Economic Benefits and Consequences of Tourism in Developing Countries: A Case of Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to study the economic benefits and consequences of tourism in developing countries with the use of Thailand as a case study. Tourism in Thailand has been developed rapidly during the last 20 years and is becoming a pillar industry in Thailand. In 2009 tourism was contributing 14.70% to Thai GDP. According to the government's data, in 2010, Thailand attracted 15.80 million tourists, and it generated about 19 billion dollars of revenue. Obviously, tourism is becoming a leading industry of Thai economy from the job creation, income generation and government revenues to the economic leakage and local prices increasing.

Keywords: Thai economy, Domestic Tourism, Contribution, Revenue

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Introduction

Tourism industry becomes the significant sector to the economics of Thailand, tourism is often considered as revenue and foreign exchange generating force for both host countries and tourist's home countries. Especially in developing countries, one of the primary motivations for a region to promote itself as a tourism destination is the expected economic improvement. So, a substantial number of public campaign and advertisements have been used to promote tourism. Tourism resources; the destinations or tourist attraction where people travel to for relaxation purpose (Kariyapol, 2019; UNESCO, 2017), Thai government considers Thai tourism industry as one of the most important industries for income generation.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand reported that since 2014, Thailand has received around THB 2,000 million per year in tourism receipts ranking it the 10th highest income source for the tourism industry in any country (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2016). The number of international tourist arrivals to Thailand in 2018 reached 38.12 million people. Hence, in 2018, Thailand received approximately THB 2.01 trillion in revenue from the arrival of international tourists (Kasikorn Research Center, 2019). However, tourism is also criticized for the positive and negative impacts of many destinations where the tourists visit. There are three principal impacts - environmental, economic and socio-cultural. This research paper finds that there are both negative and positive economic impacts of tourism.

Objective

The objective of this article is an attempt to study the economic benefits and consequences of tourism in developing countries finding Thailand as a case study searching for a significant of tourism from the positive to negative impacts of tourism.

Economic Impacts of Tourism

Tourism can be a great revenue booster if a community is able to effectively manage it. There are cases that tourism can actually bring a negative impact to a community as well.

What can tourism do for an economy?

Actually, tourism is an incredibly labor-intensive industry. With that being said job creation to satisfy demand is a must. The major industries that are affected by tourism are: transportation, hospitality, restaurants, and retailers. As tourism grows so does the need for employees in each of these industries. Direct positive economic impacts of an event for an economic area resulting from tourists spending in terms of income, jobs and taxes. Estimation for these economic impacts varies on the base of primary data collection, an approach used to conduct the study and primary data collection. There are three different methods for primary data collection and aggregate or disaggregate the data to design impacts estimates (Kasikorn Research Center, 2019; Messer, 2010).

Estimating Indirect and Induced Positive Economic Impacts

Travelers in an economic area produce secondary impacts over that of their original expenditures. Indirect impacts occur when travel related industries, such as hotels, purchase goods and services from suppliers within the economic area. These purchases generate additional output or sales. The industries meet the demand by supplying goods and services required by hotels. The other type of secondary impact is the induced effect on sales or output. This results as the employees of industries and their suppliers spend part of their earnings in the economic region. The sum of the indirect and induced effects comprises the total secondary impact of travelers spending in the economic region (Kariyapol, 2019; SCB Economic Intelligence Center, 2019).

Income generation

The income from tourism contributes to the gross national product of a country. The tourism contribution is the money spent by tourists minus the purchases by the tourism sector to service these tourists. In most developed and many lesser-developed countries the percentage share of international tourist receipts in the gross national product is low, typically between 0.30% and 7.00%. Adding in the effects of domestic tourism increases the percentage significantly because domestic tourism is usually much more extensive than foreign tourism (Geneva Business School, 2019).

The total income generated depends on the multiplier effect noted above. Different sectors of the industry produce more income than others. Income generated is a reflection of the total amount spent and the amount of leakage within that sector. It has been found, for example, that bed-and-breakfast places have relatively low leakage because of their ability to buy what they need locally. However, they produce much less revenue initially compared to a large hotel, which will have a smaller multiplier effect because of its need to purchase goods and services outside the destination (Geneva Business School, 2019).

