

การเปรียบเทียบการจ้ดนำเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศของ ผู้ประกอบการเพื่อพัฒนาธุรกิจการท่องเที่ยว สีเขียวอย่างมีคุณภาพ: กรณีศึกษาผู้ประกอบการ ในเกาะภูเก็ตและเกาะบาหลี

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ECOTOURISM
TOUR CONDUCT OF TOUR OPERATORS FOR
THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY GREEN
TOURISM BUSINESS: A CASE STUDY OF TOUR
OPERATORS IN PHUKET AND BALI

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยในครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์การวิจัยเพื่อ 1) ศึกษาและเปรียบเทียบการจัดนำเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศของผู้ประกอบการในเกาะภูเก็ตและเกาะบาหลี และ 2) วิเคราะห์การจัดนำเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศของผู้ประกอบการกับหลักของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ โดยใช้เครื่องมือวิจัยที่สร้างขึ้นจากงานวิจัยในอดีตที่ได้กำหนดหลักเกณฑ์และตัวบ่งชี้คุณลักษณะของความเป็นผู้ประกอบการธุรกิจจัดนำเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ หรือเรียกว่า 6 E's Ecotourism Model for Tour Operators (EMTO) เพื่อนำมาใช้ประเมินการจัดนำเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศของผู้ประกอบการ โดยจงเจาะเลือกผู้ประกอบการ 4 รายในทั้งสองเมืองท่องเที่ยวเพื่อเป็นกรณีศึกษา และการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลโดยการสังเกตและการสัมภาษณ์ โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา ผลการวิจัยพบว่าผู้ประกอบการทั้ง 4 ราย ในเกาะภูเก็ตและเกาะบาหลีมีลักษณะการจัดนำเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศส่วนใหญ่สอดคล้องกับหลักการของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ และเป็นผู้ประกอบการจัดนำเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศที่มีคุณภาพ อย่างไรก็ตาม การจัดนำเที่ยวในบางกิจกรรมยังไม่สอดคล้องกับหลักการของการท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศอย่างแท้จริง ผู้วิจัยจึงได้เสนอแนะแนวทางการจัดนำเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ (Tour Conduct) สำหรับผู้ประกอบการเพื่อเป็นแนวทางการพัฒนารูปกิจการท่องเที่ยวสีเขียวอย่างมีคุณภาพ

คำสำคัญ: การท่องเที่ยวสีเขียว การท่องเที่ยวเชิงนิเวศ การท่องเที่ยวอย่างยั่งยืน ประเทศไทย

Abstract

This study has the objectives to 1) examine and compare the ecotourism practices of the ecotour operators in Phuket and Bali and 2) analyze if the practices of those tour operators are in accordance with ecotourism principles by employing a research instrument - the 6 E's Ecotourism Model for Tour Operators (EMTO) - from the past research to evaluate the practices of ecotour operators. The 4 samples were purposively selected based on prior study's referral. Participant observation and in-depth interview are used to collect the required data of which are content analyzed to determine if their practices correspond to ecotourism principles. Based on the findings, the tour conducts of the four operators in Phuket and Bali are congruent with ecotourism principles, and they are the quality ecotourism operators. However, some practices may not be associated with the ecotourism principles. Suggestions are provided on the responsible tour conduct for the tour operators to promote the quality green tourism business.

Keywords: Green Tourism, Ecotourism, Sustainable Tourism, Thailand

Introduction

In general, there is no formal definition of green tourism, and it was never well defined (Buckley, 2009; Font & Tribe, 2001; Font, 2002). In the tourism literature, the word "green tourism" is often referred to the environmentally friendly tourism activities and, it is often used as an alternative term to represent the tourism that cares or concerns the environment (Furqan, Mat Som, & Hussin, 2010). In overall, a review of literature indicates that many scholars refer green tourism as the tourism activity that generates low impact to the environment (Barber, 2012; Furqan et al., 2010; Tseng & Kuo, 2013). For a relationship between green tourism and ecotourism, both of them share a similar principle on the minimal impact to the environment. In the ecotourism literature, ecotourism is widely defined as low impact nature tourism which contributes to the maintenance of species and habitats of the natural area (Font & Tribe, 2001; Goodwin, 1996). Ecotourism is frequently used to label as green tourism since it is a responsible travel focusing on low/minimal impacts to the areas visited as well as being the base to the sustainable tourism (Furqan et al., 2010; Font & Tribe, 2001). Thus, ecotourism is widely addressed as a good example of green tourism practices as well as the quality tourism (Font & Tribe, 2001; Hong, 2009; Sangpikul, 2010). Given the limited studies on green business practices, this study therefore examines ecotourism tour operators (ecotour operators) to represent the quality green tourism business.

Currently, the tourism industry is more concerning on the demands of product quality, tourism standard, responsible tourism, green tourism, ecotourism and sustainable tourism (Hong, 2009; Sangpikul, 2010; UNWTO, 2010). In the near future, it can be foreseen and expected that the global tourism would be more competitive on the above issues, particularly the increasing of public's demands on the green tourism or environmental-friendly products (Sangpikul, 2011). Although there is an abundance of ecotourism research in international and Thai contexts, tourism scholars are still suffering from the limitation of research-based knowledge on the important issues such as ecotourism practices, green practices, and quality tourism for the business sector (Hong, 2009; Rangsit University, 2004; Sangpikul, 2011). A review of the literature indicates that most ecotourism research was conducted in a wide range of topics such as community development, natural resources, environment, impacts, ecotourists, and tour guides (Sangpikul, 2010). However, very few studies have examined in relation to the ecotourism business sector, particularly for the green or responsible practices among the tour operators. Moreover, little effort has attempted to examine on the issue of quality tourism business.

