

SUSTAINING AND MARKETING COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM: SOME OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THAILAND

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ประเทศไทยแม้จะมีสินค้าและบริการที่น่าสนใจต่อผู้บริโภค สถานที่ท่องเที่ยวในชุมชนหลายแห่งประสบความลำบากในการรักษาตนเองให้อยู่รอดทางเศรษฐกิจ เบื้องต้นมีสาเหตุมาจากความสามารถทางการตลาดที่ไม่ดีพอหรือการขาดความสามารถทางการตลาด สถานที่ท่องเที่ยวในชุมชนส่วนมากอาศัยการบอกปากต่อปากของนักท่องเที่ยว การรายงานข่าวและตีพิมพ์ข่าวในสื่อท้องถิ่นเป็นครั้งคราวและการรวมอยู่ในการตกลงซื้อขาย (packages) โดยผู้ดำเนินการธุรกิจท่องเที่ยว อย่างไรก็ตาม ข้อสังเกตและสิ่งที่พบแสดงให้เห็นว่าสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวดังกล่าวสามารถผ่านพ้นข้อจำกัดเหล่านี้ได้โดยการหาความมั่นคงจากแหล่งสนับสนุน การเป็นหุ้นส่วนทางธุรกิจและการทำให้สินค้าและบริการต่างๆ มีความหลากหลาย ยิ่งไปกว่านั้น ข้อสังเกตและการค้นพบยังชี้ให้เห็นว่ากลุ่มตัวอย่างซึ่งส่วนมากมาจากสถาบันการศึกษาท้องถิ่นเป็นนักท่องเที่ยวส่วนมากที่เดินทางมาท่องเที่ยวยังสถานที่ท่องเที่ยวในชุมชน ดังนั้น สถานที่ท่องเที่ยวเหล่านี้ควรจะหาทางยึดกลุ่มเป้าหมายนี้ไว้เพื่อให้เกิดความมั่นใจและนำไปสู่ความยั่งยืนทางเศรษฐกิจ ในทางตรงข้าม การท่องเที่ยวชุมชนซึ่งมีรูปแบบเป็นตลาดน้ำและตลาดชุมชนที่อาศัยการพูดปากต่อปากและได้รับการกล่าวถึงในสื่อท้องถิ่นเป็นครั้งคราว กลับมีนักท่องเที่ยวมาเยือนอย่างต่อเนื่อง บางส่วนเกิดขึ้นเนื่องจากลักษณะโดยทั่วไปของคนไทยที่มีความผูกพันกับการจับจ่ายสินค้าเป็นอย่างมาก ยิ่งไปกว่านั้น การเยือนตลาดน้ำและตลาดชุมชนไม่ต้องอาศัยความพยายามและทรัพยากรมากนัก

Abstract

In Thailand, despite having the products and services that are of interest to consumers, many community-based tourism destinations have difficulty in economically sus-

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taining themselves, primarily due to poor or lack of marketing capacity. Most have relied on visitors' words-of-mouth, the occasional coverage in local media, and on being included in tour operators' packages. Nevertheless, observations and findings show that destinations can overcome this deficit by securing support and business partnerships, and diversifying their products and services. Observations and findings further show that study groups, mostly from local educational institutions, make the bulk of the visitors to community-based tourism destinations. Hence, these destinations should work towards securing this target group, thereby potentially securing some economic sustainability. On the contrary, community tourism that takes the form of floating markets and community markets, which depends on word-of-mouth and occasional mention in local media, does not run short of visitors. This is partly due to the inherent nature of Thais – having a strong affinity for shopping. Furthermore, visitations to floating and community markets require little effort and resource.

INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, the travel and tourism industry is a major, rapidly growing, multifaceted and multisectoral industry, with significant contribution to the country's economic growth and employment. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimated that industry is expected to generate US\$105.1 billion of economic activity for Thailand by 2017, or an expected contribution of 6.7% to the GDP, and a total of 4,767,000 jobs (WTTC, 2007). However, much of this projection has been impacted by local and global stochastic events (e.g. Thailand's political turmoil, global economic meltdown, Iceland's volcanic eruption, and epidemics).