Certain sectors of the economy benefit from tourism more than others. The primary industry beneficiaries of tourist spending are food and beverage, lodging, transportation and retailing. A strong secondary effect is felt in real estate, auto services and repair and trucking (CBRE Thailand, 2017; UN ATLAS, 2016).

Government revenues

Tourism income accrues to the government in three ways: from direct taxation on employees as well as goods and services; from indirect taxation such as customs duties; and from revenue generated by government-owned businesses. The Bahamian government, for example, estimates tourist revenue from the following sources: customs duties, excise duties, real property tax, motor vehicle tax, gaming taxes, stamp tax, services of a commercial nature, fees and service charges, revenue from government property, interest, and reimbursement and loan repayment. The Thai tourism industry recorded total international arrivals of 31.25 million in January-October 2018, up 7.84%, generating an estimated 1.63 trillion Baht in tourism revenue, up by 9.98% over the same period of 2017 breaking down into each region as presented below (TAT News, 2019; UNESCO, 2017; Yuvejwattana, 2011):

Overview: All regions grew well except the Middle East and Oceania. Visitors from East Asia totalled 21.58 million (+9.71%), Europe 5.24 million (+4.24%), the Americas 1.25 million (+3.01%), South Asia 1.60 million (+10.75%), Oceania 766,119 (-1.74%), Middle East 635,311 (-6.29%), and Africa 158,630 (+8.41%).

East Asia: East Asian visitor arrivals comprised the biggest market share of all visitors. A total of 21.58 million or 69.00% were from East Asian countries. Apart from China, the other top sources of arrivals were Malaysia (3.17 million), South Korea (1.46 million) and Lao PDR. (1.44 million).

ASEAN: ASEAN countries in total are generating over 8.24 million arrivals, with the growth by Malaysia (+12.73%), Philippines (+12.33%), Indonesia (+10.94%), Vietnam (+9.46%), Lao PDR. (+4.92%), Cambodia (+4.36%), Singapore (+2.99%), Myanmar (+0.56%), but Brunei (- 4.95%).

Europe: European visitors were up 4.24% to 5.24 million. Russia retained its status as the largest source market from Europe with arrivals of 1.10 million, up 11.75%. The United Kingdom is the second highest source market with a total of 788,333, followed by Germany 695,077, up 3.96%. Visitors also grew from East Europe (+9.34%), Austria (+12.22%), Netherlands (+6.65%), Finland (+5.99%), Italy (+5.85%), and Denmark (+4.27%).

The Americas: Arrivals from the Americas grew 3.01% to 1.25 million. The main market, USA, increased by 5.61% to 875,485. Arrivals from Canada were up 7.52%.

South Asia: Arrivals from South Asia grew by a strong 10.75% to 1.60 million. India topped the list with arrivals up by 11.23% to 1.28 million. Other countries also showed good growth; such as, Nepal (+25.00%), Bangladesh (+8.70%), Pakistan (+3.64%), Sri Lanka (+3.39%).

Oceania: Arrivals from Oceania declined by 1.74% to 766,119 visitors. Australian visitors declined by 1.96% to 665,308. Arrivals from New Zealand declined by 0.47% to 97,631.

Middle East: Arrivals from the UAE declined by 7.99% to 109,705. Arrivals from Saudi Arabia declined by 19.64% to 24,695. However, some markets like Kuwait (+2.73%) reported good results.

Africa: Arrivals from Africa grew by 8.41% to 158,630, mainly due to arrivals from South Africa (80,109). In 2018, TAT has set a target of 36 million arrivals and 1.97 trillion Baht in expenditure, up 3.85% and 8%, respectively over 2017.

Employment

It is estimated that over 60 million jobs worldwide are generated both directly and indirectly by foreign visitors and domestic travelers journeying to places 64 kilometers or more from home. 33,000 jobs are created for every USD 1 billion of spending in OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, while the same amount generates 50,000 jobs in the rest of the world. The three tourism-related sector– hotel and restaurant, wholesale and retail trade, transportation and communication –together employ more than 10 million workers, adding 1.40% each year and comprising 26.00% of total employment in Thailand (TAT News, 2018).

