

Abstract

In contrast to popular conventional trekking tours that dominate the Northern Thai tourist industry, this thesis explores community-based ecotourism, one of the alternative strategies currently being used among highland minority groups and NGOs in Northern Thailand. Ecotourism offers a unique strategy that embraces local aspirations for achieving self-determined sustainable development and is promoted locally and globally as a mechanism of achieving economic development alongside environmental conservation. An analysis of findings from participant observation, interviews, and secondary data gathered during fieldwork in 2002-2003, suggests that community-based ecotourism is likely to achieve only limited success on a small scale in terms of the immediate benefits it generates in host communities. Since ecotourism is premised on the commodification of nature and culture, it seems unlikely that ecotourism, which links people, tourism and the natural and cultural environments, will be a successful avenue for achieving long-term sustainability.