

POTENTIAL POINTS OF ATTRACTIONS AND TOURISM PRODUCTS TO BE DEVELOPING AS THE TOURISM DESTINATION: THE CASE STUDY OF SAMUTSONGKRAM PROVINCE, THAILAND

Panisa Panyalert

Lecturer, Tourism Management, International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Nakhon Pathom Education Center, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand

E-mail: panisa.pa@ssru.ac.th, panisa.pan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The tourism products of Samut Songkram Province, Thailand are aimed to study in an aspect of developing points of attractions and destinations. The author attempts to empirically analyze the tourist destination, Samut Songkram Province, Thailand, by using components of the tourism inventory as including: attraction, accessibility, accommodation and amenity. An understanding of existing tourism product is very important in order to find out strength and weakness at the destination.

A qualitative research design is deemed appropriate for this study because the available article as it relate specifically to tourism in Samut Songkram province is immature. Therefore, the author will carry out primary research with ten respondents in different government organizations and companies related to tourism, and local people. An in-depth interview with several open-ended questions will be preferred in order to get deep detail of necessary data for analyzing in tourism product's importance, four components of tourism product, and strength and weakness aspects.

The results are concentrated on potential places and sites, and existing tourism product. As, there are many types of tourist attraction in Samut Songkram province to support various types of tourists for example; natural resources sites, learning center attractions, historical sites, and religious sites, where tourists can visit there by many modes of transportation such as waterway, and land by train and car. They can also choose the accommodation types from their preferences with the full amenities of infrastructure and superstructure. As well as, the results on strength and weakness can assist the provincial authority to keep developing more on the destination.

Keywords-Destination Development, Tourism Inventory, Tourism Product

INTRODUCTION

Samut Songkram is the province of fertile land, of plants and food grains, the production source of vegetables and fruits, as well as a vast variety of seafood products. It is also an interesting historical source for the early Rattanakosin period. It is an ancient province with a long history. Originally, it is believed that this province was once a part of Ratchaburi province. Then, towards the end of the Ayutthaya period going on to the Thonburi period, it was separated from Ratchaburi province and was called Mueang Mae Klong.

Therefore, it is known as the beautiful small province in the central region of Thailand, and it has convenient transportation by water and land ways. In another word, it can be said that an accessibility to and within the province is very convenient. Samut Songkram has many types of accommodation including facilities for serving to tourists, depending on their preference. They are located both at downtown and at uptown with

different themes of hotels, homestays and resorts. Furthermore, the amenity is also available in the province. Although, it is not much as other nearby tourist destinations such as Bangkok, Ratchaburi and Kanchanaburi, there are infrastructure and superstructure, provided to tourists in order to be comfortable.

This paper reports on a study of Samut Songkhram by critical analyzing to its existing tourism product, and strength and weakness. With awareness of tourism development in Samut Songkhram, this research deems it important to explore opportunity for the province to host unique tourist attractions in the central Thailand, thus evolving into a popular destination in the Kingdom. An exploratory research on Samut Songkhram's potentiality to become tourist destination is needed to help gain insights to the tourism planning of Samut Songkhram Provincial Administration Organization. Study of strength and weakness of the destination must be included in the interview process.

It is the aims of this paper to; explore the potentials of places and sites developed into tourist destinations, delineate and understand existing tourism product as a function of development, identify strength and weakness of such places, as well as suggest a way for Samut Songkhram Provincial Administration Organization to continue develop in the destination.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The tourism product is composite in nature and includes everything tourists purchase, see, experience and feel from the time they leave home until the time they return. It includes the journey to and from the destination, accommodation and travel while at the destination, and everything purchased including food and beverage, souvenirs, amusement and entertainment. The tourism product also involves experience and expectations that cannot be directly purchase but still form part of the overall package.

Tourist destinations are composed of attractions, accessibility, accommodation and amenity. Kozak and Rimmington (1998) identifies that primary elements contributing to the attractiveness of a tourist destination as being climate, ecology, culture and traditional architecture, and secondary elements specifically for tourist groups, e.g. hotels, catering, transport and entertainment. The following lists show components of tourist destination, used to delineate and understand existing tourism product of Samut Songkhram province.

