Cultural Tourism Activities with Community Participation in Songkhla Old Town

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to investigate activities and explore tourists’ needs for Cultural Tourism activities in Songkhla Old Town, and to design Cultural Tourism activities with community participation in Songkhla Old Town. The main informants of this participatory action research were: a group of related private sectors and people, a group of the government sectors and public organizations, and a group of tourists. The research instruments were: participatory observations in community stage arrangement and in-depth interviews. The data were classified, decoded, interpreted, and tested through triangulation. The results of the study revealed that tourism activities could not yet present clear identities and were not attractive enough. Activities that were most wanted by tourists were dining and shopping for local goods while enjoying the atmosphere on Thanon Nang Ngam where old buildings are still intact. Cultural Tourism activities that found to be suitable for Songkhla Old Town were: activities held at different places around the area with roads linking them; activities promoting knowledge and understanding about history; activities promoting relationships among family and friends; activities presenting simplicity and traditions of the community’s way of life. These activities should be arranged as one-day trips.

Keywords: cultural tourism activities, tourists, Songkhla Old Town, community
Background

Tourism industry plays a very important role in driving many countries economically and socially. In developing countries, in particular, tourism has become a main development strategy because tourism can generate income for the country as it is related to many types of business that distribute income widely and as deep down as the community. Tourism can also change society through exchange of data, knowledge, technology and culture with “traveling” as an important tool. Tourism can, therefore, bring benefits to the local area and result in the country’s economy as a whole. Thailand, thus attaches importance to tourism development. On April 17, 2009 the government passed a resolution to make tourism part of the national agenda and an inter-ministry agenda requiring integrated administration involving various organizations in the private and government sectors including local administrative organizations and the general public. Policies and strategic plans for tourism were made under the national tourism development plans 2012-2016 (Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2011).

Songkhla Province is an important strategic province for tourism industry in the lower south where most tourists come to Hat Yai as it is a large shopping area with convenient accommodation, good food and convenient transportation in addition to its interesting festivals and activities; it is also not expensive. The number of tourists from within Thailand and abroad is increasing. In 2010 the total number of tourists visiting Songkhla Province consisted of 795,684 Thais and 595,910 foreigners (Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2011). Songkhla Province is a center for commerce as well as for history of the lower southern part of Thailand. It is an old town consisting of ancient communities, ancient sites, ancient artifacts, traditions, traditional entertainments, folk art inherited from ancestors (Data of Songkhla Province 2010, p. 9). Therefore, Songkhla Old Town in Muang District of Songkhla Province has potential for development to be cultural tourism sources that are interesting and can be another selling point for the tourism industry.

Presently, the tourism styles in the Songkhla Old Town area are in the category of cultural and historical tourism. Some examples of activities include Songkhla Tae Raek Fair, taking a tricycle around town, touring Wat Matchimawat Museum, City Pillar Shrine, Ban Bon Masjid, and Songkhla Naional Museum. Beside these, there are activities arranged during various festivals such as walking streets (on Thanon Nang Ngam), and the City Pillar Shrine celebration. However, the data collected from the field showed that these activities had not attracted many tourists. For, the activity of taking a tricycle around town, there were
an average of 1-2 tourists a week, the average number of tourists visiting Songkhla National Museum was 11 people a day, and that for the Wat Matchimawat Museum was 7 people a day (Songkhla National Museum, 2011). For Songkhla Tae Reak Fair and the walking street (on Thanon Nang Ngam) activity, although there are a large number of people at the fair and the activity, most of them are Muang Songkhla locals. They are not tourists as defined in this study. So most tourists come to dine and shop for local goods on Thanon Nang Ngam.

As can be seen, the activities still lack their highlights and attractive features. According to Travel Career Ladder (Pearce, 1998), incentives have influence on searching for desirable things from tourist attractions and give different experience to tourists. Thus, exploring tourists’ needs can help improve activities to make them with more quality, more interesting and meet tourists’ needs.

