

Strategies for Cross-Border Tourism between Thailand and the Lao PDR: A stakeholders' perspective

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The objective of this article is to present various perspectives on the development of cross-border tourism of Thailand and the Lao PDR gained from interviews and focus group meetings with key persons from relevant public and private sectors. The emphasis is on the important guidelines and the activities in which the two countries should cooperate in terms of the development of the infrastructure and facilities for tourism, as well as the enhancement of human resources and marketing promotions. In addition, the results can contribute to the creation of a joint regulatory framework and various border policies, so that cross-border tourism can be a tool to attract an increasing number of tourists and the preparedness of the relevant areas of both countries can be improved.

Key words: *Strategic Tourism Plan, Cross-border Tourism, Thailand, Lao PDR.*

Introduction

ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 and has become an inter-regional government organisation. The tourism industry is now a major contributor to economic and social integration and is considered to be an important part of the economy of all of the member countries of ASEAN, especially Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand (Fongtanakit, Somjai, Prasitdumrong, & Jermittiparsert, 2019; Jermittiparsert, 2019; Jermittiparsert & Chankoson, 2019). Furthermore all receive a significant portion of their income (more than 10 percent of GDP) from tourism (ASEAN Tourism Organisations, 2016). Thus, the ASEAN community created the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016 – 2025

by focusing on improving the competitive capability in the tourism sector of the ASEAN community as a unified destination for tourists and the promotion of sustainable tourism in ASEAN, that will provide beneficial opportunities for every sector (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2016).

The Lao PDR is one country in ASEAN that has a border with Thailand, with a total length of 1,810 kilometers, having 20 permanent border checkpoints and 29 border crossings (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand, 2019). For the past 10 years, Thai people have been the largest group of international tourists visiting the Lao PDR (Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand, 2015, pp. 35-47). Also, in the year 2019, a total of 1.84 million Lao tourists travelled to Thailand, which is ranked 2nd among tourists from the member countries of ASEAN and 5th among all tourists (Department of Tourism, 2020). Moreover, tourists from third countries that crossed the border between Thailand and the Lao PDR in the year 2017 amounted to 3.27 million inbound tourists to Thailand from Laos, and 3.08 million outbound tourists travelling from Thailand to the Lao PDR (Royal Thai Embassy in Vientiane, 2015). This shows that both countries have tourists travelling across the border for tourism and that these two countries are interdependent in the economic sector involving combined tourism. Presently, the Lao PDR is using tourism as a tool for building the economy of the country by relying on their cultural and natural assets (Sriruksa, 2020). In addition, Thailand has measures and guidelines for the promotion of tourism in order to increase the income generated from tourism (Somchan & Panyarrien, 2019).

Furthermore, the two countries have had good relations for a long time, their languages and cultures are similar, and their history and migrations provide interesting stories that can be presented for tourism (Boonyanupong, 2016). Moreover, there are numerous tourism routes that connect them together. Currently, the Lao PDR provides opportunities for businesspeople to enter and invest in tourism-related businesses such as transportation, hotels, restaurants, entertainment venues, souvenirs and other related fields (Huayhongthong, 2018). Importance is given to the preparation of standards for tourism in order to have a single standard for all of the member countries of ASEAN, and there is also a plan to develop the routes linking the principal tourism cities of the Lao PDR with the neighboring countries (Office of International Trade Promotion in Vientiane, 2015). These countries now realise the importance of tourism as a tool in national development through the creation of memorandums of understanding on cooperation in the area of tourism (ASEAN Information Centre, Government Public Relations Department, 2016). The objective is to increase efficiency and expand cooperation in tourism that will provide mutual benefits for both countries in the long term, such as building cross-border cooperation to reduce obstacles and facilitation of convenience when travelling across the border. This involves joint promotions to create the circulation of tourists, including tourists from the two countries and other nations, the creation of marketing, the development of personnel, and various other factors.

