

## **Approaches and styles of tourism management of the Thai Herb Community to promote tourism in the Herbal City of Saraburi Province, Thailand**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this research was to study the approaches and styles of tourism management of the Thai Herb Community to promote tourism in the Herbal City of Saraburi Province. This research used the qualitative research method by collecting the information on theories, concepts, knowledge, and related researches. The primary information was studied by interviewing the key informants including the executives and personnel from government agencies in Saraburi Province, local administrative organizations, private sector totaling 11 persons. The research result revealed that the systematic knowledge management for the project of research knowledge management for community-based and social use would be the project that could create sustainability by transferring knowledge and technology. The project implementation team has accumulated knowledge to the target audience who is the policy maker and practitioner in the government agencies in Saraburi Province, local administrative organizations, private sector, communities, and people in the area through the organization of training and seminars on the research results to transfer knowledge about tourism management of the Thai Herb Community to elevate tourism and promote the development of Herbal City of Saraburi Province. The research results revealed that the approaches were that the tourism in Saraburi had the potential with distinguishing features of agricultural tourism. These could be combined with herbal resources to be used as a selling point for public relations of tourist destinations, community tourist sites/Herbal City. The concept of marketing mix was used along with promoting strengths, correcting weaknesses and style which was to do activities through (1) the main activities in the preparation of raw materials, tourism management, readiness to support tourists and services, (2) the supporting activities were such as technological development, human resource management, and the basic infrastructure of the organizations..

**Keywords:** Tourism management, community tourism, herbs

### **1. Background and significance of problem**

Tourism is the world's largest industry reflected from the rapid expansion of global tourism every year resulting in the overall economic effects (Jermisittiparsert, 2019; Godil, Sharif, Rafique, & Jermisittiparsert, 2020; Razzaq, Sharif, Ahmad, & Jermisittiparsert, 2020). Thus, tourism development is clearly and generally accepted as important to the economic development of the country. This can be seen from the tourism performance affecting the country's economy. The revenue from tourism grows every year resulting in higher overall economy of the country. It also helps creating jobs and distributing income to the local area which has led the government to continue to enhance the policies to promote tourism of the country and to create strategies to stimulate tourism. (Sukanthasirikul, 2013).

The 12<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan continues to emphasize the role of communities and local community organizations in the management of tourist attractions by taking advantage of Thai identity and uniqueness reflecting the local culture and community way of life. This will promote the creation of added value to tourism products and services as well as distributing the income to people in the community and locality across the country thoroughly and fairly. It includes the promotion on tourism taking into account the capacity of the ecosystem in order to create the balance and sustainability in the development of Thai tourism industry. The creative tourism groups can be developed according to the potential of the area linked to tourism activities according to market needs such as community tourism, health tourism, agricultural tourism, maritime tourism, green tourism, and cultural tourism to be the new tourist attractions that attract quality tourists from around the world (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2016).

As the current travel styles are varied according to the behaviors of tourists and the popularity of society, the new type of tourism has increased in popularity. Especially health tourism, the government has assigned the Ministry of Public Health together with related agencies to jointly develop the herbs for efficient use to be accepted and add value to Thai herbal products. The first Thai Herbal Development Master Plan (B.E.2560-2564) was prepared and the Herbal City development project was launched in 2017 piloting 4 provinces. Later in 2018, the Herbal City development project was expanded to other nine provinces including Phitsanulok, Uthai Thani, Saraburi, Nakhon Pathom, Chanthaburi, Surin, Amnat Charoen and Songkhla aiming at increasing the economic competitiveness of the ASEAN countries and creating more value for the country. Saraburi Province was designated one of the Herbal Cities.

Saraburi Province has implemented the management of herbs from upstream, mid-stream, to downstream. There are the communities that grow chemical-free organic herbs with standardized processing and systematic distribution. With the potential for herbal management of the local community of Saraburi Province, the development can be furthered to the health tourism attraction by integrating to achieve creative tourism.

