

# ASSESSING COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THAILAND'S SOUTHERNMOST BORDER PROVINCE

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*This study aims to assess the capabilities and capacities of community-based tourism (CBT) in Thailand's southernmost border province, Yalaprovince, and provides guidelines for the development and improvement. This research employed mixed methods using the Community-based Tourism Indicators of Thailand (CBT-I standards) which abide by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)-Destination Criteria and the in-depth interview to assess and present the guidelines for the CBT communities. The participants of this study consist of 30 representatives of public and private agencies, villagers and community leaders. Data were analyzed using content analysis and descriptive statistics techniques.*

*The results of the study showed that Thai community-based tourism needs effective management. Specifically, Thai CBT in the southernmost province lacks personnel development and sustainable destination management. Therefore, the knowledge transfer and effective management systems towards sustainability are the most challenges in the Thai CBT development. Importantly, this research showed that the Thai CBT-I standards is well suited for assessing the CBT destinations with socio-cultural diversity. This case study research also provides empirical evidence of the CBT development in the developing country in Asia. It pinpoints areas needed for improvement to strengthen the capabilities and capacities of the CBT communities. Private and government tourism organizations can use the practical implications of this research's findings to enhance the CBT development in the country.*

## **Introduction**

In recent times, tourism has played a critical role to diversify developmental activities and improvement of the local economy, especially in the rural areas. Tourism industry has contributed in stimulating consumption, promoting trade, boosting economic growth, and enhancing international communication (Qian et al., 2018). Because of that, government and private sectors place importance on tourism development to strengthen both national and local economy (Banki & Ismail, 2014). Many countries in Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa have promoted community-based tourism (CBT) -community owned and managed enterprises of tourism activities to generate benefits for community members (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009) and to revitalize rural communities (Lee & Chang, 2008). Although tourism has positive economic impacts, tourism activities can positively and negatively influence socio-culture and environment of the destination and host communities (Byrd et al., 2009). Therefore, it is necessary to assess tourism development of destinations to maintain long-term success and minimize adverse impacts of tourism (Diedrich et al. 2009). This research thus evaluates CBT development towards sustainability in the southernmost province of Thailand, Yala province as a way of contributing to the existing literature.

## Literature Review

A number of challenges emerged from mass tourism (e.g., social and environmental issues) have roused the attention of all stakeholders to widely search for alternative and sustainable tourism solutions (Novelli et al., 2017; Qian et al., 2018). In 1990s, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) introduced the concept of sustainable tourism as tourism development that can meet the demand of both tourists and host communities whilst considering preservation and improvement of the future development (World Tourism Organization, 1998). The community-based tourism (CBT) is known as one of the best practices in sustainable tourism development (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

The principle of CBT is rooted in active participation of communities in planning, implementing and managing tourism to maximize benefits for the communities (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). The CBT development also preserves environmental sustainability and respects traditional socio-culture to mitigate negative tourism impacts (Tourism Concern, 2009). Therefore, the CBT has been used as a local diversification strategy for sustainable tourism development in host communities in developing countries in many regions such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East, South America and Africa (e.g., Al-Oun & Al-Homoud, 2008; Erskine & Meyer, 2012; Giampiccoli & Nauright, 2010; Holladay & Powell, 2013; Nunthasiriphon, 2015). Nonetheless, general misconception, lack of awareness on the CBT among the stakeholders, and poor sustainable management have been reported in many academic studies (e.g., Boonratana, 2010; Giampiccoli & Nauright, 2010; Lee & Jan, 2019; Salazar, 2012). Therefore, clear guidelines on how to develop and implement tourism successfully and sustainably are required for CBT communities and relevant agents.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) provides the concept of sustainable tourism development as balanced development of economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects in order to achieve long-term sustainability (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2015). The GSTC offers four pillars of sustainable tourism development criteria: sustainable management, economic benefits, culture, and environment with suggested indicators for the destinations and host communities (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013). Consequently, the GSTC criteria have gained importance to increase public awareness and is a benchmarking tool for developing, monitoring and evaluating CBT performances towards sustainability (Novelli et al., 2017). However, GSTC has been criticized for its inflexibility and high cost of implementations (Novelli et al., 2017); and thus, it is difficult to be met in practice.

