

ABSTRACT

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Tourism industry in Thailand generates the country's second largest source of revenue, which has generated significant revenue and income circulating throughout the nation. Rapid increasing rate of tourists has created negative impact on socio-economic and environmental conditions, particularly natural exploitation, unequal income distribution and waste management problem. Thus, the need to develop tourism in a sustainable manner has also become a primary concern.

In Thailand, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) then shifted its policy towards more sustainable tourism development, focusing on conservation and benefits to local communities. The overall goal of ecotourism development in Thailand is to develop a sustainable industry, to maintain a healthy natural and social environment, and to foster self-reliance in local communities. However, there are many studies indicating that where ecotourism is not sufficiently community-focused has created negative impact on the environment, and indigenous communities have not received sufficient benefits. Thus, the concept of community-based tourism was initiated. The idea behind the community-based approach is to create potential for empowering the community, enhancing their involvement in decision making, and making sure that the will and incentive to participate come from the community itself.

The key findings from the 4 case studies reveal that community-based tourism in Thailand generally emerged from both inside and outside factors, including economic difficulties, environmental degradation as well as government policy. The success of community-based tourism depends on various issues, such as the abundance of tourism resources, level of community participation, strong leadership, the strength of community organization, fair benefit distribution, effective natural resource management and sufficient outside support.

The result of this study also highlighted that community-based tourism, which has been perceived as a sustainable tourism, would create both advantages and disadvantages to local people in various aspects, including economic, environmental, social and cultural impacts. Therefore, principles of sufficient economy philosophy and Buddhist economics were introduced to integrate with the concept of community-based tourism as a guiding principle for all people to acquire real happiness.