

ความรับผิดชอบต่อสิ่งแวดล้อมในท้องถิ่น: ภาระผูกพันของโรงแรมประเภทรีสอร์ท

LOCAL ENVIRONMENT RESPONSIBILITY: AN OBLIGATION OF RESORT HOTELS

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บทคัดย่อ

สิ่งแวดล้อมตามธรรมชาติในแหล่งท่องเที่ยวเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญยิ่งที่ดึงดูดนักท่องเที่ยวให้ไปเยือนงานธุรกิจรีสอร์ทซึ่งขึ้นอยู่กับสิ่งแวดล้อมตามธรรมชาติของท้องถิ่นค่อนข้างมาก เมื่อธุรกิจรีสอร์ทได้รับประโยชน์จากทรัพยากรธรรมชาติของท้องถิ่น จึงควรร่วมรับผิดชอบ ขณะนี้ยังมีรีสอร์ทจำนวนหนึ่งยังไม่ตระหนักถึงความสำคัญของสิ่งแวดล้อมตามธรรมชาติที่มีต่อความสำเร็จและความยั่งยืนของธุรกิจ แม้ว่าธุรกิจรีสอร์ทจำนวนมากมีกิจกรรมที่แสดงความรับผิดชอบต่อสิ่งแวดล้อมกำหนดอยู่ในนโยบายขององค์กร แต่ส่วนใหญ่ยังเป็นไปเพื่อประโยชน์ในเชิงธุรกิจ เช่น การทำกิจกรรมการประหยัดพลังงานแล้วนำมาทำการตลาด บทความนี้ประสงค์ที่จะชี้ให้เห็นความสำคัญของสิ่งแวดล้อมและทรัพยากรธรรมชาติของท้องถิ่น ที่รีสอร์ทนำมาใช้เพื่อการตลาดและการบริหารจัดการ ทั้งนี้เพื่อให้เกิดการตระหนักในภาระผูกพันที่รีสอร์ทควรร่วมรับผิดชอบต่อสิ่งแวดล้อมของท้องถิ่น อีกทั้งควรกำหนดเป็นประเด็นในนโยบายด้านความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคมขององค์กร

คำสำคัญ: การท่องเที่ยว ความรับผิดชอบต่อสิ่งแวดล้อม รีสอร์ท ความรับผิดชอบต่อสังคม สิ่งแวดล้อมของท้องถิ่น

Abstract

The local natural environment is the major factor that draws visitors to destinations. Resort hotel businesses depend greatly on the local natural environment for their existence. As resort hotel businesses use the benefits of the local natural resources in providing services to visitors at the destinations, thus they should take more responsibility. Today, a number of resort hotels still do not realize the importance of the natural environment on the success and sustainability of their businesses. Even though many resort hotels include environmental responsibility activities in their company's policy, however, the majority of hotels do it for managerial benefits to boost the hotel brand image, for example water and energy saving, waste reduction and recycling. This paper aims to highlight the importance of using local natural environment for resort hotels as a marketing strategy and operation process. Resort hotels should be more conscious of their obligation towards the local natural environment and incorporate this aspect in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy.

Keywords: Tourism, Environmental Responsibility, Resort, Corporate Social Responsibility, Local Environment

Introduction

The growth of international and domestic tourism in Thailand in the past four decades has resulted in the environmental deterioration of some well-known tourist destinations (Blanco, Rey-Maqueira & Lozano, 2009; Dodds, Graci, & Holmes, 2010; Ryan, 2002; MOTS, 2014). Due to the fact that natural resources, such as oceans, beaches, mountains and waterfalls are common public goods and are available at no cost, they are often over-consumed and exploited by profit-oriented businesses as well as the public. The natural environment, which is major attraction that draws tourists to holiday destinations, includes the sea, sand and sun (3S) in warm climate countries. The beautiful destinations have experienced exponential growth in the number of tourists due to the marketing campaigns of the National Tourist Offices (NTOs), tour operators and hotel companies. Attractive destinations have become popular and are faced with the environmental issues as a result (Dodds et al., 2010; Ryan, 2002). Ryan (2002, p. 18) also wrote that "it is now almost a cliché that the growing demand for natural places, if unfettered, leads to more crowds.... Growing demand leads to more buildings, more development, and in that development, that which was originally sought, disappears". The continuously increasing environmental impacts have called for responsible actions by various stake holders, particularly major tourism suppliers such as resort hotels who earn profits from the value of beautiful natural resources at tourist destinations.