According to Phuket Insider (2009), tourism and it relative industry offered 14.60 million jobs in Thailand, which was 55% of total jobs of 26.60 million. According to another study from the World Tourism Council, in 2009, tourism offered more than 4 million jobs, which was 11.10% of total jobs. Unemployment is becoming one of the most serious issues of society, in 2010, the unemployment rate of Thailand is 0.50%; in 2011, it was 0.70%. Compare to the United States (2010, 9.60% and 2011, 9.10%) and China (2010, 6.10% and 2011, 6.50%) tourism in Thailand does have positive effects of the society. Furthermore, Thailand government forecasts that by 2019, one job in every 8.30 jobs in Thailand will be related to tourism. This gives Thailand rank eight among the countries with the highest growth rate for overall employment in both direct and overall contribution (TAT News, 2018; TAT News, 2019; Thai Embassy, 2016).

Contribution to local community economies

Tourism can be a significant or even an essential part of the local economy. As environment is a basic component of the tourism industry's assets, tourism revenues are often used to measure the economic value of protected areas. Part of the tourism income comes from informal employment, such as street vendors and informal guides. The positive side of informal or unreported employment is that the money is returned to the local economy and has a great multiplier effect as it is spent over and over again (Geneva Business School, 2019).

Tourism has various economic contributions, particularly for community development. It contributes directly and indirectly to a region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and diversifies the local economy. The sector also provides income-earning opportunities for local communities, generates employment for skilled and unskilled local communities across a range of sectors such as accommodation, transportation, entertainment (Messer, 2010). More so, tourism generates new business opportunities, supporting local business and contributes to foreign exchange earnings (Messer 2010). Additionally, tourism supports infrastructural development for local communities and improves the quality of life for local communities.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Governor, said "When local communities grow, the country grows. With travel and tourism now widely recognized as a major contributor to grassroots economies, job creation and income distribution, we are now taking specific measures to ensure that the benefits are better distributed across the breadth and depth of the entire kingdom." The target is to improve the ratio of both domestic and foreign visitors between main cities vs secondary cities from 70:30 to 65:35. Details of the "Amazing Thailand Go Local" campaign are as follows (TAT News, 2018; TAT News, 2019; Thai Embassy, 2016):

Enjoy Local

A TAT Plus online card will be launched specifically for use in local communities and secondary cities in partnership with F&B outlets, souvenir shops, shopping at Pracharath Sookjai shop, petrol stations, car rental companies, etc. Cardholders will get special discounts and mileage accrual for redemption with various domestic airlines.

SET in the Local

Encourage companies listed on the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) to hold their MICE events; such as, conferences and seminars as well as corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in local communities and secondary cities in the 55 provinces, especially during weekdays. Partners include the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), the Local Administration Department and various Chambers of Commerce. A corporate tax exemption on income equal to 100% of expenses will be offered for seminars and accommodation rooms, transport and other expenses incurred for conducting staff training seminars in the 55 provinces. This is equal to a 200% corporate tax deduction for such staff training seminar costs.

Local Link

Cooperate with domestic tour operators and travel agents to offer incentives; such as, discounted meals when buying local tour packages covering secondary destinations. An exemption from personal income tax for the amount paid out to tour operators, hotel operators or homestay operators for domestic tours to the 55 provinces, but not in excess of 15,000 Baht in total.

Eat Local

Promote consumption of local food and purchase of local raw materials in cooperation with the Thai Restaurants Association, celebrity chefs, credit card companies, local banks and provincial authorities. Attract food lovers by organizing "Eat Local Week" activities under the aegis of different TAT domestic offices all over the country. Offer opportunities to earn points and get privileges; such as, dining at Michelin star restaurants.

Our Local

Partner with the theme and recreational parks, museums and local provincial administrations to organize local community events based on their unique culture and identity. Specific activities will be organized to promote travel to different secondary cities every week, accompanied by rewards schemes for purchase of local arts and craft items and advertising support to promote the events.

Local Heroes

Organize "mobile clinics" to upgrade the quality of human resources at the community level, enhance their knowledge base to boost their competitive advantage and open up opportunities of the Digital Age. Support speakers, academics, artists and celebrities who can create and design locally-oriented products and services and help local communities access funding support.

Local Strong

Strengthen local communities through more integrated public-private sector cooperation, reinforce the supply chain and help improve the quality of products. Develop "Creative Tourism" to enhance the brand image and appeal of tourist attractions, and support new start-up entrepreneurs to promote secondary destinations.

