



Ban Nawanoi School Stay: an Alternative Accommodation in Local Community

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Abstract

There are two objectives for this qualitative study: 1) reviewing the background of the Ban Nawanoi school stay, and 2) analyzing the potentialities of the tourism resources and activities in the school as well as in the community area where the school was located. Data collection for this qualitative study was done through a) 3 purposive in-depth structured interviews of the focus groups of 5 authoritative sampling members, b) group interviews of 7 members from Ban Nawanoi community, and c) participatory observations and informal conversations in various contexts. Data were organized and classified into groups showing similarities, differences and the relation of one another using the guideline of Data Organizing Techniques as suggested by Schmuck (2006). Afterward, Data Triangulation as suggested by Patton (2001) was employed. The criteria employed were labeled as the four pillars--Safety, Sanitation, Meaning and Service or SSMS as fundamental criteria for the assessment of accommodation facilities in Loei suggested by Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (Public Organization) or DASTA and Thai Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Association or TEATA (2016). The results of this study showed that Ban Nawanoi school, located in Dansai District Loei Province, had a good history and a good background to turn into a school stay and it also had tourism potentialities and the availability at a very good level in terms of facilities, creative activities with the hosts and cultural attractions in terms of local accommodation with its identity, local food, safety, friendly atmosphere of teachers and students including parents or guardians of the students, natural resources and environment, culture, memorable experiences for tourists to talk about and to revisit the destination.

Keywords: *School stay model, School Stay in Dansai, Homestay Business in Dansai, Ban Nawanoi School in Dansai, School stay in Loei Province, Accommodation in Dansai*

1. Introduction

Loei is a province in the Northeastern part of Thailand, listed as a secondary province to visit. Loei Province is considered as the sea of mountainous terrains, with the richness of nature as well as the culture of the ethnic community and the preservation of its traditional lifestyles and culture. A number of people from Luang Prabang migrated across the Mekong River onto the hidden beauty of Loei Province for over 400 years (Chutisilp et al, 2017). As a result, the Laotian culture, the way of living, their way of thinking, their warm hospitality particularly towards guests, and above all, their cultural beliefs-- especially the beliefs in Buddhism and Animism--could easily be seen through the way people of ethnic varieties have led their lives. The hidden beauty of Loei has been waiting for tourists to explore in addition to the extreme climate difference during the year—that is to say in the mountainous areas the temperature is near freezing point during winter and at night in particular whereas the weather is hot in the summertime and during the day. However, a lot of tourists love this climate difference. They truly enjoy the hot sunbathing during the day, and they can cool themselves off during the night. It goes without saying that tourism has been accepted as a great favorable impact on Loei's economy, bringing in domestic and foreign currencies and creating job opportunities in hospitality businesses including culinary business, various types of accommodation business, transportation, souvenirs and the like. In 2018 Loei earned 3,812 million baht from tourism, an increase of 8.1% from 2017 (http://loei.nso.go.th/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id) Loei is, thus, the destination enjoying the positive economic impacts of tourism especially in Dansai District, where local Buddhist monasteries hold many festivals with the community's traditional music and folk dances, especially a well-known spirit dance ceremony, known as Phi Ta Khon in Dansai District of the Loei Province, taking place

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on the first weekend after the sixth full moon--usually in June--starting from Friday, when there is a gigantic procession of people of all sexes and ages in their colorful masks and costumes, to Saturday when a smaller parade marches along the street to Wat Pon-Chai in the morning, while in the afternoon the elders bringing out a small rocket filled with little good luck tokens for tourists or visitors. During the festival, pools of domestic and oversea tourists from various regions pour into the destination. The accommodation has been fully reserved several months before the festival—13 hotels, 4 resorts, 3 campgrounds and quite a number of homestays. Tourists do not mind staying in any homestays or just any rooms. In the promotion of tourism, the accommodation sector constitutes the most important segment (Urry and Larsen, 2011). Homestays have been promoted as alternative tourism; this can attract more tourists to come to the local community (Bhuiyan et al, 2012). As a part of accommodations, homestays provide service to the general public. The experience from the development of accommodation, the quality standard of service and public safety are the most important issues that have to be considered (Lamaiwong, 2014) in addition to the memorable experiences they would never forget.

