

Comparative Analysis of Community-Based Tourism Management: Case Studies from Bhutan and Thailand

Jambay Lhamo

Program officer, Queen Project Office Bhutan, Bhutan

Worapol Wattanalaungarun*

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, Thailand

Att Atchariyamontree and Watcharapong Wattanakul

Faculty of Agricultural Technology, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, Thailand

E-mail: jambay87@gmail.com, worapol_wat@cmru.ac.th*, att_atc@cmru.ac.th and

watcharapong_wat@cmru.ac.th

*Corresponding author

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Abstract

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of community-based tourism (CBT) management between Bhutan and Thailand through a qualitative research approach. Sample group from purposive sampling, including focus group discussions with key stakeholders. The research instruments consisted of content analysis tables, guidelines and questions for focus group discussions and document analysis. Analytical method with SWOT Analysis and TOWS matrix. The findings indicate that both countries adopt participatory CBT development frameworks in which the public sector, private sector, and local communities play integral roles in strengthening tourism capacity and governance. In Eusu Gewog, Haa Dzongkhag (District), Bhutan, CBT management is strongly conservation-oriented and regulated through centralized governmental policies that strictly control tourist numbers, access to tourism areas, and seasonal travel in order to ensure environmental and cultural sustainability. Conversely, CBT management in Buakkhang Subdistrict, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand, is grounded in Cultural Community-Based Tourism, emphasizing Yong ethnic cultural heritage, community participation, and the “Nawatwithi” (local innovation-driven) model. This approach prioritizes the preservation of local identity while fostering community-based economic development amid increasing urbanization. The comparative findings identify six key approaches to sustainable CBT development in both contexts: 1) community-led tourism governance; 2) capacity building and human resource development in community-based tourism; 3) network formation for participatory CBT management that enhances community pride and identity; 4) operational development aligned with CBT standards, regulations, and governance frameworks; 5) development and strategic use of information and communication technologies for CBT promotion; and 6) targeted marketing strategies aimed at attracting appropriate visitor segments, particularly tourists with strong interests in culture, nature, and environmental sustainability. These approaches contribute to minimizing negative tourism impacts while enhancing sustainable income generation for local communities.

Keywords: Comparative analysis, Community-Based tourism management, SWOT-TOWS analysis, Eusu Gewog Haa Dzongkhag district Bhutan, Buakkhang subdistrict Thailand



Introduction

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has become an important mechanism for driving national economic development. Thailand and Bhutan are among the countries that attract a significant number of international tourists. According to data from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, more than 30 million international tourists visited Thailand in the past year. Among these visitors, the number of Bhutanese tourists traveling to Thailand increased by approximately 6 percent compared to the previous year. Similarly, the number of Thai tourists traveling to Bhutan has also increased. In response to this growing tourism exchange, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has established collaborative initiatives to promote tourism between the two countries under the campaign “Two Kingdoms, One Destination,” targeting the Bhutanese market by showcasing Thai soft power and cultural charm during the Amazing Thailand Festival in Bhutan 2025 held in Thimphu (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2025).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has gained increasing importance within the context of contemporary development, particularly in countries with distinctive cultural identities, traditional lifestyles, and rich natural resources. Tourism thus functions as a key mechanism for economic development while simultaneously preserving social, cultural, and environmental values. This phenomenon is clearly reflected in the cases of Bhutan and Thailand, two countries that share long-standing relations rooted in cultural proximity and shared values, such as simplicity, mutual respect, and collective consciousness.

Bhutan’s development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) (Ura et al., 2011) and the High Value, Low Volume (HVLV) tourism policy (Destination Haa, 2018) tourism action plan 2018–2023 policy emphasize balanced development among economic, social, environmental, and cultural dimensions. These approaches are consistent with Thailand’s Sufficiency Economy Philosophy. Both concepts highlight that development should not focus solely on economic indicators but should also emphasize quality of life and the harmonious relationship between humans and nature within the context of CBT. Thai tourists have continuously shown interest in visiting Bhutan due to its cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and unique community lifestyles. Conversely, Bhutanese visitors traveling to Thailand often perceive the country as welcoming, safe, and convenient for communication, as well as culturally familiar due to similarities in religious and cultural traditions. Such mutual appreciation reflects the close relationship between the two nations (Mailap, 2024).

