The Study of Problems and Threats of Tourism Development in Khon Kaen, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This research article aims to study problems and threats that affect tourism development in Khon Kaen city. The study has been conducted through a qualitative approach. In-depth interviews were used to collect research data from 20 key informants, and content analysis was used to analyze the data. In addition, researchers used a focus group to gain information about problems and threats. Research results found that problems that affect tourism development in Khon Kaen city consist of attraction, participation, activity, and public relation. Meanwhile, threats that affect tourism development of Khon Kaen city consist of economic, social, and political threats. In addition, this research will lead to the creation of an approach to developing a provincial strategic plan, especially in the tourism sector, to create a new alternative for the tourism industry in Thailand.

Keywords: Problems, Threats, Tourism Development, KhonKaencity

Introduction

The tourism industry is now growing rapidly and is very important for improving a country’s economy and generating its revenue. Countries around the world have focused on accelerating the development and promotion of the tourism industry in order to produce income (McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Inskeep, 1991; McIntosh & Goeldner, 1990). The income generated from international tourists is slated to rise to 1,600 million USD between 2004 and 2020 (The World Tourism Organization, 2004).

Each government has focused on the importance of the tourism industry as a key strategy for generating revenue for the country. Countries around the world are preparing to provide tourism service and to develop their tourism efficiency in order to compete with other competitors in the world market (Bumrungchit, 2006; Keyser, 2002). The travel industry in Thailand is a major industry that is vital to national development because the tourism sector is related to many sectors. Tourism helps the country by distributing income to people, stimulating the manufacturing sector, and enabling the country's resources to achieve the greatest benefit (George, 2004; Suwan, 1996; Shaw & Williams, 1994) In addition, tourism also helps to support the conservation of local arts, culture, and heritage as well as the development of infrastructure, education, and technology, thus reducing people’s migration from rural areas to cities (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2004)

Creative tourism is an alternative kind of tourism that has been discussed wildly. This kind of tourism is different from traditional tourism, which focuses only on taking time to relax and to seek happiness and enjoyment from tourism attractions. Rather, the purpose of creative tourism is associated with the development community approach for achieving a sustainable lifestyle in the community by facilitating tourism events together with community. Tourists receive new experiences from the community, such as local culture, tradition, history, or practice in everyday life. Creative tourism focuses on the relationship between tourists and locals in the community. The goal of creative tourism is to encourage tourists to participate in a community’s activity and to encourage the community to treat tourists as members of the community.
Currently, organizations in both the public and private sectors have been found to be interested in applying the creative tourism approach in tourism management within their communities. Such an organization offers an innovative travel management concept to the community in order to find a suitable approach to creative tourism management or to create a creative tourism network (Howkins, 2010). In addition, organizations have assessed the impacts of creative tourism on stakeholders in all sectors, and they have investigated the impacts of tourism development in the local community in Thailand.

Khon Kaen city is a province in the northeastern region of Thailand. The city has the potential to serve as a center of tourism in the region. Its suitable location in the center of the region boosts Khon Kaen’s standing as the center of tourism and service. Many activities are related to the service sector, such as shopping malls, hotels, restaurants, night markets, and MICE activities. These sources attract visitors who come to the city and bring much income to the community and stakeholders (Kingpiboon, et al, 2001)

However, although the city has the potential to be a center of tourism in the region, some barriers affect the provincial development, especially from a tourism perspective. This research paper has focused on problems and threats that are affecting tourism development in Khon Kaen city. The results will be applied in the creation of a strategic plan that will drive the province to be a creative and sustainable city.

**Objective**
To study the problems and threats that affect tourism development in Khon Kaen city

**Methodology**
The study has been conducted using the qualitative approach. Khon Kaen city has been selected as a research area in which to discover problems and threats that affect tourism development in Khon Kaen city. In-depth interviews were used for 20 key informants from various tourism-related sectors, such as government, the private sector, the community, and visitors. Semi-structured interview guidelines and focus groups discussions were used to gather information as well. In addition, researchers used content analysis to analyze the data.

