

Abstract

Community Based Tourism (CBT) emerged during the 1980s as a result of the increasing need to define and implement ways of addressing the challenges of tourism development in the destination through a ‘community approach’. It has since become a popular approach to tourism development that seeks to address the negative environmental and social impacts derived from such development whilst adopting the principles of sustainable development. Unsurprisingly, given its focus on benefiting and engaging local destination communities within tourism development, CBT has also attracted a significant degree of academic attention. However, such attention has been concerned primarily with the planning and management of CBT from a ‘supply’ perspective; conversely, a gap in the literature exists in regards to considering CBT as a tourism product in general, and from the perspectives and experiences of tourists in particular. In other words, limited attention has been paid to the demand for CBT as a tourism ‘product’. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to address this gap by developing an understanding of CBT from not only the perspective of the supply side but also from the perspective of the consumer, more specifically, both international and domestic tourists.

Consequently, Pai, a well-known destination in Thailand for both international and domestic tourists was selected as a case study. Given the focus of this study on seeking to identify and appraise the perceptions and experiences of tourists consuming the CBT product, in-depth interviews were conducted to obtain rich and detailed data, the samples comprising 25 domestic and 25 international tourists. In addition, interviews were undertaken with the supply-side stakeholders, including three representatives of the local public sector administration and eight private sector respondents, including entrepreneurs and members of the local community, in order to understand the current situation with regards to CBT development in Pai. Brochure contents analysis was also undertaken in order to identify the contemporary ‘induced’ destination image of Pai as one influence on the destination choice and decision making process made by tourists. The outcomes of the interviews and contents analysis, along with a cross-cultural analysis of the responses of international and domestic tourists, revealed that the destination images held by both groups of tourists matched those portrayed by tour operators in the brochures. However, tourist knowledge and recognition of CBT in

general, and Pai as a CBT destination in particular, were found to be limited. Nevertheless, international visitors in particular perceived the authenticity of the destination more so than domestic tourists, reflecting the differing characteristics and motivations based on their own cultures. Furthermore the community itself lacked the participation and unity required for CBT to be effective. Hence, this study concludes that not only does a destination such as Pai, that originally developed within a community based development policy framework, face significant challenges in developing tourism according to the principles of CBT, but also that tourist themselves have difficulty in understanding the concept of CBT. Nevertheless, the study reveals that, despite the differing perceptions and demands of international and domestic tourists, the potential exists to develop tourism in Pai to bring greater benefit to the local community. Therefore, the thesis proposes collaborative plans that are necessary to allow CBT managers to better design and develop strategies that enhance the community's benefits from tourism, whilst meeting the needs of both international and domestic tourists.