Nevertheless, the development of tourism between the two countries must rely on cooperation at both the national and regional levels in the areas along the adjoining border. In this way, it will be possible to efficiently improve the quality and tourism potential and create value and good impressions for tourists that travel in both countries, which will lead to further cooperation between the countries in various other related areas. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to have the formulation of a clear strategic tourism plan linking Thailand and the Lao PDR that will provide direction for future development and cooperation.

Literature Review

The areas along the border are important to the national strategies of countries in terms of politics, the economy, society, culture, and defense, and they are directly important to the stability of the power of the centres in the common destinations linked by trade and the transportation of goods and services (Khamkhun, 2008). Moreover, the ability to generate benefits that stimulate the growth of the border areas (Hoekman, Frenken, & Van Oort, 2008) creates opportunities in employment (Gu & Ryan, 2008), which help boost the local economy and raise the level of standards of living for the local population (Ahmed & Krohn, 1991). Also, there are opportunities for trade and investment in new businesses (Dyer, Gursoy, Sharma & Carter, 2007) and tourism activities that promote cultural traditions and cultural heritage (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). Creation of opportunities for cultural exchange between the visitors and the hosts is known as cross-border tourism (Besculides, Lee & McCormick, 2002), which is defined as travelling to visit important tourist destinations in neighboring countries as a journey between the two areas in order to experience places that are different from one's normal environment during a single period of time (Odunayo & Tobora, 2014).

The management of cross-border areas that have been successful include those in Europe, which have an abundance of accommodation, culture, and natural resources that are appropriate for the development of sustainable tourism (Jelinčić, Tišma, Lantos & Tolić, 2019). One of the tools to manage tourism is the 12 principles of sustainable tourism of the World Tourism Organisation of the United Nations (UNWTO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2005), comprised of the three dimensions of sustainability, including economic viability, social equity, and environmental protection. The important factors that drive cross-border travel (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019) include convenience in travel, helping to increase the number of tourists crossing the border, facilitation of convenience in terms of visas and procedures to cross the border, transportation networks and flexible transportation arrangements, and encouragement of travel that is shorter and more frequent. In addition, tourist destinations that provide a more diverse experience, preparation in terms of information technology, cooperation between cross-border alliances and the development of ecosystems make cross-border tourism significantly more convenient. Moreover, regarding the issue of



visas for short-term travel, permission for visas includes the entire group of EU countries. Therefore, the results of cross-border tourism are positive (Laube, 2019). A case study of the EU indicates that the Schengen area established by the Schengen Agreement provides convenience for travellers. Furthermore, cross-border tourism is regarded as a tool for the creation of sustainable tourism within the unified group of countries, in which it is possible to travel throughout the European Union without needing to apply for visas. Thus, it is a unique political asset that provides value to both the citizens of third countries and the governments of Europe (Federico, 2010).

Research Methods

This research applied a qualitative method using both primary and secondary data. The secondary data was obtained from documents and related research papers. The primary data was obtained from people working in the departments that promote cross-border tourism and cross-border trade in Thailand and the Lao PDR. There were two groups of informants: 1) The first group comprised the main informants from Thailand including representatives from the central agencies, namely the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the Ministry of Commerce, the Royal Thai Army, the Royal Thai Embassy in Vientiane, the Federation of Tourism Industries of Thailand, the Thai Tourism Business Association, and the Domestic Tourism Business Association; and the representatives of the provincial level agencies of Thailand that have a border with the Lao PDR, namely the Tourism Authority of Thailand Regional Offices, the Provincial Tourism and Sports Offices, the Provincial Administration Organisations, the Provincial Commercial Offices, the Immigration Police, the Tourist Police, the Border Patrol Police, the tour operators, the Provincial Chambers of Commerce, the Provincial Industry Councils, tourism-related associations, and others. The second group of informants were those from the Lao PDR, comprised of representatives of the central agencies of the Lao PDR, namely the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Lao Association of Travel Agents, and others; and the provincial representatives of the Lao PDR that have contacts with Thailand, namely the Culture and Tourism Information Office, the Foreign Affairs Office, the Tax Office, the Immigration Police, the Provincial Associations of Travel Agents, and others. The data was collected through in-depth interviews with a total of 40 people.

