



Competitive Situation Analysis of the Current Tourism Management of the Floating Markets along the Tha Chin River Basin in Comparison with That of Other Nearby Floating Markets Using the Five Force Model and SWOT Analysis

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Abstract

This research aims to: 1) analyze the competitive situation of the current tourism management of the floating markets along the Tha Chin River Basin in comparison with that of other nearby floating markets using the Five Force Model; and 2) analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the tourism management of the floating markets along the Tha Chin River. This research employed a qualitative research. Data were collected from 21 key informants consisted of executives of the government authorities and private organizations, stakeholders of 6 floating markets along the Tha Chin River, covering 4 provinces, and academics. In-depth interviews and a focus group discussion were used to collect the data. Research findings showed that: 1) in terms of the limitations of the Tha Chin River Basin, every floating market has its own uniqueness and local wisdom2) in terms of the strengths, there are efficient waste management and the systems for maintaining and conserving natural and environment in the areas whereas the threats there are conflicts in terms of politics and religions in many cities, communities, and public areas. These conflicts cause psychological impacts to tourists, making them postpone their decision to travel.

Keywords: Tourism Management, Floating Markets along the Tha Chin River Basin, Competitive Situation

Introduction

Thailand is renowned for its tourist attractions which has high potential in satisfying tourists. However, these tourist attractions encounter many problems including lack of safety and security measure for tourists, having negative images (this problem needs immediate solution), and facing with the issues of cleanliness and hygiene. These problems need attention and solutions if the country would like to enhance its tourism industry and attract more tourists. In fact, Thailand has abundant types of tourist attractions including natural sites, historic sites, arts and culture, and floating markets. The latter represents places where tourists can learn and experience the ways of life of the local people.

A “floating market” is one type of major tourist attractions that have been used to promote tourism in Thailand as a response to the continuous growth and expansion of global tourism. Floating markets are tourist attractions that can represent the unique ways of life of Thai people that are mainly based on sharing or trading of goods among different communities. Many floating markets have been facing with problems arising from changing in tourist behaviors and the way they are managed such as lack of proper planning at a community level, lack of a key person who can in charge of the management continuously, having an issue of monopoly management from a private sole proprietor or a private company, lack of active local participation, lack of budget and knowledge on tourism management, and insufficient infrastructure and facilities. As a result, these floating markets have to depend highly on and need assistance from the government sector. Based on the studies on many floating markets, it is found that these floating markets have to face with many other problems such as environment-related problems, service-related problems, lack of attractive tourist activities for tourists, lack of proper planning at a community level, and disappearance of unique and original image of traditional floating markets. Upon addressing these problems, the researcher would like to study the current situation of tourism management in the floating markets along the Tha Chin River Basin and their competitive situation at the present time in comparison with that of other nearby floating markets by using the Five Force Model.

Research Objectives

- 1) analyze the competitive situation of the current tourism management of the floating markets along the Tha Chin River Basin in comparison with that of other nearby floating markets using the Five Force Model
- 2) analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the tourism management of the floating markets along the Tha Chin River Basin.

Literature Review

Floating markets

The floating market is a place where people gather and interact with each other. It also serves as a trade center. At present, tourism activities along the floating markets present a way of life of people in these areas in the old time. The Tourism Authority of Thailand has promoted community-based tourism in Thailand, and this has brought tourists' attention to visit the floating markets along more than 30 significant river basins in the country. Nowadays, there are more tourists who are interested to have tourism experiences in a natural setting and/or to have cultural experiences (Lapluetchai, 2013). The Tha Chin River Basin is one of the places where there are floating markets in different forms based on the characteristics of the communities. The Tha Chin River splits from the Chao Phraya River at Makkham Tao Sub-

district, Wat Singha District, Chai Nat Province, and flows through Suphanburi Province, Nakhon Pathom Province until it empties into the Gulf of Thailand in Samut Sakhon Province. The Tha Chin River has many regional names. Its name is based on the places where it passes. It is called Makham Tao River in Chai Nat Province. While it passes Suphanburi Province, it is called Suphanburi River, then when passing Nakhon Pathom Province, it becomes Nakhon Chai Si River. Finally, only near its mouth in Samut Sakhon Province, it is named Tha Chin River (Agriculture and Hydro-Informatics Institute (Public Organization), 2012).

