



PROMOTING TOURISM DESTINATION VIA THAI TELEVISION DRAMA

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Abstract:

Tourism has a great impact on national economies. This hospitality industry has been used as a tool to increase gross domestic product by many governments. Recently, film induced tourism has become a very popular trend among travelers. However, this field of study can be deemed a new paradigm among Thai Tourism and Hospitality scholars. Therefore, in this article, the author explores and discusses this type of tourism. The main purpose of this academic writing is focused on how Thai television dramas and films can be employed to promote tourism destinations in the Northeast, Thailand. Since *Nakhi*, a popular TV drama of 2016 and *Nakhi 2*, the film produced in 2018 were made on the Northeastern locations, this paper delineates the speculated effects of both motion pictures on tourism business of the region. Guidelines on making use of the film influence to promote tourism were also given.

Introduction

The Northeast of Thailand, also known as Isan, has often been regarded as the nation's forgotten backyard. It is considered the least developed and poorest region in spite of its largest size and population. The region covers one-third of Thailand's area and is dwelled by more than thirty-four million citizens or one-third of the total people. Based on many studies, the regional poverty has been assumed to be derived from these reasons: the majority of Isan people are farmers whose small-scale agricultural activities provide the low marketing bargaining power; the productivity of their crops is low due to the infertile, saline and sandy soil; little rain; inadequate fertilizer; and poor irrigation facilities. Indeed, the destitute living situations of these Northeastern agrarians have even been set side by side to those unfortunate situations that take place in Sub-Saharan Africa [1,p.58].

The United World Tourism Organization has predicted 3-4% increase of global tourism in 2019

(International Medical Travel Journal 2019: Unpaged). It was reported also that tourism remained to be the fastest growing industry with considerable growth even when the world had confronted with economic instability or recession in 2014. Therefore, it is unquestionable why tourism has always been considered as the powerful driving force for an international economic development [2,p 103-104]. With the provision of numerous employment opportunities, the industry has been used as a key tool by the governments worldwide to reduce poverty, lower income inequality and boost the country's economy.

2018, the country had witnessed 3845811 foreign visitors, (the highest number in the record). Statistically, it is apparent that tourism business has been well-established and developed satisfyingly in Thailand. The industry accounts around 10% of Thailand's economy. As a matter of fact, The

Tourism Authority of Thailand expects that 40 million tourists will visit the country in 2019. At least B3.4 trillion in revenue or the rise by 10% is anticipated to be made from both the international and domestic travelling markets this year (Thailand Tourist Arrivals. 2019: Unpagued; Thai Life. 2018: Unpagued). Because the business plays an important economic role, tourism has always become part of Thailand's top agenda.

Although the success of tourism industry in Thailand has often been recognized locally and universally, the fruitful outcomes of the business can only be attributed to the tourist attractions located in the North, South and the Central Regions. Rarely have the Northeastern or Isan destinations been popularly visited by either Thai or alien travellers. Tourism in this region lagged behind other areas. The unproductive results of tourism in the Northeast may be caused by an ineffective management leading the region to become the least visited position in the country. To fix this problem, according to James Higham's *Thailand: Prospects for a Tourism-led Economic Recovery* the "Amazing Isan" campaign was launched in order to promote the inexpensive destinations of this unfortunate tourism Thai zone. Nevertheless, tourism incomes in the Northeastern part is still regarded as lower than the average in comparison to those obtained in more popular tourist attractions in other regions. Owing to these reasons, this paper proposes and addresses the deployment of *Nakhi* or other TV dramas and motion pictures filmed in the Northeast to be an alternative and entertaining tool to influence and boost tourism business in the Northeast, Thailand [3,p.129-143].

Discussion

Film induced tourism is a new form of travelling business. It engages the journeys to any destinations which are featured through motion pictures on television, video, cinema or computer screens. Travellers who take part in this kind of tours have been inspired by the places they have viewed in the films. As a result they would like to directly experience and relate themselves more to the films by visiting the movie locations, film sets, or the film theme parks. Tourists who decide to go to Hoi An, Vietnam, after they have watched Thai TV drama *Hoi An . . . Chan Rak Thur*, for instance,

can be classified as the visitors of film induced tourism. Indeed, we do not really know whether their decision has been made either because they have been impressed by the love story between the female and male protagonists (a Vietnamese girl called Huang Mei and Thai man called Muang-man), or because they just want to take a look to make sure that this ancient Vietnamese city appears to be scenic, magical, romantic, similar to or different from what they could feel or see from the film or not.

As elaborated in Film-induced Tourism: Inventing a Vacation to a Location, more and more tourists had visited the places which had been projected through films and television series without any tourism promotion campaigns launched by both the government and non-government agencies. The phenomenon is understandable because favorable images of the destinations shown on these films and TV dramas impact a great deal on traveller's destination choice. The knowledge concerning certain aspects of the places such as their nature, culture, and people is provided to the filmgoers or TV drama viewers. Subsequently, the notions obtained through watching films will influence the viewers' attitudes towards the presented locations. Consequently, their interests in these destinations will grow driving them to pay a genuine visit to the shooting places of these motion pictures [4.p.34]

It is undeniable that movie or TV drama locations can draw travellers' attention and interests. Psychologically, movie locations can appeal to tourists because, like the movies, they bestow an escape or a fantasy world to visitors. Besides, visiting the real places enable the viewers to turn the intangible or imaginative experiences gained from watching dramas to be the tangible or concrete experiences. In other words, visiting the real places gives viewers a more realistic sense to them than just appreciating the visual images from the flicks. As added in the study performed by Rewtrakunphaiboon, an intangible visual experience is available from the movies while taking a look at the real movie sets and film locations in person provides something truer to visitors. For these reasons, there has been a growing phenomenon that tourists visit destinations

presented through films leading to a new form of increasingly important cultural tourism called film-induced tourism.

There have been many interesting tourism spots projected in *Nakhi*, a popular Thai mythical drama aired on Thai TV channel 3 in 2016 and *Nakhi 2* made in 2018 for the cinemas. Although the storyline of both the TV drama and the silver screen movie was originally set in the Northeast, Thailand (Khong Chiam of Ubon Rachathani), the filming locations also included other regional places such as Kanchanaburi's and Erawan Waterfall and Prasart Muang Sing; Uthai Thani's Pa Tard Cave, and Puwai Cave; Nakhon Nayok's Wang Takrai Waterfall; and Ratchaburi's Chompol Cave. As regards Northeastern locations, three outstanding destinations were selected to be the settings of this film: Buriram's Prasart Hin Phanom Rung; Nakhon Ratchasima's Jim Thompson Farm; and Chaiyaphum's Pa Hin Ngam.

Tracking down these movie locations, tourists will find that the Northeastern is the land of diversity. Each tourist attraction offers different pleasure, impressive attractiveness, and distinct benefits to its visitors. Taking a trip to this region, visitors can choose to stop by several places depending on their preference and interest. Located in Pak Thong Chai, as its name implies, agritourism is available from Jim Thompson Farm. The place is open to the public to enjoy Northeastern farming lifestyle only during mid-December to mid-January. The farming values of the Northeasterners can be appreciated through agricultural activities launched at this farm: extracting silk, making pottery, rice husking, shopping, etc. Every year, the farm presents unique thematic agrarian activities from which visitors can learn and be enthralled. In contrast to Jim Thompson Farm, Pa Hin Ngam of Chaiyaphum is well-known for its natural beauty. Visitors will be drawn in by hugely unusual rocks of different shapes. Apart from the strange rock formations, travelers can gain adventure, relaxation as well as health by trekking along various natural wonders at Pa Hin Ngam: blooming wild flowers, waterfall, rivers, steep cliffs and Thung Dok Kra Jiao or Bau Sawan Field (Field of Curcumas).

