



Business Prospects of Slow Tourism in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSES: To survey and analyse business prospects of slow tourism in Thailand.
METHODS: It was a qualitative approach, with face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 15 tourism entrepreneurs. **RESULTS:** It was revealed that infrastructure and government policies were keys to successes to support the sustainable domestic tourism, particularly among senior tourists. In addition to suitable policy measures from the government, due to the fact of increasing competition in the tourism industry, advertising, marketing and promotions in both traditional and social media were necessary business strategies. **CONCLUSIONS:** Government infrastructure and policies were key factors in supporting sustainable domestic slow tourism.

Keywords: Tourism entrepreneurs, Thai senior tourists, slow tourism

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บทคัดย่อ

วัตถุประสงค์ สํารวจและวิเคราะห์โอกาสทางธุรกิจของการท่องเที่ยวสำหรับนักท่องเที่ยวสูงอายุในประเทศไทย **วิธีวิจัย** วิธีการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยมีการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกแบบตัวต่อตัวกับผู้ประกอบการท่องเที่ยว 15 ราย **ผลการวิจัย** โครงสร้างพื้นฐานและนโยบายของรัฐบาลเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญต่อความสำเร็จในการสนับสนุนการท่องเที่ยวภายในประเทศอย่างยั่งยืน โดยเฉพาะกลุ่มผู้สูงอายุชาวไทย นอกจากมาตรการทางด้านนโยบาย การท่องเที่ยวของรัฐบาลแล้ว เนื่องจากการแข่งขันการทำธุรกิจในอุตสาหกรรมนี้กำลังเพิ่มขึ้น การตลาด การโฆษณา และการส่งเสริมการขายทั้งสื่อดั้งเดิมและโซเชียลมีเดียเป็นกลยุทธ์สำคัญเพื่อความสำเร็จของธุรกิจ **สรุป** โครงสร้างพื้นฐานและนโยบายของรัฐบาลเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญต่อความสำเร็จในการสนับสนุนการท่องเที่ยวแบบเนิบช้าภายในประเทศอย่างยั่งยืน

คำสำคัญ: ผู้ประกอบการท่องเที่ยว นักท่องเที่ยวสูงอายุชาวไทย การท่องเที่ยวแบบเนิบช้า

Introduction

Thailand's tourism is on the rise. According to the estimate by Kasikorn (2017) Thailand's domestic tourism would grow by 7-8 percent in 2017, circulating 930 to 938 billion baht in tourism-related revenue to rural areas. The research pointed out further that Thais would undertake perhaps 158.2-159.7 million domestic trips, rising by about 6.2-7.2 percent, versus the 7.3 percent gain recorded in 2016

For the past few decades, Thailand's proportion of the senior population has noticeably increased in a consistent manner, thanks to the considerable improvements in medical health treatment and healthcare awareness, successfully and systematically managed and promoted by several government units, consecutively leading to longer life expectancy in Thailand. This is the direct, fundamental, and leading factor in producing the consequence in terms of the expanding number of Thai senior tourists. Services and products that make traveling more convenient for seniors are a great business opportunity in Thailand, now, and into the future, particularly the slow tourism business.

Thailand Population Structure

Statistics show that the proportion of persons aged over 60 years in

Thailand now accounts for 13 percent of the total population. In the next 20 years, the ageing population is expected to account for 25 percent of the population. The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security now serves as the core agency in organizing various activities to enhance the potential of senior citizens and provide them with occupational training as well as looking after their well-being and welfare. Concerning this aspect, the parliament has passed a law which is Thailand's Older Persons Act of 2003, aiming to protect, promote, and support the rights and benefits of older persons, including social welfare, medical services, education, occupation or occupational training, and social activities. In this regard, public and private organizations have been urged to participate and share responsibility in the development of programs for the elderly. Additionally, events in local communities have been established as well. Within the next 20 years, the elderly are expected to make up 20 percent of Thailand's total population. The nation is among the first of today's developing countries to become an ageing society. A substantial number of people live in Bangkok and the surrounding Bangkok Metropolitan Region. More than 14 million live in the

Bangkok Metropolitan Region. This means Bangkok is much larger than any other urban area in Thailand.

