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Contact: 91-231-2535706/07 Fax: 91-231-2535708 Website: www.siberindia.co.in

Email: sajmr@siberindia.co.in, sibersajmr@gmail.com

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A Study on the Potentiality of Sustainable Ecotourism In Dawei and Myeik at Tanintharyi Region

TIN AUNG LWIN

Department of Economics,
Yangon University of Education, Myanmar

Abstract : Tanintharyi Region is existed with islands including the Mergui Archipelago, which is one of the country's most popular tourist destinations, comprising more than 800 attractive islands for the ecotourism. The study aims to examine whether sustainable development of Ecotourism at Tanintharyi region is possible or not. This study uses a descriptive method with the primary data and secondary data. It was conducted with three groups of survey questionnaires: one for local residents with 150 sample sizes, international and domestic tourist with 50 sample size each. The research is done on both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Dawei and Myeik was selected for case study. The findings illustrated that ecotourism in Dawei and Myeik has impacted local livelihoods and other environmental, economic, socio-cultural factors in both positive and negative ways. In this study, the positive effects were found to be more significant than the negative effects. Importantly, local residents in the study area expresses optimism about the future of ecotourism and have claimed that any negative consequences cannot discourage their desire for continuing ecotourism. Government should improve infrastructures more, provide social and environmental awareness trainings and stakeholders and tourists should cooperate with authority and community and report on negative impacts for responsible practices.

Introduction

Tourism represents a major sector of the global economy and considered to be an effective driver of economic growth and development in destination areas. Tourism may be taken into account as the relationships and phenomena emerging from the voyages and temporary stays of people traveling mainly for leisure and recreational objectives. It is prone to continue developing in the future because more people seek opportunities for leisure and recreation away from their surroundings. Tourism provides economic and social benefits but it is also a threat to sustainable growth and development.

Myanmar is characterized by diverse ecosystems, rich biodiversity and a wealth of ethnic lifestyles and cultures. It is the responsibility of the citizens to hand-over these gifts from nature, and the invaluable heritage of the ancestors, to future generations. Protected areas are established to conserve these gifts, including snow-capped mountains, wetlands, distinct forest types, seascapes, coral reefs and their constituent biodiversity. They are also powerful economic drivers that contribute not only to ecosystems and biodiversity conservation, but also to the development of our local, sub-national and national economies. At the same time, protected areas are perfect destinations for ecotourism.

The rapid expansion of Myanmar's tourism sector presents special opportunities to promote ecotourism that focuses upon our protected areas with their rare wildlife, beautiful land and seascapes, and diverse ethnic lifestyles and cultures. As we progressively open these special areas for ecotourism activity it is most important to safeguard and protect their unique and valuable assets. As we do so, all of us must share responsibilities. We must work together to raise environmental and cultural awareness and respect, to minimize negative impacts, to deliver direct financial benefits for conservation and livelihood development, to empower local people, and to consistently strengthen and improve management systems that sustain these areas.

Growing extent tourism in particular due to the natural beauty of the archipelago and the

Maungmagan beach near Dawei especially, Mergui Archipelago comprises with over 800 beautiful islands. Due to its virtual isolation, the islands and surrounding seas are alive with an amazing diversity of flora & fauna and very beautiful underwater scenes and marine life. Salone tribes (Sea Gipsy), the inhabitants of the islands are well-known for their skillful diving. Maungmagan beach, Dawei Peninsula (jungle trekking, snorkeling), Dawei, Myeik, Kawthaung (Starting point for Myanmar-based cruises to Myeik), Lampi island, 115 island (Snorkeling, mini hiking and jungle trekking) Myauk Ni island, Horse Shoes island, etc. Ecotourism to the area is having the potential to bring a wide range of benefits to local communities. Additional / alternative sources of income from guiding, homestays, and the sale of craft materials. Increased income in region from accommodation, food sales, etc. Multiplier effects through the purchase of local goods and services for tourists. The introduction of toilets and waste disposal for tourists would likely to lead to their adoption by local people with consequent improvements to local health. Increased attention by the government to the protection of natural resources on which local people depend for elements of their livelihood. Increased pride taken by local inhabitants in their culture and their surroundings. Therefore, this study emphasized the potentiality of sustainable ecotourism in the study area.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to identify the current status of Ecotourism at Tanintharyi region, to find out the perceptions of local residents on impacts of Ecotourism and to find out the awareness of domestic tourists and international tourists on sustainability.

Method of Study

This study uses a descriptive method. The primary data and secondary data are used. The information, facts and figures of the secondary data are obtained from the relevant ministry and association such as the Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, publications, newspapers and internet websites. Primary data are collected from the result of interviews and survey questionnaire to domestic tourists, international tourists and local residents based on simple random sampling procedure.

Literature Review

Deriving from the trend of globalization and urbanization, tourism to the natural areas has become more popular during the recent years. To balance their busy city lives people crave for wildlife experiences in the natural environments and people living in these areas have acknowledged this need and turned their conventional source of livelihood such as fishing, farming and forestry into running tourism business (Buckley 2003).

Bromberek (2009) notices that ecotourism has become a fashionable trend, which emphasizes a direct contact with the nature protecting and conserving it. In recent years the term of ecotourism has become widely visible in the tourism industry. The trend of ecotourism derives from the trend of the ideology of responsible, sustainable and ecological consuming concerning any kind of activity including tourism. It has been argued whether these ecological and sustainable values are only temporary trends or stable evolution in the tourism. This is an issue where scholars have not reached consensus upon and only time will tell how the future will be. The concept of ecotourism is complex and frequently it is mixed with the concepts of nature-based, rural, adventure or other types of tourism. Though, many times ecotourism forms an amalgam with some of the mentioned types of tourism. Moreover, it is difficult to determine what lies in the essence of ecotourism: what kind of activities, people, management and environment are involved? (Weaver 2008).

United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 2002) defines ecotourism as nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas. Similarly, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES 2006) defines ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that protects the nature and creates welfare to local communities.

To make the difference more clear Martha Honey has listed six key principle characters of ecotourism:

1. Minimize impact
2. Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
3. Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
4. Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
5. Provide financial support and empowerment for local people
6. Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental and social climate (Martha Honey).

The linkage between environment and development was globally recognized in 1980, when the International Union for the Conservation of Nature published the World Conservation Strategy and used the term "sustainable development" and promoted the concept (IUCN, 1980 as cited in Holmberg & Sandbrook, 1992).

Sustainable development represents a compromise, in that it suggests that the twin goals of environmental sustainability and human economic development are compatible, attainable, and mutually inseparable (Simon, 1989; Redclift, 1991). Overton (1999) claimed that sustainable development must deal with a long-term strategy rather than a short-term policy agenda. However, in order to be sustainable, our environmental, economic, and social systems need to show a high degree of stability and integrity over a very long period of time.

Overton (1999) pointed out that environmental sustainability is the process of ensuring the current course of interaction with the environment is pursued, with the notion of keeping the environment as pristine and natural as possible. Economic sustainability requires the achievement of poverty reduction, equity, and efficient use of resources (Elliott, 2006). Social sustainability proponents also believe that sustainable development is best understood in terms of people-oriented activities, and the sustainability of a human community (Allen & Thomas, 2000).

The three perspectives on sustainable development described above each have a unique focus in their approach, they also share a number of common characteristics and goals. Thus, overall, it can be said that sustainable development seeks to meet five broad requirements:

1. The integration of conservation and development
2. The satisfaction of basic human needs
3. The achievement of equity and social justice
4. The provision of social self-determination and cultural diversity
5. The maintenance of ecological integrity. (Jacobs & Munroe, 1987 as cited in Holmberg & Sandbrook, 1992)

The linkage between ecotourism and sustainable development has been explored by many academics recently. This is well represented by Wall (1997), who clearly indicated that ecotourism has the potential to contribute to sustainable development on the grounds that it is often viewed as a sustainable form of tourism. However, in order to contribute to sustainable development, ecotourism must be economically viable, ecologically sensitive, and culturally appropriate. In fact, these three factors are held to be the three primary prerequisites for achieving sustainable development (Wall, 1997).

Myanmar Ecotourism Policies, Plans and Strategies

Ministry of Hotel and Tourism of Myanmar set out 14 key objectives under six strategic programs. They are as follows;

Strategic Program 1: Strengthen Institutional Arrangements • develop an ecotourism planning and management framework • strengthen the legal and regulatory environment for ecotourism • develop an Ecotourism Partnerships Framework

Strategic Program 2: Strengthen Ecotourism Planning in and around Protected Areas • build human resource capacity in ecotourism planning and management • design ecotourism management plans for protected areas

Strategic Program 3: Engage Local Communities • raise community awareness of ecotourism and protected area issues and opportunities • promote business opportunities for protected area communities • build private sector knowledge of good practices in engaging protected area communities

Strategic Program 4: Invest in Infrastructure and Responsible Business Models • improve infrastructure in and around protected areas • promote innovative business models for protected areas • promote responsible practices in elephant tourism

Strategic Program 5: Strengthen Research and Monitoring Frameworks • deepen knowledge of the tourism and protected areas relationship

Strategic Program 6: Strengthen Marketing and Interpretation • raise national awareness of Myanmar ecotourism • develop and align a Myanmar Ecotourism Marketing Plan within the broader tourism marketing strategy

Findings and Discussion

Tourist flows in Dawei and Myeik is examined by two ways. One was conducting questionnaires to local people especially when would be the time for more tourists in Dawei and Myeik. Another is from secondary data analysis of Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, Tanintharyi Region. According to Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, Tanintharyi Region, the study areas have been integrated to be year round tourist season especially with many caravan tours that are coming into the region through border crossing cities from Thailand. However, it could not be year round tourist seasons according to local people responses tourism season is to be called summer period and the months with long school holidays.

Table 1. Monthly Tourists Arrivals with Caravan Tour through Border Cities 2016-2018

Month	2016		2017		2018		Total	
	Quantity (Unit)	%	Quantity (Unit)	%	Quantity (Unit)	%	Quantity (Unit)	%
January	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
February	2	1.47	12	2.64	27	8.94	41	4.60
March	24	17.65	66	14.54	21	6.95	111	12.44
April	-	-	49	10.79	28	9.27	77	8.63
May	-	-	26	5.73	-	-	26	2.91
June	-	-	61	13.44	11	3.64	72	8.07
July	14	10.29	42	9.25	-	-	56	6.28

August	-	-	34	7.49	61	20.20	95	10.65
September	-	-	18	3.96	80	26.49	98	10.99
October	-	-	87	19.16	39	12.91	126	14.13
November	-	-	11	2.42	-	-	11	1.23
December	96	70.59	48	10.57	35	11.59	179	20.07
Total	136	100%	454	100%	302	100%	892	100%

Source: Survey Data, 2019

Table 2. : International Tourist Arrivals to Dawei, Myeik and Kawthaung through Three Border Cities 2014-2018

District	Dawei		Myeik		Kawthaung		Total	
	Quantity (Unit)	%	Quantity (Unit)	%	Quantity (Unit)	%	Quantity (Unit)	%
2014	4224	15.7	9477	3.5	217058	80.8	268759	100
2015	46896	14.16	15085	4.55	269176	81.28	331157	100
2016	41203	12.16	9956	2.94	287779	84.90	338938	100
2017	8230	2.39	9822	2.86	325777	94.74	343829	100
2018	9302	2.59	7321	2.04	342109	95.37	358732	100
Total	147855	9	51661	3.15	1441899	87.84	1641415	100

Source: Survey Data, 2019

Table 3 : Respondents' Perception on Tourists Arrival and Tourist Seasons in Dawei and Myeik

Tourist Seasons	Respondents' Perception on Tourists Arrival			
	International Tourists (n=150)		Domestic Tourists(n=150)	
	Quantity (Unit)	%	Quantity (Unit)	%
June-August	20	13.3	12	8
September-November	35	23.3	29	19.3
December-February	38	25.3	34	22.7
March-May (Summer School-holidays)	36	24	57	38
Year Round	21	14	18	12

Source: Survey Data, 2019

Perceptions of The Respondents in Potentiality on Sustainable Ecotourism Development in The Survey Area

Concerning of potentiality in ecotourism, the considered socio-cultural, environmental and economic factors are analyzed as follow from local residents, international tourists and domestic tourists.

(A) Socio-cultural Perception of The Respondents in Potentiality on Sustainable Ecotourism in The Survey Area

The questionnaire design was to measure the respondents' socio-cultural perception on the potentiality on ecotourism to be sustainable and developed in the survey area. The data shows that ecotourism builds up social solidarity as people worked together to develop in which the mean score is 3.55 and the standard deviation is 0.96. It shows that ecotourism activities and services can make community closer to work together and it helps the area to develop as a social improvement. The second highest is that ecotourism brings infrastructure improvement

for sustainable development in which the mean is 3.46 and the standard deviation is 1.04. The respondents pointed out that there will be more accessible roads and recreational buildings with the tourism improvement. The third highest is that ecotourism creates behavioral changes in society in which the mean is 3.34 and the standard deviation is 1.17. The respondents pointed out that there would be competition among locals and it would change the behavior of people as the result of the emergence of economic benefits to some local people. The respondents assumed that ecotourism will create education support, living standard condition improvement in which the mean is 3.30 and the standard deviation is 1.18. The mean of the factor that “ecotourism will create crime cases and child labor more” is 2.70 and its standard deviation is 1.32. It means that there would not be more crime cases and child labor issues in future.

Table 4 : Socio-cultural Perception of The Respondents in Potentiality on Sustainable Ecotourism in The Survey Area

Dimension	Mean Score of The Respondents	Standard Deviation
Ecotourism builds up social solidarity as people worked together to develop	3.55	0.96
Ecotourism brings infrastructure improvement for sustainable development	3.46	1.04
Ecotourism creates behavioral changes in society	3.34	1.17
Ecotourism creates education support, living standard condition improvement	3.30	1.18
Ecotourism will create crime cases and child labor more	2.70	1.32

Source: Survey Data, 2019

(B) Environmental Perception of The Respondents in Potentiality on Sustainable Ecotourism in The Survey Area

The questionnaire design was to measure the respondents’ environmental perception on the potentiality on ecotourism to be sustainable and developed in the survey area. The data shows that ecotourism will encourage local to look after the forests, islands and beaches, in which the mean score is highest, 3.80 and the standard deviation is 1.15. It shows that there is potentiality of environmental sustainability that helps for ecotourism development. The second highest is that ecotourism will lead local people to more environmental awareness in which the mean is 3.47 and the standard deviation is 1.19. The third highest is measured that ecotourism will help for the improvement of household rubbish disposal in which the mean is 3.44 and the standard deviation is 1.31. It shows that it will help local residents for proper littering habit. The respondents pointed that there would be an increase quantity of plastic bottles at beaches and islands in which the mean is 3.43 and the standard deviation is 1.21 as they concern especially with domestic tourists. And the last point is that ecotourism will help to restrict of wood for local use in the survey area and a decrease in firewood collection in which the mean is 3.13 the lowest, and the standard deviation is 1.38 as they still concern that some local people will still in need of collecting wood for housing and cooking purpose.

Table 5 : Environmental Perception of The Respondents in Potentiality on Sustainable Ecotourism in The Survey Area

Dimension	Mean Score of The Respondents	Standard Deviation
Ecotourism will restrict of wood for local use in Dawei/Myeik area and a decrease in firewood collection	3.13	1.38
Ecotourism will help for the improvement of household rubbish disposal	3.44	1.31

Ecotourism will encourage local to look after the forests, islands and beaches	3.80	1.15
An increase quantity of plastic bags and plastic drinking bottles at beaches and islands	3.43	1.21
More environmental awareness of local people	3.47	1.19

Source: Survey Data, 2019

(C) Economic Perception of The Respondents in Potentiality on Sustainable Ecotourism in The Survey Area

The questionnaire design was to measure the respondents' economic perception on the potentiality on ecotourism to be sustainable and developed in the survey area. The data shows that ecotourism will sustainably create job opportunities for local in which the mean is highest 3.64 and the standard deviation is 1.04. It shows a good signal that it is economical potentiality to sustain ecotourism as job opportunities help the local residents. The second highest is that ecotourism will sustainably generate extra income for locals, in which the mean is 3.32 and the standard deviation is 1.18. The third highest is that the respondents concern with income from all tourist service jobs are sufficient in which the mean 3.19 and the standard deviation is 1.27. The two lowest are relatively pointed out that ecotourism will create equal and fair distribution of income and all villages can access ecotourism jobs. It shows the respondents' concern that not all villages can access ecotourism jobs and as a result, it will create low equal and fair distribution of income.