Chiang Mai Province is one of the key destinations frequently visited by Bhutanese tourists, as it offers diverse tourism resources that align with the lifestyle of highland communities. One notable area with strong tourism potential is Buakkhang Subdistrict in San Kamphaeng District. The majority of the population in this area are Yong people who have preserved their cultural identity and traditions. Ban Pa Tan community, in particular, has been recognized as one of the 50 outstanding OTOP Nawatwithi model communities (Department of Community Development, 2018) and has successfully developed tourism activities and local products that create economic, social, and cultural value.

At the same time, Eusu Community in Haa District (Dzongkha: Haa), Bhutan, is one of the key communities promoted by the Bhutanese government for community-based tourism development. The community is located in a tranquil valley and is distinguished by its natural resources and local cultural heritage. Chiang Mai Rajabhat University has played an important role in strengthening community development collaboration through the OGOP Model II Project, implemented in six communities across Bhutan, including Haa, Tsirang, Wangdue Phodrang, Lhuntse, and Trashi Yangtse. The project integrates the development of more than 100 community products as part of a Demand-Driven Local Economy approach, linking community product development with community-based tourism under the framework of the



Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (Wattanakul, 2022). Despite growing comparative tourism research in Asia, studies comparing CBT governance between Buddhist-majority communities with distinct administrative systems particularly between Bhutan's centralised conservation model and Thailand's decentralised, community driven model remain limited.

The connection between these development concepts, community lifestyles, and collaborative initiatives has therefore led to the need for a comparative study of tourism management in these two community-based tourism destinations. Both areas share similar geographical characteristics as mountainous communities and receive support from government sectors, yet they operate under different socio-cultural and administrative contexts. This study aims to analyze and compare tourism management, operational mechanisms. Across five dimensions: 1) governance and policy framework, 2) community participation, 3) management mechanisms, 4) economic benefit distribution, and 5) cultural and environmental conservation. Development approaches in order to better understand appropriate strategies for community-based tourism development within different contexts. The findings are expected to contribute to strengthening cooperation and promoting sustainable tourism development between the two countries.

Objectives

1. To conduct a comparative analysis of community-based tourism management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan, and Buak Khang Subdistrict Community in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand.
2. To identify and propose evidence-based sustainable CBT development approaches for communities in Bhutan and Thailand, derived from a comparative SWOT-TOWS analysis of both case studies.

Methodology

This research employs a comparative qualitative case study approach. The study applies an analytical framework developed from a review of relevant literature and concepts related to community-based tourism and sustainable development. The framework consists of five dimensions: 1) Governance and policy framework 2) Community participation 3) Management mechanisms 4) Economic benefit distribution 5) Cultural and environmental conservation. These dimensions are used to categorize data and systematically explain the similarities and differences between the study areas.

Population and Sample

The population includes people of Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan, and people of Buakkhang Subdistrict Community in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand.

Sample: The research data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through purposive sampling, including focus group discussions with key stakeholders, such as community leaders, community-based tourism entrepreneurs, representatives of local government agencies, and community members involved in tourism activities. Each community included 15 participants of community leaders, entrepreneurs, government representatives, community members. In addition, non-participatory field observations were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the local context and operational processes in the study areas. Secondary data were collected from policy documents, tourism development plans, project reports, and relevant research studies.

Research Instruments The research instruments consisted of: Content analysis tables, Guidelines and questions for focus group discussions



Scope of the Study

The scope of this study focuses on a comparative analysis of community-based tourism management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan, and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand.