Following the GSTC criteria, a number of countries have been developed and offered the sustainable tourism development standards which suit the context of the country. For instance, the Ecotourism Australia and the Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism of Australia provides the Green Globe 21 as the global affiliation, benchmarking and certification for sustainable travel and tourism (Green Globe Certification, 2014). In Thailand, the CBT-I standards have been introduced and implemented as a self-assessing, benchmarking and guiding tool for the CBT development (Suansri & Yeejaw-haw, 2013).

The Thai CBT-I standards is accredited by the GSTC as a comprehensive tool guide for the CBT sustainable tourism practices in order to improve the quality of tourism products and services and to protect community rights holistically (Sangsnit, 2013). Even so, whether the Thai CBT-I standards are applicable to other ASEAN countries is still questionable because of the diversity of socio-cultural aspects (Novelli et al., 2017). In response to this concern, the

aim of this research is: (1) to use the CBT-I standards to assess the CBT performance of the multi socio-cultural communities and (2) to investigate the feasibility and appropriateness of the CBT-I standards in the diverse settings. This research findings contribute to the body of the CBT knowledge and standards regarding the diversity of socio-cultural context.

## **Methodology**

Using the Thai CBT-I standards, this research investigated the CBT performance of the host communities in Yala province- the southernmost, Thai-Malaysian border province with the Thai-Buddhist, Thai-Muslim and Thai-Chinese cultural diversity. A combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches is most suitable because of the complexity of the topic. The three CBT destinations comprised Ban Chulabhorn Phattana 10, Ban Ta Phayao and Ban Aiyorweng of Yala province were selected as case studies for following reasons:

1. Socio-cultural diversity of the communities (Ban Chulabhorn Phattana 10 is a Chinese community, Ban Taphayao is a Buddhist community and Ban Aiyorweng is a Muslim community),
2. A long and well-established CBT enterprises (Ban Chulabhorn Phattana 10),
3. A newly established CBT community (Ban Ta Phayao),
4. A local government established CBT destination (Ban Aiyorweng).

This research carried out with observations and assessment of the CBT management system and tourism activities and 30 in-depth interviews (10 interviewees per community) using semi-structured and unstructured questions with host communities regarding the CBT-I standards of Thailand. The multiple techniques were employed to validate the information obtained in the data collection processes (David & Sutton, 2004). This study used content analysis and descriptive analysis to analyze the data in order to provide insightful information.

## **Key Results**

### ***Community background and context***

#### ***Ban Chulabhorn Phattana 10***

With reference to the in-depth interviews, Ban Chulabhorn Phattana 10 community is located in the border of the Hala Bala forest wildlife sanctuary and thus has beautiful natural resources. Ban Chulabhorn Phattana 10 community has been known for the CBT programs for over 10 years. This community offers ecotourism activities such as trekking to see native plants and wildlife in the Hala Bala forest. Furthermore, the community is also a historical destination. Most of community members were the formers of the Malaya Communist Party of Malaysia. Tourists can learn about the fighting history of the Communist Party of Malaya in Asia and visit the museum showing the Communist Party members' life living in the forest. Added to that, the community members are the Thai-Chinese descent and thus, tourists can experience authentic Chinese cuisine.

#### ***Ban Ta Phayao***

Ban Ta Phayao is the gateway to the Hala Bala forest. The community is located at the Bang Lang Dam of Yala province. The informants revealed that the majority of the Ta Phayao community members are Buddhists who originally lived in Ban La Haad in Than To district of Yala Province. They had evacuated to Ban Ta Phayao area because of the Bang

Lang Dam construction project in the year 2002. The community was considerably new to the CBT because they has organized the CBT activities for about three years. Domestic tourists and tourists from neighboring countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore, visit Ban Ta Phayao community for natural tourism activities such as cruising along the Bang Lang Dam to see nature, visit Koh Thuat to pay respect to the sacred Buddha images and trekking in the Hala Bala forest.