Table 6 : Economic Perception of The Respondents in Potentiality on Sustainable Ecotourism in The Survey Area

Dimension	Mean Score of The Respondents	Standard Deviation
Ecotourism will sustainably create job opportunities for locals	3.64	1.04
Ecotourism will sustainably generate extra income for locals	3.32	1.18
All villages can access ecotourism jobs	3.05	1.32
Income from all tourist service jobs are sufficient	3.19	1.27
Ecotourism will create equal and fair distribution of income	3.09	1.31

Source: Survey Data, 2019

Assessing tourists' flows play essential role to enhance further tourism development in Dawei and Myeik areas. Tourist flows for international tourists from border gateways were rising gradually year after year in Tanintharyi region under secondary data, primary data and field observation. In case of domestic tourists, although there is no secondary data, the number of domestic tourists were soaring up based on key informant interview and focus group discussion of local people. As a consequence, the findings for tourist flows of both international and domestic were increasing arrivals in Tanintharyi Region. Due to the secondary data, with the increasing tourist flows, there was an increasing number of rooms and hotels in the survey areas.

According to the survey interviews, many residents acknowledged that roads were improved and better than before. Yet, the residents claimed that there are still some problems concerning transportation in rural villages especially in rainy season since roads were not constructed to use cars. And the train transport was still needed to enhance for the convenience of the visitors.

Employment opportunities, income generation and their economic activities of local people were seen as an economic impact. Employment opportunities in survey area were the highest

position with almost all people can find a job easily in survey areas within their population although some are going Thailand for other well-paid jobs. So, the finding pointed out employment situation in survey area are going well and supporting local people through tourism development. Based on three groups of economic activities in survey area, hotels and guest houses group could run their tourism economic activities very well in compared with the rest two groups which were souvenir shops group and transportation services and local tour guides group. Although most of the local people economic activities rely on agriculture, mining and fisheries, these tourism economic activities are involved in the development. The income situation between the rest two groups were no have great disparity. Besides, based on interview and group discussion, the income generation became higher than previous three years. In employment case, the finding was quite obvious because tourism development created job opportunities for local people. Only very small amount of people changed their jobs in the tourist low season.

Education support, change of living standard, Myanmar traditional norms and behaviors are seen as positive social affect. The positive social affect was high therefore those positive social impacts could be maintained to be better situation. The negative social impact assessment measured with child rate, sex tourism, child labor criteria. The outcome of negative social impact turns into totally positive ones because the finding shows there was no negative social impact of ecotourism in survey area other than a very few number of conflicts between the visitors and the residents. Those negative matters minimized as much as the local people controlled to be a sustainable development with ecotourism.

Suggestions

To enhance Ecotourism development and its sustainability, the following suggestions are to be considered in the survey area.

From the government side, fully implementation of 14 key objectives under six strategic programs of Ecotourism strategy and leads to the Responsible Community Involvement in Tourism, adopting and strengthening better regulation for social and environmental issues as it relates to the Ecotourism sector, building the capacity of policy, regulatory and inspection authorities at regional level, increasing awareness of relevant regulatory and policy frameworks and raising transparency are required.

From the business owners and investors of the tourism side, supporting the principles of the government's implementation of the ecotourism policies, plans and strategies which relate to sustainable and responsible ecotourism, committing to applying international social, environmental and human rights standards and undertake due diligence in the business, practicing enhanced human rights due diligence on particular issues, ensuring the participation of communities in tourism development, taking collective action to address to environmental, social and human rights issues, strengthening the governance of the Myanmar Tourism Federation (MTF) and its member organization; are required.

From the tourists' side, respecting local Myanmar culture and traditions, the environment, and women's and children's rights, support the development of sustainable ecotourism in survey area are strongly encouraged by not buying and damaging forbidden nature items.

From the community side, conducting responsible activities for better environment, engaging actively in EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) consultations related to tourism development projects and disclosure processes, reporting on negative impacts on ecotourism and highlight ways in which these could be mitigated in line with national law and international standards.

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