

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 State of problem

Tourism has become one of the fastest growing industries in recent years. It is widely recognized that the growth rate of tourism has exceeded the growth rate of the other industries, both in Thailand and in other countries. In spite of this rapid growth, it is not easy to define the term, "Tourism". Generally speaking, tourism involves traveling, sightseeing, entertainment, catering and accommodation. In recent years, the popularity of tourism towards natural scenery has rapidly grown and many have said that ecotourism is the one of the fastest growing, if not 'the' fastest growing type of 'new tourism'. Trends indicate that the growth of ecotourism coupled with the larger market segment of nature tourism far surpasses that of tourism in general. While lack of differentiation between ecotourism and other forms of nature tourism makes tracking ecotourism development difficult, it is obvious that travel to natural areas is increasing at a tremendous rate. In 1996, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) predicted that there would be an 86% increase in tourism receipts, of which the majority would come from 'active, adventurous, nature and culture-related travel' (Honey, 1999).

However, nature-based tourism (NBT) is one of the most exciting sectors in the tourism industry, growing by the estimated 10 to 30 % per annum (McKercher, 1998). The most obvious characteristic of ecotourism is NBT. Valentine (1992, pp.108 as quoted in Weaver, 2001a) defined NBT as tourism 'primarily concerned with the direct enjoyment of some relatively undisturbed phenomenon of nature'. A variety of motivations for NBT has been suggested, including the desire to get back in touch with nature, a desire to escape the pressures of everyday life, seeing wildlife before it is too late, and specific

interests and activities such as trekking, bird watching, canyoning and white-water rafting and kayaking (Whelan, 1991).

Thailand has diversity in tourism resources; especially in geography, climates, biology, flora and fauna. Many famous destinations with high potential of tourism industry, especially in the South of Thailand, are full of natural resources, cultural heritage and unique local way of life. Hence, the diversity of the physical and geographical characteristics has led to the rapid growth of NBT. Global interest in environmental matters has made more and more people want to experience our unique outdoor wonders (McKercher, 1998). The market for countryside tourism is growing across the south of Thailand, turning the countryside into the key part in the recreation and tourism scene.

Based on the tourism economic inflation departed by the Research Institute for Development of Thailand, the information of WTO forecasted that the long-termed growth of world tourism during 2002 to 2020 would have the average growth rate of tourists around the world about 4.1% per year, having 1,000 million visitors in 2010 and 1.6 billion visitors in 2020. Besides, the tourism in Asia Pacific is forecasted to change its position from the third (under Europe and United States) to the second of the world in 2020. The average growth rate of tourism in Asia Pacific is expanding 6.5% per year. The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) forecasted that the amount of foreigner tourists in Thailand would increase to 7.5% per year during 2000 to 2020 (WTO, 1997: 39 and 63).

In order to get more income from tourism industry, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, region 5 (Suratthani) conducted the seminar on the topic of “Roadmap for the Leader of Quality-Based Sustainable Tourism (Chumphon, Ranong, Suratthani)” on 21st December 2004 which aimed to achieve the quality of tourism resources for higher tourist’s arrivals by emphasizing on the destination development, services and

human resource improvement and marketing strategy planning. The seminar focused on new tourism products with fully sustainable resources for more new qualified group of tourists.

The roadmap indicated the number of tourists which are totally 1,751,718 travelers (846,281 tourists on Samui Island) specified by 162,037 domestic tourists and 684,244 international tourists in 2003. Tourism revenue of Suratthani on tourism industry is 12,391.22 million baht. Most tourists spend their vacation on Samui Island and other islands in spite that Suratthani town has diversity of natural resources that can be developed to providing new tourism products and activities.

Suratthani, the largest province of the south of Thailand, is covered with the diversity in geographical and physical phenomenon: mountains, plains, rivers, dazzling white sand coasts and islands. The historic remains have clearly revealed that this long historic town has been the center of transportation. The route to Suratthani is normally suitable for being a resting place of traveling to Andaman and Gulf of Thailand. Increasingly, Suratthani is ranked to be one of the eighth of major tourist destinations.

