

## Has Promotion of Community-based Tourism been A Successful Rural Development Strategy in Northeast Thailand?

Sukanlaya Choenkwan <sup>1, \*</sup>, and A. Terry Rambo <sup>2</sup>

### AFFILIATIONS

<sup>1.</sup> Department of Agricultural Extension and Development, Faculty of Agriculture, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand.

<sup>2.</sup> Program of System Approaches in Agriculture, Faculty of Agriculture, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand.

\* Corresponding authors:  
sukanl@kku.ac.th

### ABSTRACT

Promotion of community-based homestay tourism (CBT) in rural villages is an important element of Thailand's rural development strategy. This paper assesses how the concept of community-based tourism has worked in practice by examining the present status of all 53 government-recognized homestay communities in Northeast Thailand. It also identifies the challenges faced by these communities in implementing CBT. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in every community with a total of 81 key informants. It was found that nearly half (45.3%) of these homestay communities were completely inactive because they had received no visits by tourists. The active homestay communities were classified into four types based on how they are organized, the volume of tourists received, and how benefits of tourism are shared within the communities. Only a handful of active homestay communities (5.7%) are categorized as practicing community-based tourism. This low success rate reflects the many challenges that communities seeking to implement the CBT strategy must overcome. It is concluded that if widespread development of community-based homestay tourism villages is the sole measure of success of this rural development effort, then it must be judged to have been a failure. However, if the measure of success is broadened to include increasing the economic welfare of some villagers, even if not the whole community, then the program as implemented in Northeast Thailand can be judged to have achieved somewhat greater, but still very limited success.

RECEIVED 2024-05-05

ACCEPTED 2024-10-14

**COPYRIGHT © 2025 by Forest and Society.** This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

### KEYWORDS

Homestay tourism; Sustainable tourism; Community development; Rural Development; Agricultural Extension; Community-based management.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper assesses the extent to which promotion of community-based homestay tourism (CBT) in Northeast Thailand has been successful and identifies some challenges that must be overcome if CBT is to be implemented successfully. It addresses the question: *‘Does the community-based tourism concept work in reality as a strategy for rural development?’* It does so by examining the present status of all officially certified CBT homestay communities in Northeast Thailand and identifying the challenges and problems faced by them.

In the discourse of rural development studies CBT has been widely advocated as an effective development strategy for communities in poor agrarian hinterlands of developing countries and developed countries alike. Its proponents portray it as a way to simultaneously strengthen rural communities, empower rural people, and increase their economic and social well-being. CBT has been promoted as a rural development strategy that can provide multiple benefits to destination communities, including reducing poverty and strengthening community social structure (Mbaiwa, 2005; Muller et al., 2020; Lopez-Guzman et al., 2011). According to Brohman (1996: 60),

*“Community-based tourism development would seek to strengthen institutions designed to enhance local participation and promote the economic, social and cultural well-being of the popular majority.”* Moreover, CBT also involves the host community in planning and managing tourism development in a more sustainable way (Hall, 1996). Timothy & Boyd (2003) portray CBT as the participation of local communities in tourism development, which can be done in both the decision-making process and the distribution of tourism benefits. Involvement of local communities in CBT activities is seen as a critical component for the sustainability of tourism development (Murphy 1985; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008).

Numerous studies have been published on successful attempts to develop CBT in rural communities in many countries (Moscardo, 2008; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Stone & Stone, 2011; Nitikasetsoontorn, 2014; Dodds et al., 2018; Kunjuraman, 2022). One case study of a CBT destination in Laos by Pasanchay & Schott (2021) found that there were numerous direct and indirect benefits created by CBT that contributed to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG1 (no poverty) and SDG11 (encourages local participation, empowerment, and decision-making). Moreover, CBT also contributed to some extent to advancing SDG3 (good health and well-being) and SDG5 (gender equality).

