

The Guidelines for Developing Cultural Tourism According to the Strategic Development Plan of Sakon Nakhon Province*

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Abstract

This research aims to determine guidelines for the development of cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province. This study is qualitative research. The sample group comprises 22 individuals engaged in tourism at cultural tourist attractions in Sakon Nakhon Province, including representatives from the government, private, and public sectors, assembled through a focus group discussion process.

The results of the study are presented as follows: For the product, the identities of tourist attractions should be created. Tourist attractions should be linked. Opportunities for tourists to participate in tourism activities should be provided. For the price, prices should be appropriately set to the quality of products and services. Prices of products and services should be clearly notified. For the distribution channel, more distribution channels should be increased. Maps recommending tourist attractions should be provided. Tourist attractions should be accessed. For the sales promotion, interesting media should be created. Advertising and public relations channels, online and offline, should be increased. Special price promotions for the off-season should be organized. Trainings for personnel involved in tourism should be conducted, and they should be ready to serve tourists in every aspect. For the process, service procedures should be developed systematically and concretely. Safety should be provided, and for the physical characteristic, landscapes should be improved with local identity. The information obtained is highly valuable for supporting and promoting cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province. Relevant

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agencies can disseminate this information or further develop it to maximize its benefits for tourism in the province.

Keywords: Guidelines for Developing Cultural Tourism; Cultural Tourism; Strategic Development Plan; Sakon Nakhon Province

Introduction

Southeast Asia has rich tourism resources, both natural and cultural. There are also many sites registered as World Heritage Sites of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), all of which are outstanding and make ASEAN full of even more interesting charms (Department of Tourism, Republic of the Philippines, 2015). Thailand is also a member of the ASEAN countries. The domestic tourism situation in January–March 2023 has a clearly better recovery direction compared to the same period of the previous year. There were 42.87 million Thai visitors, an increase of 49 percent, and tourism income of 187,861 million baht, an increase of 30 percent. This improved tourism direction is a result of the ease of the COVID-19 outbreak situation. It is not the main obstacle to travel, and Thailand opened the country and canceled various measures to facilitate domestic tourism to recover to the level of a normal year (Domestic Marketing, Marketing Strategy Division, 2023).

Thai people or foreigners liked to travel to popular tourist attractions such as Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Pattaya. Therefore, it is the cause of promoting tourism in secondary cities. Data were analyzed to identify the top travel trends for 2018 by Expedia, Inc., which is an American company that provides world-class online travel services, and it was found that Thai tourists have turned to liking and searching for tourist attractions in the country more, especially the secondary cities such as Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, and Nan, which have seen a noticeable increase in the number of tourists. The most popular destination in Thailand, which has grown more than 50% compared to 2017 and is ranked number one, is Sakon Nakhon (The Balance, 2019). Sakon Nakhon is a province located in the northeastern region, and it has the 9th largest area in the Northeast. The area is a plateau surrounded by mountains and forests at approximately 172 meters above sea level (Sakon Nakhon Provincial Office for Local Administration, 2020). Sakon Nakhon Province has a trend of progressive tourism growth. That is to say, the number of tourists visiting the province has increased. Each year, the number of tourists slightly increases and continues to increase accordingly. Mostly, tourists visit and stay at the accommodations during events or important festivals. Activities, festivals, and traditional events are factors promoting

tourism. In addition, government agencies support activities to stimulate tourism as well as promote conferences and seminars for various government agencies. There is also a promotion of tourism based on three dharmas: dharma (dharma), Watthanadharmma (culture), and dharmachart (nature). Moreover, there is Phuphan Ratchaniwet Palace, which is the residence of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the royal family (Sakon Nakhon Provincial Culture Office, 2020). Moreover, Sakon Nakhon is a city with communities dating back to prehistoric times and is an old city with six indigenous tribes, namely the Phu Tai, the Yo, the Tai So, the Tai Kalerng, the Tai Yoi, the Tai Lao, the Isaan, and two races, the Thai–Chinese and Thai–Vietnamese. Each tribe has a distinctive culture, inheriting and adhering to their cultures and traditions from generation to generation and living together with love and unity until now. Therefore, it is the origin of being "City of Culture" (Nonghan Study Center, Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University and Faculty Architecture, Urban Design, and Creative Arts, Mahasarakham University, 2018). It can be seen that the potential of tourist attractions and various elements of tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province can attract tourists to visit the city. It can be measured from past tourist statistics; to illustrate, in 2014 there were 136,813 tourists; in 2015 there were 144,338 tourists; in 2016 there were 149,646 tourists; in 2017 there were 169,931 tourists; and in 2018 there were 182,411 tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020).

