



# Management of Historical Tourism in Songkhla Province, Thailand

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## Abstract

This research of historical tourism management in Songkhla province aims to study the management potential of historical tourism in Songkhla Province and the potential for community participation in the management of historical tourism in Songkhla Province. This was a mixed-method research, employing both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The research sample was composed of: 1) community experts, alumni and leaders; 2) religious leaders; 3) residents of Songkhla Province; 4) academics and government officers; and 5) travel business operators. The tools used for data collection included 400 questionnaires, observation forms and in-depth interviews with community, government and private-sector representatives. Quantitative data were analysed using a t-test and a one-way analysis of variance. Qualitative data were subjected to content analysis by exploring historical attractions in the 16 different districts of Songkhla Province. Overall, 86 important historical attractions were identified, which were categorised into one of four historical periods. The quantitative study found that the potential for attracting tourists for the historical value of tourist attractions in Songkhla Province is moderate. When considering each area, it was found that nearly all areas were at the moderate level, with the exception of one area valued at a high level (physical identity = 70.8%) and one area valued at a low level (historical importance = 63.8%). The potential to support tourism was found to be at a high level. The potential for tourism development was found to be at a moderate level. The potential for management and conservation of tourist attractions was found to be at a moderate level. The potential for local community participation in tourism management was found to be at a low level. Indeed, it was found that the participation of local communities was at a low level in almost every issue, especially being part of the tourist attractions, such as in the role of guides or provision of services. This had the lowest average score.

**Keywords:** Community participation, historical tourism, tourism potential, Songkhla, tourism management.

## Introduction

The tourism industry is the driving force of many countries around the world because it can increase national revenue channels and enables many businesses to operate continuously. It also helps keep employment rates high and facilitates income distribution to the people. Analysts believe that 2018 was the year of the tourist industry, when tourism became the main industry driving the global economy and the level of international competition to attract tourists increased. Competition in the tourism industry is powered by changing consumer expectations, which modify satisfaction standards and force companies to adjust their business plans. Data collected online by the American Marketing Association from 10,000 international tourists found that in 2018 the majority of tourists still aimed to travel to countries in Asia and Europe, as in the previous year



(<https://www.prachachat.net/world-news>).

The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) revealed that there were 1,235 million global tourists in 2016, which was a 4% increase from the previous year (Wardi, Abror and Trinanda, 2018). It was a popular year for tourism among the Millennial generation (people aged 18-34), who favoured short-stay trips of 3-5 days and focused on multiple countries on the same holiday. Becoming a member of the ASEAN Community in 2017 was an important step for the tourism industry of Thailand, which is considered one of the twelve most important sectors of the economy. Thailand is famous and recognised by tourists from around the world for its beautiful environment and varied tourist attractions, both natural and cultural, as well as those suitable for urban lifestyle like shopping malls, entertainment venues and spas. From the forecast of UNWTO for 2020, there will be over 1,600 million international tourists. This shows that tourist destinations in ASEAN are likely to grow, causing more intense competition between tourist businesses in the future. With the potential and strength of Thailand to support a variety of tourists, business owners must ready themselves and adapt for the liberalisation of tourism. They must identify potential strengths, emphasising experiences and creative tourism that can attract a greater number of tourists from the ASEAN region. The Second National Tourism Development Plan placed great importance on sustainable tourism, which is reflected in the sub-strategy for the development of demand and supply in tourism (Zhang et al., 2019). In addition, Thailand also set up a sustainable community tourism strategy from 2016-2020. These actions were in response to the UNWTO declaration of 2017 as a year of sustainable tourism, which was made at the International Tourism Fair of Spain (FITUR) (Bramwell et al., 2017).

ASEAN progress was underlined at the 20th ASEAN Tourism Ministers Meeting held at the 36th ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) in Singapore on 19th January 2017. Under the title 'Shaping our Tourism Journey Together', national leaders and managers of tourism organisations and airlines in ASEAN countries came together to discuss a vision for the region going forward. With the Minister of Trade and Industry of Singapore as President and Mrs. Kobkan Watthanawarangkun, former Minister of Tourism and Sports of Thailand, as Vice President, the group initiated the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan (ATSP).

