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FORGING PEACE TOURISM: COMMUNITY-BASED HOLISTIC SECURITY INITIATIVES IN THAILAND'S SOUTHERN BORDER PROVINCES

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Abstract

This study investigates the development of a holistic security management system at Ban Piyamit 5, a historical tourism destination within the fragile socio-political context of Thailand's Southern Border Provinces. Using a mixed-methods design integrated with Participatory Action Research (PAR), the study engaged 15 key community stakeholders and 297 tourists to identify security vulnerabilities and systematically develop localized interventions. Initial empirical findings revealed critical deficiencies in specialized safety personnel and emergency response protocols. To efficiently address these operational gaps, the community established a volunteer tourism security task force, supported by an eight-dimension safety manual and specialized emergency training. Post-intervention evaluations showed a significant 58.52% increase in volunteers' security knowledge and a "very good" tourist satisfaction rating. This research demonstrates that synergizing physical safety with psychological security through community empowerment is vital for building resilient tourism environments. The framework offers a scalable, evidence-based model for policymakers to advance sustainable "peace tourism" in complex, conflict-sensitive regions.

Keywords: Holistic Security Management, Peace Tourism, Participatory Action Research, Southern Border Provinces, Community Empowerment

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Introduction

Tourism safety is a multidimensional construct. Kullberg (2010) categorizes this concept into two primary dimensions: objective safety, which refers to a physical environment devoid of threats, and subjective safety, which concerns an individual's internal sense of security. Both dimensions strongly influence travel decision-making, tourist satisfaction, and a destination's overall brand image (World Tourism Organization, 1996; Amir et al., 2015; Ashton & Chootiraka, 2016). In the Thai context, tourists face diverse risks, from road traffic accidents—a leading cause of fatality—to petty crime, theft, health concerns, environmental hazards, and the danger of getting lost in wilderness areas (Krungthep Turakij, 2022). Recognizing these challenges, the Thai government established the Bureau of Tourism Safety and Security Standards to elevate national safety protocols to meet international benchmarks.

Songkhla Province serves as a strategic tourism hub in Southern Thailand, attracting a significant volume of visitors from Malaysia and Singapore. However, the Na Thawi district and the broader Thai-Malaysian border zone continue to face persistent security challenges rooted in complex socio-economic disparities and a unique historical legacy. As a former stronghold of the Malayan Communist Party, the area's rich historical heritage and cultural diversity coexist with contemporary security vulnerabilities that impact both visitors and residents. Daily risks include road accidents exacerbated by inadequate signage and navigation systems, the danger of getting lost in mountainous terrain, encounters with hazardous flora and fauna, and a critical lack of rapid-response emergency medical services. Currently, the Ban Piyamit 5 (Khao Nam Khang) community lacks a systematic, site-specific safety framework. Consequently, there is an urgent need to develop a holistic security system based on multi-stakeholder collaboration that prioritizes protecting both tourists and residents (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017).

Addressing security concerns in border tourism communities is vital for fostering sustainable development and long-term social harmony (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006). Building upon previous developmental experiences at Ban Piyamit 1, this research applied localized knowledge to the highly fragile context of Ban Piyamit 5 (Khao Nam Khang). Rather than relying exclusively on state authorities, this initiative is premised on the idea that effective security must be firmly rooted in active community empowerment and localized crime-prevention strategies. Consequently, this study rigorously aims to develop a community-based holistic security management system—encompassing targeted safety measures, human resource capacity building, and localized service units. Ultimately, this framework seeks to serve as a sustainable, evidence-based model for transforming vulnerable border communities into safe, culturally vibrant destinations, thereby forging a definitive path toward long-term peace tourism and regional stability.

Literature Review

Tourism Safety Management

Effective safety management in tourism destinations requires robust multi-stakeholder collaboration, spanning from strategic planning and operational execution to proactive public relations. These integrated efforts are essential to build tourist confidence and encourage repeat visitation (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006; Nakphin & Buafai, 2018). In this context, the Tourist Police Bureau identifies several critical safety concerns affecting travelers, including direct threats to life and property, accidental injuries, commercial exploitation or unfair practices, and drug-related offenses in tourist areas.

