

Guidelines for Promoting Passenger Tourism at Secondary City Airports in Thailand*

Waraphon Klinsreesuk¹, Jakkawat Laphet², Panida Rakklin³ and Tapsatit Gooncockkord⁴

Burapha University, Thailand^{1,4}

Sripatum University, Thailand^{2,3}

Corresponding Author, E-mail: waraphon.kl@go.buu.ac.th

Abstract

The article 'Guidelines for Promoting Passenger Tourism at Secondary City Airports in Thailand' has the following objectives: to study guidelines for promoting tourism in secondary cities in Thailand from various perspectives. It is found that tourism serves as a significant contributor to Thailand's economy, accounting for 10-20 percent of the GDP, with a notable share of approximately 3 trillion baht predominantly sourced from foreign tourists. However, this income is largely concentrated in a select few primary cities, fostering spatial inequality across only 15 provinces including Bangkok, Chonburi, Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Surat Thani. These cities collectively generate 88 percent of the total tourism revenue. Despite this concentration, the presence of over 55 secondary cities and 21 airports overseen by the Department of Airports, Ministry of Transport, offers potential for wider distribution of tourism-related income.

The airports include: Northern region: Nan Nakhon Airport, Pai Airport, Phitsanulok Airport, Phetchabun Airport, Phrae Airport, Mae Sot Airport, Mae Hong Son Airport, Lampang Airport, Northeastern region: Nakhon Phanom Airport, Buriram Airport, Roi Et Airport, Udon Thani Airport, Ubon Ratchathani Airport, Sakon Nakhon Airport, Loei Airport, Southern region: Chumphon Airport, Trang Airport, Nakhon Si Thammarat Airport, Narathiwat Airport, Ranong Airport, Betong Airport, Yala Province These airports cater to a substantial number of travelers annually. In 2022, passenger numbers surpassed 9,735,881, demonstrating a

*ได้รับบทความ: 16 พฤศจิกายน 2566; แก้ไขบทความ: 21 กุมภาพันธ์ 2567; ตอรับตีพิมพ์: 29 กุมภาพันธ์ 2567

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growing trend, further reinforced by a significant increase to over 5,924,591 passengers during the first five months of 2023. This escalating trend is expected to yield substantial economic implications. The Department of Airports has outlined plans for continual airport development spanning 2025-2027, signifying imminent transformation and contributing significantly to tourism promotion efforts in Thailand. The results of the study identified three key travel trends: Cultural Tourism, Natural Tourism, and Health Tourism. They highlight the significant role of secondary city airports in facilitating convenient travel, particularly within provinces possessing their own airports.

Keywords: Tourism Promotion; Secondary City Tourism; Secondary City Airport

1. Introduction

Thailand's tourism industry is diverse and sustainable, offering unique experiences that highlight the country's culture, traditions, and wisdom. This cultural aspect is highly valued by Thai tourists. The government and private sector are promoting tourism among Thais, especially in secondary cities, to generate community-based income. As a result, revenue from tourism in secondary cities increased by 24.91% in 2021, exceeding 2020 levels.

The analysis of the revenue distribution from tourism in secondary cities since 2018 reveals an average proportion of 16.3 percent, indicating the need for further stimulus and encouragement to

attract more tourism to these areas.

The objective is to achieve a revenue ratio where 80 percent comes from tourism in main cities and 20 percent from secondary cities. Moreover, Thailand must prioritize the promotion and continuous development of tourism in secondary cities, along with the implementation of specific measures to ensure safe tourism practices during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (Master Plan under the National Strategy, 2022).

Furthermore, air travel is gaining popularity for tourists, particularly for visiting secondary cities. Research indicates the presence of 21 secondary airports in 55 provinces across Thailand, based on Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT).