The aim of the plan is to help ASEAN become a quality tourist destination offering diverse experiences by 2025 (Koh & Kwok, 2018). This will be achieved through the development of balanced and sustainable tourism, community participation and responsibility, which will support economic and social well-being for ASEAN citizens. ASEAN ministers agreed that it was necessary to take action on a number of different issues, including assessing the potential of tourist destinations in ASEAN and their interconnections, the level of knowledge, understanding and awareness of the importance of ASEAN tourism, upgrading the digital market to keep pace with changes, increasing the potential for gathering, saving and analysing statistical data related to tourism, increasing the participation of ASEAN citizens, and raising the level of cooperation between ASEAN and international organizations.

There are many forms of tourism, of which historical tourism is one. UNWTO categorises three types of tourism: natural-based tourism, cultural-based tourism and special-interest tourism. Historical tourism falls into the second category: cultural-based tourism. Historical tourism involves visiting attractions that have a relationship with the past in order to comprehend the richness and historical value of the location or develop knowledge and understanding of the history of ancient sites and artefacts. Historical tourist attractions emerge from the current tourist demand or through classification as one of a group of important sites in the country. Part of the promotion policy of the government sector aims at preserving and developing historical tourism.



Historical tourism is important for both the international and domestic tourism industries and there is an increasing number of visitors to historical tourist attractions in many different provinces across Thailand. These attractions have clear identities and reveal the history of the location, the lifestyle of ancestors and the objects that were valued in the past. Historical tourism requires quality and systematic management. If the management is inadequate, there could be a negative impact on the tourist attraction, which highlights the importance of historical tourism development. Important considerations of historical tourism management include calculation of the potential for attracting and supporting tourists, management of attractions that require conservation, creating and cultivating consciousness within the local community, raising the level of local participation and distributing income to the community.

In the past, Thailand has lacked readiness to manage historical tourist attractions, which has caused many sites to become derelict and worthless. The major reason for this was the developing economy and lack of funding directed towards historical sites. Three decades ago, tourism became an important factor in driving the economy because of the availability of tourism resources, including natural attractions, cultural traditions, community lifestyle, historic sites, antiques and services. The private sector and the tourism industry rely on the availability of these resources. These tourism products create a lot of work and generate substantial income for the area.

In 2016, 6,857,413 tourists visited Songkhla Province, generating a total income of 59,836.28 million baht. The number of foreign tourists in Thailand during 2016 was 32,529,588, meaning that Songkhla received approximately 21% of this number (however it should be noted that the figure for visitors to Songkhla includes domestic tourists). Although there are more tourists every year, there are various effects on the economy, society and environment. Currently, tourist behaviours have changed and visitors seek more knowledge, place greater importance upon the environment, want to learn about history and value sustainable tourism practices.

This investigation studied the historical tourism management potential of Songkhla Province and the level of local participation in the development of historical tourism in Songkhla Province. The research will hopefully deepen the level of understanding about historical tourist sites in the province and highlight the value of culture and lifestyle. The research analysed the behaviour of people in the past that was related to historical tourist attractions. Historical knowledge is important in making tourists aware of the background of tourist attractions and creating pride in the national heritage of Thailand. This is especially true when considering historical content that explains the power of the state or national history that focuses on the values and bravery of its leaders who act as role models to the current community.

Historical tourism in Songkhla Province has many weaknesses, causing the potential of tourism in the area to be unfulfilled. The weaknesses include the creation of new activities and services that generate interest in tourism to the province. There is also a lack of systematic tourism management, which risks the loss of tourist business to competition from neighbouring provinces and nearby countries in the ASEAN community. The major research questions of this investigation were: 1) can the tourism resources of Songkhla Province be developed into historical tourism resources? 2) which area of historical tourism has the greatest potential for development? and 3) to what extent does historical tourism in Songkhla Province give local people the opportunity to participate?

### **Research Aims**



This research examines the potential of managing historical tourist attractions of Songkhla province and the potential for the people in Songkhla Province to participate in historical tourism management.