In the specific context of Ban Piyamit 5 (Khao Nam Khang)—situated at the volatile juncture between Songkhla and the Southern Border Provinces (SBPs)—the risk profile is significantly more complex than in conventional destinations. This area faces asymmetric threats, including civil unrest, insurgent attacks, and the risk of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) along

transit routes. Furthermore, socio-economic fragility has exacerbated general criminality, drug trafficking, and cross-border human smuggling networks. Such elevated security concerns inevitably undermine the regional tourism industry, adversely affecting travel motivations, destination image, and long-term sustainability (Pizam & Mansfeld, 1996; Hall et al., 2003).

Safety Measures and Theoretical Frameworks

Comprehensive safety protocols for tourism destinations must integrate multiple vital dimensions, specifically encompassing rigorous crime prevention, proactive accident mitigation, robust public health measures, natural disaster preparedness, navigational safety, and protection from hazardous local flora and fauna (Saengthongdee, 2017). Analytically, this study is deeply anchored in three pivotal criminological theories: Clarke's (1997) Situational Crime Prevention (SCP), which focuses on systematically reducing criminal opportunities by modifying the immediate physical and social environment; Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux's (1990) paradigm of Community Policing, which emphasizes the critical synergy between formal law enforcement and residents; and Jeffery's (1971) Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), which strategically utilizes urban and architectural design to deter illicit activity.

These theoretical frameworks apply well to border tourism communities. Lessons from conflict-affected Asian regions, such as post-2002 Bali, show that successful tourism recovery hinges on stringent security measures coupled with strategic, positive communication (Hitchcock, 2007). Similarly, the development of "Peace Tourism" in the Korean demilitarized zone (Shin, 2005)—as well as in comparable international contexts—shows that increasing tourism arrivals can stabilize volatile situations and significantly improve peace prospects (Becken & Carmignani, 2016). These precedents underscore the critical need to integrate robust security protocols with proactive peace-building initiatives and community economic empowerment.

Participatory Action Research and Community-Based Infrastructure

Buhalis (2000) argues that a destination's success relies on the "6A's" framework—Attractions, Accessibility, Amenities, Available Packages, Activities, and Ancillary Services—where safety is an indispensable amenity. Expanding on this, public welfare theory distinguishes safety into objective and subjective dimensions, emphasizing environmental management for ecological sustainability and overall quality of life (Kullberg, 2010; Yousukh, 2009; Phoboon, 2009). To operationalize these multidimensional concepts, this study employs Participatory Action Research (PAR). This approach empowers local communities to actively engage in problem identification, research design, and practical implementation, thereby transforming residents into catalysts for social change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2001). This methodology aligns with Galtung's (1976) holistic security framework, which links the absence of direct violence ("Negative Peace") with the presence of social justice and structural sustainability ("Positive Peace"), alongside Lederach's (1997) grassroots peace-building model.

Integrating these theoretical foundations into Community-Based Tourism (CBT) serves as a vital mechanism for local resource management, leveraging creative paradigms to enhance heritage and deliver meaningful visitor experiences (Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration, 2015). Maximizing this potential requires a cross-sector approach, ensuring that both public and private entities fulfill their collaborative planning responsibilities. This collective accountability is paramount to guaranteeing that tourism infrastructure not only drives economic growth but simultaneously reinforces the destination's foundational safety and security.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, primarily driven by Participatory Action Research (PAR). A cornerstone of this approach was actively engaging community members at every stage of the research process—from problem identification and security measure design to data collection, analysis, and practical implementation. Methodological techniques included Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and intensive brainstorming sessions.

Population, Sampling, and Data Collection Procedures

This study utilized two distinct participant cohorts to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The first cohort comprised 15 key informants selected through purposive sampling, representing government agencies, community leaders, local enterprises, and entrepreneurs within the Ban Piyamit 5 community, all possessing at least one year of operational experience in the area (as detailed in Table 1). The second cohort consisted of the destination's tourists; from an estimated population of 1,300 visitors in January 2024, the team selected a representative sample of 297 tourists using accidental sampling, calculated via Yamane's (1967) formula.

