

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT : AN OVERVIEW OF MICRO-LOGISTICS IN CHIANG MAI, THAILAND

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Noted to be one of Thailand's highlighted tourist attractions, Chiang Mai is a tourist hub that welcomes millions of tourists annually. According to an article published by the Climate and Development Knowledge Network, written by Kyoko Kusakabe, Pujan Shrestha and S. Kumar of the Asian Institute of Technology, there were approximately about 5 million tourists in Chiang Mai Province in 2012 alone (Kusakabe, Kyoko, 2014). Despite being more than 700 kilometers away from the country's capital, tourists still flock to Chiang Mai, thanks to the logistical possibilities the government and private sector have offered. On those numbers alone, it is easy to see that logistics is a very important factor in Chiang Mai's tourism industry.

Chiang Mai : Rose of the North

Founded by King Mengrai in 1296 AD, Chiang Mai has its own distinct culture compared to the rest of Thailand. This is all due to the fact that Chiang Mai has boasted a long history as part of the Lanna Kingdom. Well-renowned as the "Rose of the North," (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2014). Chiang Mai has lived up to its name as one of the country's most beautiful provinces. Not only is it due to its picturesque natural landscapes, but also to its distinctly colorful ethnic and cultural identities.

Chiang Mai has this unique blend of old-and-new and natural-and-state-of-the-art that really distinguishes it from any other city in Thailand. This area of 20,000 square kilometer of land claims not only the natural sights of the Ping River Valley, but the green forested mountains and the endless rice paddies, as well (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2014). Besides from that, Chiang Mai is also a bustling metropolis that offers different malls, department stores, and markets that sell not only world famous brands, but local handicrafts as well. Because of this



Figure 1 Rice Paddies on the Outskirts of Chiang Mai

distinctive balance, it is easy to see why Chiang Mai is such a hub for tourists from all over the world. Besides from that, the ethnic and cultural variety in Chiang Mai also allows tourists a much larger option to explore. Like most of the northern parts of

Thailand, Chiang Mai also has its own local culture that can be seen its distinct dialect, traditions, arts and lifestyles (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2014). These can be seen the cuisines, ways of life and even ancient arts and architecture.

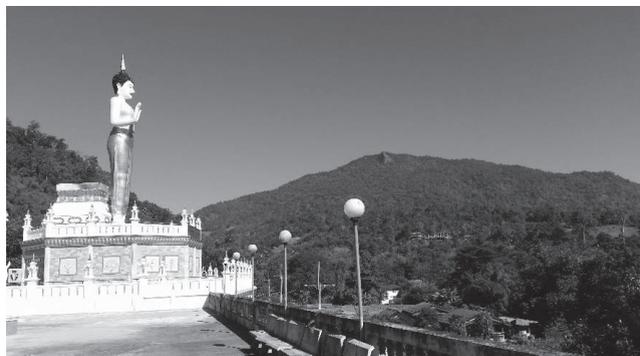


Figure 2 This Buddha serves as a reminder of peace among the people of this village

Tourism in Chiang Mai

With such a plethora of resources, human, natural or otherwise, it becomes easy for the tourist industry to boom in this city. The natural attractions can pull in tourists interested in adventure and eco-tourism, while the indigenous groups of the provinces can attract visitors who want to learn more about the local cultures and lifestyles. Ancient

temples and monuments satisfy the curiosity of the history buffs. The offers of luxury hotels and fancy shops can definitely entice anyone willing to pay well for excellent experiences and services, not to mention the shopping opportunities. As mentioned, this well-balanced city offers an inimitable variety for tourists of all ages.



Figure 3 This trekking trip is also a form of merit-making

In terms of natural tourist locations, Chiang Mai has an abundance of options to choose from. From trekking, elephant ridings, white-water rafting, zip-lining, and other jungle adventures, tourists can enjoy the beautiful natural sceneries Thailand has to give. Tour agencies can offer set deals or

even customize a package according to a tourist's wants and needs. According to a Malaysian TAT brochure, jungle trekking is considered to be one of Chiang Mai's most popular tourist activity (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2014).



Figure 4 A literal jungle trek

As for the indigenous groups here in the North, tourists can meet and even experience the local lifestyles of not just local Thai people, but also the six tribal groups of the North which are the Karen, Hmong, Lisu, Lahu, Yao and Akha. As each group each have their own idiosyncratic custom, belief, attire, language, rituals, dances and even

agricultural practice, visiting a tribe or two is most definitely a worthwhile trip. Home stays, cooking schools, and handicraft centers can show visitors the local's ways of life. The cultural learning experiences offered are so eye-opening, it is no wonder many tourists return to visit over and over again.