Many crowded floating markets have disappeared. Only some floating markets where communities are strong can turn the crisis into the opportunities to preserve their old culture and use this as main and sustainable tourist attractions of the communities. The examples of these successful floating markets are those along the Tha Chin River Basin in Suphanburi Province including Sam Chuk Floating Market or “Talat Roi Pi Sam Chuk (the 100 year-market)”, and the floating markets in Nakhon Pathom Province including Lam Phaya Floating Market, Bang Luang Market, Wat Klang Ku Wieng Floating Market, Tha Na Market, and Don Wai Floating Market. These floating markets are now ecotourism tourist attractions that promote cultural learning.

Concepts for Enhancing the Floating Market Capability as a Tourist Attraction

Considering capabilities of a place to see whether it has a potential to be promoted as a tourist attraction is the first action that needs to be performed if we want the development plan to achieve its goals – whether it is to be modified, developed, or improved. Each tourist attraction has different levels of potentials. Those which have high potentials will be the priority. The high potential tourist attractions refer to the tourist attractions whose characteristics are consistent with the trends of tourism in the country, and are likely to serve as the main income generators as well as economic boosters of the country. However, the trends of travelling always change. Nowadays, people become more interested in ecotourism in which they will have opportunities to be close with nature and learn the ways of life of local people which depend more on nature. The floating markets feature uniqueness and ways of life of people which are distinct and represent the old Thainess. They have become attractive places for tourists (Thanapotivirat, 2008).

One of the components of a tourist attraction is local resources in an area, and these resources are natural resources. The assessment of a tourist attraction therefore needs to consider local resources because they will be used for tourism on a long-term basis. Moreover, if there is any impact on these resources, it is likely to expand. This is consistent with a concept of ecotourism attraction assessment which consists of 4 main aspects: 1) nature which refers to natural resources which have the potentials to be developed into tourist attractions or provide tourist activities; 2) ways of life which represent one form of resources in the area and are generally unique and present local culture of the communities such as how people live their

lives and agricultural ways of life of people; these can be transformed in a form of accommodation services in which local people offer tourists to stay with them; 3) production process which refers to attractiveness of agriculture that represent local wisdom and the use of folk technologies for agriculture; these can be transformed into tourist attractions or tourist activities; moreover, tourism can also be managed in a form of field trips and training; and 4) marketing which mostly is about marketing of agricultural products which might be similar or different from those in other areas; these products are related to marketing in terms that they can be sold as souvenirs which can generate income to the communities (Thanapolkiat, 2011).

Research Methodology

The key informants of this research consisted of the Regional Director of the Central Region, the Director of the Tha Chin River Basin Management and Coordination Division, Chief of the Water Basin Plan and Policy Analysis, Governors of Suphanburi Province and Nakhon Pathom Province, Tourism Officers of Suphanburi Province and Nakhon Pathom Province, Chief Executives of the Provincial Administrative Organization of Suphanburi Province and Nakhon Pathom Province, Community Development Officers of Suphanburi Province and Nakhon Pathom Province, Chief Executives of the Sub-district/Municipality Organization of the areas where the six floating markets are located and representative from the private sector including Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of “We Love Tha Chin River Club” in Nakhon Pathom Province and “We Love Suphan River” in Suphanburi Province. Data were collected by in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion in which the participants were encouraged to express their opinion on the competitive situation of the tourism management of the floating markets in the Tha Chin River Basin at present in comparison with that of other nearby floating markets based on the Five Force Model (Porter, 2008), and how to enhance tourism in these floating markets based on the SWOT analysis.

Research Results

The competitive situation of the tourism management of the floating markets in the Tha Chin River Basin at present in comparison with that of other nearby floating markets based on the Five Force Model

1) In terms of the limitations of the floating markets in the Tha Chin River Basin, it is found that every floating market had its own uniqueness and local wisdom; 2) in terms of the competitive intensity of these floating markets, it is found that: 2.1) tourists were very loyal to other markets, making it difficult for new entrants to compete with; 2.2) there were government policies that control the operation of the floating markets such as setting quotas, providing concession, and establishing standards; 2.3) there was a strict control on

entrepreneurs in the area, making it difficult for new competitors to enter into the area; 3) in terms of substitution, it is found that each floating market had its own specific complete substitution; 4) As for the bargaining power of the entrepreneurs, it is found that these floating markets had an opportunity to grow and expand in the future as a result of the enforcement of the civil state policy; therefore, the competition would not be highly intense because there was still opportunities for each business to make profit; and 5) For the bargaining power with tourists, it is found that the PR information provided to tourists were complete as a result of communicative innovations.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats of Tourism in the Floating Markets in the Tha Chin River Basin

Discussion of Research Results

Standards of the Floating Markets

Strengths: 1) having parking lots and efficient traffic systems; 2) having efficient waste management, sufficient waste bins, and efficient waste operation; 3) having systems for maintaining and conserving natural and environment in the areas; and 4) having communicative innovations for tourism purpose which meet with the standards set by Tourism Authority of Thailand.

