

## Development of the Ecotourism Management Model for Forest Park

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**Abstract:** Ecotourism is an environmentally responsible travel to natural areas that conserves ecological system, natural resources and environment with great appreciation of natural habitat. Additionally, its aim is to educate the traveler; directly benefit for and the well-being of local people. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. All stakeholders of local administration organizations, business persons, local people and tourists at Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park in Thailand have participated in ecotourism management in order to minimize the impact of global warming or water shortage, to educate the traveler and local people, to build the environmental and cultural awareness and respectability, to create the positive experiences for both visitors and local people, to provide the direct financial benefits of conservation for all stakeholders. The objective of this research was to develop the Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park in Thailand. The populations were all stakeholders who involved into the ecotourism activities at Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park in Thailand. The questionnaire was used as a tool for data collecting. Path analysis was used for data analysis. The model was verified by all stakeholders. The finding revealed that the two models ecotourism management for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park were the model of Local Administration Organization (LAO) and Business Group (BG). The model of LAO was found that the plan factor directly affected to act factor with 0.861, to benefit factor with 0.910 to evaluation factor with 0.771 and to natural resource and environment conservation with 0.827, respectively. The act factor affected to benefit factor with 0.795, to evaluation factor with 0.795 and evaluation factor affected to natural resource and environment conservation with 0.819 while benefit factor affected to evaluation factor with 0.732 and to natural resource and environment conservation factor with 0.836. Moreover, evaluation factor affected to natural resource and environment conservation with 0.858. However, model of BG illustrated the Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park by Business Group (BG), the results showed that plan factor directly affected to act factor with 0.594 and evaluation factor with 0.708 but did not affected benefit factor and to natural resources conservation. Furthermore, benefit factor directly affected to natural resources conservation factor with 0.420. Meanwhile, act factor directly affected to evaluation factor with 0.442 and evaluation factor directly affected to natural resources conservation factor with 0.296. It can be concluded, the LAO had better Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park than BG because the plan factor showed more effecting to act and benefit factors. Finally, it also directly affected to evaluation factor and natural resource and environment conservation as mentioned before. Therefore, it indicated that the LAO had better plan and act than the BG, they got better in the benefit, the evaluation and the natural resource and the environmental conservation while the BG model illustrated that the lacked of good plan and act therefore, they received the fewer benefit and the lack of good evaluation and the natural resource and environmental conservation. Considering with the stakeholders' opinions indicated that the LAO and the BG should cooperate in order to provide more information of this tourism destination and to rearrange the surrounded building. Additionally, the LAO should help the BG to organize the tourism site in order to maximize all stakeholder benefits.

**Key words:** Development, Ecotourism management model, Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park, LAO, BG, Thailand

### INTRODUCTION

The sustainable tourism, the sustainable development have become prevalent concepts since the

mid 1980s and ecotourism has experienced arguably the fastest growth of all sub-sectors in the tourism industry. The popularity represents a change in tourist perceptions, increased environmental awareness and change attitude

to conserve the environment including a desire to explore natural environments (Randall, 1987). Australia is an important area for the study of tourism and parks. It is the first country in the world to develop and approve a national ecotourism strategy (Allcock *et al.*, 1994). The implementation of the strategy is well under way with \$10,000,000 of Federal funding approved in priority areas such as accreditation, market research, energy and waste minimization, infrastructure, education, monitoring, regional planning, business development and conferences (Lee, 1994). Individual states are responding with state level plans (Burns, 1995). There are high levels of industry, government and environmentalist attention paid to the long-term implications of increasing tourism use in sensitive parks, reserves and world heritage sites. The concepts inherent in nature-based tourism are actively studied and debated (Harris and Leiper, 1995). Australian government efforts are aggressively trying to fill the gap between policy endorsement and policy implementation so often seen in tourism (Pigram, 1990).