Currently, Sakon Nakhon Province has a 4-year strategic development plan (2018–2021) with the following visions: being a source of safe agriculture and advanced trade, investment, and tourism development in the Mekong Subregion. Strategic issues are determined with Strategic Issue 2 on the development of trade, investment, and tourism, mentioning the support for the three dhamma attractions of Sakon Nakhon Province that have become more widely accepted (Sakon Nakhon Governor's Office, 2020). The development of tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province is emphasized as the first priority within the framework of promoting tourism based on three dharmas. Cultural tourism is, therefore, very important. However, from the statistics of activities that tourists like to do while in Sakon Nakhon Province, it is found that cultural tourism activities are ranked third, which is nearly three times as far from the first place. The first place is general tourists, representing 85.45 percent, while tourists interested in cultural tourism activities are only 30.88 percent (Suanpleng, 2016). It is considered a small number compared to the cultural tourism resources of Sakon Nakhon Province. Therefore, for the culture, traditions, and way of life of the Sakon Nakhon people to continually exist and express the identity of the community sustainably, Sakon Nakhon Province must have guidelines for the development of cultural tourism

according to the strategic development plan to maintain the culture and traditions of the community.

For the reasons mentioned, guidelines for developing cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province are studied through the concept of the tourism marketing mix, which can satisfy tourists for the development of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province.

Objective

To determine guidelines for the development of cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province.

Literature Reviews

The Guidelines of Developing the Cultural Tourism According to the Strategic Development Plan of Sakon Nakhon Province is qualitative research. Background and significance of the study, objectives, as well as literature reviews leads to the development of a conceptual framework. Topics for literature reviews were determined including concepts of cultural tourism and concepts of marketing mix factors in tourism as follows.

The Guidelines for Developing Cultural Tourism According to the Strategic Development Plan of Sakon Nakhon Province, this is done through qualitative research. Background and significance of the study, objectives, and literature reviews lead to the development of a conceptual framework. Topics for literature reviews were determined, including concepts of cultural tourism and marketing mix factors in tourism, as follows:

Four-Year Strategic Plan for Provincial Development (2018–2021):

The 4-year Sakon Nakhon Province Development Plan (2018–2021) sets the direction for operations in Sakon Nakhon Province. The provincial development strategy is outlined as follows (Sakon Nakhon Governor's Office, 2020):

1. Provincial Development Positioning

1.1 Agriculture and Agricultural Industry 1.2 Trade and Investment 1.3 Development of the Three Dharma Tourism: Dharma (dharma), Watthanadharma (culture), and Dharmachart (nature).

2. Vision

“To become a safe agricultural source and to advance trade, investment, and tourism development in the Mekong Subregion.”

3. Mission

Mission 1: To effectively manage Sakon Nakhon Province’s strategy for sustainable development in alignment with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

Mission 2: To facilitate, advocate for, support, and foster collaboration across all sectors within Sakon Nakhon Province, ensuring an integrated approach toward sustainable development.

Mission 3: To oversee, assess, and regulate the governance of Sakon Nakhon Province in accordance with the principles of good governance.

4. Strategic Issues: The strategic plan encompasses five key issues, as follows:

1. Development of agriculture and the agricultural industry in alignment with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy.

2. Enhancement of trade, investment, and tourism through three core strategies:

2.1 Capacity-building in trade and investment. 2.2 Promotion of the three Dharma principles of tourism. 2.3 Expansion of land and air transportation capabilities.

3. Advancement of human resources to elevate the quality of life.

4. Pursuit of integrated, balanced, and sustainable development of natural resources and the environment.

5. Emphasis on good governance principles and stability.

In conclusion, an examination of documents pertaining to the strategic plan for provincial development over the five-year period (2018–2022) indicates a notable preference for strategic issue number 2—fostering trade, investment, and tourism aligned with the three Dharma principles of tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province.

Concepts of cultural tourism

Several academics similarly defined "cultural tourism." It can be summarized as follows:

Charoensin (2019) described cultural tourism as a trip to seek experiences about ways of life, living, arts and culture, archaeological sites, history, religion, and culture and traditions in the past to meet the needs of tourists.

Hitchcock (1997) stated that cultural tourism allows tourists to absorb and see the way of life of past societies through various things, such as handicrafts, buildings, habitations, tools used for making a living, costumes, etc.

It is consistent with the concept of the Department of Tourism (2013), the Office of Tourist Attraction Development (2014), and Aphisupakornkul and Srisuk (2007), who defined cultural tourism as traveling to see things that represent culture, such as palaces, temples, archaeological sites, antiques, traditions, ways of life, all forms of art, and other things reflecting prosperity that have been developed to suit the environments and lifestyles of people in each era. Tourists will know the history, beliefs, views, ideas, faith, and appreciation of people in the past transmitted to the present generation through these things.

Components of cultural tourist attractions, which is tourism in cultural tourist attractions that have a unique local identity, consist of ten attractions that the European Center for Traditional and Regional Cultures, or ECTARC (Richards, 1995, 2007), mentioned below.

- 1.1 Visible history and historical traces
- 1.2 Archeology and museums
- 1.3 Local traditional architecture, buildings, and city plans, including ruins
- 1.4 Arts, handicrafts, sculptures, paintings, statues, and carvings
- 1.5 Religion, including religious rituals
- 1.6 Music, plays, movies, and entertainment
- 1.7 Languages and Literatures, including the Education Systems
- 1.8 Ways of life, costumes, cuisine, and dining etiquette
- 1.9 Traditions, local cultures, traditional customs, and festivals
- 1.10 Work or technologies used in specific areas

Ingesa and Phetphongphan (2022) conducted a study on the factors influencing impressions of arts and cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province. The results indicated that travel experiences, the atmosphere at tourist attractions, satisfaction with souvenir shops, and OTOP (One Tambon, One Product) had a positive influence on arts and cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province. Conversely, satisfaction with restaurants, including restaurants, coffee shops, and beverages, had a negative influence on arts and cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province.