The term “homestay” referred to the use or exertion of one’s home as a residential space for business purposes or as a form of accommodation with lodging facilities (Lynch, 2005). What Lynch (2005) and Wang (2007) had similar research results emphasizing that tourists enjoyed staying in homestays because they could interact with the hosts and participated in the hosts’ activities particularly those tourists who sought novelty, uniqueness or freshness of tourism type. Additionally, Urry and Larsen (2011) added that tourists wanted to perceive the uniqueness and the novelty of each destination through a special ‘filter’ of their own to judge the uniqueness of the destination especially the accommodation. Tourism is, to a great extent, dependent on the type and quality of accommodation available. Hotels have been and still are the principal form of accommodation. However, there has been a growth and development of some other forms of accommodation over the years. This is what Urry and Larsen (2011) defined the accommodation of this type as supplementary accommodation and was, in fact, an important segment of tourism. To help solve the problem of the accommodation of the Dansai District, the Director of Ban Nawanoi School turned their classrooms into “School Stay,” an alternative accommodation for tourists from all walks of life.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this qualitative study are:

1. To review the background of the Ban Nawanoi school stay; and
2. To analyze the potentialities of the tourism resources and activities in the school as well as in the community where the school was located

3. Materials and Methods

Data collection for this qualitative study was done in several ways using both primary and secondary data to fulfill the objectives. Primary data were collected as follows: a) 3 purposive in-depth structured interviews of the focus groups, comprising of 5 samples--the Baan Nawanoi School Director, DASTA representative, TEATA representative, Head of the Community Committee, and Head of Dansai District Tourism; b) group interviews of the community members of Ban Nawanoi, comprising of 7 members—4 community members with their children at the school, and 3 members without any children at the school; and c) participatory observations and informal conversations in various contexts. The guideline for assessments employed in this study was the fundamental homestay guideline of DASTA-TEATA, referring to Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (Public Organization) or DASTA and Thai Ecotourism and Adventure Travel Association or TEATA (2016).

The guideline emphasized the four pillars: Safety, Sanitation, Meaning, and Service or SSMS to improve the accommodation facilities in Loei. Data were organized and classified into groups showing both similarities and differences and at the same time show the relation of one another using the guideline of Data Organizing Techniques as suggested by Schmuck (2006). Then, Data Triangulation as suggested by Patton (2001) was employed.



4. Results and Discussion

Data compilation was first done through informal conversations with the community members who accompanied their children to school. All of them were eager to earn their additional income from the tourism business on top of their annual earnings from their farm crops. They mentioned about tourism development projects for sustainability as executed by DASTA and TEATA in 2017 and 2018 by focusing on Tourism Supply Chains in the area of Dansai District, concerning the small hotels, resorts, homestays, restaurants, tour operators, guides, and souvenir shops. By so doing, DASTA and TEATA held various training through numerous participatory workshops together with the hands-on technology at the on-site training in Dansai District. Therefore, some community members who attended the workshops expected that they could have a part in the supply chains. The DASTA and TEATA criteria or guidelines of the four pillars (DASTA and TEATA, 2016) of “SSMS” were:

- 1) Safety referring to the safety of tourists while in the community and while commuting to the downtown area but basically while staying in the school;
- 2) Sanitation referring to cleanliness and hygiene of the room, the toilet and particularly the food;
- 3) Meaning referring to stories related to the situations or contexts; and
- 4) Service referring to good service with warmth and hospitality of the school members as well as the community members as host of the tourists



Figure 1 Ban Nawanoi School Stay in Dansai, District, Loei Province

The researchers had selected the SSMS as criteria as fundamental guidelines towards doing the ‘school stay’ business to see how the Ban Nawanoi school stay would fit for an alternative accommodation entitled to post the sign, School Stay as in Figure 1

From the purposive in-depth structured interviews with leading community members of Ban Nawanoi, comprised of the present Headman, the former Headman, the Leader of the community housewives participating in the OTOP activities, the School Director, and Head of the community cultural festivals. All of them were well aware of the fact that the community had to lead their way of living along with the SSMS criteria (DASTA and TEATA, 2016). With a few meetings to learn about the criteria and implementations, the community, and the school faculty eventually were ready for the implementations of the criteria and the assessments. The first criterion, “Sanitation” for the benefits of hygiene, concerning good health and cleanliness in all household chores and all activities especially the toilets and the kitchen or the cooking areas of the school as well as of every house in the community. Safety, one of the criteria, was also considered the most important thing for every group member; however, the community had been without crime or robbery or drugs for years because every member kept their eye on for others in case that something peculiar might be going in the community. As for the “Meaning”, there had been many legendary stories, and many other stories related to beliefs and superstitions of the community; the community; therefore, every member of the community including students and teachers had many stories and tales to share with guests and tourists. In considering the “Service,” the main obstacle was the use of