There were five research tools applied in this study: 1) The qualitative interviews were based on the review of the theoretical concepts and the related literature. 2) The focus group meetings were held 22 times with the representatives from the agencies, which were attended by approximately 15 – 20 people in each meeting. 3) The Future Search Conference (FSC) was held in Thailand three times and in the Lao PDR three times for a total of six times with representatives from the agencies, which were attended by approximately 20 - 25 people each

time. The stakeholders attended to cooperatively establish the strategies for tourism between Thailand and the Lao PDR, by the analysis and synthesis of the present situation with SWOT Analysis and specification of the strategies with the TOWS Matrix for an understanding of the direction and factors that influence tourism linking the two countries in the present, and imagining the desired future goals. 4) The net results of the strategic tourism plan linking Thailand and the Lao PDR that will be implemented in the joint operations using the information was obtained from the meetings and applied to the drafting of a strategic tourism plan between the two countries. 5) The meetings for sharing opinions and suggestions concerned with the research results with the stakeholders for the creation of the strategic plan were held two times, with the representatives from the agencies that attended the meetings amounting to approximately 20 - 25 people each time.

Results of the Study

The investigation of the current environment using SWOT (Kerin, Berkowitz, Hartley & Rudelius, 2003), which is comprised of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of tourism between Thailand and the Lao PDR, was conducted. It was found that the strengths of tourism linking these two countries are the diversity of the tourism resources distributed throughout all areas, the geographical advantages, and the routes that are able to link to third countries such as China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar and Malaysia, due to both countries being centrally located within this region. Also, there are the cultures and languages that are similar, and the governments of both countries have policies for the promotion of tourism, especially tourism in local communities and other areas.

Regarding the weaknesses of tourism linking both countries, it was found that the basic infrastructure system for transportation between the two countries is not comprehensive, the database for linking tourism is not modern, there has not been any creation of joint marketing for the two countries, and there are differences in the potential of personnel in tourism and the standards of services. The development of products and tourism services in secondary cities also have limitations, and there are the differences of the basic infrastructure in border areas and restrictions concerned with visas, the degradation of the environmental conditions and the traffic congestion of the principal tourist destinations, and the lack of confidence regarding safety and hygiene.

Regarding opportunities for tourism linking both countries, it was found that modern marketing channels have easier access and low costs. The aim to promote tourism from neighboring countries and internationally includes mutual agreements regarding professional personnel in the tourism of ASEAN (MRA-TP), and there has been development in terms of access by air, by land and by water. In addition, there is the China–Laos Railway that will be finished by the end of 2020, which will make the transportation of tourists more convenient and increase the



flow of tourists. Finally, there is the growth of the number of tourists, especially Chinese tourists.

Regarding the threats related to the tourism linking both countries, it was found that currently, there is intense competition in the global tourism market, in addition to the competition for tourism among the member countries within the ASEAN region for the value of the tourists that are interested in the principal tourist destinations and major tourism trends. There are also problems related to decline of the global economy, the problems of natural and human made disasters, and the outbreaks of various communicable diseases that reduce tourism.

From the Tows Matrix analysis (Koontz & Weihrich, 1978), it was found that the strategies that should be implemented to attract tourists are proactive strategies (SO Strategies) comprising the promotion of motivation to raise the level of traditional festivals in order to attract more tourists, the development of the basic infrastructure and transportation by land, by water and by air so as to be prepared to tangibly link the tourist destinations in local areas, and the development of tourism routes that have diversity and comprehensive tourist destinations that have the potential to support tourists in a variety of ways. In addition, there should also be a common identity, the promotion of tourism routes linking to third countries, and the development of tourism within communities.

