

Thailand: Popular Eco-Activities & UN Heritage Sites

Mir Tafveez Mehmood

Research Scholar, Department of Tourism Studies

Central University of Kashmir.

ABSTRACT

Thailand has lot to offer to nature lovers and if planned properly, the country has got strong potential for being counted among the top Ecotourism Destinations in future. In Thailand new holiday resorts and tourism projects are designed with sustainability in mind. The island of Kho Khao in Thailand which was devastated by the 2004 tsunami has acted as a reminder to many resort owners who have taken into consideration the environmental and climatic safety standards while renovating or building resorts. The article provides for the eco-activities and heritage dimensions and aims at providing insights into the various eco tourism activities and heritage sites of Thailand.

Keywords: *Thailand, Eco-activities, Ecotourism, Conservation, Heritage Sites,*

I. INTRODUCTION

Eco Tourism in Thailand has started to gain importance owing to the fact that this tourist hotspot has managed to conserve its resplendent natural beauty despite hordes of tourist flocking the peninsula. Beaches, mountains, rivers, valleys and a vast green cover attract tourists to this kingdom. The hills in the north of Thailand are teeming with wild animals, birds and rare plants in dense tropical jungles. Thailand is among the most popular countries for tourists and each year welcomes millions of travelers. In the late 1980's the government prohibited all forestry activities until the point the forests recover and can be sustainably managed. The country is rich in deep jungles, rivers and waterfalls, hot springs and terraced fields of rice which all together offer a great opportunity for trekking activities. Treks can last several days, while overnight stays are arranged in hill tribe villages in bamboo huts of local people's homes (Jha, 2016).

II. POPULAR ECO-ACTIVITIES IN THAILAND

1. Trekking and Cycling

For nature lovers, Trekking and cycling in Thailand are considered among the best loved outdoor activities. Considering its wealth of natural beauty, Thailand is a Trekker's paradise. From limestone caves and amazing rock formations to its numerous waterfalls one can enjoy breathtaking sights from a mountain top. One can

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choose to go on a single day activity or undertake a week long strenuous trek. To reduce the impact of carbon emissions on the environment economic modes of travel like cycling and trekking are also encouraged in Thailand

2. Nature Study and Bird Watching

Thailand is a popular destination for Bird Watching and Nature Study. The hills of Chaing Mai house many rare species of flora and fauna. Among the most popular spots for bird watchers is the Nakhon Ratchasima while Phetchaburi has Thailand's biggest national park housing more than 250 species of bird, including the grey peacock and the great Hornbill. Thailand has more than 1,200 species of butterflies including the world's largest moth, popularly known as the Atlas moth which has got an unbelievable wingspan of eight inches and resembles a snake's head. Khao Yai National Park at Nakhon Ratchasima and emerald forest of Phetchaburi are the ideal locations for nature study. Thi Lo Su waterfall is among the most popular and beautiful waterfalls in Thailand and is located in Umphang Wildlife Sanctuary. Thi Lo Su waterfall is also the highest waterfall in Thailand.

3. Agrotourism

Agrotourism is a concept that stems out of eco tourism where visitors or tourists are encouraged to get acquainted with agricultural life at a farm or ranch first hand. Agrotourism promotes the well being of agricultural life through increased income and employment thereby fostering economic stability at the rural level. Visitors feel good owing to the fact that they are also giving something back to the agro community. From endless rice farms and cultivation of herbs to gardens full of flowering plants and fruit orchards Agrotourism comprises of all aspects of agriculture, floriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry thus making for a delightful firsthand experience for visitors. For the ideal experience of local farm life and hill tribe plantations in Thailand one can visit Ban Hua Mae Kham Agrotourism Center at Chiang Rai and Phu Rua Highland Agricultural Research Station. The Thai Elephant Conservation Center, Lampang offers a very interesting activity of learning how to tame and take care of an elephant. Agrotours in Thailand includes the study of winery, tour to private fruit orchards and learning of traditional Thai cooking.

4. Village Homestay

There are many communities in Thailand that welcome foreign tourists to their homes to experience their lifestyle. In recent years this particular activity has grown in popularity as it offers the tourist with the unique insight into how farmers and village dwellers go about their daily lives of farming, livestock raising, fishing, etc. In Thailand, Hill Tribe culture and traditions are especially popular among tourists. At Chiang Mai one can meet and live with many hill tribes in their natural surroundings. This village homestay concept is a good thing for Thailand due to the fact that these gentle village dwellers are neither bothered by tourists nor have they been

corrupted by the western influence that tourists tend to bring with them. So their lives remain untouched by modern civilization. One can take a nature trip and study the local riverside community at Samut Songkhram. And if one wants to learn squid fishing and rubber tapping with the local people the Krabi in Thailand offers an ideal location. Also, one can learn how to make fishing nets and catch crabs by living with the local fishing community of Phang Nga in Thailand.

