

E-Tourism for Baan Pihuchang as a Cultural Tourism Destination

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Abstract: *The study examined the identity of Baan Pihuchang, NakornPathom Province and the promotion of sustainable tourism. The study used qualitative research based on field work, observations, in-depth interviews, group discussions, related documents and literature coupled with an evaluation form of tourism destination to embrace a holistic approach of the study. The findings showed that Baan Pihuchang's identity included a Tai Song or a Thai Song Dum cultural heritage with strong community ties. Compared to other tourism destinations in the vicinity, Baan Pihuchang was still little known to the general public and not attractive to main tourists. It needed a strategic direction and promotional strategies and involvement from various sectors namely a Sub-District Administrative Organization, a community leader, related organizations and higher education institutes to cooperatively work and promote Baan Pihuchang as a cultural tourism destination in Thailand or even among ASEAN nations. In addition, e-tourism was necessary for a niche tourist market to be known and made aware to other people in Asia and other people in the world.*

Keywords: sustainable, tourism, culture, promotion

1. Introduction

This research was conducted in response to sustainable tourism which is one of the major economic concerns of the nation. As the statistics of tourism in the year 2012 showed, 22 million foreign tourists visited Thailand, which added an additional 2 trillion baht to the nation's economy. New kinds of tourism have increased especially health and wellness-oriented tourism, adventure sports, green tourism and cultural tourism. UNWTO (UN World Tourism Organization) predicted that in the year 2020, there would be 1,600 million international tourists around the world in which the more popular destinations are East Asia Region, Pacific and South East Asia Countries.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand recently launched several tourism campaigns such as "Miracle Year" or "Amazing Thailand" focusing on the local traditions, art, culture of Thainess as well as unseen places. Exotic experiences have been provided in several cities nationwide where there is rich cultures and community involvement. Tai Song or Thai Song Dum or Lao Song is some of the unique ethnic groups from China, Vietnam or Lao. Due to the Dien Bien Phu war, certain groups migrated to other countries especially to Southeast Asian nations such as Thailand, Khmer, Lao, and Philippines.

Baan Pihuchang, NakornPathom Province is where the villagers' race including the people of Tai Song or Thai Song Dum have historically migrated from Southern China, Vietnam or Laos for more than 200 years since King Rama V. The first location in Thailand was at the Petchburi Province. Through the year some families started looking for new places to reside and farm so they scattered to several other provinces such as Loei, Suphanburi, NakornPathom and northeastern provinces. Amidst globalization, the Baan Pihuchang community is still enriched with their own identity from older traditional and cultural practices,

language, costumes, and food which allows Baan Pihuchang to become an attractive tourism destination for Thailand and other ASEAN countries in the future.

Currently, the Baan Pihuchang community is not well-known; therefore, the research was conducted to investigate its identity and develop strategies for sustainable tourism. Qualitative research was used based on observation, field work, related literature and documents, in-depth interviews and group discussion of stakeholders in order to obtain detailed information. A tourism evaluation form was also used to analyze the quality of life and local environment.

2. Purpose and Scope of the Study

The objective of the study was to investigate the unique characteristics of Baan Pihuchang and identify the promotion tourism strategies of Baan Pihuchang for a sustainable tourism. The scope of the study utilized only village 4 and 5 of the Baan Pihuchang district at Amphoe Bang Lane, NakornPathom Province since it accommodated most of the Tai song ethnic people.

3. Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach. Data were collected from field work, observations, in-depth interviews, group discussions, documents, literature and relevant research work. The research tools included open-ended questions, an evaluation form of tourism resources as well as a standard form on cultural tourism destination. A strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) analysis was performed. The population of the study was divided into 5 groups. The first group included the community leader and villagers of Pihuchang residing in Village 4 and Village 5. These people consider themselves as Tai Song or Thai Song Dum, including a Pihuchang intellectual and the Abbot of Pihuchang Temple. A second group were more an academic

and from educational institutions. A third and fourth were tourists and government officers from related organizations promoting tourism industry respectively. The last was the Chief Executive of the Sub-district Administrative Organization.

Apart from the data collection based on observations, field work, related documents reviews, in-depth interviews from community stakeholders, the researchers used a tourism evaluation form developed by Tourism Promotion Department to consider the tourism standard of the area. Then finally, the SWOT analysis was used to further acquire data for the study.

4. Result of the Study

From the analysis, it was noted that the BaanPihuchang community was very strong in cultural heritage in terms of language, rituals, and handicrafts. Its obstacles are limited public land, budgets constraints, community leader involvement, commitment and his vision as well as supporting organizations. More importantly promotional campaigns have been delivered at a minimal level. The study has been addressed as follows:

4.1 Geography

The Baan Pihuchang community is located in the area that is easily accessible by transportation through four main routes from Bangkok surrounded by well-known tourism destinations. As compared to those places, it is still lagging behind in terms of natural resources, public space, public services and local administration attention. Due to the public land limitations, it is difficult for Baan Pihuchang to expand its area and activities in serving a large number of tourists. However, Baan Pihuchang is one of the safest places of the province.

4.2 Cultural Preservation

The study showed that Baan Pihuchang has remained distinctive in cultural preservation of a Tai Song or a Thai Song Dum ethnic group regarding their native language, spirit rites, and handicrafts. The community has been preserving Tai Song ethnic group strongly with their prides. On April 19th of every year, the Thai Song Dum Event is launched for gathering their ethnics. Further, Tai Song cultural learning exhibition and language learning center can be found within a temple school compound for disseminating their ethnic knowledge.