Tourism Business in Thailand

Travel refers to the activity of travelers. A traveler is someone who moves between different geographic locations for any purpose and for any duration (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2010). It is important to preserve and protect our natural resources, culture, and traditions, and for this, tourism is a vital factor. Tourism is not only concerned with the movement of people, but also includes various other service-providing agencies. The movement of people is temporary in nature as it goes up to a maximum of one year, but the impact on the allied service industry is long lasting, which gives a boost to the economy, creating job opportunities. The direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in 2016 was 1.2925 trillion baht (9.2 percent of GDP), according to the World Travel and Tourism Council's recent estimate (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017). This is forecasted to rise by 9.3 percent to 1.4122 trillion baht in 2017. This primarily reflects the economic activity generated by industries, such as hotels, travel agents, airlines, and other passenger transportation services (excluding commuter services). It also

includes, for example, the activities of the restaurant and leisure industries directly supported by tourists. The direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP is expected to grow by 6.7 percent to 2.708 trillion baht (14.3 percent of GDP) by 2027 (Languepin, 2017).

Slow Tourism Concept

The origin of the term 'slow travel' varies. In a literal sense, it came about prior to the advent of modern transport technology. The pilgrimage routes, the Grand Tour, and similar romantic, cultural, or religious journeys were antecedents of what we refer to now as slow travel (Dickinson et al., 2010). It was a combination of experiencing local food and beverages, and engagement with people and cultures. Moreover, the main purpose of a tourist's visit to a rural destination is the interaction with nature and rural culture (Farmaki, 2012). Therefore, the environmental setting is an especially attractive factor, perhaps the most important for tourism in rural areas (Frochot, 2005). Additionally, recent research associates the need to ensure that the environment is of high quality (Devesa et al., 2010).

Characteristics of slow travel as well as motivations and the destination experience of slow tourism have been directly associated with the slow food movement that developed in Italy during

the late 1980s. It developed with respect to the slow food and Città slow movement (Warren & Leromonochou, 2011; Petrini, 2007). These were related to binding local inhabitants to their localities and emerged as a community initiative for residents (Dickinson et al., 2010). Furthermore, slow tourism is attractive to travelers who are concerned about the environment, and it is often associated with a form of low-carbon travel (Chiesa & Gautam, 2009). It is not only attractive to travelers who are concerned about the environment, but without a doubt, the low-carbon emission is a significant factor of slow travel. Slow tourism should consist of 10 concepts (10 slow: 10S) as follows: 1) Slow activity means doing longer activities at each tourist spot; 2) Slow logistics refers to leisure as well as safe and environmentally-friendly travel; 3) Slow food is delicate cooking, using fresh, clean, and safe materials; 4) Slow stay is to have more overnight stays at a tourist area and to engage in suitable touristic leisure activities; 5) Slow place/city refers to residing in a community tourist area or a peaceful small town with no pollution; 6) Slow money is a fair division of expenses between travel entrepreneurs and tourists; 7) Slow development entails small-scale development that supports

tourist activities; 8) Slow accommodation is about peaceful, clean, and safe accommodations, with good environmental management; 9) Slow life refers to spending time peacefully with nature in a rustic lifestyle; and 10) Slow energy refers to tourist activities that save energy. If Thailand can develop and implement slow tourism, it will be another way for Thailand to create a sustainable tourism industry. This is because slow tourism is environmentally friendly; it saves energy and protects natural resources as well as strengthening the business sector in the community (Thongsong, 2014).

Expectancy Theory of Motivation

It is desirable to account for the motives behind pleasure or holiday travel, business travel, visits to friends and relatives, and other specific travel categories (Pearce et al., 1998). Tourist motivation will be viewed as a global-integrating network of biological and cultural forces which give value and direction to travel choices, behavior, and experience. It is recognized that destination is not only a tourism product, offering an integrated experience to customers, but it is a perceptual concept, which is interpreted subjectively by consumers and is dependent on a wide range of factors (Buhalis, 2000). Social, cultural, personal

and psychological factors, the number of tourist attractions, available amenities, price, human resources, and various types of tourism destinations are examples of the elements which can be considered in decision-making.

Samut Prakarn Province as Slow Tourism Attractions

The Thai government has recently, and quite frequently, highlighted international tourism. The development of, and research on domestic tourism, on the contrary, has been rather neglected despite the fact that the value of domestic tourism has contributed significantly to the country's economy. According to Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister, Somkid Jatusripitak, Thailand will boost domestic tourism as part of its objectives to achieve sustainability in tourism. He also added that one project that needs to be discussed is "One District, One Tourist Destination," to add more value to popular destinations as well as to create new destinations through a storyline. This will also help to achieve tourism competitiveness. Additionally, Thailand should place strong emphasis on domestic travel. Samut Prakan, a central Thai province on the Gulf of Thailand, sits just South of Bangkok at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River. The province has 1,004 km² of area, with a population of 1.262

million in 2014. Samut Prakan Province is one of Thailand's famous visitor attractions. There are several famous places for Thai tourists. For example, on the river's East bank is the Ancient City, a sprawling outdoor museum with scaled-down replicas of historic temples, old cities, and a palace while upriver, a huge, triple-headed elephant statue crowns the Erawan Museum, which has fine arts displays and religious relics.

