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## SUSTAINABILITY TOWARD THE 7 GREENS CONCEPT

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This study aimed to evaluate the potential and capability of Nan province in terms of sustainable tourism destination towards the 7 Greens Concept developed by Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). Data was collected using tourists' questionnaire to domestic tourists (n=200) visiting Nan during a specified period, and interview with 15 respondents representing tourism related business in Nan province. It was found that respondents had high expectation towards Nan province because there are many interesting historical sites and cultural tourism to experience, variety of natural resources for tourists, opportunity to experience authentic ways of life with local people and participate in cultural events. After visiting Nan, the respondents felt that Nan had better prospects for cultural tourism than they expected. Therefore, Nan province has potential to develop itself as a cultural tourism destination. In addition, the majority of respondents recognized that Tourism Authority of Thailand promoted activities to conserve tourism environment using the 7 Greens Concept which could benefit and support the growth and development of Nan's tourism.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Sustainable tourism, Tourism development, 7 Greens Concepts, Cultural tourism.

### Introduction

Tourism is often considered having significant contribution to countries' economy. Many countries in Europe or Asia use tourism as one mean of economic development. Tourism is not only generates revenue in terms of foreign currencies but also has multiplier effects to the area of tourist destinations and the other regions in the country. As opposed to the favorable aspects, tourism can cause negative consequences to tourism destinations, especially the undesirable results of mass tourism. Apart from the deterioration of natural environment in tourism destinations, the mass tourism may result in negative impacts in terms of culture and society (Ceron & Dubois, 2009; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Swarbrooke, 1999).

Therefore; during the early 1980s, there has been attempted to promote alternative small scale environmentally friendly tourism against the convincing mass tourism that generating revenue and employment (Gosling, Hall, & Weaver, 2009). The failure of promoting small scale tourism brought about the idea of 'sustainable tourism development'. Sustainable tourism development that could applied to both small scale and mass tourism on the assumption that the outcome would be positive economic, sociocultural awareness, and ecological conservation (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987).

By the early twentieth century, the sustainable concept was well establish in forestry conservation practice including zoning for recreation purposes (Nash, 1968). In the late 1950's the concept has also

been applied to human use over the land and the outdoor recreation activities known as carrying capacity integrated with biophysical and social carrying capacity (Mitchell, 1989). Furthermore, Butler (1980) recommends in the concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution that sustainable tourism demand expanding beyond the carrying capacities should apply to specific destinations.

Reflecting to the sustainable tourism scheme, The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) promoted sustainable tourism practice through 7 Greens Concepts since 2009. The 7 Greens Concept includes Green Heart, Green Logistics, Green Attraction, Green Community, Green Activity, Green Service, and Green Plus (Tourism Promotion Department, 2009).

### Methodology

Located in the northern part of Thailand, Nan is a well-known destination in terms of historical and cultural sites. Therefore; Nan province was chosen by TAT as one of the leading tourism destinations that is responsible to implement the 7 Greens Concept which would help preserving the cultural environment of its tourism destinations.

Questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used to collect data from two groups of respondents as follows.

- 1) Domestic tourists of Nan province were administered by questionnaires, and
- 2) Tourism related business representatives were interviewed.

Using convenience sampling, domestic tourists were approached and asked to answer the tourists' questionnaire, which was comprised of close-and open-ended questions and the Likert scale to rank their perceptions towards 7 Greens.

Semi-structure interview questions were used to collect data from 15 respondents who operated small sized businesses such as souvenirs shops, food and beverage services, and car rental.

Indicators used to evaluate the outcomes from the implementation of 7 Greens Concept were structured in a meeting by the Director of TAT Regional and Provincial Sectors of 20 persons. Since the policy was established for a few years and limited activities were applied, it was agreed that the outcomes were vulnerable; therefore, only twelve indicators were applied to the tourists' questionnaire.

### Findings

Finding from the study are reported in two parts. Part 1 is the findings from questionnaire responded by Nan domestic tourists (n = 200). Part 2 is the findings from interviewing of tourism related business representatives (n = 15).

Fifty-six percent of the tourist respondents were female, and 44.0 percent were male. The majority of respondents are 24-34 years of age, graduated with bachelor's degree (64.5%), and employed by public sectors (30.5%) with monthly incomes of 10,000 to 20,000 Baht. Almost all of the respondents visited tourist sites in Nan for pleasure or recreation purpose (77.5%) with the average 3.1 days duration of stay.

The tourism sites which most of the tourist respondents visited are Pumin Buddhist temple (74.0%), Chae-Hang Pagoda (70.0%), and Chang-Kam Buddhist temple (62.5%).

Tourist activities which most of the respondents wanted to participate are cultural/traditional activities (59.5%), learning about local arts and culture (52.0%), conservation of local environment (42.0%), and activities about local people's occupations or ways of life (31.5%).