To obtain robust empirical data, the research team coordinated closely with local stakeholders to gather primary insights through focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and practical workshops, using co-developed semi-structured guides and protocols to ensure local relevance. Concurrently, the team collected quantitative primary data from the tourist sample using structured survey questionnaires designed to evaluate current safety measures. The team supplemented this primary data collection with secondary data, including a comprehensive review of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and established security protocols, to strengthen the study's conceptual foundation.

Table 1 Profile of Key Informants

No.	Position/Affiliation	Participant ID
1	Director, Civil Society Division, Peace Center, ISOC Region 4 Front Command	1
2	Chief of Civil Affairs, 42nd Military District	2
3	Professional Policy and Plan Analyst, Songkhla Provincial Office of Tourism and Sports	3
4	Social Development Specialist, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani Campus	4
5	Public Administration and Law Specialist, Yala Rajabhat University	5

Data Analysis and Limitations

Qualitative data were rigorously analyzed utilizing content analysis, a systematic methodology for interpreting communicative content (Tarmprawat, 2012). This process involved an inductive approach to generate specific operational codes and identify overarching thematic patterns. Concurrently, quantitative data were evaluated using descriptive statistics, specifically focusing on frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. While providing strong localized insights, this study acknowledges methodological constraints, primarily a relatively small sample of key informants and limited capacity for extensive cross-variable analysis, both stemming from the research area's highly specific, localized scope.

Research Results

Stakeholder Perspectives and Gap Analysis

To clearly define the requirements for a robust tourism security architecture, the research team conducted in-depth interviews with key community and institutional stakeholders. As synthesized in Table 2, these expert perspectives underscored three foundational imperatives:

the necessity for a multidimensional security approach to elevate destination branding, the critical need for structured personnel training supported by dynamic operational manuals, and the strict requirement for standardized protocols grounded in rigorous risk analysis and proactive public communication.

Table 2 Stakeholder Perspectives on Destination Security Systems

No.	Inquiry Theme	Informant(s)	Qualitative Synthesis
1	Essential Security Components	1, 3, 5	Security must be multidimensional to build visitor confidence and strengthen the destination's brand image.
2	Personnel Training Needs	1, 2, 3, 4	Training is vital for effective incident management; it requires clear, frequently updated operational manuals.
3	Standardization Strategies	1-5	Standards should be rooted in rigorous risk analysis, simulation-based training, and proactive public communication.

Focus group discussions subsequently revealed a critical security deficit within the destination. Although general Village Security Teams (Chor Ror Bor) were active, a specialized volunteer group dedicated exclusively to tourism security was largely absent. Emphasizing this vulnerability, community representatives highlighted that the lack of a structured tourism security task force constitutes a pressing operational issue requiring immediate strategic prioritization.

Development of the Holistic Security Manual

Building upon the comprehensive qualitative synthesis, the research team developed the localized "Ban Piyamit 5 (Khao Nam Khang) Tourism Security Manual". This framework rigorously operationalizes eight critical dimensions of security, specifically targeting facility readiness, personnel competence, crime prevention, accident mitigation, public health standards, navigational safety, protection from indigenous flora and fauna, and natural disaster preparedness, as comprehensively illustrated in Figure 1. To ensure these preventive measures translate into actionable protocols during crises, the team established a systematic emergency response workflow for assisting tourists, detailed in Figure 2.