The accommodation sector is one of the major sectors of the travel and tourism industry. In Thailand, the accommodation establishments have been continuously developed to meet the demand of international as well as domestic tourists. In 2015, the accommodation sector was the leading foreign revenue earner from international tourism. The revenue from this sector accounted for 31.58% of the total revenue of 1,457,450.28 million THB from international tourism (Tourism Department, 2016). The significant development of nature-based tourist accommodation in Thailand is on touristic islands and seaside destinations such as Phuket, Suratthani (Samui Island), Chonburi (Pattaya), Prachuabkirkhan (Hua-Hin), Songkla (Hat Yai), Krabi, Petchaburi, followed by scenic landscape destinations such as Chiangmai and Chiangrai. These provinces received more than 47% of tourist arrivals to Thailand or 46,390,382 visitors in 2014 (National Statistical Office, 2015). The following table shows the top holiday destinations of Thailand excluding Bangkok. It also presents the number of hotel establishments and rooms in these major provinces. The top 3 provinces that have the highest number of hotel establishments are Suratthani, Phuket and Chonburi respectively. They are all well-known seaside resort destinations of Thailand.

Table 1 Thailand's top tourist destinations in 2014 (excluding Bangkok)

Province	No. of Establishments	No. of Rooms
Suratthani	1138	37,197
Phuket	814	66,350
Chonburi	582	40,373
Chiangmai	571	24,669
Krabi	412	11,255
Prachuabkirikhan	346	9,480
Chiangrai	272	8,811
Songkla	256	14,173
Petchburi	163	6,798

Source: National Statistical Office (2015)

The exponential growth of the demand for travelling to popular holiday destinations has led to the growth of tourism industry, requiring constructions of hotels and resorts, golf courses and other infrastructure to serve the industry. This has caused environmental deterioration at nature-based tourist destinations, and has been researched by several authors. Dodds et al. (2010)'s study found several environmental problems in Koh Phi Phi such as waste (lack of recycling and an abundance of water bottles), beach degradation and rapid development with no formal planning. Tourists to Koh Phi Phi recommended measures to improve the environmental problems such as litter control, beach clean-up, waste management, recycling, and marine-protection strategies. Chubchuwong, Beise-Zee, & Speece (2015) studied international visitors' opinions about the environment in Hua Hin (in Prachuabkirikhan Province) and Pattaya (in Chonburi Province). The study found that visitors have rather negative attitudes about the environment at both destinations. Some visitors expressed concerns and made suggestions to open-ended questions. The top five suggestions are 1) more garbage bins should be provided, 2) local people should be educated on environmental issues, 3) local people should use less plastics bags and bottles, 4) beaches and streets should be cleaned up more and 5) local people should throw rubbish in garbage bins not in public places. From these studies, it can be seen that some overseas visitors felt that problems with regard to the environment at Thailand's seaside resort destinations need to be urgently addressed.

The Tourism Strategic Development Plan 2014-2017 which was prepared by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS, 2014, p. 20) states that one of the threats to the tourism industry in Thailand is the deterioration of tourist destinations due to the growth of tourism that concentrates on quantity rather than quality. One of the development plans to solve the problems is to establish a network including both the public and private sectors. This indicates that environmental problems cannot be left to the government to handle. Private sectors should step in and share the responsibilities in conserving and protecting the natural environment and

natural resources at the destinations. As resort hotels are considered a major private sector of tourist destinations, they should play a leading role in conserving the local natural environment.

A number of researches on environmental impact from tourism often recommend resort hotels to take part in the environmental responsibility because they consume local natural resources and at the same time generate waste and pollution (UNEP, 1999; Punitha & Rasdi, 2013). However, hardly any research discuss the benefits that local natural environment provides to resort hotels for their marketing and operational purposes.

The objectives of this article are firstly, to illustrate how the local natural environment and resources provide significant marketing and operational benefits to resort hotels, and secondly, to recommend resort hotels to take more responsibility towards the local natural environment through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities.

In this article, a resort hotel is defined as a luxury facility that is intended primarily for vacationers and is usually located near special attractions, such as beaches and seashores, scenic or historic areas, ski parks, or spas. (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2016).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the tourism industry

The United Nations Environment Plan or UNEP (1999), identified tourism's three main impact areas: 1 the depletion of natural resources (water resources, local resources, land degradation), 2 pollution (air pollution and noise, solid waste and littering, sewage, aesthetic pollution), and 3 physical impacts (such as degradation of ecosystem, tourism-related land clearing and construction etc.). Tourism development puts pressure on natural resources when it increases consumption in areas where resources are already scarce. Tourism industry generally overuses water resources for hotels, swimming pools, golf courses and personal use by tourists. This results in water shortages and degradation of water supplies as well as generating a greater volume of waste water. This article illustrated that the tourism industry, including resort hotels, is one of the industries that create negative impact to the natural environment of destinations.

In order to sustain the development of the tourism industry globally, the World Tourism Organization has issued World Tourism Organization Global Codes of Ethics for Tourism (WTO, 2000b in Ritchie, 2003, p. 56). In Article 3: Tourism, it states a factor of sustainable development that firstly, all stakeholders in tourism development should safeguard the natural environment with a view to achieving sound, continuous and sustainable economic growth geared to satisfying the needs and aspirations of present and future generations equitably, and secondly, all forms of tourism development should be conducive to saving rare and precious resources, in particular water and energy, as well as avoiding as far as possible, waste production. These requirements should be given priority and encouraged by national, regional and local public authorities. According to the code of conduct, an accommodation sector which is an important part of the tourism industry should take part in safeguarding the natural environment and natural resources of the destinations.

In the last ten years, due to the environmental impact at tourist destinations, the management of sustainable tourism has become a global issue. A number of researches addressed the sustainability of tourism (e.g. Budeanu, 2005; Imran, Alam, & Beaumont, 2014; Miller, 2001). There have also been a number of researches on corporate social responsibility of the tourism industry in recent decades (e.g. Blanco et al., 2009; Inoue & Lee, 2010). Falck & Heblich (2007),

described CSR as a voluntary corporate commitment to exceed the explicit and implicit obligations imposed on a company by society's expectations of conventional corporate behaviour. According to the definition of European Commission (in European Cities Marketing, 2011), CSR is defined as a concept where by companies integrate social and environment concerns in their business operations and in their interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis. For the European Commission, CSR measures of tourism businesses comprise the responsible use of natural and cultural resources; the minimization of pollution and waste; the conservation of landscapes, biodiversity and cultural heritage; fair and responsible treatment of employees, suppliers and guests; fair use of local products and services; as well as involvement and cooperation with local communities so as to improve the quality of life of the local people.

Environmentally responsible activities of hotels

Three studies regarding CRS in the hotel industry were reviewed in this article. Firstly, a research by Grobois (2012) evaluated CSR reporting practice of 150 largest hotel companies in the world. The study was categorized into five areas: 1 environmental goals, 2 employment qualities, 3 diversity and accessibility, 4 society/community well-being, and 5 economic prosperity. The data analysis indicated that the most popular environmental goals that hotel companies are committed to included: 1 waste reduction and recycling (commitment declared by 43 companies), 2 energy conservation (42 companies), 3 water conservation (40 companies), and 4 mitigation of climate change (27 companies). A commitment to specific goals was reported by most companies as an on-going effort. However, Grobois (2012) noted that such goals were made largely without a target date, nor did they hold the stakeholders accountable. Even though this research did not particularly mentioned resort hotels, it is widely understood that top international hotel chains generally manage both city and resort properties.

Secondly, Levy & Park (2011)'s study identified and analysed current CSR practices and the benefits gained from implementing these activities in the lodging industry in the United States. A survey of US-based hotel executives showed that the most important and highest performing initiatives of environmental practices focused on energy, waste and water management. Hotel executives reported that cost savings and branding-related outcomes were the greatest benefits of CSR implementation. Thirdly, a study by Peng, Wei & Li (2013) summarized CSR reports from 15 top Chinese hotel-management companies. They found several CSR characteristics: first, charitable donations, volunteer activities, green hotel practices and the reduction of energy consumption; second, providing accommodation and support for governmental activities; third, more responsible towards the community and society, the environment, employees, governments and customers than suppliers, competitors and creditors. Table 2 shows the summary of 3 studies on CSR activities by hotel companies.

Table 2 Hotel CSR characteristics

Author	Grobois (2012)	
Topic	Most Popular Environmental Goals That Top Hotels are Committed to	
Finding	<u>CSR Goal</u>	<u>No. of companies committed to</u>
	Waste reduction and recycling	43 companies
	Energy conservation	42 companies
	Water conservation	40 companies
	Mitigation of climate change	27 companies
Author	Levy & Park (2011)	
Topic	Survey on Executives in the US Lodging Industry	
Finding	Most important environmental practices are energy, waste, and water management	
	Greatest benefits of CSR are cost savings and branding-related outcomes	
Author	Peng et al. (2013)	
Topic	Most Common CSR Characteristics of Top Chinese Hotel Companies	
Finding	Most common are charitable donations, volunteer activities, green hotel practices and the reduction of energy consumption	
	Second most common are providing accommodation and support for governmental activities	
	Third most common are responsibility towards the community and society, the environment, employees, governments and customers, suppliers, competitors and creditors	

Based on the observation of the above table and from previously mentioned studies (Grobois, 2012; Levy & Park, 2011; Peng et al. 2013), it can be seen that the majority of hotels' CSR activities are focused on the internal environment management objectives rather than on the local natural environment.

The demand for CSR from the new tourists

In the past decade, research studied the trend of changing tourist behaviours and the demand for responsible tourism (e.g. Aguilo, Alegre & Sard, 2005; Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Roman, & Scott, 2009). Aguilo et al. (2005, p. 224) wrote that "new consumers seek good quality products that are more flexible, with a greater respect for the social and environmental setting and pay more for the sun and sand product if it involves 'a good quality environmental setting. Notably, the consumers are turning to ethical products (Yeoman, 2005 in Dwyer et al., 2009) by intention to purchase products that go beyond good quality and prices, especially social and environmental responsibility. According to the changing tourist behaviours which give higher preference to organizations that include environmental and social concerns, resort hotels should be aware of this trend and be more environmentally responsible.

Discussions and recommendations

In this article, the author intends to provide a rationale as to why local environment responsibility is crucial for resort hotel management sustainability.

