and fast	3.97	0.76	High
Fast and impressive management of accommodation services	3.89	0.85	High
Standardized accommodation and safe attractions	3.86	0.79	High
Standardized health and safety requirements in restaurants	4.04	0.72	High
Convenient transport infrastructure, including clear and effective signage	4.07	0.78	High
Standardized public transport services with information detailing the exact service period. Transport staff act with high regard for ethics, price equality and safety	3.95	0.88	High
Standardized traffic management at tourist attractions	3.93	0.89	High
Standardized travel agency services prioritizing honesty, safety, and reliability	3.97	0.79	High
Tour guides provide services with honesty and ethics	3.88	0.81	High

Table 3: Foreign Tourist Needs in the Cultural Heritage Area of the Old City of Songkhla

<i>Tourist Needs</i>	<i>Level of Need</i>		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Indicator</i>
Public announcements through a variety of media platforms	3.78	0.69	High
Information provided is up-to-date and fast	3.89	0.65	High
Fast and impressive management of accommodation services	3.82	0.69	High
Standardized accommodation and safe attractions	3.85	0.76	High
Standardized health and safety requirements in restaurants	3.82	0.83	High
Convenient transport infrastructure, including clear and effective signage	3.77	0.80	High
Standardized public transport services with information detailing the exact service period. Staff act with high regard for ethics, price equality and safety	3.85	0.83	High
Standardized traffic management at tourist attractions	3.74	0.90	High
Standardized travel agency services prioritizing honesty, safety, and reliability	3.83	0.76	High
Tour guides provide services with honesty and ethics	3.86	0.70	High

From questionnaire results, it was clear that domestic tourists prioritize the standardization of transport infrastructure, navigation, and information services when selecting a holiday destination. Two of the highest scoring categories were clear signage (= 4.07) and availability of information (= 4.00). Domestic tourists also valued healthy and hygienic restaurants highly. The results for foreign tourists were not as high, suggesting that they placed a generally consistent value on all aspects of the travel experience. Further interviews were held with domestic and foreign tourists in Songkhla Old Town. Below is a selection of additional considerations noted during the interview process:

On past holidays, I have been put off by pushy touts and unscrupulous vendors trying to rinse every last penny from my wallet. I didn't feel that here. It is important to me that official personnel and community members alike act in a welcoming and ethical way. They must want me to enjoy my stay, not want me to spend all my money. (Interview 2020)

One thing that does let this place down is the lack of English. I know it’s not the local language, but a few accurate translations here and there would really enhance my visit because I’d get a better understanding of what I’m looking at. (Interview 2020)

Transport is a key factor when I decide where to go on holiday. If it’s easy to get to, there’s a better chance I’ll come. (Interview 2020)

I’d like to see a bit more attracting me to the area than the one or two main sites. The local tourism board should think about linking up with neighboring provinces or, even better as there’s an international airport nearby, neighboring countries to collaborate on a travel experience. They’ve done it in the North of Thailand, why not here? (Interview 2020)

The researcher also conducted a TOWS analysis of the Old Town of Songkhla and drafted strategies for promoting heritage marketing, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: TOWS Matrix for Promoting Heritage Marketing in the Old Town of Songkhla

	<i>Strengths (S)</i>	<i>Weaknesses (W)</i>
Opportunities (O)	Proactive Strategies (SO) 1. Develop and upgrade attractions with educational activities and services to preserve the old town 2. Promote links to old town tourism routes and cities in the IMT-GT (Thailand-Malaysia-Indonesia) framework of cooperation	Corrective Strategies (WO) 1. Promote and support the marketing of tourism in the old town together with tour operators and online marketing 2. Integrate and link budgets from government and private agencies for tourism development
Threats (T)	Defensive Strategies (ST) 1. Promote public relations to create a tourism image in the old town 2. Coordinate, link and integrate budgets for the development and promotion of tourism marketing	Preventative Strategy (WT) 1. Develop and upgrade tourism marketing standards to increase the competitiveness 2. Develop tourism marketing promotion activities to be continuous and diverse