The development of the activities should involve community participation in setting the directions and making decisions on tourism in the Songkhla Old Town area. All parties concerned should participate in the development, administration, management, finding solutions to the problems and identifying the needs. This would reduce conflicts or disagreements, and would make the community proud in itself as the quality of life is improved, and there would be fair income distribution, public benefits, environmental sustainability, maintenance of local identities and cultures, and learning and respecting different cultures in the community. Thus, it is necessary to have the people sector and stakeholders to participate in tourism activity development in Songkhla Old Town (Community-Based Tourism Institute, 2011).

The data obtained from this study would be concluded and used to designate the types of activities that meet the needs of tourists and the community. For this study, a community stage was opened for stakeholders consisting of people in the area, governmental organizations, local organizations, private organizations and experts to take part in designing activities that would meet the needs of tourists. The data were also obtained from in-depth interviews with tourists. Hence, the types of activities will meet the needs of the tourists as well as the community. In addition, these types of activities would attract more tourists resulting more tourism expenditure in the area (UNWTO, 2011), and this would make tourism in the area sustainable.

Objectives/Research Questions

1. To investigate Cultural Tourism activities in Songkhla Old Town.
2. To explore the needs of tourists for Cultural Tourism activities in Songkhla Old Town.

3. To set the types of Cultural Tourism activities with participation of communities in Songkhla Old Town.

**Research Methodology**

The research procedure comprises selecting the study area, informant groups, instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

**Selecting the study area:** The area selected was the first main area in Ban Bo Yang in Muang Songkhla from the area 1-1 to 1-4 covering major streets such as Thanon Nang Ngam, Thanon Nakhon Nai, Thanon Nakhon Nok, etc. (Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, 2009, p. 13-14).

**Informant groups:** There were three groups of informants: related private sectors and people; the government sectors and public organizations; and tourists who are not residents of Muang District of Songkhla Province who arranged their own traveling.

**Research instrument:** structured individual in-depth interviews and structured questions for the community stage

**Data collection:** The data were collected from related documents, and a survey of the target areas. The data were then used for constructing questions for in-depth interviews, arranging a community stage and presenting the study results to the public.

**Data testing:** The data were tested through triangulation.

**Data analysis:** Content analysis was carried out. The data from documents and the field, participatory observations from the open stage, in-depth interviews were classified according to the issues of the study, screened, checked, analyzed, decoded, interpreted and concluded. After that a study report was written descriptively.

**Finding**

The results of the study on the types of Cultural Tourism activities designated with participation of the communities in Songkhla Old Town revealed the following:

1. The main Cultural Tourism activities in Songkhla Old Town were:
   Activities related to food consisting of consumption of local foods such as rice stew, ancient style noodles, and buying local sweets and snacks such as Thong-ek, Sampanni,
Tom sai sai, Kalochi, sweetened millet, Thien sod, large-sized Salapao, etc. as mentioned by tourists when interviewed.

“I come here to buy something to eat. There is some famous food like rice stew that has been around since grandfather’s time, being passed on to the father’s time and now to the third generation, and there’re also local sweets like Thang-ek, Thian sot…”

(Songsin Buathong (a made-up name), interviewed on December 15, 2011).

“Many kinds of food and sweet here are delicious and should be bought to take to your friends and family”. (Thammarak Nualphut (a made-up name), interviewed on January 2, 2012).

As can be seen, the key selling point for Songkhla Old Town is delicious exotic food that you can actually sit down to eat and then take a walk along the street where ancient houses are situated on both sides near the City Pillar Shrine.