Nevertheless, given its strong economic potentials, tourism has remained an important tool for improving the socioeconomic statuses of local communities (Jamieson, 2003; Kennedy and Dornan, 2009). Many of these local communities are often rural and economically marginalized (Hatton, 1999; responsibletravel.com, 2007) and this has led to the development and promotion

of community tourism in many developing countries including Thailand. Participating members of the community tourism destinations generate income as service and produce providers, and as employees, and allocate a portion of their income to a common fund, thereby providing benefits to the community as a whole. Members of the community not involved in the tourism enterprises apparently gain some form of benefit, such as community fund or as multiplier effect (Hausler and Strasdas, 2003).

Some private sector agencies may collaborate with the participating community by providing the funds, clients, marketing, tourist accommodation or other expertise. Depending on the agreement made, the private sector agency may or may not have a stake in the tourism enterprise (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996; Ashley *et al.*, 2006; responsibletravel.com, 2007; Goodwin and Santilli, 2009). The agreement usually involves providing support to community development and to active partnership with the community when planning the tourism development.

Depending on the communities, the objectives for establishing tourism vary with destinations; ranging, among others, from pure economic gains, to conservation of their natural and cultural heritage, and self-mobilization and empowerment (The Mountain Institute, 2000; Suansri, 2003; Goodwin and Santilli, 2009; Tourism Concern, 2009). Some of these community destinations have successfully achieved their objectives, while others not (Boonratana, 2009; Goodwin and Santilli, 2009).

Community tourism in Thailand, here defined as visitation to local/indigenous communities to purchase various products and services (Boonratana, 2009), takes many forms such as community markets, homestays, agrotourism, community-based tourism (CBT), community-based ecotourism (CBET), and OTOP villages. OTOP or One Tambon One Product refers to local products, and these may include handicrafts, garments, pottery, household utensils, and processed/unprocessed foods. This general definition of community tourism is to describe all forms of tourism associated with a local or indigenous community, and to reflect the diversity of such tourism in Thailand.

In contrast, a true CBT (within the Thailand context) is defined as an economically, environmentally, socially, and culturally responsible visitation to local/indigenous communities to enjoy and appreciate their cultural and natural heritage, whose tourism resources, products, and services are developed and managed with their active participation, and whose benefits from tourism, tangible or otherwise, are collectively enjoyed by the communities (Boonratana, 2009).

In Thailand, some community tourism destinations market their products and services on their own initiatives (e.g., community-owned websites, leaflets) and some through their collaborators (businesses, non-governmental organizations); while others rely on more traditional means, such as visitors' words-of-mouth, or tour operators' inclusion of the destinations as part of their tour packages (Boonratana, 2009).

As in a number of other developing countries, many community tourism (in particular CBT) destinations in Thailand have difficulty in economically sustaining themselves, despite having the products and services that are of interest. Among the many constraints include poor market access or lack of marketing capacity (Seif, 2001; Harrison and Schipani, 2007; Mitchell and Muckosy, 2008; Boonratana, 2009; Goodwin and Santilli, 2009). For economic sustainability, community tourism is dependent on a constant flow of visitors. Goodwin and Santilli (2009) stated that although CBT initiatives are dependent upon the same tourism infrastructure, very few CBT destinations are linked to the mainstream tourism industry, therefore making their access to the market generally poor.

In addition, there is the question of the target markets (Seif, 2001; Boonratana, 2009). Inability to identify, acquire, and gain the attention of appropriate target groups can severely affect marketing, which in turn affects the sustainability of the CBT destinations (Seif, 2001; Beirman, 2006; Boonratana, 2009; Goodwin and Santilli, 2009). Furthermore, marketing is a costly affair, frequently beyond the means of small to medium tourism enterprises (Seif, 2001), therefore affecting the destinations' market-

ing capacities.