appropriate language even in Thai to domestic tourists, and even worse in English to foreign tourists. Later this problem was taken care of. Owing to the assistance and dedication of the School Director, the language problem had been solved through the intensive English language training offered at the Ban Nawanoi School by the volunteers from Peace Corps Thailand, from Volunteers Canada, and from TEATA, who took a turn to teach communication English (karaoke-approach) to all ages of the community members, teachers and students. They could communicate at a certain level. In some instances, the researchers conversed with the students in English; they could respond instantly and appropriately without shyness or reluctance as most local Thai people would. The idea of requesting assistance from the volunteers, as it was called volunteer tourism (GardMcGehee, 2012), was something new but with the vision of the Directors who have always equipped himself with new trends of knowledge and with open-minded personality required in top executives; it was very successful. As a result, the last criterion, Service, was the most impressive experience every tourist guest could definitely get from the Ban Nawanoi hosts. One of the in-depth interviews showed the necessity of the school to raise funds for the school management. Ban Nawanoi School was a primary school with 5 teachers and 29 students: a total of 8 students in 3 kindergarten levels, and 21 students in 6 elementary levels. The school was on the top list of schools to be closed down due to the shortage of students. If that was to happen, students would naturally be transferred to other schools quite a long way from the Ban Nawanoi community. Every member of the community attended the meeting trying to find the best way to save the school so that parents and children would not have to travel more than 50 kilometers back and forth every day. Many solutions were discussed around the major topic of tourism. One suggestion from the School Director was to turn the school into a homestay to assist the school financial management, and at the same time, the school stay could serve as a model for community homestays, or even for other schools. One building of the school with about 4 rooms had not been used; therefore, those rooms had to be renovated into bedrooms or sleeping areas, while, at the same time, the toilet had to be totally renovated in the design, the bidets, plumbing, lighting, and other items for hygiene considerations. In order to make the school stay attractive, the new trends towards health and “green” living ways with non-chemical and low carbon consumption were to be applied. Hence, within a few weeks, the committee was appointed along with plots of garden vegetables with non-chemical fertilizers and mushroom farming in the schoolyard. Students of elementary levels took the responsibilities of soiling, planting, and harvesting when the crops were ready for picking, kindergarten students helped with watering. The produces from the school were used in cooking for students and teachers. The surplus was sold to the community and visitors or tourists. The school could earn some money. And later on, some other projects such as “No littering of garbage around the School,” “Recycling of Community’s Garbage,” “Bins for Litters,” were implemented in the community. It should be noted that without the community participation and the helping hands of members of the community, school stay could not come into existence. All the credits should go to every member of the community, especially the school faculty. Finally, turning part of the school into a school stay complying in accordance with the four pillars, SSMS, was not impossible.

The researchers did not overlook the Thai Homestay Standard B.E 2554 (Department of Tourism, 2011). But the fact that the school stays at Ban Nawanoi school was at the initial stage. The school together with the community needed improvement so that it would comply with the Standard. At this point, the structure of the school building was in a good, stable and safe condition such as roof, walls, doors, floor, and the like, as specified in the Standard. Additionally, the design and simple building materials reflected the local identity, local culture and heritage. What matters most was a big yard in front of the school and a large plot of land for gardening at the back where fruits tree had been planted such as papaya trees, mango trees, bananas, including a vegetable garden and mushroom farms. The area enabled all types of outdoor activities for students, for local community and guests or tourists, on top of a small hill surrounded by the natural beauty of Loei. There was also plenty of space for indoor implementation of activities especially communal activities emphasizing social cohesion, where villagers get together and conduct activities such as cleaning the school, the community and preparation before an event or before guests or tourists came,



which Lamaiwong (2014) put a lot of emphasis on this matter because it showed the cohesive participation of community members to share their responsibility for the school to secure sustainability.