Songkhla Tae Raek Fair or Early Songkhla Fair (Walking streets where you can enjoy delicious delicacies and look back to Bo Yang in the past). The activity is organized every Friday and Saturday from 4.00 to 10.00 pm. On Thanon Chana along Muang Songkhla Wall. The fair takes the form of a walking street with many different types of goods and sometimes there are stage performances (Nakhon Songkhla Municipality, 2009). However, activities in this fair still lack the outstanding features of Songkhla Old Town. Most goods are the same as those available in other markets in general. Thus, historical, intelligent and social values of Songkhla Old Town are missing as reflected by some fairgoers:

“Nowadays there’re very few characteristics of Songkhla Tae Raek. The fair is clangorous and awkward”.

(Songchai Phatthan (a made-up name), interviewed on November 16, 2011).

“The fair puts emphasis on selling goods such as meat balls, cell phone covers, and clothes. Anyone can organize this kind of fair. This fair must show the identities of being the early Songkhla town”.

(Sanya Chaiko (a made up name), interviewed on December 24, 2011).

Taking a tricycle around town:  This activity offers a tricycle service around Songkhla Old Town with the following details:
“One or two tricycles park waiting for tourists at Pha Thammrong Museum each day. Mostly they give service to 1-2 tourists a week and charge them 200-300 baht per trip. However, during Songkhla Tae Raek Fair, there are more tourists interested in the service because they don’t have to pay for the service; Nakho Songkhla Municipality hires five tricycles (200 baht each) to take tourists around the old town (fair)”.

(Phanawan Bunsong, interviewed on December 14, 2011).

The quality of the service of this activity was rather low because most of the tricycle riders were old and did not have the ability to describe or explain the history of Songkhla Old Town to the passenger. Another disadvantage was that the passenger of the tricycle was exposed to the sun or rain directly as the tricycle has no roof.

**Visiting important religious places** such as the City Pillar Shrine, Wat Matchimawat, Wat Yang Thong, Wat Pho, Masjid Ban Bon, etc. The City Pillar Shrine is the main destination for tourists. It is situated in the middle part of Thanon Nang Ngam where the city pillar is housed. The city pillar was moved to this place when the town was moved from Laem Son coast (Singha Nakhon District). The city pillar was erected on March 10, 1842 during the reign of King Rama III. And Wat Matchimawat or Wat Klang is an ancient Buddhist temple built 400 years ago toward the end of Ayudhya Period. It was formerly known as Wat Yai Sichan. In the compound of this temple, there is an interesting historical building, the Ubosot or the main building of the temple, built in the reign of King Rama I. The building features Sino-Thai art and inside the building there are mural paintings that are still completely intact such as the painting of the busy Songkhla Seaport at Hua Khao Daeng, etc. The gate of the temple features Sino-European art (Thammasat, 2011).

**Visiting Museums:** There are three museums in Songkhla Old Town: National Museum of Songkhla, “Phattharasin” Museum in Wat Matchimawat, and Phathammarong Museum. The first two museums are open Wednesdays to Sundays from 9.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. with the average number of 16, and 10 tourists per day, respectively (National Museum of Songkhla, 2011). The third museum is open everyday except Mondays and official holidays from 8.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. It is also open during Songkhla Tae Raek Fair on Friday and Saturday evenings. An interview with an official of the museum revealed that:
“There are about 400 Thai and 4-5 foreign tourists visiting the museum every month. Most Thai tourists visit the museum while walking around Songkhla Tea Reak Fair while a few of them visit the museum on other days”.

(Phanawan Bunsong, interviewed on December 14, 2011)

It can be seen that museum tours are not very popular among tourists as most tourists who visit the museums are people with special interest in museums.

**Festive activities:** These are the City Pillar Shrine celebration that is held at the same time as the walking street fair (on Thanon Nang Ngam), and Chinese New Year Festival. During the fair, there are traditional ceremonies in Chinese style, and Chinese opera at night. From 2006, the walking street along Thanon Nang Ngam was organized by Songkhla Old Town Community. Thanon Nang Ngam is closed to vehicles from Thanon Phatthalung intersection to Thanon Saiburi intersection. The effects of this are that some residents do not agree with it because they cannot drive their cars home, and it is not convenient for some customers who have to park their cars outside the area and walk to the shops in this area. However, as a whole, people agree that the activities can improve the sale of their goods.

