



CULTURAL TOURISM AREA OF KHON KAEN PROVINCE: POTENTIAL AND STRENGTHS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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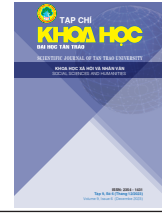
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Abstract

The article is based on research and practical evaluations of the potentials and strengths of Khon Kaen province, Thailand, such as its culture, traditions, architecture, and arts, in the context of tourism development. A survey was conducted to explore the experiences of tourists visiting three major temples in Khon Kaen, aiming to identify advantages and existing challenges that need to be addressed. The research findings, based on the responses of 120 tourists visiting Nong Wang Pra A-Ramluang, Thung Setthi, and Pra That Kham Kaen temples, affirm that Khon Kaen boasts a diverse natural landscape and has favorable conditions for robust development in tourism.



KHU DU LỊCH VĂN HÓA TỈNH KHON KAEN: TIỀM NĂNG VÀ THỂ MẠNH PHÁT TRIỂN DU LỊCH

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Thông tin bài viết	Tóm tắt
Received: 18/8/2023	<p>Bài viết dựa trên việc tìm hiểu, đánh giá thực tiễn về những tiềm năng, thể mạnh của tỉnh Khon Kaen, Thái Lan như: văn hoá, phong tục, kiến trúc, nghệ thuật,... trong việc phát triển du lịch. Tiến hành khảo sát thăm dò du khách tham quan du lịch tại 3 chùa lớn tại Khon Kaen để chỉ ra những ưu điểm và tồn tại cần khắc phục. Kết quả nghiên cứu 120 khách tham quan du lịch tại 3 chùa: Nong Wang Pra A- Ramluang, Thung Setthi, Pra That Kham Kaen khẳng định: Khon Kaen có cảnh quan thiên nhiên đa dạng và có điều kiện phát triển mạnh mẽ.</p>
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1. Introduction

Historical and cultural tourism resources are valuable assets for nations in economic development. They reflect the civilization, intellect, lifestyle, and management technology of society, showcasing aspects such as culture, customs, architecture, art, and more. Tourism resources, especially significant landmarks like temples and shrines, play a crucial role. Temples serve as a historical and cultural link to the community, acting as repositories for heritage and culture, with art expressing the wisdom and talent of ancestors. They are considered bridges connecting the past and present. Additionally, some temples offer beautiful architectural and natural landscapes. Temples and shrines are essential destinations for historical and artistic tourism that captivate the attention of travelers (Suksamran, 1993), (Mulder, 1997), (Shinichi, 2023) [9], [10].

Khon Kaen is a province in Northeastern Thailand. It is one of the key cities in Thailand's Socio-Economic Development Plan, alongside Chiang Mai, Songkhla, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Chonburi (InThailand Travel, 2023)[3]. Khon Kaen possesses unique cultural heritage, including traditional arts, folk culture, and a rich history of the local people. With economic development, Khon Kaen has the potential to thrive in the tourism industry, meeting the demands of visitors. The province boasts a diverse natural landscape, encompassing plains, forests, lakes, and hills, providing favorable conditions for sightseeing and exploration (Kantawateera, 2014) [4].

These potentials and strengths, combined with the cultural and natural diversity, form the foundation for tourism development in Khon Kaen. Utilizing these resources can contribute to the prominence and sustainable growth of this cultural tourism destination.

The article evaluates the potential strengths of Khon Kaen province in the context of tourism development.

2. Research methods

The article employs a document research method to explore and evaluate research findings on the cultural tourism region of Khon Kaen province. This includes studying documents related to the historical development, cultural heritage, and distinctive aspects of the folk culture of the people in Khon Kaen. Specialized articles and literary works often discuss unique cultural festivals, celebrations, and traditions, emphasizing the richness and diversity of culinary culture, music, traditional arts, etc. Particularly, the study focuses on tourist attractions such as temples and shrines in Khon Kaen as part of tourism development.

Investigative methods were utilized to gauge the attitudes of 120 tourists visiting temples, specifically Nongweng Pra A-Ramluang, Thung Setthi, and That Kham Kean in Khon Kaen.

3. Research results and discussion

3.1. Prominent Cultural Tourism Sites in Khon Kaen Province

Khon Kaen is the sixth-largest province in the Northeast, the third-most populous in the Northeast region, and a central hub for activities in the Northeastern Central region. Situated along the Friendship Highway (National Highway 2) and National Highway 12 (East-West Economic Corridor), it serves as another major route from the Northeast to the North at Lom Sak, Phetchabun province, and connects to travel destinations in Laos to the south. To the north, it borders Loei, Nong Bua Lamphu, and Udon Thani provinces. It is adjacent to Mahasarakham and Kalasin provinces, to the south of Buriram and Nakhon Ratchasima. To the west, it shares borders with Chaiyaphum and Phetchabun (Howell, 2019), (Komain kantawateera, 2014), (Tanakitputhimet, 2017), (Ann Augustin, 2023)[2], [6], [11].