#### *Ban Aiyorweng*

Referencing the interview findings, historically, Aiyorweng community is a native of Pattani who was exiled by politics to live in the deep Hala Bala forest during King Rama V; and thus, the community members called themselves the Hala people. In 1952, because of being threatened by the Malaya communists, the Thai government moved the Hala community to the current area. Ban Aiyorweng nowadays is located on the bank of Pattani river in Betong district of Yala province. Specially, Ban Aiyorweng is the largest and most beautiful sea-fog community in the southern Thailand and has viewpoints of beautiful mountains and lakes above the Bang Lang Dam. The dominant culture of the Aiyorweng community is informed by Malay ethnicity and Islam.

However, there are local Buddhists, Thai people of Chinese descent and the "Orangasri" or Sakai ethnic group live in harmony in the area. Because of their abundant natural resources and multi-culture, the local government has actively promoted mass tourism and the CBT in the destination since the year 2014. As a result, the destination has become one of the most visited destinations in the southernmost region of Thailand.

#### **The CBT-I standards assessment**

##### *The CBT performance of Ban Chulabhorn Phattana 10*

The CBT-I standards assessment of Ban Chulabhorn Pattana 10 community showed that this community had a high assessment score in the management towards sustainability ( $\bar{x} = 3.31$ ), local economics, social and good quality of life ( $\bar{x} = 3.63$ ), and preservation and promotion of cultural heritage ( $\bar{x} = 3.33$ ). They also received a fair score in the systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and environment ( $\bar{x} = 2.93$ ) and safety and security ( $\bar{x} = 2.42$ ) at the destination.

Table 1 - The Thai CBT-I standards assessment score of Ban Chulabhorn Pattana 10 community

No	Criteria	Full score	Average score ( $\bar{x}$ )	Description
1.	A tourism organization has the management towards sustainability	4	3.31	Excellence
2.	Management of local economics, social and good quality of life	4	3.63	Excellence
3.	The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage	4	3.33	Excellence
4.	Systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and environment	4	2.93	Good
5.	Service and safety	4	2.42	Good
	Total score	20	15.61	Excellence (78.05 %)

The findings of the in-depth interviews were presented in Table 2 to provide suggestions for the CBT development and improvement of Ban Chulabhorn Pattana 10 regarding the five dimensions of the CBT-I standards.

Table 2. Suggestions for Ban Chulabhorn Pattana 10's CBT development and improvement based on the in-depth interview findings

<b>1. A tourism organization has the management towards sustainability</b>
1) There should be a group agreement on tourism management which integrates the three dimensions: economy, society and environment in the CBT operations and follow up the performance annually. 2) The CBT community should support the new generation to participate in the tourism operations.
<b>2. Management of economics, social and good quality of life</b>
1) The community should design the variety of experience tourism activities that are consistent with the ways of life of the community. 2) The community should design and develop products and packaging to increase the value of community products and attract tourists
<b>3. The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage</b>
1) The community should establish a tourism database on community cultural heritage for the systematic and efficient use of the CBT programs and to promote CBT activities.
<b>4. Systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and environment</b>
1) The community should design and plan the use of tourism resources effectively and sustainably. 2) The community should campaign the natural resources preservation within the community.
<b>5. Service and safety</b>
1) The community should have written regulations, and tourists have to follow the regulations seriously. 2) The community should provide tourism information such as signs and tourist maps. 3) The community interpreters should be trained properly to provide knowledge about natural resources, local history and ways of life correctly and clearly for tourists.

