

Tourist Transportation Problems and Guidelines for Developing the Tourism Industry in Khon Kaen, Thailand

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Abstract

Lack of public transportation and traffic jams are major issues in many tourist destinations. In this study, we present the tourism-related problems of Khon Kaen, Thailand, and provide guidelines to develop its tourism industry. We performed in-depth interviews with 30 tourists, 20 local residents, and 5 government agencies in the Khon Kaen municipality. In addition, we did a small group discussion by inviting 5 tourists, 5 local residents, 5 government agencies, and 3 academicians to discuss ways to improve tourist transportation in Khon Kaen. From the study, we found that Khon Kaen lacks public transportation. We also found that, although the city can be reached by air, the current flight options are not enough to meet the needs of passengers; furthermore, the city's rail transportation needs to be developed, and there is no municipal bus service around the city or between the city and the airport. To develop transportation guidelines for the tourism industry, local governments, especially in the Khon Kaen municipality, should host an initiative and bring all stakeholders together to solve the problem. In addition, a city bus system needs to be developed immediately, and a public transportation network that links to tourist attractions is also important because it is difficult for tourists to access attractions if they do not have private transportation. Finally, public facilities such as toilets, as well as walkways for disabled people and elderly, also need to be developed, but with environmentally sustainable designs.

Keywords: tourist transportation, problems, guidelines, tourism industry

1. Introduction

Tourism encourages local development by increasing employment and national income (Szivas, Riey, & Airey, 2003). Tourism has become increasingly affordable for developed economies, as the number of international tourists has more than doubled in recent decades. The expansion of international tourism has had a large impact on transportation geography (Rodrigue, 2013). In addition, tourism affects many aspects of life for local residents, such as social, economic, cultural, and environmental (Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013). According to the Department of Tourism (2014), about 26.5 million persons entered Thailand in 2013 (Department of Tourism, 2014), and income from businesses related to tourism during this year was about 1.66 trillion baht, or 51.875 million USD (approximately 32 Baht = 1 USD) (The Center of Economic and Business Forecasting, 2013). The Marketing Research Division (2013) explains that tourists decide to travel to Thailand due to its beautiful natural resources, cheapness, and safety. Moreover, cultural tourism allows religion and beliefs to be integrated into tours (Naipinit et al., 2013a). Thailand also has strategies for development that are divided into clusters in order to develop plans for suitable areas; Khon Kaen province is grouped in the "Roi Kaen Sarn Sin" cluster (Naipinit et al., 2013b).

Transportation infrastructure is very important to regional development and it is an important factor that supports economic activity (Brida, Deidda, & Pulina, 2014). Transportation is a major factor that supports the activities of visitors; however, the region's transportation system has difficulty meeting the needs of both the city's population and visitors, as the increase in visitors and residents who use the transportation system has created more traffic jams and accidents, which affect the country's tourist image (Victor, 1992). In cities with good public transportation systems, few tourists need to hire private transport; however, in cities with poor public

transport, most tourists will have higher demand for public transportation systems and hire private transport. Thus, the number of tourist arrivals to cities as a factor in the design of urban mass transportation supply (Albalade & Bel, 2010).

Khon Kaen is a large central city in northeastern Thailand. The city is a stronghold of the region and is one of the fastest-growing economies in Thailand (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013). However, Khon Kaen faces many problems, such as traffic jams and a lack of public transportation (Economic Intelligence Center, 2014). Good public transportation is very important to Khon Kaen because of poor public transportation and traffic jams, which are obstacles to both local residents and tourists who visit Khon Kaen (Kantawateera et al., 2014). In line with researchers' findings about the importance of tourism related to transportation and the specific problems with tourism-related transportation in Khon Kaen, this paper poses research questions about the region's tourism and transportation problems, as well as propose guidelines for the development of tourism and transportation in Khon Kaen.