Research Procedures

1. Reviewing relevant documents and academic literature.
2. Conducting non-participatory observation, where the researcher observed the study areas and collected data without participating in the activities of the target communities.
3. Conducting focus group discussions, with participants including community leaders, community committee members, community representatives, stakeholders, and local administrators.
4. Analyzing the results from the focus group discussions using SWOT analysis (Hill and Westbrook, 1997) (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to conduct a comparative analysis of community-based tourism management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan, and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the TOWS Matrix (Wehrich, 1982) and comparative analysis across five dimensions between the two communities, including economic benefit distribution and cultural and environmental conservation. These dimensions served as the analytical framework for comparing data from both case studies.

Results

1. Comparative Analysis of Community-Based Tourism Management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Thailand

Across five dimensions: 1) governance and policy framework, 2) community participation, 3) management mechanisms, 4) economic benefit distribution, and 5) cultural and environmental conservation. The comparative analysis reveals that community-based tourism (CBT) management in Eusu Community, Bhutan, and Buakkhang Subdistrict, Thailand, is fundamentally shaped by contrasting governance structures that directly influence sustainability outcomes. Although both communities share highland contexts and institutional support, their tourism systems differ in policy control, community autonomy, and coordination mechanisms.

Bhutan demonstrates a state-controlled conservation-oriented model, characterized by strict regulation, limited visitor access, and strong policy enforcement. This approach prioritizes environmental and cultural preservation, resulting in stable and relatively equitable outcomes but constrained flexibility. In contrast, Thailand reflects a community-driven cultural tourism model, emphasizing decentralized governance, strong local participation, and adaptive economic activities based on cultural identity. This model allows greater flexibility but faces coordination challenges and uneven benefit distribution.

A hybrid governance pattern is observed in both contexts, where state support and community initiatives interact. This indicates that CBT systems operate along a continuum between centralized control and community autonomy rather than within fixed categories.

Key structural differences between the two areas are summarized in Table 1 and Table 2. The analysis showed that Bhutan prioritizes control and protection, whereas Thailand emphasizes adaptation and participation, reflecting different pathways toward sustainability.



Table 1 Comparison of Area, Population Structure, Economic Conditions, and Income between Haa Community, Bhutan and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Data	Haa Community, Bhutan	Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand
1. Area	1,905 square kilometers, with 78% forest area	31.48 square kilometers, no forest area
2. Geographic Characteristics	Haa District is located along the western border of Bhutan. Northwest borders Tibet, southwest borders Samtse District, southeast borders Chukha District, and northeast borders Paro District.	The area is a lowland plain sloping toward the southwest. North borders San Kamphaeng District (Chiang Mai), south borders Ban Thi District (Lamphun), east borders San Kamphaeng District (Chiang Mai), and west borders San Kamphaeng and Saraphi Districts (Chiang Mai).
3. Population Structure	13,655 people, 2,952 households	8,777 people, 4,257 households
4. Main Occupations	Agriculture, livestock farming, and tourism	Agriculture, handicrafts, trade, and tourism

Table 2 Comparison of Community-Based Tourism Management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand Based on SWOT Analysis and Five Analytical Dimensions.