Due to a growing awareness of the importance of green tourism, today there are an increasing number of related activities, projects and businesses on green tourism. However, studies and research-based knowledge pertaining to the green tourism practices are still limited. This study, therefore, has a goal to investigate the tour conducts of ecotour operators in order to reflect the responsible tour conducts, impact consideration, and educating tourists, thereby leading to the quality green tourism business. The study was conducted as a case study based on a foreign research (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003) identifying that there were the tour operators whose conducts were congruent to ecotourism principles in Phuket and Bali. However, prior research lacks the criteria and indicators to measure and compare the ecotourism conducts of the tour operators. The study by Kontogeorgopoulos (2003) had examined the four original ecotourism

tour operators (in short called ecotour operators) in Phuket and Bali regarding their businesses' background and ecotourism practices. Kontogeorgopoulos used a descriptive method to explain how these tour operators in both destinations conducted their tours. The study revealed that the four companies being examined at least performed or practiced a soft ecotourism. Given the contribution of Kontogeorgopoulos' study to the identification of ecotourism tour operators in Phuket and Bali, there should be a further study to examine tour operators' practices through a formal assessment with the established criteria and indicators in order to extend the existing knowledge on ecotourism business sector.

With the above research background, this study, therefore, has the objectives 1) to examine and compare the ecotourism practices of ecotourism tour operators in Phuket and Bali, and 2) to determine if their practices are in accordance with ecotourism principle by mainly using previous research's measurement from Sangpikul (2011). This study, therefore, is an extended research of Sangpikul (2011; 2014) and Kontogeorgopoulos (2003) by comparing ecotourism conduct of the four tour operators in Phuket and Bali in order to point out the quality and green practice through the empirical research. The contribution of the study is expected to yield the green tourism practices by using ecotour operators in two destinations as the case study. The results will disclose how the sustainable practices are conducted by concerning the environmental impact, tourist education, and local benefits; thereby leading to the quality green tourism business. Moreover, the comparative investigation of the actual tour practices of the ecotourism tour operators will add to the existing limited literature on green tourism business, particularly in the Thai context.

Literature Review

Overview of Green Tourism

Due to the enhanced awareness of the negative impact of tourism on the environment, efforts have been made to develop approaches for making tourism sustainable (Furqan, Mat Som, & Hussin, 2010). During the past two decades, we have seen a growing interest in the relationship between tourism development and environmental quality (Erdogan & Tosun, 2009). With this concern, there is an emergence of sustainable tourism development which later has been further transformed into other forms of sustainable tourism such as conservative tourism, ecotourism, and green tourism. However, green tourism seems to be less defined due to its various focuses and meanings (Furqan et al., 2010; Wong, Wan, & Qi, 2015). Because of its loose term and lack of well-defined meaning, green tourism may be generally used to indicate as the environmental friendly tourism or low-impact tourism. Thus, green tourism may be frequently labeled in other names such as low impact tourism, environmental tourism, and responsible tourism. Today, the green tourism concept is highly appealing to tourism enterprises and operators owing to increasing concern on the environmental issues (Wong et al., 2015). As the meaning of green tourism implies the sense of environmental friendly product, during the past decades, there have been an increasing number of related activities, projects and businesses involving in green tourism such as Green Leaf program (for accommodation) and Green Globe for travel business (Esparon, Gyuris, & Stoeckl, 2014; Wong et al., 2015). As the green tourism market is growing, there should be more research on this issue to contribute to the public knowledge.

Ecotourism Tour Operators: The Quality Green Tourism Business

In the tourism literature, quality tourism is often referred to the tourism activity that cares or concerns the quality of the environment/destination by reducing environmental impact (Font, 2002; Jarvis, Weeden, & Simcock, 2010). A good example of the quality business may be seen from the environmental tourism programs established from the leading tourism organizations (e.g. Green Globe, Green Leaf). These programs have been set up with the goals to certify the responsible tourism providers and their sustainable practices. In this regard, ecotourism is therefore argued as the quality tourism as well because its goal is relatively similar to those of the environmental tourism programs (see ecotourism definitions and its principles).

Research Framework (Construct) Development

According to the existing literature, there is limited research-based literature on the issues of criteria and indicators to investigate the ecotourism practice of the tour operators. This study, therefore, has employed the framework (construct) from prior research (Sangpikul, 2011) that has established the criteria and indicators to examine the qualification of being the ecotourism tour operators or the 6 E's Ecotourism Model for Tour Operators (EMTO) to be used for this study. A brief review on how the framework/construct (with criteria and indicators) has been established is presented as follows:

Analyzing ecotourism definitions and identifying the key elements of ecotourism

Given a wide range of ecotourism definition, it is important to find out its common elements as well as to identify the key elements of ecotourism in order to determine the boundary (or scope) of ecotourism. Table 1 presents the selected ecotourism definitions while Table 2 shows an example of identifying the key elements of ecotourism based on definitions. According to Table 1 & 2, the five key elements (criteria) of ecotourism are identified, namely, 1) nature attractions 2) education/learning 3) conservation 4) impact consideration, and 5) community development.