Wansani (2022) investigated the tourism image of Japan's Tokushima Prefecture, focusing on cultural tourism. The study aimed to enhance the tourism image of Sakon Nakhon Province, Thailand, by drawing insights from the development of the tourism image in Tokushima Prefecture, Japan. The findings suggested that implementing strategies from Kushima, Japan, could serve as a model for Sakon Nakhon Province due to the similar contextual factors between the two regions. Sakon Nakhon Province is encouraged to create a new, realistic, and modern image to attract

tourists. This may involve utilizing various steps and tools, including media and technology, to rectify existing image deficiencies and enhance clarity.

Concepts of tourism marketing mix factors

Serirat (2003) referred to the marketing mix as the controllable marketing variables that an organization must use together to satisfy the target market and achieve marketing objectives to meet the goals of consumers and create customer satisfaction beyond competitors. Therefore, the service marketing mix, or the 7 P's, is used in service businesses.

Components of the service marketing mix

1. Products and services mean things offered for sale in response to customer satisfaction. Products offered for sale may be tangible or intangible. Therefore, products consist of goods, services, ideas, places, organizations, or people. They must have utility and value in customers' opinion so that products can be sold.

2. Price refers to the value of the product in terms of money, and price is the cost to the customer. Consumers will compare the value of the product with the price of the product. If the value is higher than the price, the consumer will decide to buy.

3. Place refers to the structure of the channel, including institutions or activities used to move products and services from the organization to the market. The institution that brings products to the target market is the marketing institute. Activities helping in product distribution include transportation, warehousing and stocking inventory, and distribution.

4. Promotion is the communication of information between seller and buyer to create attitudes and purchasing behavior. Personal selling and non-personal selling may be used in communication. There are many communication tools, and one or more tools may be chosen. The principle of integrated marketing communication (IMC) is used with consideration of the suitability of customers, products, and competitors to achieve common goals.

5. People in the service business are people providing the service individually. Differences in providing services to customers can be created for maximum satisfaction and to be different from competitors. Therefore, to develop the potential of those service providers, it can be done through selection, training, and motivation. A good service provider should have expressive skills, a positive attitude towards services, respond to customer needs, create new things, solve problems, and have a good personality.

6. Physical evidence refers to the image or things that consumers can easily notice physically and that consumers can recognize in the image of the service, such as the environment

of the service location; the decoration, design, and division of space in a building; the tidiness within the office; the arrangement of office equipment; the cleanliness of the building; the reliability of the building; and the use of modern equipment, etc.

7. Process refers to the delivery of quality service to customers quickly to create customer satisfaction.

From the mentioned literature reviews, it can be concluded that the Service Marketing Mix (7 Ps), including product and services, price, place, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process, was applied in the study. This is in order to know the opinions of the community on the development of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province and to obtain guidelines for the development of cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province for those interested and those involved in tourism development to use as practical guidelines.

Conceptual Framework

For the research on guidelines for developing cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province. This study is qualitative research, and the following concepts and theories are applied:

1. Concepts about the tourism marketing mix are applied to the concept of service businesses. The service marketing mix, or 7 P's, is used (Serirat, 2009).

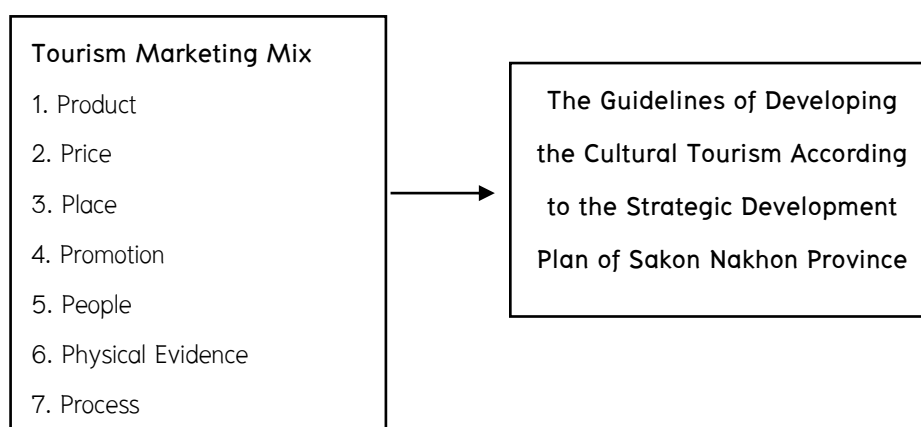


Figure 1: The conceptual framework used in the research on the Guidelines for Developing Cultural Tourism According to the Strategic Development Plan of Sakon Nakhon Province.

Research Methods

This is qualitative research conducted through a focus group interview to determine guidelines for the development of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province. The details are as follows:

Population and samples

Key informants in this research are people involved in tourism at cultural tourist attractions in Sakon Nakhon Province. Twenty-two samples, from three groups: the government sector, the private sector, and the non-governmental sector, were selected through purposive sampling.

