



Benefits, Challenges, and Key Success Factors of Community-based Tourism Management in Thailand: An Exploratory Study of 3 Destinations in Thailand

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Abstract

This study aims to provide insight into the key factors that contribute to the success of community-based tourism initiatives in Thailand. In-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders in three tourist destinations in Thailand to gather their perspectives on the impacts of tourism on the communities. The results of the interviews revealed that community-based tourism has several benefits, including economic benefits, cultural preservation, environmental protection, social benefits, and educational benefits. This tourism faces two main challenges such as lack of infrastructure and conflict within community. The findings also showed that key success factors encompassed community involvement, government support, and partnerships with private sector. The implications of these findings for the future development of community-based tourism are discussed.

Keywords: 1) Community-based tourism 2) Key success factor 3) Sustainable tourism 4) Ban Nam Chiew 5) Koksathorn

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Introduction

Community-based tourism, also known as CBT, is a type of tourism that is focused on involving local communities in the tourism industry. In Thailand, this approach to tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years due to its many benefits. CBT initiative is an approach to tourism that involves local communities in the planning and operation of tourism activities in their area. This approach can provide numerous benefits to the local community, including economic development, conservation of natural and cultural resources, and empowerment of local people (Boonratana, 2010, p. 285). This research article aims to explore the potential of community-based tourism as a sustainable development strategy and to identify the challenges and opportunities associated with its implementation (Saisamute, et al., 2016, p. 39).

One of the main advantages of CBT in Thailand is that it helps to generate income for local communities. By involving local people in the tourism industry, CBT allows them to earn a livelihood from tourism without having to leave their communities. This can be especially important in rural areas where there may not be many other job opportunities. CBT also helps to preserve local cultures and traditions. By involving local communities in the tourism industry, CBT helps to ensure that traditional customs and practices are not lost as younger generations move away from their communities in search of work. This can help to keep alive the unique cultural heritage of Thailand, which is an important part of the country's appeal to tourists.

Another benefit of CBT in Thailand is that it can help to reduce the negative impacts of mass tourism. By involving local communities in the planning and management of tourism activities, CBT can help to ensure that tourism development is sustainable and does not harm the environment or local way of life. This can help to protect the natural beauty of Thailand's many stunning destinations, while also ensuring that tourism benefits local communities rather than just large corporations (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen and Duangsaeng, 2014, p. 114).

Overall, community-based tourism in Thailand is an important and growing sector of the country's tourism industry. By involving local communities in the planning and management of tourism activities, CBT provides many benefits, including generating income for local communities, preserving local cultures and traditions, and reducing the negative impacts of mass tourism. As found by Kampetch, Lukanathinakorn and Hirunsathaporn (2023, p. 30), the quality criteria including economic and social development and quality of life of the community in Baanrimklong Homestay Community Enterprise in Samut Songkhram Province is fairly good. By examining case studies from top-three CBT destinations of Thailand, this study aims to provide insight into the key factors that contribute to the success of community-based tourism initiatives in country (Koment, et al., 2015, p. 101).

There is a significant amount of existing literature that emphasizes the benefits of CBT projects in various countries, including Thailand. In qualitative studies, Kontogeorgop-



oulos, Churyen and Duangsaeng (2014, p. 104) explored the success factors of CBT in Mae Kampong through interviews with residents and participant observations. Their study highlights the importance of fortunate geographical conditions, external support, and transformational leadership in enabling successful CBT initiatives in Thailand. Sin and Minca (2014, p. 101) employed a combination of qualitative research methods such as participant observation, interviews with tourists, locals, and stakeholders, document analysis of tourism materials and brochures conducted at the Elephant Camp community in Chonburi. The study highlights the tensions and contradictions that arise when tourists attempt to 'go local' and engage with presumed local communities. More recently, Lo and Janta (2020, pp. 9-10) investigated the benefits and challenges of CBT in Muen Ngoen Kong community in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Data from field observations, and interviews with community committee members and local residents were employed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Their findings indicated that several challenges had been experienced in the implementation of CBT, including conflict over resource ownership and benefit leaking, financial issues, and problems of community participation.

