

# Fostering Creative Community-based Tourism and Integrated Tourism Model in Promoting Local Economy through Community-based Tourism in Suphan Buri Province: Innovating Social and Economic Initiatives for Tourism Enhancement in the New Normal

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**Abstract** This study investigates the potential for enhancing tourism in the New Normal through creative community-based approaches, with a focus on Suphan Buri Province. It aims to develop a tourism activity model and creative tourism routes that integrate various tourism aspects to bolster the local economy through innovative socio-economic initiatives. The research gathered data from 400 Thai tourists and 100 key informants, through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, respectively. For quantitative data, the researchers employed analytical methods included frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while content analysis was used for the qualitative interview results. The findings reveal a high overall potential for community-based tourism management, with all facets—accessibility, attractions, facilities, services, and activities—consistently rated highly. The study successfully designed five creative tourism routes, including a nature and community lifestyle learning route, an ancient market exploration route, a pilgrimage route to the Suphan Buri Buddha statue, a route offering traditional blessings, and a relaxation route showcasing the region's natural beauty and cultural heritage. Furthermore, the study proposed guidelines for sustainable tourism development, involving tourists in activities such as making traditional Thai desserts, participating in local culinary experiences, dressing in traditional attire, and immersing themselves in cultural festivals and historical explorations. This comprehensive approach not only promotes cultural heritage and local traditions but also supports the economic sustainability of the community in the New Normal.

**Keywords** Creative community-based tourism; Integrated tourism; Economic initiatives; Innovating social; Thai tourists

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## Introduction

Tourism plays a key role in the socioeconomic development of Thailand, with the government's policy focusing on elevating the industry through value-added tourism products while striving for a harmonious balance between economic growth, societal benefit, and environmental sustainability (Sungkaew, 2020). The strategic policy aims to customize tourism activities to target specific interest groups, such as those seeking relaxation, entertainment, or educational experiences in diverse settings, thereby boosting local and national economic prosperity (Sudsawasd et al., 2022). Despite these efforts, tourism's expansion often leads to environmental degradation and cultural erosion, as evidenced by increased waste and the over-commercialization of cultural sites (Belsoy et al., 2012). Such outcomes reveal a profound disconnect between the intent of tourism development and its impacts, characterized by activities that may neglect local communities' profound cultural and ecological ethos (Sin & Minca, 2014). This misalignment indicates a critical oversight in the tourism sector: The insufficient integration of community values and sustainable practices in tourism development, which, if addressed, could fortify community resilience and maintain the integrity of local heritage sites. To address these issues, innovative tourism approaches that enhance the visitor experience and promote sustainable economic practices, preserve cultural heritage, and protect environmental resources. Termed 'creative tourism', this approach advocates for participatory engagement with the local culture, ensuring that tourism development supports the sustainable evolution of communities, preserves indigenous traditions, and fosters a tourism model that aligns with local identities and values (Wisudthiluck et al., 2013). This study explores how creative, community-based tourism can serve as a cornerstone for sustainable development in the tourism sector, particularly within Thailand's unique socio-economic landscape.

Creative tourism represents a strategic approach within the broader spectrum of sustainable tourism development. Richards (2020) characterizes it by its integration of "Thainess," which encompasses the essence of Thai culture, including local lifestyles, wisdom, arts, and historical contexts. This form of tourism is instrumental for local communities in directing their development trajectories, including the capacity to regulate tourist influx and craft interactive activities that enhance mutual understanding between visitors and hosts (Duxbury et al., 2020). Such initiatives safeguard cultural heritage and heighten community awareness of their unique traditions and knowledge, positioning creative tourism as a key driver of sustainable community development across Thailand. Furthermore, the evolution of tourism necessitates several critical strategies: increasing the value of tourism experiences to boost economic returns while prioritizing quality over quantity; increasing competitiveness, especially in less prominent tourist destinations and among smaller business operators; and promoting equitable economic benefits. Furthermore, practical, sustainable tourism management must incorporate rigorous cleanliness, safety, and environmental conservation standards. Lastly, the sector's growth depends on preparing the workforce for industry changes and revising regulatory frameworks to facilitate the advanced use of technology and information in tourism promotion and management (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2022).