SWOT	Eusu Community, Haa District, Bhutan	Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand
Strengths	1. Pristine natural and cultural resources: Haa has beautiful landscapes and protected natural areas (Strict Nature Reserve), which are habitats of rare wildlife such as red pandas and snow leopards. The community also maintains unique local cultural traditions such as Bon rituals. (C) 2. Strong government policies: The implementation of the “High Value, Low Impact” tourism concept helps maintain sustainability and prevent mass tourism problems. (G, C) 3. Homestay development: Homestays are standardized, and continuous training is provided to homestay operators to improve service quality and generate direct income for the community. (M, E) 4. Global reputation: Haa was ranked as one of the 25 best travel destinations in the world in 2025 by BBC Travel, which strengthens tourist confidence in visiting the area in 2026. (E, G)	1. Diverse traditions and cultural heritage. (C) 2. Buakkhang Temple is more than 1,000 years old, with significant historical narratives. (C) 3. Strong community occupational groups producing various products such as batik clothing, monk robes, handicrafts, cotton bags, wood carvings, coconut-shell souvenirs, palm-leaf crafts, woven textiles, spider-web flags (Tung Yai), Yong traditional cuisine, mushroom farms, and organic fertilizer production. (P, E, C)) 4. Presence of a private small airport. (M, E) 5. Morning and evening markets reflecting the local way of life. (C, E) 6. Yong-style architectural identity. (C) 7. Preservation of the Yong language as a local language. (C) 8. Strong cultural capital within the community. (C, P) 9. Existence of local wisdom learning centers. (C, P) 10. Clear CBT management structure; training has been conducted since 2007, involving collaboration among households, temples, schools, and government sectors. (G, P, M) 11. Strong networks supported by government and private sectors. (G, M) 12. Recognition and awards, including Health Tourism Community certification from the Ministry of Public Health and Educational Tourism awards. (G, E) 13. Agricultural village with traditional rice varieties such as San Kamphaeng rice. (C, E) 14. Homestays that allow tourists to experience community lifestyles. (M, E) 15. Model village for behavioral change in Chiang Mai Province. (G, P)



Table 2 Comparison of Community-Based Tourism Management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand Based on SWOT Analysis and Five Analytical Dimensions. (continue)

SWOT	Eusu Community, Haa District, Bhutan	Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand
Weaknesses	1. Accessibility limitations due to mountainous terrain. (M) 2. Special permits are required for visitors, and bookings must be made through licensed tour operators. (G, M) 3. Tourism activities depend heavily on seasons, especially outdoor activities such as trekking. (M, E)	1. Large number of groups makes coordination difficult. (P, M) 2. Some traditional knowledge has disappeared overtime, such as cart making and wood carving. (C, M) 3. Lack of storytelling and interpretation for tourism presentation. (C, M) 4. Weak management of accommodation services, transportation, booking systems, and technology use. (M) 5. Some cultural resources are declining due to infrastructure development. (C, P) 6. The Sufficiency Economy Learning Center has stopped operating after COVID-19. (C, P) 7. Local wisdom is gradually disappearing due to limited knowledge transfer to younger generations. (C, P) 8. Insufficient production capacity in some villages. (M, E) 9. Lack of backup labor for production. (M, E) 10. Limited use of innovation in production processes. (M, E) 11. Some villages do not engage in textile production. (M, E) 12. Limited product development and value addition. (M, E) 13. Weak product presentation and marketing. (M, E) 14. Lack of systematic data collection. (G, M) 15. Limited SME development and financial resources. (E, G) 16. Weak connections among community groups. (E, G) 17. Some community leaders lack active engagement. (P, G) 18. Lack of English signage for international tourists. (M)

Table 2 Comparison of Community-Based Tourism Management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand Based on SWOT Analysis and Five Analytical Dimensions. (continue)

SWOT	Eusu Community, Haa District, Bhutan	Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand
Opportunities	1. Expansion of high-quality tourism markets, supported by reduced Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) to USD 100 per night until 2027. (G, E) 2. Growth of eco-tourism and adventure tourism, including trekking routes such as Panorama Trail and Nub Tshona Pata Trek. (C, E) 3. Digital technology improves accessibility for homestay booking and tourism information. (M, E)	1. Reviving lost local wisdom and forgotten stories, and promoting the continuation of traditional knowledge through community groups and associations. (C, M) 2. Establishing community storytelling (Storytellers) to communicate local culture and history to visitors. (C, M) 3. Installing interpretive signage and community information boards at the subdistrict level. (C, M) 4. Developing tourism maps of local attractions. (C, M) 5. No other community in Chiang Mai has an airport located within the community area, which represents a unique tourism asset. (M, E) 6. The private small airport can serve as an aviation learning center. (M, E) 7. The community can participate in tourism activities related to the airport, such as aviation tourism or sightseeing flights, and develop a tourism information center. (M, E) 8. Linking tourism activities with homestay accommodations within the community. (M, E, C) 9. Organizing traditional rice farming tours around the airport area, demonstrating traditional agricultural practices. (M, E, C) 10. Developing unique product identities for community products. (M, E, C) 11. Improving and developing homestay accommodations. (M, E, C) 12. Improving and strengthening community check-in points as tourism attractions. (M, E, C) 13. Establishing a joint Community-Based Tourism (CBT) committee. (G, P) 14. Promoting the continuation and preservation of local wisdom. (G, P) 15. Conserving traditional rice varieties to create a community signature product. (G, P) 16. Developing network strategies connecting 13 villages. (G, P) 17. Organizing relationship-building activities among groups, such as local leaders, administrators, and community networks. (G, P) 18. Developing a standardized tourism data collection system to gather statistical tourism data for Buakkhang Subdistrict. (M, E) 19. Establishing a community product exhibition center for the subdistrict. (M, E) 20. Establishing a Tourism Information Center to support tourism services. (M, E)