*The CBT performance of Ban Ta Phayao*

The findings presented in Table 3 showed that Ban Ta Phayao community had a fair assessment score in the management towards local economics, social and good quality of life ( $\bar{x} = 2.13$ ) and preservation and promotion of cultural heritage ( $\bar{x} = 2.67$ ). However, they received a fairly low score in the systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and environment ( $\bar{x} = 1.80$ ), safety and security ( $\bar{x} = 1.46$ ) and the management towards sustainability ( $\bar{x} = 1.41$ ) at the destination.

Table 3 - Thai CBT-I standards assessment score of Ban Ta Phayao community

No	Criteria	Full score	Average score ( $\bar{x}$ )	Description
1.	A tourism organization has the management towards sustainability	4	1.41	Fair
2.	Management of economics, social and good quality of life	4	2.13	Good
3.	The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage	4	2.67	Good
4.	Systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and environment	4	1.80	Fair
5.	Service and safety	4	1.46	Fair
	Total score	20	9.47	Fair (47.35%)

Table 4 presented suggestions emerged from the in-depth interviews for the CBT development and improvement of Ban Ta Phayao community regarding the five dimensions of the CBT-I standards.

**Table 4** shows suggestions for Ban Ta Phayao's CBT development and improvement based on the in-depth interview findings

<b>1. A tourism organization has the management towards sustainability</b>
1) There should be a group agreement on tourism management which integrates the three dimensions: economy, society and environment in the CBT operations and follow up the performance annually. 2) The community should systematically record income and expenses and have a group deposit account. 3) The CBT community should support the new generation to participate in the tourism operations.
<b>2. Management of economics, social and good quality of life</b>
1) The community should design the variety of experience tourism activities that are consistent with the ways of life of the community in order to meet tourists' interests and expectations. 2) The community should design and develop products and packaging to increase the value of community products and attract tourists
<b>3. The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage</b>
1) The community should establish a tourism database on community cultural heritage for the systematic and efficient use of the CBT programs and to promote CBT activities.
<b>4. Systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and environment</b>
1) The community should design and plan the use of tourism resources effectively and sustainably. 2) The community should raise awareness of the importance of preserving natural resources and the environment among group members, people in the community and visitors. 3) The community should campaign the natural resources preservation within the community.
<b>5. Service and safety</b>
1) The community should have written regulations, and tourists have to follow the regulations seriously. 2) Community should have more community interpreters. 3) There should be a service point and signposts indicating the tourism information of the community and warning. 4) The community should have a service center that can coordinate in case of tourists having accidents / emergencies.

### *The CBT performance of Ban Aiyorweng*

Table 5 - Thai CBT-I standards assessment score of Ban Aiyorweng community

No	Criteria	Full score	Average score ( $\bar{x}$ )	Description
1.	A tourism organization has the management towards sustainability	4	2.43	Good
2.	Management of economics, social and good quality of life	4	3.12	Excellence
3.	The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage	4	1	Improvement
4.	Systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and the environment	4	2.33	Good
5.	Service and safety	4	1.75	Fair
	Total score	20	10.63	Good (53.15%)

The findings presented in Table 5 showed that Ban Aiyorweng community had a high assessment score in the management towards local economics, social and good quality of life

( $\bar{x} = 3.12$ ), followed by the management towards sustainability ( $\bar{x} = 2.43$ ) and the systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and environment ( $\bar{x} = 2.33$ ). However, the score of the safety and security was fairly low ( $\bar{x} = 1.75$ ). Significantly, the community needs to improve their preservation and promotion of cultural heritage ( $\bar{x} = 1$ ).

Table 6 provided suggestions emerged from the in-depth interviews for the CBT development and improvement of Ban Aiyorweng community regarding the five dimensions of the CBT-I standards.