**Table 1** In 55 secondary cities in Thailand

Regions	Numbers of Provinces	Provinces
North	16	Chiang Rai, Phitsanulok, Tak, Phetchabun, Nakhon Sawan, Sukhothai, Lamphun, Uttaradit, Lampang, Mae Hong Son, Phichit, Phrae, Nan, Kamphaeng Phet, Uthai Thani, and Phayao
Northeast	18	Udon Thani, Ubon Ratchathani, Nong Khai, Loei, Mukdahan, Buriram, Chaiyaphum, Sisaket, Surin, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Bueng Kan, Kalasin, Yasothon, Nong Bua Lamphu, and Amnat Charoen
South	9	Nakhon Si Thammarat, Phatthalung, Trang, Satun, Chumphon, Ranong, Narathiwat, Yala, and Pattani.
Central and East	12	Lopburi, Suphan Buri, Nakhon Nayok, Sa Kaeo, Trat, Chanthaburi, Ratchaburi, Samut Songkhram, Phetchaburi, Chai Nat, Ang Thong, and Sing Buri

Tourism significantly contributes to Thailand's GDP, accounting for more than 10-20 percent, amounting to over 3 trillion baht, with the majority concentrated in the country's major cities, representing 88 percent of the total tourism income. Therefore, promoting tourism in secondary cities is crucial, as it helps alleviate the burden of high tourist density. Redirecting income to secondary urban areas is especially important, considering that a substantial portion of

tourists, especially foreign visitors, utilize services from various secondary city airports. According to the Airports of Thailand (2022), the number of tourists traveling domestically using Thailand's secondary airports has exceeded 13,328,844 (Department of Airports, 2023). Moving forward, it is imperative for the government and private sectors to continue their collaborative efforts in supporting the influx of tourists post the COVID-19 crisis.



2. Tourism Promotion in Thailand from Government

Thailand's Tourism Authority (TAT) prioritizes preserving its renowned tourist spots and enhancing its overall tourism system. The emphasis lies in attracting high-quality visitors, achieved through diversifying its tourism services to accommodate diverse traveler preferences. The strategy involves nurturing emerging tourism destinations while safeguarding the country's cultural heritage, traditions, and distinct Thai identity. Additionally, there is a concerted effort to highlight the importance of conserving the environment and natural resources.

At the operational level, the objectives include: (1) boosting tourism's contribution to Thailand's gross domestic product (GDP), (2) amplifying tourism earnings in secondary cities, and (3) bolstering Thailand's tourism sector's overall competitiveness. These endeavors are crucial in bolstering the national strategy for cultivating competitive capabilities. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic since December 2019 has severely impacted global tourism. Ongoing

constraints on international travel have resulted in a significant decrease in the number of foreign tourists visiting Thailand, marking the most substantial decline in over a decade. Despite vaccination initiatives, effectively controlling the highly transmissible and mutating virus remains a significant challenge.

Data from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports reveals a significant 98 percent decrease in international tourist arrivals in Thailand for 2022, with only 11,065,226 tourists compared to 28,150,061 in 2023 (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2023) (accumulated numbers from January to October 2020). In response, the government has launched several initiatives to encourage tourists to explore secondary cities. These initiatives include projects like 'Amazing Thailand,' 'We Travel Together,' 'Half-Half,' 'Thai Tourism Year 2023,' and 'Visit Thailand Year 2023: Amazing New Chapters.' Additionally, there are plans for a 10,000 baht digital money project aimed at stimulating the national economy.

The government has notably extended strong support to various tourist attractions in the northern region.

**Table 2** Tourist Attractions in Secondary Cities in Norten Region in Thailand

Provinces	Tourist Attractions
Chiang Rai	Phu Chi Fa, Doi Mae Salong, Wat Rong Khun, and the Golden Triangle
Nan	Wat Phumin, Gardenia TurgidaRoxb, Wat Prang, Doi Samer Dao, Pha Chu, Doi Phukha National Park, Wat Phra That BengSamkat, Wat Phuket, Wat Phra That Khao Noi, Bo KlueaSinthao, Khun Nan National Park
Phayao	Pangkha Royal Project Development Center, Pho Khun Ngam Mueang Monument, Doi Phu Nang National Park, PhuLangka Forest Park
Phrae	Wat Phra That Cho Hae, Wat Phra That Chom Chaeng, Phra That Doi Leng, etc.
Mae Hong Son	Wat Phra That Doi Kong Mu, Wat Chong Kham - Wat Chong Klang, Pang Ung, ThamPla National Park - NamtokPhaSuea, Ban Nam Phiang Din, Su Tong Pae Bridge, Ban Rak Thai, Doi Mae U lotus field. Neck, Mae Surin Waterfall National Park
Lampang	Wat Phra That Lampang Luang, Ratsadaphisek Bridge or White Bridge, Chae Son National Park
Phitsanulok	Lam Nam Khek, Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat Woramahawihan, Wat Nang Phaya, Chat Trakan Waterfall National Park
Sukhothai	Sukhothai Historical Park, Khao Luang, Tham Chao Ram

According to Table 2, even though the northern region has several Provinces without airports, travel is still convenient in many parts of the country, including major cities in Thailand.

