



**STUDY OF AGROTOURISM IN NORTHERN
THAILAND: KEY SUCCESS FACTORS AND
THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY**

BY

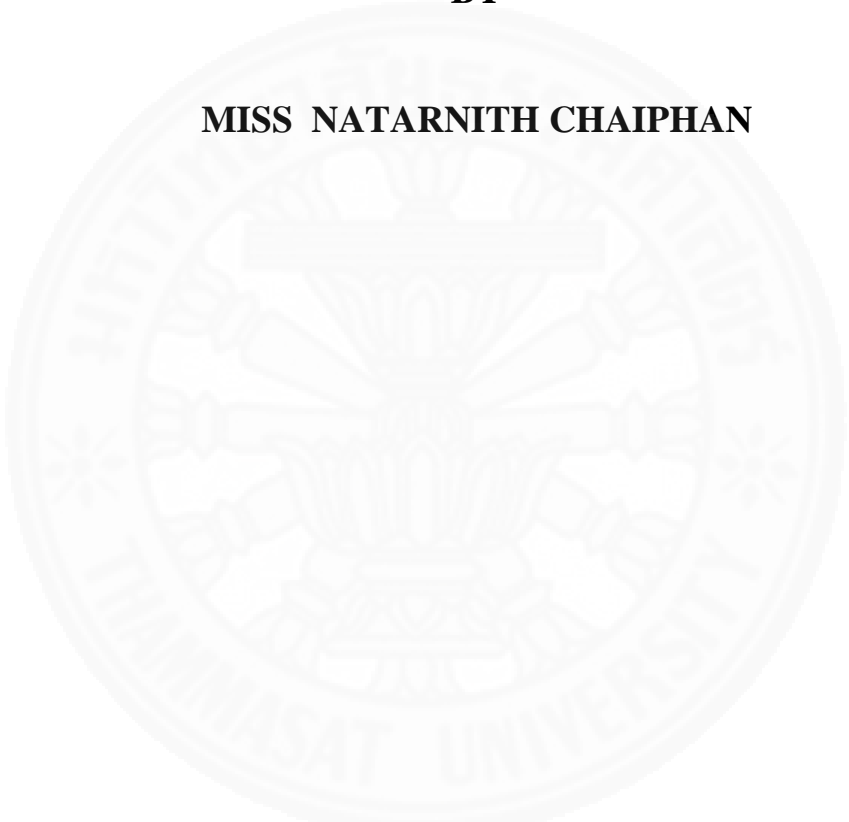
MISS NATARNITH CHAIPHAN

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAM IN MARKETING
(INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM)
FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND ACCOUNTANCY
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2016
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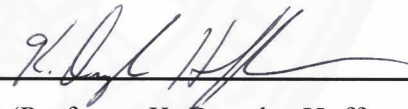
ENTITLED

STUDY OF AGROTOURISM IN NORTHERN THAILAND: KEY SUCCESS
FACTORS AND THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY

was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Science Program in Marketing (International Program)

on..... 8 MAY 2017

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Independent Study Title	STUDY OF AGROTOURISM IN NORTHERN THAILAND: KEY SUCCESS FACTORS AND THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY
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ABSTRACT

Agrotourism is the type of tourism that aims to provide knowledge of sustainable agriculture, it may include having tourist participates in local agricultural activities while learning about local cultures, traditions and way of life. It is a growing traveling trend that bring in significant revenue stream to agricultural farms. This study preliminary explored the industry through in-depth interview with agrotourism operators and identified key success factors of the business in term of tourism service design, sustainable management and marketing of agrotourism destination. The study also identified challenges of promoting agrotourism destination through social media, the main communication channel, faced by agrotourism operators especially one that is small size. Most importantly, this study identified trends within agrotourism industry which are (1) Experiential learning of agricultural, (2) Back to the nature, and (3) Eat organic food and made recommendation on how to serve the trends.

Keywords: Agrotourism, agrotourism trends, agrotourism operators, key success factors.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Thailand is an agricultural country blessed with an abundance of natural resources. Agriculture has been a part of the Thai way of life since ancient times, and Thai people have enjoyed making a living from the gifts of nature from the land and sea for centuries.

The Northern region of Thailand is different from other parts of the country in many ways; such as, culture, climate, geography, and way of life. Containing mountains, forested hills, dense jungle, and river valleys, the North provides locals with abundant natural resources and fertile agricultural lands ideal for growing temperate fruits and vegetables and highland agriculture. It is also home to several hill-tribes and unique Lanna people. The differences of ethnicity and culture play a vital role in the conduct of agricultural practices in the Northern region. The combination of wisdom passed on through generations reflected in agricultural practice with unique culture and way of life is one of the fascinating charms of flourishing the agrotourism in the Northern Thailand.

As the trend for agrotourism recently started to bloom, many agricultural practitioners offer farm visit for tourist to learn about their agriculture knowledge and experience local way of life. Some operate as a learning center, others as an opportunity to market an authentic agricultural tourism experience. While the practice and offerings are various among agrotourism operators, key elements contributing to the success of agrotourism establishment remain unclear. As the trend is settling in and the industry which seem to be growing, it is a great opportunity for local farmers, communities and agriculture businesses to develop this agrotourism into an attractive yet sustainable business.

Important questions that results of this study would answer are: What are the key success factors of agrotourism in northern Thailand and how attractive is it for agrotourism to further develop. This can help agrotourism operators in northern

Thailand to better understand and improve their operational management, service design and offerings, and marketing strategy. It also can help a new comer to operate competitively in the industry. The forecast of trends and opportunity can provide directions for future business development. In addition, this study provides a set of guidelines for a sustainable agrotourism model and community development.

