



A STUDY OF EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS POSSIBILITY OF SONGKHLA TO BECOME MICE CITY

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ABSTRACT

As MICE Industry can be generated a lot of income to Thailand, whether holding a meeting in small or big scale, domestic and inbound travellers from incentive travel, holding an exhibition from MICE city of Thailand. 2019, MICE City in Thailand consists of eight provinces that considered from MICE eight criteria according to TCEB. The aim of this study is to examine external stakeholders' perspective on the potential of Songkhla to become MICE city. Now there are eight provinces designated as MICE city by TCEB based on their criteria. This study therefore explores the possibility of Songkhla province to be designated as MICE city as well. Target of research are separated to two sectors which consists of government and private sector that include, student representative, venues provider, hotel, organizer company, government sectors and association that related to drive MICE city. Method of analysing data is qualitative method that will examine the eight criteria. As a result, the advantage of Songkhla is unique tourist attraction and cultural. Nonetheless, Songkhla has the problem as traffic and public transportation.

Keywords: *MICE City, MICE Industry, Stakeholders, Songkhla Province*

Introduction

Songkhla is the source of services, retailing, tourism business, and education center in southern of Thailand. Songkhla also has been a center in southern of Thailand. Therefore, it has an advantage of transportation e.g. Songkhla's deep seaport that represents to be the international deep seaport. In addition, there are a border checkpoint between Sadao and Jang-lon to Malaysia and trilateral economic cooperation among Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. However, if Songkhla has developed a city for meetings, incentive travel, conventions, and exhibitions will be making the enormous economic growth rate in Songkhla. The MICE business travel will create jobs and generate income for the population in Songkhla that rather than other types of tourism from this reason, it's necessary to develop MICE business in Songkhla (City Profile & MICE City Strategy, 2017). In Songkhla, there is a policy is support activities related to the MICE industry that gather from the government sector to improve the project and supporting some budget which is consistent with TCEB (City Profile & MICE City Strategy, 2017). The general problems and obstacles

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in the city of MICE development are the lack of continuity for supporting in the MICE industry development, while hotels, venues, and some organizer have not enough awareness and understanding of the MICE industry that included the lack of the supporting from government and private agencies sectors (Nattakan et al., 2015).

Many researchers are interested in Study of stakeholder's perspective towards possibility of Songkhla become MICE city and study MICE carrying capacity to develop the city of MICE development guidelines for Songkhla and to develop the MICE industry as a mechanism to drive the economy and to increase the potential of entrepreneurs. Development of a knowledge and understanding of stakeholders in the MICE industry to be ready the center for organizing meetings and exhibitions of the region and be informed of Songkhla development as a city of MICE, the MICE industry in the region is stronger and ensures revenue growth and benefits for the region (TCEB, 2017). Songkhla has the potential to develop into the MICE city, and has a working committee to drive the development of Songkhla with the goal of developing Songkhla as a MICE city. Divided into 2 phases, within 2020 the city will be developed into the national and late mice city in the year 2022. The plan for the development of Songkhla province in the year 2018 to 2019 in the creation of awareness and publicity as well as academic work, should be organized to educate the development of local personnel, including all other sectors involved in helping drive Songkhla to the MICE city (Many agencies join forces to drive Songkhla to MICE City, 2019).

Research Objectives

1. To study external stakeholders' perspective of potential to MICE city in Songkhla.
2. To provide significant information for MICE city development in Songkhla.

Research Methodology

The overall purpose of research is to examine external stakeholder's perspective of potential to MICE city in Songkhla, to study MICE situation in Songkhla, and to provide significant information for MICE city development in Songkhla. In addition, bringing the feedback in actual experience of stakeholders from the population in sampling group method for development of the city to become MICE city in the future. The target of research population is the external stakeholders that involved in the MICE industry. Nine stakeholders were selected for in-depth interview via video interview. The occupation of the nine stakeholders are stated below.

Representative 1: Luxury speed boat entrepreneur as Tour operator business in Phuket.

Representative 2: Academic officer as Academic officer in Nakornsrihammarat.

Representative 3: Exhibition organizer as Administration manager in Phuket.

Representative 4: Marketing and convention officer as Marketing Manager in Surat Thani.

Representative 5: Event organizer company owner as Managing Director in Bangkok.



Representative 6: Travel agency manager as Manager of tour operator in Surat Thani.

Representative 7: Accommodation owner as Business owner in Nakornsrihammarat.

Representative 8: Business development officer as Business development department officer in Narathiwat.

Representative 9: Event organizer company manager as Organizer company in Bangkok.

The eight criteria that the interview was conducted on are accessibility, support from host, activity and attraction, accommodation and facilities, venue and facilities, image and reputation, city environment, risk and crisis management. The interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. The interview was recorded, and the responses of the interviewee were compared.

Results

The summary of similar answers from the respondents are presented below.

Q1: The ease of entering the city and the venue?

Eight of interviewees informed ease of entering the city and the venue in the same way answers as *“It easy and convenient of accessibility to Songkhla in many ways such as air, land and train.”*

Q2: Supporting MICE events from the host in the city?

Six of interviewees stated supporting MICE events from the host city in the same way answers as *“Most supporting from private sector.”*

Q3: Activities and attraction for pre or post event?

