

Creative Tourism through Thai Handicraft Village A Case Study of “Mae Khiaew Khong Louang”

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Received: October 29, 2024; **Revised:** November 22, 2024; **Accepted:** November 22, 2024

ABSTRACT

This investigation sought to examine the management of the group. It also sought to examine the feasibility of establishing it as a tourist attraction. It sought to establish guidelines. The rules will facilitate the development of the bamboo weaving group. They will promote creative and sustainable tourism. This study is qualitative in nature. The researcher has examined studies and pertinent documents. Data was acquired through interviews. The demographic cohort comprises individuals. Bamboo basketry handicraft collective "Mae Khiaew Khong Louang".

The results were as follows: This artisan group is located approximately 20 kilometers from Chiang Mai city. Accessible transportation. No homes or community facilities currently exist. A maximum of 30 to 40 travelers may be accommodated daily. The initiative should commence with educating the handicraft group and stakeholders on creative tourism. This will transform it into a creative tourism destination. Arrange space and facilities in accordance with the native culture. Facilitate engagement between cultural proprietors and attendees. Restrict the visitor count to the capacity that allows for comprehensive care. Generate awareness by supplying information for tourists to facilitate their decision-making on visitation. Devise tourism activities that facilitate visitor engagement. These operations aim to retain current tourists and attract new ones through public relations efforts. Regulate tourist quality and enhance it without altering the community's lifestyle. Society and culture to enable handicraft groups to achieve independent development.

To establish the Mae Khiao Khong Luang group as a creative tourism destination, a focused approach is recommended that prioritizes education on sustainable tourism practices among the group and stakeholders. Organizational strategies should reflect local cultural authenticity, integrating designated spaces for meaningful artisan-tourist interactions while regulating visitor numbers to align with community capacity. Promoting awareness through targeted public relations and designing engaging activities can support visitor interest while preserving the community's lifestyle. Sustainable tourism planning would further benefit from quality control practices to safeguard cultural integrity, ensuring that economic, social, and environmental impacts are balanced to foster long-term growth and self-sustainability for the handicraft group and surrounding community.

Keywords: Creative Tourism, Thai Handicraft Village, Mae Khiaew Khong Louang

Introduction

Creative tourism is an innovative approach to travel that goes beyond traditional sightseeing, inviting travelers to immerse themselves actively in local culture, skills, and traditions. Unlike typical tourism, which often focuses on observing a destination's highlights, creative tourism emphasizes participation, learning, and personal expression. Travelers might take a cooking class with local chefs, learn traditional arts like pottery or weaving, or engage in workshops led by artisans. By creating something themselves, visitors gain deeper insights into the cultural and artistic heritage of a place,

forging authentic connections with local communities. Richards (2011) discusses how the tourism sector has evolved to embrace creative experiences, moving beyond the passive consumption of cultural heritage toward an interactive, experience-based model. Richards explains that this shift aligns with broader trends in the "experience economy," where the demand for novel, participatory activities has risen. He argues that creative tourism adds value by enabling tourists to co-create experiences, which builds a deeper connection with destinations and local communities. This approach reflects a response to the oversaturation of cultural tourism offerings, aiming to provide unique, harder-to-replicate experiences by involving tourists in workshops, performances, and creative learning activities.

This hands-on style of travel has gained popularity in recent years as travelers seek more meaningful, memorable experiences. Creative tourism not only enriches visitors but also benefits local communities by supporting local artisans, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering cross-cultural exchanges. As a result, creative tourism has become an increasingly valued form of sustainable travel, offering unique, interactive experiences that encourage cultural appreciation and responsible engagement.

Thai handicraft represents a distinctive fusion of aesthetic tradition, cultural significance, and technical mastery, often reflecting the unique social and spiritual values of Thailand. Each region in Thailand boasts specialized crafts: Northern artisans are known for silk weaving and umbrella making, Central regions excel in bronze and silverware, while Southern provinces produce sophisticated wood carvings. These crafts are usually passed down through generations, preserving techniques and motifs that date back to Thailand's earliest civilizations. Moreover, Thai handicrafts have played an essential role in sustaining local economies, especially in rural areas, providing income and a means of cultural expression. Scholars note that Thai artisans often imbue their work with symbolism, such as patterns inspired by Buddhist teachings or depictions of mythological creatures, emphasizing harmony, balance, and prosperity. Recently, the global appreciation for sustainable, handcrafted goods has fueled interest in Thai handicraft, leading to renewed efforts to protect and promote these art forms, thereby safeguarding Thai cultural heritage against the pressures of industrialization and modernization.

Research problems

What is the key factor that can enhance the creative tourism through Mae Khiaew Khong Louang Handicraft Village?