Regarding the reactive strategies (ST Strategies) to develop the preparedness of areas, these include the promotion of trade investment and enhancement of convenience in business operations, the establishment of one-stop tourist service centres in order to offer services to assist tourists, and the development of cooperation and a regulatory framework of policies. With regard to the strategic solutions (WO Strategies) to raise the level of tourism potential, these are comprised of the development of permanent border checkpoints into border crossings for travel and border trade, the thorough development of the transportation system for connections to the tourist destinations, and the development of the knowledge and skills of the personnel in tourism in order to improve the standards for providing support to tourists in the future. Also, there should be marketing and promotions of tourism to specific groups by improving the conveniences and facilities, the promotion of trade, investment, products and tourism services along the principal routes, the encouragement of entrepreneurs to be beneficial tourism partners, and the planning and management for sustainability. In terms of the preventative strategies (WT Strategies) to create the confidence for tourists, these are comprised of the development of the basic infrastructure and the enhancement of confidence regarding safety and hygiene.

The study of the information to be used in the creation of a strategic plan from the various groups of stakeholders identified five principal issues.

- 1) The number of tourists and the income from tourism should be increased by a wide variety of suggested guidelines. These are improvement of the quality of tourist destinations, development of the routes and itineraries, for example tourism routes including three countries, such as Thailand – Laos – Vietnam, development of tourism activities, creation of the joint marketing by groups of entrepreneurs, development of tourist facilities, development of souvenir products and other items, that groups of entrepreneurs consider will help increase the potential of tourism and create good experiences for tourists.
- 2) The convenience in crossing the border should be facilitated by focusing on fast and accurate procedures for services, transparency of fees for crossing the border, development of the basic infrastructure that is needed in border areas, such as toilets and public transportation between checkpoints, which will help reduce the time needed for crossing the border and increase the time spent travelling for tourism, and the coordination of checkpoint opening and closing times in both Thailand and the Lao PDR. Also, there is a proposal to extend the length of time when crossing the border using a border pass from 3 days to 5 days for the citizens of Thailand and the Lao PDR that do not have a passport, in order to allow tourism for a longer period of time. In addition to this, there is a proposal to upgrade the checkpoint at Ban Yak Khu, Amnat Charoen province to a permanent checkpoint with the local checkpoint at Saiphuthong, Savannakhet province, and others.
- 3) Tourism personnel should be developed in terms of languages that are used in communication with tourists, especially English and Chinese, the enhancement of the knowledge and skills of the people who provide tourism services, promotion of morality and ethics in services in order to create good impressions on tourists, and reduction of accidents and damage that may occur during the providing of services.
- 4) Tourism should be promoted by the government sector, for example promotion of investment from the private sector by reducing taxes or granting special privileges to entrepreneurs who invest in the secondary tourism cities, follow up and motivation of various businesses and agencies to contribute to the investment funds for tourism in accordance with the regulations in order to provide funds to help the government and promote tourism, and expansion of international cooperation in tourism.
- 5) Research should be conducted on the target market tourism groups at all times to remain up-to-date with the current situation that is always changing and to find methods that improve the quality of the goods and tourism services in order to have continuity and fulfill the requirements of tourists. Moreover, solutions to the various problems related to tourism between Thailand and Laos need to be provided.

In terms of the strategic tourism plan linking Thailand and the Lao PDR, there should be a joint formulation by the stakeholders in both countries for the length of time of five years. By having the vision of “Two Nations, One Charming Destination” with the objectives that include the promotion of cooperation of the government and private sector, and the associated networks in

the transfer of tourists and ethical operations and the raising of the level of experience and security in tourism by having four strategies comprised of:

Strategy 1: Development of the Basic Infrastructure and Tourist Facilities, comprised of four strategies, namely:

Strategy 1 - Development of Infrastructure and Public Transport, with the activities as follows: 1) Improve transportation on the route of Mukdahan - Kaysone Phomvihane City - Muang Phin - Muang Xepon - Hue City - Danang (R9) and the route of Chiang Rai - Bokeo - Luang Namtha - Xishuangbanna (R3A). 2) Increase the international public transportation system on the route of Chiang Rai – Oudomxay – Phongsali - Dien Bien Phu – Sapa, and the route of Nakorn Phanom – Thakhek – Yommalath - Ha Tinh (R12). 3) Develop the domestic transportation system for bus stations, airports, and train stations linking tourist destinations.