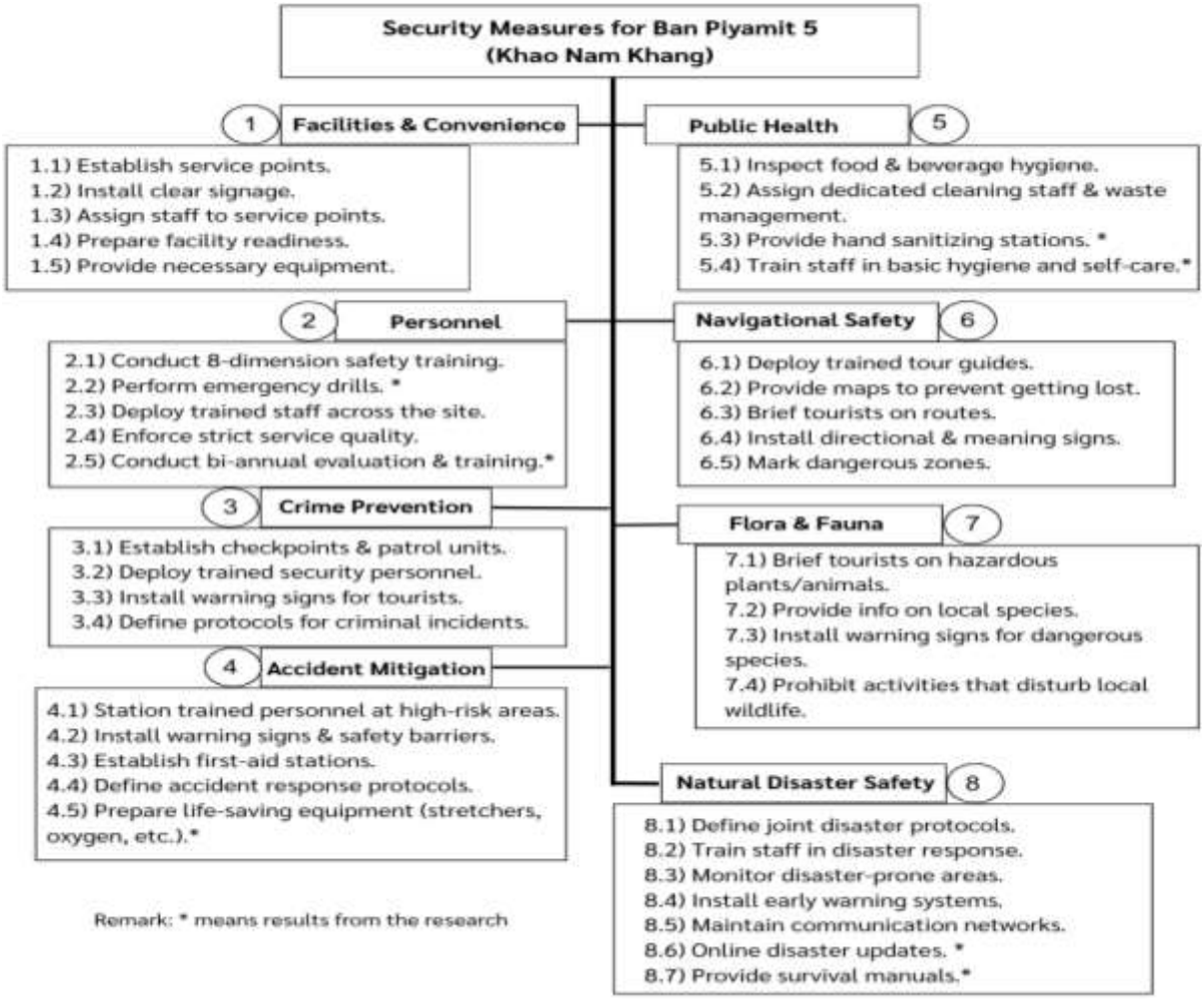


Figure 1 Security Measures for Ban Piyamit 5 (Khao Nam Khang)