The lack of sustainability highlights the need for small scale, slow growth and locally based ecotourism. Local peoples have a vested interest in the well being of their community and are therefore more accountable to environmental protection than multinational corporations. The lack of control, Westernization, adverse impacts to the environment, loss of culture and traditions outweigh the benefits of establishing large scale ecotourism. The increased contributions of communities to locally managed ecotourism create viable economic opportunities including high level management positions and reduce environmental issues associated with poverty and unemployment. Because the ecotourism experience is marketed to a different lifestyle from large scale ecotourism, the development of facilities and infrastructure does not need to conform to corporate Western tourism standards and can be much simpler and less expensive.

There is a greater multiplier effect on the economy because local products, materials and labor are used. Profits accrue locally and import leakages are reduced (Cater, 1994). However, even this form of tourism may require foreign investment for promotion or start up. When such investments are required, it is crucial for communities to find a company or non-governmental organization that reflects the philosophy of ecotourism; sensitive to their concerns and willing to cooperate at the expense of profit. The basic assumption of the multiplier effect is that the economy starts off with unused resources, for example that many workers are cyclically unemployed and much of industrial capacity is sitting idle or incompletely utilized. By increasing demand in the

economy, it is then possible to boost production. If the economy was already at full employment with only structural, frictional or other supply-side types of unemployment, any attempt to boost demand would only lead to inflation.

Ecotourism focuses on environmental study in order to conserve the ecological system of the area. There is an accompanying focus on the participation of the local people in the management or organization of this form of tourism. Therefore, this regards to incorporate elements of natural tourism, cultural tourism and historical tourism based on the importance of maintaining the ecological system of those areas (Thiengkamol, 1997). Responsible ecotourism includes programs that minimize the negative aspects of conventional tourism on the environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of ecotourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation and creation of economic opportunities for local communities. For these reasons, ecotourism often appeals to environmental and social responsibility advocates (Randall, 1987). Therefore, it can be concluded that ecotourism is an environmentally responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, accompanies with the participation of the local people, improves the well-being of local people and incorporate elements of cultural tourism and historical tourism to provide an importance for maintaining the balance of ecological system for the tourism sites (Ties, 1990; Thiengkamol, 1997).

Natural resource management can be utilized as a specialized tool for the development of ecotourism. There are several places throughout the world where the amount of natural resources are abundant. But with human encroachment and habitats these resources are depleting. Without knowing the proper utilization of certain resources they are destroyed and floral and faunal species are becoming extinct. Ecotourism program can be introduced for the conservation of these resources. Several plans and proper management program can be introduced so that these resources remain untouched. Several organizations NGO's and scientists are working on this field. Like as Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park has very unique natural resources of nature trail walking, climbing and seeing the nature of rock garden and beautiful valley but it also provides the another side of site seeing by using E-Tak car to bring the tourist who is not able to climb in the another side of Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park. LAO members and BG play an important role of ecotourism management for this tourism site. Moreover, tourists who are customers will be able to

support for the successful of natural resources and environment management with conscious mind of natural resource conservation, particularly, local guides who are the community youth and adults also take very important roles to suggest and guide the tourists to cooperate for ecotourism management for this tourism site.

This research was aimed to find out the management of all stakeholders who involve in the ecotourism management of Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park, generally they include the LAO members and business man who are major groups of local peoples who plan, act, share benefit, evaluate the result of ecotourism management in order to meet a goal of sustainable conservation of natural resources and environment of Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park. Because Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park is a tourism site that will support their livelihood and well-being for these stakeholder to build the environmental and cultural awareness and respectability, to create the positive experiences for both visitors and local people, to provide the direct financial benefits of conservation for both tourists and local people, to empower to local people and to raise the sensitivity of host countries' political, environmental and social aspects (Thiengkamol, 2008; Weiss, 1995).

Therefore, researcher wish to study and develop an appropriate Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park and it is very interesting to find out the strength and weakness and seek the threat and opportunity of the stakeholders to improve to obtain more subjective for ecotourism management of Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park for present and future. Finally, it leads to sustainable development for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park in Thailand.