Table 1 Selected ecotourism definitions

| Sources | Ecotourism definitions |
|---|---|
| Blamey (2001, p.18) | Ecotourism is nature-based, environmentally educated, and sustainable managed in terms of natural and cultural environment. |
| Weaver (2001, p.15) | Ecotourism is a form of tourism that fosters learning experiences and appreciation of the natural environment, or some components thereof, within its associated cultural context. It has the appearance of being environmentally and socio-culturally sustainable, preferably in a way that enhances the natural and cultural resource based of the destination and promotes the viability of the operation. |
| The International Ecotourism Society, USA (2015) | Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. |

Table 2 Example of identifying the key element of ecotourism based on the definitions

| Sources of definitions | Nature element | Education element | Conservation element | Impact element | Community element |
|---|----------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Blamey (2001) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Weaver (2001) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | - | ✓ |
| The International Ecotourism Society (2015) | ✓ | - | ✓ | - | ✓ |

Analyzing the relationships between the key elements of ecotourism, ecotourism principles, and ecotourism's code of conduct

The aim of this part is to cross-check if the five key elements of ecotourism are in accordance with ecotourism principles (Table 3) and code of conduct (Table 4) as well as to understand their relationships. The analysis was done by using the parentheses indicating the relationship at the end of each principle.

Table 3 Analyzing the relationships between the five key elements of ecotourism and ecotourism principle

| Source | Ecotourism principles |
|---|---|
| International Ecotourism Society (2009) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimizing impact (relates to impact element) - Building environmental and cultural awareness and respect (relates to learning & conservation element) - Providing positive experiences for both visitors and hosts (relates to natural, learning and community elements) - Providing direct financial benefits for conservation (relates to conservation element) - Providing financial benefits and empowerment for local people (relates to community element) |

Table 4 Analyzing the relationships between the five key elements of ecotourism and code of conduct

| Source | Ecotourism code of conduct |
|--------------------------|--|
| Ecotourism Norway (2009) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Norwegian ecotourism business is nature and culture based and has ecotourism as an underlying philosophy for all its business activities. It contributes actively to nature and culture conservation, is aware of its own effect on the environment and always practices a precautionary attitude. (relates to nature, conservation, and impact elements) - It is run as sustainable as possible, constantly balancing ecological, cultural, social and economic considerations. (relates to nature, conservation, and community elements) - It contributes to preserving listed buildings and has local adaptation, local architectural style and distinctiveness as a general goal in its choice of materials and solutions. (relates to conservation element) - It offers memorable experiences and creates meeting places that give employees and guests insight into local culture, community and environment. (relates to corporate & community elements)* - Employ tour guides well versed and respectful of local cultures and environments. (relates to corporate element)* |

According to the analysis in Table 3, it shows that the five elements of ecotourism are consistent to ecotourism principle because they are related to each other. Moreover, when analyzing the linkage between the code of conduct (Table 4), the analysis has identified one additional element that is associated with ecotourism tour operators and crucial for the success of ecotourism business. It is labeled as the 'corporate element' (the six element) which affects the management of the company in terms of providing ecotourism experience such as well-trained guides, tour planning and operations. In overall, through the analyses of ecotourism definitions, ecotourism principles and code of conduct, we are able to develop an ecotourism construct (Table 5) for investigating the green practices of tour operators. This construct is labeled as the 6 E's Ecotourism Model for Tour Operators (EMTO).

Table 5 Ecotourism construct and its operationalization for investigating ecotourism practices (green practices) of tour operators

| Ecotourism construct (criteria and indicators) | Operationalization of ecotourism construct (how to measure) |
|---|---|
| 1. Nature elements (Boo 1991; Buckley 1994; Fennell, 2003; Wight 1993.) 1.1 a visit to uncontaminated natural areas or protected areas 1.2 providing nature-based activities 1.3 maintaining low or non-consumptive activities 1.4 a visit to associated cultural attractions or local community located nearby ecotourism areas | 1.1 Does the company provide a trip to visit uncontaminated natural areas or protected areas? (use observation) 1.2 Does the company provide any nature-based activities? (use observation) 1.3 Does the company maintain low or non-consumptive activities? (use observation) 1.4 Does the company provide a trip to visit cultural heritage or local community located nearby ecotourism areas? (use observation) |
| 2. Education element (Boo 1991; Fennell, 2003; International Ecotourism Society, 2009) 2.1 providing travelers the opportunity to learn about the nature 2.2 providing travelers ecotourism interpretation (education activity) at ecotourism destinations 2.3 Encouraging natural appreciation, awareness or respect for the nature among travelers 2.4 promoting natural education/learning as well as natural appreciation, awareness or respect for the nature among local residents | 2.1 Does the company provide information for tourists to learn about the nature, the areas visited or surrounding environment? (use observation) 2.2 Does the company provide educational activity for tourists to learn or understand the ecosystem, the nature or the environment? (use observation) 2.3 Does the company provide any information to encourage tourists to appreciate or respect the natural environment? (use observation) 2.4 Does the company provide education or knowledge for local residents regarding natural awareness or conservation? (use interview) |

