

# CREATIVE TOURISM ROUTE THROUGH FISH MATERIAL OF LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTS IN WESTERN OF THAILAND

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## ABSTRACT

The research on creative tourism route through fish material of local food products in western of Thailand aims to explore the potential of tourism attractions related to food learning in western and also survey tourism information for learning of Thai food in 8 western provinces consisting of Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Suphan Buri, Phetchaburi, Prachuab Khiri Khan, Samut Songkhram and Samut Sakhon, to design the effective tourism route for food learning. The methodology applied for this research are qualitative and quantitative methods; studying secondary data of local food and interviewing with local gurus on food and lifestyle aspects and field survey of area and tourist attractions having uniqueness in terms of food culture, tradition and indigenous knowledge related to food, based on the concept of conservative agro-tourism, community-based tourism and sustainable tourism development.

The analysis results from secondary data and field survey represented the identity and uniqueness of each studied area that were later used as tourist attractions and the food culture identity in western could be separated into 2 parts; 1. Coastal provinces : Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, Phetchaburi and Prachuab Khiri Khan mainly utilizing seafood materials, and 2. Non-coastal provinces; Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Suphan Buri and Nakhon Pathom mainly utilizing food materials from rivers, mountains and agricultural areas. After determining the food identity and uniqueness together with the tourist attractions, both were connected with the existing tourist attractions in each area and then the area-based tourism routes for food learning was designed before conducting potential evaluation of the tourist attractions. The findings revealed that the attractive tourism route for food learning with commercial potential could be divided into 3 routes; “Salt Route”, “Jaggery Route” and “Fish Route”.

Subsequently, the travel itinerary was designed as an example for those 3 tourism routes for food learning in order to introduce to an individual tourist in a form of two days’ trip expected to be potentially commercial for applying as a new tourism model of western provinces. This model will suit for FIT tourists and tourists with interest in food learning in a form of “Travel, Taste and Learn”. However, all data gained above are required to be further improved in various aspects so as to be applicable and support for undertaking works of the Tourism Authority of Thailand or TAT in each area to further develop the tourism model for food learning.

**Keywords:** Tourism Route, Creative Tourism, Fish Material, Food Production and Local Food

## INTRODUCTION

Food tourism or tourism for food learning is currently one of the popular tourism models since eating is an activity that tourists firstly focus for their trips. Thailand has been long time famous for food that becomes a part of travel and food is also tourists’ favorite souvenir or giveaway. Consequently, tourism activity for food learning is then dramatically

popular with continuous growth since tourists have an opportunity to experience and participate in such a preferred activity in which they can taste and have food. The tourism in this captioned model therefore becomes another high potential market of value creation and growth of income gain. In addition, it also helps generate income to community and agricultural sectors since food is a presenter representing society and local culture of each area and also prove that tourists actually reach tourist destinations. Having local food is income distribution to communities both directly and indirectly and also attracts tourists' attention by sharing via on-line social media.

With respect to benefit to be gained in food tourism, it not only contributes income and reputation to Thailand, but also helps generate income to local communities and agricultural sector both directly and indirectly i.e. food using agricultural products as a main materials, participation in learning farming activity and agricultural product transformation, food souvenir or giveaway such as spice, seasoning, instant food product, fruit etc. (Nathakorn Kumphet, 2021) With Thailand's advantage in being a well-known agricultural product producer by applying an organic farming method matching with current healthy trend, Thailand thereby can easily create its uniqueness and identity.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The field survey was conducted by focusing the qualitative data to gain knowledge, indigenous knowledge, expertise and experience of the sampling group or key informants through a semi structure in-depth-interview, in which the issues of interview questions had been preliminarily set, including participatory observation.

The objective of this research is to create and upgrade the creative tourism route through local food in western of Thailand and the study was separated into 3 stages as follows:

**Stage 1 Survey Implementation:** The relevant secondary data was explored from documents, writing books, textbooks, journals, research studies as well as data on the internet and then synthesized to find out definition, meaning of local food and business relevant to the creative tourism through local food. After that, the primary data was collected from real locations concerned i.e. source of materials, place of food production, restaurants, souvenir shops, tourist attractions related to food in order to be utilized for the next stage of this research.

**Stage 2 Design of the creative tourism route through local food in western of Thailand:** The data of concerned tourist attractions having significant identity of local food gained from survey and research was analyzed and synthesized to evaluate potential and possibility whether those could be parts of the designed tourism route.

**Stage 3 Evaluation of the creative tourism route through local food :** The evaluation was undertaken, among all concerned parties; both foreign and Thai tourists, tourism experts, travel agents, government and private sector authorities, in which their representatives raised their participatory comments to obtain an appropriate guideline and all suggestions and policy information were later concluded by the researcher for further development and designing of the creative tourism route through local food of western of Thailand.