Eight of interviewees informed activities and attraction for pre or post event city in the same way answers as *“There are activities and attractions in Songkhla and Hat-Yai with many kind of tourist attraction such as traditional place, entertainment, various of multicultural, trade show that can be attracting tourism.”*

Q4: Accommodation and facilities?

Five of interviewees informed accommodation and facilities in the same way answers as *“The hotel in Songkhla does not have 5-stars hotel and not facilitate business traveler.”* 65

Q5: Venue and facilities?

Seven of interviewees informed venue and facilities in the same way answers as *“There is many convention centers for a choice to customers that include ICC Hat-Yai and Hat Yai Hall at central festival and each other. In addition, ICC Hat-Yai and Hat Yai Hall have a potential and ability to handle an event.”*

Q6: The image and reputation of the city?

Seven of interviewees informed the image and reputation of the city in the same way answers as *“Songkhla is the center economic growth of southern in Thailand, tourist attraction.”*



Q7: City environment?

Six of interviewees stated that city environment in the same way answers as *“Economy and infrastructure in Songkhla are still have quite problem.”*

Q8: Risk of event cancellation and security or crisis management?

Six of interviewees informed risk of event cancellation and security or crisis management in the same way answers as *“There are safety and security system in strict standard for entering the event.”*

Q9: Advantage of Songkhla province?

Eight of interviewees informed Advantage of Songkhla province in the same way answers as *“There are unique tourist attraction and cultural are the best advantage in Songkhla.”*

Q10: The disadvantage of Songkhla province?

Seven of interviewees informed the disadvantage of Songkhla province in the same way answers as *“Problem is public transportation, traffic and security.”*

Conclusion and Discussion

Accessibility

Traveling to Hat Yai and Songkhla quite convenient especially with land and air transportation. Which has both an international airport and a highway connecting the city, Songkhla has the large highway road that can be connected to the airport. Similarly, Hat Yai International Airport has enough and suitable flights such as domestic flights to Bangkok, Khon Kaen, Chiang Mai, including international flights to Malaysia and Singapore. Moreover, rail transport is convenient. Likewise, the Civil aviation authority of Thailand said that the number of flights affects the arrival rate of travelers (The Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand, 2019). The same way, accordance the convenience of land transportation system has an influence on the traveling of the people in the city (Destination Choice between First-time and Repeat Tourists, 2016).

Support from host

Most of the supporting in Songkhla are usually from private sectors rather than government agencies. Based on the results of the survey, the stakeholders have the opinion that the private sectors in Songkhla have good and appropriate MICE support, as they think that private sectors are more professional and attractive than government agencies. However, Songkhla has no potential to organize large-scale events because the knowledge and skills of employees or staffs are not as skilled as they should. Conversely, with the literature said that the city has potential for will develop to MICE city. That city must have supporting from both government and private sectors in term of policies, budgets and marketing activities for MICE (Sethasathien, 2017).

Activity and attraction

In Songkhla there are diverse and interesting attractions, with its unique and distinctive cultural heritage in Songkhla, Songkhla old town is a fascinating cultural destination. Meanwhile, Songkhla is



outstanding of shopping, entertainment and variety of foods, including trade show in Songkhla can be attract tourists. Therefore, advantages of Songkhla are the attraction of international tourists. Especially, Malaysia and Singapore. Accordance with key component of tourism system are the diversity and interesting of attractions, which are really important factor for destination. Similarly, the variety of shopping centers and restaurants are indispensable things for trips (Luengthitikanchana, 2016).

Accommodation and facilities

Hotels and accommodations in Songkhla are not potent enough to attract tourists because the hotel's level and reputation are not as standardized as possible. Meanwhile, in Songkhla has no hotel or accommodation that is above 3 stars. There are a lot of hotels in Songkhla, but the quality and standard hotels are often less and difficult to find. In contrast, MICE City should have the hotels with 4-star or more (Criteria and guidelines for MICE City development, 2014). Likewise, accordance the hotel levels affect the decision to travel (Destination Choice between First-time and Repeat Tourists, 2016).

Venue and facilities

In Songkhla, there is a venue that is suitable and has a variety of facilities, especially the International Convention Center Hat Yai and Hat Yai Hall that have experience, including the standard of MICE events according with venues that are ready and standardized are important trends affecting the MICE industry (Sethasathien, 2017). Similarly, venues that passed to standard criteria, and capable the expansion of MICE city development (Criteria and guidelines for MICE City development, 2014).

Image and reputation

Songkhla is the economic center of the southern region. Including the tourist attractions in accordance with city reputation that affects the city being known of people in the region level (Criteria and guidelines for MICE City development, 2014). However, the respondents did not mention the image of MICE at all. Conversely, the experience of the event in the past can reflect the image and potential of the province (Sethasathien, 2017).

City environment

Found that in Songkhla there are economic and infrastructure problems resulting in businesses in the area to sluggish. Including problematic traffic and public transportation that does not cover the entire city. In contrast, that the infrastructure is important to support business tourism (Sethasathien, 2017).

Risk and crisis management

The risk management in Songkhla is quite good and strict. In the event there is strict security management. As well as at the event, there are relatively low risks. Likewise, Risk in organizing events in the area that affects the ability to organize events such as political protests or natural disaster (Criteria and guidelines for MICE City development, 2014).



Recommendation

This research can be further developed into a quantitative research. Which can focus on the increasing population to further for find important information to be obtained from the growing population. In order to use important information to develop Songkhla in the future.

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