## Literature Review

The global society of travellers is continually growing. People are placing ever more importance on time for travel and the experience of visiting new societies and cultures. Consequently, tourism management has grown into a field of considerable interest worldwide. In 1996, Peleggi (1996) identified a growing awareness of national identity in the domestic Thai tourism market, which was threatened by the increase of privately-managed heritage attractions. Indeed, ineffective government management was seen as a major obstacle to the Thai ability to maximise the opportunities provided by the golden tourism boom of the 1990s (Kaosa-ard, 1998). Since then, successive governments have recognised the potential of Thai history as a transformative influence on the national economy. However, despite creating revenues for the state, “the top-down approach is failing to contribute to the economic well-being of local residents” (Thanvisitthpon, 2016). A greater level of community participation is required so that locals benefit from the economic rewards of tourism in their communities. Sirivanichkul et al. (2018) argue that awareness of the cultural and historical value of attractions is necessary in both external visitors and community members in order for the tourist sites to be managed effectively and benefit from sufficient levels of community participation. This is also supported by Soonsan (2017).

Perhaps the most famous summary of community participation is Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969). Arnstein proposed a model in which there were 8 degrees of citizen participation, ranging from manipulation at the lower end to citizen control at the upper end. These 8 degrees were represented as rungs of a ladder and covered non-participation, tokenism and citizen control. The first two rungs on the ladder are non-participative and aim to educate locals to support a proposed plan. In order for participation to become legitimate, local citizens must be informed and offer advice. There are three stages of this ‘token’ participation that Arnstein argues is purely symbolic. Once power gets redistributed to the people, then community participation is finally achieved (Nicolaidis, 2017; Tapaninaho & Kujala, 2019). There have been a number of proposed alternatives to this model in recent times, with scholars recognising new kinds of roles, relationships, practices and sense of purpose since the advent of social media and social learning (Collins and Ison, 2009; Tritter and McCallum, 2006).

Community participation in Thai tourism initiatives ranges from manipulation to partnership (Tseng et al., 2019). Given Thailand’s status as a developing economy, there remains a need for financial incentive to encourage community members to participate more actively in local tourism (Pornprasit and Rurkkhum, 2019). The research of Palmer and Chuamuangphan (2018) concurs, with findings of a case-study of community-level ecotourism stakeholders in Chiang Rai province showing that “involvement in community based ecotourism in a traditional hierarchical society like Thailand appears to be linked to an individual’s social standing or general position in society and to be far from a matter of free choice.”

There are dangers that community participation in tourism can negatively alter the community if infrastructure development is not systematically planned alongside the expansion of tourism activities. One further potential side-effect of whole-community involvement is the commodification of the community and a staged authenticity that detracts from the tourism



experience (Pookhao Sonjai et al., 2018). Nonetheless, international research agrees that community-based tourism can alleviate poverty, improve quality of life and empower people, if it is developed well (Dodds, Ali and Galaski, 2018). Recent research paints a positive picture of community participation and the effect of tourism on communities in Thailand. The main determining factors in successful participatory tourism are “fortunate geographical conditions, external support, and transformational leadership” (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen & Duangsaeng, 2014: 106). This also concurs with Nicolaides (2015: 21) who asserts that “Stakeholder management essentially necessitates an integrated approach to strategic decision making in which a wide range of multiple stakeholders must be satisfied and considered as far as possible in all organizational undertakings. It is not possible to please all stakeholders all the time, but efforts should be made not to harm them either. Any decisions taken by managers without considering stakeholders may result in both financial and reputational cost to an organization”.

Since the UNWTO revealed that over 39% of international tourism arrivals was due to cultural tourism, research in the field has grown quickly. “Major research trends include the shift from tangible to intangible heritage, more attention for indigenous and other minority groups and a geographical expansion in the coverage of cultural tourism research” (Richards, 2018: 12). In fact, there are a number of emerging trends in heritage tourism research. The “growth in heritage tourism scholarship...focuses more on experience, identity, stewardship, place and empowerment than the more descriptive supply versus demand work that preceded it” (Timothy, 2018: 177). National and local heritage is now considered a consumable tourist product.