## 2.Literature review

**In developing the Herbal City according to the first Thai Herbal Development Master Plan B.E.2560-2564**, the Thai government and related agencies recognize the importance of Thai herbal development which is an important wisdom and resource of the country. The systematic and sustainable development plan was formulated having the Steering Committee and the National Master Plan Drafting Committee on the development of Thai herbs of 2017-2021. The first master plan aims to promote and preserve valuable wisdom about Thai herbs as well as developing the production and use of Thai herbs with quality, full efficiency, and complete cycle. It will result in the stability, wealth and sustainability of Thai herbs as well as creating the added value to the Thai economy (The first Thai Herbal Development Master Plan B.E.2560-2564).

**Herbal City development plan:** The 4<sup>th</sup> Strategy defines “Herbal City Development” as the sixth measure of the strategy. The main content is to convey the measures and programs from the National Master Plan to regional development. The focus is on the development of a complete range of herbs from the upstream, mid-stream, to downstream in growing herbs, processing and making products that can be used for various purposes. This can create the economic value and sustainable community growth relying on civil state mechanisms and cooperation from all sectors. The civil state mechanism and the cooperation from all sectors are important for driving the development of Herbal City by selecting provinces that are ready to be developed into the Herbal City and promote the development of the Herbal City as the context of the country. This measure consists of two plans; (1) developing provinces that are ready to be a model of the Herbal City in 4 regions of the country and (2) promoting the development opportunities of provinces/provincial groups with potential to become Herbal City (The first Thai Herbal Development Master Plan B.E.2560-2564). Each plan has goals, implementation approaches including indicators of plan summarized as follows.

**Concept of Agro-tourism management:** Agro-tourism is the tourism that focuses on the learning of agricultural way of the farmers by emphasizing the participation of tourists in carrying out activities to learn agriculture and livelihoods, culture, and tradition as well as bringing the available resources for learning to benefit and generate income for the community and the farmers. Agricultural tourism is the conservation together with tourism so as not to affect the community and the environment. It is the travel trip to agricultural areas, agricultural gardens, agroforestry, herb garden, livestock farm and pets to appreciate the beauty, success and enjoyment in the farmland to gain knowledge and new experiences on the basis of responsibility. The persons are raised with the awareness to preserve the environment of that place. In each agricultural tourism site, the activities are organized to serve tourists in various activities depending on the conditions.

1) Tourists participating in short-term activities such as visits to agricultural gardens. Tourists may collect produce in the garden or buy produce by picking and doing short-term activities with the villagers.

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2) Tourists staying in the village. The tourists are allowed to stay in the village to study and experience the life of rural farmers. The tourists will receive a warm, safe, convenient and clean service.

3) Tourists being trained to learn knowledge of new agriculture and knowledge that is local wisdom, new farming practices such as planting and caring, agricultural product processing. A certificate may also be given for learning folk wisdom such as studying useful insects, local edible plants, making coconut sugar and palm sugar, etc.

4) The agricultural products and local handicrafts of farmers are sold as utensils and souvenirs including fresh fruits, fresh flowers, seeds of interesting plants for tourists to buy and grow.

5) The business way is guided for other business suffering problems from the economic downturn. Some tourists come to travel in order to operate business related to agriculture because it is the business that gives quick returns. This kind of tourism does not only benefit farmers but it is also a mean to help the private sector affected by the current economic condition (Maejo's University Farm, 2012).

The results of Agro-tourism is considered the direct income to the farmers, owners or producers. Tourists have visited and bought various produce that farmers have made in normal occupations such as 1) being able to sell saplings and seeds for tourists to buy back to try planting. Some may lead to further expansion as new farmers to increase and create jobs and new occupation. 2) Being able to sell the collected produce and send it to tourists directly. It helps expanding the retail and wholesale markets for farmers. 3) Some products that are not sold fresh can be processed into another form of product prepared dry as food preservation distributed to tourists as income that has increased from the original. 4) Contributing to introduce more agricultural businesses that the tourists and farmers who exchange knowledge and ideas can help expanding the results of farming to other businesses. It is to create jobs and more professions such as doing business with fresh fruit and wicker, packaging machines, etc. 5) The management of tourism to visit the farm also allows neighbors to sell products from agricultural farms, food products, and beverage increasingly (Maejo's University Farm, 2012).

