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## **HISTORICAL TOURISM : A CASE STUDY OF MUANG WIANG SA**

### **Abstract:**

The study of historical tourism: a case study of Muang Wiang Sa purposed to study community context, general situations about historical tourism, and historical tourism resources of Muang Wiang Sa, Wiang Sa district, Surat Thani province, Thailand. The method of this research was qualitative research by applying SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). The key informants were from three groups; namely 1) executives and community leaders, 2) manufacturer and entrepreneur, and 3) representative local people in the community. The research instruments were an in-depth interview, documentaries and focus group. The findings indicated that: Muang Wiang Sa has valuable historical attractions. The existing community sages are ready to convey the knowledge to the young new generation. However, the community does not have high potential in the management of historical tourism and environmental conservation. The cooperation of the community in the management of tourism is at the high level. Basic infrastructure and facilities should be improved. The historical tourism plan should be made. Moreover, the collaboration of young generation in the community must be encouraged.

### **Keywords:**

tourism, historical tourism, Muang Wiang Sa

**JEL Classification:** Y90, Z00

## Introduction

Tourism is currently one of the main industries in Thailand that generate substantial income for the country's economy at the local, regional, and national levels. Thailand is a country with a wide range of tourism resources, from the beauty and distinction of nature, both land and sea, historic culture, including the way of life in rural communities in different regions. Moreover, the kindness and friendly nature of Thailand has long been unique (Kanhaming and Pimonsree, 2012). Tourism is used as a guide to local tourism development by offering tourist attractions, cultural heritage, historical heritage, wisdom, and identity of the community to tourists, for example; folk tales, folk art, customs, folk heritage, or even the geography of the locality, etc. These resources will contribute to the development of local tourism. Each community itself will have unique and valuable tourism resources. Local communities in Thailand try to use tourism as a plan for sustainable local development. Furthermore, tourism has become a profitable business for many areas (Jinhirun and Kamnuansilapa, 2013).

Surat Thani province is the largest of the southern provinces of Thailand. Surat Thani is a former capital of the Indonesian Srivijaya Empire, one of the most famous destinations for tourism. The province remains a vibrant city equipped with a commercial and transportation hub, many historical and cultural attractions, forested mountains, and some of Thailand's most famous islands; Koh Samui, Koh Phangan, Koh Tao, and the Mu Koh Ang Thong Marine National Park. The growth of tourism industry, social and economic development of the province has continued (Department of Tourism, 2017).

Wiang Sa is a district in the southeast of Surat Thani Province, Thailand. The Tapi River forms the western boundary of the district. Smaller rivers within the district are Khlong Nam Thao, Khlong Tan and Khlong Chanuan. While to the west the terrain descend to the Tapi plain, to the east are the hills of the Nakhon Si Thammarat mountain range. The northeast of the district is protected within the Tai Rom Yen National Park. Wiang Sa originated as a minor city-state (Muang) under the control of Nakhon Si Thammarat after the Srivijaya times (Wikipedia, 2017).

Historical attraction is an ecotourism, which is the result of the current flow of conservation of alternative tourism. The alternative tourism, such as sustainable tourism, green tourism, bio-tourism, conservation tourism, community tourism, and ecotourism, is increasing incomes in tourism and maintaining the environment. Historical tourism is a form of cultural based tourism, a travel to archaeological destinations and historical attractions in order to understand and learn archeology, history, local history and on the basis of responsibility and consciousness to preserve cultural heritage (Intamano and Visuthismajarn, 2014).

An important selling point for tourism is the differences and diversities of culture and tourism resources. The culture-historical archaeology, cultural history, way of life, and tourism natural resources can be presented as the major selling point for the tourism sites. Muang Wiang Sa has a long history. The community has a simple society with

the inheritance of some culture from the ancestors to the present day and abundance of natural resources and environment. The community is characterized by its unique character. Local wisdom accumulated from the past makes it ideal to Muang Wiang Sa as an attractive tourism site. However, it appears that the community has not received as much attention as it should and is not known to tourists from various sources. Therefore, the researchers were interested in studying general situations about historical tourism, and historical tourism resources of Muang Wiang Sa in order to prepare and develop the community to be a new tourist attraction of the Surat Thani province.

## **The Purpose of the Research**

The objective of this research was to study the community context, general situations about historical tourism, and historical tourism resources of Muang Wiang Sa, Wiang Sa district, Surat Thani province, Thailand.