An "Amazing Thailand Go Local" Directory will be launched to provide specific information on dining, travelling and accommodation for getting tax deductions. The governor concluded: "We want tourism and related activities to really benefit local people and give them a new source of income and pride. This project will allow many local communities off-the-beaten track to show off their unique Thainess while looking forward to a brighter future."

Negative Impact of Economic Impacts

Tourism has many hidden costs, which can have unfavorable economic effects on the host community. Often, developed countries are better able to profit from tourism than poor ones. Whereas the least developed countries have the most urgent need for income, employment and general rise of standard of living by means of tourism, they are, unfortunately, least able to realize these benefits. Among the reasons for this are large scale transfer of tourism revenues out of the host country and exclusion of local businesses and products (Boz, 2012).

Leakage

Leakage occurs in many industries. In the case of tourism, the causes for economic leakage depend on the destination and its development. In general, tourism leakage takes place when revenues from its economic activities are not available for reinvestment or consumption of goods and services within the same destination. As a result, economic resources are "leaked away," which predominantly occurs when tourism companies are foreign owned and/or when they are based in another country. Large-scale leakage has been associated with mass tourism and high-end, luxury tourism, both of which tend to be externally controlled. Leakage also occurs when tourism-related goods, services, and labor are imported. Thus, it is difficult to avoid leakage, especially in small island developing states that depend on the import of skilled staff and goods and services (Boz, 2012).

Mitchell and Sheila (2007) further explained that leakages are also the payments made outside the destination economy: In other words, the proportion of the total holiday price that does not reach or remain in the destination. Some leakage happens internally, where tourists spend money at the destination but this pays for imported goods and services. Other tourism leakages are external payments that never make it to the destination country, such as travel agent commissions, tour operator profits and foreign airlines.

World Tourism Organization has similar surveys; in many developing countries and in practically all less developed countries, a generally considerable percentage of the foreign exchange income generated by international tourist arrivals leaks out of the economy. This leakage can be in the form of repatriation of benefits of foreign tourism companies, remuneration of foreign staff and, last but not least, imports of goods and services to respond to the tourists' needs (Boz, 2012; UNWTO, 2007; TAT News., 2019).

There are two main ways that leakage occurs:

1. **Import leakage**

Which occurs when tourists command standards of equipment, food, and other products that the host country cannot supply. It is typical of less-developed countries where food and drinks must often be imported, since local products are not up to the tourist's standards or the country simply doesn't have a supplying industry. Thus, in such a scenario, much of the income from tourism expenditures leaves the country again to pay for these imports. According to UNCTAD the average import-related leakage for most developing countries today is between 40.00% and 50.00% of gross tourism earnings for small economies and between 10.00% and 20.00% for most advanced and diversified economies. However, import leakage is not only typical of developing countries. A study from UNEP Tourism (2011), looking at tourism 'leakage' in Thailand estimated that 70% of all money spent by tourists ended up leaving Thailand (via foreign owned tour operators, airlines, hotels, etc.). Estimates made for other Third World countries range from 80% in the Caribbean to 40.00% in India. On average, of each US$ 100 spent on a vacation tour by a tourist from a developed country, only around US$ 5 actually stays in a developing-country destination's economy (SCB Economic Intelligence Center, 2019).

2. Export leakage

Multinational corporations and large foreign businesses have a substantial share in the import leakage. Often, especially in poor developing destinations, they are the only ones that possess the necessary capital to invest in the construction of tourism infrastructure and facilities. As a consequence of this, an export leakage arises when overseas investors who finance the resorts and hotels take their profits back to their country of origin (Boz, 2012; UNEP Tourism, 2011).

According to CBRE Research, 45.00% of the existing hotels in Bangkok operate with international brands. The rest are local hotel brands (37%) and hotels with no brand (18%). With a share of 67.00%, international hotel brands dominate the first-class and luxury hotel market in downtown Bangkok. While international hotels have a greater market share than local brands in the first-class and luxury sector of downtown Bangkok's hotel market, it's a different story for mid-range hotels, which make up 40.00% of downtown Bangkok's hotel supply (Boz, 2012; SCB Economic Intelligence Center, 2019).

Increase in prices

Increasing demand for basic services and goods from tourists will often cause price hikes that negatively affect local residents whose income does not increase proportionately. In addition, tourism development and the related rise in real estate demand may dramatically increase building costs and land values (Kariyapol, 2019; Yuvejwattana, 2011).