**Approaches for Health and Wellness Tourism management:** The Health and Wellness Tourism is the trip to visit places or tourist attractions that are beautiful in natural attractions inserted with culture, history, and various environment including the study on the application of wisdom for care and therapy. The aim is to learn the way of life and to relax by dividing time for tourism to pursue health promotion activities or rehabilitation therapy such as leisure travel, stress relief, advice on physical and mental health care, proper exercise, massage, herbal compress, meditation practice, physical examination, and medical treatment (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2561). In addition, the Health and Wellness Tourism refers to the vacation in the midst of nature to learn how to use natural energy to cure and strengthen the health. The mind is fresh and clear coupled with tourism. The local culture has been observed bringing what has been received to improve the quality of life. In summary, the Health and Wellness Tourism is the tourism with incentives or aims to promote health and/or rehabilitation therapy. It is the tourism that combines treatment and rehabilitation both physically and mentally with an awareness on the conservation of tourist resources and the environment in natural and cultural attractions, etc.

The Health and Wellness Tourism is the tourism or leisure activity in conjunction with taking care of tourists' health. The health tourism can be categorized according to the health of tourism into 3 levels. 1) The tourism can maintain the health of tourists already in good health to be improved. Tourism like this is very popular all over the world. This is because most tourists are starting to focus on maintaining their health in today's degraded environment by exercising and taking care of health properly such as meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, mineral bath or spa, traditional massage, eating herbs, healthy eating and relaxation in the fresh air closer to nature. 2) The tourism can restore the health of tourists or in the recovery phase. In this kind of tourism, tourists want clean air, good and natural environment, healthy food, and light exercise to restore health. 3) The tourism can cure the tourists' disease. This type of tourism is gaining immense popularity because medical expenses in Thailand are cheaper than abroad and Thailand has the doctors who have expertise and various skills such as dentistry, hip replacement, knee replacement, cosmetic surgery, etc. (Faculty of Business Administration, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, 2017).

### 3. Research methodology

This is Participatory Action Research (PAR) starting from doing technical cooperation with the Saraburi Province agency to study the information on enhancing the promotion of Herbal City tourism development and other topics which were obtained from literature reviews and related researches. The data obtained from the study by conducting survey in the areas and interviewing stakeholders was analyzed and synthesized. The knowledge was transferred and the research results were submitted through seminars with relevant agencies or stakeholders to be used in a concrete way. The details are as follows.

1. The documents were studied and the literatures related to enhancing the promotion of Herbal City tourism development were reviewed together with other topics to analyze, synthesize and manage knowledge before being used to expand the results to transfer theoretical knowledge to the target group.

2. The meetings were held for the operating team and stakeholders including the executives and personnel from government agencies of Saraburi Province, local administrative organizations, private sector totaling 11 persons. The in-depth interview was conducted including brainstorming to summarize the data obtained from the study. All worked together to find the ways to promote herbal products, herb industry, and other resources which are the supply of tourism.