Table 2 Comparison of Community-Based Tourism Management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand Based on SWOT Analysis and Five Analytical Dimensions. (continue)

SWOT	Eusu Community, Haa District, Bhutan	Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai, Thailand
Threats	1. Increasing tourism costs due to the introduction of 5% GST on accommodation and tour services starting in 2026. (G, E) 2. Competition from neighboring countries offering similar landscapes at lower prices. (E) 3. Climate vulnerability in mountainous regions, which may affect tourism infrastructure. (C, M)	1. Unexpected crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which can disrupt tourism operations. (G, E) 2. Need for diversified occupations to reduce economic risk. (M, P) 3. Product imitation and price competition. (M, P) 4. Lack of understanding of roles within tourism management. (M, P) 5. Weak coordination and communication among stakeholders. (M, P) 6. Challenges in maintaining the strength of the model community. (P, C) 7. Lack of younger generations continuing traditional crafts. (P, C) 8. Waste management challenges from agricultural by-products, highlighting the need for zero-waste approaches. (C, M)

Note : G=Governance, P=Participation, M=Management, E=Economic, C=Conservation)

**Figure 1** Focus group discussion activity in Haa Community, Bhutan (Researcher, 2025)



Figure 2 Focus group discussion activity in Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand (Researcher, 2025)

2. Results of the Study to identify and propose evidence-based sustainable CBT development approaches for communities in Bhutan and Thailand, derived from a comparative SWOT-TOWS analysis of both case studies.

The comparative analysis of community-based tourism management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan, and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community in Thailand found that Eusu Community emphasizes controlling the number of tourists and creating high value tourism (High Value, Low Volume). This model can be adapted by the Buakkhang community to help preserve local identity and ensure that tourism management does not exceed the carrying capacity of the area. At the same time, Eusu Community can learn from the flexibility and strong community collaboration of the Buakkhang community in order to enhance community participation and strengthen local cooperation. In terms of sustainable development, both communities should focus on developing sustainable infrastructure, improving environmental management, and continuously building knowledge within the community. By utilizing cultural strengths and opportunities arising from tourist demand, communities can address weaknesses related to limited knowledge and reduce challenges from tourism competition. Emphasis should be placed on capacity building, network development, and conservation-based marketing strategies to promote sustainable tourism. Based on the SWOT analysis, all relevant data were analyzed using the TOWS Matrix to determine development strategies for community-based tourism in both areas, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3 TOWS Matrix Analysis for Determining Development Approaches for Community-Based Tourism in Eusu Community, Haa District, Bhutan and Buakkhang Subdistrict Community, Thailand under the Five-Dimension Analytical Framework