Strategy 2 – Development of Tourist Facilities, with the activities as follows: 1) Establish the system of clear international traffic signals and signs in English as well as the official language of each country. 2) Promote and develop systems related to tourism, namely communication and online booking systems. 3) Develop databases for tourism in order to provide information that is accurate and up-to-date. 4) Create a plan for the management of tourists and tourist destinations in order to ensure preparedness to support tourists during the high season of tourism by focusing on the principal cities through which the China-Laos Railway passes.

Strategy 3 - Development of Border Management, with the activities as follows: 1) Develop the immigration procedures for higher levels of speed and safety. 2) Develop the transportation system via the border in order to facilitate convenience for tourists and those who use the cross-border services. 3) Enforce the laws on the collection of fees as announced in the use of border checkpoint services by tourists. 4) Make the level of checkpoints equal, namely the Phu Du permanent border crossing in Ban Khok district, Uttaradit province, Thailand with the Ban Pha Kaew International Checkpoint, Mueang Pak Lai, Xaignabouli Province, Laos regarding the issue of the Visa-on-Arrival as well as the Ban Huak Permanent Border Crossing, Phu Sang District, Phayao Province with the local checkpoint at Pang Mon, Mueang Khob district, Xayaburi province, Laos, the permanent border crossing at Pak Saeng, Ubon Ratchathani province, Thailand with the local checkpoint at Pak Taphan, Salavan province, Laos and the Ban Yak Khu checkpoint, Amnat Charoen province, Thailand with the local checkpoint at Saiphuthong, Savannakhet province, Laos.

Strategy 4 - Creating Safety for Tourists, with the activities as follows: 1) Develop the tourist assistance centers, increase the channels of communication between tourists and the related agencies, and install the warning systems in case of disaster. 2) Conduct training to provide knowledge to the security guards, rescue units, and people in the areas of tourist destinations in order to provide the ability to help tourists quickly. 3) Promote the creation of insurance for tourists in order to have coverage of accidents while travelling for tourism.

Strategy 2: Enhancement of Human Resources and Services, comprised of three strategies, namely:

Strategy 1 - Promotion of the use of ASEAN MRA-TP for activities as follows: 1) Promotion of the government sector to establish policies for tourism personnel via the procedures for improving human resources under the mutual agreements regarding the acceptance of the qualifications of tourism personnel in ASEAN (MRA on Tourism Professionals: MRATP). 2) Encourage entrepreneurs to provide opportunities for personnel in joint organisations for the development of human resources, such as training seminars to improve the human resources in tourism and other areas.

Strategy 2 - Promotion of trade knowledge transfer in the field of tourism, with the activities as follows: 1) Provide training on tourism knowledge, ability, skills and expertise by providing opportunities for personnel in both Thailand and Laos to participate in joint training themselves in order to conserve the budget. 2) Promote the assessment and certification of the tourism personnel in both Thailand and the Lao PDR. 3) Provide skills and create awareness of the 'service mind' concept in order to create good impressions for tourists. 4) Develop the potential of local communities by providing an understanding of skills needed in seeking their income and management of benefits from tourism.

Strategy 3 - Promotion of Ethics in Career Development, with the activities as follows: 1) Match businesses with entrepreneurs in the tourism of Thailand and Laos in addition to the entrepreneurs in tourism in the groups of third countries. 2) Develop the business agreements for mutually beneficial tourism partnerships under ethical businesses practices.

Strategy 3: Promotion of Cooperation in Marketing, comprised of five strategies, namely:

Strategy 1 - Formulation of and Enhancement of the Image of Tourism in the areas forming 'Two Countries, One Destination', with the activities as follows: 1) Promote tourism under the concept of the 'Lan Chang Culture Quadrant' in the route of Nong Khai - Loei – Vientiane - Luang Prabang. 2) Promote the creation of the 'Connecting Cities' tourism, namely Mukdahan – Savannakhet - Nakorn Phanom - Khammouan, Chiang Mai – Phayao – Xaignabouli - Loei, and Nan – Hongsa – Luang Prabang. 3) Promote tourism along the Mekong River basin with Thailand and the Lao PDR as the co-hosts, such as short Mekong River cruises, including Chiang Khong - Kaeng Pha Dai – Muang Pak Tha, Bokeo province, the Lao PDR and others.