## **Methodology**

The method of this research was qualitative research by applying SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats). This research used sample size of the 3 key informants, which were 1) executives and community leaders, 2) manufacturer and entrepreneur, and 3) representative local people in the community. The purposive sampling technique was employed for the research. The research instruments were an in-depth interview, documentaries and focus group. Data analysis was performed using descriptive analysis.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results show that Muang Wiang Sa has valuable historical attractions. The community has a long history. Wongsawan (2013) stated in her research entitled “the cultural development of Wiang Sa ancient settlement in Surat Thani province based on archaeological evidence” that the earliest settlement at Wiang Sa was found at the sites within the ancient town of Wiang Sa and at Ban Nong Sano and Ban Rai Tai, outside the ancient town of Wiang Sa, which was dated to the late pre-historic period (3,000-4,000 BP). Hindu religious evidence found at Wiang Sa ancient settlement indicated two main sects of Hinduism which were Vaishnavism (whom reveres Vishnu as the supreme god) and Shaivism (whom reveres Shiva as the supreme god). The evidences mostly found inside Wiang Sa town, Wiang Sa district, including two Vishnu sculptures in Pallava Art Style dating approximately 7th century, and another Vishnu sculpture in Chola Art Style dating approximately 11th century as well as the sculpture of Vatukabhairava in Chola Art Style dating approximately 11th century. From the Wongsawan’s excavation inside the town in 2012, a piece of sculptured hand at main religious monument was found. It was assumed that the right hand was one of the 7th century Vishnu statues in Pallava Art Style. It could be said that the Vishnu shrine was also the main religious monument believed for this ancient community. From the

archaeological evidence indicated that Wiang Sa ancient settlement preferably believed in both sects of Hinduism and the evidence also indicated cultural landscape development of Wiang Sa ancient settlement as well. Moreover, the ancient settlement at Wiang Sa and its surrounding area on the Tapi River Basin used the Tapi River as their main route to connect to nearby communities as well as the connected way to the ocean on the east coast at Ban Don's Gulf. There was also the cultural contact between these communities and the communities of the east and the west coasts along the passage of time.

The study found that Muang Wiang Sa has a simple society with the inheritance of some culture from the ancestors to the present day and abundance of natural resources and environment. Society has a strong tradition and culture in both past and present. Most of villagers were engaged in agriculture as their main occupation. The strengths of Wiang Sa Community were strengthening of social institutions and self-sufficient lifestyle. These results are consistent with research of Praneetham and Satjachaleaw (2015) which pointed out the people's way of life in Southern part of Thailand.

The study revealed that the existing community sages are ready to convey the knowledge to the young new generation. However, the community does not have high potential in the management of historical tourism and environmental conservation. The cooperation of the community in the management of tourism is at the high level, however, lack of integration of the work of all sectors, lack of promotion and support of government and private sectors in tourism management. Hunnark (2016) stated that one way to develop historical tourism was to create "the way to learn a long history of Thailand in one day" by focusing on management of preserving and taking care of historical evidence as well as landscape management. Basic infrastructure and facilities should also be improved. Historical learning site should be developed so that tourists, interested people and people in community can learn from it. Tourist attractions as well as new activities need to be developed in order that they showed identities and values of historical tourism.

Moreover, the finding found that the community faced problems of flooding during the rainy season and increasing garbage. Sometimes strong water erodes the road. Basic infrastructure and facilities should be improved. Tourism policy is not clear. Local people are not interested in developing tourist attractions, shortage of skilled personnel with technical knowledge and knowledge of product processing, lack of packaging development and value addition. Therefore; the campaign to make people in communities understand and aware of intellect, values of handicrafts, traditions, cultures and simple way of life which are based on the community context in order to preserve the environment in historical sites nearby. Policies and projects developed by the government should support historical tourism development (Hunnark, 2016).

Threats found in the study were modern media and technologies have persuaded children and young people to focus more on Western culture. Quickly and easily perceiving of information leads the current social change. Younger generations

adopted modern culture, lifestyle and new trend into the community (Praneetham and Satjachaleaw, 2015). The tourism development budget is insufficient. People, especially young generation still lack the sense of commitment and love local, lack of people who sacrifice and devote time to collective efforts to fully socialize.

Opportunities found in the study were the government has the policy to promote domestic tourism and provides support in arranging tourism promotion activities. The municipality of Muang Wiang Sa has the authority to develop tourism in its own area. Therefore, the historical tourism plan should be made. Moreover, the collaboration of young generation in the community must be encouraged.

## Conclusion

Muang Wiang Sa has valuable historical attractions. The community has local wisdom, attractive tourism sites, sages who are ready to convey the knowledge. The community has an opportunity in the tourism business, receiving more attention from tourists and become a destination for historical tourism. It is recommended that strategies and marketing plans for promotion of community-based historical tourism should be made. All sectors should participate and involve in developing and implementing planning and policies. Community and concerned organization should develop the historical attractions routes and promote activities and tourism opportunities in learning history and culture of Muang Wiang Sa. Brochure with route and activities based on local culture and historical attractions should be created. The development of personnel for historical tourism is also needed.

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