

DEVELOPING CREATIVE TOURISM ROUTES TO PROMOTE AGRICULTURAL TOURISM IN SAKHU SUBDISTRICT, THALANG DISTRICT, PHUKET PROVINCE, THAILAND

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of the tourism industry underscores the growing significance of community-based tourism as a mechanism for sustainable local development in Thailand. Agrotourism, which integrates agricultural activities with tourism experiences, presents a promising strategy to support rural economies and promote cultural exchange. This study aimed to explore the potential of agrotourism resources in Sakhu Subdistrict, examine tourists' needs and preferences, and develop innovative tourism routes to enhance the appeal and sustainability of agrotourism in the area. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. Data were collected from 400 tourists and 30 key informants, including local stakeholders and tourism experts. Research instruments comprised questionnaires, interview guides, and assessment forms designed to evaluate the potential and suitability of agrotourism resources. Both statistical and content analyses were applied. Findings indicated that Sakhu Subdistrict possesses diverse tourism resources, such as beaches, fruit orchards, and cultural attractions based on local wisdom. However, the overall agrotourism potential scored only 59.76%, which is below the national standard. Tourists expressed high levels of demand for accommodations ($\bar{x} = 4.48$), activities ($\bar{x} = 4.42$), and attractions ($\bar{x} = 4.41$), with particular interest in fruit picking and local cooking experiences. Based on the findings, two creative tourism routes were developed: one focusing on agricultural lifestyles and the other on fishing community practices. Trial implementations and evaluations showed high suitability ($\bar{x} = 4.12$), with accommodation receiving the highest score ($\bar{x} = 4.28$).

Keywords: Tourism routes, Agricultural tourism, Tourism potential, Tourist demand, Phuket

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INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is a rapidly expanding sector that plays a vital role in Thailand's economy and society. The National Tourism Development Plan (2012–2016) emphasized the importance of tourism, particularly community-based tourism, which promotes community and local government participation in the development of tourist attractions. This approach aims to create value and added benefits while taking into account environmental sustainability, local identity, and traditional lifestyles (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2011). Subsequently, the second National Tourism Development Plan (2017–2021) encouraged public participation in tourism management and emphasized the importance of enabling people to benefit from tourism. It promoted tourism education, awareness, and encouraged communities to engage in the development of tourism products and services based on local heritage and culture (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017). In this context, agricultural tourism (agrotourism) is considered a key activity in the development process, serving as a bridge between agriculture and tourism. It contributes to the equitable distribution of economic and social benefits, representing a strategic approach for fostering both community and national development.

Thailand is considered an agricultural country with a wide variety of farming occupations and rich agricultural wisdom. The nation is well-known for its expertise in crop cultivation, horticulture, fisheries, and livestock production, all of which hold significant potential as tourist attractions. These agricultural assets can create memorable experiences for visitors by providing opportunities to participate in farming activities, engage with farmers, and experience the natural environment and rural agricultural lifestyles. Such interactions foster learning and the exchange of knowledge about sustainable livelihoods (Department of Agricultural Extension, 2007). Agrotourism, in this context, not only generates income for local communities, particularly for farmers who own agricultural tourism sites but also allows other community members to benefit from tourism (Tachom et al., 2021). Agrotourism offers tourists the chance to

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experience nature, rural lifestyles, local customs, traditions, and diverse agricultural practices, and gain new knowledge and experiences in an enjoyable and environmentally responsible manner. Additionally, it enhances the value of agricultural resources for farmers and related stakeholders, contributing to stronger families, communities, and societies in terms of economic, social, environmental, and cultural development (Madhyamapurush, 2010).