Strategy 2 - Development of Tourism Routes for Third Countries Connectivity, with the activities as follows: 1) In the Upper routes, namely routes in Thailand - the Lao PDR - China, such as the route of Chiang Rai – Bokeo - Luang Namtha - Mengla Town - Xishuangbanna, and the routes in Thailand - the Lao PDR – Vietnam, such as the route of Chiang Mai – Phayao

- Khop district – Oudomxay – Phongsali - Dien Bien Phu – Sapa, 2) in the Middle routes, with routes in Thailand - the Lao PDR – Vietnam, such as the route of Mukdahan province - Kaysone Phomvihane City - Muang Phin - Muang Xepon - Dong Ha City - Hue City - Danang, and the route of Nakorn Phanom – Thakhek – Yommalath - Ha Tinh, 3) in the Lower routes, such as routes in Thailand - the Lao PDR – Vietnam, namely the route of Ubon Ratchathani – Salavan - Quang Tri and the route of Thailand - the Lao PDR – Cambodia, namely Ubon Ratchathani – Champasak - Stung Trang.

Strategy 3 - Development and Planning of Tour Packages, with the activities as follows: 1) The World Heritage City Route of Ayutthaya - Khamphaeng Phet - Sukhothai – Luang Prabang – the Plain of Jars, Xiang Hoang, 2) The Cultural Heritage Route of Phra That Phanom, Nakorn Phanom – Ban Chiang, Udorn Thani – Phra That Luang, Vientiane – Wat Prabat Phonsanh, Bolikhamxai, and 3) The Railway Route of Bangkok - Nong Khai – Vientiane - Vang Vieng – Luang Prabang.

Strategy 4 - Development of Tourism by Communities linking Thailand and the Lao PDR, with the activities as follows: 1) Improve tourism in communities regarding quality and standards for both the products and tourism services of these communities. 2) Promote tourism activities to maintain local uniqueness, identity and authenticity. 3) Build tourism group networks between communities in Thailand and the Lao PDR, with Thailand functioning as a model for the development and promotion of tourism by communities, as well as encourage the arrangement of a forum for consultation and exchange of knowledge about tourism in communities.

Strategy 5 - Joint Marketing Promotions, with the activities as follows: 1) Offer goods and/or tourism services in exhibitions for tourism at the international level. 2) Promote and organize an annual festival between the two countries and organize international exhibitions in order to promote tourism between Thailand and the Lao PDR. 3) Provide joint public relations for the routes via social media channels by using the joint campaign of the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO) and communication via groups of bloggers who write articles about tourism. 4) Promote the sales of package tours that are inclusive of travel costs and entrance fees to tourist destinations by focusing on visits to the tourist sites along the routes.

Strategy 4: Development of Cooperation and Regulatory Frameworks of Policies, comprised of three strategies, namely:

Strategy 1 - Balancing the Economy, Society and Environment, with the activities as follows: 1) Raise the level of protection and control of impacts on the environment from tourism by enforcement of the applied legal measures and regulations under the legal systems of both Thailand and the Lao PDR. 2) Promote responsible consumption and production.

Strategy 2 - Create Cooperation in Setting Agreements, with the activities as follows: 1) Promote the creation of agreements in allowing the use of border passes by expanding the areas for tourism and increasing the length of the time to stay, namely in the areas of Nakorn Phanom province - Khammouan province – Savannakhet province – Mukdahan province and allow travel to all four of these areas and others, and increase the amount of days for travel to 4 nights, 5 days. 2) Conduct the joint formulation of measures for facilitation of convenience for the use of motor vehicles to travel for cross-border tourism between Thailand and the Lao PDR in order to simplify the management of documents and reduce the length of time and complexity under the laws and regulations of Thailand and the Lao PDR. 3) Establish measures for the facilitation of convenience by creating a Re-Entry Visa for tourists from third countries. 4) Coordinate the opening and closing times of border checkpoints, so that the opening and closing times of Thailand will be the same at every checkpoint and be coordinated with the Lao PDR checkpoints and other related services, such as public transportation between checkpoints. Moreover, a joint committee for cooperation in the development of cross-border tourism should be established.