**Objective of research:** The objective of this research was to develop the ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park in Thailand.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research design was implemented in steps by step as follows:

- The populations were all stakeholders who involved into the ecotourism activities at Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park in Thailand. The purposive sampling technique was used for sample selection from LAO and business group who were local business man and local guides. The questionnaire was used as a tool for data collecting. The questionnaire was validated by 5 experts. The reliability was determined

- The research instrument was the questionnaire and it was used for data collecting from LAO members and business persons at the forest park
- The descriptive statistics used were frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The inferential statistics used was path analysis for data analysis (Russell, 2000)

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park:** Two model of ecotourism management were revealed from the study. There are development of Ecotourism management model of Local Administration Organization (LAO) and Ecotourism management model of Business Groups (BG). The findings were as followings:

**The Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park by LAO members:** The Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam by LAO members, the findings revealed that plan factor directly affected to act factor with 0.861 and benefit factor with 0.910 at highly statistical significant level ( $p < 0.01$ ). Meanwhile it also directly affected to evaluation factor with 0.771 and natural resources conservation factor with 0.827 at highly statistical significant level ( $p < 0.01$ ).

However, act factor directly affected to evaluation factor and benefit factor with similar 0.795 with highly statistical significance ( $p < 0.01$ ) and it also directly affected to natural resources conservation factor with 0.819 with highly statistical significance ( $p < 0.01$ ). Benefit factor directly affected to at evaluation factor and natural resources conservation factor with 0.732 and 0.836, respectively with highly statistical significance ( $p < 0.01$ ). Moreover, evaluation factor directly affected to natural resources conservation factor with 0.858 with highly statistical significance ( $p < 0.01$ ) as shown in Fig. 1.

**The Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park by business group:** The Ecotourism

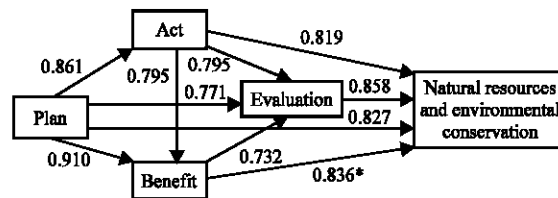


Fig. 1: Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park by LAO members (\*\*Statistically significant at level of 0.01)

management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park by Business Group (BG), the results showed that plan factor directly affected to act factor with 0.594 and evaluation factor with 0.708 at highly statistical significant level ( $p < 0.01$ ) but did not affected benefit factor and to natural resources conservation. Furthermore, benefit factor directly affected to natural resources conservation factor with 0.420 at highly statistical significant level ( $p < 0.01$ ). Meanwhile, act factor directly affected to evaluation factor with 0.442 and evaluation factor directly affected to natural resources conservation factor with 0.296 at highly statistical significant level ( $p < 0.01$ ) as shown in Fig. 2.

**Model verification by stakeholders:** The meeting was held for model verification by stakeholders of LAO, local business of shops, local guide, local drivers and local people. The opinions of all stakeholders were revealed that the highest mean score was all stakeholders should have benefit sharing together with 4.51 at most congruent level of opinion. The subsequence was all stakeholders should evaluate the result of implementation together with 4.48 at most congruent level of opinion. The third was ecotourism management must be held a meeting to plan together for management of tourism site among stakeholders with 4.45 at most congruent level of opinion

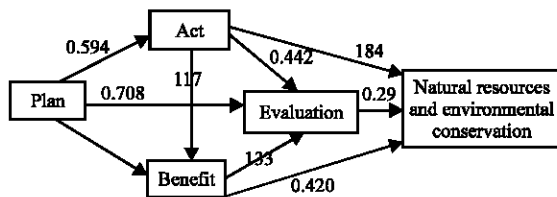


Fig. 2: Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park by business group (\*\*Statistically significant at level of 0.01)

