TOURIST ATTRACTION STANDARD : SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT TOOL OF THAILAND

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Received July 31, 2010 Accepted October 13, 2010

ABSTRACT

Tourism has become the main source of income for the economies of an increasing number of Thailand. There is now increasing agreement on the need to promote sustainable tourism development to minimize its environmental impacts and to ensure more sustainable management of natural resources. The tourist attraction standard is the tourism management tool for sustainable tourism development. There are 12 tourist Attraction standards. The standard of tourist attraction is a set of documents which made of 2 sections; a general section, and a specific section based on each typical category. In each section composes of criteria and indexes to evaluate the performance, competency and quality of those attractions. The tourism auditor use the standard of tourist attractions as a tool for develops the tourism site.

Key Words : Tourist attraction standard, Sustainable tourism management, Natural resources tool, Thailand tourism, Economy

INTRODUCTION

Tourism can be considered one of the most peculiar socio-economic phenomena of the twentieth century. Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. The developing countries are attempting to cash in on this expanding industry in an attempt to boost foreign investment and financial reserves. While conceding that the uncontrolled growth of this industry can result in serious environmental and social problems, the United Nations contends that such negative effects can be controlled and reduced. While tourism provides considerable economic benefits for many countries, regions and communities, its rapid expansion can also be responsible for adverse environmental (and socio-cultural) impacts. Natural resource depletion and environmental degradation associated with tourism activities are sometimes serious problems in tourism-rich regions. It is estimated that tourism will have a great positive impact on the income levels of rural areas, preserving cultural heritage, creating more jobs for the young generation and health tourism. From this point of view

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Tourism is seen as an income generating, job producing welfare source for the member countries’ citizens. On the other tourism are also source for social gains and an assurance for different cultures and environment. The countries where the economy is driven by the tourism industry are becoming increasingly concerned with the environmental, as well as the socio-cultural problems associated with unsustainable tourism. As a result, there is now increasing agreement on the need to promote sustainable tourism development to minimize its environmental impacts and to ensure more sustainable management of natural resources. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines sustainable tourism as “Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.”

The kingdom of Thailand lies in the heart of Southeast Asia, making it a natural gateway to Indochina, Myanmar and Southern China. Thailand embraces a rich diversity of cultures and traditions. With its proud history, tropical climate and renowned hospitality, the Kingdom is a never-ending source of fascination and pleasure for international visitors. The potential of tourist resources in Thailand was at the high level with natural tourist resources and man-made tourist resources. There are plenty of tourism resources in Thailand. Some are natural tourist attractions while others are historical or cultural. Most of them are famous among both Thais and foreigners. Tourism has become the main source of income for the economies of an increasing number of Thailand. Moreover, tourism sector has been recognized as one of the major sources of foreign revenue for Thailand.

Thailand, Tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the economic sector and further rapid growth is expected in the future. The number of tourists is increasing every year. At the same time, however, increased demands for ecotourism create pressure on carrying capacity. Greater numbers of visitors makes it more likely that habitats will be at risk and the wilderness and cultural heritage could be ruined. Therefore, careful tourism management tools and assessment are important and necessary for sustainable tourism development.

**Sustainable tourism in Thailand**

The world population is growing at a high pace. Also, per capita income is increasing as well, especially in developing countries. Consequently, the total number of people seeking leisure in tourism destinations will grow over the coming years. This surge creates a burden on the environment and on our planet’s resources if not tackled accurately. The environment is both the source and the sink for tourism.

Sustainable tourism is tourism development that avoids damage to the environment, economy and cultures of the locations where it takes place. The goal of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development is a positive experience for local people; tourism companies; and tourists themselves. The general interpretation of sustainable development as linked to tourism and planning have been established by the World Conservation Strategy (1980), the World Commission on Environment and Development (The Brundtland Report of
There are more widely used definitions available all focusing on different edges of the triangle of market, civil society, and state. Most of them try to find an appropriate balance between the aspects of environmental protection, economic development and the ethical elements representing the needs of tourists and local communities. However, sustainable tourism in its current form is rather ineffective. The major obstacles that occur when shifting from mass tourism towards sustainable tourism are different stakeholder interests. In order to implement sustainable tourism in an effective manner, leadership is necessary.