Being Thailand's most impressive and important Khmer temple, Prasart Hin Phanom Rung

in Buriram was built during the 10th – 13th century to be Hindu temple as a sacrifice to Shiva. This historical and archeological site was unique because it was made of the pink sandstone. To enter into the main sanctuary of Prasart Hin Phanom Rung, visitors have to pass two Naga (male serpent deity) bridges. It is believed that these Naga bridges represent the stairway or passing from the planet dwelled by humans into another planet dwelled by Gods. After *Nakhi* (female serpent deity) was broadcast on channel 3 in 2016, the venue became more popularly visited by the drama fans who desired to trace and recall the romantic and magical feelings of their favorite movie. In other words, they want to reconnect with the leading characters of this drama from this filming location of *Nakhi*. Owing to the success of this film, the provincial government of Buriram had invited Nataporn Tameeruks, the movie star who took the leading fictional role of *Nakhi*, to perform in the annual Phanom Rung Historical Park festival of Buriram. As a matter of fact, the festival is usually held around the end of March to the beginning of April in order to promote tourism and to conserve the local archeological sites and national treasure. Certainly, the significant annual event combines all spectacular cultural, adventurous and commercial activities such as performing arts of Apsara dance performance, special light show to showcase the ritual to worship the celestial beings who dwelled at Prasart Hin Phanom Rung, exhibitions of OTOP products and local foods, sports games, etc [5,p.93].

To induce the viewers to visit the locations used for shooting the films requires several techniques. As elaborated in An Exploratory Research on Perceived Destination Attractiveness from Viewing Korean Film of Thai Private University Students: A Case Study of Bangkok University, several film components must be appropriately, craftily, and collectively portrayed in the film so that the viewers could be prompted to take a real trip to its filming locations. Indeed, according to study conducted by Nicki Grihault, apart from the settings of the film, the combination of celebrities, storyline and songs were all crucial for whether or not the moviegoers would make a decision to journey to the shooting destinations. of the films. If these elements had been blended perfectly well arousing the movie spectators to feel very much impressed and emotionally attached to the events,

the characters, or other respects of the films, it was certain that these tightly bonded viewers would take a trip to visit the filmed locations (2003: 1-22).

It is discernible that the featuring of the locations together with plot, songs and celebrities in the film can motivate the viewers to take a tour at the settings of the film. As a matter of fact, the projection of the places in the films are not beneficial for boosting the number of tourists to visit only the filming locations. In addition to inducing tourism, films can be employed to promote different aspects of the places or the communities. As reported by tourism and hospitality scholars, governments and non-government sectors can deploy films to create positive awareness, knowledge, and perception concerning local or national food, products, landscape, scenery, language, education, culture, the society and so on to the viewers or filmgoers. By familiarizing them with the favorable images of these items, other forms of tourism can be instigated and blended in film-induced tourism: shopping tourism, ecotourism, culinary tourism, cultural tourism, sports tourism, medical tourism, you name it [7,p.123]; [8,p.524-540]. Consequently, in light of promoting tourism in the Northeast, Thailand, many unique, exotic, and outstanding qualities of this region, particularly those which are unavailable from popular attractions in other regions, should be highlighted and presented in the films. Furthermore, to make it work in practice, it is advisable that local governments or private sectors in the Northeast should join hands to support and enhance film producers and studio owners to showcase and incorporate these favorable aspects of their region into their films.

Generally, the location of the Northeast provides a lot of promising opportunities for both domestic and international businesses including tourism, and hospitality industry. Bordered by Mekong River and Laos to the north and east and Cambodia to the south, the region has been established as one of Thailand's Special Economic Zones. This means that some provincial areas of the Northeast can be deemed the gateways to connect, scaffold, and exchange multilateral investment, trade, education, culture, as well as tourism with the

neighboring countries. Based on the agreements among the governments, the infrastructure development projects have been constructed while the cross-border, customs, and immigration agreements have been made in order to facilitate transactions among these neighboring ASEAN nationalities. Therefore, all Thai and alien travelers who want to get around the major cities of the Northeast are conveniently provided with either the land, water or air transports.

Apart from containing the tourist attractions like those which had been used as the filming locations for *Nakhi*, this part of Thailand also embodies reputable religious, cultural and historical uniqueness. Thus, it can be said that the Northeast can fulfill different interests of all types of visitors. In terms of religion, for instance, many renowned Buddhist monks of the country came and come from the Northeast: Luang Bu Man Bhuridatta, Luang Bu Chah Subhaddo, Luang Por Koon Bhurisutto, Luang Ta Maha Bua Yanasampano, etc. Their monasteries and stupas scatter around Isan or the Northeastern territory. For these reasons, their believers, both Thais and foreigners, have regularly launched Dharma tours to visit these religious sanctuaries where the revered Buddhist monks used/use to practice their religion or teach their Buddhist followers. Besides paying homage to these respectable monks/their statues and making merits, these Dharma tourists, like most pilgrims, may learn to meditate to gain peace and develop their spiritual progress by visiting these holy places.