Figure 5 These tribal shopkeepers were kind enough to let us listen to their songs

As mentioned, other avenues offered in Chiang Mai's tourist attractions include the arts and architecture in Lanna style. Temples built in ancient times are highlights for history aficionados. Some indoor museums and cultural centers are also available for those who want to escape the heat, but still wanting to know more about Chiang Mai's history.

Lastly, the luxury experience is definitely another view of the bustling modernity of Chiang Mai. Five-star hotels, state-of-the-art shopping malls, many great places to eat and drink coffee, and boutique restaurants cater to both locals and tourists who want to experience a more contemporary side to Chiang Mai.



Figure 6 Coffee shops in Chiang Mai

With such a variety of choices to pick from, tourists in Chiang Mai will never run out of options. The next question is however, how do tourists move from one area to another? Are the current systems of transportation working? What can be done to develop these various modes of transportation both within the city boundaries of Chiang Mai and beyond to the city districts?

Logistics plays important role in Tourism development

Before going into the definitions of logistics, addressing what the supply chain is would be most helpful. Despite the variety of definitions, according to The Logistics Handbook A Practical Guide for the Supply Chain Management of Health Commodities by the USAID Deliver Project, the supply chain not only encompass

“the planning and management of all activities involved in sourcing and procurement...and all logistics management activities,” but it also coordinates and collaborate with partners, whether than would be the suppliers, third party service providers, customers and all others that fall in between. If anything, the supply chain management incorporates the “supply and demand management within and across companies”. As for the logistics management, it has been defined as a part of the “supply chain management that plans, implements and controls the efficient, effective forward and reverses flow and storage of goods, services and related information between the point of origin and the point of consumption in order to meet customers’ requirement”. It serves an integrating function that organizes and improves logistical activities, while

integrating said activities with other functions that would include finance, sales manufacturing, marketing and information technology. If anything, the logistical activities are “the operational component of supply chain management, including quantification, procurement, inventory management, transportation and fleet management and data collection and reporting”. In other words, the supply chain management is pretty much the “logistics activities plus the coordination and collaboration of staff, levels, and functions” (USAID, 2011). While the supply chain covers and connects the supply and demand dynamics and the international manufacturers, logistics focuses on the details within a particular program within the supply chain system.

It is no surprise to see the great importance of logistics and supply chain within tourism. The tourism industry involves a great of participants.

Asides from the service suppliers, operators and travel agencies to clients, the industry also involves the transportation, accommodation, restaurants and even entertainment (Tigu and Călărețu, 2013) aspects of the industry, as well. As logistics can be used as a tool to help save a business both money and time, it can also help the tourism industry to grow and be competitive not only within a regional level, but also in the global market.

Micro-Logistics in Chiang Mai

To start off, it is important to discuss the logistics of how tourists can first arrive in Chiang Mai. Because it is such a tourist hub, Chiang Mai offers many different ways for tourists to get here.

By air, the Chiang Mai International Airport hosts various flights from all over Thailand and other countries. Airlines such as Thai Airways, Bangkok Airways, Nok Air and other low-cost airlines are available for any passengers’ needs and budget.



Figure 7 Aerial View of Chiang Mai

As for the land transport, trains and buses are available for use. The State Railways of Thailand offers daily services from Bangkok and other nearby stations. As for buses, while they may extend up to 10-hour rides between Bangkok and Chiang Mai, it is a safe and convenient option for visitors to use.

In terms of local transportation, Micro-Logistics, the most common form of transportation in Chiang Mai among tourists is “Songtaews”. It covered pick-up trucks with rows of seats in the back that transport people along set routes (Suzanne Nam, 2014). There are many colors Songtaew in Chiang Mai. While the red functions

more like a taxi, the songtaews of other colors serve as routed buses around the city and even towards the sub-districts on the outskirts of the Chiang Mai's city district. There are two types of green songtaews that passes by Maejo University that goes to town. White Songtaews follow a route towards the Sankampaeng District. Blue Songtaews head towards Sarapee and Lamphun in the south. Yellow Songtaews travel either towards Mae Rim

or DoiSaket areas. Also, some Yellow Songtaews towards Sanpatong and ChomThong districts. Other forms of transportation include tuk-tuks and metered taxis. Though it says 'meter', most services don't count the meter. Instead, the drivers and clients reach a mutual price before pick-up. This service is provided through calling in the center. This is the best option if it's late at night and there are no more songtaews available.