Table 5 (Continued)

| Ecotourism construct (criteria and indicators) | Operationalization of ecotourism construct (how to measure) |
|---|--|
| 3. Conservation element (Boo, 1991; Blamey, 2001; Fennell, 2003; International Ecotourism Society, 2009) 3.1 conservation of wildlife, plant or natural resources in terms of physical, financial or other assistances 3.2 collaborative efforts between business and community/state agency in natural conservation 3.3 maintenance or enhancement of ecosystems and environment 3.4 incorporation of preservation/conservation into management plans | 3.1 Does the company have any activity/project to help protect or conserve wildlife, plants or natural resources in terms of physical, financial or other assistances? (use interview) 3.2 Does the company have any activity/project to do with local community or state agency in natural conservation? (use interview) 3.3 Does the company have any activity/project to maintain or enhance the ecosystem or environment of the areas visited? (use interview) 3.4 Does the company incorporate preservation/conservation into management plans? (use interview) |
| 4. Impact element (Blamey, 2001; Fennell, 2003; International Ecotourism Society, 2009) 4.1 complying the rules and regulations of protected areas 4.2 maintaining low or minimal personal impact to the environment and local community 4.3 avoid disturbing wildlife or wildlife habitats 4.4 proper waste management during the trips 4.5 area's carrying capacity consideration 4.6 small group consideration (e.g. less than 20 persons) | 4.1 Does the company comply the rules/regulations of the areas visited? (use observation) 4.2 Does the company maintain low or reduce tourists' impact to the environment/local community? (use observation) 4.3 Does the company avoid disturbing wildlife or wildlife habitats? (use observation) 4.4 Does the company have a proper way to manage waste/garbage occurred during the trip? (use observation) 4.5 Does the company consider the area's carrying capacity? (use interview) 4.6 Does the company maintain a small group of travelers when visiting the destinations? (use observation) |
| 5. Community element (Boo 1991; Blamey 2001; Hugo 1999) 5.1 local employment relating to business operations 5.2 local involvement in tour activities 5.3 local involvement in tour planning 5.4 purchase/use of local products and service 5.5 promoting local culture learning or appreciation among travelers 5.6 contribution in local education, environment or conservation | 5.1 Does the company hire local people in relation to business operations? (use interview) 5.2 Does the company involve local people in any tour activities? (use observation) 5.3 Does the company involve local people in any tour planning? (use interview) 5.4 Does the company encourage local use or purchase of local products/services? (use observation) 5.5 Does the company provide any activity for travelers to learn or appreciate local culture? (use observation) 5.6 Does the company assist local community in terms of education, environment or conservation? (use interview) |

Table 5 (Continued)

| Ecotourism construct (criteria and indicators) | Operationalization of ecotourism construct (how to measure) |
|---|---|
| <p>6. Corporate element (Hugo 1999; International Ecotourism Society, 2009)</p> <p>6.1 setting company policies and/or objectives on sustainable tourism, ecotourism or responsible tourism</p> <p>6.2 providing a code of conduct for tour activities</p> <p>6.3 providing staff a training on ecotourism or related training</p> | <p>6.1 Does the company have a policy or statement to promote sustainable tourism, ecotourism or responsible tourism? (use interview)</p> <p>6.2 Does the company provide staff the code of conduct for conducting the tours? (use interview)</p> <p>6.3 Does the company provide employees a training on ecotourism or the environment? (use interview)</p> |

Source: Sangpikul (2011)

Methodologies

The target population of this study is the tour operators who claim or label their businesses or products as 'ecotourism' or 'eco-tour' through the marketing media (e.g. magazines, brochures, and Internet). This study used a purposive sampling to select 4 samples (tour operators) from previous study's referral on similar topic (see Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003). In Kontogeorgopoulos' study, the two original ecotour operators from Phuket and Bali were investigated. These selected samples are the tour operators with environmental awards from international tourism associations. It is expected that examining these companies may provide something to learn about their good practices. Therefore, this study used the same samples with Kontogeorgopoulos' study with a total of 4 companies being investigated. Phuket and Bali were chosen as areas of investigation as undertaken by Kontogeorgopoulos (2003). The two operators based in Phuket were labeled as A and B, and the other two companies in Bali were labeled as C and D. Data of company A and B were based on prior study (see Sangpikul, 2011) while the data of company C and D were collected in May 2014 as a part of the university's research project (see Sangpikul, 2014).

According to the nature of this study dealing with ecotourism practices (tour conducts), two research instruments (i.e. observation form and interview form) were developed on a base of the research construct from Table 5. Both observation and interview forms were reviewed by academics and industry practitioners to determine its appropriateness, validity and practical application. Corrections and modifications were made accordingly. For the observation method, researcher (author) asked tour operators (sales staff) to recommend an ecotour. Since each company offers 3-4 ecotourism programs, it is almost impossible to collect data from all recommended tours due to time and budget constraint. Having discussed this issue with tourism scholars, it could be acceptable to collect data (observe) two trips from each company for an exploratory research. Therefore, there were a total of eight tour programs to be observed. To participate in eight trips, the simple random sampling was used by drawing two trips from tour list of each company. During the surveys, researcher asked permission from tour operators to participate in the tour program. When joining the tours, the observation was undertaken at the beginning of

the tour program until the end. During each tour, the observation form was used to record tour operators' practices. The issues to be observed were mainly involved with nature element (where they went), education element (what they taught), impact element (what they concerned), and community element (what they did).

