

## **An Analysis of Beach Tourism Strategic Plans: A Case Study of Songkhla Province, Thailand**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study aims to investigating the strategic plans of beach tourism management in Songkhla Municipality; Thailand. Four strategic plans developed by involved local organizations namely; (1) Songkhla Municipality, (2) Office of Songkhla Tourism and Sport, (3) Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO), and (4) Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT): Songkhla and Phattalung Service Branch; were compared and analyzed. The results clearly exhibited that each organization has its own mission and strategic plans. However, the beach tourism strategic plans of each organization does not show any supports or integrated functions to each other. The integration of strategic plans from all the organizations; therefore, is necessary for effective beach tourism management and mutual concrete structure of working which might contribute to sustainable tourism in the future. The integration could be achieved by indicating goals of beach tourism, as well as indicating success index of all plans.

Keywords: Beach tourism, Beach management, Strategic plans, Songkhla

### **1. Introduction**

Tourism industry has become Thailand's most important economic activity due to its highest rank of the country's total value of goods and services, related economic activities which lead to investment, employment, and income distribution at the local level. Tourism generates cash flow of both foreign and domestic currency, valuing at hundreds of billions of Thai baht a year. The foreign currency has contributed to compensation for the balance of trade deficit during Thailand's economic crisis. According to the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012 - 2016), the Thai government aims to develop the country as a hub of quality tourism with high potentials to compete in the global market place (Department of Tourism, 2012).

Being a province in the south cluster among the eight clusters of Thailand, Songkhla is the third biggest city of southern Thailand after Surat Thani and Nakorn Sri Thammarat and ranks the 27<sup>th</sup> biggest province of the country. It has been known as "The City of Two Seas" due to its location on the Samila Peninsula, between the Gulf of Thailand and Songkhla Lake (the largest lake in Thailand). Its Samila Beach and Chalatat Beach won 'Best Beach Award' in 2010. After the beautiful beaches of Songkhla had been considered to have great potentials

to become a leading destination, a tourism campaign “Wonderful two seas” was organized to promote Thailand’s tourism during 2012-2016. According to the master plan of Songkhla Lake development, the two beaches have considerable potentials to attract tourists due to their high biodiversity and ecosystem values. However, they can be fragile to environmental destruction, which can be the consequence of tourism development (Visuthismajarn, 2005). Currently, Samila Beach and Chalatat Beach are being ruined by not only crowded tourists but also natural disasters which lead to costal erosions. As this is an urgent agenda for Songkhla Municipality to rehabilitate and manage beaches, this study aims to assist this problem by examining and investigating the strategic plans, particularly the beach attractions in Songkhla. This investigation on the beach tourism management can be useful for developing and implementing tourism policies, which might contribute to “sustainable and productive tourism of Thailand”. The expected results of this study are based on the belief that their benefits for tourism policies could yield positive influences on the nation’s tourism management in the future, as well as on Songkhla’s tourism development plans.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 The concept of beach tourism and beach management

The term “beach tourism” is still not well-defined. However, Biswas (2016, p.343) recently attempts to explain beach tourism as “total tourism, leisure, and recreational activities that take place in the coastal area and the offshore coastal waters.” Ariza, Jiménez, and Sardá (2008) assert that “as long as the tourism industry requires beaches to support its activity, beach management will be strictly oriented to accommodating this use” (p.142). Beach management is part of the coastal area which required long-term policies and effective management strategies to create the sustainable beach tourism. To achieve successful sustainability, managing beach would have to be integrated into a broader framework in order to create benefit to all stakeholders (i.e. tourists, local communities, businesses, and local governments).

Beach management, in other words, appears to be a protection plan since the beaches are vulnerable from tourist activities and public infrastructure. Although some constructions are the public utilities which served the need of both local people and tourists, the beach management plan will work as a guideline by suggesting the maximum levels of using the beaches while maintaining and minimizing the impacts from its erosion. William and Micallef (2009) recommend that the beach geography and the beach ecosystem should be carefully considered before initiating any construction projects. Moreover, the concept of Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) should be adopted when evaluating the impacts of beach utilization as this idea can assist to analyze in every aspect (i.e. tourism, management, marketing, and environment). In addition, McGregor (1996) recommends that an evaluation of conservation and environmental protection plan should be particularly involved as this can work as a tool for indicating the possibilities of environmental problems.

