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"Global Goals, Local Actions: Looking Back and Moving Forward"

Approaches to Enhance Services of Accommodation Business in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province for Senior Tourists

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Abstract

This research aimed to provide approaches to develop or enhance accommodations in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province to facilitate senior tourists properly. Key informants of this study consisted of hotel staff at the operational level and local residents in the areas as well as academics in the field of tourism and hotel business. Total number was 11 people. They were selected by purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling technique. Data were gathered with a means of in-depth semi-structured interviews. The research findings showed that in order to serve senior tourists well, accommodations should be easy or convenient to reach. This aspect was priority. Clear signs telling directions to accommodations should be put in place. Accommodations should have certain measures to ensure safety and security for tourists. In terms of personnel, hotel staff should have proper knowledge on senior tourists' needs and how to take care and give advices to them, especially first aid knowledge and basic medical assistance. Accommodations should also pay an attention to their surroundings which needed to be tranquil, natural, and peaceful, or they should be designed with eco-friendly concerns and should be compatible with existing natural resources. As for facilities in the accommodations, this aspect was very necessary for senior tourists therefore accommodations should provide proper facilities that made everything convenient for them in all areas. Lastly, in terms of activities, accommodations should arrange activities that were compatible with local resources or made use resources properly.

Keywords: Accommodation business, senior tourists

Introduction

Tourism and service industry is considered as one of large industries in Thailand. It also generates a large amount of revenue to the country. Growth in tourism and service industry has led to the development of related components and sectors to facilitate various groups tourists including senior tourists which currently represent a potential and growing



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market. Higher number of senior tourists is a result of changes in population structure and becoming an aging society of the country. According to the forecast of the United Nations, the number of senior people can reach up to more than 1,968 people in 2050 (Jirawadee Rattanapaitoonchai, 2014).

As a result of growth in a number of senior tourists, Tourism Authority of Thailand has been launched many projects to facilitate these tourists. This group of tourists tend to have high purchasing power, especially foreign tourists. Behaviors of these tourists also differ from other general tourists in terms of their needs which emphasize good and special service and value for money of service, and their decision-making which is like to base on rational and satisfaction rather than emotion. Moreover, senior tourists tend to have longer stay and pay a special attention to safety and security and characteristics of service.

Since senior tourists appear to be a high potential market, studies on behaviors of these tourists and how to develop/enhance tourism-related components to respond to their needs are required. Samut Songkhram Province is one of the provinces enjoying a high number of tourism activities, evidenced by a large number of tourists staying in the province in 2016 between January and July. During this period, there were more than 100,000 tourists. However, there were some months that a number of tourists dropped a little. For example, in April, there were around 90,000 tourists (Department of Tourism, 2016) which might be a result of weather conditions during that month that affected tourists' decision. However, it is still obvious that Samut Songkhram Province is one of interesting tourist destinations in the eyes of tourists. It is also included the "12 Tourist Cities, Must Not Miss Campaign" which aims to encourage tourists to visit secondary tourist cities. This campaign creates a trend to visit this province.

According to Tourism Authority of Thailand Samut Songkhram Province Office which is in charge of tourism activities in three provinces consisting Samut Songkhram, Samut Sakhon, and Nakhon Pathom, tourism in these areas involve excursions, weekend trips, and trips during long holidays. Pre-and post- seminar tourism activities also represent major products of these areas. With this reason, accommodations in these areas need to be prepare and be ready for tourists. Apart from this, there are projects and campaigns promoting tourism activities for senior tourists or retired tourists. These projects make it more obvious that there are urgent needs to develop/enhance tourism-related components in these areas.

As previously mentioned that tourism in Samut Songkhram Province is well-known and popular and there is already an awareness to develop tourism-related components to facilitate senior tourists. Although the province is full of various types of tourist attractions as well as beautiful landscape and rich culture and be there are sufficient number of



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accommodation for tourists, there is no obvious model for the development of accommodation for senior tourists nor how to manage or prepare facilities and services specifically for senior tourists. Upon realizing this, this study aimed to examine approaches for the development/enhancement of accommodations in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province that can respond to needs of senior tourists efficiently. The findings of this study can serve as a model for other areas. They can also play an important role in providing more opportunities or choices for senior tourists. Money paid by these tourists can generate revenue to communities.