Strengths – Opportunities Strategies	Weaknesses – Opportunities Strategies
1. Community-based management: Allowing communities to be the owners and managers of tourism activities so that income returns directly to the local community. (P, E, G) 2. Building community tourism networks: Promoting participatory tourism management while strengthening community identity and pride in local culture to support sustainable management. (P, G, C) 3. Promoting tourism based on history, beliefs, ethnic identity, lifestyle, and local wisdom, along with conservation efforts. (C, P, M) 4. Enhancing tourism standards, including tourism activities and homestay accommodations. (M, G, E)	1. Developing human resources in community-based tourism, including knowledge, service skills, management, marketing, and sustainability awareness. (M, P) 2. Managing tourism distribution across space, activities, and time to avoid seasonal concentration and overcrowding during peak periods. (M, C, G) 3. Collecting tourism data and monitoring impacts in order to support policy development and effective decision-making by government agencies and community organizations. (G, M, C)
Strengths – Threats Strategies	Weaknesses – Threats Strategies
1. Targeted tourism marketing: Attracting tourists who value culture, nature, and environmental sustainability, which helps reduce negative impacts and increase economic benefits. (E, C, M) 2. Balancing tourism development with the carrying capacity of the community, ensuring that tourism activities do not negatively affect local lifestyles or environmental resources. (C, G, M)	1. Developing operational standards and regulations for community-based tourism management. (G, M) 2. Using information technology and digital platforms to promote community-based tourism and improve communication with tourists. (M, E) 3. Encouraging and developing younger generations to gain knowledge, skills, and experience in community-based tourism while preserving community identity and sustainability. (P, C, M)

Note : G=Governance, P=Participation, M=Management, E=Economic, C=Conservation)

Summary of Community-Based Tourism Development Approaches under the Five-Dimension Analytical Framework

Based on the comparative analysis of community-based tourism management between Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan, and Buak Khang Subdistrict Community in Chiang Mai, Thailand, development approaches can be summarized under the following five dimensions:

1. Governance and Policy Framework

Community-based tourism development should promote community-led management, allowing communities to own and manage tourism activities under appropriate regulations and policy frameworks. This approach supports participation, shared decision-making, and community self-governance, which can lead to fair income distribution within the local community.

2. Community Participation

Human resource development is a key factor in community-based tourism. Efforts should focus on enhancing capacity, skills, and professionalism among community members, as well as improving understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each

stakeholder group. Additionally, developing storytellers and local guides who understand the local lifestyle, culture, and beliefs can help create meaningful tourism experiences for visitors.

3. Management Mechanisms

Tourism operations should be developed according to appropriate standards and guidelines suited to local contexts, with emphasis on activity management, service quality, and coordination among relevant stakeholders. This will help provide positive tourism experiences while maintaining a balance among economic, social, and environmental aspects.

4. Economic Benefit Distribution

Community-based tourism marketing should focus on attracting tourists who value culture, nature, and environmental sustainability. This approach helps reduce tourism impacts while improving income quality for the community. Income distribution should also be equitable and inclusive, contributing to long-term economic stability.

5. Cultural and Environmental Conservation

Participatory tourism management networks should be built upon community pride in local identity and the conservation of natural resources, traditional lifestyles, and local cultural heritage. Both communities should develop tourism strategies aligned with the capacity and potential of their local environments, ensuring that tourism development remains sustainable and benefits the community economically, socially, and environmentally.

Discussions

The analysis reveals that Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan represents a model of conservation-oriented tourism management under strong state governance, while Buakkhang Subdistrict Community in Chiang Mai, Thailand represents a model of cultural-based tourism management driven by community power and local institutional support. Although both areas aim to achieve sustainable tourism, they differ in how they manage and utilize their available resource capital. Several key issues reflect management approaches that emphasize sustainability and participation. Policy and Governance in Haa District, tourism management operates under the Bhutanese government's "High Value, Low Volume" concept. Tourist numbers are controlled through the Sustainable Development Fee (SDF) in order to protect natural resources and traditional culture. Tourism development in Haa therefore prioritizes quality over quantity, with the government playing a strong role in establishing a strict policy framework. In contrast, Buakkhang Subdistrict emphasizes tourism management through local governance mechanisms, particularly through the Buak Khang Subdistrict Municipality in collaboration with local agencies and academic institutions. The community adopts the OTOP Nawatwithi model to strengthen grassroots economic development and promote Tai Yong cultural tourism. Community Participation and Identity in Eusu Community, local residents play a key role in managing homestay accommodations that preserve traditional Bhutanese lifestyles. Tourism thus functions as a tool for protecting fragile cultural traditions within a high-mountain valley environment. Meanwhile, Buakkhang Subdistrict demonstrates strong efforts in preserving Tai Yong cultural identity, with Wat Pa Tan serving as a central institution for transmitting traditional knowledge from elders to younger generations. Cultural festivals are also organized to communicate local identity to tourists. These findings are consistent with Ngernklay (2018), who conducted a qualitative comparative study of creative tourism policies and models between Thailand and Lao PDR. The study found that both countries promote tourism development through community participation, while government agencies, private sectors, and local communities all play significant roles in strengthening tourism potential. Success factors include cooperation among all stakeholders, particularly local communities, government, and private organizations. Additionally, several studies highlight similarities in development concepts between Thailand and Bhutan. Mukem &