Research objectives

This research aims to explore identity of Mae Khiaew Khong Louang Handicraft Village, focusing on creative tourist attraction development.

Literature review

Bamboo weaving is a traditional handicraft that reflects both the functional ingenuity and cultural heritage of many societies, particularly in Southeast Asia, where bamboo is abundant. In Thailand, bamboo weaving is practiced extensively across rural communities, with artisans creating items ranging from practical household goods, like baskets and mats, to intricate decorative pieces and ceremonial objects. The process of bamboo weaving requires significant skill, involving the careful selection of bamboo, cutting, drying, and weaving it into complex patterns that often carry symbolic meanings, the Thai Arts and Crafts Center (2020). In addition to their aesthetic and functional appeal, bamboo products are valued for their sustainability, as bamboo is a renewable resource that grows quickly and requires minimal environmental impact to harvest. Research suggests that bamboo weaving not only supports local economies and provides sustainable income sources but also plays a vital role in preserving traditional knowledge systems and community identities. With the rise of eco-friendly and artisanal markets, there is growing interest in bamboo handicrafts, which has led to initiatives aimed at

preserving and promoting the craftsmanship while encouraging innovations that meet contemporary aesthetic and practical demands.

According to the Thai Arts and Crafts Center (2020), bamboo weaving in Thailand is deeply interwoven with the daily lives and spiritual practices of rural communities. The craft is not merely utilitarian; it also embodies symbolic elements, with specific weaving patterns often associated with local beliefs about protection, prosperity, and harmony with nature. These woven items, ranging from baskets to ceremonial mats, are created using sustainable techniques that have been refined over generations, highlighting a tradition of environmental stewardship. Moreover, as global interest in eco-friendly products rises, bamboo weaving has become a vital avenue for rural economic development, allowing artisans to preserve their cultural heritage while meeting contemporary market demands.

The Mae Khiao Khong Luang Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group is situated in Ban Pa Bong, Tambon Pa Bong, Amphoe Saraphi, Chiang Mai Province. This community has a longstanding tradition of manufacturing woven handicrafts. Historically, this community possessed an abundance of bamboo. Inhabitants utilized bamboo to fabricate woven items for everyday purposes. When bamboo was abundant, they sold it to generate revenue for their families. Consequently, a market demand for the products existed. A collective of peasants from Pa Bong, proficient in bamboo weaving and innovative in designing bamboo products for home decoration or various containers, convened. Ms. Thongsuk Kaewsamut is the present leader of the handicraft group. She oversees this handicraft group due to insufficient output to satisfy client demand, as all items are handcrafted and the creators are elderly. The Mae Khiao Khong Luang Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group has inherited bamboo weaving expertise over generations. Ms. Thongsuk Kaewsamut envisions transforming the group into a learning center if she ceases producing bamboo weaving handicrafts and no successor emerges to manage it. This center would enable tourists to engage with bamboo weaving handicrafts and contribute to the preservation of the traditional knowledge associated with bamboo weaving in Ban Pa Bong, ensuring its continuity. This aligns with creative tourism, a type of tourism that enables tourists to enhance their creativity by engaging in activities or educational courses that utilize local talents and experience (Richards and Raymond 2000: 17). The unique characteristic is that it promotes tourists to share knowledge in order to attain a more profound comprehension of the social, cultural, and environmental qualities of the tourism region through direct interactions with local inhabitants or cultural custodians (Suddan Wisutthilak 2012: 20). Based on the aforementioned origin and significance, the researcher selected to investigate the management of the handicraft group to evaluate its potential for transformation into a creative tourism destination, with the aim of proposing guidelines for the advancement of the “Mae Khiao Khong Luang” bamboo weaving handicraft group to facilitate future creative tourism initiatives, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. “Mae Khiao Khong Luang” bamboo weaving handicraft group

Research methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, focusing on collecting data through document analysis and in-depth interviews. The data were gathered from a review of academic literature, research articles, and relevant documents to gain a foundational understanding of the subject area. The target population for this study comprises Mrs. Thongsuk Kaewsamut and the members of the Mae Khiao Khong Luang Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group.

Data collection was conducted using both structured and unstructured interview techniques to allow for a comprehensive exploration of perspectives. Structured questions provided a framework to address specific aspects of the study, while unstructured questions allowed participants to express their views and experiences freely. Both individual and group interviews were conducted to capture a diverse range of insights from the participants.