In the marketing of resort hotels, usually the attractiveness of destinations is promoted. Generally, tourists choose their holidays based on desirable destinations, prior to choosing places to stay. Thus, destination image plays an important role in attracting visitors to the destinations (Yuksel, Yuksel & Bilim, 2010). Therefore, the success of the resort hotel business relies on the attractiveness of natural resources at tourist destinations. Dwyer et al. (2009, p. 65) stated that "the natural environment and climate conditions are very important in determining the viability and attractiveness of the region as a tourist destination. Tourism development tends to be based near attractive or unique features of the environment, enabling visitors to gain access to interesting natural or manmade environments". Richie (2003, p. 44) stated that "the ecological and natural environment is a major attraction of many destinations. Often, the experience of the unique environment represents a core of tourism products for many destinations these natural phenomena represent the life blood of their tourism industries, and any decline in their value will have an adverse effect on the destination". Hotels and resorts at tourist destinations take advantage of the attractive natural environment at their destination for consumption and marketing purposes at no cost. There is naturally some kind of depreciation to that natural environment, depending on the number and frequency of visitors coming to those destinations. Therefore, in order to show environmental and social responsibility, resort hotels should bear the cost, at least partially, to maintaining and preserving the destinations' natural environment

Medlik (1994) originally included "location" as part of a hotel's product. Resort hotels cannot ignore the importance of the quality of the local natural environment that their visitors encounter. Resort hotels mostly design landscapes to capture the best view of the beautiful natural scenery. Once hotels are established, hotel rooms, which are the core product, are usually categorized based on the desirable natural views. For instance, a deluxe five-star beach-front hotel in Phuket may categorize rooms starting from the lowest to the highest prices starting from Deluxe Garden View rooms, Deluxe Ocean view rooms, Ocean Front Junior suites, and Ocean Front Grande Suites, respectively. The natural environment and scenery add value to the rooms. They are the major factors in determining the room category, which is the core product of a resort hotel.

Visitors are generally willing to pay a higher rate for a better scenic view. Therefore, a resort hotel's room revenue depends greatly on the natural beauty of the environment surrounding the hotel. Resort hotels also use the natural views to add value to their restaurants. Hence, it is common that nature-based resort hotels and restaurants enjoy financial benefits of the local environment.

Natural beauty, such as white sandy beaches, clean and transparent sea, and lush green forests, are always used as promotional tools at no cost. As can be seen generally, most seaside resort hotels use ocean view photographs and beaches in their advertising and publicity.

In addition to the marketing benefits that resort hotels gain from the beautiful natural environment, there are some operational benefits as well. Seaside resort hotels are likely to use less electricity compared to city hotels due to the pleasant natural environment that attracts guests to stay for a long period on the beach. Thus, air-conditioners in resort hotels are being

used less than the city hotels. In Krabi and Phuket provinces, where the majority of hotels are situated on the beach, the electricity expenses in 2013 were 10 to 11.5 percent of the total operating expense respectively, whereas in Suratthani and Songkla, where there are higher numbers of hotels in the city, the electricity expenses were higher i.e. 22.3 to 27 percent respectively (National Statistical Office, 2015).

Regarding benefits to the “people”, beautiful natural scenery also plays an important role in staff recruitment and retention. In most beach front hotels, the beautiful local natural environment is one of the important benefits for staff motivation, retention, as well as hiring package.

Two diagrams were designed by this author to illustrate various benefits which local natural environment provides to resort hotels, and the returning of benefits by resort hotels to the local natural environment.