“People walking in the fair are impressed with the atmosphere of the old town while walking along the street that is colorful, lively, and fun”.

(Wiwat Nawapraphakun, interviewed on November 18, 2011)

“I’ve been to the celebration and I like it. The atmosphere is good and I get to have some delicious food”.

(Phansaeng Sukniran, interviewed on January 3, 2012).

“I can sell more goods during the fair because I have longer selling time.”

(Thipphawan Dilekwet, interviewed on December 13, 2011).

It can be seen that tourism activities bring in both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, they make the economic condition better while bringing problems of parking space, garbage, etc. There is a lack of preparation for the increasing number of tourists, too. From an interview with a marketing officer of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (Hat Yai Office), more problems were revealed:
“For touring around Songkhla Old Town,...there’s a lack of information about it, a lack of tour guides, and some buildings are rundown”.

(Pratchayakorn Chaiyakhot, interviewed on December 24, 2011).

Moreover, from the Community Stage on the style of Cultural Tourism activities with community participation, further problems were found:

“Nowadays, it is like we all live our own life and people in the community do not know about the activities taking place in their community. Tourists are scattered everywhere with no directions for their visits, and there’s a lack of good management”.

(Supradit Sangsuwan, Community Stage, January 11, 2012).

For the above mentioned problems, it is necessary for all related parties to join hands in improving tourism in the community and find ways to conclude and form guidelines for activities to be take place in the future.

2. Tourists’ needs for Cultural Tourism activities in Songkhla Old Town

Most tourists visiting Songkhla Old Town come with their families or friends. The majority of them are from Hat Yai district, followed by people from other districts, and nearby provinces. Other groups of tourists are from Bangkok, Malaysia and Singapore who drive their own cars to Songkhla while some come in a van of their organizations. Most tourists choose to visit Thanon Nang Ngam between 10.00 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays and stay around for about 1-2 hours. The factor that makes them come to the area is their holidays. Thus, there are more tourists on long weekends and holidays, as said in the following interviews:

“There are many tourists in the afternoon, especially people from Hat Yai who come here very often. I see some of them every week. I also see some Malaysians, particularly during Chinese New Year festival and light boxes of firecrackers”.

(Thipphawan Dilekwet, interviewed on December 13, 2012).

In one interview, a tourist gave her point of view on touring around Songkhla Old Town as follows:
“I usually come here to buy ancient sweets and then go on to the beach”.
(Pratthana Sangkaew (a made-up name), interviewed on January 2, 2012).

The most popular activities among tourists are dining, buying local sweets, walking along Thanon Nang Ngam to take pictures, and paying respect to the City Pillar Shrine, evidenced by the following:

“No matter what kind of tourists they are, they want to relax which includes eating, shopping and sightseeing”.
(Wutthichai Petsuwan, interviewed on November 16, 2011).

“On Thanon Nang Ngam, there are many good foods such as Ran Tae’s food, Ice-cream Ong, Mung bean ice-cream, local sweets,...and also old houses to see”.
(Pakorn Srisuk (a made-up name), interviewed on December 15, 2011).

“I heard a song saying there is a noodle shop under the Chinese opera house. So I come here to have a taste of it”.
(Kanyalak Yingkhong (a made-up name), interviewed on January 5, 2012).

“My family comes to pay respect to the shrine every New Year, Chinese New Year, and the celebration fair”.
(Rattanaporn Sanitdi (a made-up name), interviewed on January 2, 2012).

The above statements are in line with the opinions obtained from the Community Stage held on January 11, 2012 which found that most tourists are on Thanon Nang Ngam because they want to try local food and pay respect to the City Pillar Shrine. Tourists taking sightseeing tours to look at old buildings spend most of their time in restaurants or sweet shops. They don’t go to other areas such as Thanon Nakhon Nai and Thanon Nakhon Nok.