The researcher summarized these findings and presented them to key informants for further discussion and development of a marketing strategy and set of guidelines for the tourism program of Songkhla Old Town. Three programs that would meet a variety of the aforementioned tourist needs were concluded by participants in the discussion groups: A single day-trip: “One Day in Songkhla Old Town;” A two-day, one-night program (promoted as a fun weekend activity): “Experience History and Admire the Lifestyle and Products of Songkhla Old Town;” and A three-day, two-night program: “Visiting the Old Town—Linking the Historical Stories of Songkhla.” The details of each program were presented to tour operators for further use or adjustment in order to offer a more efficient and effective service to tourists.

Proposed Marketing Plan for Cultural Heritage Sites in the Developing World

Following analysis of results from observations, surveys, interviews, and discussions, a proposal was created for a strategic marketing plan for heritage sites in the developing world.

The vision of the marketing strategy is to develop the market for Songkhla Old Town and promote it as a heritage destination for learning history, traditional knowledge, and the value of sustainability. The mission of the marketing plan is to: Develop an efficient marketing infrastructure to support tourism; Develop personnel for promoting effective marketing in order to support tourism; Promote and develop activities to stimulate marketing; Promote marketing and proactive public relations; and Promote and develop participatory markets.

To achieve this marketing plan, it was agreed by key informants that local tourism should be developed and activities and services upgraded to meet international standards. Of particular importance is the promotion of eco-friendly learning in heritage sites. Based on tourist surveys and interviews, it will be especially beneficial to promote the connection of routes in neighboring communities and nations, such as the link between Songkhla Old Town and other old towns in the Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand-Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) cooperation framework. Tour operators and online marketing will proactively support the marketing of heritage sites. Communications and public relations will be promoted in order to create awareness of the value of heritage sites and build a unique image for the area. Marketing standards will be developed and upgraded to increase the capacity of heritage sites to compete on the international stage.

Action Plan for Marketing in the Songkhla Old Town Heritage Area

The action plan for marketing in Songkhla Old Town focuses on data analysis of the marketing potential of the area. This led to the formulation of strategies for development and practical marketing management that are in line with the marketing vision for heritage areas. According to the results, the vision was created to promote heritage areas as international tourist destinations for learning history, traditional knowledge, and the value of sustainability. Consequently, the development of the market in Songkhla Old Town should focus on specialized tourists interested in educational tourism and experiencing the lifestyle of the past. Nevertheless, promotion and support must remain for general groups to learn about the modern and historical lifestyle. This can primarily be facilitated through projects and marketing activities that create awareness of the value and sustainability of continued investment in heritage sites.

Guidelines for Marketing Management in Heritage Sites

The guidelines for marketing management in the heritage sites are divided into short term and longer term needs. The following steps are immediate requirements and recommended as guidelines for immediate implementation. Improvement and development of infrastructure is important to support and enhance the efficiency of marketing management. These improvements consist of:

1. Signage improvements at landmarks and attractions in historical towns, such as ancient buildings or old architecture linked to the history of the town.
2. Improvement of transportation systems and traffic routes in historical towns to reduce congestion and improve the flexibility of travel within the old town. This includes establishment of a system to facilitate more convenient transport services to see old cities, especially the preparation of a clear schedule that includes the timings of the service. This will greatly enhance the tourist experience.
3. The development of a digital communication system to support the behavior of visitors in the digital era.

4. Improvements to the lighting system on the main roads in old towns, including decorative lights on architecture, buildings, old houses, and various important historical sites throughout the city.
5. Promoting the introduction of a wireless internet system to provide information services as well as other digital media services.
6. Supporting the establishment of a learning center.
7. Creation of a living museum.