In the Sakhu Subdistrict, a variety of agricultural activities are practiced, including fruit orchards, fisheries, agricultural product processing, and seafood production. The community's distinctive way of life holds great potential for development as a tourist destination. However, the community still lacks the knowledge and capacity to manage agrotourism and has not yet integrated its attractions and tourism activities coherently. The residents are eager to preserve their agricultural resources and local heritage through the development of creative agrotourism routes in the area. Such development is expected to increase awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of natural and cultural resources among local people. Therefore, this study aims to explore and analyze the potential of agrotourism resources, investigate tourists' demand for agrotourism, and develop creative tourism routes to promote agrotourism in the Sakhu Subdistrict, Thalang District, Phuket Province. The goal is to enhance the visibility and capacity of community-based agrotourism, contributing to sustainable job creation, livelihood development, and income generation for the local community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Tourism Resources

Tourism resources refer to tourist attractions, activities, and cultural traditions that reflect the distinctive characteristics of local civilization and are capable of attracting visitors. These resources are diverse and can be classified into various types according to their nature and role. Generally, tourism resources can be categorized into three main types (Isichaikun, 2003). 1) Natural Tourism Resources: These refer to attractions that originate from natural settings, which may be slightly modified by humans to enhance their suitability for tourism. Natural tourism resources can be subdivided into three groups: (1) Undisturbed natural resources: Areas that remain in their original, pristine condition and are suitable for study or nature appreciation, such as national parks, mountains, or wildlife sanctuaries. (2) Accessible natural resources with basic infrastructure: Areas such as grasslands, hot springs, or beaches that are more easily reachable and may have some basic facilities. (3) Developed and adapted natural resources: Natural settings that have been enhanced or developed, such as resorts or recreational areas integrated with natural landscapes. 2) Historical, Archaeological, and Religious Tourism Resources: These include man-made sites that possess historical, archaeological, or religious significance. They can be divided into: (1) Historical and archaeological sites: Locations such as ancient cities, monuments, or inscriptions that serve as evidence of past civilizations. (2) Religious sites: Structures like temples, churches, or ritual spaces that represent human beliefs and religious faith, which are integral to cultural identity. 3) Cultural and Traditional Tourism Resources: This category encompasses ways of life, customs, and practices passed down through generations, including language, clothing, traditional games, music, and local ceremonies. It also includes cultural values and belief systems such as local wisdom, tribal identities, and social norms. These elements attract tourists interested in learning about and understanding the culture of a particular area (Isichaikun, 2003).

The Concept of 5As in Tourism Components

Effective tourism resources should comprise essential components that can attract tourists, stimulate their interest in visiting, and leave them with a memorable experience. These components have been studied and proposed by various institutions and scholars. One widely recognized framework is the 3As model proposed by Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (2005), which includes: Attraction – the appeal of the destination, Accessibility – ease of access to the site, and Amenity – the quality of services and facilities provided. In a more comprehensive approach, Dickman (1996) expanded this model into the 5As framework, which includes the following elements: Attraction – This refers to tourist attractions that are either natural or man-made, including cultural traditions and heritage, which serve as the primary draw for tourists.

Activities – These are the experiences and engagements available to tourists at the destination, such as hiking, diving, shopping, and other leisure or cultural activities. These add value to the destination and enhance its appeal. Accessibility – This involves transportation systems and infrastructure that enable tourists to travel to the destination, including distance, road conditions, and travel convenience from major hubs. Amenities – This includes basic infrastructure and services essential for tourism, such as restaurants, public utilities, safety measures, and healthcare services, which contribute to a comfortable and secure experience. Accommodation – Adequate, diverse, and suitable lodging options that cater to different tourist needs.

Accommodations should ideally be located near tourist attractions to ensure convenience and safety. According to Glyptou (2022), effective tourism planning that enhances visitor satisfaction and competitiveness must incorporate the five core components of the 5As framework: accommodation, activities, attractions, accessibility, and amenities. In this regard, Sujkird (2024) employed the 5As tourism component framework as a strategic tool for the development of agrotourism routes in Uthai Thani Province. Similarly, Chomphoothong et al. (2023) adopted the 5As model to evaluate the tourism potential of agrotourism sites in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province. The findings from both studies underscore the widespread applicability of the 5As framework in tourism planning and destination management in Thailand, as it provides a holistic lens through which to examine the critical elements necessary for delivering a high-quality and sustainable visitor experience.