1.2 Working Definition

Agrotourism:

According to Tourism Authority of Thailand, agrotourism is the type of tourism that aim to provide knowledge of sustainable agriculture, it may include having tourist participates in local agricultural activities while learning about local cultures, traditions and way of life. It is the type of tourism that utilize the existing resources to generate economic value to the business operators and local community, developing a sustainable tourism that reserve local cultures and resources.

Northern Thailand:

Northern Thailand includes provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Nan, Phayao, Phrae, Mae Hong Son, Lampang, Lampun. These provinces have the cooler climate, the highland-mountains geography and the unique Lanna culture and way of life.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To understand current structure of agrotourism industry in northern Thailand
 - a. The type of agrotourism attractions.
 - b. Stakeholders and key players in agrotourism industry in northern Thailand
2. To identify success factors for sustainable agrotourism
 - a. Service design in tourism aspect
 - i. Attraction
 - ii. Amenities
 - iii. Accessibility
 - iv. Activities

- v. Accommodation
 - b. Sustainability aspect
 - i. Site management
 - ii. Knowledge management
 - iii. Community participations and community strength
 - iv. Hospitality
 - v. Safety
 - c. Key marketing strategy and tools
 - i. Target market
 - ii. Positioning
 - iii. Communication message
 - iv. Communication channel, etc.
- 3. To identify the opportunity for growth of agrotourism in Northern Thailand
 - a. Agrotourism trends
 - b. Challenges

Important questions that results of this study would answer are: What are the key success factors of agrotourism in northern Thailand and how attractive is it for agrotourism to further develop in Northern Thailand.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Literature Review

Sustainable Agricultural in Thailand:

Sustainable agriculture is the practice of an integrated farming system of plants and animals using the principles of ecology and the relationship between organisms and the environment. The concept of sustainable agriculture was introduced to farmers in Thailand to rehabilitate natural resources and maintain long-term harmony in the nation's ecological system. The goal of sustainable agriculture is not the optimization of profits but the achievement of maximum benefits for communities, quality of life, and environmental conservation. Sustainable agriculture in Thailand is promoted through five farming systems:

1. Natural farming, the use of agricultural activities based on the ecological and environmental preservation approach, avoids unnecessary external inputs and reduces the use of methods that disturb the ecological balance
2. Organic farming not only sustains the health of ecosystems and the natural environment, but also the health of the human population. Restoring soil fertility and water quality, as well as to improve health and food safety
3. Integrated farming involves at least two different agricultural activities operating simultaneously in the same field. The diverse activities in the same field improve the environment and agricultural produce.
4. New theory farming was initiated by His Majesty the King and underlies the concept of self-sufficiency and the principle of moderation or the 'Middle Way.' This farming system aims to make farmers self-sufficient in the production of adequate food for household consumption, and to sell any excess crops for income.

5. Agro-forestry combines agriculture and forestation and focuses on the interaction between the two. Cultivating cash crops or raising livestock within forested areas improves soil quality and biodiversity, increases the variety and quantity of agricultural produce, and decreases deforestation resulting from agricultural expansion.

These systems lead farmers to self-sufficiency, a concept developed by His Majesty the King and practiced throughout the country. (Jitsanguan, 2001)

Agrotourism in Northern Thailand:

The northern region of Thailand is different from other parts of the country in many ways, the cooler climate, the highland-mountains geography and the unique Lanna culture and way of life, this contributes to an interesting destination for agrotourism. The series of mountain in northern Thailand are home to several hill tribes and ideal locations for growing highland agriculture, a number of organizations, especially projects under Royal Initiatives, offer to help the locals in making effective use of the high elevations and cooler temperatures. These organizations and projects provide locals with better standards of living and agricultural practices that replace the traditional slash and burn practices and opium cultivation with cash crops, coffee and tea plantations. While the wisdom passed on through generations creates many delicate craftsmanship and festinating culinary, the attractiveness for traveler lies at the offering of local experience and touch of local culture embedded in the traveling journey, from food to the stay, from attractions to souvenirs. (*Agrotourism, Green Travel in Thailand*, 2015)

Aspect of quality in Agrotourism:

Agrotourism is the type of tourism that aim to provide knowledge of sustainable agriculture, it may include having tourist participates in local agricultural activities while learning about local cultures, traditions and way of life. According to Division of Attraction Development, Ministry of Tourism and Sport, to operate a quality agrotourism, the standard of conduct and operation include the tourism aspect of: 1.

Attractiveness 2. Amenities 3. Accessibility 4. Accommodation 5. Activities; and sustainable aspects of: 6. Site Management 7. Knowledge Management 8. Community Participations and Community Strength 9. Hospitality 10. Safety (Division of Attraction Development, n.d.)

Impact of agrotourism on local agricultural occupation:

A concept of agrotourism has been used as a mean to local agricultural occupation improvement in numbers of developing countries. There are both positive and negative impacts on the local occupation where the positive impacts being the increase of conservation of agricultural, and diversification of agricultural career, whereas the negative being agricultural resources being used for tourism rather than agriculture. To improve local agricultural occupation, agricultural communities should promote agrotourism activities as a form of local agricultural demonstration or study with the cooperation among residents. (Na Songkhla, & Somboonsuke, 2012)

Alternative Tourism Encounter:

The socio-cultural realm of tourism that involve local cultural learning while minimize the change in natural resources and local way of life, presents more sustainable practices and different dynamics between residents and tourists than is the case for mass tourism. The tourism encounter in alternative tourism is a space that the tourist and the community co construct resulting in mutually fruitful relationship, in which the tourist can escape from an eventual daily empty meeting ground into romanticized community, whereas the community can enjoy, beside the financial profit, the pride and contributes to variety in daily tasks. (Dolezal, 2015)

Agrotourism as educational and fun activities:

For tourist consumers, rural and farm tourism has evolved towards association with educational and fun activities to spend their free time in harmonious way. The farm tourism or agrotourism provides an alternative way to spend the free time far away from the bustle of large urban communities while offering the fun of getting hands on

activities and learning the culture of working the land, the traditional occupation of farming, raising animals and the occupations of the rural population. (Petroman, 2016)

Tourism experience creations from business perspective:

Tourism experience involvement dimensions are:

- Emotional experience involvement such as excitement, enjoyment, inspiration, fascination and surprise
- Mental experience involvement results in cognitively perceived experience such as learning or thought-provoking.
- Flow-like experience involvement results in an emotive yet cognitively perceived experience which is of conative and creative nature, constitutes to a higher level of involvement. It examines factors such as perception of uniqueness, meaningfulness, escapism and getting lost in the story created during service.
- Social experience involvement such as interactions of the participants, group atmosphere, the communications with the group. (Zatori, 2013)

Key factors from communities' perspective of tourism sustainable management

The factors of community support, climate change, carrying capacity and environmental education on sustainable management and destination marketing efforts from local communities are important factors influencing the success of rural tourism. It is believed that local communities with better environmental knowledge ranging from environmental issues, potential impacts, and preventive or environmental management knowledge can better manage a tourism destination in a sustainable way. On the other hand, community support has as well a significant positive impact on rural tourism destination marketing efforts as the local communities are equipped with the fundamental knowledge about the location and potential unique selling point. Hence,

the support from local communities in promoting the destination tends to lead to better destination marketing efforts. (Chin, 2016)

Elements for evaluation of Agrotourism

Elements for evaluation for quality of Agrotourism can be grouped into 2 categories:

- (1) Elements of tourism industry which consist of attraction, amenities, accessibility, activities, and accommodation.
- (2) Elements of sustainability which consist of site management, knowledge management, community participations and community strength, hospitality, and safety. (Division of Attraction Development, n.d.)

This can be a guideline for studying key success factor in this study.

Literature review shows that agriculture in Thailand has been an importance aspect of life and northern Thailand has a unique agricultural and culture for ideal agrotourism. To study the success factor of the industry, we can study the quality of agrotourism in aspects such as attractiveness, site management and community participations then investigate the tourism encounter and experience in dimension of tourism experience involvement mentioned above together. The involvement and support of community is also vital to the success of agrotourism which should be studied to identify the success factors as well.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Methodology

Secondary research was done to collect agrotourism-related statistics and structure, and primary research including in-depth interview and observation were done to identify success factors for sustainable agrotourism and trends.

3.1.1 Secondary Research

Secondary research from publications, reports, news release from government sectors and authority to understand current structure of agrotourism industry in northern Thailand. (Objective: 1a, 1b)

3.1.2 Primary Research: In-depth interview

In-depth interview with stakeholders in agrotourism industry was done to explore their operational management, marketing strategy and unique offerings, and identify success factors for sustainable agrotourism and trends. (Objective: 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b)

Target Population:

Interview with management level of various type of agrotourism operators:

- a. Large size private agrotourism (of more than 50 Rai of area): 3 operators
- b. Medium size private agrotourism (of 20-50 Rai of area): 5 operators
- c. Royal initiatives agrotourism: 3 operators
- d. Micro / community operated agrotourism: 5 operators

Data Collection Plan:

In-depth interview respondents were recruited through personal connections and solicitation. Interviews were conducted through face to face or telephone depending on the convenience of respondents. The interviews took between 50-90 minutes using probing and projection techniques to discover any underlying marketing tactics and operating insights.

3.1.3 Primary Research: Observation

Observation was done in agrotourism operators' premises. Mainly to observe following conditions: attractions, amenities, accessibility, activities available, accommodation, hospitality and safety as well as their marketing communication. (Objective:2a, 2b, 2c, 3b)

3.2 Data Analysis Plan

The data from secondary research was summarized in qualitative form and the in-depth interview will be analyzed individually to define the key success factors for agrotourism industry and summarize to predict the trends for future of the industry.

3.2.1 Key Research Variables

To identify success factors for agrotourism industry, this study investigated the management and strategy of agrotourism operators in term of their:

- Service design in tourism aspect: site management, site accessibility, service and accommodation offered, activities and attractions offered, etc.
- Sustainability management aspect: community participations and strength, knowledge management, etc.
- Key marketing strategy and tools: positioning theme, personality association, communication message, communication channel, etc.

The success factors then being measured against the size of agrotourism operators, number of visitors and expectations of their management teams.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Structure of Agrotourism Industry

4.1.1 Type of attractions

According to The department of Agricultural Extension, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (2017), Agrotourism can be classified according to the business operation as (1) community-based agrotourism attraction, (2) government-arranged agrotourism attraction and (3) agricultural product development center. It can also be categorized by the nature of the agricultural practice; (1) agricultural farming, (2) forestry, (3) fishery, (4) livestock farming and (5) local cultural agriculture. Looking at the activities offered from agrotourism operators, it can be categorized into (1) Agrotourism involved selling of agricultural crops, (2) Demonstration Farm and workshop, and (3) Agricultural business learning. (Na Songkhla, Somboonsuk, 2011) From observation, agrotourism attraction can also be group according to the type of ownership and operation as (1) Royal Initiatives Project, (2) agricultural corporation and (3) Local private farmer.

While there are 23,200 agrotourism destinations in Thailand, with over 1,500 located in northern Thailand, there are approximately 213 locations mainly located in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai (The department of Agricultural Extension, n.d.)

Type of Agrotourism according to its business operation	Type of agrotourism according to the agricultural practice	Type of agrotourism according to the activities offered
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community-based agrotourism attraction 2. Government-arranged agrotourism attraction 3. Agricultural product development center 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agricultural farming 2. Forestry 3. Fishery 4. Livestock farming 5. Local cultural agriculture 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agrotourism involved selling of agricultural crops 2. Demonstration Farm and workshop. 3. Agricultural business learning

Figure 1 Types of Agrotourism

4.1.2 Stakeholders who have influence on Agrotourism

In operating and promoting of agrotourism, there are many stakeholders involved including agrotourism operators, local farmers, local community and residents, tourism institutes and other governmental organizations. In the perspective of agrotourism operators, the main stakeholders who have significant effect on the industry are (1) The agrotourism operators who control the design of attractions and tourism offering, as mentioned by interviewee Khun Vilasinee K. of Rai Ruen Rom

“... it is the offering from the farm, the learning camp, the workshop, the stay and other augmented services which create the attractiveness for visitors and facilitate the growth of the industry.” (personal communication, March 9, 2017).

(2) The local community and residents who contribute to the creation of authentic culture and experience which believed to be the other core value for visitors who seeks authentic experience from agrotourism in northern Thailand. This group of people are also be affected by the agrotourism

“...visitors search for authentic local experiences, learning and living like the local... and they like it here, this is what unique about the community, the most important thing which visitors cannot find elsewhere” Said Khun Somsak S. of Mae Klang Luang Community (personal communication, March 7, 2017).

“The local farmers is another important element of developing tourism..., they take part in shaping what activities the (Inthanon Royal)project can offer to the visitors which also in turn shaping the practice of our local farmers... On the other hand, their lives are greatly affected by the development of agrotourism, it can change the whole socio-cultural of the community.” (K. Suthineam, personal communication, March 7, 2017).

(3) The visitors, whose influence affect directly to the economic value of agrotourism as well as the design of service offering from agrotourism operator.

“It is a seasonal business and number of visitors and their preference is very crucial to the agrotourism” (N. Kawinna, personal communication, March 8, 2017).

Other stakeholders who also have influence on the industry are (4) Individual influencers and social media who act as the spreading of word of mouth.

“People follow the social media especially Pantip and Facebook to us, they saw nice pictures of us which taken and posted by social media influencers that visited us and wrote about us” (N. Kawinna, personal communication, March 8, 2017),

and (5) The government agent such as the department of Agricultural Extension and provincial tourism authority who take part in promoting agrotourism.

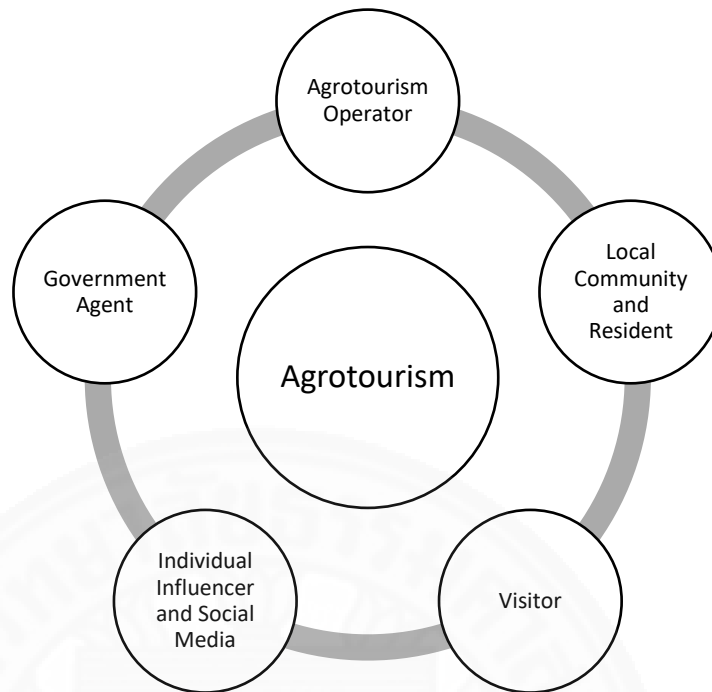


Figure 2 Stakeholders who has influence on agrotourism

4.1.3 Key Player

It is quantitatively unmeasurable to identify the key player in the industry, however, from the qualitative research, interviewees view some of the agrotourism operators as successful and role model of the industry.

1. **Royal Project Inthanon Chiang Mai**, offers various tourism activities, learning center, café and restaurant and farm stay. It is viewed as excellent in term of developing agricultural practice, farmland development, tourism development and authentic socio-cultural preservation. Exceeding management expectation, Royal Project Inthanon welcome more than 20,0000 visitors per day during peak period. As one of interviewees, Khun Pradit S. of Mon Cham, stated

“...also, they focus on developing Doi Inthanon as a tourism destination for learning agriculture, local culture and just for relax in the nature. They provide very good Servicescape for all the activities, I see them as a good role model for agrotourism.” (personal communication, March 7, 2017).

as well as Khun Somsak S. of Mae Klang Luang who mentioned

“If talking about agrotourism in this area, Royal Project Inthanon is a very successful one” (personal communication, March 7, 2017).

2. **Singha Park by Singha Corporation**, which is viewed as very professional agrotourism operator offering excellent farm visit service, café and restaurant.

“we don’t compare ourselves with Singha, they are professional organizer of farm visit, we (offering) are more like local farming experience...but Singha Park is a place that we admire, their services are professional and very organized which we would like to have that in balance with our authentic experience....It is hard to define (successful agrotourism) as farms offer different service and people take definition of the term agrotourism itself differently, but Singha Park is sure a successful and well organized one” (V. Kitaphanich, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

Majority of interviewees also mentioned that when talking about successful agrotourism operators, they think of Royal Initiatives Projects.

4.2 Success Factors for Sustainable Agrotourism

4.2.1 Service design in tourism aspect

What visitors expected from agrotourism are unique traveling experience, worry-free environment, local agricultural knowledge and participation, and experience of authentic local culture and way of life, (Chaiprateep, 2014) which is consistent with insight from agrotourism operators

“visitors come here to relax, enjoy nature while experiencing the unique culture and way of life of the people here, some are very interested in the know-how of farming, some just enjoy learning bits of growing vegetable and plants.” (K. Suthineam, personal communication, March 7, 2017).

Attraction

Because there are many type of agricultural farming and many agrotourism farms grow many type of agricultural plants, each agrotourism destination offers unique point of attractions. From the research, the common characteristic of attractions are beautiful landscape and natural environment. Khun Pradit Sithichok claimed that the unique point of Mon Cham is the magnificent scenery which visitors appreciated for (personal communication, March 7, 2017).

“People love us because we have such beautiful tea plantation, the view is extraordinary...and we worked to keep it that way” said Khun Yupin Cheewinkulthong (personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Khun Taradol Khadngaongam also claimed that visitors love taking pictures of their beautiful scenery and enjoy the peaceful nature surrounding, it is the main reason visitors come visiting and the main aspect people values (personal communication, March 4, 2017).

Authentic local experience is another element that agrotourism operator seen as important attraction for visitors experience. It includes preserving the socio-cultural environment of local way of life so visitors can take an escape from their busy life to experience novelty of local culture.

“...we try to keep our local culture, our subculture of Chinese which is unique, you can only find it in some of the northern region, and each geographic area of subculture are slightly different, coming to our tea plantation, it is another world, another language, another culture. Visitors can sense that in every touch point” (personal communication, March 1, 2017).

“Visitors come here to learn and experience the local life, they spend time here for days living with the villager, study how they grow and harvest their rice, live their visiting days just like the local” (S. Sribhumthong, personal communication, March 7, 2017).

Amenities

Agrotourism operators see agrotourism as experiential tourism which offer visitors local agricultural experience and knowledge, authenticity, and a place for nature retreat. To keep those elements, agrotourism offer basic amenities with no luxury.

“ The nature itself is luxury, agrotourism provide a place for visitor to come and experience the luxury of nature ” (P. Akkaravivat, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

Khun Khunawut Suthineam claimed that operating as agrotourism is different from a hotel, the core of the business is not for luxury but the nature, the agricultural offering and authenticity, providing basic amenities emphasize on cleanliness, safety and convenience while embedding the elements of local culture is the strategy to provide the agrotourism experience (personal communication, March 9, 2017).

Café and restaurant is the service every agrotourism operator see as a must to offer.

“ ...part of enjoying the nature is to sit down and have a good meal in a relaxing atmosphere surrounded by nature. People travel far for this and we put effort to create delicious food with our organic healthy ingredient freshly picked from the farm ” (V. Kitaphanich, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

Khun Puttima Akkaravivat stated that it is strategic elements for agrotourism operator to offer a great dining-in-the-nature experience with great quality meal. (personal communication, March 9, 2017). Consistent with other agrotourism operators who claimed that café and restaurant is the place where all visitors visit and spend time, one of the major revenue stream in operating agrotourism.

Other augmented service for agrotourism include the tour guide service and sightseeing place recommendation.

Accessibility

Accessibility is an important factor for visitors selecting agrotourism destination. Visitors enjoy the beautiful scenic when traveling to agrotourism destination which located in rural or mountainous area, condition of easily reachable road is very important for starting a good traveling experience and directional signage is a small element putting visitors at ease when travelling to the location. Agrotourism operator see the accessibility as point of parity which they need to create an easily reachable access for the location as well as sufficient parking facility.

“We are trying pave the road to our farm nicely so any type of car can come to our farm easily, and we always put up extra signage during peak season” (N. Apaiwong, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

“We plan to improve our facility to be more elderly friendly” (K. Suthineam, personal communication, March 7, 2017)

Activities

Agrotourism operators offer various activities according to the nature of their farmland. Aside from beautiful scenery that visitors enjoy, agrotourism operators offer farm tour which visitors can learn about agricultural practice. Fresh fruit picking is the activity visitors enjoy greatly as farms get more than triple amount of visitors coming for fresh fruit picking on farm (V. Sankhamrak, personal communication, March 9, 2017). Workshop of agricultural know-how and local craft is another activity that successfully attract visitors and give visitors an authentic experience. According to Khun Vilasinee Kitaphanich, what visitors enjoy most is their hands on experience of farming workshop and local craft workshop (personal communication, March 9, 2017).

“The coffee bean selecting and roasting workshop is what visitors value about our agrotourism, they do not need to be the ones who want to be in coffee business, coffee drinkers will see beauty of a cup of coffee and appreciate more for its scent, and they come visit us for that knowledge” (S.Komkrit, personal communication, March 4, 2017)

Accommodation

Accommodation on agrotourism site is an additional offering that allows visitors to better experience the authenticity of local agricultural way of life as well as to enjoy the nature. Consistent with the amenities offering, accommodation for agrotourism is basic and simple with decorative representing local culture and life. It focuses on cleanliness and safety, and decoration is a plus.