1. Five samples were selected from government agencies including Sakon Nakhon Provincial Culture Office, Sakon Nakhon Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, Provincial Development Office, District Development Office, and Sakon Nakhon Provincial Administrative Organization.

2. Five samples were selected from the private sector, including the Sakon Nakhon Chamber of Commerce, the Sakon Nakhon Tourism Business Association, entrepreneurs involved in the tourism industry, tour businesses, food and beverage businesses, and souvenir businesses.

3. Twelve samples were selected from the public sector, consisting of people residing in various districts of cultural tourist attractions in Sakon Nakhon Province, including Kusuman, Khok Si Suphan, Tao Ngoi, Phon Na Kaeo, Phu Phan, Mueang Sakon Nakhon, Waritchaphum, Sawang Daen Din, Akat Amnuai, and Wanon Niwat.

Creation and development of instruments:

1. Established the question structure and analyzed the enhanced factors and the risk factors.

2. Distributed the revised interview form, as per suggestions from the thesis advisor, to five experts to evaluate its content validity and assess its suitability for use with the target group.

3. Enhanced and revised the semi-structured interview based on feedback from the experts. Then, presented it to the thesis advisor again.

4. Organized a comprehensive focus group to undergo the process of evaluating human research ethics. Following approval, prepared the focus group for further data collection from the sample.

Research instrument

Instruments used to collect data in this qualitative research include:

1. A focus group interview, which is a set of structured questions for determining discussion points, allows the perception of opinions from various aspects.

2. A data record form from the results of a focus group interview to find guidelines for developing integrated cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province for sustainable tourism

3. Tools for recording images and audio from the focus group interview, including voice recorders, cameras, and VDO cameras.

Data collection

Data were collected in the following steps:

1. The letters were sent to the target group and research assistants in the area to participate in the focus group interview.

2. The focus group interview was conducted in the following steps:

- 2.1 Informing participants about the purposes and processes of the focus group interview.

- 2.2 Clarifying the consent form for research with volunteers and ensuring they fill out the form completely.

- 2.3 Introducing oneself and the research assistants to establish familiarity.

- 2.4 Specifying questions to be analyzed.

- 2.5 Summarizing issues or topics through brainstorming according to the conceptual framework.

3. The focus group interview was conducted according to the appointed date, time, and location on Friday, March 17, 2023.

Data processing and data analysis

1. Data processing

Qualitative data were collected from key informants using a focus group interview. The research objectives were clearly explained so that the content could be obtained.

Primary data and secondary data were used in data processing, as presented below.

1. Primary data are preliminary data obtained from general observation and focus group interviews.

2. Secondary data were studied from preliminary data from concepts, theories, documents, articles, and related research to be used in determining research guidelines, which lead to guidelines for further data analysis.

2. Data analysis

Content analysis was applied, and the results were processed into research results by analyzing qualitative data according to Miles and Huberman (1994) in three steps as follows:

1. Data organizing is organizing data systematically to be ready to be displayed and presented. Data organizing can be divided into:

1.1 Physical data are data obtained from sound recordings. The text is transcribed and organized.

1.2 Content data are the study and collection of data from interviews that have not been completely interpreted or analyzed to be categorized or compared for relevant data analysis of the research issues.

2. Data display is presenting data descriptively after organizing and linking data completely. Data are categorized and displayed in tables.

Result

For the presentation of research results on the guidelines for developing cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province, both enhanced factors and risk factors were analyzed. This included data from the focus group interview, which involved individuals from government agencies, the private sector, and the community. Twenty-six participants were asked to discuss and express opinions or information on specific issues. The results of the analysis are represented below.

1. The context of cultural tourist attractions of Sakon Nakhon Province in the past to the present

It is necessary for the management of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province to be ready and build a strong community by raising awareness and consciousness among the people in the community, which will lead to the development of cultural tourism. At present, the major problems come from the lack of cooperation of people in the community with agencies involved in tourism promotion because of the discrete nature of tourism promotion. Therefore, those involved in the management of cultural tourism communities must participate in the process of planning, administering, sharing benefits, and sharing responsibility to be consistent with the management model based on the local community context. Activities that are designed to allow tourists to participate and create a learning experience will impress them enough to make them come back, including the importance of changes in technology, the creation of community identity, and the

development of a model of local knowledge management in parallel to create sustainable marketing.

2. The analysis of enhanced factors and risk factors for cultural tourism of Sakon Nakhon Province

2.1 Strengths or advantages of cultural tourism. The province has a variety of tourist attractions (three dharma attractions) and cultures (six indigenous ethnic groups and two races). The important festivals are the Prasat Phueng Parade (Wax Castle Parade) and the Christmas Star Parade. There are products created from local wisdom, such as basketwork and local fabrics. Transportation is convenient on both land and air (buses and airplanes). In addition, there is also the country's second-largest freshwater lake, Nong Han, and there is interesting local life along Nong Han.