Objectives

To propose approaches for the enhancement of accommodations in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province for senior tourists

Research Scope

This research focuses on all types of accommodations in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province by examining potentials of various aspects of accommodation as well as proposing approaches for developing these aspects. The scope of research are as follows:

1) Scope of the study area

All types of accommodations in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province.

2) Scope on the study content

This study examined potentials of accommodations located in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province because these areas are known as famous tourist destinations and have been visited by a large number of tourists. They also have a context appropriate for being developed as tourist destinations. Moreover, there are various types of accommodation located in the areas. The sample of this study consisted of:

- Hotel staff at the operation level
- Local residents in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province
- Academics in a field of tourism and accommodation businesses

3) Scope on study period

This study was conducted for a period of 12 months between October 2017 and September 2018.



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Literature Review

Theories on senior people

The National Statistical Office (2014) states that senior people refer to people whose ages are 60 years or above. The number of senior people in Thailand has experienced rapid growth. We can classify senior people based on age into 3 main groups: senior people at the beginning stage (those whose ages are between 60 -69 years); senior people at the middle stage (those whose ages are between 70 – 79 years); and senior people at the ending stage (those whose ages are 80 years or above). Based on the National Statistical Office survey in 2014, the majority of senior people in Thailand were in the beginning stage, accounting for 56.5 percent. These senior people evaluated their own health and reported that their health was at a very high level and relatively better than the other two groups. Moreover, the survey also reported that the senior people in this group participated in activities at the highest level. This information provided a framework for this study in determining age ranges of senior people who represented the research population. Specifically, the population of this study were senior people in the beginning stage or those who were 60 – 69 years old.

Concepts and theories on standards of service for senior tourists

Department of Tourism (2012) has developed standards of service for senior tourists. These standards serve as guidelines for tourism-related businesses to check and evaluate their services in three main aspects including management aspect, service aspect, and physical surrounding and establishments. These three aspects serve as a framework for creating and proposing guidelines for the development of tourism-related businesses in existing research. Accommodation and lodging business is one type of tourism-related businesses that also uses such framework to develop or evaluate its services.

Based on Ranee Esichaikul (2009)'s study on significance of and satisfaction of senior European tourists visiting Thailand, the findings showed that there was no urgent factor or aspect that need immediate rectification. The study also reports that there were 9 important factors leading to tourist satisfaction. The most three important factors included: 1) location of an accommodation; 2) price of an accommodation; and 3) having various kind of food and price of food. Moreover, aspects that needed to be improved included: assistive devices for seniors or disabled people in a hotel; facilities and conveniences provided during an immigration process; events and festival; service quality of a travel agency; service quality of a tour leader and a tourist guide; leisure activities; medical facilities; basic infrastructure.



Methodology

Research Population and Sample

The key informants of this study were hotel staff at the operational level who worked at a hotel located in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province, and academics in a field of tourism and hotel business. The total number of informants was 11 people. They were selected by purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling technique. Data were collected with a means of in-depth semi-structure interviews.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study collected data from secondary sources including academic documents and articles, books, textbooks, and related researches in order to gather and analyze concepts and theories related to the issues of investigation. This is not only part of literature review, but also serves as a framework of this study.

The researchers gathered data via a means of in-depth semi-structured interviews. An interview guide was developed to cover the topics mentioned in the research objectives. This interview guide was used to ensure that the interviews would cover all the topics of interest. It also allowed the researchers to adapt questions or add more questions so that the data could provide answers to the research questions, or in other words, it could enable the researchers to achieve the research objectives. The collected data were analyzed with content analysis.