### **Population Scope**

The population for this research is the key informants having knowledge on food culture such as food vs. festivals and traditional events of each province, food vs. lifestyle to explore the identity of local food culture in focused area and local communities consisting of:

1) A group of food material producers; owners of coconut farm, palmyra palm farm, fishery and rice farming in western who conserve and inherit indigenous knowledge of producing food materials for cooking i.e. jaggery, palm sugar, coconut milk, vegetables and fruits planted in the focused area that are main cooking materials of local food menus.

- 2) A group of local housewives who conserve and inherit indigenous knowledge of dessert cooking and process of original Thai cuisine
- 3) A group of gurus and community leaders who can pass on indigenous knowledge of cuisine and local lifestyle
- 4) A group of representatives from government and private sector authorities concerned with tourism in western; local offices of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, offices of the Provincial Commerce, Provincial Tourism offices
- 5) Tour operators in both local area and Bangkok whose target market comprises both Thai and foreign tourists with particular tourism demand

### **Sampling Method**

As required data for this research is the qualitative one; knowledge and experience of gurus, the sampling consisted of food gurus and food culture gurus in each province. The snowballing technique of purpose sampling was then applied to the target groups having local food knowledge, related to tradition and culture together with searching for gurus in various aspects from documents, storytelling of concerned personnel and next suggested informants until obtaining qualitative integrated data.

## **RESULTS**

**1) “Salt Route”** – Travel and taste fish in Suphanburi, Petchaburi and Prachup Khiri Khan : In view of tourism concept in the location where fish is a main material of cooking and fishery is the lifestyle, it was found that since each tourist attraction has not yet been officially opened for tourists, tourism service then looks unsatisfied. However, the quality of service can be upgraded but the duration of 2 days program is too short for tourists since the tourist attractions or Ban Khlongwan Coastal Aquaculture Research & Development Center in Prachuap Khiri Khan and Nuanchan Fish Processing Group are rather far from Bangkok causing over time consuming. The proposed appropriate program is to arrange 1 more overnight stay before leaving for Bangkok so that tourists will not get too tired. Nevertheless, the creative tourism route is well designed since both tourist attractions are in the same route and not far away from each other.

In each tourist attraction, each type of fish plays a vital role as protagonist attracting tourists’ attention and this tourism model has never been focused. In addition, the particular lifestyle of local people in each community having fish as the connector also favorably draws tourists’ attention to a major role of both freshwater and saltwater fishes. Story telling through lifestyle, occupation concerned with fish and using fish as raw material for diversified menus impresses tourists who prefer to learn different process of travelling and taste of each type of fish is also a new experience of fish consumption contributing value to tourism and tourists. However, the objective of this tourism model is an in-depth learning of tourists rather than travelling in a normal tourism market. Additionally, since those 3 tourist attractions are the festive events for which tourists need to search more information in advance for their travel plan so as to be matched with the festive events’ schedule.

As the 3 tourist attractions; Kaeng Krachan Fish Eating Festival of Petchaburi, Mae Klong Pla Too Festival of Samut Songkhram and Tha Cha-lom Pla Too Festival of Samut Sakhon, are usually held once a year requiring tourists to preliminarily search for the tentative schedule prior to planning their trips whereas for other locations, tourists can plan their trips all year. In addition, in some tourist attractions such as sun dried squid of Pran Buri, Prachup Khiri Khan, although it has not yet become an official tourist attraction, tourists can experience the production process of sun dried squid including sightseeing of drying squid yards that generally located along the estuary of Pran Buri River.

**“Fish Route ”** – The purpose of this route is to experience lifestyle of local people in relation to “fish”, both freshwater and saltwater ones, or river and sea leading to wide consumption of fish. The activity in this route thereby emphasizes on fish as a main material of Thai cuisine in those days representing a particular characteristic of such a certain area. The places concerned along this route consist of Kaeng Krachan Dam – Sun Dried Squid of Pran Buri District – Pech Nai Roo Shop –the Coastal Aquaculture Research & Development Center in Prachuap Khiri Khan – Nuanchan Fish Processing Group as per the following itinerary:

### **Day 1**

- 08.00 hrs. Leave Bangkok for Kaeng Krachan District with 230-kilometer distance (from Victory Monument) and duration of 3 hours for sightseeing tour on fish floating baskets at Kaeng Krachan Dam
- 12.30 hrs. Lunch at homestay
- 14.00 hrs. Enjoy sailing a rubber boat along the route of Petchaburi River and swim in the homestay area
- 18.00 hrs. Dinner with karaoke at homestay

