



Good Practice Story Title: U thong's heritage revival: Up to sustainable development by spirit of civil society

Destination: U thong Ancient City

Country: Thailand

Submitting Organization: Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA)

Category:

- Destination Management
- Nature & Scenery
- Environment & Climate
- Culture & Tradition
- Thriving Communities
- Business & Marketing

Destination description:

U Thong may not be widely known as a tourism destination, but its historical richness attracts a specific group of visitors, particularly those interested in cultural and historical sites. For instance, Phutthamonthon of Suphan Buri serves as a religious center and an economic boon for the region. Highlighting attractions like the monumental Phra Phuttha Pusaya Khiri Sri Suvarnabhumi Buddha statue and the longest sky walk in Thailand, which offers a panoramic view of U Thong's ancient city, significantly boosts Suphan Buri's economy. Preserving and promoting these sites not only preserves the area's heritage but also stimulates tourism, fostering economic growth. Therefore, it's essential to stress the significance of conserving these landmarks and utilizing them for sustainable development to ensure Suphan Buri's continual prosperity.



Summary of Good Practice Story:

U Thong is an ancient city with a long history spanning thousands of years. It holds significance as evidenced by historical records, having served as both the capital of the Dvaravati Kingdom and the epicenter of Suvarnabhumi, the origin of culture, customs, and arts. Presently, this area retains a rich historical legacy and is the location of Phutthamonthon in Suphan Buri province. Before the development of Phutthamonthon in Suphan Buri province from 1991 to 2011, the area was an abandoned mine due to the expiration of mining contracts. Local residents disposed of garbage, leading to environmental degradation and drug abuse issues. Recognizing the importance of development to address these problems and uphold Buddhist teachings, all sectors aimed to transform the area into a tourist destination, enhancing the economic value of Suphan Buri province.

Issues faced:

The ancient city of U Thong boasts a long history dating back to the Dvaravati period, yet its historical significance remains underutilized economically and in terms of tourism. The primary reasons include limited understanding of governmental regulations and insufficient community involvement in urban development. Issues such as land rights violations and air pollution from waste burning further exacerbate the situation. Between 1991 and 2011, the Phutthamonthon of Suphan Buri, once a stone mining site, deteriorated into a landfill and a gathering place for delinquent youth. To address these challenges, the abbot of Wat Pa Lelai Worawihan initiated the construction of the monumental Buddha statue "Phra Phuttha Pusaya Khiri Sri Suvarnabhumi," aiming to revitalize the area and promote Buddhist teachings and community development. With support from the government, private sector, and local community, this project transforms U Thong into a sustainable and culturally significant destination for tourists and locals alike.



Solution:

Due to the excavation of archaeological sites in the area is hindered, unable to be excavated and used economically. To address the current state of the ancient city of U Thong, efforts are underway to develop a new tourist attraction named "Phutthamonthon of Suphan Buri " This initiative aims to showcase the historical significance of the Dvaravati civilization and link with other attractions. For instance, it features the largest rock-carved Buddha image globally, Phra Phuttha Pusaya Khiri Sri Suvarnabhumi, along with the U Thong Ancient City nature study walkway bridge (sky walk). By integrating tourism industry feedback and considering diverse visitor demographics, this approach seeks to create a model tourist area accessible to people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds.

Methods, Steps, and Tools applied:

As Phutthamonthon of Suphan Buri gains prominence among tourists, particularly during holidays when a significant influx of visitors occurs, some members of the community have yet to benefit from tourism development. Recognizing this, stakeholders have come together to address these challenges. A concept emerges: utilizing tourism to enhance the quality of life for local residents, including:

1. Economic Benefits Distribution: Allocating space for 95 community-owned shops prioritizing local residents. Providing shuttle services for tourists organized by the community-based Ancient City of U Thong and Phra Pathom Chedi Network along tourist routes linking community attractions, leading to income generation for surrounding communities.

2. Job Creation: Creating opportunities for unemployed individuals to participate in various activities, such as providing shuttle services for elderly tourists. By implementing these strategies, we can ensure that tourism development not only enriches the region economically but also improves the livelihoods of local residents, fostering community participation and sustainable growth.



Achievements and Results:

Phutthamonthon of Suphan Buri represents the transformation of neglected areas into vibrant tourist destinations. By harnessing the region's rich historical heritage, this initiative aims to generate economic opportunities for local communities, thereby enhancing their livelihoods. Job creation for the unemployed is a key aspect, empowering individuals and stimulating economic growth. Encouraging the involvement of local community groups in area management helps mitigate issues like encroachment on agricultural land, fostering sustainable development. Moreover, ensuring a fair distribution of tourism income across society ensures that everyone benefits equitably from the region's newfound prosperity. This holistic approach not only revitalizes the area but also fosters community cohesion and sustainable progress.

Lessons Learned and Advice:

Phutthamonthon of Suphan Buri, under the supervision of state agencies, faces issues of land encroachment for livelihood purposes, leading to hardships for local residents. Collaboratively, government agencies, private sector entities, local authorities, and the community have developed the ancient city of U Thong by fostering cooperative mechanisms. This includes formulating policies, project plans, activities, and budgets to systematically manage the area as a tourist destination. The local community benefits from this tourism development model, which helps to mitigate encroachment on public land. Consequently, opportunities arise in the ancient city of U Thong, stimulating economic growth, creating employment, generating income for the community, and contributing to the national economy.



Recognitions and Additional References

<p>Thailand Tourism Awards 2021, tourist attraction category</p>	<p>Community Tourism Standard Award (Excellent level) from 2020-2026</p>
	

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