The Power of Partnership: Promoting Eco-Friendly Hotels through Nan’s Accommodation Network.

Nan living Old City, Thailand
Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (Public Organization) (DASTA)
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
People & Community

Summary of Good Practice Story
Nan's historic "Living Old City" in northern Thailand faced a triple crisis: peak-season overtourism generating traffic and waste, major flooding exposing climate vulnerability, and rising utility costs threatening small hospitality businesses under old management practices. Rather than waiting for top-down mandates, local hotel owners, supported by DASTA Nan and the Nan Accommodation Operators Club, adopted the international Green Hotel standard, forming dedicated "Green Teams" to manage seven sustainability categories — installing solar cells, tracking water use and improving waste segregation — while overcoming barriers like high upfront costs and staff resistance through low-cost first steps, fun workshops instead of lectures, and nudge-based guest communication, alongside linking hotels to farms for organic-waste composting and produce buy-back. Between 2024 and 2025, tourist satisfaction reached 4.67/5, visitor numbers grew from 122,877 to 149,416, and annual revenue rose from 53.8 to 64.7 million baht, earning Nan a Green Destinations Gold Award and recognition at ITB Berlin, with the model since inspiring similar heritage towns including Chiang Khan, Sukhothai and Mae Hong Son. The lesson: sustainability relies more on community bonds and social capital than expensive technology, and green upgrades should be framed as long-term investments that cut costs, not distant environmental obligations.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context
Nan Living Old City: Green Growth From Within

Nestled among northern mountains, the historic district of "Nan Living Old City" has long suffered from peak-season overtourism, triggering severe traffic congestion, mounting waste, social tensions, and the devastating aftermath of major flooding. Facing these threats, local hotel owners refused to let their hometown's charm disappear. Rather than waiting for top-down orders, they chose a path of "self-adaptation from within."

Supported by DASTA Nan and the Nan Accommodation Operators Club, hospitality businesses adopted the international Green Hotel standard as a vital development tool. Guided by energy experts, hotels established dedicated "Green Teams" to manage resources across seven core sustainability categories. From installing solar cells and tracking water usage to rigorous waste segregation, these businesses successfully cut operational costs while actively reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Ultimately, Nan's success proves that true destination resilience relies on its people. By transforming properties into eco-friendly sanctuaries, this local hotel network has built a balanced tourism ecosystem—one that safeguards the environment while preserving the true, sustainable spirit of Nan for generations to come.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed
Nan's Triple Crisis: The Turning Point for Survival

The rapid expansion of "Nan Living Old City" thrust the historic district into a severe triple crisis, threatening its infrastructure and cultural security:

- The Overtourism Crisis: Peak-season tourist crowds overwhelmed the city, generating massive amounts of waste that damaged the old town's image and causing heavy traffic congestion across the cultural hub.

- The Climate Crisis: Major flooding served as a stark warning of Nan's vulnerability to climate change, directly impacting local livelihoods and disrupting the hospitality economy.

- The Business Survival Crisis: Continuing with old management practices risked skyrocketing utility costs. Without a shift toward resource efficiency, the town's unique cultural charm would fade, triggering a permanent decline in visitors.

These interconnected threats were not distant worries, but immediate hazards to Nan's environmental and cultural future. Ultimately, this intense pressure became the definitive turning point. It united hotel operators and local agencies, forcing them to abandon outdated tourism

practices and embrace the Green Hotel standard as the only viable path to long-term sustainability.

The Vision: What you set out to do
The ultimate goal for Nan Province is to pioneer a "truly sustainable, low-carbon tourism model" by elevating its hospitality sector through the Green Hotel standard and seamlessly linking it to a thriving Community-Based Tourism (CBT) network.

Implementing this green framework is a vital catalyst for Nan's future across five key dimensions:

- Preserving Local Well-Being: Strategic resource management ensures residents maintain a high quality of life, fostering a healthy balance between local living and tourism.

- Conserving Natural Heritage: Protecting Nan's pristine environment and unique landscapes safeguards its appeal as a premium, long-term destination.

- Empowering Communities: Cultivating CBT generates direct local income and instills immense cultural pride, keeping heritage alive.

- Combating Climate Change: Aggressively reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions builds critical climate resilience against future natural disasters.

- Elevating Destination Credibility: Embracing sustainability positions Nan as a responsible, world-class destination, inspiring long-term confidence among conscious travelers and investors alike.

By embedding these values, Nan is transforming environmental responsibility into a definitive competitive advantage.

The Journey: How change happened
The Vision: Transforming Nan into a Model Low-Carbon Destination

The ultimate goal for Nan Province is to fundamentally revolutionize its tourism ecosystem, transitioning into a "truly sustainable, low-carbon tourism city." This ambitious transformation is driven by a two-pronged strategy: comprehensively upgrading the accommodation sector to meet rigorous Green Hotel environmental standards and seamlessly connecting these businesses with the local Community-Based Tourism (CBT) network.

By integrating the hospitality sector with the grassroots economy, Nan is establishing a comprehensive sustainability framework that addresses five critical dimensions:

- Preserving Local Well-Being and Social Balance: Rapid, unchecked tourism often disrupts the peace of traditional communities. By implementing systematic resource management under the Green Hotel standard, Nan ensures that the local way of life is protected, allowing residents to maintain a high quality of life and coexist in perfect harmony with visitors.

- Conserving Pristine Natural Resources: Nan's unique mountain geography and rich cultural heritage are its greatest assets. Protecting this fragile environment through eco-friendly business operations guarantees that the province preserves its authentic charm and remains an attractive, viable destination for long-term tourism.

