

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Background

Cambodia tourism sector is playing a crucial role and is the key to country's development. It makes significant direct contribution to government revenues and the employment. The sector generates about US\$ 300 million per year in income (MOT, 2003). Thus, tourism has significantly contributed to the country's economic development and poverty reduction with the assumption that a visitor spent at least US\$ 500 then it helps to feed two of Cambodian people for one year.

However, tourism also has major impacts on the natural and built environment and on the well-being and culture of host population. Consequently, concept of sustainable development has become widely accepted as the way to improve and maintain a better future. The United Nation Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) wish to encourage all countries to ensure that their policies and actions for development and management fully embrace the principle of sustainability.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has prepared the tourism development strategy for Ratanakiri province. It is formulated within the framework of National Development Plan for Cambodia. Ratanakiri is one of the four provinces including Phnom Penh, Siem Reap Province and Sihanouk Ville areas that are the key zones of tourism development for Cambodia. These four areas possess high potential for tourism development. Cambodia is looking to promote eco-tourism and cultural tourism as an alternative of sustainable tourism practice to satisfy the need of modern tourists who are looking for experiential travel opportunity. Though eco-tourism is relatively a new concept for Cambodia, public agencies and private tour operators are playing

a pioneering role to promote this tourism activity. However, these activities have yet to be properly and fully organized and integrated.

1.2 Importance of the study

Virachey National Park, the largest protected areas in Asia located in Ratanakiri and Steung Treng provinces of Cambodia, is endowed with great diversity of flora, fauna and wildlife. The park has rich natural and cultural resources for tourism development. High species diversity and abundance make the park ecosystem important not only for producing harvestable productivity but also supporting main livelihood of local community in and around the park towards the protection of biodiversity and natural tourism resources. According to Cambodian National Tourism Development Plan (2001-2005), the government is looking to promote eco-tourism and cultural tourism in northeast Cambodia including Virachey National Park as a means to alleviate poverty and ensure the equitable distribution of benefit of tourism revenue to local communities. For this reason, many efforts for the protection of the park ecosystem and natural resources therein have been taken.

Although the park has been designed in zoning such as core zone, conservation zone, sustainable use zone and community zone, the management of the park has become a challenging issue. For instance, there are numerous government agencies, especially local authority, have a stake in illegal logging operation and management of the natural resources of the park. Approximately 500 truck loads of trees worth an estimated U.S\$ 15 million were logged and transported out of the country to Vietnam through Laos. According to the poor management of the government body, the Vietnamese comes across the border of the countries for illegal logging and hunting wildlife. In addition

to the local communities living in and around the park whose livelihoods depend heavily on the natural resources of the park, clear up the forest for their traditional agriculture and hunting wildlife are one of the main livelihood activities. There are numerous reports of resource use conflicts among local communities in and around the park and the park rangers.

In relation to the vision and policy to develop tourism in Virachey National Park in sustainable direction, indicators for sustainable tourism have not been mentioned in the plan to assure that tourism development and management will lead to sustainability. It is very risk to the country to develop tourism without the appropriated planning and management, especially in the area with fragile and precious environment. Then, this critical issue deeply interests the researcher to study about the sustainable tourism planning and management by focusing on the area of Virachey National Park (VNP), as the case study. The research was conducted to examine the potential of sustainable tourism planning and management and identify the guidelines for sustainable tourism that can be used to lead the development in the park in the sustainable way.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are summarized as the follows:

1. To study the existing situation of tourism development in Virachey National Park.
2. To study the existing tourism development plan and management strategy of Virachey National park.
3. To study stakeholders' perceptions on tourism development in Virachey National Park.
4. To propose guidelines for sustainable tourism planning and management that could be applied in the future development of other local tourism destinations in the country.

1.4 The benefits of the study

This study contributes to the background information for the development of BPAMP (Biodiversity and Protected Areas management Project) which is intended to improve the management of Virachey National Park. This study is also to help the government of Cambodia to lead the development in sustainable way:

- The development of tourism in Virachey National Park (VNP) under sustainable tourism planning and management approach.
- A better understanding of negative impacts of tourism on the community and the park.
- The possibility to apply the results of the study and using the experience gained from Virachey National Park to build up the sustainable tourism development model to facilitate and sustain the tourism development in the national protected areas of Cambodia.

1.5 Scope of the study

To make the research manageable and to achieve the objectives, some limits were placed on the study as follows:

1.5.1 Scope of information sources:

- The stakeholders for this study focused mainly on
- Officer group of Biodiversity and Protected Areas management Project for Virachey National Park.
 - Local community in and around the park.
 - International visitors who traveled to Virachey National Park, during the period of January 2006.

1.5.2 Scope of study issues:

Potential for site development of the park, perception of local community and international visitors and sustainable tourism development.

1.5.3 Period of the study: Because of limitation of time and financial constraints and remoteness and inaccessibility of the park, the field study was conducted during the period of January 01-30, 2006.

1.6. Definition of key terms

The essential terminologies used in this study and their definitions are defined as follows:

1.6.1 Community's culture is defined as activities and performance that represent the local and community identity and social system.

1.6.2 Natural attractions are defined as tourist attractions with natural features and biological substance such as flora and fauna, waterfall, natural park, waterways, scenery and vegetation.

1.6.3 Community-based tourism is defined as tourism in the area where the local people participate and get involved in all processes of tourism development and operation and the tourism expenditures are expected to distribute within destination.

1.6.4 Eco-tourism is defined as a form of tourism activities or tourism operation that fosters learning experiences and appreciation of the natural environment and many combine elements of associated cultural context.

1.6.5 Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that ensures the tourism opportunities for the future generations as well as the fulfillment of the needs of current tourists and local communities. It fosters the conservation of the cultural and

natural environment of the tourism destinations and keeps balance of the economic sustainability of the tourism industry.

1.6.6 **Tourism planning** is defined as a process designed on the future of tourism to maximize the benefits and minimize the undesirable impacts to the destination or area that tourism occurs.

1.6.7 **Tourism management** is defined as the ways to manage the resources for tourism, the interaction of tourists with physical resources and hosts of tourist areas and the aspect of tourism impacts in destination.

1.6.8 **Stakeholder** is defined as ones who get involved both directly and indirectly in tourism industry including public agency, local communities, visitors and business sectors. However, this study did not include business sector as the stakeholder of tourism development in the park because the park and the community are underdeveloped. So, there is no business sector in the park or in the community.

1.7 Research conceptual framework

The conceptual framework for the study was presented as follows:

