



# Enhancing Learning on Community-based Tourism: Cases of Thai Tribal Communities

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## Abstract

This study used participatory action research to enhance tribal communities learning regarding Community-based Tourism (CBT) management. Five tribal communities in Northern Thailand were selected as units of analysis. Participatory Action Research (PAR) was employed include planning, acting, observing and reflecting process. In total, 50 community members voluntarily joined as local researchers whilst 108 community members voluntarily responded to community potential assessment process. Thai and foreign tourists were accidentally sampled to reveal their push and pull factors influencing their CBT travel behavior. Questionnaires, reflecting meetings and brainstorming were used for data collection. Descriptive statistics and content analysis were used for analyses of collected data. The results showed different levels of community potential perceived by respondents. There were similar push and pull factors influencing Thai and foreign tourists' CBT travel behavior. Major push factors influencing tourists' behavior were the need to visit places that never been visited before and to learn new experiences in a different culture. Major pull factors were the beauty of natural attractions and environments as well as the honesty and friendliness of community people. Appropriate CBT routes were mapped by 50 community members and the authors.

**Keywords:** Community-based Tourism, Participatory Learning, Tribal Communities

## Introduction

Thailand is among the top destinations that tourists want to visit. Statistics show that approximately 40 million tourists from around the world visited Thailand in 2019 and it this number is forecast to increase every year (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2020). The tourism industry has contributed to Thailand's national income as well as to social and economic development. Community-based Tourism (CBT) has been widely mentioned in Thailand for the past decade. The Thai government launched a sustainable tourism policy and strategic plan to promote the development of CBT within the country (Department of Tourism, 2018). The policy and plan focus on economic and social development at the grass root level as well as on the sustainability of community development. However, to meet CBT standard requirements, communities should encourage participatory management among their community members (Suansri, 2003).

In developing countries, there are some obstacles to the promotion of CBT; for example, the lack of entrepreneurial knowledge to setting up appropriate CBT management as most local people do not know how to start the CBT even if they have rich natural resources and beautiful tourist attractions. Many beautiful attractions are located in tribal communities in the highlands where the local people belong to different ethnic groups. A number of communities have been confronted by the lack of adequate governance, insufficient funding and community potential (Novelli, Klatte, & Dolezal, 2017). In the current study, the authors went to tribal communities in Northern Thailand several times to investigate the need for CBT development. The tribal communities were interested ready for the chance to commence a new opportunity by developing their own CBT organizations to improve their social and economic status. However, the majority of tribal people do not know what CBT is, nor how to go about CBT management. This study aimed to enhance learning of tribal communities towards CBT by means of participatory action research. There were four research questions: 1) What is the



community potential perceived by respondents? 2) What are the major factors that influencing tourist behavior? 3) What are the important guidelines for the CBT development of specific communities? 4) What can tribal people initiate as specific tangible products related to their needs and the guidelines?

### **Literature Review**

The Thai government realized the importance of CBT as a part of the country's development. CBT projects and initiatives were funded to help local people build a better quality of life. However, to become tourism communities, there are some important criteria. According to Suansri (2003), the principles of CBT should comprise the following: recognize, support and promote community ownership of tourism; involve community members from the start in every aspect; promote community pride; improve the quality of life; ensure environmental sustainability; preserve the unique character and culture of the local area; foster cross-cultural learning; respect cultural differences and human dignity; distribute benefits fairly among community members; and contribute a fixed percentage of income to community projects. Push and pull factors have a great impact on tourist behavior. Ezeuduji & Dlomo (2020) investigated push and pull factors for domestic leisure travel in a South African municipality and found significant push factors such as seeking social interaction, relaxation, exploring different activities and cultures, visiting friend and relatives and escape from normal routine. They identified pull factors such as the beauty of natural resources, its diverse history and culture and excellent recreational facilities. Khuong & Ha (2014) reported that the appropriate push and pull factors will bring about satisfaction and support the intention to visit again.

### **Methods and Materials**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) was used as the research methodology. Tribal communities were selected based on their interests in CBT development. Five tribal communities voluntarily joined this study: Ban Pa Pae (Mae Hong Son province), Ban Nongtao, Ban Dok Daeng, Ban Khun Om Long and Ban Chapo-Pasi (Chiang Mai province). Recruitment of ten local researchers from each community was done based on their voluntary interest. In total, 50 local researchers were chosen. The research process was:

1. Fifty local researchers acquired basic knowledge on Community-based learning, in their own community under conditions of rapid socioeconomic change. A creativity camp was used to boost their creative thinking practices. The local researchers participated in all PAR process include planning, acting, observing and reflecting process.

2. Questionnaire A was answered by 108 community members who voluntary to assess their perceived community potential toward CBT. Questionnaire B was answered by 120 Thai tourists and 126 foreign tourists volunteer to identify the push and pull factors influencing their CBT travel behavior. All questionnaire items used a five-rating scale; the authors then converted all scores into percentage format for comparison purposes.

3. Local researchers together with the authors conducted reflection meetings, brainstorming and synthesizing all data collected; then, they designed the guidelines for CBT development and initiated specific products relevant to their guidelines.

**Table 1** Target Population and Research Tools Used

Target Population	n	Research Tools
Local Researchers	50	All Aspects of the Research Process
Community Members	108	Questionnaire A
Thai Tourists	120	Questionnaire B
Foreign Tourists	126	Questionnaire B

**Table 2** Percentage Interpretation of Community Potential and Influencing Factors

Percentage	Potential Level	Percentage	Potential Level	Percentage	Influencing Level
81-100	A = Very High	51-60	D = Low	85-100	Major Influencer
71-80	B = High	41-50	E = Very Low	75-84	Moderate Influencer
61-70	C = Moderate	< 41	F = Critical Low	Below 75	Slight Influencer

Table 1 shows the numbers of target populations in the study and the research tools used. Table 2 shows how the researchers interpreted the responses from ‘Questionnaire A’ (Community Potential) and ‘Questionnaire B’ (Influencing Factors).

## Results and Discussion

### Perceived Community Potential

Results toward perceived community potential showed in the following table.

**Table 3** Community Potential Perceived by Respondents

Community Potential Factor	Percentage					Mean	Level	Rank
	BPP (n = 23)	BN (n = 23)	BDD (n = 22)	BKO (n = 20)	BCP (n = 20)			
Community's Human Capital	88.7	79.6	90.0	88.0	87.0	86.7	A	1
Community's Readiness	92.5	64.6	22.7	71.3	65.3	63.3	C	2
Coordination with Related Organizations	63.0	66.5	43.6	59.0	59.0	58.2	D	3
Community Leader's Potential	71.0	29.3	61.8	65.0	58.3	57.1	D	4
Beneficial Returns for Community	97.4	44.3	30.0	52.0	24.0	49.5	E	5
Community Administration	73.6	51.3	32.0	52.3	37.7	49.4	E	6
Engagement with Tourists	80.9	31.3	22.7	42.0	50.0	45.4	E	7
Training towards CBT	80.0	23.9	24.1	61.0	33.0	44.4	E	8
Community Participation	70.6	24.2	42.5	52.0	30.0	43.9	E	9
Engagement on Tourism Development	62.9	43.8	26.4	46.0	34.0	42.6	E	10
Managerial System and Procedure	76.0	41.1	24.2	43.1	28.0	42.5	E	11
Mean	77.9	45.4	38.2	57.4	46.0			
<b>Community Potential Level (Based on Mean Value)</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E</b>			

**Note:** BPP = Ban Pa Pae; BN = Ban Nongtao; BDD = Ban Dok Daeng; BKO = Ban Khun Om Long; BCP = Ban Chabo-Pasi

Table 3 shows that the communities had different perceptions of their own potential regarding CBT management. Community's human capital was the only A-level score, whilst the other factors were mostly at the very low level. Comparison among the five communities showed that Ban Pa Pae had the highest mean whilst Ban Dok Daeng had the lowest. Three out of the five communities perceived their potential lower than 50 percent.

### Push Factors Influencing Tourist Behavior

The local researchers collected data on tourist CBT travel behavior from both Thai and foreign tourists to discover the major push factors (demand side) and pull factors (supply side) influencing tourist behavior. The major push factors (85% or higher) are presented in Figure 1.

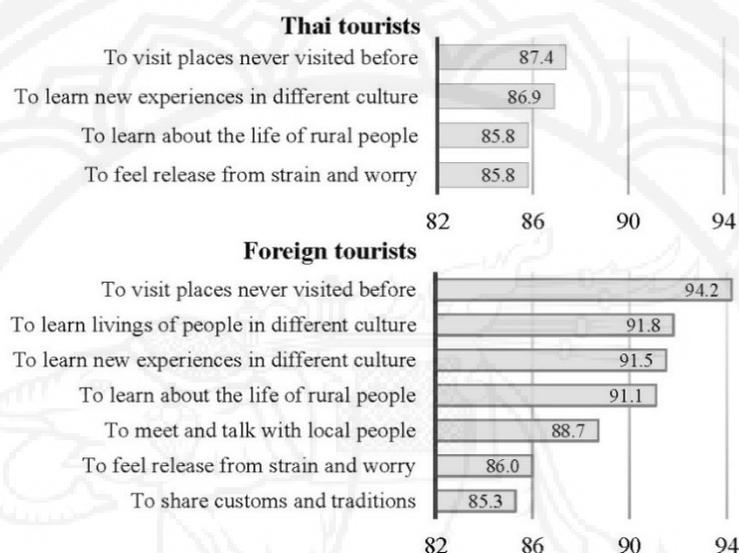


Figure 1 Major Push Factors Influencing Tourist Behavior.

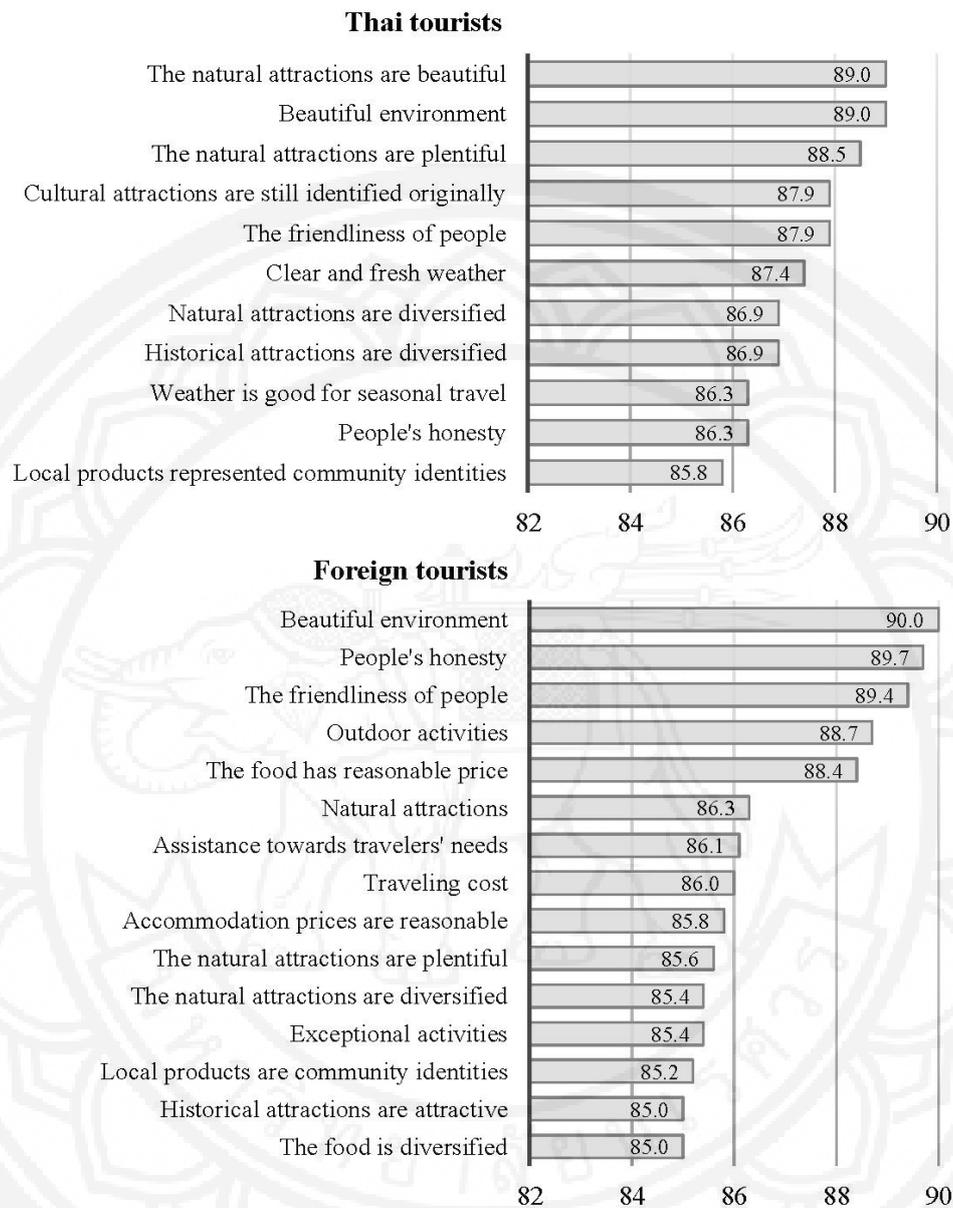
Figure 1 shows the major push factors influencing tourist behavior with similar results for both Thai and foreign tourists: to visit places they have never visited before; to learn new experiences in different culture; to learn livings of people in different culture; to learn about the life of rural people; and to feel release from strain or worry. Foreign tourists were also interested in meeting and talking with the local people and sharing in their customs and traditions.