The following steps are less urgent requirements and recommended as guidelines for the medium- to long-term management of the heritage destinations:

1. Training and development of interpreters/local guides/young guides.
2. Developing and enhancing knowledge in tour operations and lecturing on historical data, as well as promoting the value of the old city to local guides.
3. Promoting service standards for service personnel in tourism related businesses, such as service personnel in hotels, service staff in restaurants, and local drivers.
4. Promoting and supporting a volunteer network for providing additional services.
5. Developing participation of the public sector.
6. Promoting and developing young entrepreneurs in the service and industry of heritage destinations.

The Development of Activities for Creative Learning in Heritage Towns

It was agreed by focus group discussion participants that activities stimulating creative tourism in heritage sites should be developed for Songkhla, such as traditional markets, water tourism around nearby lakes, rivers, and seas, street-art and street-music activities, and creative media for sharing the history of the town. Activities must also be developed and upgraded to international levels and the town should be linked to other old cities in the vicinity. Development of these links will include promotion of the historical connections between the old towns, such as that between Songkhla, Penang, and Malacca. This could be achieved by promoting cultural learning and architectural heritage, and organizing self-drive caravan rally activities that traverse the Songkhla-Penang-Malacca route. An Old Town Food Culture Festival was also proposed to promote the storied history of the Songkhla-Penang heritage. These are suggestions from the field study respondents and similar networks or events could be established in other nations.

It was also agreed that marketing channels and public relations should be developed for specific groups of visitors (niche market), such as conference groups, international travel caravans, and elderly groups. A network of cooperation will be established among tour operators, both inside and outside the area, to promote and stimulate businesses in the old town. Business matching activities will be arranged between professional tour operators and tourism business operators in heritage sites to stimulate attractions, activities, and products. These can then be included in the programs of the various companies that participate in the activity. A calendar must be created for the heritage zone to promote attractions, activities, festivals, and traditions in the old city area. This will be an effective promotion for travel agencies.

A modern online media system will be established to give direct access to visitors interested in old towns. Respondents acknowledged that it is necessary to develop a digital communication system and public relations service that support the behavior of specific groups. This is to be achieved by creating digital signage, QR codes to communicate information in important spots, and media to raise awareness about the history of old towns through cartoon animations or short films. It is hoped that each of these will significantly promote tourism in the heritage site.

Discussion

The results indicate that it is necessary to involve a variety of agencies for the implementation of the marketing management guidelines, including the government and the private and the public sectors. These will include the local Tourism and Sports Office, Provincial Cultural Office, Tourism Authority, Provincial Administrative Organization, and the Tourism Industry Council. Each of these institutions must be responsible for their own aspect of the operation and should harmonize and cooperate with the other agencies. Typically, heritage sites collaborate with partners and sponsors to develop social marketing campaigns that significantly promote local destinations and help to support environmentally sustainable practices (Truong and Hall 2017). It is hoped that the network mentioned above might achieve this. Moreover, research has recently shown that community participation is another vital factor in the success of heritage sites. The level of participation by members of the locality is influenced by resident perceptions towards the tangible personal benefits and outcome. Thus, it is clear that a simultaneous local marketing campaign would be beneficial to win over the hearts and minds of local residents, and engage them on the heritage site project (Jansri 2019). The most successful heritage tourism initiatives share four common strengths: cultural policy-making, cultural event organization, participatory management, and enhancement of public urban spaces (Lak, Gheitasi, and Timothy 2019).