(Table 1). Nevertheless, the 9 items rest were also at most and more congruent level of opinion. The finding revealed that there were two models Ecotourism management of LAO members and Business group that shown in Fig. 1 and 2 as mentioned before. It can be concluded, the LAO members had better Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park than Business group because the plan factor showed more effecting to act and benefit factors. Finally, it also directly affected to evaluation factor and natural resource and environment conservation factor as mentioned above with highly statistically significant at level of 0.01. Therefore, it indicated that the LAO members had better plan and act than the business group, they got better in the benefit, the evaluation and the natural resource and the environmental conservation while the Business group model illustrated that the lacked of good plan and act, therefore they received the fewer benefit and the lack of good evaluation and the natural resource and environmental conservation. The results were congruent to concepts of Thiengkamol (2008) and Weiss (1995) on the organization management that would better benefit when they implement with knowledge and responsibility though good planning, acting and evaluating then the benefit would be better as well. Additionally, LAO members should help the business group to organize the tourism site in order to maximize all stakeholder benefits since generally most of LAO members had more education than local business group.

This study is congruent to the study of Thiengkamol (1997) in terms of the business group that they did not pay much attention enough on the effect of the action affecting to environment and natural resources but they would pay attention on only profit gaining. Nevertheless, business group are still able to develop their competency, especially the local guide in terms of

Table 1: Opinion of stakeholders to verify Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park

Items	Ecotourism management model for Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park	Mean	Congruent level
1	Success of ecotourism management needs the tourist cooperation	4.28	Most
2	Ecotourism management must have the measurement to select the tourist by supporting for the tourist who is interested in environment and ecological conservation	4.35	Most
3	Ecotourism management must be emphasized on business that causes no impact to environment and minimizes resources consumption	4.41	Most
4	Ecotourism management must be let government and private sectors to cooperate to promote to be the same standard over all country	4.18	More
5	Ecotourism management must be promoted on environmental conservation activities as selling concept of tourism	4.23	More
6	Ecotourism management must be provided information for tourist both inside and outside the country to know the ecotourism sites including the appropriate practice for each tourism site	4.32	Most
7	Ecotourism management needs the person to be developed together with local educational institute	4.19	More
8	Ecotourism management needs local culture and tradition to be concerned	4.37	Most
9	Ecotourism management must be held a meeting to plan together for management of tourism site among stakeholders	4.45	Most
10	Ecotourism management must implement tourism site conservation activities among stakeholders	4.40	Most
11	All stakeholders should have benefit sharing together	4.51	Most
12	All stakeholders should evaluate the result of implementation together	4.48	Most

more international level by searching the support from Provincial Tourism office or educational institute to assist them for foreign language such as Loei Rajabhat University. In order to promote this tourism site for national level and international level, this can be distributed through different channels of media whether newspaper, magazine, television, radio, leaflet and internet. Therefore, increasing the number of tourists, it needs local people participation, the support from different agents and the promotion with different channels of media that are consistent to different studies of Thiengkamol (1997), Junton (2002) and Panich (2005) and concepts of Harris and Leiper (1995).

Considering with the stakeholders' opinions indicated that LAO members and business group should cooperate to provide more information of this tourism destination and to rearrange the surrounded building with more clean and ready including rearrange the building in Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park to be more consistent with geographical tourism site. Moreover, they should arrange the tourism site of Suan Hin Pha Ngam forest park as center of knowledge and understanding creation on conservation of natural resources in terms of herbs, orchid, endangered plants and biodiversity conservation through emphasizing on the beautiful natural scenery and arranging the exhibition in the tourism office to be a guideline and highlight of this tourism site, particularly on the biodiversity of herbs and plants. These ideas are also pertinent to the study of Thiengkamol (1997) and concepts of Ties (1990).

### CONCLUSION

Regarding to the stakeholders' opinions in the aspects of success of ecotourism management needs the tourist cooperation, ecotourism management must have the measurement to select the tourist by supporting for the tourist who is interested in environment and ecological conservation, ecotourism management must be emphasized on business that causes no impact to environment and minimizes resources consumption and ecotourism management must be provided information for tourist both inside and outside the country to know the ecotourism sites including the appropriate practice for each tourism site. These opinions are congruent to the studies of Junton (2002) and Panich (2005).

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