- Empowering Communities through Cultural Tourism (CBT): True sustainability cannot exist without economic equity. Linking eco-conscious hotels with CBT networks ensures that tourism revenue flows directly into the hands of local artisans, farmers, and weavers. This economic injection fosters deep local pride and encourages the preservation of intangible cultural heritage.

- Building Climate Resilience and Disaster Preparedness: In the wake of severe flooding and unpredictable weather, reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions is no longer optional. The adoption of green technologies—such as solar energy and efficient waste management—directly cuts greenhouse gases, preparing the city to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

- Elevating Global Credibility and Destination Image: Modern travelers actively seek destinations that align with their values. Transforming Nan into a responsible, low-carbon destination enhances its international reputation, building long-term confidence among conscious travelers, high-value study groups, and sustainable business investors.

Ultimately, this integrated approach proves that environmental responsibility and economic survival go hand in hand, securing a resilient and vibrant future for Nan.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved
Nan's Green Transformation: Impact and Success

The adoption of Green Hotel standards has driven tangible improvements across Nan:

- Community & Environment: Hotels foster economic equity by sourcing local products and employing residents. Advanced waste, plastic, and wastewater management cut landfill burdens and protect the Nan River, while winning the Green Destinations Gold Award has ignited immense local pride.

- Tourists: Eco-conscious travelers enjoy safe, green spaces, knowing their stay directly supports carbon reduction and community well-being.

Proven Data (2024–2025)

The strategy's success is backed by rising satisfaction and economic growth:

- Tourist Satisfaction: 4.67/5 (Very Satisfied) | Resident Satisfaction: 4.07/5 (Satisfied)

- Tourism Growth: Visitors grew from 122,877 to 149,416, boosting annual revenue from 53.8M to 64.7M THB.

The New Face of Nan Old City

Nan has successfully evolved from a traditional cultural town into an international Low Carbon Destination celebrated at ITB Berlin. Accommodations have upgraded to certified standards (Good Travel Seal), embedding rigorous environmental data tracking into daily operations. Most importantly, local staff and residents have developed deep environmental discipline, uniting the community and operators to safeguard Nan's tranquility, cleanliness, and timeless heritage amidst growing tourism.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn
Overcoming Green Barriers: Insights from Nan

Navigating Key Challenges

Upgrading local SMEs to Green Hotel standards revealed critical barriers: high upfront costs, staff resistance, guest friction, and mismatched municipal infrastructure. Nan overcame these by starting with low-cost measures, replacing rigid lectures with fun workshops, using nudge psychology for guests, and partnering with Nan Municipality to sync the city's waste segregation system.

The Power of Social Capital

Nan proved that sustainability relies on community bonds over expensive technology. Hotels connect the circular economy by sending organic waste to local farms for composting and buying back fresh produce for guests. This "gentle but serious" northern charm transforms eco-cooperation into a rewarding experience.

Strategic Recommendations

- Shift Mindset: View green upgrades as long-term investments that cut utility costs.
- Nudge, Don't Force: Guide guests subtly with positive choice architecture.
- Four-Step Execution: Form a Green Team, track resource data for 6–12 months, implement green procurement, and conduct internal audits.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

The "Nan Old City Model" extends far beyond local success, creating a powerful ripple effect across both national policy and cultural heritage cities:

- Driving National Policy: Nan's milestone in winning the Green Destinations Gold Award has reshape national tourism strategies. Agencies like DASTA have integrated this low-carbon model into the National Tourism Development Plan, adapting Nan's accessible criteria to help SMEs nationwide qualify for the Thailand Tourism Awards.

- A Blueprint for Heritage Cities: Nan has shattered the myth that green initiatives require massive capital. Similar historic destinations, like Chiang Khan, Sukhothai, and Mae Hong Son, are now adopting Nan's community-based circular economy and "gentle nudge" approach, proving that environmental conservation can successfully fuel economic growth.

Message of Hope and Strength

Nan's resilience is not measured by rapid growth but by the deep cultural and environmental roots preserved across generations. It proves that sustainability's greatest power comes from collective pride and a shared love for one's hometown. This united community network stands as a permanent shield, securing local livelihoods, protecting a cherished way of life, and welcoming future visitors with genuine, sustainable pride.

Awards or Certifications

1. Nan Living Old City was certified under the Green Destinations Gold Awards 2024

2. Green Destinations Top 100 Stories 2020:
"Conservation of Historic Buildings to Promote Sustainable Tourism Development for the Future of Nan Province"
3. Green Destinations Top 100 Stories 2021:
"Women Empowerment"

4. Green Destinations Top 100 Stories 2023:
"Tourism Waste Management in Nan Town Square (Khuang Mueang Nan)"

5. Green Destinations Top 100 Stories 2025:

“Nan Living Old Town: A Model for Conservation and Sustainable Tourism Development”

6. Green Hotel Standard: 4 Silver certified hotels and 6 Bronze certified hotels in 2025

7. Good Travel Seal Standard: 1 Silver certified hotel in 2025

Web Articles
https://nan.prd.go.th/th/content/category/detail/id/9/iid/326971

https://www.nancity.go.th/news/detail/2887/data.html

https://mgronline.com/local/detail/9680000077467

https://www.dailynews.co.th/news/5028435/

https://web.facebook.com/watch/?v=2443077762798118

Other Relevant Links
https://nan.mnre.go.th/th/news/detail/100532

https://greenhotelthai.com/th/

Quotes or Testimonials
Transforming hospitality into a force for nature, securing a sustainable future for Nan’s rich cultural heritage.