Strategy 3 - Encourage Private Sector Investment in Secondary Cities, with the activities as follows: 1) Collect information related to investors for use in investment planning. 2) Match investors with coordinators in specific areas in order to facilitate convenience in business operations. 3) Formulate measures for the promotion of investment. 4) Promote investment in tourism in the routes of secondary tourism cities on three routes, namely the route of Chiang Mai – Phayao – Khop district - Xaignabouli – Luang Prabang, the route of Khamphaeng Phet – Sukhothai – Phitsanulok – Uttaradit – Xaignabouli – Luang Prabang, and the route of Loei – Xaignabouli – Luang Prabang.

Strategy 4 - Research Cooperation, with the activities for the promotion of joint research in tourism through cooperation between educational institutions and various related sectors of both countries.

Conclusions and Discussion

Tourism is an important tool for the economic value of every region due to its major role in creating jobs for the labor market of each country (The United Nations in Thailand, 2015). Through the important measures that will make the tourism of each area able to progress as mutually intended, the formulation of a strategic plan is an important tool that will create awareness of the guidelines for transparency in operations (Sitikarn B., et al., 2016). In the ASEAN region, there are strategic tourism plans that are implemented in several sub-regions in order to create operational transparency and be appropriate for the areas and scope of cooperation, namely the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016 – 2025 (Association of South East Asian Nations, 2015), the Greater Mekong River Sub-region Economic Cooperation



Program (Department of International Trade Promotion, 2018), the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, or ACMECS (Department of International Economic Affairs, 2007), the work plan for the Indonesia–Malaysia–Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT – GT) sub-regional program (CMGF Secretariat Thailand, 2017) and others. The strategic tourism plan linking Thailand and the Lao PDR will be another plan that will provide the two countries with guidelines for transparent operations to enable the planning of activities and specify those who will be responsible for compliance with the established targets. Previously, neither Thailand nor the Lao PDR had a strategic plan at the bilateral level between the two countries; therefore, this plan can function as a prototype for cooperation in the sharing of resources and continue to strengthen the national relations. Also, it will be consistent with the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan by clearly specifying the important points in which Thailand and the Lao PDR must cooperate in order to generate value from tourism.

The promotion of border-crossing must rely on the cooperation from the government, the private and the public sectors of the countries that have the adjoining borders in order to have the liaison as a first step toward mutually building and maintaining good relationships (Sirirassamee T. & Sukmuen P., 2007). This is especially true in the border towns that tourists use as border-crossing points, which will be directly affected by tourism and spending in these areas that will result in increased trade, investment, and cross-border trade in other areas (Pakdeepinit, 2017). Thus, the governments of both countries should promote and cooperate in the agreements that are concerned with the increase of convenience at border crossings (Pongsiri, Srisontisuk & Phosing, 2020), in order to facilitate convenience for tourists and reduce the time used in crossing the border. In the future, if it is possible to develop and create procedures for border-crossing for tourism that are similar to those of the European Union, it will significantly increase convenience (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019). In addition, if the planned implementation and activities according to the strategic plan are all completely supported by the resources, it is expected that there will be an increase in the number of tourists that travel between the two countries, the rate of spending per person of tourists, and the length of time of the average stay of tourists. As a result, the rate of employment in the tourism sector will also rise, leading to sustainability in tourism from cross-border tourism (Federico P., 2010), which will function as a stimulus for the economy of both countries.

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to thank the Office of the Science, Research and Innovation Promotion Board for providing research funding. Furthermore, we would also like to express our sincere gratitude to Phayao University, Thammasat University and Srinakarinwirot University for supporting this research study.



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