Khuong & Ha (2014) reported similar influencing push factors: to learn something new and interesting; to visit a place that they have not visited before; to fulfil their dreams of visiting a foreign land/country; to meet new people and socialize with the local community; and to escape from daily routine. Another study concluded that the most powerful push factors influencing tourists' behavior were: they needed to escape from the ordinary, to see as much as possible, to have a change from busy jobs and to see and experience a foreign destination (Katsikari, Hatzithomas, Fotiadis, & Folinas, 2020). In CBT, tourists seek prestige and social interactions (Mohammad & Som, 2010).



### Pull Factors Influencing Tourist Behavior

The major pull factors influencing tourist behavior are presented in Figure 2.

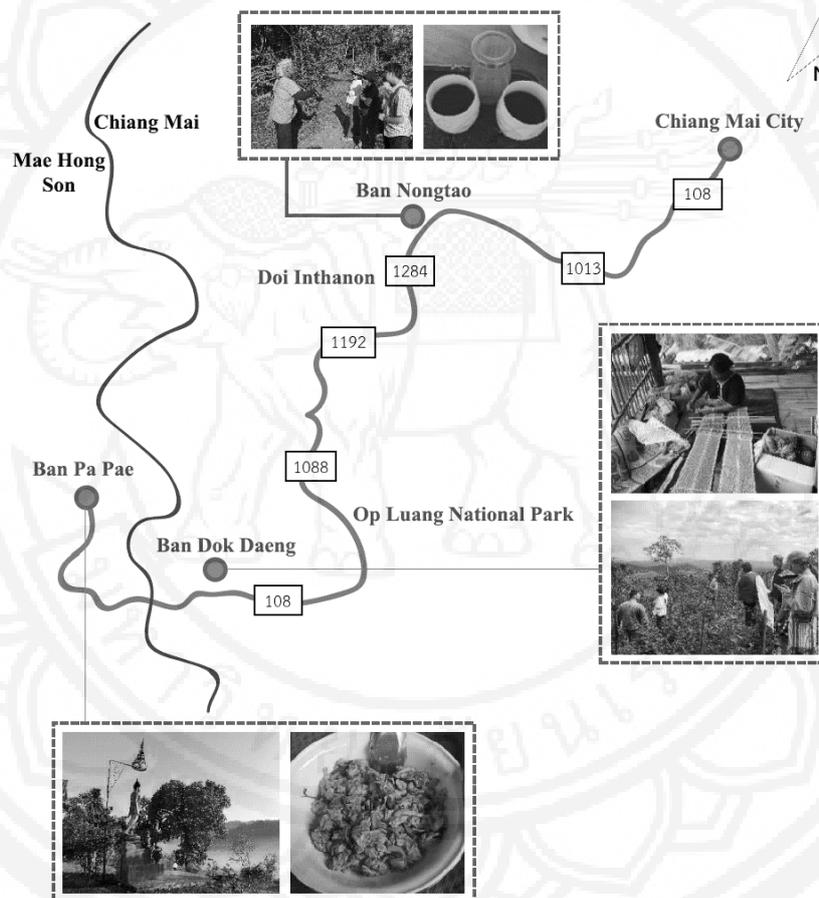


**Figure 2** Major Pull Factors Influencing Tourists' Travel Behavior.

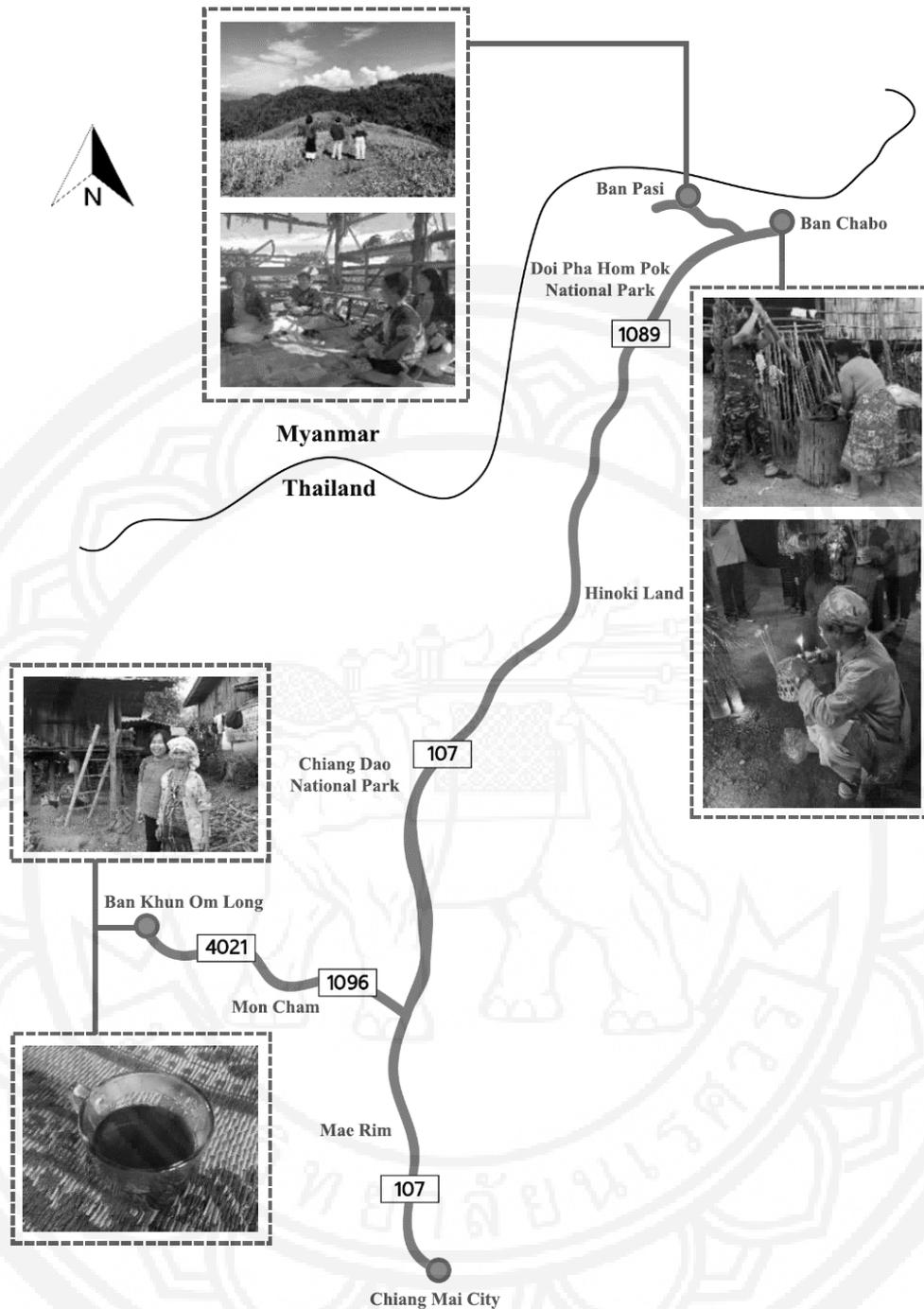
Figure 2 shows the major pull factors compared with the push factors. Both Thai and foreign tourists were attracted by several factors such as the beauty of natural attractions and environment, cultural attractions, the friendliness of people and outdoor activities. Katsikari et al. (2020) reported that the pull factors in CBT are the outstanding scenery, exotic atmosphere and a culture different from one's own. Mohammad & Som (2010) reported on the importance of destination attributes in CBT decision making by tourists. The influencing pull factors reported by Khuong & Ha (2014) were: accommodation, transportation and recreation facilities; festival/special events and activities; warm and sunny weather; historical, cultural, art and religious attractions; variety of food; beautiful natural scenery and landscape; and safe and easy access to the destination.

### Tourism Routes

The local researchers together with the authors suggested two main travel routes (Route A & Route B) for CBT in the five tribal communities: The routes are presented in Figure 3-4. Figure 3 shows Route A which connects three communities of Ban Nongtao, Ban Dok Daeng and Ban Pa Pae. The route starts in the Chiang Mai city center and using highway 108 passes Doi Inthanon and Op Luang National Park which tourists can visit before reaching the next community destination. This route provides plenty of natural resources to see and many food stops. Tourists should allow 3-5 days for travelling. Figure 4 shows Route B which tourists start their journey from Chiang Mai city center using highway number 107 passing through Mae Rim district. Tourists may turn left to Ban Khun Om Long or keep going straight ahead to Ban Chabo-Pasi which is close to the Myanmar border. This long route passes Chiang Dao National Park, Hinoki Land and Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park. Tourists should allow 4-6 days in this route.