Orsantinutsakul (2023) examined the adoption of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy at the Spiritual Agriculture Center in Bhutan and found that the concept was introduced through training programs and educational exchanges with Thailand. Furthermore, Suthasupa (2024) examined nature conservation in Bhutan and suggested that Bhutan's success in conservation results from multiple factors, including national policies, legal frameworks, cultural traditions, Buddhist ethics, and social norms. Recommendations for Thailand include integrated conservation development programs with community consultation, ecosystem connectivity strategies such as the B2C2 approach, sustainable tourism development through attracting high-quality tourists, and strengthening social norms related to environmental conservation. Similarly, Chinbutranont et al. (2025) demonstrated that Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) policy integrates Buddhist principles into sustainable development goals across various sectors. Their findings emphasize integrating Buddhist values into public policy, education, and community development, which reflects similarities with the Thai context and contributes to strong bilateral relations between the two countries. In addition, developing integrated tourism information systems between the two countries could significantly support tourists. This aligns with Li & Law (2020) and Cai et al. (2024), who highlight the importance of tourism information systems and the role of big data analytics in supporting tourism and hospitality research during times of crisis. Moreover, Correia & Kozak (2022) identified that future tourism research trends emphasize integrated tourism development approaches. Therefore, comparative studies that integrate tourism development between two countries play an important role in strengthening bilateral relationships and promoting collaborative tourism development.

Discussion of Development Approaches for Community-Based Tourism in Haa District, Bhutan and Buakkhang Subdistrict, Thailand

The findings suggest several key development strategies for community-based tourism in Eusu Community in Haa District, Bhutan, and Buakkhang Subdistrict in Chiang Mai, Thailand, including: Community-led tourism management where communities serve as owners and managers of tourism activities so that income returns directly to local residents. Development of human resources in community-based tourism. Establishing participatory tourism management networks that emphasize pride in local identity. Developing operational standards and regulations for community-based tourism. Utilizing information technology to promote community-based tourism. Developing targeted marketing strategies that attract tourists who value culture, nature, and environmental sustainability. The success factors in both areas highlight the importance of networking and cooperation, both within and outside the community, as well as the use of social capital, such as unity and cultural faith, as driving forces. Bhutan focuses on preventing negative environmental impacts through strong national policies, while Buak Khang focuses on circulating income within the community to improve quality of life and reduce labor migration. These findings are consistent with Wattanakul et al. (2023), who studied tourism development strategies for the OTOP Nawatwithi model in Ban Pa Tan Community in Buakkhang Subdistrict, San Kamphaeng District, Chiang Mai. The study identified six key strategies: 1) Extending community tourism activities. 2) Building cooperation for sustainable tourism. 3) Improving tourism communication and promotion. 4) Developing community human resources. 5) Strengthening tourism marketing. 6) Creating unique tourism attractions. Similarly, Wattanalaungarun et al. (2019) examined tourism identity development based on sustainable tourism management in Mae Rim District, Chiang Mai, identifying four key development components: 1) Community members must understand tourism development and continuously improve their tourism skills. 2) Preserving local lifestyles, historical identity, and cultural uniqueness. 3) Environmental conservation. 4) Applying the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, such as household vegetable gardens for self-