The province of Samut Prakan received, in 2017, 145,000 visitors (+5.0 percent), with revenue of 219 million baht (US\$ 7.3 million, which was +10.9 percent). Located to the South of Bangkok and with a coast on the Gulf of Thailand, Samut Prakan is a relatively popular destination for day trippers and offers a combination of different kinds of resorts that are attractive to Thai tourists, including renowned Buddhist temples and a well-known seafood restaurant. These attractions are not necessarily attractive to international tourists since signage and styling are only Thai in nature. However, lacking the international renown, not just of the capital but also of regional centers, such as Chiang Mai and Pattaya, and the famous beaches of islands, such as Samui and Phuket, Samut Prakan seems destined to remain of secondary importance, only in terms of overall

tourism. There is an opportunity to develop senior tourism in Samut Prakan as a specialist destination, by understanding the needs of this segment of customers and then seeking to develop the necessary services and facilities as required. The example of destinations for slow tourism promotion in Samut Prakan includes Samut Prakan Crocodile Farm and Zoo, the Erawan Museum, the Ancient Siam, and Bang Pu Creation Center.

Research Method

This project adopted a qualitative method of research. Data collection was carried out in Samut Prakan Province in Thailand. The respondents to the questionnaire were 15 Thai tourism entrepreneurs, in Samut Prakan. A pilot test was used to ensure accuracy and the ability to understand and respond clearly. The questionnaire comprised three major parts, including some demographic characteristics on gender,

age, retirement, marital status, and education level. Perspective questions included concerned with individual tourism entrepreneur's perspectives relating to slow tourism, information prior to traveling, the preferred modes of transport, the importance of tourist themes, the interests and key factors concerning infrastructure and facilities, and open-ended questions for respondents to freely express additional information to understand the nature of the sample obtained. The researchers aimed to obtain a good representation of both men and women and also people in all of the various age categories. Once all questionnaires had been collected, data were processed and analysed by SPSS.

Research Findings

The survey was conducted targeting business owners. The profiles of the interviewees are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Tourism Entrepreneurs

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Experience in Operating Tourism Businesses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Male	9	40-45	4	Below High School	1	1-3 yrs.	1
Female	6	46-50	6	Bachelor's Degree	13	3-5 yrs.	1
		51-55	4	Higher	1	5-10 yrs.	6
		61-65	1			10 yrs.	
Total	15		15		15		15

Respondents were asked about their age since the purpose of the survey was to discover the opinions of managers, aged 40 or over. Only those respondents who answered that they were a minimum of 40 years old were selected to complete the questionnaire.

The majority of the respondents aged between 40-65. The official retirement age in Thailand is 60 although it has been extended to the age of 63 for some people in public service who are difficult to replace. The age varies considerably more in the private sector, where people can work longer in some cases if they so desire. The sample had

larger proportions of people aged over 65 than between 60-64, suggesting that many people continue to regard 65 as the appropriate age for retirement.

The next question was related to the educational level of respondents and had the following results. The majority of the sample received an educational level of less than high school graduation. This is not surprising since 12 years of government supported education for children was not guaranteed until 1997. Although more people have been able to obtain tertiary levels of education more recently, this was not the case in the past.



As revealed in Table 2, the majority of entrepreneurs were SMEs, investing over 5 million bahts and

employing 5 or more employees individually.

Table 2: Investment and Employment in Tourism Business

Investment/(Baht)	Frequency	Number of Employees	Frequency
2,000,001-5,000,000	6	Fewer than 5	5
Above 5,000,000 baht	9	5 and more	9
Total	15	Total	15

Main businesses of the sample tourism entrepreneurs are described in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Description of the Business

Description of Business	Frequency	%
Arrange international groups tour	11.0	73.33
Arrange group tours in Thailand and interantional	3.0	20.0
Arrange group seminars in Thailand and international group tours	1.0	6.67
Total	15.0	100.0

Data in Table 3 show that the majority of entrepreneurs were involed in international group tour business. In this regard, it suggests that they are well prepared to receive not only Thai

senior tourists but also foreign senior tourists.

Table 4: Opinions about Thailand's Tourism Infrastructure (%)

	<i>Thailand's Tourism Infrastructure</i>	<i>Government's Attitudes toward Slow Tourism</i>	<i>Thailand's Policy toward Slow Tourism (Investment Incentives)</i>
Poor	6.67	20.0	20.0
Neither poor nor good	20.0		
Good	20.0	40.0	26.67
Very good	40.0	40.0	53.33
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

From the discussion with all managers, 8 of them believed that exist in infrastructure for tourism was currently sufficient for senior travelers. However, four of them thought differently that for senior travelers, it was quite not convenient, and even worst. It was the most obstacles for senior people living in Thailand to go from places to places.