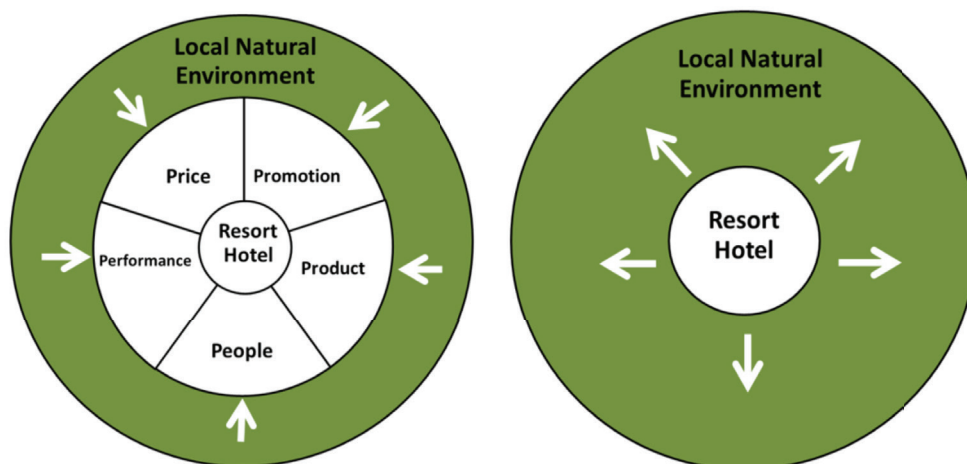


Figure 1 Interdependence of a resort hotel and the local natural environment

The circle on the left represents the benefits which a resort hotel receives from its local natural environment while the right circle represents the contributions that hotels should return to their local natural environment.

Resort hotels receive freely abundant benefits from their local environment. Hence they should return back some contributions to help perpetuate the sustainability of that destination. Some benefits that resort hotels could return to the locality are discussed below.

According to Chubchuwong 's study (2014) international visitors' opinions about the environment in resort destinations in Thailand, there are several aspects of environmentally responsible activities that still can be done by public and private sectors to improve the local environment. Examples of such activities include: a) the provision of environmental-friendly facilities i.e. signage, recycle bins in the public places, b) educating the local people on the environment-friendly behaviours, c) join the local environment committee to share environment initiatives, d) using more of low carbon or non-motorized transportation, and provide bicycles for guests who want to travel in a short distance. In table 3, the author provides some environment responsible recommendations that can be done by resort hotels for the local environment.

Table 3 Recommended environment responsible activities for resort hotels

Environment-friendly facilities
Provide recycle trash bins in public places
Provide environment-friendly signages in public places
Provide bicycles for guests who want to travel short distance
Use low carbon or non-motorized transportation for resort guests
Environment conservation activities
Participate regularly in beach clean-up
Participate regularly in tree plantation
Participate in flora and fauna conservation activities
Involve resort guests on environment conservation activities
Financial support
Provide financial support to public sectors / foundations for environment conservation / protection purposes
Education
Educate staff on environment responsible behaviours (what they should do at home and for the society not only for the workplace)
Create awareness of environment-friendly behaviors for the local
Network
Join local environment committee to share environment initiatives
Create network among private business for environment protection and conservation

Conclusions

An accommodation business is a service business that requires visitors to come and stay at the property at tourist destinations (Kotler, Bowen, & Markens, 2006). Thus, the local natural environment is a major part of the visitors' experience and is crucial to the success of businesses. Visitors also consume or share natural resources which are the common goods of local residents. Based on the value the of natural environment on resort hotel product development, product pricing, marketing and promotion as well as operational and personnel management as stated above, it is undeniable that the natural environment at holiday destinations is a critical factor for the success and sustainability of resort hotels. However, today most resort hotels still

engage in CSR activities for their administrative purposes such as cost saving and brand marketing. They need to start looking beyond their own benefits, and generously contribute to the local environment.

Research indicates that the experience of the beautiful natural environment leads to visitors' emotional attachment with the destination, and emotional attachment results in an intention to return to the destination (Yuksel et al., 2010; Chubchuwong & Speece, 2016). Therefore, the conservation and maintenance of the natural environment leads to repeat visits. Moreover, the study found that new tourists appreciate businesses that are more socially and environmentally responsible (Aguilo et al., 2005). This study shows that most hotels' CSR goals are focused mainly on marketing and operational issues. To ascertain their businesses' sustainability, and to pay back to the local natural environment, resort hotels should place more importance on the preservation and maintenance of local natural environment in their CSR activities.

In this article, the author provides a new perspective on local environment responsibility to resort hotel executives and concerned stakeholders. A list of environment responsible activities are also given as additional CSR guidelines to help resort hotels become more environmentally responsible.

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