In this manuscript, I describe and discuss findings and observations with respect to the strategies that some community destinations in Thailand have employed to promote their products and services, and the target markets appropriate to sustaining these destinations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Most of the information on the community destinations' marketing strategies and their target markets was obtained while carrying out a study (Boonratana, 2009) that looked into the contribution of CBT to maintaining sustainable lifestyles and to supporting the local socioeconomic development. I visited 12 sites (table 1) and employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Babbie, 2005; Veal, 2006). The focus however, was on two sites, namely Ban Mae Kampong and Ban Mae Lai, for the following reasons:

1. Ban Mae Kampong: a long and well-established CBT destination;
2. Ban Mae Kampong: a renowned model for CBT and/or for its 'best practices';
3. Ban Mae Kampong: a wholly owned community enterprise;
4. Ban Mae Lai: a newly established CBET destination;
5. Ban Mae Lai: a unique type of community destination, one not marketed as CBET, but as an outdoor education and research centre;
6. Ban Mae Lai: A unique partnership between the community and a private business;

7. Proximity to each other (about 40 minutes drive apart); and

8. Both are award recipients (Ban Mae Kampong received the 2007 Thailand Tourism Award for CBT, and Pang Soong Lodge at Ban Mae Lai received the 2006 SKAL Ecotourism Award).

At all sites, I carried out opportunistic interviews with members of the host communities, the business stakeholders, and the visitors; and relied, to the extent possible, on some participant and non-participant observations. At the two focal sites, I also employed in-depth interviews using semi-structured and unstructured questions with the host communities and a business partner (Ban Mae Lai only), and structured and semi-structured survey questionnaires with the visitors. The purpose for employing a number of techniques is to validate the information obtained through a process commonly referred to as triangulation or cross-examination (David and Sutton, 2004, p.44; Veal, 2006, p.107).

The rationale for carrying out visitor surveys were: to determine their motivation(s) for visiting the destinations, to obtain their evaluations and assessments of the destination, and its components, and to obtain their opinions, suggestions or comments on various aspects of the destination. Survey questionnaires were, however, limited to those visitors who stayed overnight or more, and to those who used the accommodations designated by the host communities. This was to ensure that responses reflected at least some understanding of the concept and principles of CBT, and that their evaluations and opinions were acceptable.

Table 1: Location and Nature of Community-based and Community Tourism Destinations Visited (Adapted from Boonratana, 2009).

Site	Coordinates	Type of Enterprise	Attractions/Activities
Ban Mae Lai, Chiang Mai Province*	18°53'25"N / 99°21'34"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Partnership with Track of the Tiger TRD (a tourism company); . Operations managed by business partner; . Some community members hired as full/part-time employees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ecotourism ✓ Outdoor education ✓ Corporate team-building and retreats ✓ Adventure challenge racing ✓ Scientific studies and research ✓ Pang Soong Lodge ✓ Nature trails ✓ Waterfall ✓ Rappelling ✓ Agroforestry (shaded coffee and miang tea)
Ban Mae Kampong, Chiang Mai Province**	18°51'50"N / 99°21'09"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Collection of community-owned and privately owned microenterprises; . Community-based cooperative manages community-owned microenterprises and community area only. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Community-based tourism ✓ Traditional Lanna culture ✓ Homestays ✓ Outdoor education ✓ Handicrafts and souvenirs ✓ Thai massage ✓ Nature trails ✓ Waterfall ✓ Welcoming/blessing ceremony (bai sri sukwan) ✓ Cultural shows (dance and music) ✓ Alms giving to monks ✓ Local foods ✓ Agroforestry (miang tea and coffee) ✓ Zip line adventure (operated by Flight of the Gibbon Treetop Adventure Co. Ltd.) ✓ Private resorts (outsider-owned)