Moreover, community-based tourism is increasingly recognized as a mechanism for economic development and enhancing competitiveness within local communities (Giampiccoli, 2020). Nonetheless, it faces several challenges, chiefly related to the sustainable management of natural and cultural resources. These challenges include the degradation of tourist attractions due to inadequate systematic management, a lack of proficiency in utilizing technology for information dissemination, and deficiencies in creating comprehensive databases for cultural resources and tourism (Prakoso et al., 2020). Furthermore, the involvement of local communities or property owners in community-based tourism management needs to be clarified, often resulting in ineffective participation and governance (Scheyvens, 2002). To address these issues, higher education institutions in Thailand have started playing a crucial role by acting as mentors through facilitating interactive activities such as homestays,

local cuisine cooking lessons, and studies of local lifestyles, emphasizing environmental conservation and cultural heritage preservation. For this sector's sustainable development residents, civil society, government bodies, entrepreneurs, and educational institutions must forge a community-based tourism network, leveraging their collective resources and expertise to overcome these systemic challenges (Mountain Institute, 2000).

Thailand focuses less on international tourism and prioritizes domestic tourism in the New Normal era. As a result, Thai tourists play an important role. The behavior of domestic tourism in the New Normal era following the COVID-19 crisis includes the following: 1) Prioritizing travel within the country is with fewer crowds, contributes the first choice, 2) opting for short-distance trips by car, and 3) visiting lesser-known, "Unseen" destinations with fewer crowds, contributes to increasing the number of tourists and generating income within the country. Unseen tourist attractions encompass the following categories: 1) Magical and natural tourist attractions, 2) adventure tourist attractions, 3) sacred tourist attractions, 4) traditional and cultural tourist attractions, and 5) way-of-life tourist attractions. They elevate the significance of Thai tourists and country's diverse forms of tourism, including natural, historical, cultural, agricultural, and health-based tourism. This diversity facilitates an integrated tourism model tailored to tourists' preferences and needs, including agricultural, health-based, cultural, way-of-life, religious-based, travel-learning, and creative tourism (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). Thai tourists value organizing tourism activities, attraction management, safety, and high-quality services that meet their expectations. Concurrently, tourists are increasingly interested in engaging with the local community's lifestyle and gaining new experiences, aligning with Thailand's promotional strategies for a way of life, learning, and local cultural tourism (Manowalailou, 2017). This trend accentuates the role of community-based tourism as a catalyst for community development, which requires active participation from community members and utilizes local resources like folk wisdom, art, and culture. These resources enrich the tourism experience, making community involvement and the environmental setting crucial components (Boonying et al., 2024). Therefore, it is essential to study the community context and potential for community-based tourism in tourist destinations to align tourism activities with tourists' needs and community capabilities, ensuring enriching and memorable experiences through collaborative activities between visitors and local communities (Asker et al., 2010).

Suphan Buri Province, characterized by its diverse tourist attractions spanning natural, historical, and cultural destinations, presents a robust potential for developing its economic foundation through tourism. However, the management and innovation within tourism community groups are suboptimal, demonstrating a need for more alignment with broader societal and community needs. This shortfall underscores the necessity for enhanced development strategies that integrate creative and innovative approaches. Community products and enterprises require significant revitalization to improve outcomes and attract more Thai tourists, especially in the context of the New Normal. Given this backdrop, our research aims to explore the development of creative community-based tourism and integrated tourism models to boost the local economy in Suphan Buri Province. This entails fostering a reciprocal learning environment between community hosts and tourists and devising novel strategies to increase the value and appeal of tourism while ensuring it contributes to sustainable development. This approach only enhance the visitor experience and promote socio-economic growth aligned with sustainable practices.

### **Research objectives**

This study's research objectives are threefold: First, to evaluate the potential of fostering creative community-based tourism as a mechanism for enhancing tourism in the context of the New Normal. Second, to develop a comprehensive tourism activity model incorporating creative tourism routes with integrated tourism strategies to enhance tourism experiences in the New Normal. Third, to formulate and propose guidelines that facilitate the growth of creative community-based tourism and

integrated tourism initiatives specifically designed to bolster the local economy of Suphan Buri Province. These guidelines will leverage innovative social and economic initiatives, positioning community-based tourism as a central element in sustainable tourism development within the new societal norms.

## Research methodology

### Quantitative research design

The study population comprised 230,096 Thai tourists, as recorded by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports as of December 31, 2022, who were visiting Suphan Buri Province. Employing Taro Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1975) to ascertain a scientifically robust sample size, the study aimed for a confidence level of 95 % with a margin of error not exceeding 5 %. This calculation stipulated a sample size of 400 individuals. We employed probability sampling through a simple random sampling (SRS) method by drawing lots, ensuring that each participant had an equal opportunity for selection, thereby supporting the generalizability of the study findings within the defined parameters.