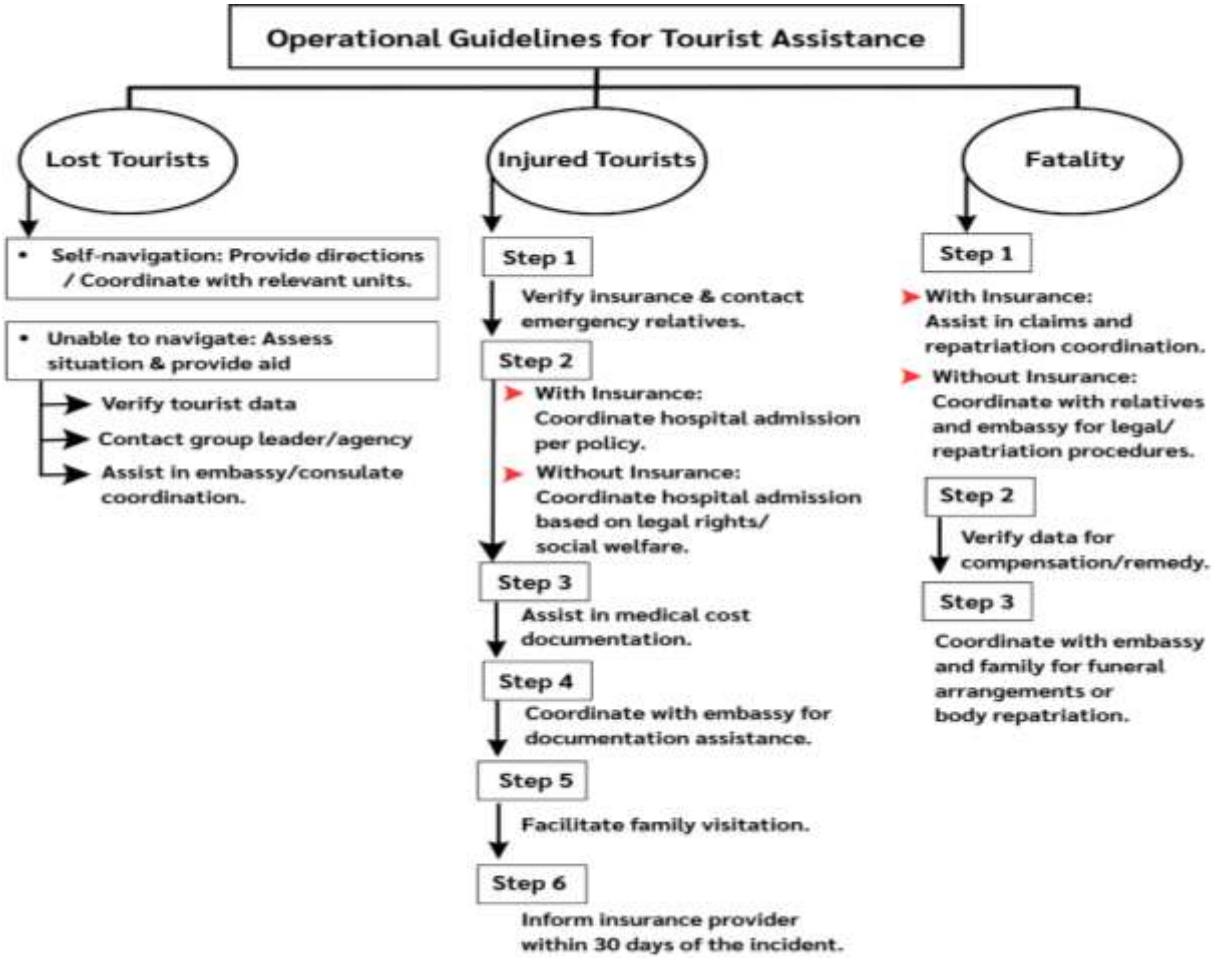


Figure 2 Operational Guidelines for Tourist Assistance

Volunteer Implementation and Efficacy Assessment

To effectively operationalize these safety protocols and address the identified personnel gap, the research team established a dedicated task force comprising 10 community volunteers. As shown in Figure 3, these individuals underwent rigorous, hands-on specialized training—facilitated in collaboration with the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA) and the Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Center, Region 12—focused on checkpoint management and rapid emergency response. To scientifically evaluate the pedagogical efficacy of this intervention, a pre-test and post-test assessment was administered. As detailed in Table 3, the quantitative results reveal a highly significant 58.52% increase in the volunteers' objective security knowledge (with the mean score rising from 5.10 to 7.90). This substantial improvement empirically confirms that targeted capacity-building directly empowers the community to manage localized safety risks independently and competently.