Table 6 - Guidelines for Ban Aiyorweng's CBT development and improvement based on the in-depth interview findings

<b>1. A tourism organization has the management towards sustainability</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) There should be a group agreement on tourism management which integrates the three dimensions: economy, society and environment in the CBT operations and follow up the performance annually.</li> <li>2) The community should have concrete engagement activities with relevant agents such as a local government and private sector (documented in MOU).</li> <li>3) The community should systematically record income and expenses and have a group deposit account and revenue allocation to the CBT group members.</li> <li>4) The community should record the number of tourists traveling to the destination.</li> </ol>
<b>2. Management of economics, social and good quality of life</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The community should design the variety of experience tourism activities that are consistent with the ways of life of the community in order to meet tourists' interests and expectations</li> <li>2) The community should develop souvenir products from the existing ones such as using natural colors and being environmentally friendly in accordance with the quality certification standards and the uniqueness of their culture and local life.</li> </ol>
<b>3. The preservation and promotion of cultural heritage</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The community should establish a tourism database on community cultural heritage for the systematic and efficient use of the CBT programs and to promote CBT activities.</li> <li>2) The community should prioritize the importance and necessity of education and motivate people to learn and promote their cultural heritage in the community.</li> <li>3) The community should create tourism activities based on their cultural resources to provide tourists authentic experiences</li> </ol>
<b>4. Systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and environment</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The community should design and plan the use of tourism resources effectively and sustainably.</li> <li>2) The community should raise awareness of the importance of preserving natural resources and the environment among group members, people in the community and visitors.</li> <li>3) The community should campaign the natural resources preservation within the community.</li> </ol>
<b>5. Service and safety</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The community should improve tourism landscape, take care of safety regularly and estimate carrying capacity to accommodate tourists in each area.</li> <li>2) The community should provide tourism information such as signs and tourist maps.</li> <li>3) The community interpreters should be trained properly to provide knowledge about natural resources, local history and ways of life correctly and clearly for tourists.</li> </ol>

### Discussions and directions for future studies

Overall, the findings showed that due to their long experiences in tourism, Ban Chulabhan Pattana 10 has organized and operated the CBT far better than Ban Ta Phayao and Ban Aiyorweng communities. Nonetheless, of the CBT-I five dimensions, all communities have shared common challenges in the tourism organization management towards sustainability, systematic and sustainable management of natural resources and environment and service and safety. The insightful information from the in-depth interviews showed that

all communities need to establish a group agreement of the CBT operation and followup the performance annually. They also have to design and plan the use of tourism resources effectively and sustainably. Importantly, all communities need to have an effective personal development system to train and transfer knowledge among the group members and local interpreters, and finally, the communities have to provide clear written regulations and signposts for tourists to follow for safety purposes.

The findings of this study provide evidence that the CBT development benefits local economy, social development and quality of life of the community members. These findings support the literature indicating that CBT development has positive impacts on the host communities, especially in the rural areas (Byrd et al., 2009; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Lee & Chang, 2008; Qian et al., 2018). Furthermore, the findings also provide insightful information that community-based tourism suits destinations with diverse social and cultural backgrounds. The CBT does not only give economic benefits to the communities, but also respects socio-cultural diversity and preserves natural resources and environment in order to achieve long-term success and sustainability of the communities (Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 2013; 2015). Importantly, in response to Novelli's et al. (2017) concerns, the study shows that the Thailand's CBT-I standards is applicable to CBT communities that have different social and cultural backgrounds. The Thai CBT-I standards, therefore, can be used as a benchmarking and guiding tool to assess the CBT performance of host communities in other developing countries, especially in ASEAN.

This study provides insights with regards to the CBT performance of the southernmost communities in Yala province of Thailand. Tourism authorities, local government and private sectors can use the study's findings for development and improvement of CBT communities in the destination. However, the study limited to the three communities with different socio-cultural background. Further investigations of the CBT-I standards assessment in other CBT destinations are needed to compare the results. It is also necessary to use other criteria assessing the CBT communities for comparative purposes to provide better understandings and contribute to the body of CBT knowledge.

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