Sam Chuk 100-year Old Market, Supanburi Province** [opens daily]	14°45'20"N / 100°05'42"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Partnership and joint management with local governance; . Microenterprises mainly owned by local residents and few owned by residents from adjoining districts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Traditional Chinese-Thai culture ✓ Old style buildings ✓ Local and traditional foods ✓ Cultural shows ✓ Handicrafts and souvenirs
Thai Buffalo Conservation Village, Suphanburi Province [opens daily]	14°38'45"N / 100°09'03"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Privately owned and managed SME; . Employs local community members and their buffaloes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Rural farmers lifestyle ✓ Traditional rural Thai houses ✓ Cultural shows ✓ Water buffalo shows ✓ Chalets ✓ Thai massage
Mahasawat Agrotourism, Nakhon Pathom Province** [opens daily]	13°48'24"N / 100°17'00"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Microenterprises independently owned and managed by 18 participating households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Orchards and farms ✓ Horticulture ✓ Food processing ✓ Boat cruise along canals ✓ Hand tractor rides
Lumphaya Floating Market, Nakhon Pathom Province [opens weekends only]	13°57'30"N / 100°12'13"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Microenterprises independently owned by residents and non-residents; . Managed by a local committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fresh market ✓ Local and traditional foods ✓ Floating restaurants ✓ Boat cruise along river
Don Wai Floating Market, Nakhon Pathom Province [opens daily]	13°46'19"N / 100°17'04"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Microenterprises independently owned by residents and non-residents; . Managed by a local committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fresh market ✓ Local and traditional foods ✓ Floating restaurants ✓ Boat cruise along river
Bang Nam Pheung Floating Market, Samut Prakarn Province** [opens weekends only]	13°40'52"N / 100°34'28"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Partnership and joint management with local governance; . Microenterprises independently owned by residents (and non-residents?). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Local and traditional foods ✓ Boat cruise along canals ✓ Handicrafts and souvenirs

Koh Kret Community Tourism, Nonthaburi Province [island open to public daily, but market opens on weekends only]	13°54'46"N / 100°29'23"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Microenterprises independently owned by residents and non-residents; . Managed by a local committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Mon community ✓ History and historical sites ✓ Local and traditional foods ✓ Thai massage ✓ Boat cruise along river ✓ Cycling ✓ Homestays ✓ Handicrafts and souvenirs
Amphawa CBT and Floating Market, Samut Songkhram Province [destination open to public daily, but market opens on Fridays and weekends only]	13°25'32"N / 99°57'23"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Businesses independently and jointly owned by residents and non-residents; . Market managed by a local committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Boat cruise along river ✓ Fresh market ✓ Local and traditional foods ✓ Homestays ✓ Spa ✓ Resorts ✓ Fireflies viewing ✓ Handicrafts and souvenirs
Taling Chan Floating Market, Bangkok Municipality [opens weekends only]	13°46'37"N / 100°27'24"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Microenterprises independently owned by residents and non-residents; . Managed by a local committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Local and traditional foods ✓ Fresh produce ✓ Ornamental plants ✓ Boat cruise along canals ✓ Foot massages ✓ Handicrafts and souvenirs
Khlong Lat Mayom Bangkok Municipality** [opens weekends and on public holidays only]	13°45'42"N / 100°24'56"E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Microenterprises independently owned by residents and non-residents; . Managed by a local committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Local and traditional foods ✓ Fresh produce ✓ Ornamental plants ✓ Boat cruise along canals ✓ Fortune-telling ✓ Orchards ✓ Handicrafts and souvenirs

*Winner of 2006 SKAL Ecotourism Award

**Winners of the 2007 Thailand Tourism Awards for Community-based Tourism

RESULTS

As Ban Mae Lai did not receive visitors regularly, I could only carry out questionnaire surveys with only 29 visitors; and given that this sample is not representative, I present only the findings from visitor surveys carried out at Ban Mae Kampong.

Marketing

Apparently, only Ban Mae Lai, Ban Mae Kampong, Sam Chuk 100-year old Market, and the Thai Buffalo Conservation Village actively marketed their products and services. The other destinations did not apparently market themselves, although a few destinations may have pamphlets or brochures on site that briefly describe the available products and services. All, however, to a greater or lesser extent, relied on visitors' word-of-mouth, television/radio programs, being mentioned on websites of agencies and businesses, or their inclusion in tour operators' packaged tours. Observations showed that the floating markets and community markets are very popular day-trip destinations for urban dwellers and international visitors. Opportunistic interviews revealed that these markets remain popular destinations for the domestic market regardless of the economic crisis or other stochastic events.