Concept of Agricultural Tourism

Agricultural tourism, or agrotourism, is a concept that meaningfully integrates the agricultural and tourism sectors. Its primary aim is to enable visitors to learn about, understand, and experience the lifestyle of farmers through hands-on activities conducted in agricultural settings. This form of tourism emphasizes experiential learning rather than mere

entertainment or leisure. Tourists are offered opportunities to participate in various farming-related activities such as vegetable planting, fruit harvesting, animal feeding, product processing, or even engaging in local agricultural festivals and traditions. This concept not only raises awareness among tourists regarding the significance of the agricultural sector but also contributes to the generation of additional income for rural communities and promotes the sustainable conservation of natural resources. Furthermore, it optimizes the use of local resources and creates opportunities for farmers to enhance their knowledge and develop quality learning sites for visitors (Department of Tourism, 2009). The Department of Agricultural Extension (2005) describes agricultural tourism as encompassing visits to various types of agricultural sites, such as fruit orchards, herbal gardens, agroforestry plantations, livestock farms, and aquaculture operations. It also includes visits to educational institutions or research centers focusing on agricultural technology. These destinations offer tourists the opportunity to engage in creative, hands-on activities that allow them to appreciate the beauty of agricultural environments, learn about farming success stories, and gain an understanding and awareness of environmental and cultural conservation.

Songkhla (2022) proposed a categorization of agricultural tourism activities based on the nature of content and tourists' interests, dividing them into four main groups: Demonstration Activities – Focus on showcasing production processes, such as mushroom cultivation, beekeeping, or food processing. These activities are ideal for tourists who seek practical knowledge that can be applied to their livelihoods. Educational Activities – Emphasize academic knowledge, such as organic farming programs that include training sessions, expert consultations, and lectures. These are popular among farmers and individuals deeply interested in agriculture. Product Sales Activities – Involve selling agricultural products to tourists, such as processed foods or souvenirs. Many sites, particularly women's groups, also demonstrate the making of traditional snacks or local dishes. Agribusiness Guidance Activities – Suitable for individuals interested in agricultural entrepreneurship. These activities provide in-depth information on production and marketing models, often in the form of business farm tours, inspiring tourists to pursue agricultural enterprises. Moreover, Kaewsuriya (2001) classified agricultural resources that can serve as the foundation for agritourism activities into seven categories: rice farming, ornamental flower cultivation, fruit orchards, vegetable gardens, herbal plantations, livestock farming, and agricultural festivals.

In addition, Dhungana & Khanal (2023) highlight the role of agrotourism in the United States, noting that its primary objective is to attract visitors to farms through various activities such as farm tours, pick-your-own fruit and vegetable experiences, farm animal interactions, and agricultural festivals or events. In contrast, in Thailand, Sangnak et al. (2025) observed the emergence of new formats of agrotourism, which emphasize immersive learning experiences that actively engage visitors, along with the integration of advanced technologies such as hydroponic farming to cater to the preferences of modern tourists. Furthermore, Thakur & Arora (2025) stated that agrotourism contributes to increased income and employment opportunities for agricultural communities in India and Kenya, while also promoting environmental sustainability and preserving the traditional lifestyles of local communities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objectives of this study were to investigate the capacity of agrotourism in Sakhu Subdistrict, assess tourists' expectations and interests, and design creative tourism routes to improve the attractiveness and long-term viability of agrotourism in Sakhu Subdistrict. This study employed a mixed-methods research design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The methodology is outlined as follows:

Population and Sample

The population and sample for this study comprised three groups:

1) Local Wisdom Practitioners, Community Members, Community Enterprise Groups, and Agrotourism Site Owners in Sakhu Subdistrict, Thalang District, Phuket Province. A total of 15 participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- Local wisdom practitioners: Individuals possessing knowledge, experience, and expertise in traditional agricultural practices, local fisheries, and indigenous culinary arts.
- Community members, community enterprise groups, and agrotourism site owners: Individuals or groups actively involved in supporting tourism activities, operating community-based enterprises, or managing agrotourism initiatives within the Sakhu Subdistrict.
- Willingness to participate: Participants were required to voluntarily agree to provide information and actively engage in the research process aimed at developing an agrotourism route in the Sakhu Subdistrict.

2) Tourism Experts, Travel Agency Representatives, Tourist Representatives, and Representatives from Tourism-Related Agencies in Phuket Province. A total of 15 individuals were purposively selected based on the following qualifications:

- Tourism experts (n = 5): Individuals with academic or professional expertise in tourism management or tourism route development.
- Travel agency representatives (n = 3): Professionals with experience in delivering travel services to both domestic and international tourists.
- Tourist representatives (n = 3): Individuals with prior experience in participating in agrotourism, either within Thailand or abroad.
- Representatives from tourism-related agencies (n = 4): Personnel affiliated with government bodies or official tourism organizations in Phuket Province.

3) Thai Tourists Visiting the Sakhu Subdistrict Community in Thalang District, Phuket Province. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula (1977) for an unknown population, yielding an estimated sample size of 369 respondents. To enhance the reliability and completeness of the data, the number of respondents was increased to 400, selected through convenience sampling.

Research Instruments

Four types of research instruments were utilized in this study. All instruments underwent content validity verification by three experts using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method. The IOC values for each instrument were as follows:

1. The Tourism Resource Potential Assessment Form achieved an IOC value of 0.987.
2. The Semi-Structured Interview Guide had an IOC value of 0.953.
3. The Tourist Needs Questionnaire yielded an IOC value of 0.979. It was pilot-tested with a sample of 50 individuals who shared similar characteristics with the target population. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.97.
4. The Evaluation Form for the Suitability of Agrotourism Routes recorded an IOC value of 0.979.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Data, the researcher conducted qualitative data verification using data triangulation by comparing information from different sources. Subsequently, the interview data were analyzed using content analysis methods. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including percentages, means, and standard deviations, were applied to analyze the levels of demand for agrotourism activities and the suitability of the developed agrotourism routes based on the research findings. A summary of the research procedures is presented in Figure 1.