- Attraction: scenery/natural resources, climate, culture, food, history and ethnicity
- Accessibility: bus/train stations, airport and port
- Accommodation: types (e.g. boutique, budget, guesthouse and home-stay), service and facilities
- Amenity:
 - Infrastructure: water system, power source and road
 - Superstructure: communication network, health care, security system, tourist information center, shopping center and restaurant
- Activity: e.g. shopping, playing water sports, massaging, climbing and picnicking

The SWOT analysis helps in analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of the tourist destination. This also helps in sound understanding of elements, process and practice of local institutions. Following that, strategic alternatives are selected in the light of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities as determined through internal and external environment analysis. SWOT analysis is intended to maximize strengths and opportunities, minimize external threats, and transform weaknesses into strengths and to take advantage of opportunities along with minimizing both internal weaknesses and external threats.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design is deemed appropriate for this study because the available article as it relate specifically to tourism in Samut Songkhram province is immature. Therefore, the author will carry out primary research with ten respondents in different government organizations and companies related to tourism, and

local people. An in-depth interview with several open-ended questions will be preferred in order to get deep detail of necessary data.

The in-depth interviews took about two months at Samutsongkram. The ten respondents were a Samutsongkram governor, a president administration of Samutsongkram province, a policy and framework analyst from Office of Tourism and Sport-Samutsongkram, and a member of city municipal and a chief of tourism promoting from Samutsongkram City Municipal, which these five persons considered as the representatives from government organization. The five local businesspersons considered as the representatives from companies in the tourism industry. Moreover, there were twenty local people taken the interview too.

The key-informants are selected based on convenience sampling size because of time limitation. Interview data are recorded on audio tapes and notes are taken. The interviews are useful in gaining a more detailed perspective of desired forms of public participation by interest groups, power relationships, and the structure of the public administration system, local cultural and traditional values and other pertinent factors.

RESULTS

1.1 Potential Places and Sites

There are many potential places and sites of Samutsongkram Province where can be the magnet to attract more tourists to travel and visit as follows.

1.1.1 Bang Khae Noi Temple

The temple is located along Mae Klong River. In the temple, much woodcarving is very noticeable and rare, because it took money, time and skill to carve it delicately by technicians who have the expertise. Makae Mong Wood used as a cradle for the principal Buddha image in the temple is very large.

1.1.2 Bang Kung Camp

Bang Kung Camp is a navy campsite with historical significance, particularly during the reign of King Taksin the Great. Within the camp is an ordination hall built in the Ayuttaya period. There is also a replica wall and this was built to celebrate King Taksin's battle with the invaders.

1.1.3 Bang Kung Temple

It is the old temple from Ayutthaya period. This temple has many interesting things, for instance: ancient texts that talk about ancient medicines. The front of the temple is adjacent to the Mae Klong River with many freshwater fish living in this river.

1.1.4 Charoen Sukharam Worawiharn Temple

In the temple, there is Luang Pho To, its principal Buddha image. It is made of laterite. Luang Pho To was enshrined at the temple that had been abandoned in Ratchaburi before being respectfully engaged to this temple. The front of this temple is adjacent to Damnoen Saduak canal. This area also offers pedal boats for visitors to ride along the canal.

1.1.5 Nativity of Our Lady Cathedral

This cathedral was built over a century ago. It is Gothic art of France. Furthermore, it was built from burnt bricks, mortared with low sugar syrup from black cane. The interior is decorated with stained glass from France. It tells about a narrative of the Virgin Mary from the Bible and images of male and female saints, has statues as are described in the Bible. It is a beautiful church and located on Mae Klong River.

1.1.6 King Rama II Memorial Park

This park is a project in honor of King Rama II and has been recognized by UNESCO. It is on the land to commemorate the King's patronage of arts and culture. The park is divided into six sections and these show art objects of the early Rattanakosin period, and show the way of life of people during the period. Some of

these are the main hall, with the king's statue and old artifacts. There is also a men's' and a women's' dormitory, which shows the lifestyle of the genders in that era. In addition, there is an outdoor theatre, a botanical garden, and souvenir shops.

1.1.7 Amphawa Floating Market

The Floating Market is the second most popular floating market near Bangkok after Damnoen Saduak Floating Market but more authentic, with visitors almost exclusively Thai. It has become such a magnet for Thais and foreigners that food stalls have grown from the riverbanks and stretched far into the surrounding streets. All along each side of the canal, old charming wooden shops sell Amphawa souvenirs during the weekend only.

1.1.8 Mae Klong Railway Market

Talad Rom Hoop or Mae Klong railway market is known as an ordinary fresh produce market located by the railway tracks. The market turns into a tourist attraction when a train passes through it eight times a day. As train approaches slowly, the makeshift stalls start pulling back their wheels and closing overhead shelters, and umbrellas. The vendors, customers and tourists move to side and watch the train pass from where they were standing few minutes before.