However, there is a lack of recent qualitative study that delves into the essential elements of success drawn from the multiple destinations in the country, especially in the era of post COVID19 pandemic. Additionally, there is limited exploration of the perspectives of community leaders from different roles in CBT sites. Therefore, this study aims to fill

these gaps by analyzing the factors contributing to success and the obstacles encountered by CBT operators in three renowned CBT destinations in Thailand.

First, Ban Nam Chiew in Trat province is in the south at Ban Pak Khlong, Nong Sano Sub-district, Mueang Trat District. Ban Nam Chiew means a village with the water that flows very swiftly. This fishing village is the center of people from two religions and three cultures living together peacefully. The canal in village flows through the middle of the village into the Gulf of Thailand which the villagers use as a source of fishing. Until now, most of the people of Nam Chiao sub-district are fishermen, rubber plantations, orchards and trading. There are also fish products such as shrimp paste, fish sauce, and dried shrimp for sale to tourists (Chiabphimai, Feongkeaw and Noklang, 2021, p. 158). Second, Koksathorn in Loei province is known as "Hugging the wind, covering the sun" with a long history that reflects the beauty of steep mountains surrounding a small community. It is full of stories and many natural wonders so that tourists can learn how to live with the people in the community, including taste local food, black sesame chicken soup, papaya salad, wild banana plum salad, and fried fermented pork with pickled ginger (Phromkham, et al., 2022, p. 22). Third, Mae Kam Pong in Chiangmai province is the village aged over 100 years old. Most of the villagers migrated from Doi Saket District. The general condition of the community is surrounded by mountains, tea and coffee plantations, waterfalls and fertile forests (Doi Mon Lan), including beautiful natural resources. The majority people in this

community makes “miang” (tea) as well as coffee, trading and being hired (Jitpakdee, Harun and Zain, 2016, p. 410; Raepet and Boonsayan, 2021, p. 8)

In this case, the research problems are 1) how CBT impact local communities?, 2) what could be the challenges?, and 3) what are success factors for CBT?.

Methods

Research Design and Instrument

This study employed qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews and observation with community leaders in CBT destinations. This methodology delved into unexplored or insufficiently researched domains to cultivate a comprehensive knowledge about a specific topic (Swedberg, 2020, p. 23). The importance of utilizing in-depth interviews stems from the researchers' ability to uncover extensive information, enabling a thorough comprehension of the subjects under investigation (Boyce and Neale, 2006, pp. 4-9).

Research instrument is an interview guide that includes a list of questions used to conduct the in-depth interviews. The questions in the interview guide was designed to explore the research problem and research questions in depth, and to elicit detailed and rich information from the participants (Kallio, et al., 2006, p. 2958). The interview guide contains the following questions.

- How does community-based tourism benefit to this community?
- What are the challenges faced by community-based tourism in Thailand?
- What are the factors that affect the success of CBT destination?

Data Collection

The researchers have collected data from community leaders through the following steps. First, the researchers selected the study areas of data collection. The selection of study areas is be based on the research problem and research questions, as well as on the availability of participants and the feasibility of conducting the study in the selected areas. In this case, three regions in Thailand were selected, including 1) Ban Nam Chiew in Trat province, 2) Koksathorn, in Loei province, and 3) Mae Kam Pong in Chiangmai province. These three destinations represent one of the most popular CBT destinations in Eastern region (Sommit and Sitikarn 2018, p. 85), North-Eastern region (Tatiyanantakul and Chindaprasert, 2024, p. 289), and Northern region (Sawatsuk, et al. 2018, p. 15), accordingly.

Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with the community leaders at the selected regions, following the interview guide. In doing this, the researchers selected key informants to participate in this study. These informants are the community leaders who hold a significant position of influence and responsibility within a local community. These leaders play a crucial role in the planning, development, and management of tourism activities that are designed to benefit the community as a whole (Salazar, 2017, p. 18). The key informants must have the following characteristics.

- They hold formal or informal leadership positions within the community, such as village heads or business owners and operators in the community.



- They have lived in the area for a long time and have witnessed the evolution of CBT tourism.
- They possess in-depth knowledge of community in local culture, traditions, and environmental conservation.