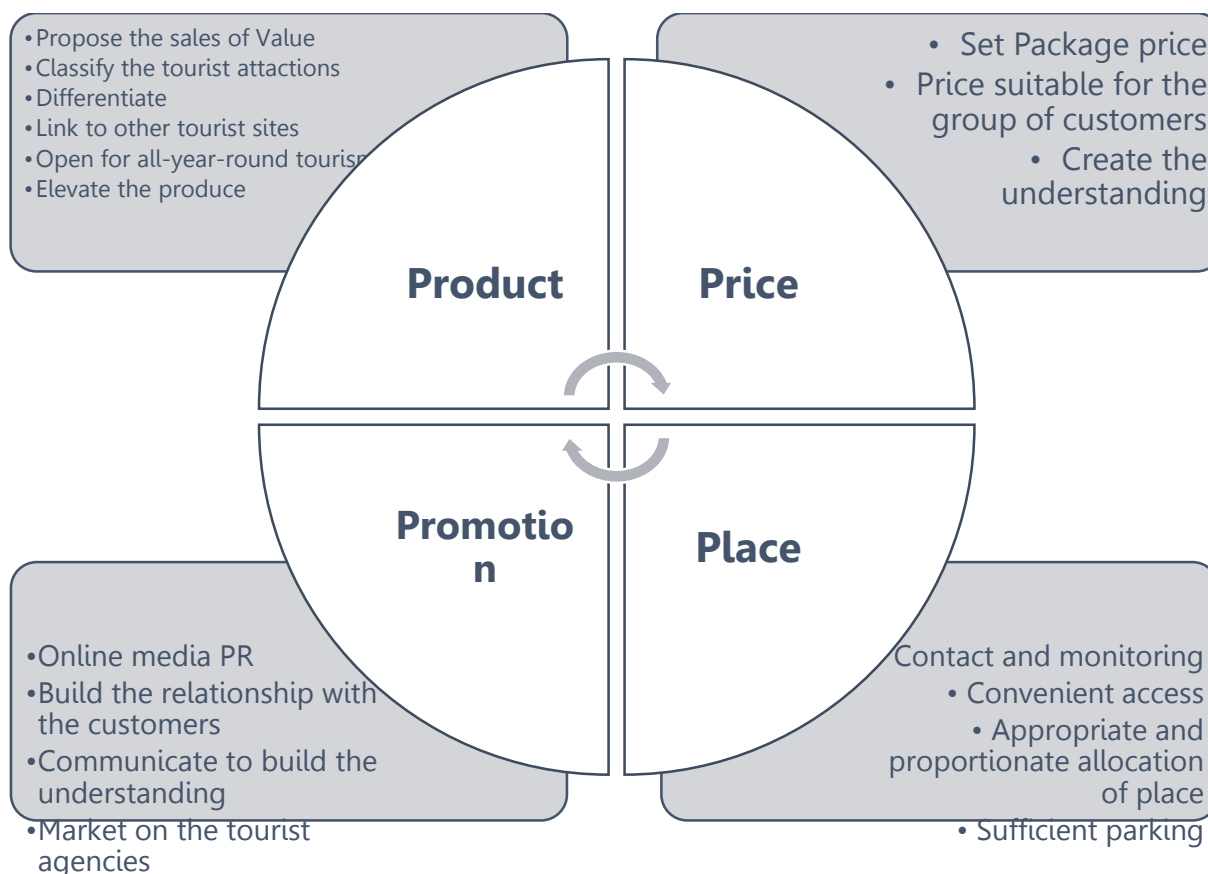
3. The management approaches and styles were created/developed for the management of the Thai Herb Community to promote tourism in Herbal City, Saraburi Province, suitable for the potential of the area/community.

#### **4. Research results**

##### **4.1. Approaches for the management of tourism market of the Thai Herb Community, Saraburi Province**

The analysis on the tourism market from the perspective of tourists suggests that Tourism of Saraburi has the potential to be an outstanding point in agricultural tourism. This can be combined with herbal resources to be used as a selling point for publicizing tourist sites / Herbal City. However, there are still many aspects that need to be improved to respond to the needs of tourists. This can be supplemented with the analysis on the behaviors of tourists using the principle of 6Ws 1H. The approaches for the development of tourism market in Thai Herb Community, Saraburi Province, can be summarized using the concept of marketing mix (4P's) to promote strengths and correct the weaknesses. It was found that: 1) In Product, the focus should be on presenting the value of tourism in Thai Herb Community classified by tourist sites following the objectives of the tourists. This can differentiate from similar competitors linked with other attractions to organize the activities to be able to travel all year round and upgrade the sales strategies from the original focus on the volume to the presentation of sales value. 2) In Price, it should not be priced on the head-to-head basis. It may be modified to the Package price to suit the group of customers. This must be clarified and understood to tourists about production prices and pricing clearly. 3) In Place, the tourists should be contacted and followed to increase the number of communication channels with tourists and facilitate the access to tourist attractions. There should be the clear signs indicating the routes to reach the tourist attractions making the location appropriate and proportionate. The adequate and appropriate parking should be allocated. 4) In Promotion, the focus should be on public relations in internet and social media to build the good relationship with tourists, develop and create the media that builds knowledge and understanding of tourism in tourist destinations as well as coordinating with famous travel agencies or leading companies nationally.