### 2.2 Principle of The elements of the beaches tourism attractions

The elements of beach tourism attractions can be classified into five factors which are;

- (1) Tourist activities: these activities should be suitable designed for doing on the beach without create any harmful effect to the environment.
- (2) Tourist attraction: It is considered as the most important basic component of beach tourism. Attraction means anything that creates a desire in any person to travel in a specific tourist destination or attraction. Local is another basic component of beach tourism. The locale may be used to include the holiday destination and what it offers to the tourist. The holiday destination may offer natural attractions.
- (3) Accessibility: Accessibility is another important factor of beach tourism. There should be accessibility for each and every location of tourist attractions. Accessibility means reach ability to the place of destination through various means of transportation. Transportation should be regular, comfortable, and safe. Include the walk way into the beach.
- (4) Accommodation: The need and necessity of accommodation cannot be ignored in tourist destination. Accommodation plays a vital role in this field. Many changes have taken place in accommodation recently. New types of accommodation, particularly, holiday villages, apartment, resort, houses, camping and caravan sites etc., have become very popular. Usually a large number of tourists visit a particular spot simply because there is a first class hotel with excellent facilities.
- (5) Amenities and Security: Facilities are very essential for any tourist center. They are considered necessary aid to the tourist center. For a seaside resort facilities like swimming, boating, yachting surf riding and such other facilities like deeming recreations and amusements is an important feature. There are two types of amenities viz. natural and manmade. Beaches, sea-bathing, fishing, climbing, viewing etc. are come under the former category. Various types of entertainments and facilities which cater for the special needs of the tourists come under the latter category. Safety and security are vital to providing quality in tourism. More than any other economic activity, the success or failure of a tourism destination depends on being able to provide a safe and secure environment for visitors (Johnpaul, 2016)

### 3. Methods

This study is a qualitative research. The secondary data were collected from four organizations namely; (1) Songkhla Municipality, (2) Office of Songkhla Tourism and Sport, (3) Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO), and (4) Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT): Songkhla and Phattalung Service Branch. To analyze the beach attraction strategic plans of each organization, the investigation form was developed and employed as a main research instrument for the data comparison. The data were analyzed by Content analysis technique.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 The analysis of beach tourism strategic plan of Songkhla Municipality

According to the beach tourism strategic plan from four organizations; five elements namely; Accessibility, Accommodation, Tourism Activities, Tourist Attraction, and Amenities and Security, were compared in order to analyze and forecast the direction on the beach management of Songkhla Municipality. The results were exhibited in table 1.

From table 1, the beach tourism strategic plan developed by the Songkhla Municipality (2012-2016) showed that the amenities and security were defined in both of the goals and the strategic plan of revenue management. Although, there were defined in the strategic goals of societal management and strategic plan of infrastructure management, their guidelines were not unclear. While the tourist attractions were defined in the natural resources and the environmental management, the tourism activities were defined in the strategic management of societal management but only in part goals were not clarify in the strategy plan.

In terms of the strategic plans of the Office of Songkhla Tourism and Sport, the results highlighted that the tourist attractions were defined in the strategic development of quality and safety of tourism products and services but the guidelines were not explained. In addition, the strategic plan exhibited that tourism activities were defined to promote quality tourism for the sustainable growth. Moreover, there were defined in the strategic goals and the guidelines of the strategic development of management and the creative economy in tourism and sport. The accessibility and the amenities and security, furthermore, were defined in the strategic goals but there are not clarify in the strategy plan to promote tourism in terms of quality for the balanced and sustainable growth.

According to the strategic plan created by the Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) (2012 – 2017), the tourism activities and the accessibility were defined in both of the strategic goals and the strategic development of sufficient and modern public infrastructure. Moreover, the tourist attractions and the amenities and security were defined in strategic goals, but there are not unclear in the guidelines.

