SOCIO ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON TOURISM AND THAI LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN KOH LARN BEACH PATTAYA, THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

In 2019, Thailand earned 3 trillion baht (US $ 90 billion) from domestic and international tourism, while pandemic revenues fell to 800 billion baht (US $ 24 billion) in 2020. More than a year and a half after the COVID-19 pandemic, the Thai tourism industry is now struggling to survive and trying to attract more quality visitors from mass tourism. The country received 40 million international visitors in 2019, and by 2020 that number had dropped to just 6.7 million. In 2021, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) estimates that there will be only 1-2 million foreign tourists visiting the country, even in the best of conditions. Some believe that this number is still considered very promising as the current vaccination rate and the numbers of daily positive cases in the country are increasing. According to UNWTO, one in 10 jobs is associated with tourism. It plays an important role in socio-economic, cultural development and sustainable development of Thailand. According to the tourism statistics of Thailand, the number of tourists visiting Thailand increased from 35.35 million in 2017 to 38.28 million in 2018 and then to 39.80 million in 2019. The increase in visitors from 2018 to 2019 is limited to 4.24%, and 6.7 million, which is actually lower than the Thai authorities expected, significantly contributed to the country’s economy. However, COVID-19 pandemic induces negative impacts on tourism sector, socioeconomic status of locals. A total of 208 locals were randomly selected as study subjects. Survey was conducted by using questionnaire at Koh Larn beach Pattaya, Thailand. The results of the study revealed and evidenced that the pandemic influences on socioeconomic status, livelihoods and daily activities. The results of the present study demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic influence on socioeconomic status of local communities in the study area. Thus, it can be concluded that pandemic conditions and travel bans exerts adverse affects on economical status of locals as well country.

Keywords: Covid-19, Tourism, Economy, Local-community and socio-economic status.
Introduction

Like many other Southeast Asian countries, tourism is one of Thailand's largest industries, accounting for almost 20 percent of GDP. In 2019, Thailand earned 3 trillion baht (US $ 90 billion) from domestic and international tourism, while epidemic revenues fell to 800 billion baht (US $ 24 billion) in 2020. Lockdown measures, travel restrictions and COVID-19 have plagued the Thai tourism industry since the pandemic hit the country in early 2020. In 2019, before the epidemic, Phuket had over 10.5 million visitors, bringing in US $ 13 billion in revenue - almost 90 percent of the island's GDP.

As per the Tourism Authority of Thailand, in the first five months of 2020, Phuket had over 3 million visitors, 2 million of them foreign visitors, in contrast to the government's travel restrictions in March 2020. In contrast, in the first five months of 2021, Phuket saw less than half a million visitors, and only 5,000 foreigners. With the introduction of the sandbox project, the authorities hope to reopen Thailand to international tourists. Thai Tourism Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakam, estimates that 100,000 international tourists will visit Phuket from July to September 2021, earning 9 billion baht (US $ 90 million) in revenue. However, these predictions may be promising. The National Economic and Social Development Council of Thailand expects only 150,000 foreign tourists a year in total, compared to 40 million in 2019, due to an increase in the delta variant.

The Sandbox project results, Delta variant control and Thailand's vaccine drive will determine whether the Thailand tourism industry year is hopefully over or plagued by pandemic. Currently, all foreigners coming to Thailand are required to remain in detention for 14 days at the alternative state quarantine facility, although fully vaccinated. With the launch of the Phuket Sandbox pilot project, travellers were able to land directly in Phuket from abroad without quarantine, but they must be vaccinated. As of July, 2021, Phuket has accepted travellers from 69 countries and territories, including Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, Spain and the US. Travellers must stay in one of these countries or territories for at least 21 days before their arrival, except for Thai nationals and returning expatriates.

Travellers must submit several documents to complete the entry application certificate online and to receive the certificate. These are:

1. Medical certificate showing negative RT-PCR COVID-19 result within 72 hours before travel;
2. Medical insurance for COVID-19 healthcare and treatment worth at least US$100,000;
3. Proof of payment for an approved hotel (Safety Health Administration + accredited) for at least 14 nights and associated RT-PCR tests; travellers staying for less than 14 nights must present a flight ticket leaving Thailand; and
4. Certificate of COVID-19 vaccination approved by Thailand’s Ministry of Public Health or the World Health Organisation administered at least 14 days prior to travel; travellers under the age of 18 only need to present a negative RT-PRC test.
Upon arrival, passengers must download and install the Mobile COVID-19 Alert Application before leaving for their hotel through an approved airport transfer service. There, passengers must take an RT-PCR test and wait in their room until a negative result is confirmed. A single test costs between 3,500 baht (US $ 105) and 4,900 baht (US $ 147). After testing the negativity, travellers can travel freely to Phuket Island. However, additional tests may be required once a week depending on the length of their stay. Passengers staying in Phuket for at least 14 days can travel to the rest of Thailand without being detained, including international travellers. At the same time, domestic travellers can go to Phuket without vaccination if they show a negative RT-PCR test seven days before departure. In July 2021, the first month of the Sandbox project, Phuket received nearly 15,000 international arrivals, including Thai nationals. Although the number is much lower than the island’s pre-pandemic levels, the Thai government hopes the project will demonstrate a successful model for the gradual reopening of Thailand to international tourists. Since the project began, the Thai government has extended the program to provide more options for travellers. Since July 15, international travellers have been able to enter the islands of Ko Samui, Ko Fa-ngan and Ko Tao in Surat Thani province, similar to the 'Samui Plus' program, but with some stricter requirements.

Tourism, considered as a significant industry, accounting for 10% of world GDP, 7% of international trade and 30% of service activities. According to UNWTO, one in 10 jobs is associated with tourism. Tourism, well known that it is an activity that contributes to the development of many countries, but despite its economic strength, tourism remains one of the most sensitive and vulnerable sectors to internal and external crises [1]. Over the past decade, many tourist destinations have experienced crises ranging from nature to man-made events, terrorist attacks, health crises (MERS-CoV, SARS, etc.), to natural disasters (Hurricane, Tsunami, Volcanic eruption, etc.). However, after these crises, the tourism industry was able to recover. Tourism has an incomparable potential for resilience [2]. However, unlike previous crises, the world is now facing an unprecedented crisis. The danger is not localized, but without escaping the tourist destination, it is within the general and international range. UNWTO estimates a 20 to 30% reduction in international traffic by 2020, which could result in a loss of $ 300 to $ 450 billion in international tourism revenue. (Figure 1. Absorbing this shock to establish its resilience is the objective sought by any territory that has built its strategy on tourism).

Tourism development under currently depends on most attracting places in the country such as natural beach areas play a vital role in the development of local tourism and tourists attractions. The availability of transportation plays a key role in attracting tourists to specific destination. In Thailand, road transport and air transport systems are well established across the country. Tourism Authority has deployed advertisements extensively in order to educate the tourists to know about their destinations spots in and around country. Hence, tourist gets knowledge of all the attractive places in Thailand. Economy of the country is based on the performance of tourism sector.
Tourists have good knowledge of what they would like, and they plan to live it. Hence, knowledge about time and time to reach good destination and destination can influence the reasons for attracting tourists. However, tourists select their destination upon the facilities such as food, safety, convenience, entertainment, pleasant weather, beautiful beaches and other basic facilities. Economy of the country is based on the performance of tourism. Thousands of industries in Thailand are interlinked with tourism. Tourism in the country is full of encouragement for the past few decades of development strategies for the development of the country's tourism. Perhaps, tourism generates considerable socio-economic growth, income distribution, foreign exchange earnings, export receipts, and employment. Presumably the selection of destination conflicts with attractions, host tourist interaction, natural resources urban spaces in a particular part of the country. Based on the feedback from the ground level need to strengthen logistics, tourism dependent investments appropriate infrastructure marketing of eco-friendly, rural, and urban natural products. Endeavours need to initiate effective rural tourism planning. To focus on measure of tourist attractions, consider the geographical, social, cultural, economic, organizational, legal, fundamental and environmental factors. Hence, it will make decisions on various local coastal tourist attractions [3, 4].

In addition to attracting tourists, there are a number of other supporting features such as nature and basic facilities. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze all aspects of tourists. Tourists use all the facilities and infrastructure available to destinations and should be as natural as possible. Conflicts arise, why tourism chooses tourism destination, availability of facilities, or perseverance of nature. National Accounts Data and Tourism's Satellite Accounts (TSA) have proven to the economic importance of tourism industry. Hence the convenience, safety, pleasant weather, environment, natural and pleasant beaches, accommodation, food, and entertainment are factors that could influence the tourist’s choice of destination. Corona virus disease (Covid-19) has had a dramatic impact on tourism in Thailand due to most of the countries did not discourage or allow outbound travel and Thailand closed its borders. The
study intended to examine the negative impacts of pandemic at study area. To elucidate the locals implications and its influencing factors on their socioeconomic status.

**Methodology**

Quantitative study conducted using survey and questionnaire as a tool to collect research data. Such questionnaire researchers are prominent and modified according to the study. A 5-point scale (Likert-type) attitude questionnaire was constructed; a primary pilot study was conducted and tested [5]. The data presented in tables and the questionnaire elements reflected using the Likert Scale score represented in each respective table. In addition, data analysis was conducted by SPSS (V.22).