2.2 Weaknesses or disadvantages of cultural tourism. Working between agencies lacks clear, concrete cooperation and also lacks continuity. The number of tourism staff is small, which affects their readiness to support and transfer knowledge to tourists. Tourism service is not up to standard, such as the service of staff in restaurants and service in accommodation, including homestay accommodation that has not passed the registration standards yet. In addition, the facilities and tourist service centers are not enough. There is a lack of support and budget for the production of attractive and modern tourism promotion media. There is also a lack of continuity in providing travel routes and the link between travel routes in the community and between communities. Inter-provincial transportation is not as convenient as it should be because some routes are still two-lane routes. Traveling from the city to tourist attractions by bus is difficult because there are few buses and they do not operate according to the set schedule. Entrepreneurs lack information on marketing and product value creation, including the technology applications to support marketing. There are few restaurants and restrooms accommodating tourists in tourist destinations. There is no map suggesting tourist attractions in the community, and there are no accurate signposts.

2.3 Opportunities for cultural tourism. The government fully supports tourism, provides support for basic infrastructure, and promotes more logistics in the area. The Tourism Authority of Thailand has a distinct policy to increase the potential of tourism and to help create branding for Sakon Nakhon Province. Government policies support the development of tourist attractions, including OTOP products, to promote community tourism. In addition, the Internet and

the online social world are popular in the world in the digital era and it helps widespread knowledge about tourism.

2.4 Obstacles to cultural tourism. Transport routes on Phu Phan Mountain are difficult. It also takes time, and there are frequent accidents. The spread of the COVID-19 virus stops travel, and it affects the decreasing number of tourists. The economic recession also affects the decreased expenditure of tourists. Tourists see the Northeast region as dry, arid, and not suitable for tourism. The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak urges each province to create marketing to attract more tourists to comply with the policy to stimulate domestic tourism.

The attitudes and behaviors of Thai and foreign tourists have changed, and they tend to adjust to the new normal after the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. Political instability affects the assurance of foreign tourists with the problems of PM2.5 air pollution in many provinces, including Sakon Nakhon Province.

2.5 Tourist Attractions. Sakon Nakhon Province has various tourist attractions, including 1) Dharma attractions, 2) natural attractions, 3) cultural attractions, 4) recreational and entertainment attractions, and 5) academic attractions.

2.6 Entrepreneurs of shops and accommodations. The laws of government agencies promoting tourism do not really support tourism because regulations and prohibitions are not flexible for entrepreneurs.

2.7 Services. Cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province is organized tourism; that is, advance reservations are required. A deposit must be paid. Tourists cannot enter the site without a reservation. Most of the tourists are mainly study tour groups, followed by general tourists.

2.8 Local people and stakeholders. Local leaders, local philosophers, and people in the community search for the outstanding identity of the community to be used as a selling point in tourism. In addition, the ethnic matters are not clear, such as the costumes and the games of each tribe.

3. Marketing Promotion of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province

3.1 General market conditions. Sakon Nakhon Province tends to experience tourism growth at a stepped rate; in other words, more tourists visit the province. Each year, the number of tourists does not dramatically increase, but it is in a better direction. At present, tourism is based on promoting tourism in the three dharmas, so cultural tourism is very important. According to the statistics of popular activities that tourists do during their stay in Sakon Nakhon Province, however, it was found that cultural tourism activities are ranked third, which shows a significant

gap from the top rank almost three times. The first place is general tourists, which accounted for 85.45 percent, while tourists interested in cultural tourism activities accounted for only 30.88 percent. (Suanpleng, 2016). There are several current conditions and intensities of cultural tourism competition in Sakon Nakhon Province. There is a problem with cultural imitation. There is a lack of continuity in providing travel routes and a lack of the link of tourism routes in the community and between communities. Entrepreneurs lack information on marketing and product value creation including the technology application to help in marketing.

3.2 Tourism products. There is diversity in cultural styles, resources, and tourist attractions in Sakon Nakhon Province. There are important festivals such as the Prasat Phueng Parade (Wax Castle Parade) and the Christmas Star Parade. There are products from local wisdom such as basketwork and local fabrics. There are various cultures among ethnic groups and races. In addition, there is the country's second-largest freshwater lake, Nong Han, with interesting local life around Nong Han. There is an opportunity for tourists to participate in tourism activities to create a real experience and exchange knowledge with the owner of the attraction. Tourism products and services must be improved to be distinctive and of high quality. In addition, the budget for the production of attractive and modern tourism public relations and media must be supported.

3.3 Prices in tourism. The pricing strategy for cultural tourism services in Sakon Nakhon Province is set. There should be clear information on the price of goods and services so that tourists feel that they are not exploited or deceived by overpriced products, and there should be rules for increasing or reducing the price of products and tourism. If the types of products are the same, the price should be at the same standard, so tourists don't feel that they pay overpriced.

3.4 Tourism distribution channels. There are channels for distributing tourism products and services. However, at present, there are not many ways to contact product owners and select products. Most of them are contacted through government agencies, and they cause delays in information reception and information deviation when tourists want to inquire about or purchase tourism goods or services. Therefore, there are solutions to solve distribution problems and increase distribution channels to make it easier for tourists to find information. For example, there are online channels so that tourists can access information quickly, which can help them make easier decisions. Maps recommending tourist attractions in the community or nearby tourist attractions are provided so that tourists can plan their trips to tourist attractions.