### **Day 2**

- 07.00 hrs. Breakfast at homestay
- 07.30 hrs. Leave Kaeng Krachan Dam, Petchaburi Province
- 09.00 hrs. Experience fisherman lifestyle and process of sun dried squid production at Pran Buri District before travelling further to Ban Khlongwan, Prachuap Khiri Khan Province
- 11.00 hrs. Lunch at Phet Nai Roo Restaurant in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province
- 12.30 hrs. Study background and tour Nuanchan Fish Farm at the Coastal Aquaculture Research & Development Center
- 14.00 hrs. Taste burger made from Nuanchan fish at Nuanchan Fish Processing Group
- 15.00 hrs. Leave for Bangkok
- 19.00 hrs. Arrive Bangkok

The creative tourism route through local food was designed based on data of evaluated activities and potential of tourist attractions in connection with tourism routes to implement the sampling touring program of 2-day and 1-night tour and such a plan can be applied for further evaluation in terms of the creative tourism route through local food in western of Thailand of the next research topics.

## **DISCUSSION**

The objective of this research is to create and upgrade the creative tourism route through local food in western of Thailand and its findings can be deployed to help develop Thailand tourism and the discussions are as follows:

**1. Concept of Special Interest Tourism and Tourism for Food Learning:** In this research, the researcher aims to study the main concept of food tourism which is one of Niche tourism as per the study of Robinson and Novelli (2005: 4-5) stating that this type of tourism was developed from Niche market meaning management of products with specific characteristic for any specific market which was not large or focuses on individual basis. This specialty tourism is the words created by producers or tourism service providers rather than tourists or consumers themselves. In other words, it was an alternative tourism different from existing tourism models and it focus on a small-scale tourist market emphasizing on different tourism experience. The concept of specialty tourism was similar to the concept of Niche tourism and it was also an alternative one apart from the mainstream tourism in which tourists were attracted by any specific activity.

The above is in line with the findings of this research obtaining the tourism route for food learning in western of Thailand. The tourist attractions that were evaluated on potential having specific characteristics to accommodate with some number of tourists. In addition, tourists interesting to join in tourism route survey are the group of people paying attention to food and food culture. Consequently, the designed tourism route then matches with the specific market group which is not the mainstream market whereas most of activities are suitable for specific interest tourists in a few number of them to avoid lacking of learning experience.

Additionally, the tourism route for food learning in western also relates to the specialty tourism i.e. agro-tourism, cultural tourism and community based tourism as stated in the study of Hall and Mitchell (2001:308) that food tourism “is travelling to a place producing food materials, ready-to-eat food, food festivals, restaurants and a place where tourists can taste food and/or experience production of unique local food.” The inspiration or force from consumption and food learning needs is the factor influencing decision making on tourist attraction selection. The tourism emphasizing on food interest can be divided into culinary tourism in which tourists’ interest level is moderate while there may be other activities held in parallel with touring food festivals as well as learning local food cuisine. The food tourism activities are combined with overall tourism experience whereas gastronomic tourism, tourists pay high attention to food inspiring them to have their trips and the selected tourist attractions are related to food cooking process starting from production of primary and secondary materials until last step of food production. Furthermore, tourists also focus on visiting famous restaurants located in selected tourist locations and along the touring program, nearly most of activities are concerned with food.

The growth of the tourism for food learning has continually increased in the special interest tourism market. Food learning is very popular among tourists since they can participate in tourism activities and taste food and food consumption is normally provided. For Thailand, the tourism for food learning tends to be higher continually since Thai food has been internationally well-known for long time and the government sector by the Tourism Authority of Thailand increasingly places importance on the special interest tourism market and tourist experience management.

**2. Potential of Tourist Attractions :** The research findings revealed that the potential of tourist attractions in relation to the concept of tourism for food learning depends on 4 factors; 1) Area Aspect : physical characteristic and convenient access, 2) Management Aspect : tourist hospitality and area management, 3) Activity & Learning Aspect : activities within tourist attractions by emphasizing on learning activities, and 4) Community Participation Aspect: community participation, tourist attraction management, participation in tourist attraction conservation and maintenance. This is in line with the concept of evaluating tourist attraction potential of Jaruj Klindeeprae’ s study (referred in Wipha Srirathu: 2008) stating about the evaluation on tourist attraction potential that the evaluation needed to cover all 4 elements of tourism; 1) Area aspect which was attracting tourists with particular or unique natural resources, historic sites related to the ecosystem, local culture and tradition including other attractive factors such as landmark, convenient access to tourist attractions consisting of route condition, season, distance from tourism central to such a certain attraction, 2) Criteria of potential evaluation which covered all management elements consisting of security of travelling in such a certain tourist attraction and nearby area, facility management, 3) Criteria of potential evaluation which covered all activities and process elements, and 4) Criteria of potential evaluation covering all participatory elements which was considering how local authorities would participate in managing tourist attractions with satisfaction of local people.