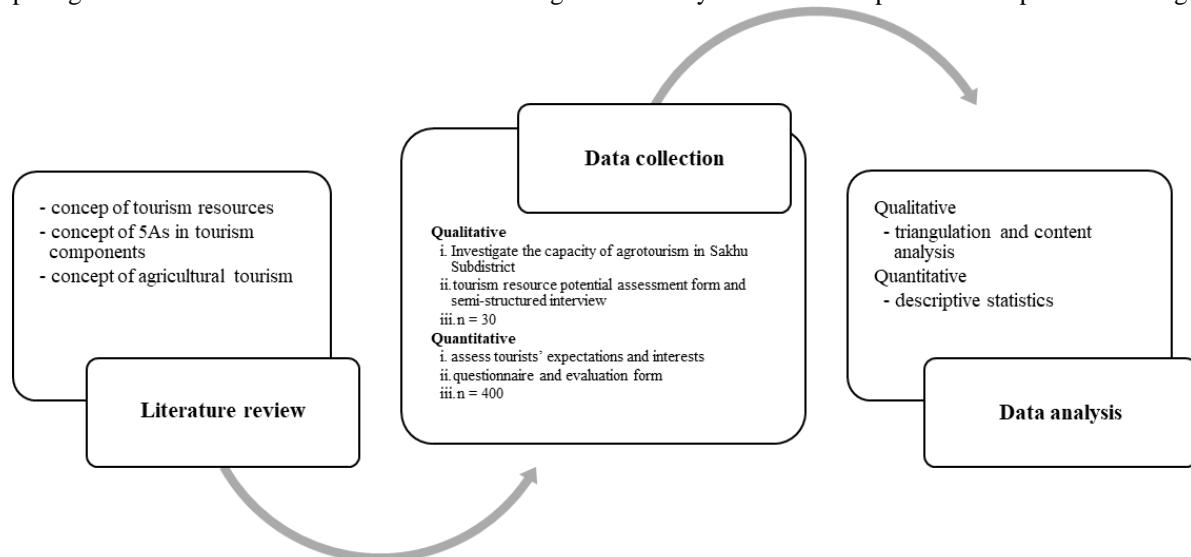


Figure 1. Research Methodology Steps (Source: Researchers (2024)

RESULTS

Agricultural Tourism Potential in Sakhu Subdistrict, Thalang District, Phuket, Thailand

The tourism resources identified in the area include: Natural tourism resources: There are three sites, namely Nai Yang Beach, Nai Thon Beach, and Pling Island (Figure 2). Cultural tourism resources: There are seven sites, including Lung Bat's New Theory Agriculture Garden, the Sakhu Subdistrict Administrative Organization Agricultural Learning Center, Ban Sakhu Durian Garden, Ching Pla Market, traditional grilling wisdom, local food, and basket weaving (Figure 3.)



a. Nai Yang Beach (20.11.2024)

b. Nai Thon Beach (17.11.2024)

c. Ping Island (23.02.2023)

Figure 2. Natural tourism resources Source: Photographed by Kanokwan Kaewuthai (2024)