In Thailand, there is now increasing agreement on the need to promote sustainable tourism development to minimize its environmental impacts and to ensure more sustainable management of natural resources. Thailand is turning its tourism industry into a high-gear economic engine. Since the establishment of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in 1976, the Thai government has incorporated tourism in each five-year National Economic and Social Development Plan. Tourism is now become so large and important that in 2002 the government established the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS). The TAT and other relevant departments have thus drawn up the "Sustainable Tourism" regulations in order to preserve tourist attractions in their original condition.

Environmental management of tourism in Thailand with the goals of preserving the ecological systems, benefiting local people and satisfying tourists, requires cooperation from various groups related to ecotourism management and operation. The implementation of this management has been undertaken through combined regulatory, promotional, and educational resources.

**METHODOLOGY**

The standard of tourist attractions was drafted based on the following steps:

- Study data of tourist attractions and categorize each of them into groups;
- Literature review on information or documents related to the standard of tourist attractions; Define definitions, criterions, indexes and other components; as part of the checklist for the standard of tourist attractions;
- Draft the standard of tourist attractions
- Study intensively on each category of the tourist attractions. These include field survey, site visit, questionnaire survey and interview of community leaders, indigenous scholars, and local government officers. The study focused on present setup, its history, its outstanding attraction or its unique characteristics. Additionally, the recent issue or change that expected to occur was also included. Afterward, draft of the standard of tourist attractions was drawn;
- Technical hearing of the standard of tourist attractions
- The draft was put into scrutinize in several rounds of technical hearing meeting. Experts, local or central, were invited to review, give input, and criticize the draft.
- Revision of the draft according to suggestions or outcome from the technical hearing meetings;
- Field test of the standard of tourist attractions in actual sites;
- Revision of the draft based on its practical use during the field test;
Technical hearing on specific stakeholders – academia, government officials, NGOs, entrepreneurs and representatives of general public;
Revision of the Handbook of Assessment of Tourist attraction based on the technical hearing above;

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Basic components of the Standard of Tourist Attractions

In order to sustainable tourism, it is necessary for countries to address various issues arising from tourism’s contribution to development in a comprehensive, systematic way. Issues of policy-making, planning, management and the participation of the private sector and other stakeholders must be addressed in terms of opportunities for action and possible constraints that need to be overcome by concerted efforts.

There are 2 sections of the components of the standard of tourist attractions

Section 1 General information of the tourist attraction

The general information composes of 2 parts as following;

Competencies to develop into a tourist attraction

The competencies cover components of the site that has potential for tourism i.e. a beautiful scenery site but difficult to access, or limit capacity to provide services, or does not safe etc.

Management of the tourist site

These components indicate ability to control, take care, operate and manage the site. Additionally, its unique characteristics and identity can also be retained. These components are:

- Sustainability – preservation of the site and management of the tourism to meet sustainability;
- Information dissemination and awareness – considering the roles of related organization, officers, local entrepreneurs and local communities;
- Economic and social managements – considering the public participatory processes i.e. roles of communities in access to information, in decision making and in responsibility on their parts. Additionally, distribution of income or benefits to adjacent communities also was taken into account.

The assessment on the management of tourist attraction looks at these 2 aspects:

- Environmental preservation management
- Tourism management.

Section 2 specific components on each typical tourist attractions

It is agreed that beyond some basic principles, different type of tourist attractions have their own identity and unique components. The assessment, thus, was designed to meet the need of each type of the attractions i.e. on rapids adventure - the safety of the tourists in rafting along the river should be in concern; or on cave tourism - good ventilation and safety of walk path in the cave should be in consideration.