**Figure 3** Route A with Images Showing some Attractions and Boxes Indicating Highway Numbers.  
(Photographs and Graphics Taken and Designed by the Corresponding Author in 2019)



**Figure 4** Route B with Images Showing some Attractions and Boxes Indicating Highway Numbers.  
(Photographs and Graphics Taken and Designed by the Corresponding Author in 2019–2020)

### Community Initiatives

Tribal people discussed with local researchers and the authors about appropriate community products that can be made using resources within community and also be marketed in the next future. In fact, further research can be fulfilled their needs and competent. Produced community products are canvas bags, ghost dolls and bamboo products. The products need more improvements in this stage of study.



**Figure 5** Initiatives Emerging from Community Ideas.  
(Photographs Taken by the Corresponding Author in 2019)

Even though the initiatives identified by the communities were very basic, there is the opportunity for more development in the next round of research. Tribal people have useful knowledge and skills that could be applied in their CBT; Comments by community members included: “We have learnt many things that we do not know before”; “We will follow up our efforts and make it better”; “Now we realize that we cannot stay still and wait for outside supports or community leader’s projects. We can now start by ourselves little by little and one day the CBT will be real”.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The tribal communities had different levels of CBT potential. The major difference was the strong community organization in Ban Pa Pae which was not clear in any of the other communities studied. The leader and members of Ban Pa Pae shared their opinions and participated in all community development processes. Members of all genders and ages engaged in community development. This participation is a very powerful tool for community development since CBT management cannot be sustained without the support and participation of many members in the local communities (Sita & Nor, 2015). Ban Dok Daeng has the lowest level of community potential (Level F) perhaps related to their language barrier problems in using the Thai language which was a major obstacle to achieving community development. Ban Nongtao is a rising star community since youth groups are very active and ready to work for their own community. For example, the young teenagers were engaged in environmental conservation activities and also in all the research processes and contributed their creative ideas on community products. The development of CBT may go very well in Ban Nongtao since the people there accepted all possible ways for development. Khun Charoen Dinu, founder of the Garbage Band, embraced the children and youths within the community and cooperated with networks both within the country and abroad. Ban Nongtao can initiate actions in the near future to achieve even higher levels of community potential. However, Ban Khun Om Long and Ban Chabo–Pasi need more help from experts and outside support to fulfil their needs. The following are recommendations for CBT development:



1. The promotion of the CBT routes from the study can be associated with existing mainstream tourism routes providing more chances for communities to engage in CBT development.

2. The guidelines given for each community must be feasible and should start with expert consultation when needed. At the same time, related government organizations should take action capitalizing on community heritage, natural attractions and local food and culture (Mohammad & Som, 2010) as well as improvement to infrastructure such as public toilets, parking areas and the road improvements (Arcana & Wiweka, 2015).

3. Printed media (Brochures, Handbooks) and new media (online and shareable media) can be developed using expert assistance. All forms of media can be effective in attracting target tourists and helping tourists to stay informed and confident regarding their travel plans. Consequently, marketing tools should be considered and be guided by a thorough analysis of tourist motivation (Mohammad & Som, 2010). CBT communities may provide an English version of the publication to accommodate the large number of foreign tourists (Sutthinarakorn, Jeerapattanatorn, & Tanjor, 2018).

4. Marketing should be provided using the appropriate marketing media. The authors suggest that communities make use of social media along with printed media. The social media content can focus on local events, culture, traditional elements and historical sites and is more likely to attract tourists, especially those who have a high educational background (Katsikari et al., 2020). There is support for conducting appropriate marketing efforts to support tourism in communities (Ezeuduji & Dlomo, 2020).

5. The standardization of homestay facilities should be emphasized more strongly in all five communities. Homestay can be a very effective tool for encouraging exchange in social and cultural activities among community members and visitors (Sita & Nor, 2015).

6. The authors suggest future research should be directed toward starting CBT management groups together with entrepreneurial learning and practice. Through practice, community members will gain in confidence and this should lead to the success of these groups. Entrepreneurial learning should be promoted so the community people can feel the impact or positive benefits of the tourism sector and foster entrepreneurship in the future (Arcana & Wiweka, 2015).

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