Moreover, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has adopted the 'Value Over

Volume' strategy, prioritizing quality over quantity, thereby reshaping the domestic market's perception of travel within the country. This strategy aims to redefine Thailand's narrative by highlighting its unique Soft Power (5F) attributes and introducing a range of diverse and innovative



experiences. Emphasizing collaboration with stakeholders, entrepreneurs, and the general public, the initiative aims to encourage both Thai residents and international tourists to discover the country. Noteworthy projects aimed at stimulating tourism include the '365 Days of Miraculous Thailand,' 'Only 100 Project,' 'Travel and Get a Job,' 'Vijit Thailand 2023 Project,' 'Amazing Thailand Festival Experience 2023 Project,' and the 'Thailand Tourism Promotion Fair Project.'

3. Tourism Promotion in Thailand from Private Sectors

In 2023, the tourism sector in Thailand has experienced a notable resurgence, with concerted efforts from both government agencies and private enterprises to revive tourism. The private sector, especially in the hotel industry, is actively preparing to welcome tourists from various parts of the world following the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Each hotel has developed strategies to ensure a strong comeback of tourists, particularly from overseas, aiming for a more robust recovery compared to previous years. This includes an increase in visitors from Asian and Middle Eastern regions, as well as a rising number of European tourists

attending conferences and seminars organized by governmental and international bodies. The relaxation of public health regulations and disease control measures has significantly contributed to the surge in tourist arrivals.

Furthermore, the private sector has made comprehensive preparations for the full resumption of hotel and accommodation services in 2023, as reported by Kasikron Research. Division of TMBThanachart Bank PCL. Analysis suggests that the projected hotel business revenue for 2023 is expected to reach its pre-COVID-19 peak, estimated at 310 billion baht, signifying an 11% increase from the 2019 figures. Notably, the reopening of the country has been pivotal in driving a 45% year-on-year revenue increase, particularly within the major hotel chains segment. These large-scale enterprises have observed a surge in revenue from associated services, including food and beverage sales, as well as other auxiliary revenue from Mixed-Use Hotels. Consequently, the recovery rate for large hotel chains has surpassed that of medium and small-scale establishments. Projections for 2023 indicate that the revenue share for large hotels will increase to 59% from the previous 55% share of the



total revenue. (TTB Analytics, 2023)

The expansion within the hospitality sector has also prompted airlines to introduce new flight routes, particularly focusing on cost-effective travel options, leading to a significant rise in both flight frequency and the volume of travelers. This collaboration between the private sector and the government is a crucial element in revitalizing tourism in Thailand and rejuvenating the vibrancy of the sector following the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Tourism in Secondary Cities in Thailand

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and the Domestic Marketing Administration have devised an extensive campaign plan to foster a vibrant travel culture within Thailand, notably through the 'Amazing Secondary City Project - Must Try, Must Love.' This initiative is geared towards revitalizing the secondary city tourism market and enticing the younger generation to explore the 55 provinces across the country. By redistributing income from major cities to secondary urban centers, the project aims to promote sustainable economic growth and elevate

the status of tourism in these regions, transforming it into a compelling trend that stimulates interest and encourages more domestic travel throughout 2023.

The TAT's emphasis lies in preserving these areas as dynamic tourism destinations by curating experiences that showcase the richness of cultural traditions, Thai identity, and local heritage. Through innovative storytelling methods, the initiative seeks to add value and foster a deeper understanding of local identity, thereby enhancing the overall tourism experience. The 'Amazing Secondary City Project - Must Try, Must Love' intends to stimulate domestic tourism among Thai travelers and redirect tourist flow to secondary cities. It strives to highlight the untapped potential of these regions through various initiatives, including unique travel experiences that accentuate the natural beauty, cultural abundance, and lesser-known tourist attractions across the 55 provinces.