Fifty-six percent of the respondents were aware that TAT promoted Nan as area of environmental and cultural conservation while 44% of the respondents were not aware of it.

The TAT promoted activities that respondents felt they were effective and lead to environmental and cultural conservation included; learning from wall drawings of Pumin temple, Horkam museum and other Buddhist temples (57.5%), joining hand-made activities in Thai-Lue village such as weaving (47.5%), and Bai-Sri blessing (45.5%).

Tables 1 and 2 compares the expectation of respondents before visiting Nan and the experience of respondents after visiting Nan.

**Table 1.** Percentage of respondents' expectations comparing with their experiences of visiting Nan Province

Perception about Nan tourism	Expectation (%)					Experience (%)				
	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
1) Nan is tourism destination that is well conserved.	22.5	37.5	32.5	6.5	1.0	33.0	58.0	9.0	-	-
2) Nan has interesting historical sites and culture.	24.0	38.5	28.5	8.5	0.5	37.0	55.0	8.0	-	-
3) Nan has variety of natural tourism resources.	21.0	41.0	29.0	7.0	2.0	40.0	47.5	10.0	2.0	0.5
4) Tourists had opportunity to experience local ways of life	19.5	37.0	33.5	7.5	2.5	41.5	37.0	18.0	2.0	1.5
5) Tourists can join cultural activities with the local people.	19.5	35.0	32.0	9.0	4.5	39.0	29.5	23.0	4.0	4.5

Remark: 5 = highest expected, 4 = high expected, 3 = moderately expected, 2 = less expected, 1 = least expected

From Table 1, the tourist respondents had high expectation (the rated score of 4) that Nan is the well-conserved tourism destination (37.5%), Nan has historical and cultural sites appealing to the tourists (38.5%), Nan has variety of natural tourism resources (41.0%), the tourists had opportunity to experience local folks and ways of life within Nan (37.0%), and the tourists can join cultural activities with the local people (35.0%).

After the visit to Nan, the respondents who perceived and rated their experience towards tourism sites of Nan as high (4 and 5 scores) were increased in every aspect as compare to the respondents who rated their expectation prior to the visit as high (4 and 5 scores) and the mean of tourists' experiences were presented in Table 2.

It was evident that tourists visiting Nan felt that tourism destinations in Nan are better than their expectations in terms of conservation of environmental, historical and culture, variety of natural resources, opportunity to experience local way of life, and joining cultural activities with the local people.

**Table 2.** Mean of respondents' expectations comparing with their experiences of visiting Nan Province

Perception about Nan tourism	Expectation (mean)	Experience (mean)	Gap
1) Nan is tourism destination that is well conserved.	3.74	4.26	+0.52
2) Nan has interesting historical sites and culture.	3.77	4.29	+0.52
3) Nan has variety of natural tourism resources.	3.72	4.25	+0.53
4) Tourists had opportunity to experience local ways of life	3.64	4.15	+0.51
5) Tourists can join cultural activities with the local people.	3.56	3.95	+0.39

Table 3 shows percentages of the respondents according to the ratings of agreement about how well Nan province has implemented the TAT campaign of 7 Greens.



**Table 3.** Respondents' opinions about Nan tourism development according to TAT 7 Greens Concept

Aspects of 7 Greens	Percentage as per rating of agreement					mean
	5	4	3	2	1	
<b><u>Green Attraction</u></b>						
Nan still has beautiful natural resources and environment	27.0	62.0	10.0	1.0	-	4.15
Nan can maintain local culture and tradition.	29.5	56.5	11.5	1.5	1.0	4.12
Nan people can maintain local ways of life.	33.5	44.5	18.5	2.5	1.0	4.07
Buildings and the building in Nan is harmonized with the environment.	30.0	36.0	28.0	5.0	1.0	3.89
<b><u>Green Community</u></b>						
Nan people can inform tourists about tourism sites, routes, culture and tradition of Nan.	38.0	35.0	24.0	1.0	2.0	4.06
Nan people are good host with hospitality mind.	55.0	32.0	11.5	0.5	1.0	4.40
Nan has learning centers, media, sign posts to support local people and tourists.	26.0	45.0	22.5	5.5	1.0	3.90
Local people and tourists participate in environmental conservation such as minimal use of polystyrene and plastics.	22.5	39.0	31.5	3.5	3.5	3.74
<b><u>Green Activity</u></b>						
Nan arranges walkways or bicycles lanes for site seeing.	32.0	44.0	15.5	5.5	3.0	3.97
Nan has tourism activities suitable for natural environment, e.g. bicycling/ forest walk/ birds watching.	34.5	36.5	21.5	5.5	2.0	3.94
Nan gives tourists opportunity to join activities to learn people's ways of life and local culture.	34.0	33.0	26.5	5.5	1.0	3.92
Nan has activities for tourists to help preserve natural environment.	38.5	29.0	26.0	4.5	2.0	3.98

Remark: 5 = highly agreed, 4 = strongly agreed, 3 = moderately agreed, 2 = less agreed, 1 = least agreed

The opinion of respondents about the degree to which Nan is considered as an area of conservation according to the TAT 7 Greens Concept is shown in Table 3. It can be concluded that the respondents strongly agreed that Nan tourist destinations have been developed towards the 7 Greens Concept in terms of Greens Attraction, Green Community, and Green Activities. Details described as follow:

### Green Attraction

Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that Nan has a high degree of conformity with respect to the 'green attraction' in terms of the natural resources (62.0%), conservation of local tradition and culture of Nan (56.5%), maintaining the traditional ways of life (44.5%), and the building in Nan is well harmonized with the natural environment (36.0%).