Some activities cannot attract many tourists such as taking a tricycle around town, visiting museums and temples because these types of activities are suitable for groups of people who are especially interested in them, as can be heard from tourists and related people as follows:

“For taking a tricycle around town, I don’t feel like taking it; I feel sorry for the peddler and a little worry where he would take me to”.
(Khanchai Yomit (a made-up name), interviewed on January 2, 2012).
“The peddler of the tricycle should not concentrate only on peddling; he should talk to tourists, too”.

(Chakrit Phatthranit, interviewed on November 15, 2011).

“During the last two months, no tourist used the tricycle service at all”.

(Chamroen Binphat, interviewed on December 14, 2011).

“Activities should be more attractive. After paying homage to the Buddha image, I don’t know where to go next. There should be more public relations and information telling directions to tourist attractions. It’ll be even better if there is a tourist handbook”.

(Yingchat Chanpha (a made-up name), interviewed on January 2, 2012).

“Museums and temples have rather little power of attraction to tourists”.

(Pratchayakorn Chaiyakhot, interviewed on December 24, 2011).

It can be seen that tourists actually have interest and wants for activities in the area but the existing activities cannot meet the needs of tourists, and some activities need improvement in service quality such as the service of tricycle tours.

3. Styles of Cultural Tourism activities with community participation in Songkhla Old Town

Cultural Tourism activities in Songkhla Old Town should focus on daytime activities because Songkhla is seen as a close town where people are rather reserved and there are also some limitations:

“The streets are narrow and there are some limitations about restrooms. Footpaths are small and restaurants can accommodate only up to 60 guests and most of them can accommodate only 20-30 guests so most tourists come in small groups rather than in large buses”.

(Chakrit Phatthranit, interviewed on November 15, 2011).
Tourists should receive knowledge about the history of the town so that they can realize the importance and value of preserving Songkhla Old Town to extend its existence. The styles of activities that should be offered to tourists were reflected in the data collected from interviews, observations, and survey of the area. It was found that there were many different points of view expressed by the private and government sectors. However, it could be concluded that the points of view on the styles of activities were in the same direction, that is, more information on history of Songkhla Old Town should be made available to tourists who should have more opportunity to do activities with the community and entrepreneurs. There should be more promotion for people to see the value of preserving Songkhla Old Town. Activities should be organized at different places scattering around the area with roads linking them. Activities and tours program should be printed in a handbook focusing on presentations of the simplicity of life and ways of traditional community life. One-day trips should be arranged so that tourists can choose to combine or adjust the tours as they see convenient. Songkhla Old Town can be reached by various means such as walking, taking a tricycle or driving a private car. However, the vehicle should be small because of the limitations in terms of space and traffic. This is also to help preserve old buildings according to the preservation plan for Songkhla Old Town.

Discussions

1. Cultural Tourism activities in Songkhla Old Town are suitable for groups of people with special interest in culture, ancient places and ancient artifacts. These groups of people are quality tourists as Boonlert Chittangwatthana (2005, 291) explains that Cultural Tourists are concerned with cultural and environmental effects on communities or countries they visit. In addition, they are prepared to pay for goods and service at a higher rate than other groups of tourists. Therefore, Cultural Tourism activities in Songkhla Old Town do not have to meet the needs of every group of tourists. Rather, they should be selected study resources that can provide knowledge in history and culture. The styles of activities should be improved in terms of quality to make them more interesting. Nevertheless, the researcher considers that tourists visiting Songkhla Old Town are not those who focus on deep history but they are interested in culture and history in general. Thus, providing information on history, it is necessary to think of the level of history suitable for tourists. Information should be easy for tourists to understand, and it should be convenient and with low costs to provide. For example, information through sound that tourists can choose to listen to at each site by
pushing a button or to download information through the Internet or via Bluetooth at service sites.