With regard to the interview method, the interviewees were recommended by company staff (salespersons). They were in the positions that involve with tour management or tour conduct of the company, for instance, general manager, operation manager and tour guides (2-3 interviewees from each company). The interviews were conducted at company's office by making an appointment, and ranged from 20 - 30 minutes each interview. A short note was made during each interview. In overall, there were a total of 10 interviewees, and most of them (60%) were tour guides due to flexible time availability. Before making an interview with each company, a formal letter from researcher's university (together with a business card) was given to the interviewees. To increase trustworthiness, all interviewees were informed about researcher's profile and university website (with relevant documents). Most interview questions were developed from the framework in Table 5, particularly on the issues of conservation and corporate elements. All interviewees were approached with the same questions, for example, "does the company have any conservation project in the area where tours are conducted?", "does the company have any code of conduct when taking tourists to visit the protected natural areas?", and "does the company provide tour guides with any training related to ecotourism/responsible tourism?". A content analysis (with descriptive approach) was used to analyze data from the observation on how the tour operators conducted their tours and to determine whether their practices corresponded to ecotourism concept (six ecotourism elements). The descriptive approach focuses on describing something being examined (i.e. situation, event or story). In this study it was used to describe (analyze) the way how the tour operators conducted their tours. Likewise, the data from the interviews were also content analyzed to describe how the tour operators' policy and operations were parallel to the ecotourism concept.

Findings

To facilitate the findings, only major results based on the observation and interview methods (what they did and lacked) are combined and presented together on an individual finding (each company) as shown in Table 6 to Table 9 while Table 10 summaries and compares the key findings of the four companies.

Company A

Table 6 Observation and interview results of company A

| Criteria | Tour 1 (what it did and lacked) | Tour 2 (what it did and lacked) |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Nature element (observation) | The company provided a day trip (travel by boat) to visit natural areas around Phang Nga bay national park by arranging canoes as a nature-based activity to enjoy the scenery as well as to learn the nature environment. Yet, tour 1 lacked a local visit and interaction with local people. | The second tour was a day trip visiting Phang Nga bay, and also an overnight trip staying at Yao Noi island. Most practices were similar to tour 1. But in the late afternoon, tour guides took tourists to visit an island and stay overnight with a local community. |
| 2. Education element (observation and interview) | During the trip, it was observed that tour guides provided tourists with the knowledge and natural education during the journey by briefing an introduction of the areas visited, presenting a booklet on marine animals and plants. While canoeing, tour guides explained about the ecosystem of the areas. At certain points of interest, they stopped to explain more information. However, it was observed that little effort was done to encourage tourists to appreciate or respect the nature. Besides educating the tourists, based on the interview, the company also educates local residents to care and protect natural resources of their areas being visited, particularly at ecotourism destinations (e.g. Yao Yai island). | Most practices were similar to tour 1. However, it was observed that little emphasis was made on the importance/ value of the areas visited and natural appreciation when compared to tour 1. During the trip, only a few stops, tour guides gave tourists a little information of the natural environment. |
| 3. Conservation element (interview) | Based on the interview, the company has done several things in relation to the conservation, particularly, on the islands being visited (e.g. Yao Yai and Yao Noi islands). The company has encouraged local residents to care and protect the natural resources by not destroying them. In the meantime, the company has attempted to persuade local residents to plant beach forest and mangrove forest on the islands for natural conservation purpose. According to the interview, the company has also funded wildlife conservation project (i.e. monkeys and birds) on the islands. Furthermore, the staff revealed that the company has set up a big cleaning day annually to work with the local community. | This practice was the same as tour 1. |

Table 6 (Continued)

| Criteria | Tour 1 (what it did and lacked) | Tour 2 (what it did and lacked) |
|---|--|--|
| 4. Impact element (observation) | During the observation, there were several procedures that the company attempted to reduce its impacts to the environment. For example, it was observed that the company always complied the rules and the regulations of the areas visited (e.g. national parks or protected areas). During the trip, tour guides advised tourists regarding proper behavior when visiting the natural areas such as what they could do and should not in order to reduce the impacts to the environment. During the surveys, the company limited the number of tourists (2 people) on a canoe to provide a personalized service, safety and reducing area impact. Food and drink (including any plastic item) were not allowed to be taken when canoeing to prevent garbage impact. It was observed that the garbage on board was properly collected. | Most practices were similar to tour 1. |
| 5. Community element (observation and interview) | Based on the observation, there was no local visit in tour 1. However, according to the interview, the company argued that it supports local employment by recruiting local people from Phuket and Yao Noi/Yao Yai islands to work with it. Many of them are employed as tour guides, some are bus drivers, boat captains, boat assistants, and cooks. According to tour guides, when visiting the local village, tourists are encouraged to buy local products and services. In most overnight trips, tour guides will arrange the activities for tourists to expose to the local life and culture such as teaching local language, cooking and local performance. In some trips, the company arranges a volunteer group to visit the island to build or maintain school facilities (e.g. toilets, library, classrooms). However, the company reveals that most tours are organized by the company itself, there was no local involvement in tour planning. | According to the observation, there was a local visit associated with this tour, and it was observed that several activities were related to local community. When arriving at the island in the afternoon, tourists were given some free time to explore the village where they had chance to meet and interact with local people. Tourists were encouraged to buy or use local products and services. In this trip, tour guides arranged the activities for tourists to expose to the local life and culture such as Thai cooking and local performance. It was observed that, at night, tourists had a chance to watch and learn Thai boxing performed by local residents. Most tourists joined this activity with local residents. |
| 6. Corporate element (interview) | Based on the interview, the company has a policy to promote sustainable/responsible tourism in Phuket and nearby areas where the tours operate. It also has a written code of conduct for tour activities. Furthermore, the company provides tour guide both professional and environmental trainings. | This practice was the same as tour 1. |