### Green Community

Majority of the respondents highly agreed that Nan has a high degree of conformity with some items of the 'green community' in terms of Nan people are good host with hospitality mind (55.0%), and Nan people has good knowledge and can inform tourists about tourism sites, backgrounds, routes, local tradition and cultures (38.0%).

Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that Nan has a high degree of conformity with the other items of the 'green community' in terms of Nan has learning centers and media for local people to learn

about the tourism (45.0%), and Nan people and tourists mutually participate in environmental conservation program such as minimal use of polystyrene and plastics (39.0%).

### Green Activity

Majority of the respondents highly agreed that Nan has a high degree of conformity with some items of the 'green activity' in terms of Nan has activities for tourists to help preserve natural environment (38.5%), and Nan gives tourists opportunity to join activities and to learn people's ways of life and local culture (34.0%).

Majority of the respondents strongly agreed that Nan has a high degree of conformity with the other items of the 'green community' in terms of Nan arranges walkways or paths for bicycles, tricycles (44.0%), railcars and suitable means of transportation for tourists, and Nan has tourism activities suitable for natural environment such as bicycles/ forest walks/ birds watching (36.5%).

### Part 2: Findings from the Interviews

Most entrepreneurs were aware that Nan is promoted by TAT as an area of cultural and environmental conservation. They heard about this campaign through various sources of information including facsimiles, emails, flyers, posters, local radios, and provincial representatives of Nan. Some of the entrepreneurs attended the meetings held by TAT and participated in TAT activities such as sight-seeing with rail carts and walking street markets. The other entrepreneurs had never joined TAT meetings or activities because of time conflict with business hours. However, they are willing to involve, and suggested TAT to enhance public relations and release the news about tourism activities more effectively.

Some of the TAT activities were well organized such as the 7 Greens conservation campaign. The public relation about the campaign was however missing, more than half of the associations and centers for local tourism did not know about what activities, when and how the activities were to be organized. There were very few sign posts and tourism news for foreign tourists although Nan has a lot of interesting tourist attractions such as Buddhist temples, historical identity of the city, natural resources for tourists. Moreover, there was no tourist information available in English, and hence foreign tourists could not recognize names of the roads or locations of tourist sites.

While the local entrepreneurs and people are willing to support tourism activities in Nan, TAT should focus in marketing to attract tourists, domestically and internationally. Conservation of local arts and culture should be emphasized while old style houses or temples must be cleaned and preserved.

Walking street market was at times popular among tourists but its location kept on changing because of technical problems such as conflict among local residents or traffics. These problems should be coordinately resolved by a local administration authority and TAT so as to promote the walking street market and local business.

One of entrepreneurs had excellent idea for environmental conservation by assigning the local people to make cloth bags for sale at 10 Baht to minimize the use of plastic bags and garbage while generating household revenues. The environmental conservation requires cooperation from local tourism entrepreneurs, TAT and tourists.

Apart from environmental conservation, there shall be management of waste and environment with cooperation of Nan residents and public sectors. In the old days, Nan was a government's town having its own administration led by royal governors. The arts and cultural heritages are thus apparent in terms of Buddhist temples and ancient sites as well as structures and layouts of the old town. However, it is unfortunate to note that despite the attempt and support of TAT to develop Nan into conservative area and cultural tourism, local related business were not sufficiently aware of the support from TAT as it should be.





## Discussion and Conclusion

The research study has led to the conclusion that some of the most popular tourist attractions in Nan province are Pumin temple, Chae-Hang Pagoda and temple and Changkam temple. Tourist activities in which the tourist respondents wanted to join are cultural activities, cultural and arts learning activities, environmental conservation activities, and activities of people's occupation and ways of life.

The perceived experience of the tourist respondents after visiting Nan indicated that Nan has a better cultural tourism to offer as compared to the expectation of the respondents prior to the visit. The implication is that Nan has potential and prospective tourism attractions which could be further developed into a cultural tourism destination.

The entrepreneur respondents believed that Nan has a high degree of conformity to the 7 Greens Concept of TAT. The entrepreneurs were also involved with TAT and had participated in the conservation activities. This could make the tourism development in Nan a sustainable one while it can preserve arts, culture and ways of life of local people in Nan.

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