3.5 Promotion of tourism sales. There are several ways to promote products and tourism marketing. Interesting media is created to represent the identity, culture, and way of life in order to create interest and attract tourists. There are activities promoting cultural tourism at special prices or promotions for the low season. For problems of marketing, promotion of products, and tourism, marketing relies on government agencies, and most tourists are study tour groups. There is no serious marketing. Therefore, there should be guidelines for solving the problem of marketing and promotion of products and tourism by increasing advertising channels and public relations, both online and offline, to reach more tourists. There should be staff who can answer tourist inquiries in all aspects, including promoting word-of-mouth marketing.

3.6 Tourism personnel. In cultural attraction areas in Sakon Nakhon Province, there are not enough staff to serve tourists because, in some tourist attractions, there is only one person who can act as a tour guide and link to the traditions, cultures, and ways of life of the people in the community. Therefore, there should be training for personnel involved in tourism to have knowledge of cultural attractions in Sakon Nakhon Province in order to be ready to serve tourists in all aspects and to express the friendliness and generosity of the hosts and entrepreneurs.

3.7 Processes of tourism services. Entrepreneurs and people in the community are enthusiastic about providing services. The tourism services that are not standardized, however, cause some groups of tourists to not be as impressed as they should be. Moreover, there is no systematic and concrete service process. Existing tourism services are not yet up to standard, such as the service of staff in restaurants, accommodation services, and homestay accommodations that has not passed the registration standards. Processes for providing services should be systematically developed, including various regulations of tourist attractions and security management, for tourists' satisfaction.

3.8 Physical Evidence of Tourism. Tourist attractions are clean, and public utilities are sufficient to provide services to tourists. On the other hand, the management is still not very good at some tourist attractions, such as space management, space division, accurate signposts, facilities, and tourist service points. The landscape should be improved to be suitable for visits throughout the year with a good atmosphere. Tourist attractions should be decorated with consideration of local identity to attract tourists and to promote the image of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province as outstanding and diverse from tourists' perspectives.

Discussion

From the study of development guidelines for cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province, the summary and discussion of the research results are presented as follows:

Enhanced factors of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province

The government fully supports tourism and the improvement of tourist attractions, including the development of OTOP products to promote tourism. It is consistent with the research of Montian (2017) that there should be OTOP products in the community. Local cultures should be preserved. The development of basic public utilities and logistics in the area are also being promoted. This is consistent with the study of Somjai and Na Lampoon (2020), which found that in the recommendations, all stakeholders should work together to plan the management of tourism components, including attractions, activities, facilities, convenience of travel, and accommodation, to make Bang Chalong District a potential cultural tourist destination. In addition, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has a policy to increase the tourism potential and to help create the tourism branding of Sakon Nakhon Province because it has various tourist attractions, such as Dharma, natural, cultural, recreational, entertainment, and academic tourist attractions. Especially in cultural tourism, there are important festivals, namely, the Prasat Phueng Parade and the Christmas Star Parade. There are products created from local wisdom, such as basketwork and local fabrics. There are six indigenous tribes and two races. There is also the country's second-largest freshwater lake, Nong Han, and there is interesting local life along Nong Han. Moreover, there is convenient transportation by both land and air (buses and airplanes). The world in the digital age, with the popularity of the Internet and the online social world, helps disseminate knowledge about tourism widely.

Risk Factors of Cultural Tourism of Sakon Nakhon Province

Previous problems with the COVID-19 outbreak caused travel to stop. It affected the decreased number of tourists, and there was the economic recession, which resulted in the spending of tourists decreasing as well. Attitudes and behaviors of tourists, both Thai and foreign, to a trend of adjusting themselves to the New Normal. The impact of the COVID-19 outbreak has forced each province to market itself to attract more tourists to meet the policy to stimulate domestic tourism. This provides tourists with more options, but there is still a lack of support and budget for creating attractive and modern tourism public relations media. This is consistent with the study of Jugsujinda et al. (2020), which found that the obstacles encountered included

delayed budgets and a lack of various public relations. Sakaeo (2020) also stated that the budget should be supported in promoting cultural tourism, and entrepreneurs still lack information on marketing and creating product value, including the use of technology in marketing. This is following Wongcharoenchaikul (2018), who found that public relations were not diverting and serious, and there was a lack of support from relevant agencies, both public and private, in providing correct knowledge in technology application. In addition, the laws of government agencies promoting tourism do not truly support tourism because regulations and prohibitions are not flexible for entrepreneurs. The problem of political uncertainty also affects the trust of foreign tourists, including the air pollution problem of PM 2.5 in many provinces in Thailand, of which Sakon Nakhon Province is one of them. Another problem that still cannot be solved is the image that tourists view the Northeastern region as dry and unsuitable for tourism. Tourists also think that the cultural tourism of Sakon Nakhon Province is organized. A reservation must be made in advance, and a deposit must be paid. Tourists cannot visit the places without making a reservation in advance. Most tourists visit the province for study tours, followed by general tourism. Another problem is that the work among agencies still lacks clear and concrete cooperation and continuity. This is consistent with the study of Jugsujinda et al. (2020), which mentioned problems and obstacles in implementing the strategic plan of Three Dharmas Tourism of Sakon Nakhon Province into practice: the lack of continuity and cooperation in work, infrastructure problems, and the continuation of travel route preparation to connect tourism routes in the community and among communities. The problem of insufficient tourism personnel resulted in a limited number of potential local tour guides and a lack of readiness to welcome tourists, including local philosophers to pass on knowledge to tourists. There was also a problem of cultural imitation: local leaders, local philosophers, and villagers should search for the distinctive identity of the community to be used as a selling point for tourism, including the issue of unclear ethnicity, such as the costumes and games of each tribe. Tourism services had not yet been standardized, such as the service of waiters in restaurants and services in accommodation, including homestays that had not yet passed registration standards. Tourist service points were not enough, including amenities at tourist attractions such as maps recommending tourist attractions in the community. There were few toilets and correct signs at tourist attractions. There were also a few restaurants to accommodate tourists at tourist attractions, and most of them were small food stalls in villages. Transportation among provinces was still not as convenient as it should be because some parts of the road connecting provinces were still two-lane routes. Traveling from the city to various tourist