1.2 Existing Tourism Product

There are four components of tourism product: attraction, accessibility, accommodation and amenity. In order to develop Samutsongkram province to be tourist destination, it is necessary to understand the existing tourism product of each component.

1.2.1 Attraction

Samutsongkram province has many types of tourist attraction to support various types of tourists for example; (1) natural resources site such as Mae Klong river which lies along the province, the tourist can touch and feel at Wat Bang Khae Noi, Wat Bang Kung and Amphawa Floating Market. (2) Learning center attractions and historical sites for the tourists who would like to get more knowledge about Thai history, culture, tradition, arts, and way of life by visiting at Bang Kung Camp, King Rama II Memorial Park, Mae Klong Railway Market and Amphawa Floating Market. And, (3) religious sites for studying and learning about the importance of temples in the past time at Wat Bang Khae Noi, Wat Bang Kung, Wat Charoen Sukharam Worawiharn, and Nativity of Our Lady Cathedral.

1.2.2 Accessibility

It is very easy and comfortable to go to Samutsongkram province. The tourist can go traveling in this province by driving their own car with the paved roads and clear direction signs along the road. Or, if the tourists are in Bangkok, and they would like to go to Samutsongkram province, there are also many scheduled public buses and vans to provide the tourists at Victory Monument, Southern Bus Terminal, Pin Klao, Chatuchak, Bangna, Bangpakok, Bang Prakeaw, and Chaengwattana.

The scheduled trains also available for the tourists from Bangkok to Mae Klong station which will let tourists to enjoy the beautiful scenery and view along the way with the cheap price.

1.2.3 Accommodation

There are many accommodation types in Samutsongkram where the tourists can select for their preferences, starting from one to five star hotels, guesthouses, resorts, but the most popular type is homestay. Homestays (or home stays) in Thailand are just what they sound like, staying as a guest in someone's home. In most cases, Thailand homestays are in rural areas where guests have opportunities to learn about Thai culture, including local handicrafts production and rural Thai lifestyle. The homestays are provided throughout the province and popular for the tourists because they are in an appropriate price with the friendly service from the local people.

1.2.4 Amenities

Due to the province is the target of both Thai and international visitors, then there are many facilities as the infrastructure and superstructure to provide to the local people and visitors for their convenience and comfortable. Moreover, the province also very near and is not far from the capital city of Bangkok, therefore it is the result that why Samut Songkhram province has many infrastructures and superstructures to support the visitors and local people. The examples of infrastructure provided in the province are water system, power source, and paved road; and the superstructures are communication network, hospitals and health care centers, shopping centers, and restaurants.

1.3 Strength and weakness

1.3.1 Strengths

Most of the tourist attractions in Samut Songkhram province are along and by the canals, and Mae Klong River where is the main river of the province. In addition, that can add more interesting and charming to the attraction sites where can create the beautiful ways of life along the river.

There are many orchards owned by the local people, producing a great variety of fruit, especially coconuts, pomelos, lychees and bananas and also an abundance of flowers such as orchids that can make the local people can earn money by selling to the tourists as the souvenirs and local products.

There are many local products and souvenirs selling at Amphawa floating market and Mae Klong Railway Market such as coconut, palm sugar, Thai desserts, Benjarong products (name of Thai porcelain with designs in five colors), silks, silverwares, and coconut shell's products. There is also Soontroporn band that is the Thai traditional musical band. All these are the uniqueness making the different with other markets in Thailand.

1.3.2 Weaknesses

Some tourist attractions such as Amphawa floating market and Mae Klong Railway Market, they have a restriction in the numbers of visitor because they are quite small places, and do not have any limitation about the carrying capacity for one day. Then, during the peak season, there can be many problems occurring due to the high number of visitor arrivals, for example insufficient in restaurants, car parks and accommodations for visitors, large amounts of garbage, as well as double-price product to visitors.

A problem of traffic jam is a serious trouble for Samut Songkhram province due to the small of province with narrow roads. This problem always happens during the weekends when many tourists come to travel around the province. Moreover, sometimes it can make bad feeling to the local people who do not involve in the tourism business because it effects with their daily life to go to the other places.

There are also problems of water and noise pollutions from the noise of firefly tour boats at night that become the serious problem of local people because they cannot fall asleep in the night time.

