

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Thailand Development Research Institute (1997) concluded that Thailand has totally 2,637 tourist attractions, comprising of 1,200 natural attractions, 993 historical and religious and 444 cultural, traditional attractions and activities. At present, Thailand's tourist attractions are increasing by about 100 attractions each year since 1997; however each destination has a difference of importance.

Phuket is one of the leading tourist destinations in Thailand, which has high potentiality of basic qualification of tourist attractions and the readiness of local people to support tourism activities. Phuket is high in demand as a supply for the tourism industry; therefore it has high tourism potentiality.

Tin mining has been a major source of income of the island since the 16th century. Many Chinese workers were employed in the mines, and their influence on Phuket culture can still be felt today. With falling tin prices, the mining has now all but ceased. Nowadays, Phuket's economy rests on two pillars: rubber tree plantations and tourism. Since 1980, Phuket has become one of the major tourist attractions of Thailand moreover; most of the sandy beaches on the western coast of the island have been developed into tourist centers, Patong, Karon and Kata being the most popular ones (Columbia University Press, 2003).

Tourism Authority of Thailand (2004) stated that Phuket's beaches are very well known among tourists around the world and are still the major destinations to attract the visitors. The 10 famous tourist destinations of Phuket, ranged by TAT Region 4, showed that 5 of 10 famous tourist destinations are the beaches as follows: Patong, Kata, Karon, Rawai and Naiyang (See Appendix A). Beach and seaside in Phuket is a cluster of major tourism products. Tourism Authority of Thailand has planned to promote beaches and seashores, which are the main market to international tourists (See Appendix B).

Songsuntornwong (2003) mentioned that tourism is the industry that was more concerned with various kinds of environment such as physical environment, ecological, social, cultural environment and etc. When tourism grows, it means we use more environments. If the environment were destroyed, it would also affect to tourism industry. In order to sustain Thailand's tourism with non- environmental problems, Thailand should build up awareness to all concerned in the tourism industry.

Phuket Provincial Office (2005) showed the result of Phuket's environmental analysis (SWOT) that the outstanding strength of Phuket has beautiful and wide variety of tourist resources. Unfortunately the degradation of resources and environment is one of the main weaknesses of tourist destinations in Phuket, hence Phuket needs to have suitable plans for decreasing environmental damage to tourist sites and natural settings as well.

Unfortunately Tsunami, the gigantic wave that severely hit Thailand on December 26, 2004, caused so much tragedy in many areas, including 6 provinces in Thailand, also. It was the greatest natural disaster that Thailand has ever experienced.

Suphamongkhon (2005) clarified after the Tsunami, the situation at the Private Sector Summit on Post-Tsunami Rehabilitation and Reconstruction at Washington, DC that the tsunami also hurt the environment, severely damaged marine and coastal national parks. Coral reefs were destroyed; agricultural land became unusable due to salt-water intrusion. Such damage has affected the tourism and fishery industries with serious consequences for the people's livelihoods. Immediately after the disaster, the Thai Government, in close collaboration with the private sector and non-governmental organizations, moved quickly to provide immediate relieves and temporary shelters for displaced victims. They undertook various projects during the first stage of rehabilitation and reconstruction work to help those that were affected. The Thai government quickly developed a strategic plan for integrating coastal management. This included the clean up of the environment and the rehabilitation of affected areas.

From the above efforts, some affected areas have already started to recover. Phuket, one of the six provinces was hit by the tsunami, is now almost back to normal.