attractions by bus was difficult because few buses were provided and did not run according to the schedule. Nong Han Water tourism was not adequately promoted.

Marketing mix of cultural tourism of Sakon Nakhon Province

The tendency of tourism growth in Sakon Nakhon Province is in a stepped way; that is, the number of tourists is increasing. Each year, the number of tourists does not dramatically increase; however, it is in a better direction. Most tourists visit and stay in the accommodation during events or important traditional activities (Sakon Nakhon Provincial Cultural Office, 2020). Nowadays, tourism is raised within the framework of promoting tourism in the three Dharmas, so cultural tourism is important. Sakon Nakhon Province has mild competition in tourism. After the opening of the country, people travel more, and the economy of Sakon Nakhon Province gradually recovers with the cooperation of government and private agencies.

Guidelines for developing cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province

1. Product. Tourism activities allowing tourists to participate should be organized to create a real experience for tourists with the exchange of knowledge between owners of the tourist attraction and tourists. This is consistent with Chompoopanya and Rojanatrakul (2022), who stated that activities allowing tourists to participate with people in the community in preserving resources, environment, and culture will impress tourists, and they will want to visit the place again. Tourism products and services should be improved to be outstanding and of high quality, and the budget to create attractive and modern tourism public relations media should be supported. McKercher and Koh (2017) stated that each tourist destination plays an important role in driving the desire to visit that destination. This is consistent with the study of Sangkakorn et al. (2018), which mentioned that organizing activities connecting cultural tourist attractions along with learning about local wisdom through activities that allow tourists to participate in hands-on activities under the atmosphere of traditional community ways will enhance the experience for tourists, including a local tour leader providing information and services to facilitate and satisfy tourists.

2. Price. The price of marketing products for cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province, compared to other types of products, is considered not very high, and tourists can afford it. Nevertheless, how we make tourists feel worth their money can be considered another price strategy. Entrepreneurs should set suitable prices for the quality of their products and services. If they are the same type of product, the price standards should meet the same criteria. There should be clear information on the price of goods and services to make tourists feel safe that they are not being exploited or that they are paying for overpriced products. Sapphanin (2018) also

revealed that tourists suggested that restaurants with similar styles or standards should sell food at the same standard price.

3. Place. Transportation for tourists to access the tourist attractions conveniently should be improved, especially the bus that does not operate according to the schedule. In addition, more distribution channels should be added to make it easier for tourists to find information, such as the internet, where tourists can access information quickly and make decisions more easily. Chompoopanya and Rojanatrakul (2022) also found that public relations for community tourist attractions should be communicated through modern communication channels that everyone can easily access, and public relations forms must be interesting. This is following Vila T.D. Vila N.A. (2018), who mentioned the role of the Internet as a tool for searching for travel information. The internet has become the primary tool for finding information and can represent a good image of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province as well. Maps recommending tourist attractions in the community or nearby tourist attractions must be provided so that tourists can plan their trips to various tourist attractions.

4. Promotion. Advertising and public relations channels should be increased to reach more tourists, both online and offline. Online media platforms include websites, Facebook, Instagram, and bloggers' reviews. Offline media include print media, radio, television, and noticeboards. This conforms to the study of Somjai and Na Lamphun (2020), which explained the behaviors and needs of tourists toward cultural tourism and suggested that more online marketing and public relations should be promoted to keep up with the present age. Wongcharoenchaikul (2018) also mentioned that public relations channels must be widely increased and easily accessed. This is consistent with the findings of Likitsarun (2019), which concluded that tourism in Phichit Province still lacks the promotion of public relations in disseminating interesting information about tourist attractions within the province to tourists and visitors, thus resulting in tourist attractions not being widely known yet. Personnel who can answer tourists' questions in all aspects should be available, including promoting word-of-mouth marketing from tourists who visited the province and were impressed.

5 People. Training for personnel involved in tourism to know cultural tourist attractions in Sakon Nakhon Province and to be ready to provide services to tourists in all aspects, including expressions of friendliness and generosity of hosts and entrepreneurs, should be organized. Jaiuea et al. (2016) found that the development of tourism personnel must be focused on the participation of all relevant sectors, especially local people, who must provide knowledge about tourism to be

able to sustainably manage tourism in their communities. This is consistent with the study of Chaiyakot et al. (2015), which mentioned that the community should be additionally developed in tourist facilities and training in providing tourist services to related groups.