Beside the natural tourist attraction, Suan Mok, the practicing Buddha's teachings place covered with peacefully natural environment, becomes famous as nature-based classroom where attracts both Thais and foreigners to visit and make meditation. The colorful unique culture and tradition have become an annual event holding activities as Chakpra Thot Phapa and Long Boats Racing Festival (taking place the day after the full moon on the 11 lunar month, this will be followed by the procession of floats (Reau Phanom Pra), depicting events from the Lord Buddha's life (Thot Phapa). Additionally, Suratthani is well known in ecotourism which comes in form of Oyster Farm Stay that travelers are able to touch local resident's way of life. The one day trip "Teiw Klong Long Bang - Mae Num Roi Sai", traveling by long boat along the Tapee River, is

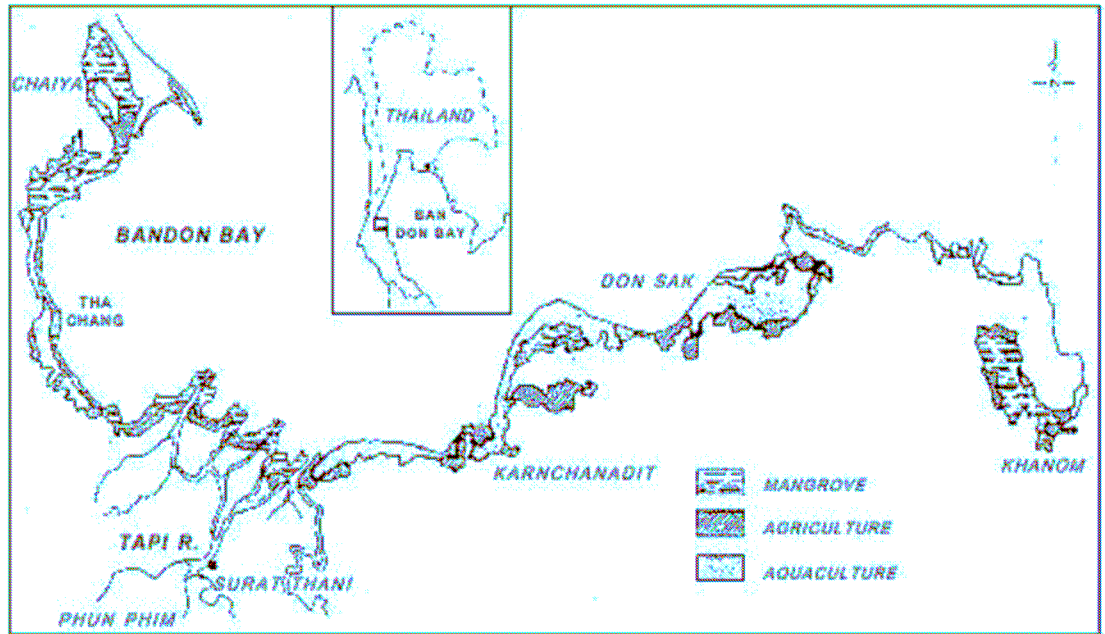
operated by local tour operator and supported by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Region 5, Suratthani.

As the above current situation, it clearly reveals that the tourism resources of Suratthani possessed potential to develop to gain higher number of tourists by providing new tourism products and activities toward alternative agro tourism, ecotourism and recreation in the countryside. The new trend of tourism target interests the researcher to investigate the potential for NBT development in the scope of new tourism products, activities and tourism destination marketing in Muang, Suratthani through Khanom, Nakhon Srithammarat.

The way from Muang, Suratthani through Khanom, Nakhon Srithammarat is the main road to the tourist destination (Koh Samui). This is the route that the researcher needs to study about the potential and destination marketing for development of NBT because it passes the tourist attractions, such as Wipawadee Waterfall, Oyster Farm Stay, beaches and camping areas, which can be developed and promoted as alternative tourism for tourists who visit this region.