Almost all of them thought similarly that actually the government was aware and well understood about the value of Senior citizens, and commented that the current government has increased more public services to serve senior citizens, especially related to health care issues. However, in practice for slow tourism, the government still did not place priority to this aspect yet.

When discussing with the respondents about how they saw the

government's support for slow tourism for senior travelers in general. Seven of them explained that the government just only promoted verbally; however, they commented that they did not receive real support from the government.

In this regard, the business owners should change attitudes instead of managing older travellers to foreign countries, which are more expensive. Change to manage the elderly in the country. The frequency of each month is more organized than the travel abroad. The cost of operation will be less than the costs of managing travel abroad.

Table 5 presents opinions of entrepreneurs on tourism business and Thai economy. It was revealed that Thai economy affected a great deal on tourism business.

Regarding *senior Thai tourists' spending during slow tourism*, the opinion of the entrepreneurs was that senior Thai people who traveled were considered to be of more and more importance, as the population of the senior Thais increases, and they had a longer and longer life expectancy. Therefore, they paid for their health and convenience. Any tourist attractions which offer good facilities for seniors would be able to attract more visitors, not just the senior people, but also their young families and relatives.

The attractions will consequently earn more from this target group.

With respect to their *views on the importance of marketing for slow tourism*, it is interesting to note that all managers agreed that marketing is very important for their businesses. Without online marketing, i.e., websites, email, and Facebook, it was unlikely that customers will know about the attractions. They said that the family members of senior Thai visitors would check information from social media before deciding to come to visit.

Table 5: Opinions on Impact of Thailand's Economy on Tourism (%)

	Impact of Thailand's Economy on Tourism	Senior Thai Tourists' Spending Towards Slow Tourism	Importance of Marketing for Slow Tourism	Competition for Slow tourism
Low	13.33	6.67	0	13.33
Fair	33.33	46.67	0	20.00
High	53.33	46.67	100.00	66.67
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

As far as their *views on competition for slow tourism* was concerned, the results in Table 6 showed the importance of marketing. In Samut Prakarn Province. There were several attractions for a one-day visit. It

was quite competitive already that they wanted to make their places become choices of their customers' visits. They wanted their customers to spend money at their restaurants, souvenir items, shows, activities, etc.

Table 6: *Views on GDP and the Importance of Slow Tourism (%)*

Level	Frequency	%
Low	1	6.67
Fair	1	6.67
High	6	40.00
Very High	7	46.67
Total	15	100.00

All the executive respondents agreed that the economic situations reflected by the country's GDP weighed as high (40.0 percent) and very high (46.67 percent) for the slow tourism.

Discussion and Policy Implications

Slow tourism has emerged from the rise of 'new tourism,' which was a reaction to mass tourism, which developed as a result of low-cost international flights, blue-sky inter-governmental agreements, and the development of tourism infrastructure in terms of ease of booking, awareness of facilities and information, and money changing, including the development of new destinations so as to provide a wide range of options that may be segmented according to demand. This form of mass tourism has negative impacts; for example, the physical impact on locations that became completely dependent on incoming tourists and the environmental impact. The new tourism movement was a

response to this and was initially characterized by societal and environmental consciousness and the search for authenticity (Poon, 1991). Authenticity was viewed as a means of entering the back region of a destination.

This approach further developed with the emergence of the slow living concept, which rejects many of the trappings of the contemporary world, in the form of fast food, surface impressions, and the intermediation of social media between observers and the real world. This movement offers not just a way to enjoy life more, but a means of reassessing the position of the individual with respect to society, identity, neo-liberal models of rationality, and the shift towards market-driven politics in the advanced countries where this phenomenon is most commonly witnessed. In the tourism context, slow tourism relates to the mode and purpose of travel and the ways in which services and

experiences are consumed by those involved.

In the case of Thailand, business owners do not need to wait for promotion or support from the government, but they should join together and help create a network in every province, applying the social media technology well, along with the continuous improvement of the service business potentiality. Then they should keep on learning about the Thai senior tourists' needs and modify all services and facilities according to the ways that senior citizens travel. It is imperative that seniors are enthusiastic, and that they want to go and find new things as well. The places and atmosphere must

be beautiful, convenient, safe, and friendly so that the elderly will come back again.

Finally, entrepreneurs should change their attitudes, instead of managing older travelers to foreign countries, which is more expensive. They could change to manage the elderly in the country. The frequencies of each month can be more organized than the travel abroad. The cost of operation will be less than the cost of managing travel abroad.

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