Study site: Koh Larn Beach Pattaya, Thailand.

**Conceptual framework**

![Conceptual framework diagram]

**Results and Discussion**

Table: 1. Distribution of visitors based on age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-31</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32-38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39-45</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 and above</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>208</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: Survey

Table one explores the distribution of visitors according to their age. Subjects were categorized in to four groups with the mean of 3.57 years and with the standard deviation of 0.58. The table shows that the majority of the tourists are 25-31 years of age 62.5%, 32-38 (20.19%), 39-45 (12.5%) 46 and above were 4.81% respectively.
Table: 2. Tourists distribution according to number of visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>30.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>40.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 and above</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: Survey

The above table demonstrates that the distributions of tourists according to their visits. All parameters are characterized by the number of visits. The study evidenced that majority of the visitors have visited the study area for four to five times (40.38%), first time visitors are 30.77%, two to three times (21.15%) and 7.7% of the tourists are visited six and above times. This study has clearly indicated that 40.38% of the visitors visited 4-6 times and above. Whereas, multiple visitors are (69.23%) visited the study site. Travelers are showing keen interest on the study destination. It could be due to natural resources or climatic conditions as well. Distribution of visitors according to facilities such as transportation, beauty of the destination natural resources, duration of time to reach the destination and knowledge about the destination and characterized by the perceptions why they choose the study area to visit.

Results of the study reveals that majority of the tourists have visited the study area due to the beauty of the destination natural resources (56.73%) transportation facilities (31.73%), knowledge about the destination (9.62%), duration of destination influences 6.32% towards the choosing destination. From the results of the study most of the tourist’s had been influenced by the beauty of the destination natural resources and transportation facilities (88.46%). Duration of the transportation did not show a significant role in the selection of the destination. This shows the tourists attitudes tourist in the selection of the destination if they like it, they are ready to travel for at any time of duration.

Previous studies, indicates that majority of the visitors have chosen the study area due to secured and sanitized properly of the study area 55.77%, food facilities at sanitization destination (31.73%), and accommodation at destination point influences 12.5%. The results of the study indicates that the visitors are really concerned about safety first and security. Visitors change their mind as pandemic affects at destinations. The study indicates that most of the tourists have been chose the study area due of the during COVID-19 pandemic convenient to reach the home safely (52.9%), Recreations with COVID-19 safety (38.46%), pleasant climate (4.80%), beautiful beaches around (3.84%), recreation facilities at destination (10.53%) and at destination point. The study indicates that beautiful beaches around and pleasant climatic conditions are the most significant influencing indicators in the selection of the destination. Conveniences had a negligible influence on choosing the destination. The visitor likes so much of the destination then ready to go and visit the particular site. Due to COVID-19, visitors not only concern about beauty, climatic conditions and natural resources to select their destinations. Study has provided concrete evidence on these aspects of the
attitudes of the visitors especially those who had previous experience and knowledge about the destination point.

Table 3. Effect of COVID-19 pandemic on socio-economic conditions of locals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Due to COVID-19 we loss 80-90% of the income</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>69.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to COVID-19 we loss 70-79% of the income from visitors</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>27.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No loss no gain</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain more money during COVID-19 by other works</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>208</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source of data: Survey

Table three elucidates the socio-economic conditions of the locals in the study area. Data reported that COVID-19 has significant influence on economic conditions of the locals. On the other hand, in our previous study during normal situations due to huge no of visitors has negative influence on environment. Previous investigation upon tourism activities there was no significant increase in heavy metal contents. An elevated level of heavy metals was noticed in the water but was not significantly increased. These increased levels of heavy metals due to the traces of this universal distribution of metal in the environment [6-10]. However, destination is chosen based on natural beauty of the beach, pleasant weather vacation spot, food, safety, convenience, entertainment, and other basic facilities available in the desired destinations.

Results are in accordance with the findings of [11], and reported the transportation, knowledge and time of travel factors influences in the selection of destinations and certain tourist places. Despite of the factors mentioned above, the availability of pleasant weather, safety facilities, driving to visit the study area. Hence, tourists have provided evidence based on the factors that lead to the study area as a destination. The findings are in accordance with [12] reported the similar findings, which impacts the tourists to visit Pangkor Island. Convenience, beautiful beaches around, pleasant climate, recreation and other basic facilities are the minor factors which encourage tourists to visit beaches in Thailand. Similar studies have been reported [12] and [13] similarly, the facilities provided, beauty, and comfort of the beach, plays a vital role in attracting tourists to visit desired destinations.