This campaign aims to raise awareness about tourism in secondary cities, drive the distribution of tourist traffic, and bolster income generation within these regions, aligning with the government's efforts to revitalize the tourism industry, which has been adversely affected by the



recent COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the TAT has garnered support from various collaborative groups and online travel media platforms, such as The Sneakout Escape, which offers insightful content on sample travel itineraries to inspire and motivate Thai tourists to explore beyond the main cities and discover the charm of secondary urban centers. This collective endeavor is aimed at encouraging increased domestic

tourism throughout 2023 (MGR, 2023).

5. Service Usages at Secondary Airports in Thailand

Previous studies have identified 25 secondary airports spread across 55 provinces in Thailand, with 21 of these airports falling under the Department of Airports, Ministry of Transport. The airports are distributed as follows:

Table 3 Secondary cities airports in each region of Thailand

Regions	Numbers of Airports	Airports
North	8	Nan Nakhon Airport, Pai Airport, Phitsanulok Airport, Phetchabun Airport, Phrae Airport, Mae Sot Airport, Mae Hong Son Airport, and Lampang Airport
Northeast	7	Nakhon Phanom Airport, Buriram Airport, Roi Et Airport, Udon Thani Airport, UbonRatchathani Airport, Sakon Nakhon Airport, and Loei Airport
South	6	Chumphon Airport, Trang Airport, Nakhon Si Thammarat Airport, Narathiwat Airport, Ranong Airport, and Betong Airport in Yala Province

These airports primarily serve secondary cities, with ongoing efforts for expansion and enhancement in accordance with the plans of the Department of Airports (Laphet, 2023).

An analysis conducted by the Authority of Airport (2023) for the Airport Action Plan, Phase 2 (2023-2027), utilizing the SWOT Analysis framework, identified the following key insights:



Strengths: The Department's strengths lie in its expertise in airport standards, a network of airports spanning all regions, and the facilitation of travel connectivity. Notable strengths include an infrastructure project plan aligned with the national strategy, a competent workforce with specialized knowledge, and well-equipped airports meeting international safety standards.

Weaknesses: Challenges include coordination issues between the central office and airports, potential personnel instability, and unclear performance structures, resulting in underutilization of resources, particularly in small and medium-sized airports. Inadequate planning for the development of these airports further impedes their growth and operational efficiency.

Opportunities: The agency can benefit from government policies supporting network development, the ASEAN Community integration, and emerging tourism trends. Competition among low-cost airlines and government initiatives promoting air travel and tourism present favorable prospects. Incorporating digital technology can streamline operations and enhance efficiency.

Threats: Challenges involve incomplete comprehensive airport development across all regions, inflexible budget management, and potential delays due to regulations, economic fluctuations, and political factors. Competing priorities in transportation infrastructure development and the dynamic global situation necessitate agile strategies for effective budget management and airport standardization.

By addressing these factors and capitalizing on opportunities, the Department of Airports can strengthen its infrastructure and services, facilitating a robust and sustainable air travel ecosystem across the secondary cities in Thailand.

6. Secondary Cities Tourism Trends in the Future

The COVID-19 resilience, the Tourism Authority of Thailand introduced the "Thailand Tourism Year 2023" and "Visit Thailand Year 2023: Amazing New Chapters" projects, reiterating its commitment to showcasing the essence of Thai tourism through Soft Power and experiential travel. These initiatives are aimed at strengthening the tourism supply chain, establishing sustainability standards, and encouraging collective participation from all sectors to



promote a hospitable culture. The revenue target set for 2023 is 2.38 trillion baht.

In 2022, Thailand experienced a positive trend with 11.8 million foreign tourists and 189 million domestic tourists (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2023) Surpassing the expected targets. This resurgence in tourism underscores a promising trajectory for the industry's recovery. As Thailand aims to fully restore its tourism sector in 2023, the Tourism Authority of Thailand is dedicated to reviving the economy through a comprehensive tourism strategy. Key promotional efforts include the "Thai Tourism Year 2023" campaign targeting the domestic market and the "Visit Thailand Year 2023: Amazing New Chapters."

Forecasting the future, the tourism industry will undergo a significant transformation, placing greater emphasis on sustainable and high-value tourism, while also bolstering its supply chain to accommodate experiential tourism. This approach involves presenting tourism products and services centered around Soft Power attributes such as (5F: Food, Festival, Film, Fight, and Fashion), with a strong focus on sustainability standards. These efforts aim to provide an exceptional travel experience and foster

Meaningful Travel, positioning Thailand as a destination that embodies rich cultural values and significance. Key principles include Jai Rak-Sam Nuk Dee, signifying a commitment to community well-being and environmental conservation, a dedication to delivering quality tourism products and services, and a heartfelt desire to revisit Thailand in the future.