The research used a structured questionnaire divided into five distinct sections for data collection. The first section gathered demographic data on Thai tourists, including seven items. The second section, consisting of ten items, assessed Thai tourists' behavior in Suphan Buri Province during the New Normal. The third section, comprising fifty items, explored the potential of community-based tourist attraction management. The fourth section, with ten items, focused on the external environmental factors within Suphan Buri Province that influence tourist decision-making in the New Normal. The final section solicited additional suggestions from participants regarding the enhancement of creative community-based tourism and the integration of tourism models to support the local economy under the prevailing conditions of the New Normal. We designed this comprehensive approach to gather in-depth information on various aspects affecting tourism dynamics and potential improvement strategies in the province.

We thoroughly assessed the validation and reliability of the research instruments to ensure robustness in the data collection process:

#### 1) *Validity*

We rigorously evaluated the content validity of the initial questionnaire draft. The research team presented the questionnaire to three academic experts who verified the appropriateness of its language and relevance to the research objectives. These experts individually assessed each item on the questionnaire to ensure alignment with the intended outcomes and scored according to predetermined criteria. These scores were aggregated and analyzed to calculate the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). An IOC ranging between 0.50 and 1.00 indicated acceptable congruence, qualifying the item for inclusion in the final instrument. Items falling below this threshold were flagged for revision or removal to enhance the questionnaire's focus and clarity, following the standards set by Rovinelli and Hambleton (1977).

#### 2) *Reliability*

Before the main data collection phase, a preliminary questionnaire was administered with 30 participants to test its reliability. The analysis of this data utilized Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire (Cronbach, 1990). The resulting reliability coefficients varied from 0.814 to 0.896 across different questionnaire dimensions, categorizing them from acceptable to reasonable levels of reliability. Specifically, the dimensions of attraction, accessibility, facilities, activities, and services of tourist attractions demonstrated reliability scores of 0.853, 0.886, 0.814, 0.895, and 0.817, respectively. The external environment affecting the decision-making dimension showed an exceptionally high reliability at 0.896. These values, corroborated by Khunthongjan (2017), affirm that the questionnaire is a dependable tool for gathering data on the various facets of community-based tourism management.

Upon finalizing the questionnaire design, the research team collected data from 400 Thai tourists at various tourist attractions throughout Suphan Buri Province. They meticulously ensured the accuracy and completeness of each response before the quantitative data were recorded. The collected data were then analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to ensure robust statistical evaluation.

The data analysis was structured into several phases using SPSS. Initially, respondents' demographic data, such as gender, age, marital status, education level, occupation, salary, and hometown, were cataloged and analyzed through frequency distributions and percentage calculations to establish a demographic profile. Behavioral data concerning the tourist's travel patterns during the New Normal—encompassing travel purpose, transportation modes, group size, travel frequency, duration, expenses, activities engaged in, and incentives for choosing specific attractions—were similarly processed to derive frequency distributions and percentages.

We also assessed the potential of community-based tourist attraction management. This involved calculating mean scores and standard deviations to categorize the attractions' potential into five levels: highest potential (mean scores of 4.21-5.00), high potential (3.41-4.20), moderate potential (2.61-3.40), low potential (1.81-2.60), and lowest potential (1.00-1.80). A parallel analysis evaluated the impact of the external environment on tourist decision-making, categorizing responses on a Likert scale ranging from strong agreement to strong disagreement based on similar statistical thresholds. These comprehensive analyses provide nuanced insights into the current status and areas for improvement within the tourism sector in Suphan Buri Province during the New Normal.

### **Qualitative research design**

This study's qualitative research design focused on a specific group of key informants integral to creative community and integrated tourism to enhance the local economy. This group consisted of 100 individuals, including 30 Chief Executives or Mayors, 30 Deputy Chief Executives or Deputy Mayors, 30 Chief Administrators or Municipal Clerks, and 10 representatives from community leaders, reflecting a comprehensive spectrum of local governance and community leadership in Suphan Buri Province.

Data was collected using structured, in-depth interviews designed to gather nuanced insights into the informants' perspectives on community-based tourism. We chose the purposive sampling method to include participants directly involved in or affected by tourism initiatives, supplemented by voluntary random sampling to enhance the diversity of viewpoints. We thoroughly crafted the interview protocol into four sections: The first section captured the demographic characteristics of the informants, the second section explored their opinions on the internal and external environments affecting community-based tourism in the New Normal, the third section assessed their views on the potential for community-based tourism management, and the fourth section solicited additional suggestions for enhancing creative community-based tourism and integrated tourism models in Suphan Buri Province. This structured approach allowed participants to express their opinions comprehensively and provide in-depth information critical for formulating effective tourism development strategies.

Upon finalizing the interview form's design, the research team sent letters to 100 key informants during the data collection process. These individuals were strategically selected to provide diverse perspectives on the implementation and impact of community-based tourism initiatives within Suphan Buri Province.