Regarding the Northeastern cuisine, although Isan dishes are spicier and more pungent than those of other regions, the popular local ones are usually confirmed to be not only tasty but also useful for our body and very easy to make. As reported in "The 15 Healthiest Thai Food Dishes In Thailand," a foreign boxer and columnist who has been living in Thailand for years has confirmed that the local dishes from the Northeast, Thailand, are "healthier and more simple fare" (Ben. 2017: 1). When coming to the Northeastern territory, travelers are recommended to try all these dishes: Papaya Salad with Plara (fermented preserved fish) and Grilled Chicken or Grilled Fish, Om, Bamboo Shoot Soup and Yanang Leave Extract, Fried Plasom, Mok and Isan Sausages. Usually, the Northeasterners will

have their meals with steamed glutinous rice when eating their local dishes. It is commonly known by experienced chefs that cooking the Northeastern recipes requires a lot of seasonings from chili, Pla Ra and several indigenous herbs. With these additions, the Northeastern dishes will certainly provide distinct appetite due to the cooking materials' exotic smells and flavors. Once these visitors try the Isan dishes, they will always crave for the hot and pungent tastes of the original local diets of this region. All in all, taking a little heat in your belly, not only can the hot and spicy Isan food help you stay away from heart disease and cancer. In fact, its spiciness can help alleviate pain and speed up weight loss as well (Breslau. 2019: 1). Astonishingly, entomophagy is common in this part of Thailand; bugs like silkworms, crickets, dung beetles, grasshoppers, or even stink bugs are commonly sold in the fresh markets and eaten by the Northeasterners. Red ants together with their eggs have been used in many special recipes, spicy salad, omelets with red ant eggs, bamboo shoot soup with red ant eggs; for instance, not to mention frogs, lizards, geckos or snakes. Whenever these strange insects and animals are in the season and they are shown in the food shops' menu, get a few bites and you will have no regrets trying something new, healthy and yummy.

In terms of cultural events, the Northeasterners have a number of year- round festivals to celebrate. Starting from January, the International Marathon is held in Khon Kaen whose running course goes through academic areas, cultural, natural and ethnic communities from which the runners can take pleasure and relaxation during their exercise. Moving further to February, a few more cultural events are offered for visitors who travel in the Northeast: Ban Chiang World Heritage Festival in Udon Thani, Garland Festival in Yasothon, and Phra That Phanom Fair in Nakhon Phanom. Visitors will enjoy the traditional dances, shows, light and sound presentation, dinner in Northeastern style, exhibitions, and sales of local products at Ban Chiang World Heritage Festival. At the same time parades and religious activities can be witnessed from Garland Festival and Pra That Phanom Fair.

Travelling to the Northeast during March to May, these events should not be missed without due cause Bun Phawet Festival, Miracle Phanom Rung,

Dok Khun Siang Khaen Songkran Festival and Rocket Festival. Since the second festival has already been mentioned, discussion about it will be omitted here. As for the first religious event, it is held in Roi Et and Loei Provinces to showcase the procession of Phra Uppakhut, a patron of Phawet ceremony. Salient features are the 13 preaching episodes of Thet Maha Chat (Great Birth), light and sound presentation, free vermicelli or khao poon, and steamed sticky rice (khao tom mut). Of Dok Khun Siang Khaen Songkran Festival, the event is deemed the traditional Thai New Year. Launched in Khon Kaen, Isan food, local products, performances, contests, folk music, Golden Shower tree flowers (Dok Khun), and water splashing are integrated in this festival. Because May is the beginning of the planting season, to worship and appease Phaya Taen, the Rain God, Rocket Festival is held by the Northeasterners around the second week of the month. Major activities visitors can observe in the event include rocket procession, Miss Rocket beauty contest, exhibition of local handicrafts, arts, dances, and cultural performances, etc. Before the rockets are placed on the carts or vehicles, they have been exquisitely decorated to represent several beliefs of the villagers. However, most of the rockets are adorned in the shape of the Naga or great serpent. The biggest and most famous Rocket Festival is held in Yasothon Province.