Company B

Table 7 Observation and interview results of company B

| Criteria | Tour 1 (what it did and lacked) | Tour 2 (what it did and lacked) |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Nature element (observation) | The company provided a day trip (travel by bus) to visit a forestry area and an elephant camp near the national park in Surat Thani. There were some nature-based activities provided for tourists (i.e. canoeing and elephant riding). Yet, tour 1 lacked the actual local visit. | The company provided a day trip (travel by bus) to visit an elephant camp in Phuket. It was observed that there were only an elephant riding and local activities for tourists. However, tour 2 lacked the local visit as well. |
| 2. Education element (observation and interview) | It was observed that there was a short introduction briefing tourists of the areas visited. Moreover, during the trip, there was no written document given to tourists to learn about the nature. No effort has been made to promote natural learning or appreciation among tourists. Based on the interview, no information was given regarding educating the local community. | Most practices were similar to tour 1 including what it did and lacked. |
| 3. Conservation element (interview) | According to the interview, the company is currently running an elephant conservation project in Phuket and Surat Thani. It also sends the staff to participate in an annual event of cleaning tourist attractions in Phuket (piers, beaches, islands). However, the company still lacks the actual conservation at ecotourism destinations. | This practice was the same as tour 1. |
| 4. Impact element (observation) | During the observation, the company implemented some impact consideration. For example, there was a short guidance advising tourists on proper behavior when visiting the natural area. Garbage was properly collected during the trip. There was a consideration of small groups while doing some activities (canoeing, elephant riding). However, it was observed that other relevant practices were rarely undertaken during the trip such as personal garbage and proper behavior in the area. | It was observed that most impact conservation was almost ignored on this tour. There was no guidance advising tourists on proper behavior when visiting the natural area as well as personal garbage and wildlife disturbance. |
| 5. Community element (observation and interview) | During the trip, there was a visit at the elephant camp where there were souvenirs for sale. It was interviewed that most people at the camp were not local residents, they came from the northern region. According to the company, some locals are employed in relation to business operations. However, the actual community involvement or participation was not implemented. | Most practices were similar to tour 1 including the lack of actual community involvement. |

Table 7 (Continued)

| Criteria | Tour 1 (what it did and lacked) | Tour 2 (what it did and lacked) |
|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 6. Corporate element (interview) | According to the interview, the company has a policy to promote responsible tourism in Phuket and nearby provinces. It has a written code of conduct for tour activities. The company provides tour guides a professional training including the natural environment. | This practice was the same as tour 1. |

Company C

Table 8 Observation and interview results of company C

| Criteria | Tour 1 (what it did and lacked) | Tour 2 (what it did and lacked) |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Nature element (observation) | The company provided a trip to visit a natural park in Bali. This was a good place to learn and enjoy the beauty of the true nature. There was a trekking activity during the trip. The trekking was arranged along the rainforest in the natural park with lots of flora and fauna. | This trip was an elephant riding at a local village through the tropical forest with lots of trees and plants. However, the area seemed to be a private property, and no other nature-based activity was provided. |
| 2. Education element (observation and interview) | Tour guide gave an introduction of the natural park, and also explained about the environment, flora and fauna in the park. Tour guide reminded tourists to avoid disturbing wildlife. While trekking, there were some explanation from tour guide throughout the trip. | At the site, tour guide provided tourists with some information about the location, routing and elephants. Little education was provided during the trip. |
| 3. Conservation element (interview) | The company has several projects to protect and conserve the wildlife by working with local organizations such as Bali Bird Park and Elephant Safari Park. Some of its tour programs have a visit to these places. The company also has a conservation campaigns to collect rubbish along the river and in villages where tours are operated. | This practice was the same as tour 1. |
| 4. Impact element (observation) | The company pays attention to area's carrying capacity by controlling a small group when visiting a natural area. The company also informs tourists of what can do and should not do when visiting the protected areas. | There was no advice on tourists' behavior during the trip. Other issues were almost similar to tour 1. |
| 5. Community element (observation and interview) | During the trip, there was no local visit. For employment, the company has a policy to hire local residents in several positions in the company. However , no local people are involved in tour planning. | There was no local visit in tour 2, and no any local involvement or participation as well. |
| 6. Corporate element (interview) | The company has a policy to promote ecotourism and sustainable tourism in Bali. It has also set up a code of conduct for tour activities to reduce the impact. The company has a regular training for its guides including natural environment. | This practice was the same as tour 1. |