Heritage tourism in less-economically developed parts of the world also faces a number of unique challenges that similar sites in the West do not encounter. These include more stringent financial constraints (Zhang 1992), private ownership (Leech 2004), human habitation (Castriota 1999), agricultural encroachment (Thorsell and Sigaty 2001), looting (Brodie 2005; Lafont 2004), colonialism (Trotzig 1989), improper conservation (Malisius 2003), war and conflict (Timothy and Boyd 2003), lack of social will (Timothy 1999), and lack of political will (Hernández Llosas 2001; Timothy and Nyaupane 2009). Thailand is fortunate because only financial constraints and improper conservation are applicable to heritage conservation in the country. The researcher believe that the division of the guidelines into two categories has addressed these two obstacles: matters needing urgent and immediate attention, and long-term solutions. The immediate priorities will ensure that the foundations for systematic conservation are put in place, which will lead to income generation and the potential for reinvestment. The longer-term goals will ensure the continuation of development and enhancement of the heritage site as an attraction. For success, there must be a balance between immediate impetus and the gains sudden investment brings, and a durable solution (Morrison 2018). The short-term requirements are infrastructural changes. Infrastructure is of critical importance to the tourism sector, which requires special provisions (Das and Chatterjee 2017). Despite this immediate need, any improvements must be well planned to maximize the potential of conservation funding and investment. Research has proven that, “as a component of the regional tourism product, tourism infrastructure is of special importance for long-term tourism growth and the general progress of tourist destinations in providing the required services to tourists” (Jovanović and Ilic 2016).

The vision of this marketing strategy is to develop the tourism market and promote heritage areas as international sites for learning history, traditional knowledge, and the value of sustainability. Consequently, the development of the tourism market in the old town will focus on specialized tourists interested in educational tourism and historical architecture. These areas of the tourism industry are growing as visitors search for more involved and authentic travel experiences (Wongtada and Krairit 2017). This is also an opportunity to generate community income and create jobs as part of the phenomenon that has been labeled pro-poor tourism—using heritage as a means of empowering communities and generating income. As Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) explain, “built heritage, living culture, and well-made arts and handicrafts are an important part of these efforts and are recognized as crucial elements of the heritage product upon which communities can base their development efforts.” It will nevertheless be important

to ensure that all developed activities and maintenance retain their authentic nature and do not fall into the trap of inventing new traditional culture. There has been criticism directed at tourism initiatives that perpetuate staged authenticity, the reduction of culture to a performance that distorts or hides authentic elements (MacCannell 1973). However, it has also been noted that this invention of traditions has proven successful in revitalizing local economies in Thailand (Prabnok 2018). Further research on the impact invented traditional experiences have on the heritage space is merited for a greater understanding of the interplay between these areas.

A variety of activities has been suggested for further marketing of heritage towns. These include promotion of the heritage links between the destination and other ‘old towns.’ In this case study, Songkhla was linked to Penang and Malacca. The Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle aims to boost trade and investment throughout the three participating countries, which is to be stimulated by private sector-led economic growth (Dayang-Affizah, Ramli, and Mee-Sing 2016). Similar studies indicate that domestic marketing is crucial to the success of the IMT-GT initiative: where effective domestic marketing exists, the links between the countries are clear and tourism grows (Prasaliani 2019). This lesson can be shared with other regions and nations as a potential model for the development of their tourism sectors.

Conclusion

The research revealed that old towns and heritage locations have the potential to boost local economies if marketed more inclusively. Based on tourist needs when visiting Songkhla Old Town, three programs were developed by local stakeholders to boost heritage tourism in the area: a daytrip, a two-day/one-night weekend tour, and a three-day/two-night historical program. The marketing plans consist of five strategies for promoting marketing. Initial guidelines for marketing management focus on the improvement and development of infrastructure, which will help to ensure conservation is based on solid foundations. For the longer term, development should focus on service sector personnel, activities for creative learning, and the development of marketing channels and public relations to specific groups of tourists. This will enhance the tourism experience and generate more income for the area that can then be reinvested into the community and the project.

Following the results of this investigation, the researcher recommends that the guidelines and marketing strategy be implemented in the heritage sites of Songkhla to promote tourism in the area. The government and the private and public sectors are urged to cooperate to develop cultural heritage areas, particularly the Tourism and Sports Office, Provincial Cultural Office, Tourism Authority, Provincial Administrative Organization, and the Tourism Industry Council. In need of immediate improvement is local tourism infrastructure, which is identified within the marketing management model.

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