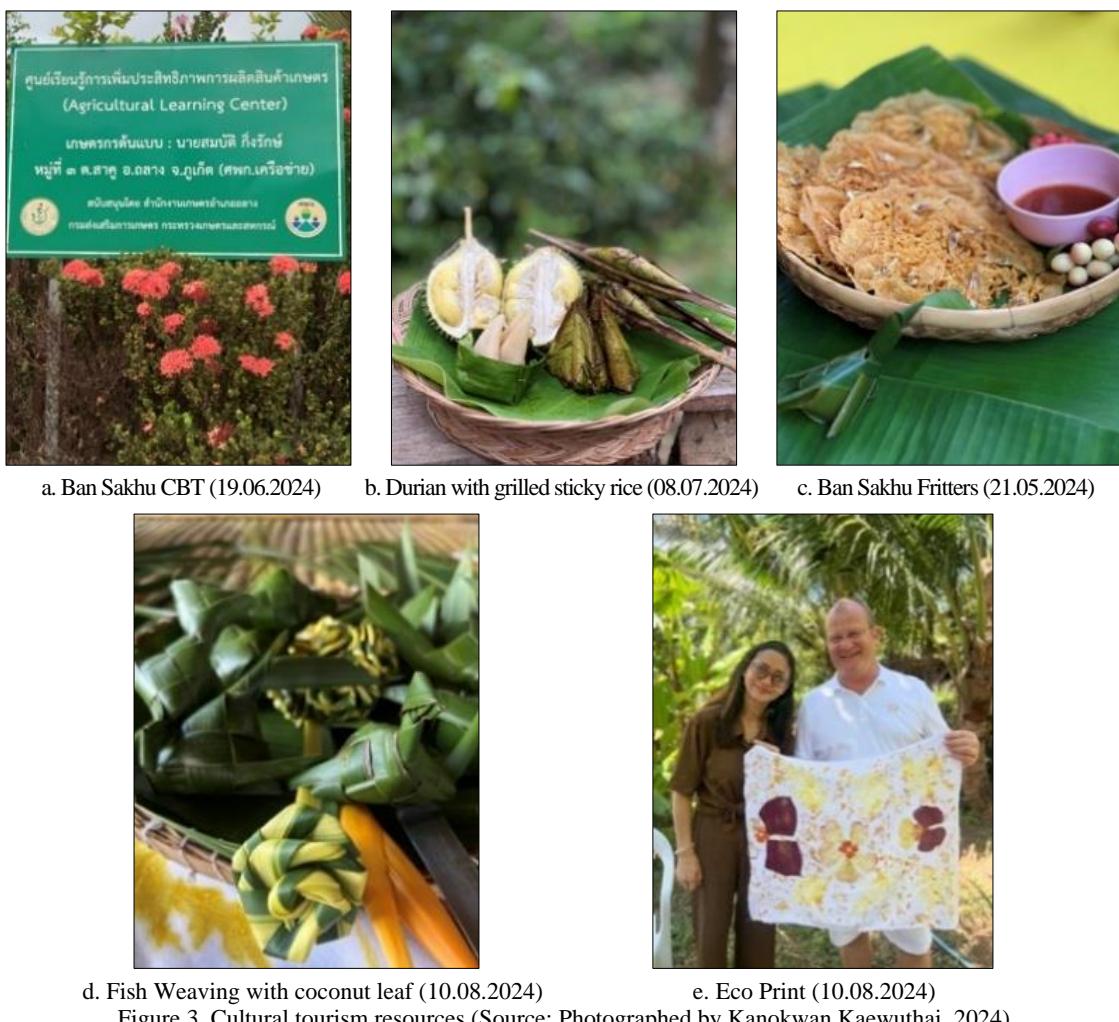


Figure 3. Cultural tourism resources (Source: Photographed by Kanokwan Kaewuthai, 2024)

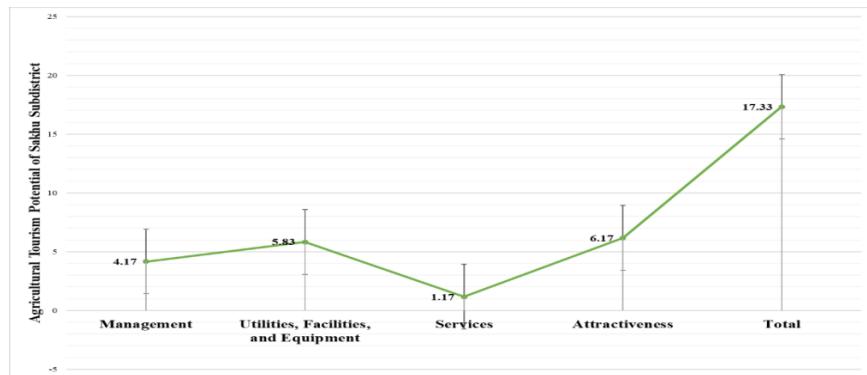


Figure 4. Agricultural tourism potential of the Sakhu subdistrict (Source: Researchers, 2024)

The assessment of potential based on the Agricultural Tourism Quality Standards (Department of Tourism, 2023) found that the Sakhu Subdistrict community's potential is below the agricultural tourism quality standard, with an overall score of 59.76%. The only component that met the standard was the attraction potential of the agricultural tourism sites, which received a good rating of 68.56%, as shown in Figure 4.

Tourists' Preferences for Agricultural Tourism in Sakhu Subdistrict, Thalang District, Phuket, Thailand

The majority of the sample group was female, accounting for 70.1%. Most respondents were aged between 41 and 50 years old (38.2%) and resided in Phuket Province (51.5%). The largest occupational group was government officers or public sector employees, making up 30.8%. Most had a monthly income of less than 25,000 baht, representing 43.8%. The majority traveled with friends (33.0%), and the travel group size ranged from 1 to 5 people (65.5%). Regarding sources of information about agricultural tourism sites, 66.3% received information from friends. Additionally, 85.2% had prior experience visiting agricultural tourism sites operated by communities in other areas. The most common activity previously undertaken was visiting mixed agricultural gardens, accounting for 72.9%. Concerning the activities that the sample group desired to experience in the

agricultural tourism sites in the Sakhu community, the top three were: visiting fruit orchards such as durian and mangosteen (62.5%), picking and eating fruits in the garden (56.2%), and participating in local cooking activities (49.4%), respectively.