Figure 8 Songtaews are very convenient in Chiang Mai

Trishaws are one of transportation services in Chiang Mai. They're slow, so tourists can have a relaxing journey to your destination. So one of their main customers seem to be older ladies who've just been to the market, returning home with their food and who probably don't fancy getting in fast-moving transport (Chiang Mai 2014).

Asides from the transportation needed by the tour service suppliers and the accessibility that will allow tourists to reach their travel destinations which are normally outside city districts, logistics play an important role in the tourism industry of Chiang Mai.

While the public transportations available are better than nothing, unfortunately songtaews may be contributing to the problem of Chiang Mai's transportation system. Because it lacks standardization, many songtaews, especially the un-routed ones, are just wandering around the city, looking for potential clients, all the while contributing to the carbondioxide emission problem of Chiang Mai. At the same time, some of these vehicles are so old and under-maintained, they seem to emit more carbondioxide than the normal vehicle. If the current standardized system of transportation in Chiang Mai is not improved, the province may have to face an environmental decline.



Figure 9 Thapae Gate

Micro-Logistic and Tourism Development in Chiang Mai

Due to the rapidly increasing number of population, both tourists and locals alike, Chiang Mai is facing a dilemma. Unplanned urban expansion, poor development practices and a substandard transportation system have caused the city extreme cases of air pollution, traffic congestion and inadequate pedestrian pathways (Kusakabe, Kyoko, 2014). Because of this, the provinces' environmental sustainability is at stake, which can then affect the tourism industry as a poor environment would most

While Chiang Mai's government and private sectors have initiated the Sustainable Urban Transport Project, the process is still underway. The local city government has now aimed to increase the "bicycle lane networks from 4% to 10% within

definitely lessen the tourist experience of Chiang Mai. It is therefore imperative to address the issues of logistics and its impact on the tourism industry in Chiang Mai.

According to the article published by the Climate and Development Knowledge Network, Chiang Mai's tourism sector alone, including associated products and services, has emitted more than 4 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2011. The largest source of these emissions come from the transportation sector of the industry (Kusakabe, Kyoko, 2014).

the city centre" (Kusakabe, Kyoko, 2014). There have also been other proposals and initiatives that aim to reduce the city's carbon dioxide emission, which includes promoting transportation alternatives such as car-free days and cycling exhibitions.



Figure 10 Wat ChediLuang

One popular alternative to minimizing carbon dioxide in the city, the Chiang Mai municipality is initiating a Non-Motorized Transport (NMT) that can promote low carbon tourism. While NMT is only suitable for short-distance trips, cycling and walking can play a crucial role in decreasing the city's pollution. According to a Policy Brief entitled, "Towards Green Pathway – Chiang Mai Municipality," 70% of car trips cover less than 5 kilometers, which can then be fairly replaceable (Kusakabe, K, 2013) with more environmentally-friendly alternatives. Steps toward this direction can directly reduce carbon dioxide emissions within the city. Besides from that, it can also lessen noise and other forms of pollution, thus creating a cleaner environment that can impact the health of the locals of the province.

Conclusion

Just as the number of tourists continues to flock Chiang Mai, the need for a cleaner and more efficient logistical system becomes apparent. While the government and stakeholders work to deal with the problems caused by the influx of tourism, certain aspects should be prioritize not only for short-term improvements, but for long term effects, as well. Due to the increasing rise of carbon dioxide emission, two issues to address regarding logistics within Chiang Mai's tourism industry are 1) Alternatives to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and 2) standardization of transportation.

As mentioned in the noted articles, alternatives for non-motorized transportation should take first priority. As there are still many downtown city tourist attractions, the government and private sectors should quickly follow through the plans of creating more bike-lanes and walkways that are safe for cyclists and pedestrians. The faster these lanes are built, the better it would be for the near future of Chiang Mai, not just environmentally, but efficiently and financially, as well.

Another way to reduce carbon dioxide emissions is to improve standardization among public transportation vehicles in Chiang Mai. As mentioned, many songtaews seem to be so old, they emit more carbon dioxide than the average vehicle. At the same time, perhaps an underground MRT or electrically-run transportation system could help bring the current organization up to date with other modes of public transport.

While these are just suggestions, most of which the government and public sectors are already slowly working towards, it is best for Chiang Mai's greater public if the city leaders would execute their plans faster. As they work to regulate the current transportation system and offer alternative transportation to tourists and local alike, Chiang Mai will continue to be a clean and beautiful tourist destination, fit to be called the 'Rose of the North.'

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