Ten types of historical tourist attractions were identified by the Environmental Research Institute of Chulalongkorn University (2006): historical parks, archaeological sites, royal residences, religious places, sandstone sanctuaries, monuments, historical and cultural museums, fortifications, other historical and cultural elements and architectural buildings. Prior research on tourism at historical attractions in Thailand tends to agree that the priority of government and private businesses should be development of the attractions. Environmental management, marketing and the conservation have traditionally been regarded as secondary concerns (Kerdpitak, 2018). Economic factors are the major driving force of many development projects at historical attractions across the country. This has been labelled as a main reason for a lack of sustainability in the industry (Sangchumnong & Kozak, 2018). In an examination of challenges to tourism development for small border towns, Yodsuwan, Pianluprasidh and Butcher (2018: 107) found that there are “four broad issues restricting tourism development...: a complex web of stakeholders, powerful vested interests, a lack of identity or planning direction, and weak market attractiveness.” Regardless, it is crucial for long-term sustainability that the management of heritage sites gives full consideration to heritage conservation, which should be integrated with tourism planning to achieve the management goals (Diteepeng & Taylor, 2016).

## **Research Methodology**

The study employed a mixed-method research approach that included both qualitative and quantitative research methods. For the first part of the investigation, the researchers visited the research area, surveyed tourist attractions in 16 districts of Songkhla Province and invited local community members and community leaders to a group meeting to identify suitable tourist attractions from each district. The selection criteria were 1) potential for attracting tourism, 2) potential for tourism support and 3) management. In each category, potential, efficiency and quality were measured to assess the standard of the historical tourist attractions. In order to determine the potential for community participation, two areas were assessed (Table 1). After application of the selection criteria, 86 suitable tourist attractions were identified.



**Table 1. Criteria for considering the potential for community participation of historical tourist attractions in Songkhla Province.**

Historical Value	Physical Potential and Organisation of Tourist Activities
Historical significance Archaeological evidence Identity of a historical period Physical identity of the tourist attraction Architectural integrity and aesthetics Artistic integrity and aesthetics Reputation and acceptance of the historical attraction Relationship to the local area	Accessibility Safety for tourism Variety of activities Continuity of tourism activities

The historical tourist attractions in Songkhla Province can be divided into four different time periods: 1) Prior to the foundation of Songkhla town beside Khao Daeng (0-1656CE), 2) foundation of Songkhla town beside Khao Daeng (1657-1680), 3) foundation of Songkhla town on Laem Son (1680-1842) and 4) foundation of Songkhla town at Bo Yang (1842-present).

For the quantitative segment of the research, 400 research participants were selected and divided into 5 equal groups. The groups were 1) local sages and community leaders, 2) religious leaders, 3) Songkhla residents, 4) academics and government workers, 5) business people in the local tourist industry. The sample size was calculated using Yamane's formula (1967: p. 886) with a 95% confidence level and  $P = .5$  assumed:  $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ . The individuals were selected by non-

probability sampling in three stages. First, the research sample was purposively refined to residents of the Songkhla Lake basin. Second, quota sampling was performed to stipulate the sample as 5 individuals for each of the 5 groups from each of the 16 districts of Songkhla Province: Mueang Songkhla District, Sathing Phra District Chana District, Na Thawi District, Thepha District, Saba Yoi District, Ranot District, Krasae Sin District, Rattaphum District, Sadao District, Hat Yai District, Na Mom District, Khuan Niang District, Bang Klam District, Singhanakhon District and Khlong Hoi Khong District. Third, accidental sampling was used to identify the 400 members of the final research sample. Questionnaires on the potential for attracting tourism, potential for tourism support and management were given to research informants.