Tourists' Demand for Agricultural Tourism

The sample group expressed a high overall demand, with a mean demand score of 4.39 (S.D. = 0.54). When considering demand by tourism components, tourists showed the highest demand for accommodation, with a mean score of 4.48 (S.D. = 0.63), followed by attractions and activities, with mean scores of 4.42 (S.D. = 0.60) and 4.41 (S.D. = 0.58), respectively. Regarding accommodation, the sample group most desired safe lodging, with a mean score of 4.55 (S.D. = 0.67). This was followed by friendly hospitality and service, and the availability of clean and private bathrooms, both with the same mean score of 4.52 (S.D. = 0.65 and 0.71, respectively) as shown in Figure 5.

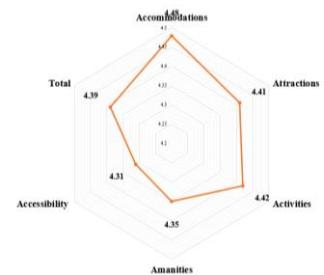


Figure 5. Tourist demand for agricultural tourism in Sakhu subdistrict (Source: Researchers (2024))



a. Map of Tourism Routes



b. Tour Programs Flyer in Sakhu subdistrict

Figure 6. Tourism routes and agricultural programs tour in the Sakhu subdistrict (Source: Designed by researcher Benjaporn Kaewuthai, 2024)



a. A warm welcome to guests (21.05.2024)



b. Farm tour by local guide (21.05.2024)



c. Local dessert workshop (21.05.2024)

Figure 7. Suitability assessment of the agricultural tourism routes (Source: Photographed by Kanokwan Kaewuthai (2024))

Tourism Routes to Promote Agricultural Tourism in Sakhu Subdistrict, Thalang District, Phuket, Thailand

The research team conducted focus group discussions with the community enterprise group to develop agricultural tourism routes in Sakhu Subdistrict. The information from Objective 1, which involved surveying and analyzing the potential of agricultural tourism resources in Sakhu Subdistrict, and Objective 2, which studied tourists' demands for agricultural tourism in the area, served as the foundational data for designing and creating tourism activities. These activities emphasize learning, direct observation, and hands-on experience. As a result, two tourism routes were developed: the Agricultural Lifestyle Learning Route of Ban Sakhu Community and the Fishing Lifestyle Learning Route of Ban Sakhu Community (Figure 6).

After designing the activities and tourism routes, the research team provided knowledge transfer to members of the Sakhu Ruamjai Community Enterprise regarding tourist services, hospitality, communication, and storytelling. This was to prepare the community for delivering quality services to visitors. A trial run of the agricultural tourism routes was then conducted to assess the readiness and suitability of the developed tourism routes, as shown in Figure 7. The evaluation of the suitability of the agricultural tourism routes in Sakhu subdistrict revealed that, overall, the routes received a high suitability score with a mean of 4.12 (S.D. = 0.60). The highest suitability rating was for accommodation, with a mean score of 4.28 (S.D. = 0.95), followed by tourism attractions with a mean of 4.18 (S.D. = 0.58), activities with a mean of 4.17 (S.D. = 0.65), facilities with a mean of 4.00 (S.D. = 0.69), and accessibility to tourist sites with a mean of 3.96 (S.D. = 0.78), as shown in Figure 8.