Figure 3 Security Checkpoints and Specialized Volunteer Training at Khao Nam Khang

Table 3 Pre-Test and Post-Test Results of Volunteer Training

Assessment Phase	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D.	Percentage Increase (%)
Pre-Test	5.10	0.99	-
Post-Test	7.90	0.74	58.52%

Quantitative Evaluation of Tourist Satisfaction

The final phase quantitatively assessed the impact of the implemented measures on the tourist experience. As detailed in Table 4, a survey of 297 tourists evaluating the effectiveness of the security protocols across the eight synthesized dimensions yielded an overall satisfaction rating of "Very Good" ($\bar{x}$ = 4.51). While environmental safety ($\bar{x}$ = 4.69) and facilities ($\bar{x}$ = 4.68) received the highest evaluations, crime prevention ($\bar{x}$ = 4.04) and accident mitigation ($\bar{x}$ = 4.40) were rated slightly lower, remaining in the "Good" category. These nuanced findings suggest that while the community-based initiative has substantially enhanced perceived safety, the deeply complex socio-political context of the Southern Border Provinces continues to subtly shape tourists' underlying psychological concerns regarding crime and security.

Table 4 Tourist Satisfaction Toward Implemented Security Measures

Security Dimensions	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D.	Satisfaction Level
Environmental and Natural Safety	4.69	0.51	Very Good
Navigational Safety	4.65	0.62	Very Good
Personnel and Staff Security	4.63	0.55	Very Good
Facilities and Convenience	4.68	0.67	Very Good
Public Health and Hygiene	4.57	0.65	Very Good
Accident Mitigation	4.40	0.63	Good
Protection from Flora and Fauna	4.40	0.63	Good
Crime Prevention	4.04	0.99	Good
Overall Average	**4.51**	**0.66**	**Very Good**

Conclusion and Discussion

The qualitative synthesis of this study successfully identifies eight pivotal dimensions of holistic tourism security: facilities and convenience, personnel security, crime prevention, accident mitigation, public health, environmental and natural safety, navigational safety, and protection from hazardous flora and fauna. These interconnected dimensions are critical determinants of visitor confidence and align with the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2017) framework, which asserts that comprehensive safety decisively influences both pre-travel

decision-making and post-travel satisfaction. Tourists inherently engage in a risk-benefit analysis, weighing experiential value against potential physical, environmental, and psychological hazards, directly reflecting Maslow's fundamental human need for safety and security (Kamhom, 2011).

A cornerstone of this research was establishing a community-based task force of 10 tourism security volunteers, guided by the newly developed security manual and in strict adherence to the 2022 Department of Tourism Regulations. This strategic capacity-building empowers local volunteers to execute primary assistance, issue precise risk warnings, and coordinate localized security logistics. As El-Sharkawy et al. (2023) argue, optimizing human resources through continuous experiential learning is vital for organizational efficiency, enabling volunteers to develop multifaceted skills beyond traditional security roles. The quantitative outcomes strongly validate this intervention's efficacy, as shown by a 58.52% surge in volunteers' operational knowledge and a "Very Good" overall tourist satisfaction rating for navigational, environmental, and personnel safety. These findings strongly corroborate Ahmed et al. (2025) and Abakirov et al. (2025), who assert that structured, localized training not only drastically improves technical competence but also cultivates positive attitudes toward social integration within multicultural societies. Consequently, maintaining these rigorous, community-driven safety standards is indispensable for cultivating international tourist trust and providing a high-impact solution to the asymmetric safety challenges inherent in the Southern Border Provinces (Seesa-ard, 2021).

In summary, establishing a holistic security framework remains a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development, particularly in geographically and socio-politically sensitive environments such as Thailand's Southern Border Provinces. By professionalizing community volunteers and rigorously implementing the localized tourism security manual, destinations can effectively mitigate asymmetric risks while significantly enhancing the overall visitor experience. To ensure long-term efficacy, government agencies and regional security stakeholders must adopt this community-based manual as a definitive operational framework. Ultimately, this highly scalable model not only facilitates proactive emergency assistance but also empowers residents to become resilient guardians of their heritage, successfully forging a paradigm of "peace tourism" that fosters sustainable economic stability and social harmony in volatile border regions.

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