According to the host community, Ban Mae Kampong markets itself through a website, which is maintained by a webmaster hired specifically for the purpose. Their products and services are also indirectly marketed through magazine articles, television and radio programmes,

teachers, and by word-of-mouth. Observations also show that Ban Mae Kampong is also indirectly marketed by private businesses established in the vicinity e.g., through the website of Flight of the Gibbon Treetop Adventure Co., Ltd., and through word-of-mouth of the Sam Ran Chon Resort's guests.

Visitor surveys (n=185) showed that teachers (44.3%) were the primary source of information. This was followed by tour operators (30.4%), the internet (26.5%), and by word-of-mouth (22.2%); and almost all respondents (98.9%) said that they would recommend CBT at Ban Mae Kampong to friends and/or relatives. There was a significant difference between the males (n=75) and females (n=110): males more than females obtained their information from tour operators ($t=2.93$, $p<0.05$) and the internet ($t=2.35$, $p<0.05$), and females more than males from teachers ($t=-2.05$, $p<0.05$). Likewise, there was a significant difference between Thai nationals (n=104) and foreign nationals (n=81): Thais more than foreigners obtained their information from tour operators ($t=11.82$, $p<0.05$), and foreigners more than Thais from teachers ($t=-9.34$, $p<0.05$), and by word-of-mouth ($t=-4.89.35$, $p<0.05$).

On the contrary, the marketing of Ban Mae Lai is wholly managed by the Track of the Tiger TRD, the community's sole business partner. This is achieved through a number of means, such as the company's website and brochures or pamphlets, and through the websites and brochures or pamphlets of businesses that the company has established agreements. It further receives promotion through magazines, other business operators, teachers, and

by visitors' word-of-mouth.

Target Market

According to the host community, the visitors to Ban Mae Kampong comprised Thai nationals (predominantly), expatriates, foreign visitors, school groups (domestic and international), couples (mostly foreign nationals), family groups, and small private groups. Some of these visitors are return visitors, although there were, as expected, more Thai nationals compared to foreign visitors returning to the destination. Domestic visitors to Ban Mae Kampong travelled on their own or with assistance of an educational institution, a government agency, or a non-governmental organization (NGO). In contrast, almost all foreign visitors to the site travelled with a tour operator or agency.

The visitors comprised both day-trippers and those spending from one night to three nights, with the overnighters averaging about one night per stay. Many Thai visitors visit Ban Mae Kampong as part of their study tour, frequently organized by educational institutions, relevant government agencies, and local NGOs, primarily to study the CBT practices and model at Ban Mae Kampong, and the local culture and traditional Lanna lifestyles. Lanna (literally meaning a million rice fields) culture refers to a distinctive culture of northern Thailand derived from the ancient Lanna Kingdom established over seven hundred years ago. Other Thai visitors visit Ban Mae Kampong primarily out of curiosity. Foreign nationals visit Ban Mae Kampong for the various activities and attractions offered. These in-

cluded the nature trails, the culture, the lifestyles, the food, the hospitality, and to observe or experience a simple northern Thai rural and traditional community.

Visitor surveys showed that most (86%) belonged to the 16 to 35 age group, although females ranging from 16 to 25 years made the majority (39%). In addition, the majority of the visitors were Thai nationals (56.2%), and the foreign nationals comprised mainly those from various European countries (32%). About 61.1% of the visitors comprised those associated with educational institutions, and students formed the majority.

