

# RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRATED ECOTOURISM ROUTE IN RANONG

**Sakarin Sriupayo**

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand  
E-mail: sakarin.sr@ssru.ac.th

## ABSTRACT

This study is focused on : 1) to survey and study ground base information of natural tourist attraction in Ranong from tourist behavior 2) to evaluate its capability of tourism activities by tourists action 3) to be a guideline to the developing plan in an integrated ecotourism in Ranong province. This research use a qualitative research as a mainly primary method to assess the capability and readiness of the province about nature and tourist activities in 5 famous tourist attractions in Ranong; Naka Wildlife Sanctuary, Ngao Waterfall National Park, Ranong Research Center of Mangrove Forest, Punyabaan Waterfall and Bokkrai Waterfall. This study will analyze on strong point, weak point, barrier and opportunity to develop to integrated ecotourism in Ranong Province. In addition, the In-Depth Interviewing and Focus group discussion will finally find the way out to create wisely tourism without the impact to its culture and environment.

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry, one of the biggest income-generating industries in the world, has been widely used as a development tool in both developed and developing countries. In an attempt to speed up the development for the objective of economic return, tourism development decisions usually come from ‘experts’ in a top-down approach which usually does not reflect the interest of the host community. As tourism is an interdisciplinary industry that depends on various parties including governmental bodies, private sectors, academia, and host communities to work together, a multi-stakeholder participatory approach is needed when making decisions concerning how tourism should be developed for the benefits of all.

Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial mass tourism. It means responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the well-being of the local people. Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to provide funds for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. Several university programs use this description as the working definition of ecotourism.

Generally, ecotourism deals with interaction with biotic components of the natural environments. Ecotourism focuses on socially responsible travel, personal growth, and environmental sustainability. Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions. Ecotourism is intended to offer tourists an insight into the impact of human beings on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

Ecotourism is tourism which is conducted responsibly to conserve the environment and sustain the well-being of local people. In addition, it affects many advantages to the area focused according to points as following:

- Building environmental awareness
- Providing direct financial benefits for conservation
- Providing financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Respect local culture
- Supporting human rights and democratic movements such as:
  - o conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection
  - o promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, by providing jobs to local populations
  - o sharing of all socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous peoples by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises

- tourism to unspoiled natural resources, with minimal impact on the environment being a primary concern.
- Minimizing of tourism's own environmental impact
- Affording and lack of waste in the form of luxury
- local culture, flora, and fauna being the main attractions
- local people, who benefit from this form of tourism economically, and often more than mass tourism

Many international organization defined the word of Ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and involves interpretation and education". Moreover, for many countries, ecotourism is not simply a marginal activity to finance protection of the environment, but a major industry of the national economy as well.

Ranong is on the Kra Isthmus, a narrow strip of land, only 44 kilometres wide, that connects Thailand with the Malay Peninsula, on the west of the Phuket mountain range. It has a long coast on the Andaman Sea. The province, together with Trat Province, is known for being one of the wettest places in Thailand, the rainy season lasting for about eight months. In addition, Ranong is one of Thailand's southern provinces, on the west coast along the Andaman Sea. It has the fewest inhabitants of all Thai provinces. Ranong is counted as the least populated province. Eighty percent of its area is covered by forests, and 67 percent is mountainous. In former years the major industry was tin mining, but most mines are now exhausted. White clay mining (for the production of porcelain) and fishing are now the main industries, along with rubber and cashew nuts.

Ranong motto is: Gra Isthmus, grassy mountain, sweet cashew nuts, natural hot spring, and genuine Ranong pearls. Due to its rich natural resources and tourist attractions, both government and private sectors try to develop tourist attractions particularly natural tourist attraction such as national park, waterfall, hot spring water to become the most famous attraction of the country by focusing on health tourism and ecotourism (Sunisa Pensub and Pawonrut Saengsirrote, 2555, p.1). The development plan follows the Andaman Coast Development strategy of the government (Andaman coast provinces include Ranong, Pangnga, Phuket, Krabi, and Trang) aiming at developing each city based on its potential. So, Ranong defines its strategy on ecotourism and health tourism due to its outstanding natural resources.