Tourist attraction standard assessment

The Standard of Tourist Attraction is a set of documents which made of 2 sections; a general section, and a specific section based on each typical category. In each section composes of criteria and indexes to evaluate
the performance, competency and quality of those attractions. The assessment of tourist attraction can be classified into two types:

The general section
The general information of tourist attraction assessment composes of 2 criterions as following:

Competencies to develop into a tourist attraction
- Suitability of its location, environment and acceptance of local community
- Condition of the environment and its popularity among tourists
- Considering how convenient to access the site – mode of travel, condition of the access road or waterway, road safety and availability of public transportation.
- Availability of safety plan, safety facility and readiness of the safety protection personnel
- Considering the support locally and nationally either on policy, budget and capacity building from local authorities, private parties or government institutions

Management of the tourist attraction
Management of human use and landscape, Monitoring and assessment of change due to tourism, Waste management and hygiene, Environmental education and awareness program
Tourism facilities, Services for tourists, Participation of local community on tourism management, Income of locals from tourism

Specific components on each typical tourist attractions
There are 9 tourist attractions standard for assessment.

Ecotourism attraction standard
There are 13 criterions Attractive in travel and natural learning, Natural abundance, Cultural connection with the local community, Safety, Attraction utility, Tourism services, Tourism activity, Monitoring and evaluation of tourism impacts, Availability of tourist information center, Providing education on energy saving and sanitary waste management, Providing education on the value of natural resource and conservation to tourists, tourist guides and local communities, Availability of human resources Local participation in tourism management, and Local community generates income from tourism

Natural attraction standard
There are 18 criterions; Biological Values, Physical Values, Social Values, Vulnerability (human cause and natural disaster), Tourism carrying capacity, Attraction accessibility, Safety, Carrying capacity of the attraction, The cooperation of local organizations, private sectors, and government organizations in tourism development, Environmental conservation and management, Monitoring and evaluation of tourism impacts, Waste and environmental management around the attraction, Tourism activity management, Environmental education and raising awareness, Basic facilities and infrastructures, Tourism service center, Human resources knowledgeable in ecosystem or conservation available to tourists, entrepreneurs and communities, and Local participation

Historical attraction standard
There are 7 criterions; Historical values, Management of attraction and tourist activities, Potentiality for development of Basic facilities, the cooperation of local
organizations, private sectors, and government organizations in tourism development, Conservation of historical attraction, and Tourism management

Cultural attraction standard
There are 7 criterions; Cultural values, Management of activities, Management of activities, Potentiality for development of basic facilities, The cooperation of local organizations, private sectors, and government organizations in tourism development, Conservation of cultural attraction, and Tourism management

Art and science educational attraction standard
There are 9 criterions; Tourism technology, Education and tourist assessment, Tourism management, Location, Appropriate facilities in the attraction, Safety management, Environmental management, Education and information service, and Socio-economic management.

Recreational standard
There are 10 criterions; Tourism technology, Tourist satisfaction, Tourism management, Attraction accessibility, Location, Appropriate facilities in the attraction, Safety management, Environmental management, Education and information service, and Socio-economic management.

Beach attraction standard
There are 8 criterions; tourism values, Vulnerability, Tourism activity capacity, Accessibility, Tourist safety, Carrying capacity, Environmental conservation and management, Tourism management,

Waterfall attraction standard
There are 8 criterions; Values and aesthetic beauty of the waterfall, Vulnerability, Tourism activity capacity, Accessibility, Safety, Carrying capacity, Conservation and environmental management, and Tourism management

Hot spring for health tourism attraction standard
There are 7 criterions; Good quality of mineral water available in the hot spring, Mineral water bathing room/ hot spring well/ swimming pool, Shower room/ toilet/ changing room, Safety management, Environmental management, The location as a tourism assets, Tourism carrying capacity, and Sustainable tourism development.

CONCLUSION
The standards of tourist attraction have been assessed to support the sustainable tourism development policy in Thailand. The result of assessment showed that there are five factors that must be considered as the competencies to develop into a tourist attraction e.g. location, condition and popularity, access, safety and support from local authorities, private parties and government institutions. Moreover, the criterions for assessment of nine different type of tourist attractions; ecotourism attraction standard, natural attraction standard, historical attraction standard, art and science educational attraction standard, recreational standard, beach attraction standard, waterfall attraction standard and hot spring for health tourism attraction standard, have been defined. These criterions can be applied as the guideline for the implementation of sustainable tourism development policy in Thailand.

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