About 15.7% of the visitors were from other rural communities on study tours, and the remaining comprised mostly white-collared workers. Almost all the visitors (98.9%) travelled to Ban Mae Kampong as part of a group, with those who are part of or associated with institutions of higher learning making 58.4% of the visitors. This was followed by those who travel on packaged tours (24.9%), and with their friends (11.9%). Visitors cited education (52%) as being the primary reason for visiting Ban Mae Kampong, but this was closely followed by curiosity (45%), ecotourism (41.1%), and local community (32.4%). No significant difference exists between males and females with respect to the reasons for visiting Ban Mae Kampong. A significant difference between Thai nationals and foreign nationals were however observed with respect to the reasons for visiting Ban Mae Kampong: foreigners more than Thais visited for educational purposes ($t=-5.58, p<0.05$), to experience the culture and lifestyles of a local community ($t=-3.33, p<0.05$), for ecotourism

($t=-7.67$, $p<0.05$), and out of curiosity ($t=2.78$, $p<0.05$).

At Ban Mae Lai, interviews with the host community and the Track of the Tiger TRD showed that visitors comprised Thai residents (including expatriates), foreign visitors, corporate groups, school groups, family groups, and small private groups. The visitors comprised both day-trippers and those who spend a night or more, with the latter averaging about two nights per stay. The international schools from Thailand and abroad made the majority of the groups from educational institutions. The focus on outdoor education and research were the main factors that attracted groups from educational institutions to this destination. Some schools have also used the destination to carry out field trips for courses such as biology and ecology. In addition, well-organized team-building activities and games served as value-added factors for primary and secondary schools on educational trips.

According to the respondents, groups and individuals from tertiary level educational institutions were attracted to Ban Mae Lai in part because of the research opportunities on nature, environment, and the social and cultural aspects of the local population. Secondly, they were attracted to the destination's association with subject specialists (e.g., botanists, ecologists, and ornithologists) and the availability of baseline data on fauna and flora. Thirdly, they were primarily attracted to ecotourism products and activities available there. In addition, the Pang Soong Lodge (operated by Track of the Tiger TRD) provides space and basic facilities to carry out preliminary

laboratory work; and the Track of the Tiger TRD and the Voluntourists Without Borders Initiative (their not-for-profit arm) provide the occasional logistical support.

The respondents further reported that groups from (mostly international) corporations were mainly interested in corporate team-building programs and activities, while ecotourism was considered a secondary attraction to them. In contrast, small and free independent travelers were attracted to the ecotourism offered at Ban Mae Lai. Overall, the respondents reported that the setting in a cool, quiet, and relatively undisturbed natural environment is one of the underlying factors that attracted visitors to the lodge, the programs, and the activities. They further emphasized that some of the programs and activities would not have been possible without the healthy and relatively intact natural environment.

DISCUSSION

Floating markets and community markets are popular destinations for domestic visitors, apparently because there are products that appeal to different ages and genders, and match different budgets. In addition, going to these markets requires hardly any planning, and physical and possibly psychological effort. To domestic visitors, the distance to a destination has been characterized as a dissuasive factor (Nicolau and Mas, 2005). Furthermore, shopping, and enjoying foods and delicacies is the inherent nature of Thais. Hence, making the public aware of the community markets would greatly benefit local communities that have prod-

ucts and services to offer. This would not only economically sustain these communities (many of whom are marginalized), but it would also help reduce some of the current impacts of the economic recession by encouraging in-country expenditures. In addition, because many of these community markets are located away from urban centres and the mainstream infrastructure, the relevant provincial authorities could assist these destinations e.g., by placing proper signage, by improving toilet and parking facilities, and waste management.

Although Ban Mae Kampong maintains its own website, it does not actively market itself, but merely provides information about the destination. The actual marketing has been mainly *gratis* through packages sold by tour operators/agents, through media coverage (radio and television programs, magazines, news articles, and online articles), and through the websites of NGOs and various public agencies. Observations and visitor surveys show that teachers, in particular, have played an important role in promoting the destination.

Given this and the fact that most visitors were associated with educational institutions either as students or as belonging to study groups organized by educational institutions, educational institutions *vis-à-vis* teachers would be the primary target market for promoting CBT. In addition, this market could ensure a steady supply of visitors, thereby ensuring the sustainability of CBT. Furthermore, CBT communities actually enjoy hosting study tours because the visitors' objective is to learn, and the communities take pride that their cultural and natural heritage are of

interest to both local and foreign study groups (Peter Richards in Ecoclub, 2006).