From the triangulation techniques, and in-depth interviews, as well as informal conversations from various contexts, the management and leadership of the School Director, were very eminent. At present, the School Director played the most important role; in the near future, training for the empowerment of youths and other community members was much needed to ease the responsibilities of the Director and to help manage the school stay. As mentioned earlier, some other Standards needed for the future such as database, collaboration among other operators, emergency rescue and evacuation, and safety features for facilities activities were needed to be implemented, while some standards were presently very prominent such as authenticity, surrounding activities of visiting popular tourist attractions, and destinations of natural resources. So, all the Standards should be implemented and complied with. Cultural aspects in the destination were so strong that they had become national festivals which could attract tourists around the world. Considering the hygiene and cleanliness of the building, particularly the cooking area for food preparation, bedrooms and toilets, all of those could be accepted that everything and all space had been thoroughly cleaned. The bedrooms, in particular, were furnished and decorated with the atmosphere of hospitality full of wonderful colors and cheerful spirits as shown in Figure 2. Some might argue that at this stage, the Ban Nawanoi school stay did not fully comply with the Thai Standard Homestay; however, it followed the guideline of DASTA and TEATA complying with the four pillars and the school stay would continue to improve to comply with the Thai Standard Homestay in the future. This was just a beginning.



Figure 2 The Atmosphere of the School Stay

Considering the potentiality and the tourism activities of Ban Nawanoi School and its community, it was found out that the school had a lot of potentialities and activities most of which were creative tourism activities, which satisfied even domestic and especially foreign tourists leading to memorable experiences. Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013) studied that memorable experiences involved the following: 1) perceived meaningfulness, 2) perceived opportunities on encountering authentic local experiences, 3) perceived significance, 4) perceived novelty or uniqueness, 5) perceived opportunities for social interactions, 6) local hospitality, 7) serendipity or an unplanned fortunate discovery and surprises, and 8) perceived professionalism of local guides. Doubtless, tourists at Ban Nawanoi school stay would encounter these memorable experiences through potentialities and activities. Firstly, talking about the tourism potentialities, the destination-- referring to the school and its community-- was situated on the high terrain so the weather was cool at night and not so warm during the day because of the cool breeze. The location of the school, in particular, was on the upper hill overlooking farmlands with a variety of crops such as corn, rice, pineapples, bananas, and the natural beauty of mountains. These would serve as natural tourism resources. The community also offered cultural resources. These resources included festivals, costumes of the ethnic group, local dances, local diets of vegetables and freshwater fish, flower offerings to the Buddha images,



and the way of living as the big family within the community. The community itself was about 22 kilometers from the downtown district of Dansai, which could be reached either by the two-rowed bus or by the bicycles enjoying the natural and cultural scenery along the bike routes. Additionally, annual festivals in Dansai were to be held every month so tourists could visit the destination all year round but especially during June for Pi Ta Khon or Mask Festival. The tourists' memorable experiences also stemmed from activities that the tourists participated in. For example, while doing the Pi Ta Khon masks painting, tourists could use their imagination to paint the masks to look very frightening in order to chase away all the bad spirits. Sizes of the masks mattered very much because most tourists would have started with the actual size to put on their heads, but later on, as time passed, their energy was worn down, so most tourists would ask for painting small masks to keep them as souvenirs from Thailand painted by themselves, ending up with buying the actual sizes to put on instead. For some tourists who wanted to finish their own masterpieces, they spent more time than others or coming back the next day to finish the masks. By so doing, the tourists could encounter numerous memorable experiences themselves (Prebensen et al, 2017) such as perceived meaningfulness, perceived opportunities on encountering authentic local experiences, perceived novelty or uniqueness, perceived opportunities for social interactions with the local people, local hospitality, and especially serendipity or an unplanned fortunate discovery and surprises when they made the painted masks themselves. They could keep the masks as souvenirs and they could talk about this activity as they could well remember with stories to share with their friends. The making and painting of the masks did have some stories behind. The stories could go on and on from the local people, which yielded meaningfulness to the activities (Hall and Page, 2005). If tourists were interested in cooking, varieties of salad made from freshly grown vegetables picked from the garden by the tourists themselves became one activity tourists enjoyed most. When fixing one type of salad, the hosts would tell the tourists that other kinds of vegetables could be used to substitute the vegetables that could not be picked on that day. So, the tourists could try more varieties and enjoyed different smells of herbs and spices mixed in the salad dressing. Another creative activity that tourists would love to lay their hands on was the weaving of baskets and purses. Some finished their weaving smaller baskets, really tiny for coin preserving. While others did finish actual size baskets spending a longer time! Whatever sizes the baskets were, memorable experiences would be embedded in the tourists' memories for a long time. Another typical activity of the people was the local dance especially after the Buddhist Lent to offer flowers to the Buddha Image enshrined in the Community Monastery, and showing their gratitude to the Spirits for good harvest as in Figure 3. Every local community member particularly the senior members in their cultural costumes would come out and dance as a ritual ceremony of paying gratitude to the Spirits for good crops. After the ritual ceremony, others like children or students of the school and members of the community including tourists joined the dance.