Moreover, to cater to the evolving needs of emerging markets (New Area) and new segments of tourists (New Segment), the focus will be on promoting high-value tourism, particularly in the realms of Health & Wellness. Emphasis is placed on forging partnerships to establish safety and sustainability standards through key initiatives such as the Good Host Project, New Chapters Season 2, the SHA Project, and the 14th Thailand Tourism Awards. These endeavors are geared towards elevating the standard and sustainability of Thailand's tourism industry, fostering sustainable growth, and reinforcing the nation's Soft Power in the global tourism landscape.

7. Thai Tourism Promotion Guidelines

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak, Thailand



has implemented relaxed measures for travelers visiting the country. As of March 1, 2023, tourists are not required to present documentation related to the COVID-19, such as vaccination certificates or test results. The mandatory Thailand Pass registration and quarantine requirements have been waived for both Thai citizens and international visitors, irrespective of their vaccination status. Furthermore, the obligation to purchase health insurance has been eliminated, although travelers have the option to acquire voluntary travel insurance if desired.

The Thai authorities have discontinued the requirement for the display of vaccination certificates, RT-PCR or Professional ATK test results, as well as insurance documentation covering COVID-19 treatment. For individuals previously infected with the COVID-19, it is necessary to ensure the absence of symptoms, including normal temperature and the absence of fever, before embarking on travel to Thailand. Moreover, for passengers transiting through Thailand airports, both in transit and transfer formats, no Thailand Pass registration, proof of vaccination, or COVID-19 test results are mandated if they are not passing through

Thai Immigration. The presentation of medical insurance documents, amounting to a minimum of 10,000 USD, is also not required.

However, travelers are advised to reconfirm the specific requirements concerning travel documents with their respective airlines and destination countries to ensure compliance with the latest guidelines. These regulatory adjustments have led to a significant surge in flight volume, with Aeronautical Radio of Thailand Company Limited (AEROTHAI) forecasting a total of 858,387 flights in 2023, marking a 65% increase from the 520,367 flights recorded in 2022. Notably, more than 5,924,591 passengers have utilized secondary city airports in the initial five months of 2023, as per data from the Airport of Thailand (2023).

8. Conclusion and Discussion

This study is about the main trends that promoting tourism in secondary cities in Thailand, emphasizing the importance of Cultural, Natural, and Health Tourism. They highlighted the significant role of secondary city airports in facilitating convenient travel, particularly within provinces possessing their own airports.



The benefits extend to airlines servicing these routes, and government initiatives, like the “We Travel Together” project, “HALF HALF” project, and tax reduction initiatives, to support travelers to travel with projects such as 10,000 THB Digital Wallet. Moreover, the private sector, particularly the hotel industry, has regained momentum post-COVID-19, with both domestic and international tourists, notably from Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, contributing to the resurgence. Secondary cities such as Nan, Loei, Phetchabun, and Bueng Kan have gained popularity, and the Tourism Authority of Thailand's efforts in providing information and facilitating various tourist services have significantly boosted the current and future prospects of effective tourism promotion.

Tourism brings a substantial income annually, mainly from Asian tourists, with fewer visitors from the Middle East and

Europe. Despite, the hotel industry has fully recovered after the COVID-19 outbreak, and there's a notable resurgence in Thai tourists, particularly in lesser-known cities like Nan, Loei, Phetchabun, Bueng Kan, and more, which have gained significant popularity recently. The Tourism Authority of Thailand is involved in assisting tourists, offering a range of services such as information provision and overall facilitation. These efforts greatly contribute to the promotion and smooth functioning of tourism, both presently and in the foreseeable future.

9. Knowledge received

The Three key trends of Travel Trends that found from this study are Cultural, Natural, and Health Tourism. They highlight the significant role of secondary city airports in facilitating convenient travel, particularly within provinces possessing their own airports. According to the figure 1.



Figure 1 The Picture from KTC Word data (2020), Pathomsuntronchai P. (2021), Amazing Thailand (2023)

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