Although the concept of CBT is attractive in principle, it has not been successfully implemented under all conditions and in all communities. Moscardo (2008) expressed the view that CBT has not, on the whole, been as effective or sustainable as promised, but the strategy still holds the greatest potential for many regions. Moscardo (2008: 175) stated that *“In the case of CBT, the reality in practice has not often matched the ideals in principle. Thus, it could be argued that true community-based tourism had not been implemented.”* Blackstock (2005) criticized the CBT concept as naïve and unrealistic because it tends to take a functional approach to community involvement; treat host communities as homogeneous blocs; and it neglects to take into account the structural constraints on local control of the tourism industry. In reality, rural communities are often faced with a number of problems or challenges that limit their ability to implement CBT projects successfully, including a lack of local participation, lack of leadership, lack of experience, and lack of knowledge and skill in the business (Stone & Stone, 2011; Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017, Kala & Bagri, 2018; Zielinski et al., 2020). Many CBT enterprises have not been successful because they failed to produce significant benefits for their communities. For example, a survey of several hundred CBT homestays in the Americas found that of the small fraction that continued to function, occupancy rates averaged five percent and that most did not survive beyond their start-up period when they received external funding (Armstrong, 2012). In Zambia, only 12 percent of the 23 CBT projects surveyed generated enough net income each year to support community development (Armstrong, 2012). CBT can even have adverse effects such as causing damage to local attractions because of the lack of management skills of the local community, erosion of cultural authenticity and traditional rural lifestyles, generating conflicts among local people due to different management styles and competing interests, and demoralizing some participating residents when the number of tourists fails to meet their expectations (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015; Leksakundilok, 2004).

The rural development literature highlights these contradictory assessments of CBT, with some researchers portraying it as a successful development strategy, while others questioned its efficacy. This led us to undertake this study to determine to what extent it had been successful in Northeast Thailand and to identify the specific challenges that communities had to overcome to make it work effectively for them.

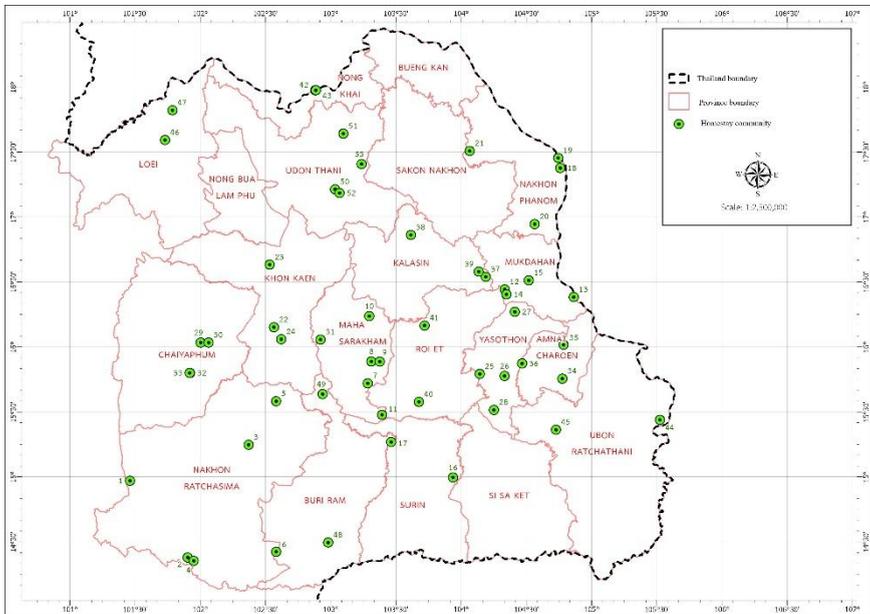
## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Study site

This research was carried out in all officially certified<sup>1</sup> CBT homestay communities in Northeast Thailand which were on the lists of Home Stay Standard Thailand, issued by the Department of Tourism in the years 2012-2015. Table 1 presents the number of homestay communities in all regions of Thailand. The Northeastern region contains 53 homestay communities, or 37.9% of all homestay communities in Thailand. Figure 1 is a map showing the locations of these communities in the Northeastern region.