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**Figure 1** Framework for the approaches of tourism market management of the Thai Herb Community, Saraburi Province

**4.2.Style of tourism management of the Thai Herb Community, Saraburi Province**

The researcher has synthesized the data from the study together with the conclusion gained from organizing the brainstorming forum to propose the model and approaches of tourism management of the Thai Herb Community, Saraburi Province. This will lead to the promotion and enhancement of the tourism in the Herbal City of Saraburi Province to have the potential to serve more quality tourists resulting in the generation of income and sustainable economic growth. The model of tourism management of the Thai Herb Community, Saraburi Province, was arranged through the Primary Activity and Support Activity as follows.

1) The Primary Activity consists of:

1.1) Inbound Logistics is an activity in preparing agricultural products and tourism activities in the tourist attractions to prepare the area to be ready arranged with personnel who perform various duties in order to serve tourists who will come to visit, experience and learn about the Thai Herb Community tourism attraction. This includes preparing products from herbs and community’s processed herbal products for tourists to choose to buy or eat. Therefore, the communities and entrepreneurs must prepare raw materials including (1) selecting herbal products and quality products which are safe in sufficient quantity to serve the needs of tourists, (2) arranging the tourism activities in accordance with the herbal way allowing tourists to get involved, get pleasure, gain knowledge and experiences from tourism activities organized by the community to attract tourists, (3) arranging the place and the area in the tourist attraction to be proportionate, comfortable, clean and maintain the uniqueness of Thai Herb Community as naturally as possible, (4) selecting personnel who provide service in tourist attractions with knowledge and experience being able to convey stories to educate or answer questions to tourists. They are persons with service mind to serve tourists willingly with friendliness.

1.2) Operations of tourist attractions are the activity in preparing the tourist attractions. The modeling of Thai Herb Community is correspondent with the potential in the tourist attractions which can respond the tourists following the demand and reflecting the Value. The approaches for the development of tourist attractions are to manage based on the DEE Model. (1) Design for Niche is the model for the tourist attractions focusing on the Niche Market and Creative Tourism requiring the customers to use the services particularly such as the family group. The emphasis is put on the tourists to be engaged in learning and enjoying the activities. (2) Explore by

Zoning is the model of tourist attractions by zoning proportionally to serve the tourism activities for the tourists to participate in various activities. The areas are zoning proportionally in doing various activities. The tourism routes in the tourist attractions are designed in a circular motion suitable for the activities that are held. The marketing is operated through various media especially internet and online media being able to organize various activities in order to have tourism management throughout the year. (3) Enlighten from Experience is the form of tourist attraction that learns the way of herb making and agricultural horticulture. The emphasis is put on transferring knowledge and experiences in herb gardening in the form of learning center, learning base, or study tours by presenting stories about wisdom and knowledge of the community and entrepreneurs to create value and impression on tourists.