Qualitative data was collected from in-depth interviews according to the research principles of Supang Chantavanit (2002) and all ethical aspects were carefully considered. Initially, the researchers examined documents concerning historical tourist attractions in Songkhla Province, their potential development and local community participation in the tourism industry. Documents included tourism literature, academic reports and studies and general reference, both domestic and international. The literature was analysed and summarised as a guideline to create a conceptual framework for the research. Suitable research tools were then created in order to answer the objectives of the investigation. Research informants were interviewed on the potential of participation in historical tourism management by people in Songkhla Province, as well as the tourism potential and management. The researchers also conducted non-participant observation of tourists and local residents. Data was validated for accuracy and completeness, before being synthesised and analysed. The 5-point Likert questionnaire results were analysed using a statistics program to determine frequency, percentage, average, standard deviation and t-test results. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences between the means of the independent groups. Qualitative data was mostly descriptive and was analysed with content analysis methods.



## Results

### Potential for Attracting Tourists

The historical value of tourist attractions in Songkhla Province was found to be at a moderate level ( $\bar{x} = 3.29$ ), with almost all individual areas evaluated at a moderate level. Some areas were evaluated as having high potential, namely physical identity, architectural integrity and aesthetics and artistic integrity and aesthetics. 70.8% of respondents believed the attractions represented the national identity, 57.8% believed the architecture was beautiful and 57.0% believed the art was beautiful. By contrast, the historical significance of tourist attractions in Songkhla Province was found to have a low potential, with 63.8% of respondents believing the attractions to be only significant at the provincial level.

The physical potential and organisation of tourist activities at tourist attractions in Songkhla Province was found to be at a high level ( $\bar{x} = 3.64$ ). Accessibility was evaluated at a high level, with 63.8% of respondents indicating that the attractions had convenient access, multiple entrances, and speed limits over 30 km/hour (63.8 per cent). The variety of activities was also evaluated at a high level. 48.8% of respondents felt that the locations hosted more than two activities other than the historical attractions. The safety of the tourist attractions was evaluated at a moderate level, with 39% of respondents indicating that there had been a number of accidents in the past 3 years. The continuity of tourism activities was also evaluated at a moderate level, with 47.5% of respondents indicating that the attractions held 1 activity per year, which had not run for more than 10 years.

### Potential to Support Tourism

Survey results showed that there is a high potential of historical tourist attractions in Songkhla Province to support tourism ( $\bar{x} = 3.61$ ). Respondents found that the level of basic amenities for tourists was at a high level. The majority (67.8%) agreed that the attractions had developed sufficient facilities to accommodate tourists' basic needs but that there were some areas that required further development in the future. The potential for tourism development of Songkhla province from external factors was found to be moderate. Most respondents (51.5%) felt that tourist attractions were suitably supported by local organizations, both government and private, who offered consultation on the development of policies, budgeting and human resources.

### Management Potential

The management of conservation at the historical tourist attractions in Songkhla Province was found to be moderate in all areas, with 61.2% of respondents believing that the attractions were well cared for. 40.5% of respondents felt that the administration of space was systematic and standardised, with the accessible areas, opening hours and tourist numbers suitably managed. 40.2% of respondents indicated that there was an appropriate plan and data collection procedure for tracking and evaluating changes due to tourism.

Tourism management in the area of Songkhla province as a whole is at a low level ( $\bar{x} = 0.33$ ). Management of services and utilities was judged to be at a moderate level ( $\bar{x} = 0.36$ ), with all issues judged to be at a moderate level. The issue with the lowest rating was the number of service personnel available to assist tourists. Additionally, warning and security systems for the life and property of tourists were rated at an average value of  $\bar{x} = 0.34$ .



The potential of tourist activities was rated at a low level ( $\bar{x} = 0.30$ ), with each individual aspect at a low level, especially whether the tourism activities have no impact on the conservation site ( $\bar{x} = 0.23$ ). The potential for knowledge transmission and raising awareness of the historical tourist attractions was found to be at a low level ( $\bar{x} = 0.30$ ). All aspects of this category were rated at a low level, particularly the clear designation of a specific building or area as a permanently-staffed knowledge centre ( $\bar{x} = 0.27$ ).