In spite of traveling difficulty, people who come to the Northeast during the rainy season of June and July can journey and revel along the Mekong River while taking part in the colorful ghost festival, Phi Ta Khon at Dansai, Loei. Getting further to Chaiyaphum, Siam Tulip (earlier mentioned as Dok Kra Jiao, Bau Sawan, or Curcumas in Nakhi shooting location section) will be in bloom. Taking a fascinating view of the vast Pa Hin Ngam which is scattered with these pinkish-purple flowers, travellers will certainly become mesmerized by its natural beauty. Besides the wonder from nature, visitors can join in the mountain bike competition, rock climbing as well as local product exhibition set at the nearby Sai Thong National Park of Chaiyaphum. At the end of the rainy season, visitors, the Buddhists in particular, can gain merit and at the same time, have fun from Ubon Ratchathani's Candle Festival held around Asanha Pucha Day and the beginning of the Buddhist Lent or *Khao Phansa*. The best known traditional

procession of the decoratively molding and sculpting candles is launched in this event.

To make the cool season more virtuous and enjoyable, Wax Castle Festival in Sakon Nakhon is highly recommended to take part in. In opposition to Ubon Ratchathani's Candle Festival, this religious event is held at the end of Buddhist Lent i.e. around October. Participants of the festival will be fascinated by the parading of intricately carved wax castles. Ancient boxing dance, traditional music, performance, and ethnic peoples in their unique costumes can be witnessed in these parades. After Sakon Nakhon's Wax Castle Festival, travelers may visit Nong Khai Province to observe Bang Fai Phaya Nak or Naga Fireballs taking place annually around mid-October in the full moon night of the eleventh lunar month. According to the belief of the villagers, the great male serpent or Naga inhabiting in the river will light and shoot the balls of fire out off Mekong River to be burnt in the air. This mysterious and supernatural act is considered by the believers as the devotion to show respect to the Lord Buddha.

Before the end of the year, Phimai Festival in Nakhon Ratchasima and the spectacular Elephant Round-up and Elephant Show in Surin will delight and warm the visitors up from Thailand's cold weather during November. Like most festivals, the former event showcases light and sound presentation, musical shows, cultural performances and sales of local products. In the latter one, travelers will be excited by the taming of more than one hundred gigantically wild jumbos and their talents in the mock battle, soccer, etc. In late November to the beginning of December, Silk, Phuk Siew and Red Cross Fair is held in Khon Kaen. Unlike the previously mentioned events, in this festival visitors can take part in the friendship making ceremony (Phuk Siew), enjoy Northeastern style dinner, *palaeng*, cultural procession, silk weaving, sales of silk and other local products as well as witnessing the beauty contest. Winter Flower Fair in Phu Rua District of Loei and Isan Grand Kite Festival of Buriram will help visitors to merrily bid goodbye to the end of the year. In December, spectacular parade and sales of flowers and plants are the major presentations in the first event while the second one will showcase kite flying competition as its highlight. In similar

fashion to most festivals, folk music, cultural performances, exhibition with sales of local products, beauty pageant, games, you name it, are certainly be available for visitors and onlookers to merely take pleasure, to learn from, to shop or do business with (Highlighted Festivals in Northeast (Isan). 2018: Unpaged).