Company D

Table 9 Observation and interview results of company D

| Criteria | Tour 1 (what it did and lacked) | Tour 2 (what it did and lacked) |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Nature element (observation) | The company provided a trip to visit a rural area in Bali by traveling pass through natural and cultural attractions. This trip used a bicycle as a low impact activity. However , the routing of the cycling was not fully regarded as ecotourism site. | The company provided a day trip to visit a natural park in Bali. This trip was a trekking in the natural area (conserved forest) for 2 hours. During the way back from the trip, there was a stop at a local village to buy foods, drinks, and local products. . |
| 2.Education element (observation and interview) | Tour guide made brief information on the routing and the areas visited. Information was regularly provided when visiting major attractions including natural and cultural sites. More information was given on cultural aspect and local life of people. | When arriving at the natural park, tour guide took tourists to the visitor office to brief some information about the park. However, it was observed that there was little information about the park at the tourist office. During the trip, tour guide provided tourists with general information. Tour guide also encouraged tourists to learn about the nature. Nevertheless, an issue on proper tourist behavior in the park was quickly briefed. |
| 3.Conservation element (interview) | The company has several conservation projects. For example, it works with local schools on recycling projects, and raises funds with Bali local zoo for wildlife conservation. However , these projects may not be directly relevant to the areas where its tours are operated. In relation to its operation, the company has a conservation campaign by collecting rubbish (with local residents) along the areas where tourists visit. | This practice was the same as tour 1. |
| 4. Impact element (observation) | The company pays attention to area's carrying capacity by controlling a small group, particularly for the rafting activity. | During the trip, it was observed that there was a brief information advising tourists of what can do and should not when visiting natural areas, including personal garbage. But other practices were not implemented. |
| 5.Community element (observation and interview) | There were local visits during the trip. Tour guides encouraged tourists to buy local products. For employment, the company has a policy to hire local residents in several positions. However , no local people are involved in tour planning. | During the way back from the trip, there was a stop at a local village to buy foods, drinks, and local products. However, tour guide paid less attention on local patronage. Other practices were the same as tour 1. |
| 6.Corporate element (interview) | The company has a policy to promote ecotourism and sustainable tourism in Bali. Yet , information is not available through Internet and other media. The company has set up a code of conduct for tour activities to reduce the impact. The company has a training for its guides on natural environment. | This practice was the same as tour 1. |

Table 10 Summary and comparison of key findings of company A, B, C, and D

| Company | What it did on green practices (good practices) | What it lacked on green practices (needs improvement) |
|---------|---|---|
| A | Nature-based activities with low impact (<i>nature element</i>), local visit (<i>community element</i>), providing knowledge and education (<i>education element</i>), encouraging natural resources conservation (<i>conservation element</i>), impact consideration and small group size (<i>impact element</i>), local employment/ supporting local learning and appreciation (<i>community element</i>), company's policy on ecotourism/ responsible tourism, staff training (<i>corporate element</i>) | Little focus on creating natural awareness and appreciation (<i>education element</i>) as well as lack of local involvement in tour planning and participation (<i>community element</i>) |
| B | Nature-based activities with low impact (<i>nature element</i>), partial local visit (<i>community element</i>), impact consideration (<i>impact element</i>), wildlife conservation (<i>conservation element</i>), local employment (<i>community element</i>), company's policy on ecotourism/responsible tourism, staff training (<i>corporate element</i>) | Little focus on creating natural awareness and appreciation as well as little emphasis on promoting trip education (<i>education element</i>), lack of providing actual local visit (<i>community element</i>), and no local involvement and participation (<i>community element</i>) |
| C | Nature-based activities with low impact (<i>nature element</i>), providing knowledge and education (<i>education element</i>), wildlife conservation projects (<i>conservation element</i>), impact consideration and small group size (<i>impact element</i>), local employment (<i>community element</i>), company's policy on ecotourism/responsible tourism, staff training (<i>corporate element</i>) | Little focus on promoting natural awareness and appreciation (<i>education element</i>), less concern on local community and involvement (<i>community element</i>) |
| D | Nature-based activities with low impact (<i>nature element</i>), providing knowledge and education (<i>education element</i>), impact consideration and small group size (<i>impact element</i>), local employment and community visit (<i>community element</i>), company's policy on ecotourism/ responsible tourism, staff training (<i>corporate element</i>) | Not relevant conservation project (<i>conservation element</i>), less concern on promoting natural awareness/ appreciation (<i>education element</i>), lack of local involvement in tour planning and participation (<i>community element</i>) |

Recommendations

In order to facilitate the implementation of the ecotourism practices for the tour operators, and to make the recommendation more meaningful, it is suggested to propose the ecotourism practices through the stage (or process) of tour operations in terms of "before trip", "during trip", and "business management". These stages are the common procedures when delivering tours of the tour operators (Amstrong & Weiler, 2002; Patterson, 2002). In addition, the six elements of ecotourism will be implemented within these stages as shown in Table 11. It should be noted that the tour practices in Table 11 are proposed based on the literature review and the actual practices of the tour operators being examined in this study (what they did and lacked); thereby reflecting the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable tourism business. In particular, these practices would not only help promote the green tourism business (like ecotourism tour operators) but they would also support the future development of ecotourism industry, particularly in the current global concern of the environmentally friendly products or green tourism