After potential evaluation on the tourist attractions along the designed tourism route for food learning, it was found that those 4 factors are considerably significant for determination of tourist attractions and accommodating with tourists. The most significant factor is the

attractive physical factor towards tourists which is in line with the principle of the tourism route. In view of learning activity factor, it should be able to reflect a key principle of the overall tourism route since tourists are interested in food learning and intend to participate in tourism activities rather than taking photos and visiting places. (Jiraporn Boonying, 2022) Secondly, it is the factor of facilities in each tourist attraction that can meet tourists' basic requirement i.e. restroom, pathway, waste disposal and tourist attraction area management, etc. However, as per the result of testing the designed tourism route, communication in tourist attractions both by signs or in-person should be additionally provided in tourism management factor as well.

**3. The Development Concept for Tourism Route in Thailand:** The research findings revealed that the tourism route for food learning was required to consider 2 contexts; tourism route (story) + food background + product/souvenir and the tourism route for food learning was also a part of the designed tourism route.

The findings are also in line with the salt route of Petchaburi where there are 4 coastal districts and two of them have salt farming; Mueang Petchaburi District and Ban Laem District and those districts are applied to be contained in the tourism route for food learning since salt is one of the main components for cooking. It is also in line with the concept and style of the Tourism Authority of Thailand on "Enjoy travelling with Experiencing of Community Lifestyle" which is travelling to experience lifestyle of people living along a river in central area under a farming atmosphere and "Travel Inland Market-Floating Market-Ancient Market-Modern Market" in Sumut Songkhram, Samut Sakhon and Nakhon Pathom. The tourism route for food learning in western of this research is an integration between existing tourism concept which has potential and the concept of tourism for food learning with special interest in local food culture. It is thereby possible that should the designed tourism route by this research be applied, it will certainly be an effective tourism route.

However, since the tourist attractions of the tourism route for food learning are mostly located in local community areas, it is definitely essential for route management to gain support from each community in tourism management and service for tourists that will contribute to the tourism route and also render proper experience to tourists. This concept is in line with the concept of sustainable tourism management of Monthawadee Poolkerd (2009) in the study on the development model of community-based tourism management for sustainability in which the findings revealed that the sustainable model of tourism management conducted by community, in terms of input aspect consisted of the elements of community capability, community motivation, community potential and investment participation whereas transformation process aspect, it consisted of organization management, administration, planning participation, decision-making participation, activity/action plan implementation participation and product monitoring and assessment participation. The community participation for management of tourism for food learning was thereby considerably essential.

## CONCLUSION

After determination of the creative tourism route through local food in western of Thailand, the designed route was proposed to all concerned for consideration and evaluation on properness in order to collect all comments and suggestions for improvement of the designed route and the target group of the potential evaluation consisted of tourism experts, travel agents and tourists of special interest tourism or modern tourism

After the creative tourism route through local food in western of Thailand had been determined and divided into 3 routes, potential evaluation for business concerned with those routes were made with field survey and data gained from documents together with data to be gained from field survey were combined and synthesized for better accuracy and be applicable

to support and effectively promote the tourism of the designed routes. All 3 designed routes have commercial potential and can be used as tourism routes for food learning in western and the researcher had designed a touring program in a form of two days trip for individual tourists having special interest or travel agents for future food learning touring program which can be deemed as another guideline supporting Thailand tourism in a form of new tourism model and another way contributable to secure and sustain the growth and development of tourism industry as well as generating income to communities and increasing the national gross domestic product.

The captioned 3 routes contain commercial potential applicable for a new tourism model in western of Thailand and suitable for an individual tourist and tourist with special interest in food learning. All data mentioned above are required more improvement on various aspects and applicable for supporting the tasks of the Tourism Authority of Thailand or TAT in each area in further developing the tourism model for food learning. This also accommodate with the strategy of increasing the national competency and competitiveness, promoting potential trade and service to create works, distribute income and generate income from foreign currencies, developing sustainable tourism for an increase of employment and generate income to communities through quality development of tourist attractions to be able to accommodate with the expansion of both Thai and foreign tourists. The development of tourist attractions can be undertaken in a form of a provincial cluster with support to development of new tourism model arranged in line with cultural potential and natural resource of each certain area with eco-friendly concept under awareness of area capability to accommodate with tourists i.e. proper-way eco-tourism, cultural and traditional tourism, agro-tourism, etc.

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