**Table 1.** Number of homestay communities in each region of Thailand (year 2012-2015)

Region	No. of Provinces	No. of Homestay communities	Percentage of all homestay communities in the whole country
<i>All</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>140</i>	<i>100</i>
Central	10	16	11.4
East	5	13	9.3
Northeast	16	53	37.9
South	8	20	14.3
North	12	38	27.1



**Figure 1.** Map showing location of homestay communities in Northeast Thailand

<sup>1</sup> As part of the effort to promote CBT in 2003, the Office of Tourism Development (OTD) of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) set out specific Thai homestay standards which included 43 criteria such as cleanliness of accommodations and food, safety, and accessibility to the homestay facilities, and efficiency of group management. Teams of inspectors from the OTD visit the homestays to assess whether they meet the standards or not. Those homestays that meet these standards are given certificates to let visitors know that they have passed inspection by the TAT (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015).

## 2.2 Research design

The objectives of this study were to ascertain the current status of every Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) recognized CBT homestay community in Northeast Thailand and to identify the challenges they faced in operating as CBT communities. A qualitative approach was employed to collect in-depth data to gain insights into the constraints on successful implementation of CBT as a community development strategy in the context of villages in Northeast Thailand.

The research was divided into two steps: Step 1) A telephone survey of all 53 CBT homestay communities recognized by TAT. The purpose of this survey was to determine the current status of these communities, i.e., where they are active or not. Key persons who were interviewed were leaders, managers, or coordinators of the homestay group in each community. It was found that 25 homestay communities (47%) were inactive, and 28 homestay communities (53%) were still operating. The findings of this survey were used to plan the next step. Step 2) A field survey was conducted of all the inactive and active CBT communities. In the case of the inactive ones, the researcher paid brief visits and completed semi-structured interviews with leaders of the homestay groups. In the case of active communities, the researchers conducted interviews with the group leaders as well as staying overnight to observe the situation and have informal interactions with villagers.

## 2.3 Informants

A total of 81 informants were interviewed for this research. Of this total, 56 informants were from active homestay communities and 25 from inactive homestay communities. Two informants, the CBT homestay group manager, and a homestay owner, were interviewed at each active homestay community. Only one leader or CBT manager was interviewed from each of the inactive homestay communities.

## 2.4 Data collection

Primary research data was collected between June 2018 - June 2019 and in November 2021 (due to a delay in fieldwork caused by Covid 19 restrictions). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders of homestay groups in every officially certified homestay community. Additional information was obtained through observation and participatory observation when the lead researcher stayed overnight at active homestay communities and visited and did interviews at all inactive homestay communities. Interview topics included the history of establishment of homestays in the community, management system, tourist attractions and activities, number of homestay tourists, external support, challenges faced by the homestay operators, and in the case of inactive villages, reasons they ceased operating the homestays. Each interview lasted about 45-60 minutes. Before beginning the interviews, the researcher asked the informants for permission to make audio recordings, which were later transcribed to be analyzed.

## 2.5 Data analysis

The qualitative results were subjective due to the nature of the phenomenological research paradigm. For this research, the interview content was discussed among the research team to develop themes derived using content analysis procedures by coding, categorizing and theming. The raw data were then converted into manageable information. Two aspects of the data were analyzed:

### *2.5.1 Identification of the status of the homestay communities*

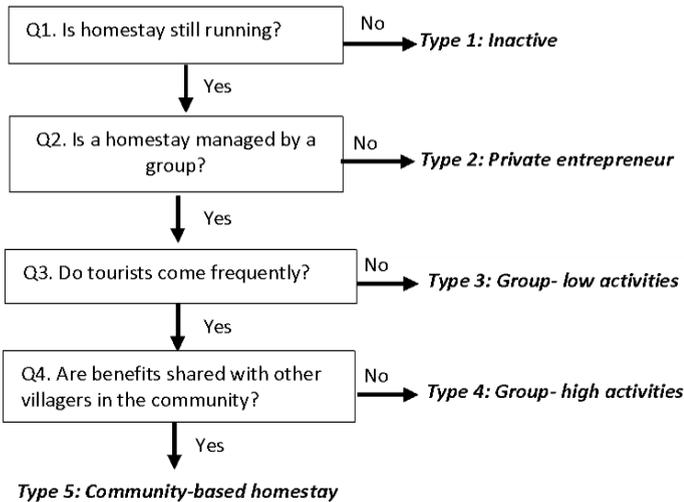
The homestay communities were identified as active or inactive homestay communities based on our earlier research on homestay tourism (Phupuak et al., 2023). We