The bamboo raft at Klong Lad Node is a popular eco-tourism activity among foreign and Thai tourists. Organized by Muang Kluang Community Tourism Enterprise in Ranong Province, the activity combines adventures in conserving the natural environment. The Muang Kluang community has been praised for their efforts to promote local government agencies and to engage in tourism marketing in the community. In 2019, in recognition of
their efforts, they received the 12th Thai Tourism Industry Award from the Tourism Authority of Thailand in the Community Based Tourism category (TAT).

The emergence of COVID-19 in Thailand has had an impact on community tourism. Travel restrictions, lockdowns and curfews across the country have caused serious financial hardship by shutting down all tourism activities. Visitors can no longer go to nearby beaches for fear that the disease will spread. It affects not only local tourism, but also the mental state of members of the community who feel insecure about their health and livelihood. Lack of tourism and opportunities to earn income have made their future uncertain, they are looking forward to government assistance and financial recovery post COVID-19.

Currently, like many people around the world, the Pattaya community is unsure about how long the pandemic will last and the steps the government will take to revive tourism. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the community already faced significant challenges in managing tourism activities due to the topography and climatic conditions of Ranong Province during the long monsoon season. The pandemic has more complex issues, creating a bigger challenge for the community to rebuild confidence and sustainable tourism activities and efforts to regain their health and local economy after the pandemic. In this article, author discusses the importance of community tourism in Thailand and proposes ways to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that support and empower community-led tourism programs.

Thailand is using the national economy and social development plan as a tool for continuous development of the country from the agricultural community, to an industry society that is adjusted according to the trends of the global economy. It recognizes that Thailand will not grow as a developed country by the headline Frame. Thailand is still caught in the middle income trap, the inequality trap Imbalance trap. Therefore, the world economy 4.0, when it enters Thailand will be a backward country if nothing changes in development [14]. On the other hand, over polluted cities like Bangkok and its vicinity areas, mostly is caused by the using of cars and buses, especially vehicles with diesel fuel and some part are from the construction sites, industrial factories and the burning [15] this has almost reduced to normal levels during the COVID-19.

The results obtain indicate that a balance must be found between severe conditions and post pandemic. Community-based tourism as a tourism activity mainly supports the community to earn some income through tourism activities along with local environmental protection[16].The number of tourists visiting Thailand increased from 35.35 million in 2017 to 38.28 million in 2018, and then to 39.80 million in 2019. The increase in visitors from 2018 to 2019 was limited to 4.24%. Tourism plays an even more important role in the Thai economy. The National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC, recently renamed from NESDB) states that the tourism sector has accounted for 18.4% (or close to one-fifth) of Thailand's GDP since February 2019. It rose from a level of 14.2% of GDP just four years ago. As the Thai economy has lagged behind in economic growth
over the past few years, and as Thai good exports slow down somewhat in 2019, Thailand expects even more from its tourism revenue. However, as we now know, the Covid-19 epidemic has put an end to the growing tourist arrivals to the country.

It is a tool to strengthen local community organizations in resource management through better local participation in the formulation and implementation of plans for local community development and resource management. In addition to the large-scale mainstream tourism industry, community-based tourism has opened up places to generate revenue and development based on local decision-making. Community members act as service providers to assist the visitor, but at the same time also take over to monitor and conserve local a resource from degradation. This type of tourism helps in empowering the society and especially provides recognition to the poor or the downtrodden. At the same time, compared to mainstream tourism business, community tourism allows the visitor to gain a more direct social and cultural experience by interacting closely with local lifestyles. Community-based tourism works for local purposes, but cannot depend entirely on the source of revenue if visitor arrivals fall due to financial or other reasons.

**Conclusion**

The results of the present study demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic influence on socioeconomic status of local communities in the study area. Thus, it can be concluded that pandemic conditions and travel bans exerts adverse affects on economical status of locals as well country. The main objective of this study is to identify the effect of COVID-19, how it influences the socioeconomic status of the locals. Beaches are most popular in Thailand. Pleasant climate, natural beauty, resources and facilities made most attractive tourist destination in Thailand. Tourists who visit beaches focus on the various aspects such as security, easy to reach safest rooms or hotels during pandemic situations, comfort, and pleasant climate, beaches around, nature, recreation facilities, and safety, reasonable cost plays an important role in selecting as destination. Locals have the opportunity to open community based entrepreneur activities in tourism sector at beach side. Study explored the socioeconomic impact of covid-19 on locals, and tourism-based entrepreneurship development. Study evidenced that corona pandemic has influence on socioeconomic status and livelihoods of the locals who depends on tourism. On the other hand, study did not examine positive aspects due to COVID-19 to the Mother Nature hence further studies need to carry out to examine the positive aspects to environment, water pollution, landscape and vegetations in Thailand.
Reference