5. Floating markets

The floating markets of Thailand serve both the local community and the tourists. For local community it acts as place for buying and selling of vegetable, fruits, etc and for tourists it acts as a great sightseeing attraction.

6. Elephant Camp Tour

Riding an elephant in Thailand is one of the most sought after “bucket-list” activities. There are proper Elephant tours being offered to tourists to observe nature in its natural form. Tourists climb on the elephant's back and ride down through lush green jungle to observe the rich flora and fauna.

7. Camping

Whether you are looking for a fun-filled activity or simply want to relax your mind than camping in Thailand is definitely the best option for you. Experience the joy of camping in the open air and sleep under the clear blue sky. Some of the best options for going camping in Thailand are Koh Ra in the Andaman Sea, Kaeng Krachan National Park, Pang Ung, Doi Inthanon, Khao Yai National Park and Phu Thub Berg

8. Bamboo Rafting

One can explore the local streams and forests of Thailand the traditional way, floating on a bamboo raft. These rafts are made from dried bamboos tied together to form the structure of the raft which helps you float on the calm and gentle streams which will be a relaxing experience that you can avail during your trip to Thailand.

III. UN HERITAGE SITES IN THAILAND

1. Ban Chiang Archaeological Site (1992)

Ban Chiang Archaeological Site is located in the Nong Han District (Udon Thani Province) of Thailand. This archaeological site was discovered in 1966 and due to its red painted pottery, it quickly gained the attention of the public. This site provides important insight into the history as rich remains of pottery had been unearthed from this archaeological site.

2. Dong Phayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex (2005)

Dong Phayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex is among the first two sites that were listed under the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Thailand. Measuring 230 kilometres in land area, Dong Phayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex consists of the Ta Phraya National Park along the Cambodian border and the Khao Yai National Park. The area includes 392 bird species, 200 reptile species and over 800 fauna species. Being a rich reserve of flora and fauna, the site is known worldwide for protecting the endangered and threatened species.

3. Historic City of Ayutthaya (1991)

Founded in 14th century, the ancient and historic city of Ayutthaya went under the Burmese rule as the city was captured in 1569. Many artistic and valuable objects were lost during this time. This historical park covers the ancient city of Ayutthaya and whatever ruins is left of it. It was in 1969 that efforts were made to renovate and preserve the ruins of the ancient city. Due to its rich culture and heritage, it was declared a Historical park in 1976 and in 1991, it was declared one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Thailand .

4. Historic Town of Sukhothai and Associated Historic Towns (1991)

The Historic Town of Sukhothai and Associated Historic Towns is situated in the lower northern region of present-day Thailand. The said twons are three physically closely related ancient towns. The total property area is 11,852 hectares comprising Sukhothai 7,000 hectares, Si Satchanalai 4,514 hectares, and Kamphaeng Phet 338 hectares. These historic and ancient towns were listed under the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Thailand in 1991. Sukhothai was the capital of the first Kingdom of Siam in the 13th and 14th centuries. It has a number of fine monuments, illustrating the beginnings of Thai architecture.

5. Thungyai-Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuaries (1991)

Thung Yai-Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the west of Thailand in Uthai Thani, Tak, and Kanchanaburi provinces, alongside the border with Myanmar. The property combines two contiguous sanctuaries, Thung Yai Naresuan and Huai Kha Khang, separately established as sanctuaries in 1972 and 1974, respectively. The wildlife sanctuaries is located close to the Myanmar border and covers over 600,000 hectares of land area. The two wildlife sanctuaries contain examples of almost all the forest types of continental South-East Asia. The sanctuary serves as a natural habitat for a wide range of animal species including large mammals and birds and land vertebrates. They are home to a very diverse array of animals, including 77% of the large mammals (especially elephants and tigers), 50% of the large birds and 33% of the land vertebrates to be found in this region.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thailand has lot to offer to nature lovers and if planned properly, the country has got strong potential for being counted among the top Ecotourism Destinations in future. The article provides for the eco-activities and heritage dimensions and aims at providing insights into the various eco tourism activities and heritage sites of Thailand. Thailand has to shift its strategy from mass tourism to alternate forms of Tourism in order to make its Tourism industry sustainable. There is a need that the government of Thailand and other stakeholders draft a strong policy for its Tourism Industry that would help to make its tourism industry sustainable.

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