The potential for local community participation in tourism management was found to be at a low level ( $\bar{x} = 0.28$ ). Indeed it was found that the participation of local communities was at a low level in almost every issue, especially being part of the tourist attractions, such as in the role of guides or provision of services. This had the lowest average score ( $\bar{x} = 0.22$ ). The potential of income for the community from tourism activities was rated at a moderate level ( $\bar{x} = 0.37$ ), although the potential for individual community members to receive income or salaries from employment related to tourism was rated at a low level ( $\bar{x} = 0.22$ ).

The communities of Songkhla Province follow a traditional way of life. The typical character of the people is loyal and they form tight-knit groups that perform well together. This is the social capital that motivates people to become involved with activities led by friends. The community lifestyle in Songkhla Province holds strong links to the original culture, making people realise the value of inherited archaeological sites, antiques and traditions. Local government bodies have the role of encouraging public participation in local tourism and community activities.

Qualitative data gathered from interviews revealed that there are many different ways in which community members can participate in historical tourism management in Songkhla Province. These include problem-solving, planning, organising activities, decision-making and tracking and evaluating results. There are more opportunities in problem-solving, such as helping to coordinate with relevant agencies to plan and solve specific problems in the case of each tourist attraction. Most people get involved with government and private initiatives, but there remains a lack of new activities created by community members. Nevertheless, there are local scholars who have worked in collaboration with model entrepreneurs to organise historical tourism programs that are compatible with modern times and modern technology. This adds important value to the historical tourism of Songkhla Province. The problems and obstacles to participatory tourism management of historical sites in the Songkhla area include a lack of real historical knowledge among most people, a lack of real opportunities provided by the government sector in which locals can participate, and a lack of funding from external agencies to manage historical tourism.

## Conclusion

There are many locations in Songkhla Province that can be considered as historical attractions and should be the subject of cultural and environmental conservation. There remains a lack of public relations in all sectors of the historical sites of Songkhla Province. Moreover, there is no platform for the community to present the historical tourism resources of the area. Together with the restoration of historical art and architecture, this is due to the management of the historical tourist sites. The length and richness of the historical narrative of locations in the area are worth greater conservation and restoration.

Any revision of tourism management must be appropriate for the local social and cultural



environment. First, awareness must be raised in the local community, encouraging residents to appreciate, cherish and join together to develop historical sites. The art and culture of the community, the stories and legends of the area and the local history should be combined to convey meaning to tourists. In order to preserve the interests of the community, residents must be invited to participate in tourism management at a policy-making level. This is consistent with the theory of Arnstein (1969). In addition, there should be comprehensive management of income from tourism that can benefit local people directly, which corresponds to findings in other case-studies across the country (Thanvisitthpon, 2016; Nicolaidis, 2015). However, it is important to delay marketing and promotion of sites that are not ready to welcome an increase in tourism because this may inadvertently damage the history and traditional way of life (Jun, Ponsata & Noh, 2016). Establishing a tourism network at the local community level will create tourism links within Songkhla Province.

This study found that there is a network of cooperation in tourism around the area, such as that between Tha Hin Eco Tourism Group, Ko Yo Agricultural Tourism Club and Wat Jot Conservation Club. However, despite Arnstein's placing of total citizen control as the top rung of her participation ladder, tourism in Thailand would not succeed without the support of the national government and associated institutions (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen & Duangsaeng, 2014). Thus, tourism management in historical tourist sites in Songkhla Province should be a joint arrangement between the government or the private sector with the community as critical stakeholders (Nicolaidis, 2014, 2017). Any models developed from the results of this investigation should focus on decentralizing leadership, retaining institutional support and increasing community participation in both decision-making and benefit-sharing.

## Recommendations

The researchers wish to recommend the promotion of public participation measures in the public and private sectors by opening a platform for communities to participate at a higher level, such as by making decisions and sharing benefits. This measure will help develop leadership potential in the area and increase the number of people ready to participate in various activities. Such developments will strengthen the community, create more value for the area and generate greater income for the residents in the future.

In terms of further areas for investigation, the researchers wish to recommend a study of tourism development that considers multiple religions. This is necessary to reflect the multiculturalism of Songkhla Province and in order to respect diversity.

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