Weaknesses: 1) Lack of the development approach to add value to the products as well as a management system to handle the tourism products in the value chain. Moreover, the competitive advantages of the Thai entrepreneurs seem to decrease, causing tourist expense per time in average to rise insignificantly due to unchanged tourism products; and 2) the floating markets appear to be in deteriorated conditions as a result of inefficient tourism promotion, lack of good management approach, and lack of an image of “Green Destination”.

Opportunities: New trends seem to emerge continuously, causing changes in many things in this new world such as Gen Y who have creative mind to deal with any possible limitations and the concept of “She Economy” or Power of Women which will lead women to hold significant positions of the countries as well as in the global communities.

Threats: 1) There are conflicts in terms of politics and religions in many cities, communities, and public areas. These conflicts cause psychological impacts to tourists, making them postpone their decision to travel; and 2) the global warming crisis that appears to be a continuous issue and causes severe impacts and changes in tourism products and tourist seasons.

Tourist Attractions

Strengths: 1) natural beauty of the Tha Chin River Basin is unique and outstanding, and the local architectural style, history, culture and tradition, and wisdom found along the floating markets in each area are also unique.; 2) there are boat services for tourists to view the

beautiful scenery and ways of life of the local people; 3) products and services are initiated from the local wisdom as a result of the One Tambon One Product (OTOP) therefore they cannot be easily imitated; and 4) hospitality of the local people in Suphanburi Province and Nakhon Pathom Province.

Weaknesses: 1) Physical limitation of the area; 2) the floating markets cannot be open for tourists in some seasons; and 3) limitations related to the operating time of the floating markets.

Opportunities: 1) Capability to develop tourism in the floating markets in the Tha Chin River Basin at the AEC level; 2) the local identities in a form of local culture, and wisdom can represent a body of knowledge in the tourism area at the global level; and 3) the promotion of river way conservation, waste management in the communities along the rivers and the promotion of CSR activities with the local communities.

Threats: 1) lack of local support and participation in some areas or there are conflicts in opinion between the government sector, private sector, and local people; and 2) lack of budget to develop innovations to promote tourism in the area.

Entrepreneurs' Good Quality of Life

Strengths: 1) Encourage people to spend money through the use of storytelling – presenting the history of the area since Ayutthaya period; and 2) Create and present the content based on local cuisine, communities, local heroes, and legend by local scholars.

Weaknesses: Entrepreneurs have their trade secrets and personal rights, causing the government sector to unable to know in-depth information and provide right solutions.

Opportunities: 1) tourist behavior appear more individual, causing the market to be divided in a smaller scale or to be divided from segments to fragments: this provides more opportunities for the local entrepreneurs to have higher stability in their businesses in the floating markets; and 2) the trend of having good health and good quality of life gains more attention than the trend of being rich; moreover, the approach to take care of good health has changed from selling medicines and medical equipment to using digital care; such trend leads to the growth of some floating markets.

Threats: Intense and on-going competition of the floating markets in the central region due to the opening of the new floating markets such as Bua Dang Floating Market in Nakhon Pathom Province, and the capability enhancement of the old floating markets such as Amphawa Floating Market and Ayothaya Floating Market, affecting the status of the market share of these floating markets.

Suggestions

1. The government sector should develop basin infrastructure and services for tourists that do not negatively affect the environment of the Tha Chin River. This should be done on an on-

going basis. Moreover, it should maintain the area's image and identities of a historic destination so that tourists can keep their memory of this area by using current innovations.

2. The private sector should establish a local enterprise so that the communities can gain income from tourists. This can generate income, boost local economy, and create jobs such tourist guides, tourist information experts, local cuisine experts, and interpreters.

3. For general people should, an awareness to love and protect the local communities should be raised among people, and this should be transferred to the next generations so that local culture and traditions can be maintained forever. Moreover, a survey on unknown or uncovered local culture should be performed so that they become known, and uniqueness and identities of the local areas should be created so that they can be used to attract tourists who are fond of conservative tourism.

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