6. Process. Systematic and concrete service procedures, including various regulations for tourist attractions, should be developed to create satisfaction for tourists. In addition, security personnel should be available at all risky places in tourist attractions, and there should be preparation to handle emergencies at all times. This is consistent with Sappanil (2018), who found that tourists recommended that they needed more staff points or channels for reporting emergencies and the installation of adequate lighting and CCTV in important tourist spots.

7. Physical evidence. The landscape should be improved to suit traveling throughout the year to attract tourists. The image of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon province should be promoted, along with decorating tourist attractions with local identities. This is consistent with the study of Phootaemnin et al. (2022), which found that the cultural uniqueness and distinctiveness of each area should be used to attract tourists and promote the image of cultural tourism. Improvements that do not cause change or do not affect cultural values should be focused on. Tourist service points should be added more, including facilities in tourist attractions such as toilets, resting points, and signs about the history of tourist attractions. This follows the study of Phuthed (2019), who found that there should be road signs, invitation signs, and public relations signs in many places and maps of routes linking various tourist attractions nearby.

The results are consistent with the four-year strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province (2018–2021), as follows:

1. Infrastructure. There are requirements to develop transportation routes linking tourist attractions in the area and improve the water supply system. The budget has been set for solving infrastructure problems.

2. Economy. There are requirements to promote careers to create income for the household. Training projects have been organized to provide knowledge about careers to the community, and careers for sustainability have been promoted.

3. Religion and culture. There are requirements to conserve local traditions and promote religious and cultural activities in schools. Activities about conserving local culture and traditions are promoted, and cultural tourism activities and routes, such as the culture along Nong Han Basin, are organized.

4. Security. There are requirements for safety in life and property. CCTV cameras are inclusively installed, and security agencies such as the military, police, and administrative departments are assigned to increase strictness in the area.

5. Tourism and services. There are requirements for tourist attractions and services in the area. The budget is requested from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports.

New Knowledge

From Figure 2, the new knowledge derived from the research explains that it raises awareness of the enhanced factors outlined in policy guidelines aimed at increasing tourism potential and assisting in building tourism branding in Sakon Nakhon Province. Additionally, it highlights the risk factors stemming from issues of collaboration among various agencies, which still lack continuity in their efforts. This includes concerns such as cultural imitation and heightened competition in tourism among provinces. Furthermore, the research provides guidelines for the development of cultural tourism in accordance with the strategic plan for the development of Sakon Nakhon Province. These guidelines encompass all seven aspects of the marketing mix: Product (creating the identity of tourist attractions), Price (setting prices appropriate to the quality of products and services), Place (increasing distribution channels), Promotion (creating attractive media), People (organizing training for personnel involved in tourism), Process (developing systematic service procedures), and Physical Evidence (improving the landscape and decorating tourist attractions with local identities). Stakeholders interested in and involved in tourism development can utilize this as a practical guideline.



Figure 2 New knowledge from The Guidelines for Developing Cultural Tourism According to the Strategic Development Plan of Sakon Nakhon Province.

Conclusion

Guidelines for developing cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province are jointly determined by those involved in tourism at cultural tourist attractions in Sakon Nakhon Province. Concepts of marketing mix factors in tourism are applied as follows: For the product, the identity of a tourist attraction is created. Tourist attractions are linked. Opportunities for tourists to participate in tourism activities are provided. For the price, the appropriate price for the quality of the products and services is set. The price of products and services is clearly stated. For the place (distribution channel), more distribution channels are added. A map recommending tourist attractions is provided. Tourist attractions are easily accessible. For sales promotion, interesting media are created. Advertising and public relations channels are increasing, both online and offline. Special price promotions for the off-season are organized. For the people, training for personnel involved in tourism is provided, and they are ready to serve tourists in every aspect. For the process, systematic and concrete service procedures are developed. Safety is provided. For physical evidence, the landscape with local identity is improved. The results are consistent with the 4-year strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province (2018–2021), including: 1. infrastructure; 2. economy; 3. religion and culture; and 4. security. The relevant agencies can apply the results to enhance their operations or disseminate them for maximum benefit, thus driving and further developing cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province.

Suggestions

From the results of the study, suggestions are presented as follows:

1. Suggestions for the usage of results

1.1 This research provides guidelines for the development of cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province. Therefore, the obtained information is extremely useful for supporting and promoting cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province. Relevant agencies can publish it or further develop it for maximum benefit to tourism in Sakon Nakhon province.

1.2 Government agencies know the opinions of the community on the development of cultural tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province, and these opinions can be used as a guideline for developing tourism plans in Sakon Nakhon Province.

2. Suggestions for further studies

2.1 This research is conducted to find guidelines for developing cultural tourism according to the strategic development plan of Sakon Nakhon Province. For further studies, the province may expand the scope to other forms of tourism in order to develop tourism in Sakon Nakhon Province.

2.2 The impacts of tourism on communities and the environment should be studied.

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