Hence, this research is to study the approach of NBT development. The outcomes are expected to effectively generate tourism planning and to attract more new group of tourists towards tourism industry in Suratthani and Nakhon Srithammarat.

Figure 1.1 Map of the study area



Source: Tingsabath, C. (2000)

These are mentioned to the questions of:

1.) Does the potential destination for NBT development emerge in constructing and reconstructing tourism places and spaces for the regions: Muang, Suratthani and Khanom, Nakhon Srithammarat?

2.) Is it possible to add the NBT activities and products to the core tourist attractions related to new products development?

3.) Could the enhancement of Suratthani and Nakhon Srithammarat as a nature-based tourist destination potentially increase a higher number of tourists' demand?

1.2 Objectives of the study

1.) To investigate the potential destination for development of NBT business in Muang, Suratthani and Khanom, Nakhon Srithammarat.

2.) To investigate the potential NBT activities and products for tourism planning in Suratthani and Nakhon Srithammarat.

3.) To propose the approaches for NBT development that could create complementary advantages and sustainability of development to community.

1.3 Scopes of research methodology

1. Research area

The potential area for this study is in Muang, Suratthani and Khanom, Nakhon Srithammarat. They can be regarded as significant new tourist destinations that have enjoyed recent substantial growth in number of tourist arrivals.

2. Population

From consideration a group of respondents for this research, the key stakeholders are people who have rights to perceive the information about the tourism development and management before the NBT development is allowed to be implemented in an event that it may affect to the tourism environment. The key stakeholders are important to give the suggestion in order to achieve the objectives. This research aims to study three major groups of stakeholders who are composed of:

- Consumer: domestic and international tourists
- Provider: accommodation enterprises
- Regulator: tourism-related officer groups

The scope of demography for this study limits three groups of samples could be justified as follows:

2.1) Both domestic tourists and international tourists who were visiting Suratthani during February to March.

2.2) Resort entrepreneurs and a multitude of farm stay owners providing accommodations, where are likely to providing new tourism products and activities as well as being developed to promote the tourism industry both in Suratthani

town and Khanom, Nakhon Srithammarat. Regarding to the research limitation, this informant is justified as a group of key stakeholders who directly related to NBT development on both gathering the benefit and the impact from the NBT management implementation, and classified by mostly within three categories:

- Premium A: outstanding
- Premium B: high potential
- Premium C: under the line closed to potential

2.3) Tourism-related officer groups who had responsibility to develop the tourism industry and played important roles related to tourism planning. The key stakeholders are also important group to express the opinion and give suggestions for tourism management including giving the comments about tourism planning. They are composed of:

- Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO)
- The Chamber of Commerce of Suratthani
- The Tourism Authority of Thailand, Region 5
- Land Department
- The expert or the professional

3. Content

According to a study for national action plan for the tourism industry in the 9th National Economic and Social Development Plans (2002-2006), there is the analysis for identifying a suitable province for tourism development. Hence, the research will emphatically investigate the potential for NBT development. The scope of content is covered with the study of the new products development in terms of the potential for alternative tourism management. This is, especially, to investigate the suggestions for NBT development involved with some specifically interesting activities and tourism marketing in the region.

The primary data gathered from questionnaires and personal in-depth interviews were grouped into categories: current circumstances, perceptions and perspectives from the key informants concerning tourism industry development and management, tourism product development, and marketing and promotion. As well, the secondary data investigated by literature review (papers, documents and tourism-related literatures) was grouped into categories: SWOT analysis and approaches used to facilitate the tourism planning in tourism product development and tourism marketing. Findings were analyzed with the intention to answer the supplementary research questions.

4. Time

The scope of research study period was conducted and attributed during January 2006 to May 2006.

1.4 Survey data analysis

1.) To investigate the secondary data sources for designing the data collecting tools, e.g. questionnaire for demand factors (both domestic and international tourists), interviewing supply factors (resort entrepreneurs, a multitude of farm stay owners and tourism-related officers), and to consult with the expert in tourism.

2.) To investigate the primary data sources towards field survey about the potential of NBT development.