Researchers analyzed the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews through content analysis, which involved the systematic coding and interpretation of textual data. This process enabled the research team to and synthesize key themes and patterns, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the existing challenges and opportunities within community-based tourism. Researchers then used the findings to develop actionable guidelines to enhance creative and integrated

tourism models that could effectively contribute to the local economy in the context of the New Normal. This analytical approach not only ensured the reliability of the data but also enhanced the applicability of the research outcomes to real-world settings.

## Research results

### The potential of fostering creative community-based tourism

The data analysis corresponding to the first objective, which investigated the potential of community-based tourism management for Thai tourists in Suphan Buri Province during the New Normal, yielded detailed demographic insights. It can be summarized as follows: The demographic composition of the sample consisted predominantly of female tourists, who accounted for 60.75 % (243 individuals) of respondents. The age distribution highlighted that the largest group, comprising 43.00 % (172 individuals), was within the 41-59 age range. Marital status revealed that a majority, 51.25 % (205 individuals), were married. Concerning educational attainment, 40.25 % (161 individuals) had completed primary education. Regarding occupation, business owners and traders were notable, making up 29.25 % (117 individuals) of the sample. Regarding income, a substantial majority, 68.00 % (272 individuals), reported earning less than 15,000 baht monthly. Geographically, nearly half of the tourists, 49.00 % (196 individuals), originated from the western region of Thailand, indicating regional preferences and travel patterns within the country during the New Normal.

The analysis of travel behavior among Thai tourists visiting Suphan Buri Province highlights several key trends and preferences: 53.00 % (212 individuals) of tourists visit primarily for relaxation or leisure. The preferred mode of transportation is personal cars, utilized by 84.25 % (337 individuals), and the majority, 94.25 % (377 tourists), travel in small groups ranging from 1 to 5 people. Travel peaks during public holidays or weekends, with 60.75 % (243 tourists) choosing these periods for their trips. Frequency of travel shows that 49.50 % (198 tourists) visit 1 - 2 times per year, and 35.75 % (143 tourists) opt for day trips. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram, are the main sources of tourism information for 57.00 % (228 tourists). Regarding expenditures, 76.25 % (305 tourists) spend under 5,000 baht per trip. Popular activities include making merit or participating in religious activities, favored by 327 tourists, and visiting ancient sites to engage with local traditions and culture, attracting 185 individuals. The primary attractions that draw tourists to the region are its natural beauty, traditional practices, arts, culture, and way of life, collectively influencing 340 tourists.

The study assessing the potential of community-based tourism management in Suphan Buri Province during the New Normal found that participants consistently rated the overall potential as high across various dimensions. These dimensions included accessibility, attractions, facilities, services, and activities associated with tourist attractions in the region. Evaluators assessed each aspect and found a high level of potential to support and enhance community-based tourism. The detailed findings of this evaluation are comprehensively summarized in Table 1, which provides a clear breakdown of the ratings for each dimension.

**Table 1** Mean and standard deviation of the overall potential of community- based tourism management (n = 400).

The potential of community-based tourism management	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank
1. Attraction dimension	3.95	0.664	High	2
2. Accessibility dimension	4.06	0.711	High	1
3. Facilities dimension	3.88	0.731	High	3
4. Tourism activities dimension	3.55	0.824	High	5
5. Services of tourist attractions dimension	3.77	0.783	High	4

The potential of community-based tourism management	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Interpretation	Rank
Overall	3.84	0.743	High	

### **Tourism activity model for enhanced tourism experiences**

We successfully developed a tourism activity model and creative tourism routes with integrated tourism to enhance tourism in the New Normal. The research team summarized the data analysis results from Objective 1, incorporating quantitative data and information from documents, articles, research, and online media. We used this comprehensive analysis to develop a model for organizing activities and routes for creative and integrated tourism. Five routes are detailed as follows:

#### ***Route 1: Exploring nature and immersing oneself in the local community's way of life***

Route 1 offers a 3-night, 4-day immersive experience in Suphan Buri, titled "Exploring Nature and Immersing Oneself in the Local Community's Way of Life." These itinerary highlights community-based tourism opportunities, enabling visitors to engage with the villagers' authentic lifestyles and appreciate the region's unique cultural heritage. The journey includes ten strategically chosen check-in points: Ban Laem Community in Bang Pla Ma District, where tourists can experience traditional Thai life and historical charm; Na Hia Chai, a center dedicated to Thai farmers' lifestyle and agricultural tourism in Mueang Suphan Buri District; Ban Wang Hora Ecotourism Community in Ong Phra Subdistrict, Dan Chang District, emphasizing ecotourism; and Thai Buffalo Conservation Village in Wang Nam Sap Subdistrict, Si Prachan District, focusing on buffalo conservation. Other stops include Somwang Ban Wang Yang Community in Wang Yang Subdistrict, known for water chestnut digging; Dong Yen Agroforestry Enterprise Group in U Thong Subdistrict, U Thong District, specializing in agroforestry; and Dvaravati U Thong Ancient City Community, an important archaeological site located on the west side of the Sam Phan Crocodile River in U Thong District. The itinerary also features Ban Tamnan Din Community Enterprise in U Thong Subdistrict, offering unique local experiences; Ban Ton Chaeng Phatthana Community, where tourists can learn about handmade inhalants and herbal balms; and Phu Hang Nak Natural Stone Garden in U Thong District, a notable natural attraction. This route provides a comprehensive and enriching experience, combining cultural education with environmental appreciation.

#### ***Route 2: Walking around the old market, seeing a bird's-eye view, and exploring the underwater world***

Route 2 provides a captivating 1-day trip in Suphan Buri, titled "Walking around the Old Market, Seeing a Bird's-Eye View, and Exploring the Underwater World." This itinerary includes ten distinct check-in points that highlight the historical and cultural richness of the province. Starting at Bang Li Market or Song Phi Nong Market along the Song Phi Nong Canal in Song Phi Nong District, the route proceeds to Kao Hong 100 Year Market, an old wooden house market along the Tha Chin River in Bang Pla Ma District. The next stop is Pho Phraya Market in Pho Phraya Subdistrict, followed by Pratu San Walking Street, a contemporary pedestrian street in an old community near Wat Pratu San in Mueang Suphan Buri District. Visitors then explore the Dragon Descendants Museum in Heavenly Dragon Park at the Suphan Buri City Pillar Shrine, followed by a visit to the iconic Banharn-Jamsai Tower in Chaloem Phattharachini Park. The route continues to Old Sri Prachan Market, Ban Chao Khun, along the Tha Chin River in Si Prachan District, and Sam Chuk Market, an ancient market over 100 years old, in Sam Chuk District. Tha Chang Market in Khao Phra Subdistrict and Bueng Chawak Chaloem Phrakiat Aquarium, located by a large natural pond in Pak Nam Subdistrict, Doem Bang Nang Buat District, round out this engaging and diverse day of exploration, offering tourists a comprehensive experience of Suphan Buri's markets, historical sites, and natural attractions.

***Route 3: Pay homage to Suphan Buri Buddha images to enhance good fortune***

Route 3 is a spiritually enriching 1-day trip in Suphan Buri, titled “Pay Homage to Suphan Buri Buddha Images to Enhance Good Fortune.” This itinerary is perfect for tourists visiting historical temples and seeking blessings. The route features ten significant check-in points throughout Suphan Buri Province, each offering a unique spiritual experience. The journey begins at Wat Phai Rong Wua in Bang Ta Thera Subdistrict, Song Phi Nong District, followed by Wat An, an ancient temple dating back to the late U-Thong or early Ayutthaya period in Bang Yai Subdistrict, Bang Pla Ma District. Next, tourists visit Wat Noi (Luang Por Niam), a century-old temple along the Tha Chin River in Khok Kram Subdistrict, Bang Pla Ma District, and Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat, a 600-year-old landmark on Sompharakong Road in Rua Yai Subdistrict, Mueang Suphan Buri District. The spiritual journey continues to Wat Phra Loi along the Tha Chin River in Rua Yai Subdistrict and Wat Phra Non, an ancient temple from the U Thong period in Wihar Daeng Subdistrict, Mueang Suphan Buri District. Additional stops include Wat Wihan Daeng on the Tha Chin River in Wihan Daeng Subdistrict, Mueang Suphan Buri District, Wat Sampa Siw in Sanam Chai Subdistrict, Mueang Suphan Buri District, Wat Khao Tham Thiam in U Thong Subdistrict, U Thong District, and concludes at Wat Lat Sing in Ban Sa Subdistrict, Sam Chuk District. This carefully curated route provides a comprehensive and profound exploration of Suphan Buri’s rich religious heritage.