2. Objectives

- 1) To study tourist transportation problems in Khon Kaen
- 2) To study the guidelines needed to support tourist transportation in Khon Kaen

3. Methodology

3.1 The Significance of the Area of Study

Khon Kaen province is the hub of northeastern Thailand. The province also has a history that dates back to the Jurassic era and has many areas that can support tourism activities, such as Ubonratana Dam and national parks (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2014). Moreover, the province's tourism appeal is as a province that provides MICE (meetings, incentive travel, conventions, and exhibitions) for the country (Kantawateera et al., 2013). Nevertheless, tourism has grown too quickly in Khon Kaen. According to Khon Kaen Municipality (2014), 2,082,763 Thais and 37,329 foreigners traveled to Khon Kaen in 2012, generating approximately 278 million USD from tourism.

3.2 Methods

This study focuses on guidelines to address the tourist transportation problem. The researchers used qualitative techniques, including in-depth interviews with 30 tourists, 20 local residents, and 5 government agencies in Khon Kaen municipality. In addition, we held a small group discussion by inviting 5 tourists, 5 local residents, 5 government agencies, and 3 academicians to discuss ways to improve tourist transportation in Khon Kaen.

3.3 Data Analysis

Researchers analyzed this data using content analysis and descriptive analysis.

4. Literature Review

Transportation is an essential part of tourism, as it brings visitors to tourist attractions (Dwyer & Forsyth, 1993). Transportation systems can be defined as networks that must be connected to travel routes. Natural and cultural resources and livelihoods support tourism (Bramwell & Lane, 2002). Government plays a significant role in developing the infrastructure to support tourist transportation (Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2008). Transportation network and infrastructure is a significant factor that affects the success of tourism development (Prideaux, 2000). Currie and Falconer (2013) suggested that tourism stakeholders should to increase reliance on transportation systems from central transportation hubs to public transportation areas for delivery to tourist attractions.

Public transportation increases the opportunities for travelers who want to visit out-of-town attractions (Matei, 2005). Air travel is a significant factor that has changed people's minds concerning time and distance, and demand for air transportation increases every day (Mammadove, 2012). In addition, Culpan (1987) explains the components of international transportation systems that are related to tourism, such as airports and air transportation, as well as sea and land-based transportation. Hall (1999) proposes that transportation is important to a tourism system. Blancheton and Marchi (2013) suggested that rail tourism systems is an effective approach to tourism sustainability because rail systems can bring many people to tourist attractions at once and are safe for the environment.

Key success factors for leisure and tourist transportation involve target group identification, catchment areas, situations regarding motorized individual traffic, and intensive, creative, and continuous market communication (Gronau & Kagermeier, 2007). In addition, many development activities that support tourism may bring negative

consequences to the environment (Samat & Harun, 2013). Sakolnakorn et al. (2013) studied tourism in Phuket Island and explored the transportation system in order to resolve its problems, such as by suggesting better public transportation and improving the island's road network, because its problems affected the province's economy. In addition, Sorupia (2005) showed that the best method of transportation in tourist areas would be for the local government to establish an electric bus line around Khon Kaen. The region's leadership should improve the system first in order to respond to both the province's people and tourism needs.

As mentioned above, transportation is important to encourage the region's tourism industry. Khon Kaen sees increasing tourist numbers every year; however, transportation is the largest problem. This paper will discuss the problems of tourism related to transportation and will provide development guidelines for solving the problem.

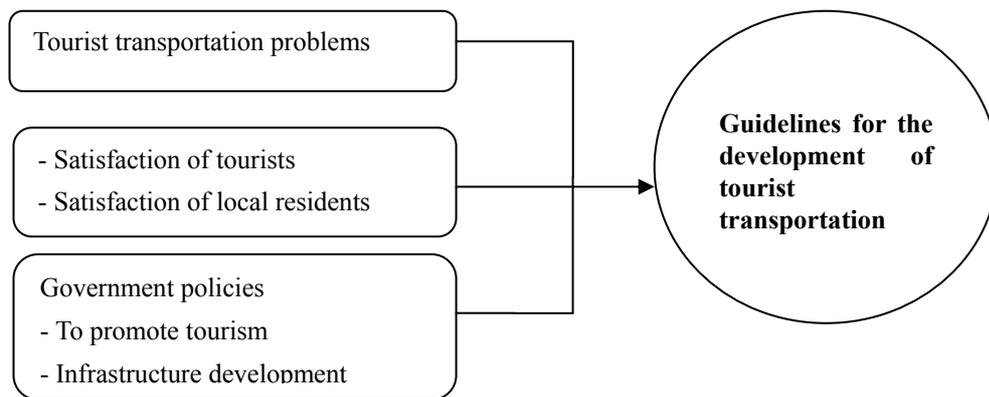


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

5. Results

Khon Kaen is a comfortable city to visit because the province in which it is located is a junction for the region, with an airport, train connections, and highways, all of which can help visitors decide to visit the city. However, Khon Kaen has several problems related to tourism and transportation, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Transportation problems related to tourism in Khon Kaen city

Problems	Situation
Public transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No public transportation to transfer tourists between the airport and Khon Kaen. - Public transportation in Khon Kaen does not cover all tourist destinations. - There are no city buses in Khon Kaen; there are only minibuses (a car with two rows of seats and a roof over the cab). - No subway, monorail, or sky train.
Taxi meters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No public transportation network that links to tourist attractions. - Many taxis have meters, but most drivers will request the fare they want.
Trains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Khon Kaen has a train station, but there are too few trains to and from Bangkok. - No local trains connect to neighboring cities.
Bus stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The bus station is far from the downtown area, and there is no public transportation for travelers between the bus station and the downtown area.
Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No public transportation is available between the airport and downtown. - There is not enough room available at the airport for outbound passengers.

This research provides guidelines for solving the transportation problems in Khon Kaen for visitors or activities related to tourism, as the issues must be managed and need to be improved and developed sustainably. So, the guidelines to improve the tourist transportation system in Khon Kaen are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Guidelines for the development of tourist transportation in Khon Kaen

Guidelines for development	Key Stakeholder(s)
- Establish an electric bus line that can transportation passengers to the bus station, airport, and tourist attractions around Khon Kaen	- Provincial Office for Local Administration and Khon Kaen Municipality
- Develop walkways for the elderly and people with disabilities. The sidewalks in the city need to be renovated in order to be suitable for users; also, make separate pathways for disabled tourists. This issue is very important for people in the city and for visitors.	- Provincial Office for Local Administration and Khon Kaen Municipality
- Standardize and enforce the use of taxi meters	- Police and the Department of Land Transportation should arrest taxi drivers who do not use meters and take illegal advantage of passengers.
- Develop a local sky train link between all districts around Khon Kaen	- Provincial Office for Local Administration and Khon Kaen Municipality
- Develop more railway routes that connect to multiple provinces, such as Kalasin, Maha Sarakham, and Roi Et. All of these provinces have tourist attractions but lack public transportation. The current train route travels from Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen, Udonthani, and Nong Khai province.	- State Railway of Thailand and the central government
- Set up more trains to travel the Bangkok-Khon Kaen-Nong Khai route	- State Railway of Thailand
- Improve the transportation network, especially the major and minor roads. Moreover, support transportation channels to cover increases in traffic lanes, and manage transportation planning systems for the province. Also, increase the public transportation utility for people in the city.	- Provincial Office for Local Administration and Khon Kaen Municipality

6. Discussion

6.1 Public Transportation

Nowadays, Khon Kaen has many activities related to tourism, and many people travel to visit Khon Kaen every day; however the city lacks public transportation and what public transportation is presently available is not safe (for instance, a common form of tourist transportation is a pick-up truck that has been modified by installing a roof bar and 2 rows of seats in the truck bed; passengers both sit and stand in the truck bed). Government should improve collaboration between government agencies (such as Khon Kaen Provincial Administrative Organization or Khon Kaen Municipality and Department of Land Transport) and transportation companies regarding the bus route to revise and improve it as well as renovate the buses, because the bus route does not presently cover all tourist destinations. Hall (1999) stated that transportation is the potential to encouraging host-tourist interaction, and Samat (2010) also suggested that road networks can support the tourism industry.