“The farm stay here is very simple because the life here is simple, we plan to decorate it more beautifully in the near future, but the decoration must reflect our local lives here” (S.Chaiyaboot, personal communication, March 3, 2017)

4.2.2 Sustainability aspect

Site management

Managing the site of agrotourism mainly concern two aspects, (1) management of visitor area and (2) water resource management. Agrotourism operators separate the visitor farm and actual farming area to better manage the plants and minimize disease which may cause by human contact. With exception for some plants, visitor farm area have different caring routine to better serve the time and exposure of visitors. Visitor seeking learning agricultural knowledge seriously often allowed to visit the crop farm with supervision.

“We separate visitor site to contain human exposure which can affect the health of plants and to better monitor visitor safety” (N. Apaiwong, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

“The visitor farm area have different maintenance routine and we often rotate among plot for visitors to visit so they always see the plant in its beautiful shape all the time” (Y. Cheewinkulthong, personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Management of water resource is a big issue for agrotourism operator, the agriculture farms require extensive use of water, developing farm for tourism require even more carefully planned use of water resource. Small farms often face some crisis

and need to temporarily stop offering accommodation during drought. (T. Suklar, personal communication, March 9, 2017)

Knowledge management

Visiting agrotourism destination, visitors expect to learn some knowledge of agricultural and local culture. Agrotourism operators must prepare and design visitors learning journey to deliver a tourism experience which visitors enjoy the learning as part of their vacation. Khun Vilasinee Kitaphanich stated that to deliver a great tourism experience, learning agricultural knowledge must be fun and enjoyable and agrotourism need to carefully plan it (personal communication, March 9, 2017). Because visitors come to contact various touchpoint of agrotourism, knowledge management to all employee in all touchpoints is important to create consistency. Khun Khunawut Suthineam stated that

“In addition to service training, all employees attend a regular quarterly internal knowledge management to keep everyone at the same page” (personal communication, March , 2017).

Community participations and community strength

Community around agrotourism location takes part in contributing a great tourism experience as visitors seek for authentic local experience. Agrotourism operator make effort in extensively managing local community participant in agrotourism and encourage the expression of local culture. Khun Khunawut Suthineam claimed that Royal project Inthanon takes into account their engagement of brining local culture to the visitor touchpoint, make local festival as part of their special agrotourism theme, create a stage for local cultural show and encourage the value added of local craft (personal communication, March 7 2017). Khun Somsak Sribhumthong also stated that community participation and strength is the most important part of Mae Klang Luang agrotourism as it is the key element of visitor’s experiential journey (personal communication, March 7 2017). The local people representing local culture is the unique point of agrotourism in northern Thailand (S.Chaiyaboot, personal communication, March 3, 2017). Creating community strength lead to agrotourism

support in the area and agrotourism operator is bind to take part in it. (V. Kitaphanich, personal communication, March 9, 2017)

Hospitality

To create welcoming hospitality for visitors, agrotourism have regular training for their employees to emphasize on hospitality with the touch of local culture and the extent of servicing quality.

“Employees are trained to become the host of their home, treating visitors as visiting friends and give them family-like feeling” (P. Akkaravivat, personal communication, March 9, 2017)

“we devote time to train employees especially prior to the peak period when visitors flood into our farm, employees need to keep in mind that visitors seek friendliness of our local people” (N. Kawinna, personal communication, March 8, 2017)

Safety

From the observation, though not neglect, safety is at minimum level. This is due to the nature of operation which visitors do not expose to operational danger, and the nature of industry development which is still at growing stage where required infrastructure and facility for tourism service are not quite settled in.

4.2.3 Marketing Strategy and Tools

Target Market: Personality Association

According to the research, agrotourism operators who operate this tourism as secondary business to their main agricultural crop production, do not clearly target any specific group of visitors. Though it is not clearly visible, agrotourism operators established some brand personality which reflect certain target groups of visitors. The common personality association found are (1) outdoors- adventurous, (2) young and smart and (3) self-rewarding.

1. Outdoorsy-adventurous: People who like to be outdoor and do some adventurous activities especially in the nature. Most likely visit as a group of families with young children and group of young adults. With design and offering of outdoor farm activities together with management vision, agrotourism, at some extent, reflect this personality which in turn reflect their target market.

“Agriculture is not boring, it is actually a fun job to do, and people who don’t have the chance to experience nature can come here and enjoy adventurous in the farm” (N. Apaiwong, personal communication, March 6, 2017).

2. Young and smart: This is the type of young and smart who value authenticity of local culture and balance with nature. This group of young people are smart in term of adapting local culture into modern lifestyle, living in harmony with nature which include the living by agriculture and leading a sustainable life. Agrotourism operators of this personality stated that this is the new trend of the generation Y people (V. Kitaphanich, personal communication, March 9, 2017), and it is a growing segment (P. Akkaravivat, personal communication, March 9, 2017).
3. Self-rewarding: Appear to be people who value peace and are health conscious. Enjoying peaceful nature in beautiful scenery is a self-rewarding and eating clean and fresh organic food is a way of taking care of one’s health (N. Kawinna, personal communication, March 8, 2017).

“Our villagers’ simple life is peaceful and relaxing, we want people to experience that.” (S. Sribhumthong, personal communication, March 7, 2017).

Positioning Theme

Each type of agrotourism destination has slightly different theme, many agrotourism employ little of marketing strategy into creating positioning. The common

themes found in the qualitative research are (1) adventurous (2) learning center (3) relaxing nature retreat.

1. Adventurous: Offer hands on experience of doing some agricultural activities as well as other fun farm activities such as ATV riding, horse riding, and harvesting of agricultural crop and fruit picking. This type of positioning them attract more of young adults and families (T.Khadngaongam, personal communication, March 4, 2017).