***Route 4: Mu Telu for enhancing luck***

Route 4 offers a spiritually enriching 1-day trip in Suphan Buri, “Mu Telu for Enhancing Luck.” This journey is ideal for those seeking blessings and an improvement in fortune, featuring ten significant spiritual destinations throughout the province. The itinerary begins at Phra Ruesi Park (Por Phu Ruesi Narot Dhamma Practice Center) at Payak Banphot Monastery in Nong Ong Subdistrict, U Thong District. The second stop is Wat Derm Bang along the Tha Chin River in Doem Bang Subdistrict, Doem Bang Nang Buat District, followed by Therapalai Temple in Wang Nam Sap Subdistrict, Si Prachan District, and Wat Nong Phian in Bang Ngam Subdistrict, Si Prachan District. The route then proceeds to Wat Phang Muang in Si Prachan Subdistrict, Si Prachan District, and Wat Khae, an ancient temple renowned in Khun Chang Khun Phaen literature, located on Somphakong Road in Rua Yai Subdistrict, Mueang Suphan Buri District. The seventh stop is the Suphan Buri City Pillar Shrine within Heavenly Dragon Park, followed by Wat Khan Thot in Tha Rahat Subdistrict, Mueang Suphan Buri District. The penultimate destination is Wat Sukkasem, an ancient temple in Makham Lom Subdistrict, Bang Pla Ma District, and the journey concludes at Wat Thap Kradan in Bo Suphan Subdistrict, Song Phi Nong District. This carefully curated route comprehensively explores Suphan Buri’s spiritual heritage, providing opportunities for reflection and blessings.

***Route 5: Invites you to sit and chill, look at beautiful views, and enjoy a great atmosphere***

Route 5 offers a delightful 1-day trip in Suphan Buri, titled “Invites You to Sit and Chill, Look at Beautiful Views, and Enjoy a Great Atmosphere.” This itinerary is perfect for tourists seeking serene settings, stunning views, and a relaxing atmosphere ideal for photography and unwinding. Suphan Buri boasts various cafes in picturesque locations such as rice fields, natural gardens, and riverbanks, providing tranquil environments for visitors to relax and rejuvenate. The route includes ten charming check-in points: Baan Rimna Cafe near Wat Phai Rong Wua in Bang Ta Thera Subdistrict, Song Phi Nong District; Kajee Cafe and Hostel in Song Phi Nong Subdistrict, Song Phi Nong District; Double P Home Cafe in Taka Subdistrict, Bang Pla Ma District; The Riverside Cafe in Bang Pla Ma Subdistrict, Bang Pla Ma District; Term Coffee Shop in Tha Rahat Subdistrict, Mueang Suphan Buri District; The Mill’s Cafe in Tha Phi Phi Subdistrict, Mueang Suphan Buri District; Lamhom Cafe at Muaan Resort in Wihan Daeng Subdistrict, Mueang Suphan Buri District; A Live Cafe and Gallery in U Thong Subdistrict, U Thong District; Tree of Us in U Thong Subdistrict, U Thong District; and



De'coffee River House in Dan Chang Subdistrict, Dan Chang District. Each location offers a unique blend of natural beauty and a relaxed ambiance, making this route an ideal choice for those looking to enjoy the scenic charm of Suphan Buri.

### **Guidelines to facilitate the growth of creative community-based tourism**

The integrative tourism model begins with exploring local identity and extends into creative Thai tourism along designated travel routes. This model emphasizes immersive experiences at living historical sites through diverse tourism activities, aligning with current tourist trends and preferences, including food, cultural and community-based tourism. Tourists engage deeply with these sites, benefiting from educational insights and the aesthetic appeal of the attractions. The integrative approach promotes unique travel experiences on social media platforms, enhancing accessibility and convenience for tourists. Local festivals and traditional activities that highlight the uniqueness of Thai tourism are prominently featured. Tourists participate in local cooking activities, preparing savory and sweet dishes alongside local experts, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the local culture and culinary traditions.

Key activities within this model include:

1) Dressing in Thai Costume: Tourists visit ancient sites and participate in traditional festivals while dressed in historical Thai attire. This interactive experience includes learning how to wear traditional garments and engaging in activities such as temple visits, offering alms to monks, and celebrating the Songkran festival. This activity is popular among tourists, who enjoy capturing and sharing their experiences on social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Line, and Twitter.

2) Dessert-Making and Story-Learning: This hands-on activity allows tourists to make ancient Thai desserts while learning about their legendary origins. Participants use locally sourced ingredients to create and decorate these desserts, immersing themselves in traditional Thai scents and flavors.

3) Cooking Local Food from Non-Toxic Ingredients: Tourists learn to prepare authentic Thai cuisine using non-toxic, locally sourced ingredients. The activity covers the entire process, from sourcing raw materials to following traditional recipes and cooking the dishes, culminating in beautifully arranged meals that enhance their visual and sensory appeal. This experience engages all five senses—taste, smell, sight, sound, and touch—enabling tourists to appreciate the cultural significance of Thai food from past to present.