recognized that there was considerable variation in the way homestay tourism was organized in different villages. These differences included the extent to which villagers participated in tourism activities, their involvement in the management of tourism, the extent to which benefits were shared within the community, and the extent to which communities were successful in attracting tourists. Four key criteria were used to identify types of homestay communities: 1) the status of the homestay communities (active/inactive), 2) management (group/individual entrepreneurs), 3) tourist numbers and frequency of tourist visits, and 4) extent of benefit sharing with other villagers in the communities. As shown in Figure 2, five types of homestay communities were identified: 1) Inactive, 2) Private entrepreneur, 3) Group low- activities, 4) Group high-activities, and 5) Community-based homestay tourism.

Each type of homestay community differs in the extent to which it is community-based and, thus, the extent to which it represents successful CBT implementation. Rozemeijer (2011), identified four equally important dimensions for sustainable CBT development, including economic viability, ecological sustainability, an equitable distribution of costs and benefits among all participants in the activity, and institutional consolidation in a form that represents the interests of all community members and reflects their true ownership of CBT. It appears that only our type 5 ‘Community-based homestay tourism’ largely matched the ideals in principle for being true community-based tourism.

*2.5.2 Identification of challenges to the development of homestay tourism in Northeast Thailand according to the responses given by the informants.*

Data was analyzed by using thematic analysis.



**Figure 2.** Decision tree of identifying types of homestay communities

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**3.1 Characteristics of homestay communities in Northeast Thailand**

The homestay communities in Northeast Thailand which were on the lists of Home Stay Standard Thailand, Department of Tourism, Years 2012-2015, present diverse characteristics and patterns including dates of establishment, tourist attractions, and management. The homestay communities were established beginning in 2004. Their

average operating period was 12.6 years with the oldest one 18 years old and the youngest one 10 years old. Thirty-five homestay communities (66%) were established by local people. These homestay communities offer one or more of five different types of attractions, including material culture, cultural activities, natural attractions, agricultural activities, and ways of life of minority ethnic groups. These attractions are similar, but not identical, to the five core attractive attributes identified by Vo (2020) in a study of 30 successful examples of CBT. These attributes included a unique event, a special tourist route, a craft village or an agro-village, a conservation area or a world Heritage or national heritage site, and a rural landscape and lifestyle.

Six homestay communities (11.3%) in our study offer material culture as their tourist attraction. All are at archaeological sites such as Ban Chiang village, which has been designated as a UNESCO world heritage site because some of the earliest known evidence of farming and of the manufacture and use of metals in the region was found in excavations there (Plate 1A). Prasat village has an outdoor museum about the prehistoric and early historic people who inhabited the area (Plate 1B). Kok Muang village is at the site of Prasat Muang Tam, an ancient Khmer temple which was constructed in the late-10<sup>th</sup> and early-11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Plate 1C).



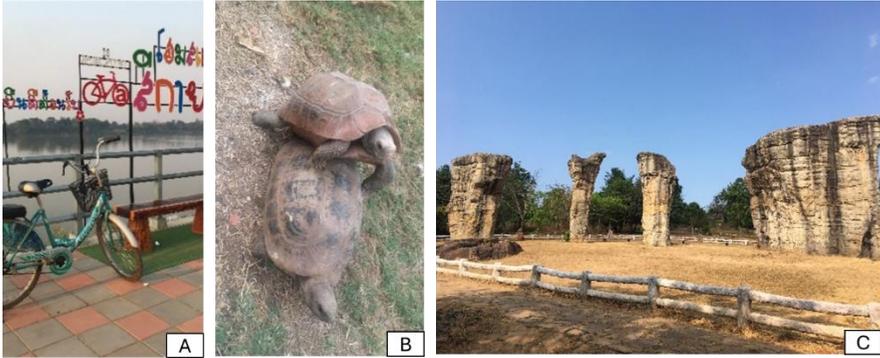
**Plate 1.** Some examples of material culture attractions at some homestay communities [Photos by Sukanlaya Choenkwan, 2019]

There are seventeen homestay communities (32.1%) that attract tourists by offering cultural activities. These include silk weaving, mat weaving (Plate 2A), cloth weaving, traditional *Isaan* dancing, and making decorative hangings (*Ma Lai Khao Tok*) (Plate 2B).