Finally, the strategic plan developed by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT): Songkhla and Phattalung Service Branch seemed to focusing heavily on the tourism marketing. It was found that all five elements of the beaches Tourism attractions were defined in both of the goals and strategy of promoting Thailand brand image. In addition, the tourism activities were defined in strategic goal and the guidelines of the strategic plan of marketing promotion. The tourist attractions were also defined in strategic goal and the guidelines of the strategic plan of the tourism products and services promotion.

Table 1: An analysis of the beach tourism strategic plan developed by Songkhla Municipality, Office of Songkhla Tourism and Sport, Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO), and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT): Songkhla and Phattalung Service Branch

Name of Organizations	The beach management strategic plans and policies	Five elements of the beach tourism attraction				
		(1) Tourist Attractions	(2) Accessibility	(3) Accommodation	(4) Tourism Activities	(5) Amenities and Security
Songkhla Municipality (2012-2016)	• Societal management				+	*
	• Revenue management					+
	• Natural resources and environmental management	+				
	• Infrastructure management					*
Office of Songkhla Tourism and Sport	• To develop quality and safety of tourism products and services	+				*
	• To promote quality tourism for the sustainable growth		*		+	*
	• To promote the creative economy in tourism and sport				+	
Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) (2012-2017)	• To develop sufficient and modern public infrastructure					*
	• To promote tourism and sport	*	+		+	*
	• To manage natural resources and environment	*				
Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT): Songkhla and Phattalung Service Branch	• To promote the brand image of Thailand	+	+	+	+	+
	• To create marketing promotion				+	
	• To promote tourism products and services	+				

Remark: + represents the factors which both of the strategic goals and the guidelines were defined. \* represents the factors which only the strategic goals were defined, but the guidelines were not explained.

## 5. Conclusion and discussion

An analysis of the beach tourism strategic plans and policies from the relevant four organizations which are (1) the Songkhla Municipality (2012-2016); (2) the Office of Songkhla Tourism and Sport; (3) the Songkhla Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) (2012 – 2017); and (4) by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT): Songkhla and Phattalung Service Branch was clearly displayed that each organization has its own mission and strategic plans. However, the beach tourism strategic plans of each organization does not show any supports or integrated functions to each other. To certain extent, each organization set the management plans relating to the missions and strategies of tourism management of Songkhla.

The beach tourism management of Songkhla is mainly handled by Songkhla Municipality. The second important organization is PAO, who organizes the International Beach Volleyball. Regarding to the Office of Songkhla Tourism and Sport and the TAT Songkhla and Phattalung Service Branch, these two organizations are responsible for tourism promotion.

This study recommends that the integration of strategic plans from all the organizations is necessary for an effective beach tourism management which will lead the concrete structure of working and contribute to the sustainable tourism in the future. The integration could be achieved by indicating goals of the beach tourism, as well as indicating success index of all plans.

Since the Songkhla Municipality plays a key role in the beach tourism management. Its responsibilities involve the development of all beach tourism elements, including landscape management, beach preservation, advertisement of beach tourism, music parks, mobile library vans, trails, Songkran Festivals, the International Kite Competitions, Seafood of Two Seas Festivals, and security management. The Songkhla Municipality also deals with the coastal erosions in Chalatat Beach, zoning of the restaurants along the beaches, Free Bike Scheme supported by DRS Property Ltd., tourists' car parking, and free-wifi services in the beach areas which these activities are beyond its responsibilities indicated in its strategic plans.

In terms of the PAO, its major responsibilities indicated in the strategic plans were mainly related to the advertisement of beach tourism and the International Beach Volleyball. It appears that the Office of Songkhla Tourism and Sport seemed to in charge with the advertisement of beach tourism, tourist information centre, tour-guide training cooperated with Bureau of Tourism Business and Tour Guide Registration Department of Tourism are its primary missions. However, the advertisement of beach tourism also cooperated by the TAT Songkhla and Phattalung Service Branch.

In conclusion, the four organizations have different intensity of beach tourism management. The Songkhla Provincial Municipality is the most influential in beach tourism management, followed by the PAO, the Office of Songkhla Tourism and Sport and the TAT Songkhla and Phattalung Service Branch respectively.

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