From above, it can be seen that Ranong has high potential on tourists activities in any types, especially, in area surrounding with natural resources. However, to appeal all visitors to the area, it needs to well study both inside and outside factor to that area whether it is appropriate to its activities in long term or not yet. The researcher expect to study this matter and find the way how to keep all nature in sustainable way with tourist satisfaction at the same time.



Figure 1: the entrance of Bokkrai Waterfall



Figure 2: Bokkrai Waterfall



Figure 3: Ranong Research Center of Mangrove Forest



Figure 4: Ranong Mangrove Forest



Figure 5: Nature trail in Ranong Research Center of Mangrove Forest

### Objectives of the research

1. to survey and study ground base information of natural tourist attraction in Ranong from tourist behavior
2. to evaluate its capability of tourism activities by tourists action
3. to be a guideline to the developing plan in an integrated ecotourism in Ranong province

### Scope of the study

This study has been designed to develop the model for ecotourism in Ranong Province. The scope of the content is the investigation the potential of natural sites and its surrounding. The scope on the area included 5 districts in Ranong; Muang, Krapur, Suksamran, Kraburi, and La-oon. The scope on the population was the tourists who travel and have an activities in ecotourism or in natural sites, Ranong Tourism Authority, government and private sector in Ranong.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research procedure

The purposes of this research are to investigate the potential of developing plan to ecotourism in Ranong Province and then, in next research, the creating the model for ecotourism in Ranong Province will be extended to the plan.

#### Population and sampling group

1. The population in this study was defined as Thai tourists who visit to Ranong for the ecotourism purpose. Due to the high number of population, it is difficult to define the sampling group. So, the researcher employed Taro Yamane table (1972, Yamane) at the 95% confidence interval with +5% deviation reaching the sample size of 400 people.
2. The sample group from the tourism business sector, government sector related to Ranong tourism industry such as Ranong Tourism Authority, Ngao Waterfall National Park, Lamnam Kraburi National Park, district chief officer, Ranong municipality, and local people of 10 persons.

### Research instrument

This study employed 2 types of research instrument in data collection.

1. Questionnaire and open question

Questionnaire consisted of 3 parts: part 1 was the demographic information of the subjects in the form of close- ended questions. Part 2 was also close- ended multiple choice questions related to tourism characteristics. Part 3 was open ended questions to invite subjects to highlight problem or propose some suggestions to tourist attractions.

2. SWOT analysis tool

Use to get the analysis data about tourist attraction's strength, weakness, opportunity and threaten relevant to natural resources area for getting the detail of data and easily to assess the capability in tourist attractions.

### **Data collection**

1. Study information from documents, articles, theories, and related researches on health tourism as a guideline for the research construction. Then, the questionnaire and the interviews including sample group were defined.
2. Distribute the questionnaire to the tourists and local people who used to visit natural attraction in Ranong.
3. Check the completeness of the returned questionnaire for the analysis.
4. Conduct the SWOT analysis tool to analyze and suggest a suitable tourism activities in natural tourism areas.
5. The information from the interview, questionnaire, and focus group was employed to create a guideline to the developing plan in an integrated ecotourism in Ranong province

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

From the study, activities in ecotourism should be well studied on the area before action. The community and all stakeholder play role very important to do better strategic appropriate with nature capability in that area. Surrounding study is related to the development of natural capabilities. Government is a main role to look after natural tourist attractions. As we can see, all natural places by government are well managed and convenient for tourists to do any activities in the area. Therefore, tourist attraction have to be well supported from public sector with help from private sector in some case, especially, the marketing plan. In addition, from tourist's point of view, most tourist always like warm welcome from host area and learn from their life style as much as possible to gain more experience of their culture.

In conclusion, there should be a research on connecting tourism to route among provinces and focused on tourist activities which is an ally to natural resources in order to have tourists do their activities in the right manner. Moreover, marketing plan to promote areas and these activities should be well organized and keeping follow-up for the result. Government play role very important to support this action.

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