3.1.1. Nong Wang Pra Aram Luang temple



Picture 1: Nong Wang temple

(Source: Wat Nong Wang temple in Khon Kaen province)

The Nong Wang temple is the main temple located in the center of Khon Kaen city. The temple has 9 floors, situated by the Kaen Nakhorn lake and easily recognizable by its golden tower. In 1811, Thao Jammutra moved the city to Ban Don Pan Chat, Muang Maha Sarakham (Ban Nonmuang, Kosum Pisai district, Maha Sarakham present-day), and since then, Ban Bueng Bon has become an ancient town from that era. Its current address is 593 Klangmueng Road, Naimueng, Mueng Khon Kaen, Khon Kaen province. The first boundary for this place was issued by the king to Phraya Nakhon Sri Borirak (Au) in 1899, and the final one was on August 24, 1984. Its secular boundary is 40x80 square meters. The total area of the temple complex is 41.266 km², recorded in land certificate

number 713, page 28, survey page 794, book number 8, page 13. The temple area is surrounded by communities, with Kaen Nakhon lake to its east. In 1981, this temple was awarded as a model of a well-developed temple, and in 1983, it was recognized as the best-developed temple. Furthermore, in 1984, it was officially recognized as a royal temple (Ann Augustin, 2023)[1].

The architecture of the temple is quite unique. Each floor of this pagoda has a specific theme or function. For example, the second floor is a museum about the culture of the Isan region (Isan Museum), while the ninth floor, the top floor, is where sacred relics are kept. As you go

higher, the view opens up, and visitors can explore the entire space of the temple and the city of Khon Kaen.

3.1.2 Thung Setthi temple

The Thung Setthi temple is smaller in scale compared to the Luangta The Luang Say Monastery. Wat Thung Setthi, located in Ban Nong Hai near the Mueang District of Khon Kaen province, is a relatively new Thai

Buddhist temple near the ring Road 230. Wat Thung Setthi translates to “Field of Millionaire’s Temple”, implying that those who contribute here are, or will become millionaires. This temple stands out from typical Thai temples with its white exterior adorned with gold and blue details, instead of the traditional gold and red temples commonly seen throughout the kingdom (Khon Kaen province tourism information, 2023)[5].



Picture 2: Thung Setthi temple

(Source: Thung Setthi temple in Khon Kaen province)

The current address of the temple is Phra Lap, Mueang Khon Kaen district, Khon Kaen province 40000. Nestled amidst rice fields, Wat Thung Setthi is situated in a serene rural atmosphere (in line with its name) compared to the central Khon Kaen city, approximately a 15-minute drive away. The temple grounds cover an area of about 29 acres, and the planning and construction process began in 1999 under the responsibility of Luangta Oy. This developer strongly supports the Dheravata tradition of Luangpu-Mon Puritatto to propagate Buddhism to the people in northeastern Thailand. According to Luangta Oy, the temple is not only built for the buddhist and making of the faithful but also as a tribute to King Rama IX and the Chakri dynasty while both were still alive. The

main construction was completed in 2012. This place is considered the confluence of three worlds: heaven, the human world, and hell (Ann Augustin, 2023)[1].

3.1.3 Pra That Kham Kean temple

The Pra That Kham Kean Temple is the most important and oldest temple in the history of Khon Kaen. The historical site of Kham Kaen is located at Wat Chomphuom, Baan Kham, Ban Kham, Amphoe Nam Phong, Khon Kaen, along the Khon Kaen - Yangtarn Road. Situated approximately 15 km from the town of Khon Kaen, this renowned temple in the northeast was built at an indeterminate age (Tourist information Khon Kaen Province, 2023)[13].



Picture 3: Phar That Kham Kaen temple

(Source: Phar That Kham Kaen temple in Khon Kaen province)

The Phra That Kham Kaen is an important, revered chedi for the people of Khon Kaen and surrounding provinces because they believe that the chedi will protect their lives and bring peace and success. The 19-meter-high structure is also said to contain a relic of the Buddha - an ancient document. The town of Khon Kaen was named after this chedi. It is also depicted on Khon Kaen's provincial seal and flag.