During the interviews, the researchers created a comfortable and non-threatening atmosphere, and encouraged the participants to speak openly and honestly about their experiences and views.

Third, the researchers utilize snowball sampling process by asking for referrals from initial participants. This method can identify additional key informants who can contribute valuable information, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the topic. We continue conducting interviews until no new insights emerge, indicating data saturation.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the collected data from in-depth interviews with nine CBT's community leaders. It is a method of analyzing and interpreting written, spoken, or visual content. It is commonly used in qualitative research to understand the meanings and messages conveyed by the content. Characteristics of content analysis for qualitative research include several dimensions. First, it focuses on the meaning and interpretation of the content, rather than the statistical analysis of data by using both inductive and deductive reasoning to identify patterns and themes in the content. Second, it emphasizes the context in which the content was created, including the social, cultural, and historical factors

through pre-specified techniques, including coding, categorizing, and comparing. Third, in-depth examination of the content helps the researchers to understand the perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs of the individuals who created it. Fourth, it takes multiple sources of data, including both primary and secondary sources to triangulate the findings. Fifth, this process has flexibility and adaptability so as to allow for changes in the research question or focus as the analysis progresses.

Results

Participants of the research consists of nine community leaders, three for each CBT destination. They can be categorized into four groups. First, homestay owners are individuals who own and operate a homestay, which is a type of accommodation in which guests stay in a private home rather than in a hotel or other commercial lodging. Homestay owners typically provide a private room and other amenities, such as meals and access to common areas, for their guests. They may also be involved in activities such as helping guests plan their itineraries and providing local information and recommendations. Second, village headman are those who are respected and trusted within a community and who have the ability to influence the actions and decisions of others within the community. They may be elected or appointed to their position, or they may simply emerge as leaders due to their knowledge, skills, and personality. Village headman may be involved in a variety of activities, including organizing community events, advocating for the needs and concerns of the community,

and working to improve the quality of life for community members. Third, team leaders are those who are responsible for leading and managing a team of individuals. They are responsible for setting goals, providing direction, and coordinating the efforts of team members to manage CBT sites and facilities. They may also be responsible for evaluating team performance and providing feedback and support

to team members. Fourth, heads of specific groups are individuals who work for the community and are responsible for carrying out the specific tasks and duties required to support the operation of the CBT destinations. They may be involved in a variety of activities, including administrative tasks, customer service, and production of handicrafts. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the participants.

Table 1 Characteristics of community leaders

Code	CBT site	Age(years)	Role
A1	Ban Nam Chiew,Trad	56	Homestay owner
A2	Ban Nam Chiew,Trad	54	Staff: Handmade hat
A3	Ban Nam Chiew,Trad	61	Staff: Mosque
B1	Koksathorn, Loei	43	Community leader
B2	Koksathorn, Loei	67	Team leader of shuttle car
B3	Koksathorn, Loei	60	Staff: Ginger powder
C1	Mae Kam Pong, Chiangmai	55	Community leader
C2	Mae Kam Pong, Chiangmai	51	Homestay owner
C3	Mae Kam Pong, Chiangmai	34	Coffee shop owner and tour guide

Benefits of CBT Initiatives

CBT is a form of tourism that involves the participation of local communities in the planning, development, and management of tourism activities in their region. There are several benefits of community-based tourism for the community

1. Economic benefits: CBT can provide a source of income for the local community, either through direct employment or through the sale of local goods and services to tourists. As one of the community leader (C1) stated that:

Community-based tourism has established a group of community enterprises that provide services in various fields, including

product as well as services from local people in the community. This business help people be self-reliant through higher income for their living costs. Locals can sell handicrafts that are made from local raw materials and sell to tourists as another income channel

2. Cultural preservation: CBT can help to preserve and promote the culture and traditions of the local community. This can include showcasing local art, music, and cuisine, as well as maintaining and preserving local heritage sites and cultural practices. As one of the staff members (A3) stated that:

Community-based tourism focuses on the preservation of the traditions and cultures of the community as well as the promotion



of the uniqueness of the cultural heritage. Tourists traveling in attractions will experience the way of life and learn about the culture of each community through local food, way of life, and participate the ritual procession that were believed by the people in the community. Bai Sri Su Kwan Ceremony at Ban Nam Chiew community is held as a Islamic religious ceremony during the Ramadan festival.