**Results**
In this research, problems has been defined as negative situations that stakeholders are dealing with and that and can use as an advantage to achieve their objectives. The definition of a threat is that it is a factor or external situation that affects the tourism development, or it refers to a negative external environment that stakeholders are dealing with. Problems and threats that affect tourism development in Khon Kaen city will be detailed as follows:

1. **Problems that affect tourism development of Khon Kaen city**
   1.1 **Attraction:** Local culture has been used as a commercial product to serve tourism; it has actually resulted in the decrease of the local culture value. Visitors have come to the city simply to see it and then to return home without considering the tourism attraction value. In addition, focus also must be placed on problems associated with the lack of creativity for promoting local identity and culture values as tourism assets.
   1.2 **Participation:** Relationships between tourism-related stakeholders are quite negative. People in the community have competed against each other to own tourism resources within their community, and problems also have cropped up between the government sector and the community. This results in poor relationships within the community and causes instability in tourism attractions from a sustainability perspective.
   1.3 **Activity:** Tourists were found to mostly stay and perform activities within the Khon Kaen urban area. They normally visit tourism attractions located in the countryside by visiting them for short periods of time and then going to other attractions. With a tourist...
behaving in this fashion, the community cannot conduct tourism activity that can fully create income for it. Income that is generated from tourism is still circulated in urban areas, not distributed to the community in other tourism areas around Khon Kaen city.

1.4 Public relations: Policy conflict between the local policy and state policy occurs in the tourism area, and it negatively affects the tourism area. For instance, the scramble of tourism management between stakeholders causes the lack of efficiency in public relations with regard to tourism activity.

2. Threats that affect tourism development in Khon Kaen city

2.1 Economic: An uncertain global economic status is one factor that affects a visitor’s decision not to travel or to spend money on traveling. Investment by groups of investors from other areas also affects local business. Locals run businesses only with limited budgets and cannot compete with large investment groups. Another finding is that economic activity mostly occurs in urban areas. Visitors normally travel to tourism attractions in the province’s countryside, but they decide to return to urban areas to stay overnight.

2.2 Social effects: Traffic conditions in Khon Kaen are quite problematic, especially in the morning and evening, when many people who live outside the urban area are traveling to work or traveling to conduct business in the urban area. The presence of many vehicles on the road results in a traffic jam. The traffic jam problem not only happens in the downtown area but also it occurs in the suburb area. This could result in dissatisfaction among travelers. In addition, the local government has considered waste to be a threat to visitors’ satisfaction when they are travelling in Khon Kaen city. A lot of waste has been found around Khon Kaen city, especially in the urban area. It causes a pollution odor and results in a bad quality of life for Khon Kaen citizens and visitors; it essentially affects the city’s image as well. Moreover, criminals from other areas might cause future crime problems to Khon Kaen city and citizens in the future, and this might further discourage visitors’ satisfaction.

2.3 Politics: Political changes in the region have reduced tourists’ confidence and thus have resulted in a decline in tourist arrivals. An uncertain political situation will cause a tourist to feel uneasy about the safety of life and property.

Conclusion

Tourism development is very important in the region; for example, Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn et al. (2013) suggested that in order to solve the traffic jam problem, relevant agencies should add traffic lanes or build new roads in the city and near tourism attractions. The current system needs to be improved so as to solve these traffic jams; regarding waste management capacity, government agencies need to issue and promote guidelines for tourists to take part in conserving natural resources. Local government agencies should position notice signs concerning conservation at tourism attractions and promote awareness of recycling among residents. Agencies need to provide education about the value of recycling and encourage reusing objects.

Problems and threats that affect tourism development in Khon Kaen city require attention because tourism would bring a lot of income to the local area. However, in order to develop a creative and sustainable city, stakeholders should collaborate by teaching tourism management knowledge to tourism-related persons about innovation—specifically, creativity of tourism, creating of tourism awareness, etc. These approaches will develop Khon Kaen city into a creative and sustainable city. The development should be focused on a tourism attraction that can create value. This research is just a preliminary study to investigate problems and treats to develop Khon Kaen city as a creative and sustainable tourism destination. In addition, this research will lead to the creation of the development of a
provincial strategic plan, especially in the tourism sector, in order to create a new alternative for the tourism industry in Thailand.

References