Table 11 The proposed tour conduct for ecotourism practices (ecotour)

| Tour process | Tour conduct for ecotourism practices/green practices |
|---------------------|---|
| Before trip | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate company's policy and objective to customers and make them aware of their role in helping protecting the natural environment (<i>corporate element</i>) • Brief visitors on proper behavior before visiting natural areas (<i>education & impact element</i>) • Give clients appropriate verbal and/or written guidance with respect to the natural areas being visited (<i>education element</i>) • Enhance visitor understanding of natural environment and local cultures before arriving at the destination (<i>education element</i>) |
| During trip | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an awareness of natural heritage and value among tourists when visiting the natural areas (<i>nature & education elements</i>) • Provide low or non-impact activities in the natural area for nature appreciation (<i>nature & impact elements</i>) • Comply the existing rules and regulations of the areas visited to reduce unflavored impacts (<i>impact element</i>) • Educate tourists on the nature and its environment, and promote natural interpretation (<i>education element</i>) • Encourage tourists to respect the nature and local cultures (<i>education & community element</i>) • Consider the carrying capacity of the visited areas by implementing a small group conduct to reduce physical and environment impacts (<i>impact element</i>) • Manage waste or garbage occurring during the trip in an appropriate way (<i>impact element</i>) • Advise tourists regarding proper travel behaviors during the trips (<i>including what they can do and should not</i>) to reduce negative impacts on ecosystem, wildlife, flora, fauna, or habitat • Do not disturb wildlife or wildlife habitats (<i>impact & conservation elements</i>) • If visit a local community, promote local purchase and usage that benefit the locals, and if possible arrange the activity for tourists to learn and appreciate local culture or the way of life (<i>community element</i>) • Advise against purchasing specific crafts that are produced from threatened natural resources or endangered species (<i>conservation element</i>) |
| Business management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate company's policy and goal to staff and employees (<i>corporate element</i>) • Be a contributor to the conservation of the areas being visited or determine the conservation plan as a part of business ethics or social responsibility (<i>conservation element</i>) • Support education/training for guides and managers in relation to the nature and the environment (<i>e.g. wildlife, ecosystem, geology, botany, flora, and fauna</i>) (<i>corporate element</i>) • Promote or participate in the activities to maintain or enhance the ecosystem of the areas where the tour is conducted (<i>conservation element</i>) • Provide local employment in relation to business operations as well as contribute in local community, use local workforce, local products and services (<i>community element</i>) |

To conclude, this study has disclosed and compared the ecotourism practices conducted by the four tour operators in Phuket and Bali. In spite of a small number of the samples being investigated (based on prior study's referral and research limitation), this study has revealed the actual ecotourism practices delivered by the tour operators in two destinations. According to the

findings, the tour operators in both destinations delivered both similar and different ecotourism practices. The similar practices, are, for example, natural visits, low-impact activities, small group size, waste management, and local employment. These findings indicate that there are the responsible tour operators attempting to deliver ecotourism practices. However, the differences, may involve little effort on educating tourists, environmental concern and supporting local community. According to the literature, these differences might result from owner's perspective, company's policy, ecotourism understanding/implementation, tour operation characteristics and staff training (Donohoe & Needham, 2008; Patterson, 2002). In addition, some operators may pay different concentration on different issues (tour practices). Some may focus on a particular practice while some may not. On the other hand, several scholars (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2004; Armstrong & Weiler, 2002) argue that these different tour practices may occur due to the goal of the company or sometimes owners as well (what they want to be). Some tour operators may just want to a general nature operator by offering ecotourism products whereas some may want to be a specialized operator such as eco-tour operator. Although, there are some similarities and differences among the tour operators, this study has shown that there are the actual responsible tour operators following the ecotourism principle in Phuket and Bali. This study has yielded the green tourism practices by using ecotourism tour operators in two destinations as the case study. The results have disclosed how the sustainable tour practices are conducted through the ecotourism practices and code of conducts. The practices of these four tour operators are the foundation leading to the quality green tourism business. Based on the findings, ecotour operator can be viewed as the quality tourism business because of its responsible practices to the environment, educating tourists, impact concern and local community benefits. In order to promote the ecotourism tour operators, it may involve government and the tourism industry in two destinations to make this issue at the national level regarding the development of sustainable tourism business like several developed countries such as Australia and USA (Ecotourism Australia, 2008; International Ecotourism Society, 2009).

Research Limitations

There are some limitations associated with this study. Firstly, due to the budget and time constraint, this study was conducted as a case study based on previous research's referral on ecotour operators' good practices. Such constraints may limit the number of the samples to be investigated. Thus, the number of the samples (tour operators) being investigated may be too small, and are not generalized to the overall ecotourism practices in Thailand and Indonesia. Future research may conduct on a larger scale of the sample size to get more in-depth information/ findings from the industry. Secondly, only two specific locations (Phuket and Bali) were explored. Consequently, the area of investigation may be limited, and not actually represents the overall picture/situation of ecotourism practices in two countries. Therefore, the ecotourism practices in other areas should be further explored. Finally, some other issues, for example, the practices for vehicle/transport, fuel or energy use are not examined in this study because they are not included in the research scope. Future researchers may objectively involve such issues in their examination.

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