**Plate 2.** Some examples of cultural activities in homestay communities [Photos by Sukanlaya Choenkwan, 2019]

There are fourteen homestay communities (26.4) which lure tourists by offering natural attractions, including Jom Jang and Si Kai Nuea homestay villages, which are located on the bank of the Mekong River (Plate 3A). Some homestay communities display animals, such as Ban Kok homestay village which is widely known as the “turtle village” (Plate 3B). Some communities have rock formations as tourist attractions, such as Wang Cam Can homestay village which is the location of gigantic limestone rock outcrops and is known as the Stonehenge of Thailand (Plate 3C).



**Plate 3.** Some examples of natural attractions for tourists in some homestay communities [Photos by Sukanlaya Choenkwan, 2019]

There are five homestay communities (9.4 %) that attract tourists by using agricultural activities such as vegetable gardening and being a “sufficiency economy” village. There are eleven homestay communities (20.8 %) that attract tourists by displaying the ways of life of ethnic minority groups such as the Thai Dam, Vietnamese, Phu Thai and Thai Saek. Plate 4 shows tourists wearing traditional Thai Dam dress at Na Pa Nad homestay village.



**Plate 4.** An example of cultural attractions in a homestay community [Photos by Sukanlaya Choenkwan, 2019]

These homestay communities also provide tourists with multiple types of accommodations (Plate 5). Most homestays provide their guests with dinner and

breakfast (Plate 6). The costs of staying overnight with two meals (dinner and breakfast) range from 300 to 500 Baht per night per person.



**Plate 5.** Different types of homestay accommodations [Photos by Sukanlaya Choenkwan, 2019]



**Plate 6.** Examples of breakfasts provided to tourists by homestays [Photos by Sukanlaya Choenkwan, 2019]

There were three types of visitors to these homestay communities: The first type is made up of villagers from other communities who were brought by government staff to learn and exchange knowledge about operating homestays. Forty-three communities (81%) had this type of visitor. The second type is students who were brought by their teachers on school-organized excursions. Fourteen communities (26%) served this type of visitor. We refer to both of these types as “*sponsored tourists*.” The third type of tourists is made up of private individuals who arranged and funded their visits to the communities by themselves to relax and learn about village life. We refer to this type as “*true tourists*.” Only eleven communities (21%) received tourists of this type, who represent the only true tourists in the conventional meaning of the word.

The frequency of tourist visits to the homestay communities can be divided into four levels: 1) None, meaning that the community never received any visitors at all; ten

communities (19%) were in this category; 2) Rare, meaning that only one or two groups of tourists visited the homestay community since it was established. There were sixteen communities (30%) in this category; 3) Occasional, meaning that the homestay community was visited by three to five groups of tourists per year. There were seventeen communities (32%) in this category; 4) Frequent, meaning that tourists visited the community almost every month. only ten communities (19%) were in this category.

One of the criteria to meet the Thai homestay standard of TAT is the efficiency of group management. It means that these homestay communities must be managed by a group of villagers following the concept of CBT. However, in actuality, the management patterns of these homestay communities are diverse. They can be divided into three types: 1) Managed as a private business by a single entrepreneurial family while other villagers participate in homestay activities as laborers and are paid only when they work for the enterprise. There were nine homestay communities (17%) of this type; 2) Managed by a group of villagers, which means many villagers working together as a group and running the homestay business together. There were thirty-eight homestay communities (72%) following this pattern; 3) Managed by a *Tambol* (sub-district) Administrative Organization (TAO). There were six homestay communities (11%) of this type.

Leaders of homestay groups are divided into two types: 1) government designated leaders such as village headmen (thirty-three communities [62%] were of this type) and 2) Community recognized leaders (twenty communities [38%] were of this type).