CONCLUSION

Samut Songkhram province has many types of tourist attraction to support various types of tourists for example; (1) natural resources site such as Mae Klong river which lies along the province, the tourist can touch and feel at Wat Bang Khae Noi, Wat Bang Kung and Amphawa Floating Market. (2) Learning center attractions and historical sites for the tourists who would like to get more knowledge about Thai history, culture, tradition, arts, and way of life by visiting at Bang Kung Camp, King Rama II Memorial Park, Mae Klong Railway Market and Amphawa Floating Market. And, (3) religious sites for studying and learning about the importance of temples in the past time at Wat Bang Khae Noi, Wat Bang Kung, Wat Charoen Sukharam Worawiharn, and Nativity of Our Lady Cathedral.

The tourists can visit there by many modes of transportation such as waterway, and land by train and car. They can also choose the accommodation types from their preferences with the full amenities of infrastructure and superstructure.

The research is useful for studying the potential sites of Samut Songkhram province, Thailand. Moreover, the development of the research is so significant for increasing the number of sampling group in order to

enhance more information of tourism in the local area. Furthermore, the research is needed the longer period for survey and interviewing in each homestay for receives the empirical information.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Assistant Professor Dr.Krongthong Khairiree (Dean of International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University) and Assistant Professor Dr.Janchai Yingprayoon (Deputy Dean of International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University), my research supervisors, for their patient guidance, enthusiastic encouragement and useful critiques of this research work. I would like to thank the Research and Development Institute, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand for financial support. I would also like to thank Ms.Siripen Yiamjanya (Lecturer of Tourism Management Program, International College, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University), for her advice and assistance in keeping my progress on schedule. In addition, my grateful thank is also extended to Assistant Professor Dr.Siriwan Saksiriruethai and Mr.Phalannaphat Siriwong (Lecturers of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University) for their help in checking English writing. Finally, I wish to thank my parents for their support and encouragement throughout my study.

REFERENCES

- Butler R.W (1980), "The concept of tourism area cycle of evolution: implications for management of resources", *Canadian Geographer*, Vol. 24, Pp. 5-12.
- Baloglu S & Uysal M (1996), "Market segments of push and pull motivations: A canonical correlation approach", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 8, Pp. 32-38.
- Metin K & Rimmington M (1998), "Benchmarking: Destination Attractiveness and Small Hospitality Business Performance". *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, URL: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/09596119810227767>.
- Kozak M & Rimmington M (1999), "Measuring tourist destination competitiveness: conceptual considerations and empirical findings", *Hospitality Management*, Vol. 18, Pp. 273-283.
- Ayres R (2000), "Tourism as a passport to development in small states: reflections on Cyprus", *International Journal of Social Economics*, Vol. 27, No. 2, Pp. 114-133.
- Andriotis K (2001), "Strategies on resort areas and their lifecycle stages", *Tourism Review*, Vol. 2, Pp. 40-44.
- Chen S.J & Gursoy D (2001), "An investigation of tourists' destination loyalty and preferences", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol.13, Pp.79-85.
- Butler R.W & Waldbrook L.A (2003), "A new planning tool: the tourism opportunity spectrum", *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 14, Pp. 25-36.
- Ibrahim E. E & Gill J (2005), "A positioning strategy for a tourist destination, based on analysis of customers' perceptions and satisfactions", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Pp.172-188.
- Studzieniecki T (2005), "Euroregions - new potential Destinations", *Tourism Review*, Vol. 60, No. 4, Pp. 26-32.
- Svensson B, Nordin S & Flagestad A (2005), "A Governance Perspective on Destination Development - Exploring Partnerships, Clusters and Innovation Systems", *Tourism Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2, Pp. 31-37.
- White C (2005), "Destination image: to see or not to see? Part II", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol.17, Pp.191-196.
- Franch M, Martini U, Novi I & Buffa F (2006), "From reconstruction and analysis of tourist profiles to some suggestions to destination management - An empirical research in the Dolomites Area", *Tourism Review*, Vol. 61, No. 2, Pp. 30-37.

- Carlo MD, Cugini A, & Zerbinì F (2008), "Assessment of destination performance: a strategy map approach", *Tourism Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2, Pp. 25-37.
- Tourism Authority of Thailand (2015), "Where to Go: Samut Songkhram", URL: <http://www.tourismthailand.org/Where-to-Go/Samut-Songkhram>.
- Yiamjanya S (2016), "Endogenous and Exogenous Factors for e-Marketing Technology and Innovation in Homestay Establishments: A Case Study of Samut Songkhram Province, Thailand", *Journal of Economics, Business and Management*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Pp. 40-46.