These activities provide significant value to tourists and enhance the experience for local hosts or instructors. Designing tourism activities that cater to tourist preferences creates a competitive advantage for communities, ensuring that tourists are impressed and happy and find their experiences worthwhile. This satisfaction stems from storytelling presented through innovative marketing models, supported by collaborations with new-generation tour operators or guides involved in social businesses. This approach raises awareness and sets clear expectations for tourists, contributing to an enriching and memorable tourism experience.

### **Discussion**

The first objective of studying the potential of fostering creative community-based tourism in Suphan Buri Province for tourism enhancement in the New Normal revealed a high overall potential for community-based tourism management. Each component—accessibility, attractions, facilities,

services, and activities—was consistently rated high. This aligns with Pike's (2008) framework, which outlines six essential characteristics of tourist destinations (6A's): available packages, accessibility, attractions, amenities, activities, and ancillary services. Furthermore, Kotler (2003) highlighted the importance of addressing physical landscapes and environments in community-based tourism marketing, ensuring the availability of tangible amenities such as parking spaces, accommodations, homestays, restaurants, restrooms, trash bins, signposts, and maps to enhance convenience for tourists.

In line with the study by Kanjanaratana and Pookaiyaudom (2020), which examined the tourism components influencing the interest in nostalgia tourism among Thai tourists residing in Bangkok, the research findings indicated that the overall agreement was high. We observed a high level of agreement in tourist attractions, tourist attraction facilities, access to tourist attractions, and activities. Similarly, in line with the study by Kupkitaphun and Bunjongmanee (2020), which explored guidelines for developing health tourism components for European tourists in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, the research findings revealed that the overall health tourism components were at a high level. Specifically, these high levels were observed in access to tourist attractions, facilities, tourist services, accommodation, attractiveness, and activities. By fostering these aspects, creative community-based tourism can significantly contribute to Suphan Buri Province's sustainable development and enrichment, in the context of the New Normal.

The second objective of creating a tourism activity model and integrating creative tourism routes to enhance tourism in Suphan Buri Province during the New Normal has led to the development of five distinct tourism routes to promote the local economy through innovative social and economic initiatives. The first route, "Nature Study and Community Way of Life Learning," offers community tourism experiences where visitors immerse themselves in the local way of life, with small communities opening up as educational tourist attractions. The second route, "Ancient Market Route for Observing a Bird's-Eye View and Exploring the Underwater World," features visits to historic markets where tourists can select from various markets and engage in unique experiences like bird's-eye views and underwater explorations.

The third route, "Paying Homage to Suphan Buri Buddha Statues to Enhance Good Fortune," caters to spiritual tourists who aspire to visit renowned temples and earn merit. This route is particularly suitable for those seeking blessings in a single day. The fourth route, "Limu Teluh Route for Blessings and Good Luck," includes destinations known for enhancing luck in various aspects of life, such as career, finances, health, and fortune. The fifth and final route, "Relaxation Route for Enjoying Beautiful Scenery and a Wonderful Atmosphere," focuses on the numerous picturesque cafés in Suphan Buri, offering serene environments ideal for relaxation and rejuvenation, whether by rice fields, in gardens, or along riverbanks.

This comprehensive approach aligns with the findings of Thanawachiranun et al. (2020), who stated that planning tourism routes must consider the objectives of route development, ensuring that each route efficiently connects significant locations and various tourist attractions. The planning must mutually benefit all parties involved, including tourists, local communities, and those responsible for the operations. We must carefully consider both the positive and negative impacts and the appropriateness of determining the tourism routes. In addition, route planning might be organized into multiple routes or systems within the city to offer alternatives for tourists with limited time or varying interests. Effective route management for tourism should guide and control travel routes and patterns to prevent confusion. It should also provide comprehensive information along the route, regularly disseminated to tourists. This information could include brochures detailing interesting tourist attractions, accommodations, restaurants, various activities, and essential facilities such as parking, lodging, restrooms, trash cans, etc.

Similarly, Klinmuenwai's (2018) study on the tourism potential of Nakrow Sub-district Municipality in Mae Tha District, Lampang Province, identified a high potential in community-based management across six elements: attractions, accessibility, facilities, accommodations, activities, and

value-added services. The study also developed a cultural and historical tourism program and a training program for local guides, emphasizing the importance of cultural and historical tourism routes and learning about the community's way of life. This model can serve as an effective blueprint for Suphan Buri Province, ensuring that tourists have enriching and memorable experiences while supporting the sustainable development of the local economy.