3. Environmental protection: Community-based tourism can encourage the conservation and protection of natural and cultural resources in the region. This can include the promotion of sustainable tourism practices, such as eco-tourism or agri-tourism. As one of the community leader (C1) stated that:

People in this community cherish the conservation of local resource because it helps restore natural resources, culture, traditions and local wisdom. That is what attracts tourists to travel in the community. CBT can show tourists the value of preserving and rehabilitating cultural inheritance and wisdom for further sustainability.

4. Social benefits: CBT can help to strengthen the social fabric of the local community by bringing people together and promoting social cohesion. It can also help to empower local communities and give them a greater sense of ownership and control over the tourism industry in their region. As one of the community leader (B2) stated that:

CBT management must start with community members who create cooperation and unity within the community, making it a strong community. Staff and community leaders, including villagers, will be trained and

learn skills in various areas all the time to help tourists in an emergency. Each month, community leaders organize a forum to exchange ideas that emphasize the way to accommodate tourists and providing assistance for tourists. More importantly, they will be good hosts to welcome and treat the tourists like relatives.

5. Educational benefits: CBT can provide educational opportunities for the local community, such as training in tourism-related skills or the opportunity to learn about the cultural and natural heritage of the region. It can also provide educational opportunities for tourists, who can learn about the culture and traditions of the local community while they travel. As one of the community leader (B3) stated that:

The objective of CBT is to improve the quality of life of the people in the community. It focuses on people as the center of learning different ways of life that is bound to nature. The fact that tourists are interested in learning about the lifestyle and culture of the local people that makes the community proud and keen to disseminate to tourists. More importantly, it can create participation and impression to the tourists to join cultural activities.

Challenges of CBT Management

There are two major challenges for community-based tourism in Thailand.

1. Lack of infrastructure: Many of the communities that participate in this type of tourism showed a lack of infrastructure and resources in nearby areas. These challenges include insufficient transportation alternatives, restricted healthcare and education accessibil-

ity, and inadequate tourist accommodations. Consequently, attracting and retaining tourists becomes arduous for these communities, and the overall tourism experience may suffer as a result. As the team leader of shuttle car (B2) stated in the following quote.

Before the establishment of CBT, natural resources were not abundant because there was an invasion at and secretly cut down the trees and destroy forests. Moreover, there was a group of investors secretly coming in to build a resort and build a house in the national park. Few years later, the government conducted prosecution and seizure of the property and restored the forest. Group leader persuaded villagers who were farmers to come up and grow vegetables on the mountain with an area of over a thousand rai for free. People in the community all planted Phaya Sua Krong trees until they filled the area. Every year at the end of the year to the beginning of the year, we can see the beauty of the Phaya Sua Krong tree. The leaves turn pink like Sakura or Cherry blossom

2. Conflict within community: Another challenge is the potential for conflict between the interests of the local community and those of the tourists. For example, if a community relies heavily on a natural resource (such as a beach or forest) for tourism, there may be tension between the need to preserve that resource and the desire to maximize its use for tourism purposes. As a community leader (C3) stated in the following sentence.

The problems in community-based tourist attractions that cause deterioration are a lot of garbage and sewage within the

area such as foul odor. The head of the community has organized the environmental management by allowing the people in the community to follow the rule strictly. There is a collection center that dumps garbage or waste in the area at the end of the community so that people in every household can bring garbage to leave there. Every week, this garbage would be destroyed or managed. However, it takes quite a long time to get the cooperation from the villagers. Moreover, the head of the community has made a request for budget to relevant agencies to support and approve the budget to buy a waste incinerator worth 15 million baht. While waiting for government assistance, the community itself has to wait for the garbage truck to pick up the community's garbage every day keeping the community clean and free of pollution.