1.3) Outbound Logistics are the activities which the Thai Herb Community must deliver tourism services to the tourists. The community and entrepreneurs must be prepared in the activities for the tourists to be impressed. The service must be systemized for the tourists to feel the reliability, convenience, quickness, safety, and value of services including:

- Establishing the reservation system in advance so that tourist attractions can prepare sufficient raw materials and able to provide thorough service
- Organizing and preparing the parking place suitable and sufficient to accommodate tourists.
- Systematically providing the welcome point of tourists to provide the information to tourists to be used when registering for services, explaining the methods and regulations of tourism in the tourist attractions
- Having knowledgeable guide to convey stories to tourists.
- There is an adequate management of tourist service providers.
- The navigation route is organized in a circular route for tourists to see all the tourist attractions of Thai Herb Community thoroughly.
- There is a tourist service point for eating food and herbal drinks. The tourist service provider will prepare herbal welcome drink) for tourists as well as providing facilities such as a resting place corner, a clean toilet, a cleaning spot, a hand washing point, a garbage dump, a meaningful sign to tourists.
- There are shops selling souvenirs to tourists, especially the unique products which are the highlight of the tourist attraction in order to add value to the products and generate additional income for the local community.

1.4) Marketing & Sale is an activity that involves setting prices, public relations, and promotion to create satisfaction and acceptance to tourists including (1) promoting tourists to receive information and feel good about tourism through the media used in public relations, (2) setting the price to suit the quality of service including the products, and (3) organizing promotional activities in order to stimulate the purchase demand of tourists.

1.5) Services are an activity that creates good experience for tourists to feel impressed interacted with tourists during and after the tour by (1) serving tourists willingly, having good relationship with tourists, taking into account the convenience and safety of tourists in participating in various tourism activities, (2) increasing contact channels for reservations/purchases through electronic media so that tourists can be contacted easily, (3) assessing the satisfaction of tourists used to improve the development of tourist attractions, and (4) creating satisfaction and confidence of tourists through the after-sales service.

2) Support Activity consists of:

2.1) Procurement which is an activity to procure and prepare the raw materials and equipment related to the tourism activities of Thai Herb Community in the preparation of management, preparation for support, service preparation, and preparation for managing tourist attractions in order to be ready to organize tourism in Thai Herb Community of Saraburi Province. This also creates value of tourism management in Saraburi Province and makes the development of tourism management in Thai Herb Community of Saraburi Province with different values from other tourist attractions worth the next tourist's visit by applying the value of Saraburi to create a tourism standard for Thai Herb Community suitable for Saraburi Province.

2.2) Technology development is an activity that will help creating and adding value to Thai Herb Community tourism by developing an information technology system used in management. The adoption of communication innovations for the improvement of service quality brings knowledge and existing wisdom to add value to tourism products and services at Thai Herb Community such as developing applications to link other tourist attractions. Saraburi with the information system of Thai Herb Community tourist attraction in order to link the information of tourist attractions of Saraburi Province altogether.

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2.3) Human Resource Management is an activity about human resource development to be readily available with the ability to accommodate and serve tourists including the ability to manage works.

2.4) Firm Infrastructure is an activity that consists of factors and support system operations of the organization to enable the main activities to operate effectively including (1) having a system for collecting and gathering financial information to be used as a tool to support the management of accurate and efficient financial information, (2) coordinating with relevant agencies in the development and improvement of infrastructure such as roads, signs, electrical systems, water supply, internet, telephone signals, and (3) arranging the routes to link tourist sites in That Herb Community with other tourist attractions of Saraburi Province.

### 5. Conclusion and recommendations

For the development on health and wellness tourism for the elderly in the village/community, local herbs are applied to Thai traditional medicine as an alternative for older tourists and groups of tourists interested in taking care of health to use the service and stay overnight. With various facilities fully equipped in taking care of the elderly and taking care of their health, there are personnel who are experts in health care to support the aging society in the future.

As this project is an operation in Saraburi province only, the results/management of research knowledge on the herbal village community tourism should be used as an applied guideline for the development of Herbal City in 9 other target provinces (according to the National Master Plan on Thai Herb Development No. 1) including Phitsanulok, Uthai Thani, Mahasarakham, Surin, Amnat Charoen, Nakhon Pathom, Chanthaburi, Songkhla and Udon Thani to develop and bring herbs to create economic value of Thailand..

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