### 3.2 A typology of homestay communities in Northeast Thailand

Five types of homestay communities were identified (Table 2). Detailed characteristics of each type of homestay community are described below.

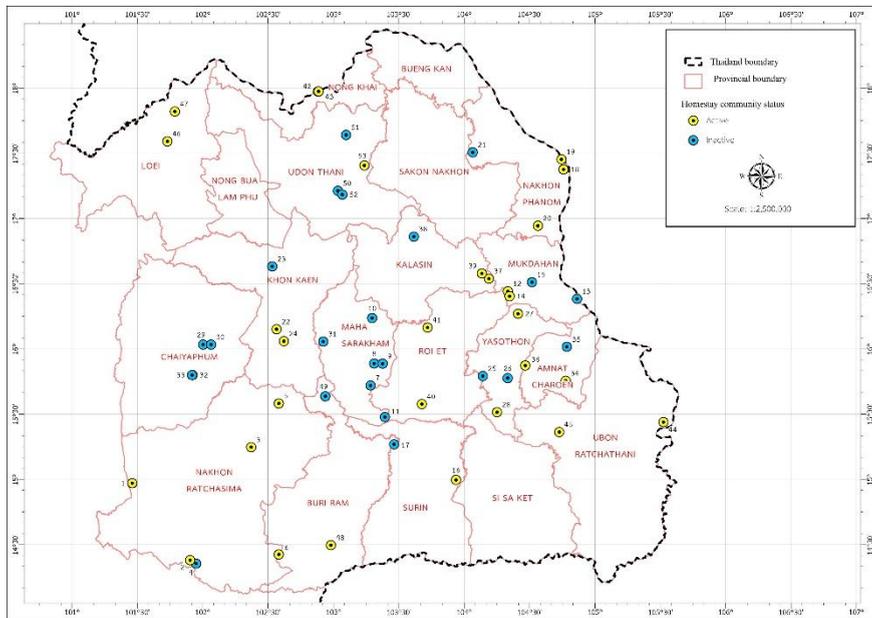
**Table 2.** Types of homestay communities in the northeastern region (n = 53)

Types	Number	Percentage
Inactive	25	47.2
Private entrepreneur	7	13.2
Group-low activities	11	20.8
Group-high activities	7	13.2
Community-based tourism	3	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 3.2.1 Inactive homestay communities

Inactive homestay communities are the villages where the homestays have stopped operating and there are no homestay activities. They became inactive after being open for only three to five years. Almost half (47%) of TAT recognized homestay communities belong to this type. Figure 3 is a map showing the status of homestay communities.

The reasons that most homestays stop running include: (1) Lack of tourists visiting the area with 41.7% of these communities having never had any visits by tourists and 37.5% only rarely receive tourist visits. All tourists who did visit were sponsored by government agencies. (2) the homestay activities were established by the village headmen without informing the villagers or the village headman changed, and his successor was not interested in continuing the activity. Almost all the leaders (91.67%) of these homestay communities were government designated leaders. The homestay projects in half of these communities were initiated by government organizations. (3) villagers are not interested in participating in the homestay activities. (4) there were conflicts over management within the group. (5) No support was received from the government.



**Figure 3.** Map showing the status of homestay communities in Northeast Thailand

### 3.2.2 Private entrepreneurs run homestays

Homestays of the private entrepreneur type are still operating but are managed by only a single-family. Other villagers participate in the homestay activities as laborers and are paid by the managing family for their services. Thus, most of the benefits accrue to the one family. Seven homestay communities (13.2% of all homestay communities) belong to this type. These homestay communities have been operating for 10 to 15 years. Most were initiated by an entrepreneurial household which perceived an opportunity to create another source of income for itself. At the beginning, they tried unsuccessfully to invite their relatives or neighbors to join in the business, so they simply borrowed their relatives' names to meet the criteria for applying for the Thai homestay standard of TAT by managing as a group. Half of these attract tourists by displaying the ways of life of ethnic minority groups such as the Thai Dam, Vietnamese, and Thai Saek. The other half attracts tourists by featuring cultural activities. Most communities of this type only receive occasional visits by tourists. One homestay run by a private entrepreneur is rarely visited by tourists, but the owner of the homestay does not worry about the number of tourists because he uses the homestay as a channel to get support from the government in the form of funding, training and networking.