4.2.1 Rituals of Ancestor Spirit Worship

The ancestor spirit belief still exists in the community including 8 kinds of spirits. According to their beliefs, if they worship those spirits regularly, they always face good fortunes. The Tai Song people trust in the ritual of worshipping ancestor spirits strictly. Various spirit worships depend on the purpose of the rites. Each house will invite their neighbors to witness the ceremony whenever the ritual is launched, most people in the community hardly deny their invitation. For example, the ancestor spirit rite so-called Sane Ruan will kill the pig at night to worship the ancestor spirit. People in the community will help one another.

4.2.2 Tai Song Native Language

It was found that the Baan Pihuchang community is still speaking their own native language so-called Tai Song language amidst the advancement of technology. Adversely, technology has helped them promote their own language through internet such as facebook and email for idea and knowledge exchanges. Their native language has also been taught at WatPihuchang School as a part of basic education. It can also be claimed that Tai song has a similar accent to Northeastern part of Thailand's but Tai Song has its own consonants which are different from Thai's. Speaking and written language research have been conducted by the university and recently preserved into digital format. Digital fonts have been completely created.

4.2.3 Tai Song Handicrafts

It was noted that Tai Song ethnic people have produced their own clothe and costumes by themselves using black or indigo blue color for both men and ladies to witness their origin. For the lady costume, the upper part is a long sleeve black shirt with 10-15 buttons and the lower part is a black long skirt with indigo blue stripes. Tai Song lady costume has her own style cut and pattern so-called Lai Tang Mo. For men costume, they wear black long sleeves shirt and long pants with loincloth by wrapping around their waists. However, the Tai Song at present wear their original costume on cultural events or official ceremonies only.

According to the study, the Baan Pihuchang villagers still make their own handicraft appliances such as religious cloth, loincloth, pillow pattern, hanging mobiles and basket weaves. They produce and sell mostly within the village and very few to some commercial events. Their handicrafts need more new design skills in order to serve market demands in the future

4.3 Public Services

It was found that public utilities such as electricity, water and telephone access to the village. Radio station was located within a temple compound publicizing community events and Buddhism teaching. Facebook and You Tube are main tools to promote its activities such as cultural events of the village.

4.4 Supporting Organizations

Unfortunately such organizations as Sub-District Organization, a Community Leader, Provincial Tourism Organization, travel agencies and related organizations, have paid little attentions to Baan Pihuchang because they found this place small to be commercialized. The mentioned organizations can lead development to the place as an attractive one compared to others' nearby. Recently few higher educational institutions have conducted research on Tai Song language.

4.5 Tourism Promotion Strategies

It was noted that most activities have been initiated by a small group of villagers such as week end market and cultural exhibitions. Other strategies like public events, TV spots, market fair or other kinds of campaigns need a lot of support from Sub-District Administration Organization, a community leader and related organizations such as

Provincial Tourism Organization and travel agencies. Cultural activities such as homestay, Tai Song handicrafts market fair can be promoted. Joint Tourism campaigns along with other nearby well-known places can be created through e-tourism which allows Baan Pihuchang to gain more public interests and recognitions both at national and international levels.

4.6 E-Tourism

New technologies can produce an essential contribution to tourism development so-called **e-tourism**. E-Tourism is a tourist information system and technology to make travelers understand about the place because internet offers the potential to make information and booking facilities available to large numbers of tourists at relatively low costs. It provides a tool for communication between tourism suppliers as well as end-consumers.

A small place like Baan Pihuchang, e-tourism is able to attract its customer base, enter new product markets and rationalize its business. An increasing proportion of internet users and tourism will gain a larger and larger share of online markets. It is certain that embracing digital communication and information technology is no longer an option, but a necessity. Thus, one of the most important characteristics of e-tourism is the opportunity to extend its capabilities and grow.

Benefits of utilizing e-tourism for the Baan Pihuchang community can provide an easy access to information on tourism services, better information on tourism services, and convenience for customers. It can be aware that e-tourism creates a new market for such place. Baan Pihuchang needs interaction with other business partners and new business partners by the support of related organizations.

5. Conclusion of the Study

According to the study, it can be concluded that the people of Baan Pihuchang appeared to desire a strong cultural preservation of Tai Song ethnic group including the continuance and maintenance of their native language, handicrafts and ancestor spirit rites. As compared to other nearby tourist places, Baan Pihuchang looks more vulnerable and reached out more or less than other communities due to their resource management problem, community leader commitment, involvement and attitudes, public land limitation, budget constraints and supporting organizations. The place seems to rely strongly on internal and external factors.

However, promotional strategies show some disparities such as cultural identity as a key concern since Baan Pihuchang is a predominant place in cultural resources, green and safe environment. The villagers have their faith and pride in local traditions which make them more conservative and value diversity less. Baan Pihuchang has strong ethnic activities, traditions, rituals and social ties. Though villagers are conservative, they are proud to be one of tourism destinations. In order for Baan Pihuchang to perform as a desirable tourism destination that captures the attention of tourists, they will be required to develop a niche market for a particular group of people for a particular its cultural reason.

The opportunities of Baan Pihuchang including its cultural heritage, their way of life and green environment can create its attractiveness. Media campaigns using TV commercials to gain the attention of a large number of people needs strong support from local government offices as well as financial budgets; but e-tourism can be easily accomplished such as social network like Websites, Facebook, Twitter or You Tube to market their uniqueness and identity stronger with the ASEAN community.

6. Further Scope of the Study

The researchers found that currently most tourists have little known about Baan Pihuchang. Due to budget constraint and other factors, e-tourism will allow the Baan Pihuchang community to easily gain more recognitions and public concerns. The impact of E-Tourism on Baan Pihuchang should be studied further more in order to see it moving forward.

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