Findings/ Results

Approaches for enhancing accommodations in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province to facilitate senior tourists were as follows:

1. Location and facilities of accommodations. Accommodations should be easy or convenient for senior tourists to access. This aspect is priority. There should be proper signs showing clear directions to reach accommodations. Moreover, accommodations should be safe for tourists. Safety measures such as light and safety and security system should be put in place. These findings are consistent with the study of Sart Sukprasert (2015) on standards of facilities for senior people in residences and public places in Nakhon Ratchasima Province. This study reported that senior people's demand on facilities/ safety and security for their life and properties was high in overall. The senior people who were respondents in this study perceived that good facilities, safety and security could lead them to have a good quality of life. Moreover, the existing study also reported that accommodations should be located near important places such as hospitals and banks or was convenient to travel to



these places. Another less important aspect was facilities provided specifically for senior people in a room and other assistive devices. These things needed to be in a good condition and always ready to use. Furthermore, accommodations should provide specific area for senior tourists. Lastly, accommodations should be located in a tranquil place surrounded by nature and they should be developed in such a way that was harmonized with surroundings and resources in the areas. The study pointed out that Bangkhontee District was more appropriate for Amphawa District because it was more well-known among all groups of tourists and had been visited by a number of tourists.

2. Hotel personnel. Hotel personnel needed to be developed in terms of their knowledge and understanding of senior people's characteristics and needs and how to take care them and give advices for them properly, especially how to provide first aid or basic help to senior people. This is because these tourists were like to have poor health and get accident easily. Basic principles of working for hotel staff is to have a service mind which served as a necessary characteristic of service providers. Moreover, hotel staff also needed to have positive attitudes and good personalities and be moral and ethical. Other knowledge and skills that hotel staff needed to have included ability to communicate with foreign language and knowledge on tourist attractions suitable for senior tourists. An important thing that accommodations should concern was employing local people or allowing local people to take part in activities arranged by them. These findings are consistent with study of Kulwara Suwanpimol et al. (2006) on how to provide trainings on quality of service for people involving in cultural tourism in Phuket, Phang Nga, and Krabi Provinces. This study argued that providing knowledge and understanding for personnel in every department was a priority because this action could enable these people to work with a clear direction.

3. Surroundings of accommodations. Surroundings of accommodations needed to be tranquil, natural, and peaceful. They should be designed with eco-friendly concerns. Accommodations should not be located near residential communities or famous tourist attractions. Proper facilities should also be provided inside the accommodations to provide convenience for senior tourists. Areas and pathways should be airy. Pathways leading to different places within accommodations should be comfortable, convenience and safe for senior people. Moreover, accommodations should also pay an attention to basic infrastructure which needed to be compatible with senior tourists' characteristics and needs such as water system, waste management system, and insect protection system.

4. Facilities for senior tourists. These facilities are very important and necessary for senior tourists therefore accommodations should pay a special attention on them and provided by providing proper facilities in very areas, especially in bedrooms and bathrooms



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which are private areas and out of observation by hotel staff. Facilities for senior people consisted of: (1) labor-saving equipment such as wheelchairs, golf carts, chairs, lifts, and parking areas; (2) assistive devices such as panic buttons provided in important areas, first aid kits; (3) protective devices such as ramps and rails and non-slip surface that should be installed and directional signs, warning signs, and other information signs which should be clear and large enough to see. These findings agree with the findings of Ranee Esichaikul (2009)'s study on significance and satisfaction of senior European tourists visiting Thailand which found that facilities needed to be improved included assistive devices for seniors or disabled people in a hotel; facilities and conveniences provided during an immigration process; events and festival; service quality of a travel agency; service quality of a tour leader and a tourist guide; leisure activities; medical facilities; basic infrastructure.

5. Activities for senior tourists. Activities represent one of key services that accommodations should provide for senior tourists during their stay. Characteristics of such activities should be compatible with resources found in the areas or they should make use of local resources. These activities should provide opportunities for senior tourists to actively learn about local ways of life or they should be encouraged to actively take part in such activities, rather than just to observe or to do sightseeing.

Conclusion and Discussions

In order to develop and enhance services of accommodations in Amphawa District and Bangkhontee District, Samut Songkhram Province to facilitate senior tourists, accommodations needed to be convenient to access, hotel personnel had to have an understanding on senior people's need and how to take care them, and accommodations should have tranquilly natural surroundings or should be developed according to the ecotourism concept that focused on balancing of natural resources. Moreover, safe and proper facilities and activities should be provided for senior tourists.

Suggestions

1. Future research are suggested to gather data from senior people from all groups of age and through such studies, clearer findings can be achieved.

2. A family segment can be another interesting group of tourists to be studied because they have potential to stay at accommodations for senior people as well. Findings gained from such studies can be interesting and beneficial for the development and enhancement of this type of accommodation.



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