“We are the farm for visitors especially families with young children to come and have their families time doing outdoor activities, ATV driving, horse riding...it is how we want visitors to think about us” (T.Khadngaongam, personal communication, March 4, 2017).

2. Learning center: Offer workshops and short courses of farming knowledge and local craft. Workshops include rice growing, clay house building and tied dye craft.

“We call ourselves a sustainable agricultural learning center” (V. Kitaphanich, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

Rai Ruen Rom and Suan Ya Luang are good example of this type of agrotourism.

3. Relaxing nature retreat: Offer accommodation with highlight of beautiful landscape and peaceful environment.

“Beautiful landscape and breath taking scenery is us, we want people to enjoy their vacation in this beautiful nature in our farm” (Y. Cheewinkulthong, personal communication, March 1, 2017).

Wang Put Tan tea plantation and Napha-Phupa are good example of this type.

Communication message

From in-depth interview, communication message from agrotourism operators often include: beautiful scenery, with nature, adventure in the farm, fresh fruits and vegetable, family fun activities, and local craft, culture and ceremony.

Communication channel

Social media is mainly used as communication tool with some Public Relation and print media.

Social media is commonly used by large and medium size private agrotourism operators. The main platform used is Facebook fan page where they upload pictures of beautiful scenery and activities in the farm as well as to promote their seasonal special festival. Even with easy access and low cost, most agrotourism operators do not utilize much of social media for marketing their locations, and few have personnel assigned to social media content creating. Rai Ruen Rom is the most marketing oriented agrotourism operators among interviewees, they are very active on Facebook page creating interesting content. Line Official Account is also used by Rai Ruen Rom to connect with their followers, communicating schedules of workshops and creative local craft and festival. (V. Kitaphanich, personal communication, March 9, 2017)

Interestingly, many of agrotourism destination became popular because of content on social media generated by visitors. Young leisure photographers and travelers who are active on social media such as web forum Pantip.com are key influencers in this market. These influencers come visit agrotourism destinations and they wrote stories about the experience and post beautiful pictures which become a review, leading people to come visit the place.

“we barely do nothing, visitors come to our place and they like it, so they go back and write about us on Pantip, suddenly we got tremendous of the visitors”
(N. Kawinna, personal communication, March 8, 2017)

Because tourism in northern Thailand is quite seasonal with peak period during October to February. Many travel magazine and website often publish article about

traveling destiny and feature interesting attractions, agrotourism destiny often get promoted from these sources, some are at a cost, most are often free.

“We do not promote much about our place, there are journalists who came seeking for creative traveling destination and activities, they come to see us and go back to write about it” (P.Sithichok, personal communication, March 7, 2017).

Local billboard and print media are used largely around the area of agrotourism operators, mostly to promote their special event.

Pricing

Agrotourism operators have different types of pricing model varying by their activities, facilities and amenities. Most agrotourism operators allow farm visit at no charge and rely on income generated from café, restaurant, accommodation and selling of agricultural product while other price it as a package of farm tour and activity.

4.3 Opportunity for growth of agrotourism in northern Thailand

4.3.1 Agrotourism Trends

There are three trends emerged recently: (1) Experiential learning of agricultural, (2) Back to the nature, and (3) Eat organic food. Agrotourism operators sees that their visitors are becoming more interested in learning about agriculture and local craft. The trend for experiential learning of agriculture and local craft is growing and agrotourism are offering more of workshops and even a camp for long term course (V. Kitaphanich, personal communication, March 9, 2017).

Back to the nature is the trend that people are trying to escape of their urban life full of pollution. All agrotourism operators interviewed are all agreed that visitors come to their farms seeking for basic life with nature.

“...the trend is back to the basic, living with nature.” (K. Suthineam, personal communication, March 7, 2017).

“People want simple life, even for short period of vacation” (S. Sribhumthong, personal communication, March 7, 2017).

Another trend is eating organic food, as people are becoming more health conscious and taking care of themselves. They value more on organic fruits and vegetable. Farms growing organic fruits and vegetable are becoming more preferable to visit, and people are more likely to come visit solely because of fresh organic food (N. Kawinna, personal communication, March 8, 2017).

4.3.2 Challenges

Because consumers rely heavily on social media when choosing their travel destination (Sigala, M.,2012) and social media influencers play a very important role in getting agrotourism destination exposed to the public, micro or community based agrotourism destinations find themselves having difficulties to be recognized by social media influencers. The challenge lies on how can micro or community based agrotourism get recognized among visitors?

Like other tourism business, agrotourism in northern Thailand is seasonal business with extremely large number of visitors during peak period and very little during off-peak period, resulting in a big gap of demand. In addition to the challenge of managing seasonal demand, managing resources, especially human resource is quite difficult as agrotourism operators often forced to let go part of their employees during off peak period to minimize their cost and hire new employees again during peak period, resulting in inconsistent service quality and excessive trainings.

Balancing between hospitality service quality and authenticity of local way of life is another challenge agrotourism operators are facing. Keeping the non-luxury local culture while offering quality service to deliver the most for visitor’s experience is the balance agrotourism operators need to find in their service design.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Looking at the product offering of agrotourism in northern Thailand, beautiful landscape and authentic culture is their attractive point. Providing basic amenities such as café and restaurant in clean and convenient manner is the basic facility agrotourism operators need to have to facilitate tourism experience. Activities such as workshops and accommodation are augmented service offerings to enhance visitor's authentic experience. The key of the agrotourism experience lies on providing authenticity of the local way of life in every touch point along visitors' tourism journey.