Hence, relevant parties including the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) should promote CBT to educational institutions both within the country and abroad. Taking it a step further, these parties could seek the support of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, and the Ministry of Education to encourage educational institutions (in Thailand) to incorporate CBT destinations as field trip destinations for their relevant courses, and possibly subsidize those trips. Besides ensuring the sustainability of CBT, it would also assist in redressing the current economic situation and prevent economic leakage by encouraging an increase in domestic travel.

In addition, CBT apparently appealed to females more than males, therefore these destinations and the relevant parties could promote CBT in women's magazines, or encourage radio and television programs for women to include the promotion of CBT destinations into their programs. Furthermore, these destinations and the relevant parties should also determine and highlight those attractions and activities (e.g., trekking and camping) available at such destinations that appeal to male consumers to generate interest from this market segment.

Foreign visitors, more than Thais, are attracted to CBT for enhancing their experience and other related reasons; therefore the Tourism Authority of Thailand, tour agencies/operators, and relevant parties could include (more) information on CBT when promoting Thailand tourism abroad.

There is a lesson to be learned from Ban Mae Lai – businesses have the capacity and capability (that most local communities typically lack) to market the products and services professionally. Initial attempts at tourism by the villagers in Ban Mae Lai in 1994 failed due to poor understanding of tourism, and lack of marketing capacity and capability (Ban Mae Lai community, pers. comm. 2008). The lack of marketing capacity has been recognized as a major constraint to many community destinations (Seif, 2001; Beirman 2006; Harrison and Schipani, 2007; Mitchell and Muckosy, 2008; Boonratana 2009; Goodwin and Santilli 2009). Securing support and business partnerships play an important role in determining the success of international community tourism projects (Beirman, 2006; Boonratana, 2009). In addition, businesses tend to have the capacity to develop new projects, therefore allowing access to a greater market share and diversity, and reduce the reliance on conventional markets (Track of the Tiger TRD in litt., 2008).

Another lesson learned from Ban Mae Lai is that communities, businesses, NGOs, and others wanting to develop CBT need not restrict their products and services to the typical expectations of CBT. Delivering the same or similar products and services will likely dilute the market for this type of tourism, even if some destinations do well. It may even result in consumers not wanting, upon a visit to one CBT destination, to visit others, as they would not be expecting anything new, different, or unique. This holds true for those destinations that are located within easy access from each other.

Hence, the unique selling points of a

particular destination should be identified and promoted. Looking at the broader picture of CBT, however, when these or some of these selling points are not so unique, then it may warrant the need to create or develop a new product or service that builds upon those unique points. Such is the case of Ban Mae Lai, offering a centre for outdoor education and research.

CONCLUSION

Community markets and floating markets have the potential for providing a sustainable income to communities, and are less likely to face risks of stochastic events, changing tourism trends, or simply the lack in marketing capacity that many other community tourism destinations typically face. Furthermore, it requires less investment, both in terms of financial and trained human resources.

Where CBT destinations in Thailand are concerned, the value of educational institutions in supplying the visitors needed to sustain the destinations should not be underestimated. Rather, it should be formalized and aggressively promoted. In addition, the appropriate media should be identified to better promote CBT to women, the current main consumers; and the products and services that appeal to male consumers should be identified and promoted. Moreover, partnership with private businesses can greatly enhance the sustainability of CBT destinations, particularly in providing the support that these destinations lack the capacity in, such as marketing.

Finally, community tourism destinations

should not only limit and market their products and services to homestays, handicrafts and foods, agriculture, cultural and natural heritage; but ought to look into the possibilities of creating unique products or services, building up existing ones, such as re-orienting it to an outdoor/nature education venue, or a centre for learning traditional wisdom and skills. This would not only diversify community tourism products and services, but will add value to existing ones.

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