This methodology was chosen to provide a deep understanding of the participants' experiences and practices within the context of bamboo weaving craftsmanship. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed based on the defined content scope, with the aim of developing strategic guidelines for managing the Mae Khiao Khong Luang Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group as a potential creative tourism destination. The analysis was structured around three main areas:

1. Analysis of Historical and Internal Management Data

The history and internal management of the Mae Khiao Khong Luang Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group were analyzed using the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, and Product) Model (Kwanrat Suanphong, 2024: 5-7). This model provided a structured framework for examining the group's foundational history, resources, operational processes, and output. Insights into the group's context, including community ties, cultural relevance, and operational strengths, were explored to understand its current status and identify areas for improvement.

2. Analysis of Cultural Resources and Development Potential

The study included an assessment of the group's cultural resources through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to identify opportunities for development and growth in alignment with creative tourism. This analysis highlighted key cultural assets, marketable skills, and potential challenges, laying the groundwork for strategies that can position the handicraft group as a sustainable attraction within the creative tourism sector.

3. Guidelines for Sustainable and Creative Tourism Management

Based on insights gathered from historical data and SWOT analysis, guidelines were developed for managing the Mae Khiao Khong Luang Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group to support sustainable and creative tourism. These guidelines focus on promoting local cultural heritage, enhancing visitor engagement, and ensuring sustainable practices that align with community values and long-term goals for the region's tourism industry.

Findings

1. The identity of Mae Khiaew Khong Louang Handicraft Village.

Bamboo weaving has been a longstanding tradition in Ban Pa Bong, where abundant local bamboo allowed villagers to create various household tools and containers. Originally a family venture led by Mrs. Khiao Kaewsamut, the craft later developed into the Mae Khiao Khong Luang Handicraft Group, formally established in 2005 under the direction of her daughter, Mrs. Thongsuk Kaewsamut. The group's mission is to provide a platform for local artisans to showcase and sell their crafts, thereby supporting community livelihoods.

Context Assessment

The group's bamboo weaving reflects the local community's relationship with nature, producing items like fish traps, storage baskets, and carrying poles, traditionally used in the village's daily activities. Besides household use, woven products are also sold for supplemental income, particularly

during the farming offseason. Establishing the Mae Khiao Khong Luang Handicraft Group has created economic opportunities for skilled artisans and served as a focal point for maintaining cultural identity.

Input Assessment

Bamboo remains the primary raw material, but due to decreased local bamboo availability, it is now sourced from Mae on District, Chiang Mai. High-quality bamboo, at least three years old, is chosen for durability and resistance to termites and mold. Additional materials like Indonesian rattan and palm leaves are also incorporated, with Mrs. Thongsuk overseeing material selection to ensure consistent quality. The production process primarily involves the village's elderly, skilled in weaving, who work from home and bring finished parts to the group for assembly. Traditional tools and some machinery, such as electric saws, aid in production.

Process Assessment

The production workflow begins with selecting mature bamboo, which is then processed into strips for weaving. Bamboo aged 1-2 years, known locally as “bamboo heya,” is also used for certain products. The tasks within the group are distributed to maximize efficiency, with different artisans specializing in shaping, weaving, edge binding, or decorative finishing. Payment for each task is provided promptly based on the complexity of the work, with Mrs. Thongsuk ensuring quality control at each stage. The group also operates a Facebook page, “Mae Khiao Khong Luang Weaving,” to reach buyers, including local markets and online platforms, attracting customers who seek traditional and unique woven products.

- **Product Evaluation**

The Mae Khiao Khong Luang group produces distinctive bamboo products that reflect both functionality and aesthetic appeal. Key attributes include:

- **Material Quality:** Utilizing termite-resistant and mold-resistant bamboo for durable products.
- **Design Variety:** Offering diverse shapes and patterns, such as square baskets and decorative containers. Mrs. Thongsuk personally designs these items, blending bamboo with palm leaves for unique patterns.
- **Upcycled Innovations:** Leveraging leftover bamboo for new creations, such as bamboo garlands, hairpins, earrings, and artificial flowers.

Beyond economic benefits, the handicraft group promotes cultural continuity, allowing local artisans, especially the elderly, to share their knowledge with younger generations. This initiative has further transformed the group into an informal learning resource, attracting visitors interested in bamboo weaving and providing hands-on experience to tourists. Mrs. Thongsuk envisions the group as a community tourism site, offering visitors a chance to learn and participate in bamboo weaving. This endeavor is essential for sustaining the craft, especially as no immediate heirs are positioned to continue the work in the future, as shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Mrs. Thongsuk Kaewsamut

2. SWOT analysis of cultural resource assessment.

Through in-depth interviews and field observations within the Mae Khiao Khong Luang Handicraft Group, the researcher examined the local environment and cultural resources. This analysis revealed that the group has extensive knowledge spanning from the careful selection of raw materials to traditional production methods and innovative product design. These aspects represent intangible cultural resources, particularly the traditional craftsmanship skills that have been preserved over generations (Rasee Burusrattanaphan, 2011, p. 117).