Pricing structure is varied depending on the offering of agrotourism operators. Tourism is viewed as another supporting business unit that increasingly generate more income to farms. Agrotourism operator make pricing decision with focus on augmented service offering.

Location is important factors contributing to the attractiveness of agrotourism in term of beautiful landscape and scenery, local community in the surrounding and convenient accessibility. Utilizing geographical and sociographical advantage can boost up agrotourism unique selling point especially in authentic tourism experience.

Agrotourism operators communicate through their social media channel but do not take marketing through this channel seriously. They mostly got promoted by social media influencer and free media which are both very powerful in term of getting agrotourism exposed to consumers and are significant factor to visitor's destination selecting decision. However, there are many small agrotourism operators whose challenge is how to be recognized by those media and influencers.

For sustainability, agrotourism operators need to consider the natural resources usage as well as the impact on surrounding community. Growing business together with developing community economically that preserve authenticity, culture and sociographic is the key to sustainability as these elements are contributing factors for agrotourism experience.

Together with the trend of (1) Experiential learning of agricultural, (2) Back to the nature, and (3) Eat organic food and the characteristics of target market of (1) outdoorsy and adventurous, (2) young and smart, and (3) self-rewarding agrotourism operators can choose to develop their service offering with focus on experiential activities such as agricultural or local craft workshops to highlight the authenticity of local culture, keeping the peaceful natural surroundings to serve the need for nature retreat as well as providing the offering cater to the need for organic food.

Limitations

Due to the limit of time and resources, this study aims to preliminary explore the industry only on agrotourism operator side of agrotourism industry in northern Thailand. The limitations are the following:

- This study only investigated on agrotourism operator side, the insight and information are from the operators' perspective only.
- Sample selection may not cover all types of agrotourism operators in northern Thailand to reflect accurately on segmental practices
- The limitation of this study insignificantly affects the report in summary and recommendation.

Overall the limitations did not vary the findings and result but the small sample size may cause inappropriate use of this study for case study or proof supporting business decision. Therefore, further quantitative study is suggested to generalize to data representing the population.

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APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Understanding and practicing agrotourism
 - a. What is your understanding of agrotourism / type of agrotourism?
 - b. What do you offer for the tourist?
 - c. What do you offer for the community?
 - d. How do you practice natural resources conservation and minimize socio-cultural impact?
 - e. Who are the players in your business and what influence do they have on your business?
2. Services and activities offer in the place
 - a. What services do you offer?
 - b. What activities do you offer?
 - c. How do you arrange activities for visitors?
 - d. What are service offered for convenience of visitors?
3. Characteristic of tourist and visitors
 - a. How many tourist/visitors you have on monthly basis?
 - b. How many do you expect?
 - c. Demographic of the tourists.
 - d. Characteristic of the tourists.
 - e. Time spent in the place and activities
 - f. What do visitors like about your place?
4. Promoting Agrotourism

- a. What are the things tourist enjoy of agrotourism?
- b. How do you promote agrotourism? What channel/ tools/ strategy?
- c. Who are the success practitioners in agrotourism, why? What contribute to their success?
- d. How to keep agrotourism sustainable?

5. Management and operation

- a. How do you train your personnel? (Knowledge, skills, service skills, and how often)
- b. How do you manage agricultural site and visitor site? (keeping visitor site available for activities all the time, isolating agricultural site etc.)
- c. How do you maintain the balance between tourism and agricultural harvesting?

6. Future expectation

- a. What do you think about the future of the agrotourism
- b. What are the future service you plan to offer?
- c. What do you think is the key service/activities to be provided for agrotourism industry?
- d. What do you expect from government and other related organizations?

APPENDIX B

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

	Name	Position	Organization	Province	Agriculture type
			Large Size Private Agrotourism Operators		
1	Khun Yupin Cheewinkulthong	Marketing Director	Wang Put Tan Tea	Chiang Rai	Tea plantation
2	Khun Taradol Khadngaognam	Co founder	Mont Yai Nan Farm Stay	Nan	Farmland
3	Khun Puttima Akkaravivat	Manager	Rai Sang Arun	Chiang Rai	Rice and farm
			Medium Size Private Agrotourism Operators		
4	Khun Vilasinee Kitaphamich	Marketing Director	Rai Ruen Rom, Chiang Rai	Chiang Rai	Farmland
5	Khun Nisanart Kawinna	Owner	Rai Napha-Phupa, Chiang Mai	Chiang Mai	Strawberry
6	Khun Vimont Sankhamrak	Owner	Rai Sankhamrak, Chiang Rai	Chiang Rai	Farmland
7	Khun Nisachol Apaiwong	Owner	Nisachol Vinyard	Chiang Mai	Grapes
8	Khun Sukrit Komkrit	Marketing Director	Suan Ya Luang	Nan	Coffee
			Micro / Community Agrotourism		
9	Khun Somsak Sribhumthong	Head of Community Development	Mea Kang Luang Community	Chiang Mai	Rice
10	Khun Supatra Klumngen	Owner	Rai Ing Chant	Chiang Rai	Farmland
11	KhunTermboon Suklar	Owner	Rai Lung Tern	Chiang Rai	Strawberry
			Royal Initiatives Agrotourism Project		
12	Khun Khunawut Suthineam,	Deputy Director of Tourism Devel	Royal Project Inthanon	Chiang Mai	Farmland
13	Khun Sukanya Chaiyaboot	Visitors and Tourism Support	Baan Maneepreuek	Nan	Farmland
14	Khun Pradit Sithichok	Tourism Development	Mon Cham	Chiang Mai	Farmland

BIOGRAPHY

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