2. For tourists who want to relax and spend time with their family or friends, tourist activities that can tighten the relationship among family members or friends will be well received by these groups of tourists, for example, eating local food, paying homage to Buddha images, buying sweets and snacks to take home to relatives and friends. This is in accordance with Pearce’ theory of Travel Career Ladder (1998) which describes that incentives have influence on searching things needed from tourist attractions. Therefore, the researcher thinks that activities to be organized should be those activities that meet the needs of tourists mainly for relationship with family and friends. This is in line with Mill’s concept (1990) classifying needs for tourism into five levels according to Maslow’s incentive theory: physiological needs, safety needs, belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization. The needs of tourists visiting Songkhla Old Town are the first three levels meaning that tourists want relaxation and spend time with their family and friends, and they need safety. They are not yet very interested in the history of Songkhla Old Town but if good tours are offered, there can be needs for historical tours because this type of tours can support relationship, too.

The activities that need improvement urgently are tricycle trips around town and Songkhla Tae Reak Fair (Early Songkhla Fair) because they are not popular among tourists; more safety and better services are needed. Profits should not be the primary focus but condition of tricycles should be improved so that they are in good condition and look beautiful first. Beside, tourists’ characteristics can also indicate their needs. Boonlert Chittangwatthana (2005, 138) classifies tourists into three categories: mainstream, moderate, and luxury. The researcher considers tourists visiting Songkhla Old Town in the moderate category. They want fun and good service that is not luxury but not poor.

3. Cultural Tourism activities with community participation in Songkhla Old Town should be based on the concept of conservation tourism and community based tourism (CBT) focusing on more fun and doing activities with the community in order to build relationship between the host and tourists. In addition, the government should provide more opportunities for the community to play more roles in tourism in the area. For example, sending community representatives to participate in meetings to plan, decide, and operate tourism activities. Moreover, for tourists who come on their own, a handbook should be provided to give information on roads to important places and on their history in more detail. The handbook should be available in three languages: Thai, English, and Chinese. If possible,
tour guides should be provided for groups of tourists who needs the service and convenience because tour guides can explain the background and importance of places to tourists so that they receive more knowledge and better experience.

Recommendations

1. From the study, it was found that there were many organizations and parties that were related to the Songkhla Old Town area. The researcher sees it necessary to have one main organization to be responsible for coordinating the organization of activities so that they are most relevant, most effective, and meet the needs of tourists and the community. The main government organization responsible for this should be Songkhla City Municipality to coordinate with other government organizations and the people sector organization should be the Songkhla Old Town Community to coordinate the people sector with nearby communities which are Ban Bon Community and Wat Don Rak Community.

2. The important base of sustainable tourism development is the community with a strong leader who is important drive power in making the designated activities concrete. Designating tourism activities a community agenda is crucial for telling the direction of community development for sustainable tourism. Therefore, the community leader must play an important role in mobilizing all the power and strategies for people in the community to voluntarily participate so that tourism activities with community participation becomes concrete.

3. The government sector should provide opportunities for the community to play more roles in tourism in the area, for example, sending community representatives to participate in planning, decision-making and operating tourism activities. Furthermore, it should support and encourage the community to get together in order to have participation in the community, and it should listen to the demands of the community in to identify suitable tourism activities that meet the needs of the government and the people sectors as well as the tourists.

4. For further studies, detailed tourism routes in Songkhla Old Town should be studied and then a map and handbook can be printed accordingly. Studies should be done on types of tours that meet the needs of tourists in order to arrange tour programs to try out and raise fund for the community practice of guided tours. Studies should also be carried out about the history of the traditional community which can be done by making a roster of prominent Songkhla locals in the past, history of important families that settled in the
Songkhla Old Town area 100 years ago. Presently, there are very few old people left. If the accounts of history, old society that are valuable are not continuous, they can be lost and not retrievable some day if records are not kept. Last, studies should be done on guidelines for tourism development for Songkhla Old Town so that it is well managed and can be used as models for tourism plans for related people to make use of them.

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