A SWOT analysis of the group identified several strengths, notably the group's reputation as a distinguished bamboo weaving collective in Chiang Mai Province. The products created here embody wisdom and creativity passed down through generations, illustrating a way of life deeply interwoven with the local community's cooperative values. However, several weaknesses are present. The raw materials are not sourced within the community, and there is no local replanting effort. Additionally, most artisans are elderly, and the production remains manual, limiting output and making it difficult to meet demand. The management structure is also concentrated, as Ms. Thongsuk Kaewsamut is the sole manager. Furthermore, space limitations only allow the accommodation of around 30-40 visitors, as the group operates from a residential area. Tourist engagement is minimal, with no participatory activities available for visitors.

In terms of opportunities, the handicraft group is located approximately 20 kilometers from Chiang Mai city, making it highly accessible. Consequently, study tours from governmental organizations frequently visit. The group also benefits from support for product design and management development, provided by Chiang Mai-based universities and governmental bodies. However, challenges persist, particularly concerning tourism infrastructure. The community lacks essential tourist components according to the 5A principle (Dickman, 1996, as cited in Suphakorn Ditsaphan et al., 2017, p. 6), such as accommodation, parking, restrooms, dining facilities, and interpreters. Consequently, visits are typically limited to half a day, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Products of Mae Khiao Khong Luang Handicraft Group

3. Guidelines for creating the Mae Khiao Khong Luang bamboo weaving handicraft collective to assist creative tourism.

An analysis of historical data using the CIPP model, coupled with a feasibility study for developing the Mae Khiao Khong Luang Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group to support creative and sustainable tourism, led to the following development guidelines:

Context: Given that most artisans in the group are local residents skilled in bamboo weaving and cultural custodians, they must gain an understanding of creative tourism, including its potential impacts on the community. This will help align stakeholder expectations with the management process, establishing agreements between cultural owners and visitors that reflect the local context and strengthen community identity. Specific recommendations include organizing the group's space to accommodate tourists by adding signage, creating informational boards about the group's history, and displaying bamboo products and raw materials in proportion. Improvements should also be made to the facilities in harmony with the community's environment, with support from relevant agencies. This aligns with Pochana Suansri's (2003), as cited in Wiraphon Thongma, 2018, pp. 6-7 recommendation that communities should be well-informed and prepared for tourism, foster resilience, and understand the community's physical attributes and history, analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges to collaboratively develop sustainable management models and coordinate effectively with related agencies.

Input Factors encompass the following resources:

- **Natural Resources:** Bamboo, a key material for the group's craft, is now scarce locally, with no replanting efforts currently underway. Given the environmental impacts on bamboo quality, the group sources bamboo from Mae On District. To ensure resource sustainability, replanting bamboo within the community could serve as an engaging tourist activity, reinforcing the local identity of Ban Pa Bong and enabling efficient, beneficial resource usage.
- **Human Resources:** Members of the Mae Khiao Khong Luang Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group should receive training on creative tourism, hospitality skills, and product craftsmanship. Recruiting individuals proficient in other languages to share knowledge with tourists may further enhance visitor engagement.

- **Tourist Management:** The group should cap daily tourist numbers to facilitate closer interactions, improve oversight, and minimize environmental impacts. Limiting visitor numbers also strengthens the connection between tourists and artisans. Due to spatial constraints, only approximately 30-40 visitors can be accommodated.
- **Cultural Resources:** The group's knowledge in selecting materials and bamboo weaving techniques should be standardized and shared with members to maintain quality and authenticity for visitors. Efforts to document and disseminate this knowledge will help preserve the craft. These guidelines reflect Pisarn Kaewyu and Prakopsiri Phakdiphinij's (2014, p. 326) approach to developing creative tourism by protecting cultural resources, diversifying handicraft activities, and managing visitor numbers to encourage meaningful cultural exchange.

Process: Establishing cooperation among the handicraft group, the local community, and relevant agencies aims to create a memorable experience for visitors that highlights traditional practices. This approach employs the Customer Touch Point principle (Phongsaphan Santitham & Pathama Sathavetin, 2020, as cited in Natcha Thamrongchote, (2022, p. 111), which involves two key interaction channels: the Physical Touch Point, where customers engage with the community in person, and the Digital Touch Point, which allows for online interaction (Adsidea, 2019).