According to legend, when young monks journeyed to Nakhon Phanom to house holy relics of the Buddha, they passed an old dead tamarind tree trunk on a small prominent hill about 5 km east of the Phong River. They stopped to rest and placed the relics on the dead tree. When, after several days of visiting in Nakhon Phanom, they found that there was not enough room left there for the holy relics, they re-traced their journey back to the west. They arrived again at this old tamarind tree stump. With great astonishment they saw that a new blooming offshoot grew out of the old tree stump. They saw this as a good omen and decided to build a thât (four-sided, curvilinear reliquary stupa) there with the help of local residents. Upon completion, they placed a holy relic within (Ann Augustin, 2023)[1].

There is no actual evidence of the date on construction of Phra That Kham Kaen. It is believed that the temple was constructed at the same time as Phra That Si Song Rak in Loei Province (in the 17th century) as both share common fundamental structural details, i.e. a low base and golden Lao-style. At this time the

area was either part of the seminal Lao Kingdom of Lan Xang or its successors Kingdoms, Vientiane or Champasak. The area was not annexed into the Thai Kingdom until 1828.

The Phra That Kham Kaen chedi is located on the grounds of the Wat Chetiyaphum temple. Other buildings on the grounds include an ubosot or ordination hall and a viharn or assembly hall, guarded by two white lions. The top ends of the multi-tiered roofs are adorned with typical golden chofa. The ubosot has blue painted gables and the entrance is flanked by two multi-tiered ceremonial umbrellas.

The Phra That Kham Kaen is now recently renovated and landscaped, and the center of an annual celebration, held on the full moon day of the 6th lunar month. The local residents make merit and pay homage at the chedi. Several cultural and musical performances are held.

3.1.4. Phu Kao and Phu Phan Kham National Parks

The park, covering an area of up to 320 square kilometers, is located in Ubonrat district and was established in 1985. The majority of the park's area consists of fruit orchards, mixed deciduous forests, and evergreen forests. Exploring this green land and indulging in the delicious fresh fruits is a worthwhile suggestion, don't you think? (InThailand Travel, 2023) [3].



Picture 4: Phu Kao and Phu Phan Kham National Parks

(Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=The+Phu+Kao+and+Phu+Phan+Kham+National+Parks>)

3.1.5. Khon Kaen night market

Tung Tan is a new shopping area on Friendship Road. The market offers a wide range of products, including handmade items, clothing, and numerous stalls to explore. There is a stage within the market

area to facilitate entertainment activities and promote Khon Kaen. From musical performances to product showcases and artistic workshops, the night market caters to various interests. For those who enjoy shopping and savoring Thai delicacies, the night market is sure to leave you satisfied (InThailand Travel, 2023)[3].



Picture 5: Khon Kaen night market

(Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=An+image+of+the+market+in+Khon+Kaen>)

3.1.6. Phu Wiang Dinosaur museum

This museum recreates both small and large dinosaur models that roamed the earth millions of years ago. Visitors can view actual dinosaur bones that have been excavated here. The children's area,

aptly named the 'Dinosaur Park,' features dinosaurs in a forest setting with fascinating sound effects. If you have the opportunity to visit, it will take approximately 2-3 hours to explore and fully appreciate the museum (InThailand Travel, 2023) [3].



Picture 6. Dinosaur Museum Phu Wiang

(Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=Dinosaur+Museum+in+Phu+Wiang>)

3.2. Visitor opinion survey at Khon Kaen Cultural tourism area

3.2.1. Scope, content, participants, and survey tools

- Survey scope: Focused on the locations of the Khon Kaen cultural tourism area, specifically Nong Wang Pra Aram Luang temple, Thung Setthi temple, and Pra That Kham Kean temple.

- Survey content: Explored factors influencing tourists' visits to the Khon Kaen Cultural Tourism Area through data collected from a questionnaire. The research aimed to understand tourists' perspectives on exploring Khon Kaen's cultural attractions and was divided into the following sections: 1/ Service satisfaction; 2/ Location satisfaction; 3/ Convenience of tourism; 4/ Historical events; 5/ Landscape factors suitable for tourism; 6/ Outstanding architectural and historical factors; 7/ Natural resources and the environment; 8/ Spatial factors involving relevant areas and locations (Thailand, 2013), (Mammadove, 2012) [7].

- Survey participants: 120 tourists, comprising 60 females and 60 males, divided into three groups: 1/ Group 1 (ages 18-25); 2/ Group 2 (ages 26-59); 3/ Group 3 (ages 60 and above).

- Survey tools:

- Based on the research content, we designed a questionnaire consisting of 4 issues with measurement criteria corresponding to evaluation levels as follows: Mostly or Very Good (5), Good (4), Average (3), Poor (2), Very Poor (1).

- Issue 1: Personal factors such as gender, age, occupation, nationality, place of residence, etc.

- Issue 2: Product-related factors influencing their visit to Khon Kaen.