consumption and for serving tourists through homestays and local restaurants. In addition, Wattanalaungarun et al. (2025) developed a community tourism management model based on the King's Philosophy for sustainability in Ban Muang Kham, Chiang Mai. The model includes seven tourism forms: 1) Community-based tourism 2) Homestay tourism 3) Educational tourism 4) Conservation tourism 5) Recreational and experiential tourism 6) Responsible tourism and 7) Business tourism Marketing development is also essential. Bunpradap & Banterng (2026) examined tourism communication and marketing strategies by comparing tourism advertising campaigns from Thailand and Malaysia through online media. The study found that effective tourism communication strategies should emphasize unique experiences, responses to changing tourist behavior, and the appropriate use of digital technologies. Collaboration among stakeholders is therefore essential for creating sustainable tourism growth in the future Furthermore, Krittayaruangroj et al. (2023) found that sustainable community-based tourism significantly contributes to economic growth. Similarly, Kim & Kang (2020) emphasized that communities play a crucial role in tourism development. Without community cooperation, negative impacts may occur throughout the tourism development process. Overtourism is not only an issue of crowding but also a long-term consequence of inappropriate treatment of local residents in tourism development. Scheyvens & Van der Watt (2021) suggested that communities should be empowered through tourism, and tourism management should reflect each community's local context and identity. Likewise, Choochat et al. (2022) developed tourism models based on the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in farming communities, highlighting the potential of agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, and eco-cultural tourism in creating tourism experiences based on local lifestyles. Finally, developing community storytelling and strengthening the capacity of community storytellers can significantly enhance tourism experiences. This is consistent with Chaiyasut et al. (2025), who developed Digital Storytelling approaches to strengthen tourism community identity through community storytellers. Their work demonstrates that storytelling can enhance the value of local resources and create deeper and more meaningful experiences for tourists.

Conclusion and suggestions

Conclusion

The management of community-based tourism in Eusu Community, Haa District, Bhutan, and Buakkhang Subdistrict, Thailand, demonstrates that both countries have strong potential for developing sustainable community-based tourism. This can be achieved through effective management led by local communities, supported by collaboration from multiple stakeholders, while emphasizing the preservation of traditional community values. Such an approach helps maintain a balance among economic, social, and environmental dimensions, guiding community-based tourism toward a sustainable future.

Contributions

This study makes three key contributions. First, it contributes to the theoretical understanding of community-based tourism by integrating governance models with sustainability outcomes, highlighting how different institutional arrangements shape tourism development. Second, it advances methodological approaches in comparative tourism studies by applying a structured SWOT–TOWS framework within a multi-dimensional analytical model. Third, it provides practical policy insights for developing sustainable tourism strategies in highland communities, particularly in Asian contexts where cultural and ecological sensitivity is critical.



Recommendations

1. Community-based tourism management should be grounded in respect for culture and the environment, ensuring that tourism serves as a tool for strengthening communities and promoting long-term sustainability.
2. Community-based tourism in both countries can learn from each other's experiences. The Buakkhang community in Thailand can learn from the policy-driven and low-impact tourism management approach of Eusu Community in Bhutan, while Eusu Community can learn from Buakkhang's adaptive strategies in responding to diverse tourism markets.
3. Both countries should establish joint tourism promotion policies and cooperative agreements, which could strengthen bilateral relations and support collaborative development of community-based tourism.

New knowledge and the effects on society and communities

This research contributes new knowledge regarding community-based tourism management in both countries and provides development guidelines for community-based tourism in Eusu Community, Haa District, Bhutan, and Buakkhang Subdistrict, Chiang Mai, Thailand. The findings highlight how community-based tourism can strengthen local communities and support sustainable development by empowering local stakeholders and preserving cultural identity. Furthermore, the study promotes stronger cooperation between the two countries, fostering collaboration in tourism development and encouraging mutual support in advancing sustainable community-based tourism.

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