One of the top destinations in Thailand, Koh Samui Island, has faced a major problem since tourism reached to this Island in the beginning of year 2000. Local people are struggling hard to survive due to high commodity prices. Food is also sold to locals at the same prices being offered to tourists. The price of pork has risen from 36 baht a kilo in the past to 80-100 baht. Charges for the public pick-up truck services to get around the island have doubles in the past decade. There are meter-taxis on the island which can cost 300 baht, an affordable sum for the islanders. There are four private hospitals with modern equipment and facilities, but most of their customers are foreigners. Most locals have no choice but turn to the only public hospital on the island which has 11 doctors and 166 beds to cater to the 40,000 locals and another 100,000 migrant workers (TAT News, 2016; Kasikorn Research Center, 2019).

Economic dependence

Many countries, especially developing countries with little ability to explore other resources, have embraced tourism as a way to boost the economy. However, as a consequence their survival often has become dependent on regular tourism revenue influx. In The Gambia, for instance, 30.00% of the workforce depends directly or indirectly on tourism. According to the WTO, in small island developing states, percentages can range from 83.00% in the Maldives to 21.00% in the Seychelles and 34.00% in Jamaica (Boz, 2012). According to Maierbrugger (2017), Thai government in its economic review for 2016 said that travel and tourism accounted for 17.70% of the nation's income last year, a whopping figure given that the share in the past used to be at around ten per cent. n money terms, the overall income from tourism was close to €71 billion, the bulk of which was spent on hotels, food and beverage, transport, sporting activities and entertainment of various sorts. Of the entire income, around two thirds came from international tourism. Economy-wise, Thailand's reliance on tourism is unhealthy as it seems to be the only organic growth driver for the country. The money distribution also confined to a few regions, mainly Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Chonburi and the southern islands, which means that distribution of tourism income is highly disproportionate and does neither contribute to rural development nor balance nationwide incomes – instead, it makes already wealthy regions wealthier and exacerbates inequality (CBRE Thailand, 2017; SCB Economic Intelligence Center, 2019).

Conclusion

Tourism clearly provides a significant number of beneficial economic impacts to any country or locality which receives a steady flow of visitors. International visitors are a valuable source of foreign currency. At the same time, the spending of both domestic and foreign visitors produces a cascading effect of new money through the economy via the multiplier effect. Enterprise is stimulated, and new jobs created, together contributing to increased government revenue. But there are some negative factors also to be considered. Determination of economic benefits is becoming an increasingly common tool used by state and local tourism agencies to justify their existing and proposed promotional budget levels. The main purpose of host countries should be to reduce tourism's negative impacts, to lead sustainable tourism development and to increase the positive contribution to local development.

Suggestion

The dominant motive for the development of tourism is economic (improvements in employment, incomes and exports), but the very process of developing tourism will impose costs elsewhere. If governmental and non-governmental organizations are to make sensible and rational decisions with respect to the current and future development of tourism, they must have reliable information on its costs and benefits. Without such information, there is the risk that significant investment opportunities may be missed, that key infrastructure developments may be starved of funds, or developments may take the wrong form or take place in the wrong location (Geneva Business School, 2019).

Mitchell and Sheila (2007) suggests that economic linkages stop leakages. Buying supplies from people in the host country allows the benefits to remain. Many developing countries now encourage local farmers to supply fresh fruit and vegetables to hotels. Labour is often the most important linkage between a hotel and the local economy, through the payment of salaries and wages. Even a foreign owner should recruit locally to minimize costs. Hotels enhance economic linkages by working with informal tourism businesses. Whether the tourists are domestic or international, their expenditure in local communities contributes to the economic development of the area. The greater the proportion of total tourism spending that stays in the local area, the stronger and more diverse the local economic base (Boz, 2012; Open textbooks for Hong Kong, 2019).

Governments and tourism companies in destination countries can support initiatives to reduce leakages further by (1) Using locally-owned accommodation (this can be up to half of the total holiday cost), (2) Endorsing destinations that integrate tourists into the local economy, where they can purchase local products, (3) Promoting resorts that employ local staff and pay reasonable salaries, and (4) Using airlines from the host country (for long-haul destinations this may constitute one-third of the total package cost).

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