The researcher is interested in tourist attractions in Phuket, especially beaches because the beaches are one of the outstanding tourist attractions in Phuket. The perception and image of Phuket is sun, sand, seas and other abundant natural attractions. Most tourists come to Phuket to visit the beaches; however the Tsunami had a negative impact to the tourism industry of Phuket. There were many tourists canceling bookings and there were many visitors losing confident to visit Phuket. At present, many organizations including Tourism Authority of Thailand have launched campaigns to encourage tourism of Andaman area emphasizing to international tourists. These campaigns support marketing strategies; however the researcher thinks that apart from marketing tools we should be concerned about quality of our environmental resources as well. The tourism components on the beach have changed after Tsunami, with in both of negative and minor positive sides (See Appendix C). These negative impacts should be resolved to recover and bring tourism back to Phuket. As previously told, there are many organizations that cooperated to recover the beachsides however the researcher thinks that the tourists are also a group of people who realize the actual situation, apart from the authorities and people who make a living on the beach. Therefore, to make an inquiry to the tourists' opinions should be one of the better ways to understand what they want and also what should be improved for long term tourism development. The results provide benefits to physical planning in order to be sustainable tourism and also the guideline for tourism marketing plan. Accordingly, the researcher is interested in studying the development of Phuket beaches for sustainable tourism and select Patong, Kata and Karon beaches as a case study.

The use of beaches without concern for environmental damage should be avoided. Especially, after Tsunami the physical character of the beaches were changed, it was a good opportunity to improve and adapt some ineffective tourism management on the beach, simultaneously stimulating environmental awareness to tourists' mind as well as authorities and people who makes a living on the beach. Therefore, the researcher thinks that the study of destination facilities and the environmental management plan is required in order to encourage beaches to be sustainable tourist attractions.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 To study the destination facilities, environmental management and tourism development plan of 3 main famous beaches in Phuket; Patong, Kata and Karon.

1.2.2 To determine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Patong, Kata and Karon beaches, analyzed from people who use the beaches both tourists and the beach stakeholders (communities and businesses).

1.2.3 To propose beach development for sustainable tourism development to Patong and Karon municipalities.

1.3 Hypotheses

1.3.1 **Hypothesis 1:** There is no difference in opinion between international and domestic tourists regarding tourism management of the beaches.

1.3.2 **Hypothesis 2:** There is no difference in opinion between communities and businesses regarding tourism management of the beaches.

1.3.3 **Hypothesis 3:** There is no difference in opinion on tourism management of the beaches among international tourists from various zones of residence.

1.4 Significance of the Study

1.4.1 To be guidelines with information and suggestions for a particular municipality in long-term beach development's plan for sustainable tourism.

1.4.2 To develop beach management's plan to meet the quality and requirement of targeted tourists.

1.4.3 To identify problems and get ready to develop, improve, change, support and enhance quality of beaches.

1.4.4 To be guidelines for developing other beaches management.

1.5 Scope of the Study

1.5.1 Scope of population: This research studied from two groups of sample respondents. The first group is tourists, both domestic tourists and international tourists who travel on Patong, Kata and Karon beaches and the second group is the beach stakeholders (communities and businesses) who lived and made a living on Patong, Kata and Karon beaches.

1.5.2 Scope of area: This research is specified on Patong, Kata and Karon beaches, Phuket Province.

1.5.3 Scope of time: This research collected data from September to October 2005.

1.6 Definition of Key terms

1.6.1 Domestic Tourist: Any person, involving residents of Thailand, who visited Patong, Kata and Karon beaches.

1.6.2 International Tourist: Any person, involving non-residents of Thailand, who visited Patong, Kata and Karon beaches.

1.6.3 The beach stakeholder: For this research, the beach stakeholder referred to local communities and the business providers who are relevant to the beach tourism on Patong, Kata and Karon beach such as vendors, taxi drivers, etc.

1.6.4 Municipality officer: Involving Patong and Karon municipality officers since they took direct responsibility to organize Patong, Kata and Karon beach tourism management.

1.6.5 Sustainable Tourism: Sustainable beach tourism responds to tourists and local communities by protecting and conserving its natural environments, maintaining stable employment and income and also respecting to socio-cultural. However, this research focuses on the beach destination therefore sustainable tourism for this research emphasizes on environmental management as its main purpose.

1.6.6 Destination facilities or Tourism service: The elements within the destination, which make it possible for visitors to stay and to enjoy the beach for instance; food & beverage, shopping, safety and security, toilets and showers areas, etc.

1.6.7 Environmental Management: The managing of environments on the beach, including the cleanliness, attractiveness, and maintenance of the beach; air quality, congestion, noise, sea quality and so on.