In addition, Khon Kaen needs to develop all forms of public transportation such as electric bus, sky train, local railway, and linkage to neighboring cities. Local tram railways within Khon Kaen province need to be developed, and the Khon Kaen Provincial Administrative Organization should be an investment source. In addition, all public transportation that will be developed should accommodate older people and those with disabilities.

6.2 Safety Systems with Transportation Service

The issue of safety systems is a basic requirement of tourism (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003) because the system is one component of visitors' decisions to travel (Mammadov, 2012). In the transportation in Khon Kaen much to monitoring the system. In regard to the safety of the transportation system the local government should consider disciplining the transport facilitator because of the direct impact on the image of Khon Kaen tourism; moreover, the transportation facilitator needs to realize the importance of the tourism system and apply both morals and fairness to how he carries out his job and manages the service. However, in the research we found unfairness problems with the facilitator of transportation, such as the taxis not surcharging tourists. This situation threatens visitor behavior, so in this situation it is important for the facilitator of transport service to check the movement.

6.3 Public Facility-related Tourism

Collaboration between airline business and government agencies for planning of airport access facilities is very important and has a positive effect upon both business and government (Bieger & Wittmer, 2006). In June 2014, Khon Kaen increased its flights from Bangkok to Khon Kaen (more than 7 flights/day in 2014, compared with 2013 and prior, which had only 3-4 flight/day). This is adequate support for residents and tourists who wish travel to Khon Kaen and neighboring municipalities; however, the problem with Khon Kaen Airport is that it does not have enough space for outbound passengers (the boarding area is small); therefore, it should expand and renovate the passenger areas. In addition, public transportation for bringing people from the airport to the city is still a problem because, for now, most arriving passengers have no choice to go to another place and have only rental car, taxis, and asking a friend to pick them up at the airport as transportation options. Thus, it is imperative that a bus route from the airport to the city be developed immediately. In addition, tourist destinations in Khon Kaen not only need improved public transportation but also public facilities, such as toilets and walkways for older people, in all tourist attractions with clear signs in Thai and English. Therefore, Khon Kaen's urban development plan should set up a new model and include all facilities to support both local residents and tourists; however every development plan to support tourism and the local population must be environmentally friendly.

7. Conclusion

Tourist mobility impacts the environment (Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014). Many studies have shown that tourism mobility is related to accidents, traffic jams, and air pollution and has a negative impact upon local residents (Levine, Kim, & Nitz, 1995; Dickinson & Robbins, 2008; Sakolnakorn & Naipinit, 2011). Public transportation is also a significant environmental concern because it can bring a lot of people together in one space, such as on a train or bus, as well as reduce traffic jams and the number of private car accidents. In this paper, the researchers discussed the importance of tourism-related public transportation. It is really important for policy makers to implement appropriate transportation policies and facilities when they set up their tourism policies and plans. In addition, in order to develop transportation to support tourism and local residents in the Khon Kaen province, the Khon Kaen municipality should host an initiative and bring all stakeholders together to solve the problem.

However, research has found that the facilitation of transportation services may threaten tourism and decrease the number of visitors due to concerns about fairness. Also, the national government and provincial government have to make rules to control and facilitate transportation together, because the topic is so important to the image of the province and the tourism industry. The topic of government management of transportation services requires a great deal of management (Aubrey & Bowie, 2007), such as registering and training transportation personnel and facilitating tourism.

Finally, the researchers would like to suggest that the Thai government collaborate with Local Administration Organizations (LAO) in all areas of northeastern Thailand to rethink the national development plan in all transportation networks, as well as implement a comprehensive transportation network that will reach all areas in the northeastern region. Even though the number of people in this area is increasing and many foreigners are deciding to make their homes in the Northeast, public transportation still cannot support the quality of life of people and lack of public transportation is an obstacle to development in all social aspects, such as economy, tourism, education and social development.

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