3.) To evaluate the primary data by SPSS program.

4.) To analyze both primary and secondary data sources by SWOT in order to recommend the operational strategies of NBT development in this research area.

5.) To program the outcomes of SWOT analysis towards the mentioned questions with a respect to a particular set of objectives of this research in order to arrange and present the effective paradigm to expedite NBT development.

1.5 Expected benefits

The important corollary purposes of this thesis are:

1.) To be an effective paradigm presented in the scenario-based approach of NBT development with the expectation of getting higher capacity in the regions.

2.) To be a guideline for resort entrepreneurs and farm stay owners in high value-added services to their existing property to create new tourism products or differentiate their business towards tourism activities.

3.) To promote the strategic planning in tourism marketing management of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, Region5, Suratthani.

4.) To stimulate those who are involved in tourism to go beyond the outcomes investigated here and apply new approaches to the tourism planning.

1.6 Definition of key terms

Nature-based tourism development is defined as the development of the potential for NBT covered with new tourism products and activities considered on its role in the delivery of a world class tourism product. NBT development is to integrate tourism planning and management as the process of preparing for tourism development and to improve cooperative strategies for tourism management. Fridgen (1991) notes that it is also the process of creating, providing and developing infrastructure and recreation facilities for visitors and resident hosts, which will raise living standard of the people through the economic benefits of tourism as well. It is the long-term process

of readying a destination for tourists or improving a destination's attractiveness to tourists.

Nature-based tourism is defined as any form of tourism that relies primarily on the natural environment for its attractions and/or settings; incorporate ecotourism as well as substantial portions of **adventure tourism** (tourism that incorporates an element of risk, higher levels of physical exertion and a need for specialized skills to enable successful participation. The concept is subjective in that perception of risk and thresholds of physical exertion from person to person.) and **3S tourism** ('sea sand and sun' or beach resort tourism can be included in other types of tourism but is usually associated with mass tourism), neither of which are necessarily sustainable or learning-centered (Weaver, 2001). Thus, it is possible to characterize NBT as tourism in which the viewing of nature is the primary objective. Douglas (2001) said that it is sometimes perceived as synonymous with ecotourism since one of its aims is to protect natural areas but it also differs from ecotourism in its lack of overt environmental interpretation and/or education.

Non-mass tourism is defined as small-scale tourism, typically associated with 3S (sea, sand, sun) resorts and characteristics such as transnational ownership, low leakage effects, seasonality, and package tours. NBT can conceivably be a form of non-mass tourism under the logic of natural resources and environment.

New products development is defined as an operational level planning framework. Against the background of the dynamic changing macro-environment, competitive, and market environments, it is essential that new product

development receives attention in those regions that want to survive as destination areas and seek tourism growth (Heath, E. and Wall, G. 1992). It helps to improve tourism marketing by adding value, differentiation and creating new tourism products which affect tourism growth and higher capacity toward tourist attractions. To meet tourist's needs and to be competitive, tourism development must be unique, friendly in appearance and assessable to the tourists.

Tourism destination marketing is defined as the marketing involves with the investigation of new tourism products and appropriate supporting systems which are required for the regional tourism organization to carry out, and assist the tourism businesses in the region to carry out, the strategies that will achieve regional tourism goals in the dynamically changing the tourism industry environment.

Demand factors are defined as the aspects influence in the existing and potential tourist to visit the area. It is the relationship between the tourists who wish to travel and their abilities to use the tourist facilities and services. This is to study the emphasizing on domestic and international tourists' perception and perspective, interest in NBT, access to information of NBT, and factors influencing tourist's decision on selecting NBT products.

Supply factors are defined as the way in which tourism is consumed by tourists who visit NBT destination areas to consume a product, service or experience. Furthermore, it involves with the tourism facilities and resources to meet demand in an efficient and profitable manner. This helps to understand how the wide range of tourism businesses and organizations in the tourism sector. This study covers with accommodation, tourists' facilities and services, transportation, infrastructures as well as attractions and activities.