Figure 3 The Ritual Dance performed by the Senior of the Community



These memorable experiences, as Prebensen et al, (2017) concluded, involved several factors, namely emotionally, physically, spiritually, and intellectually while participating in the activities. In fact, these memorable experiences attracted many tourists to revisit the destinations particularly the local suburban destinations far away from congested urban areas (Bhuiyan et al, 2012). From this point of view, it was seen that there was a lot of participation of local people, which influenced social return from activities of school stay; local people or the community members contributed to various activities for improving the living standard of the community. From the assessments on tourists' satisfaction of the School Stay at Ban Nawanoi done by the School together with the community, tourists were pleased with both natural resources and cultural resources and all the activities, especially the painting of Pi Ta Khon masks and cooking Thai dishes at the school with the teachers, students and their parents because these activities were different from any activities they had done. These were something new for them and in particular, while the activities were going on, stories concerning local beliefs and local superstitions were delivered. The tourists had the opportunity to interact and to exchange ideas with the local people. The tourists also added that tourist attractions and monasteries in the downtown area of Dansai District were not far away from the community so it was convenient for them to visit. They aired the views that they never stayed in any school stay accommodation so most of them wondered what it would be like before getting into the school. And when they experienced Ban Nawanoi school stay, they had gained memorable experiences that they really enjoyed and would never forget. Obviously, school stay activities yielded a great impact on economic development and social enhancement. As Lamaiwong (2014) pointed out that when local people participated in local activities, they were not well aware of the fact that they would finally enhance their quality of life through additional income, and at the same time, local culture, arts and crafts in the community would sustain.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study reached both objectives showing that Ban Nawanoi School in Dansai District, Loei Province had the history of its existence as a school stay and with the availability of tourism potentialities such as natural resources, cultural resources especially its own beliefs and ritual festivals making the destination popular, trendy and well-liked by tourists of all ages as there are varieties of creative activities for tourists to participate in. It was proved that a tragic occurrence could turn into an opportunity for a radical change as Baan Nawanoi School had shown. Most importantly, tourists could choose from numerous creative activities according to their interests. Whatever term is used for this the School Stay as an accommodation, Bed and Breakfast, guesthouses, or homestay, Ban Nawanoi School Stay is not only to attract tourists for the accommodation facilities and services but also the alternative creative tourism for the tourists who loved spending their time among nature and the unique cultures of a community with its own identity and many creative activities--which are different from the tourists' own cultures--and especially, loved to enjoy the authenticity of the local people and the unspoiled destination. It goes without saying that, if there are more tourists, there will, obviously, be more additional income to the community. And if there are a tourism development and management plan, it may sustain the destination's nature, environment and local people. So, it is important to manage both the school stay together with the destination cautiously with care and close attention. As a part of accommodations, more homestays would doubtlessly appear in this community in the near future not only as a type of accommodation but also as an intimate hideaway overlooking the nature of the Terrain Mountains in Loei.

The study showed that Ban Nawanoi school stay in Dansai District, Loei Province had potentiality at a very good level in terms of facilities, activities with the hosts, and cultural attractions. Besides, it was clear that there was access to the involvement of local people for community participation. Clearly enough, local people were ready to participate, to cooperate and to follow criteria complying with the SSMS of TEATA and Thailand Homestay Standard of The Division of Tourism Services Development, Department of Tourism, in terms of accommodation, food, safety, friendly atmosphere of teachers and students including parents or guardians of the students, natural resources and environment, culture, memorable experiences for tourists to talk about and to revisit the destination.



The Director confidently stated, “Though at first money seemed to be the problem as time goes on, we realize that what matters the most are the opportunities to work closely with the community, the teachers, the students, their parents, and particularly the volunteers from many organizations are the most precious. At present, I cannot do much, but I continue to do it so that one day our School Stay will be accomplished. It’s going to be our masterpiece for both the school and the community.”

The future study for the Ban Nawanoi school stay management and other activities including the leading role of the School as a role model of school stays for other schools to follow should be the prime interest of researchers. In particular, the big issue in the future is to find out relevant factors relating to the sustainability of the school stays. These will be challenging tasks for more studies to reveal.

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