According to Movie Effects on the Image of Thailand among College Student Travellers, watching film alone did not guarantee that viewers would take a trip to the filming locations they saw on the screen. As added in the same study, the places featured in the movies could draw the public to travel to the shooting destinations only when the films happened to receive phenomenon success (Siriangkul. 2005: 361). Indeed, studies have shown that people make a decision to go somewhere owing to numerous intentions: holiday, recreation, business, health, study, missions, religion, sports and/or meeting friends and family. Either for pleasure or business or for both reasons, it has been reported that people who travel need to satisfy their curiosity and inquisitiveness. They travel to get away from routines in their lives. They seek to do, discover and experience something different. In so doing, factors which will influence them to choose the destinations for their journeys incorporate these attributes: natural features, climate, social characteristics, general infrastructure, basic services infrastructure, tourism superstructure, transportation access and facilities, cost, economic and social ties and uniqueness (religious center, distinct geography, for example) including attitude toward tourists [6,p.2-7]

According to Movie Effects on the Image of Thailand among College Student Travellers, watching film alone did not guarantee that viewers would take a trip to the filming locations they saw on the screen. As added in the same study, the places featured in the movies could draw the public to travel to the shooting destinations only when the films happened to receive phenomenon success (Siriangkul. 2005: 361). In compliance with the results reported in Siriangkul's article, several research projects have shown that people make a decision to go somewhere owing to numerous intentions: holiday, recreation, business, health, education, missions, religion, sports and/or meeting

friends and family. Either for pleasure or business or for both reasons, people who travel, as confirmed by scholars and researchers, need to satisfy their curiosity and inquisitiveness. They travel to get away from routines in their lives. To put it differently, they seek to do, discover and experience something new. In so doing, factors which will influence them to choose the destinations for their journeys must incorporate these positive attributes: natural features, climate, social characteristics, general infrastructure, basic services infrastructure, tourism superstructure, transportation access and facilities, cost, economic and social ties and uniqueness (religious center, distinct geography, for example) including attitude toward tourists [6].

Although the people in the Northeast, Thailand, are not well-off, they are truly nice, friendly, and likable people who will rarely disappoint their visitors. As presented in many sources, especially in the movies, the Northeasterners have often been projected as joyful, funny, honest, simple and easy-going persons (Kittiasa. 2003: 49). With these favorable qualities, it can be said that wherever the tourists go to in the Isan compound, they will feel very much welcome and satisfied with the locals' hospitality. Try visiting Isan once, and you may want to come back to the region as soon as you can.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Travel and tourism is one of the world's largest industries. It is said to surpass food import-export, oil trading, and even automobiles. It narrows down income gap, boosts economic growth because it promotes job creations. The benefits of travel and tourism are unquestionable as they have already been briefly discussed. Nonetheless, there are two sides of every coin. In the same vein as other businesses, an excess of tourists may bring about negative effects to the local communities. Moreover, the success of films in encouraging people to visit their shooting places will fade over time. For these reasons, the negative impacts from tourism on the community's environment, culture, and the society such as pollution, crime, traffic, privacy loss, etc. must be taken in to account and the travel and hospitality industry must be efficiently and sustainably managed with pre-

caution by all parties involved in order to prevent over-tourism and its undesirable aftermaths.

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QUẢNG BÁ ĐIỂM ĐẾN DU LỊCH QUA PHIM TRUYỀN HÌNH THÁI LAN

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Abstract:

Du lịch có tác động lớn đến các nền kinh tế quốc gia. Ngành công nghiệp này đã được sử dụng như một công cụ để tăng tổng sản phẩm quốc nội của nhiều chính phủ. Gần đây, việc thông qua các bộ phim để quảng bá du lịch đã trở thành một xu hướng rất phổ biến. Tuy nhiên, lĩnh vực nghiên cứu này có thể được coi là một mô hình mới trong số các học giả về Du lịch và Khách sạn Thái Lan. Do đó, trong bài viết này, tác giả tìm hiểu và thảo luận về loại hình du lịch này. Mục đích chính của nghiên cứu này tập trung vào cách các bộ phim truyền hình và phim truyền hình Thái Lan có thể được sử dụng để quảng bá các điểm đến du lịch ở vùng Đông Bắc, Thái Lan. Kể từ Nakhi, một bộ phim truyền hình nổi tiếng năm 2016 và Nakhi 2, bộ phim được sản xuất năm 2018 đã được thực hiện ở các địa điểm Đông Bắc, bài viết này mô tả các hiệu ứng suy đoán của cả hai hình ảnh chuyển động về kinh doanh du lịch của khu vực. Hướng dẫn về việc sử dụng ảnh hưởng của bộ phim để quảng bá du lịch cũng được đưa ra.