- **Creating Awareness:** This initial step aims to introduce the handicraft group to tourists and foster a positive first impression through strategic public relations efforts. Online media channels are preferred for their accessibility and reach; however, offline methods, such as signage, directional markers, and local radio, can supplement these efforts to enhance visibility.
- **Consideration:** At this stage, tourists evaluate and compare the information provided. Clear and reliable sources, such as a Facebook page or travel reviews, should be readily available. Collaborating with online influencers can also boost credibility and appeal.
- **Purchase Decision:** Once tourists decide to visit, a streamlined system should be in place to assist with scheduling, booking, and payment options, available both online and at the handicraft group.
- **Customer Retention:** Upon arrival, tourists should feel welcomed and encouraged to participate. Interactive activities, such as hands-on product creation, can foster engagement and relationship-building with community members. However, the number of participants should be limited to ensure meaningful, personalized guidance through each activity.
- **Advocacy:** Positive experiences may prompt tourists to share reviews or offer constructive feedback, which can be valuable for enhancing services and activities. Such input also influences future visitors by providing authentic insights into the experience.

Output: In transitioning to a creative tourism site, the handicraft group can achieve a balance of economic benefits while upholding its cultural integrity. Revenue and benefits should be allocated equitably among stakeholders, ensuring tourism quality control to avoid negative social, cultural, or environmental impacts. By preserving the unique identity of bamboo weaving and respecting community values, the handicraft group can achieve sustainable, self-managed growth. This aligns with Angkrisa Saengjamnong's (2018, pp. 88, 90) findings, which underscore the importance of careful planning and management in sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism requires meticulous attention to maintaining the quality and intrinsic value of tourist sites while mitigating potential economic, social, and environmental impacts to support long-term resilience, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Creative and sustainable tourism through Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group

Conclusions and Discussion

The Mae Khiao Khong Luang Bamboo Weaving Handicraft Group originated as a family business led by Mrs. Khiao Kaewsamut and was later expanded by her daughter, Ms. Thongsuk Kaewsamut, to establish a community hub for the sale of bamboo weaving products. Bamboo, the primary raw material, was once abundant in Ban Pa Bong, where villagers traditionally used it to craft daily tools and utensils. Due to a lack of bamboo replanting in the community, materials are now sourced from Mae on District, with Ms. Thongsuk personally overseeing quality selection. The handicraft group, comprising mainly elderly members, benefits from Ms. Thongsuk's management, as she assigns tasks based on skill level, compensates according to task complexity, and ensures product standards are met. Bamboo weaving products from this group come in various forms and are distributed through middlemen who sell them online or further develop them into new products. This model aligns with Waralaya Thongpan's (2016, pp. 22-25) findings, which highlight how the group's distribution model supports additional income for residents and provides open learning opportunities. Publicity is aided by online channels supported by external agencies, though product sales primarily occur at home or business locations.

Cultural resources within the Mae Khiao Khong Luang group encompass intangible assets such as the wisdom and skills required to produce high-quality woven products. Historically, the bamboo used was dense and highly durable, though it must now be ordered from Mae On District due to its scarcity in Ban Pa Bong. Each production step is performed manually, and with most producers being elderly, product output cannot fully meet market demand. The handicraft group site has a limited capacity, accommodating only 30-40 tourists daily and currently offers no activities that foster meaningful connections between artisans and visitors. However, the group has received developmental support for product innovation from educational and governmental institutions. The site, located 20 kilometers from Chiang Mai, is accessible by convenient transport routes but lacks in-community accommodations and other tourist facilities.

The recommended approach to developing Mae Khiao Khong Luang as a creative tourism destination should focus on establishing foundational knowledge about creative tourism among the handicraft group and stakeholders, tailoring agreements to fit the local context. The area should be

organized to reflect cultural authenticity, creating spaces and facilities that enhance interactions between artisans and tourists while limiting visitor numbers to preserve community life. Initial awareness should be raised through informational resources that help tourists make informed decisions to visit. Tourism activities should be designed to promote engagement, retaining existing tourists and attracting new ones through strategic public relations. This aligns with the findings of Suddan Wisutthilak (2012, p. 20), and Siripithakul, A., & Intramarn, S. (2024). who emphasized that creative tourism fosters a deep understanding of social, cultural, and environmental values through direct interaction with cultural custodians. Sustainable tourism development for the group should include quality control measures to preserve the community's lifestyle, culture, and social fabric, thus enabling self-sustaining growth. Angkrisa Saengjamnong's (2018, pp. 88, 90) work supports this, highlighting that effective and meticulous planning is essential for sustainable tourism. Ensuring long-term sustainability requires the protection of tourist sites' economic, social, and environmental value, preventing adverse impacts and preserving these attractions for future generations.

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