The third objective of proposing guidelines for fostering creative community-based tourism and integrated tourism in Suphan Buri Province under innovative social and economic initiatives for the New Normal led to the development of integrated tourism models. Local identity and creative Thai tourism form the foundation of these models, emphasizing diverse tourism activities that offer immersive learning experiences at historical sites. Popular activities include gastronomy tourism, cultural tourism, and community-based tourism, which meet the current preferences of tourists and offer unique and engaging experiences. These activities promote the local culture and environment, leveraging social media for a wider reach. Key activities such as dressing in traditional Thai clothing, making traditional Thai desserts, and cooking local food with non-toxic ingredients provide tourists hands-on experiences that engage all five senses, fostering a deeper appreciation of the local culture and culinary traditions.

This approach aligns with the findings of Strydom et al. (2019), who emphasized the need for government and private sector collaboration, community participation, infrastructure support, and continuous marketing for sustainable community-based tourism. Additionally, recognizing and publicizing successful tourism management within communities can attract more tourists and strengthen relationships between visitors and locals. The Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (2018), classifies creative tourism into categories such as cultural heritage, art, way of life, media, and customer-responsive products and services. Nawatnatee et al. (2020) studied integrating tourism patterns based on local identity to creative-Thainess tourism in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province. The results indicated that integrating tourism patterns based on local identity into creative-Thainess tourism involves designing activities that allow tourists to engage with living history through creative storytelling and sensory learning. These activities include: 1) dessert-making as part of the living history of Thao Thong Keep Mah, 2) cooking local dishes using organic, toxic-free ingredients, and 3) wearing traditional Thai clothing while visiting ancient sites and participating in local festivals and traditions. These activities provide the highest value to tourists while enhancing local wisdom for its owners. Tourists will gain the most benefit from these experiences, leaving them impressed and feeling that the trip was worthwhile. We will promote these tourism offerings through innovative marketing strategies, in collaboration with new start-up tourism businesses that operate with a social mission. We designed this tourism model to foster a positive perception among tourists and effectively promote long-term sustainability. By integrating these comprehensive strategies, creative community-based tourism in Suphan Buri Province can significantly contribute to the local economy, offering distinctive experiences that resonate with modern tourists.

## **Suggestions**

### **Policy recommendation**

Based on the fieldwork conducted, we recommend that local-level responsible agencies conduct comprehensive surveys to assess the needs and readiness of communities for developing integrated tourism routes across various models. This assessment should thoroughly investigate community requirements, preparedness, and willingness to participate in collaborative local development aimed at transforming these areas into sustainable tourism destinations. Such an approach ensures that each community not only serves as the primary host and maintainer of these tourism initiatives but also benefits directly from increased income generated by tourism. We can significantly enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of tourism projects by empowering local communities to

take ownership and actively engage in the development process, leading to long-term economic and social benefits for the region.

### **Academic recommendation**

Fieldwork indicates that community members often need more essential skills in tourist services, which highlights the critical role that educational institutions should play in addressing this gap. These institutions should actively promote relevant knowledge and expertise by organizing targeted training sessions designed to enhance communication skills for public relations and improve customer service skills to better cater to tourists. Additionally, training programs should be extended to local personnel, including the elderly and youth, to develop them as storytellers who can effectively share knowledge about local history, indigenous wisdom, and the community's heritage. By equipping community members with these skills, educational institutions can foster a deeper connection between tourists and the local culture, enriching the tourism experience and supporting sustainable community development. This holistic approach ensures that communities are well-prepared to engage with tourists meaningfully, promoting cultural preservation and economic growth.

### **Management recommendation**

Fieldwork has revealed a significant need for more community participation in tourism activities, highlighting the need for government agencies and private sectors to encourage and stimulate involvement across all age groups actively. This collective engagement is crucial for effective management and service provision to tourists, ensuring that the community benefits economically and socially. Additionally, sustainable tourism marketing and public relations efforts should prioritize enhancing the quality of tourist experiences by promoting responsible tourism that upholds ethical values. This includes encouraging the conservation and preservation of tourist sites while maintaining the authenticity of the local way of life. By focusing on sustainable practices, tourism can be developed to benefit both the community and visitors, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship that supports long-term sustainability.

### **Future research recommendation**

Future research should include a comprehensive analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) before developing integrated tourism routes in various forms. This analysis is crucial for assessing the benefits, cost-effectiveness, and potential negative impacts on the community, ensuring that the tourism route is viable and sustainable. Additionally, it is important to consider the starting points of these integrated tourism routes, considering the travel plans of individual tourists, small groups, and organized tour groups. Differences in travel plans can significantly influence the determination of the most cost-effective and efficient routes. By accounting for these variations, future research can develop tailored tourism strategies that maximize benefits and minimize costs and disruptions to the local community.

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