Key Success Factors of CBT Management

1. Community involvement: Additionally, community-based tourism can be a more sustainable and responsible form of tourism, as it often involves supporting local businesses and investing in the long-term well-being of the community. This emphasized the ability to manage potential conflicts of interest among community members. The involvement can potentially help to minimize the negative impacts of tourism, such as environmental degradation and the exploitation of local labor. As a community leader and chair of community enterprise (A3) emphasized in the following statement.

The tourist group has to manage and be responsible for their own trip. We as a host will coordinate with the tourist on regular ba-



sis to support any activities so as to drive the tourism of this community. CBT is an alternative tourism that is managed by the community so that the benefits of tourism fall on the people in the community.

2. Government support: Government support plays a crucial role in promoting and sustaining CBT in Thailand. First, the government can provide clarity and guidance by establishing supportive legal frameworks to communities, tour operators, and other community leaders involved in CBT activities. Second, the government can provide resources and funding for capacity-building initiatives aimed at empowering local communities to actively participate in tourism development. This may include training programs, workshops, and skill-building activities to enhance the capacity of community members in areas such as hospitality, marketing, and sustainable resource management. Third, the government should provide construction or improvement of infrastructures such as roads, transportation networks, signage, visitor centers, and other essential facilities to support tourism activities in rural and remote areas. Fourth, the government can raise awareness of CBT initiatives and attract more visitors to these destinations through marketing campaigns, promotional materials, and participation in trade fairs and exhibitions. As one of homestay owners (C2) emphasized in the following statement.

In the reality, the government can provide supports in many ways so that business owners can survive in the business in a sustainable way. For example, the government officials can offer subsidy to promote CBT des-

tinations to the eyes of foreign tourists through many different channels, such as on-flight advertising, tourism festival, or local media in target countries

3. Partnerships with private sector: Collaborating with local businesses, tour operators, and investors can create a robust tourism infrastructure and market the destination effectively. More importantly, private sector involvement can bring in expertise, investment, and innovation to the community. As one of homestay owner (A1) mentioned in the following statement.

Normally, 30% of outside businesses that came to us were domestic tour companies. A few of them were from other countries such as the youth group from France. There were about 30 tourists who brought tour guide and take 3 trips a year. After that, they increased to 4 trips and 5 trips last year.

In sum, the success of community-based tourism will depend on a number of factors, including the community involvement, government support, and partnerships with private sector.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted nature of CBT and its significant impact on local communities. Through the perspectives of various community leaders, it is evident that CBT offers a range of benefits and faces several challenges. First, the economic benefits of CBT are pronounced, as highlighted by the participants. Homestay owners and local artisans have found new income streams through tourism, which has not only improved

their quality of life but also promoted self-reliance. As noted by a community leader, CBT has enabled the establishment of community enterprises, enhancing the economic stability of the region. This economic upliftment is coupled with cultural preservation, where tourism activities serve as a platform to showcase and sustain local traditions and heritage. Environmental protection is another critical benefit of CBT, with community leaders emphasizing the role of tourism in conserving natural resources. The promotion of sustainable practices, as seen in the rehabilitation of Phaya Sua Krong trees, illustrates how CBT can lead to environmental stewardship. Additionally, CBT fosters social cohesion by bringing community members together to achieve common goals, thereby strengthening the social fabric of the community. Educational benefits also emerge, as both community members and tourists gain insights into the local culture and environment, fostering mutual respect and understanding.

Despite the numerous benefits, the study also reveals significant challenges in managing CBT. Infrastructure deficits, such as inadequate transportation and insufficient tourist accommodations, hinder the full potential of CBT. The lack of infrastructure not only affects the attractiveness of the destination but also limits the community's capacity to sustain tourism activities. The testimony of a team leader regarding the restoration of natural resources post-infrastructure development illustrates the ongoing struggle to balance tourism growth with resource conservation. Conflict within the community presents another challenge. The tension between preserving

natural resources and maximizing their use for tourism can lead to disputes, as highlighted by issues of waste management and environmental degradation. Effective governance and community cooperation are essential to mitigate these conflicts, as seen in the efforts to establish waste management systems despite initial resistance from villagers.