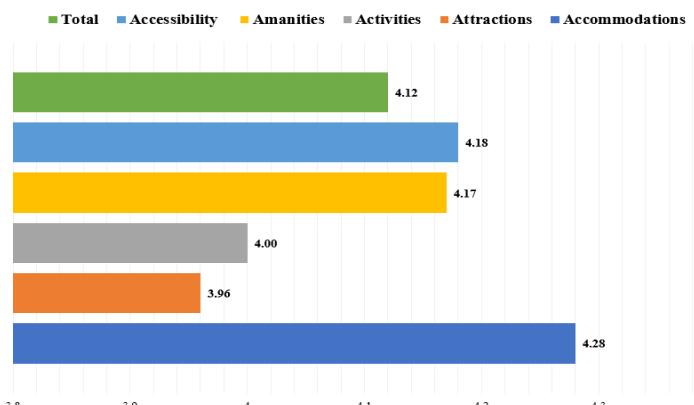


Figure 8. Suitability assessment of agrotourism routes in Sakhu subdistrict (Source: Researchers (2024)

DISCUSSION

The analysis of tourism resources revealed that the Sakhu subdistrict possesses diverse tourism assets, including natural resources such as Nai Yang Beach, Nai Thon Beach, and Pling Island, as well as cultural resources comprising agricultural gardens, local markets, traditional food, and indigenous wisdom. However, the overall tourism potential remains below standard levels, particularly in terms of facilities and accessibility. This is consistent with the study by Ruengdet et al., (2023), who stated that the tourism management model of the Bang Bai Mai Floating Market remains inconsistent with tourist needs and behaviors. Furthermore, the community's local environment is limited, and most activities emphasize training rather than promoting learning and experience-sharing for tourists, which is considered a weakness in the development potential of agricultural tourism in Thailand. Turtureanu et al. (2025) emphasized that infrastructure readiness is crucial to the success of agricultural tourism in rural areas, especially transportation systems, accessibility, and basic services such as accommodation and sanitation facilities. Meanwhile, the UNWTO (2021) highlighted that agricultural tourism should balance the use of local resources and involve the community systematically in management. Regarding tourist demand, visitors showed a high level of interest in agricultural tourism, especially in activities involving learning and hands-on experiences, such as fruit orchard visits, fruit picking, and local cooking. These activities reflect the experiential tourism model proposed by Pine & Gilmore (2020), which focuses on providing opportunities for tourists to engage in direct experiential learning rather than superficial observation. Additionally, tourists expressed the greatest demand for accommodation, with particular importance placed on safety, cleanliness, and friendly service. Therefore, the community should prioritize providing lodging that meets these expectations to ensure tourist satisfaction, which aligns with the findings of Kunchu et al. (2025), who reported that tourist satisfaction is strongly associated with the quality of accommodation and services in agricultural tourism sites and serves as a key indicator for the long-term sustainability of tourism. For the development of agricultural tourism routes in the Sakhu Subdistrict, two routes were designed to emphasize tourist participation in various activities such as learning production processes, hands-on involvement, and cultural exchange. This approach aligns with the concept of creative tourism as described by Richards & Raymond (2000) which emphasizes creating value through opportunities for tourists to interact and share experiences with local hosts. The trial implementation of these tourism routes showed overall good suitability, particularly concerning accommodation and tourist attractions. He et al. (2021) stated that community capacity building is a vital factor in promoting sustainable tourism. Therefore, government agencies, educational institutions, and the private sector should collaborate to enhance essential knowledge and develop service skills among local communities and entrepreneurs to effectively and sustainably support tourism development and elevate community potential in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Local administrative organizations, tourism offices, and the Department of Agricultural Extension can utilize the findings of this research to support strategic planning for tourism development at the local level. This includes prioritizing investments in infrastructure such as roads, accommodations, and tourist service centers, as well as promoting community participation in tourism management.
2. Educational institutions in the area should focus on developing skills and providing training in agricultural tourism management, hospitality, and the design of tourism experiences for local communities. This would foster collaborative networks between academic sectors and local communities to sustainably drive the grassroots economy.

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