- Issue 3: Marketing mix factors, including product distribution, promotional activities, etc.

- Issue 4: Respondents' feedback on desired tourism quality.

3.2.2. Analysis results

a. Analysis results regarding respondents' gender, age, occupation, and status

Social factors surveyed included gender, age, and occupation of the research subjects. The results are as follows:

Table 1: Classification of social factors of the surveyed individuals

General information		Total	Quantity (Person)	Ratio (%)
1. Gender	Male	120	60	50.00
	Female		60	50.00
2. Age	18 – 25 years old	120	40	33.33
	26 – 59 years old		40	33.33
	> 60 years old		40	33.33
3. Occupation	Pupils/students	120	33	27.5
	Professional		83	69.58
	Others		4	2.92

Social factors indicate:

1/ In terms of gender: The samples included 120 males, accounting for 50%; 120 females, also accounting for 50%.

2/ In terms of age: There are 40 individuals aged 18-25, constituting 33.3%; 40 individuals aged 26-59, also representing 33.3%; and 60 individuals over 60, making up 33.3%.

3/ In terms of occupation: 33 individuals are students, accounting for 27.5%; 83 individuals are professional, making up 69.58%; and 4 individuals fall into other categories, representing 2.92%.

b. Analysis of factors influencing cultural tourism in Khon Kaen province

Table 2: Average motivation of tourists to visit Nong Waang, Wat Thung Mueang, and Wat Phra That Kham Kaen temple

Factors	\bar{X} (Average factor)	Standard deviation	Evaluate
1. The landscape is suitable for tourism.	4.09	0.71	Good
2. Safe travel.	3.87	0.64	Good
3. Area within the temple area.	4.50	0.60	Very good
4. Natural resources and environment	4.43	0.50	Very good
5. The beauty of this place.	4.63	0.50	Very good
6. Architecture	4.68	0.47	Very good

Factors	\bar{X} (Average factor)	Standard deviation	Evaluate
7. History	4.24	0.69	Very good
8. The cleanliness of this place.	4.08	0.72	Good
9. Beauty and uniqueness.	3.41	0.61	Good
10. Signs for tourist attractions.	4.17	0.69	Good
Total	4.21	0.09	Very good

From Table 2, it is observed that the respondents focus on factors influencing their visit to Khon Kaen (Wat Nongwang) with an average value of 4.2 (highest level) considering each aspect. The respondents particularly emphasize architectural motives, with an average rating of 4.68 (highest level), followed by an average rating of 4.63. The least emphasized factor is beauty and uniqueness, with an average rating of 3.41 (moderate level).

3.2.3. Discussion of the Study

Study of specific issues of 120 tourists visiting cultural sites.

Survey of 120 Tourists: The majority of tourists are females aged 18-25 visiting the Royal Wat Nong Wat Monastery. The remarkable architecture of the Thung Miao Temple attracts male tourists aged 26-59. Additionally, female tourists aged 18-25 show more interest in visiting Wat Phra That Kham Kaen than males due to its rich history and beautiful architecture.

Through the collection and summarization of tourists' opinions on cultural tourism in Khon Kaen Province (including: Royal Wat Nongwang Monastery, Wat Thung Setthi, Wat Phra That Kham Kaen), all three locations are beautiful, surrounded by rich forested areas. The landscapes are suitable for sightseeing, and the areas are clean and tidy. However, there are some suggestions:

Wat Nongwang temple needs:

1. Information boards, guidebooks on tourist attractions to provide insight into the history and significance of the site.
2. Upgraded parking facilities to meet parking needs.
3. Tourists should be conscious of appropriate attire when visiting the temple.

Wat Thung Setthi temple needs:

1. Upgraded parking facilities to meet parking needs.

2. Diverse and attractive souvenir services.
3. Guidebooks on tourist attractions.
4. Tourists should be more conscious when participating in tourism activities.

Phra That Kham Kaen temple needs:

1. Upgraded parking facilities to meet parking needs.
2. Guidebooks on tourist attractions.

4. Conclusion

Khon Kaen Province in Northeastern Thailand is one of the country's significant economic and cultural centers. With its unique cultural heritage and diverse natural landscapes, the region holds strong potential for tourism development. Featuring traditional culture, multifaceted history, and enticing local cuisine, Khon Kaen attracts travelers fond of regional gastronomy.

The historical and cultural tourism resources play a crucial role in driving the economy. Temples and shrines serve not only as places of reverence but also as valuable historical and cultural destinations, bridging the community's past and present. The cultural and natural diversity provides a solid foundation for the robust development of tourism in Khon Kaen, contributing to the fame and sustainability of this cultural tourism industry.

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