In terms of key success factors of CBT management, community involvement stands out as a crucial factor for the success of CBT. The active participation of community members in planning and managing tourism activities ensures that the benefits are equitably distributed and that tourism development aligns with local values and needs. Government support is equally vital, providing necessary legal frameworks, resources, and infrastructure improvements. The role of the government in capacity building and marketing CBT destinations cannot be overstated, as it helps communities enhance their tourism offerings and reach broader audiences. Partnerships with the private sector further bolster CBT initiatives. Collaborations with tour operators and businesses bring in investment, expertise, and innovation, enhancing the tourism infrastructure and creating a more robust market for CBT destinations. These partnerships also facilitate a more diverse and sustainable tourism experience, as seen in the successful integration of domestic and international tour groups. These findings extend previous studies on CBT in Thailand (e.g. Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen and Duangsaeng, 2014, p. 110; Sin and Minca, 2014, p. 124; Lo and Janta, 2020, pp. 9-10) in the era of post COVID19 pandemic.



In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive examination of community-based tourism (CBT) through the insights of various community leaders. The findings highlight the multifaceted benefits of CBT, including economic development, cultural preservation, environmental protection, social cohesion, and educational enrichment. These benefits underscore the potential of CBT to contribute significantly to the sustainable development of local communities. However, the research also identifies substantial challenges that need to be addressed to maximize the potential of CBT. Infrastructure deficiencies and internal conflicts within communities present significant obstacles to the effective management of tourism activities. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from community members, government bodies, and private sector partners. Lastly, this study offers key factors contributing to the success of CBT include strong community involvement, robust government support, and strategic partnerships with the private sector. Community involvement ensures that tourism activities are aligned with local values and needs, while government support provides the necessary resources, legal frameworks, and infrastructure improvements. Partnerships with the private sector bring in investment and expertise, enhancing the overall tourism experience and infrastructure. Overall, the success of CBT hinges on a delicate balance between leveraging its numerous benefits and addressing its inherent challenges.

Implications and Limitations

According to the findings from this

study, there are several suggestions for two groups of stakeholder.

For the government, policymakers first should establish and maintain supportive legal frameworks that facilitate the growth and sustainability of community-based tourism (CBT). This includes clear regulations that protect community interests, promote sustainable practices, and provide guidelines for resolving conflicts between tourism and local resource use. Second, the government should offer incentives for communities and businesses that adopt sustainable tourism practices can encourage the preservation of natural and cultural resources. These incentives might include tax breaks, grants, or recognition programs for exemplary CBT initiatives. Third, the government should provide financial support through grants, loans, and subsidies can help communities develop and sustain their CBT initiatives. This financial assistance can be directed towards infrastructure development, capacity building, and other critical areas. Fourth, the government should prioritize the construction and maintenance of essential infrastructure, such as roads, transportation networks, health-care facilities, and tourist accommodations, particularly in rural and remote areas. Lastly, governments should support local communities by funding promotional campaigns, participating in trade fairs, and leveraging various media channels to raise awareness about CBT destinations both domestically and internationally.

For community leaders, they should foster a culture of engagement and participation among community members. This in-

volves organizing regular forums for discussing CBT-related issues, encouraging community input in decision-making processes, and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed. Second, community leaders should advocate for practices that conserve natural and cultural resources, ensuring that tourism activities do not deplete or damage these valuable assets. Third, community leaders should actively seek partnerships with private sector entities, non-governmental organizations, and other external stakeholders. These collaborations can bring additional resources, expertise, and innovation to CBT initiatives, enhancing their overall effectiveness and sustainability. Lastly, community leaders should mediate disputes, foster open communication, and work towards solutions that balance the interests of

all stakeholders and resolve conflict situation in the community.

The main limitations of this study is a small sample size from a few communities, making the results not be representative of the entire population in the country. Also, small sample sizes can limit the ability to draw robust conclusions and make accurate predictions about the larger population. Thus, the findings of the study may not be generalizable beyond the specific communities that were studied. Additionally, small sample sizes may be more prone to sampling bias, which can occur when the sample is not representative of the larger population. This can lead to results that are not representative of the true relationships or patterns in the data.

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