### 3.2.3 Group-low activities

The Group-low activities homestay type are still in operation and receive three to five visits by tourists annually. Most of these tourists are government sponsored ones. The homestay activities are managed by a group of villagers belonging to several families. Only members of the group receive substantial benefits. These homestay communities have operated for 11 to 18 years. Eleven homestay communities (20.8% of all homestay communities) are of this type. Although the homestay business has not generated high incomes for members, they continue to operate because the group leaders still want to continue because they expect in the future to get funding from the government. Most of the leaders are government designated leaders.

### *3.2.4 Group-high activities*

Communities of the Group-high activities homestay type are managed by a group of villagers belonging to several households. Only members of the group gain substantial benefits which are not shared with other villagers. These homestay communities receive tourist visits almost every month. They have been in operation for 10 to 18 years. All were established by local people, but they receive regular support from the government including organizing workshops to improve their knowledge on tourism management and sponsoring tourist visits to the homestays. Seven homestay communities (13.2% of all homestay communities) are of this type. Most of the leaders are community recognized leaders.

### *3.2.5 Community-based homestay tourism*

Community-based homestay tourism types are managed by groups of villagers. However, the benefits gained from tourism are shared with other people in the communities. These benefits can be substantial because these homestay communities receive visits by tourists almost every month. Some of the visitors are true tourists, not the government sponsored ones that other types of homestay villages depend on. These homestay communities have been in operation for 11 to 15 years. All of them were established by local people but they receive regular support from government agencies such as organizing workshops to improve their knowledge of tourism management and sponsoring tourist visits to these communities. Only three homestay communities (5.7% of all homestay communities) are of this type. All of their leaders are community recognized leaders. It is noteworthy that all the villages that are classified as community-based tourism homestay communities are inhabited by members of the Phu Thai ethnic group. The Phu Thai belong to the Tai linguistic family. The Phu Thai in Northeast Thailand settled there in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some migrated voluntarily to escape wars in their home areas in Laos while others were forcibly resettled there by the Siamese army which had taken them captive during its invasions of Laos. In contrast to villages of the Thai-Lao, who form the majority ethnic group in the Northeast, Phu Thai communities are noted for being cohesive and having high levels of solidarity among members (Phupuak et al., 2023).

## **3.3 Challenges of developing CBT homestay communities in Northeast Thailand**

There are several challenges that communities must overcome if they are to achieve success in developing CBT: 1) Attracting tourists to visit the community, 2) Motivating villagers to participate in the homestay business, 3) Developing Local capabilities to manage CBT, 4) Empowering local leaders, and 5) Ensuring continued government support to homestay communities.

### *3.3.1 Attracting tourists to visit the community*

The first challenge is to attract enough tourists to make operating homestay communities viable. Ten homestay communities (18.9% of all homestay communities) have not attracted any tourist visits since they were established, and sixteen homestay communities (30.2% of all homestay communities) have been visited only a few times since they were established. Moreover, most of these visits were sponsored by the government and no regular tourists have come to these communities on their own. The lack of tourists may be due to the lack of any special or unique features in these communities that are attractive to tourists. That is, they have low area potential. Vo (2020) indicated that one of the crucial indicators of the sustainability of a CBT venture is commercial viability which is mostly influenced by destination attractiveness to tourists. According to Thongma (2017), area potential is a crucial element to developing successful CBT. Area potential includes natural resources and cultural traditions.

Rojrungsat (2010) states that communities must have unique characteristics to attract tourists. Zielinski et al. (2020) found, in an extensive review of many case studies of facilitators for CBT development, that the supply of activities based on traditions and local customs that are attractive to tourists is an important indicator of area potential. The homestay communities included in the present study attempted to attract tourists by offering them the opportunity to observe agricultural activities, enjoy being in a beautiful natural environment, and immerse themselves in “exotic” cultural traditions. However, in most cases it seems that these attributes are not interesting and unique enough to lure many visitors. Vo (2020) suggested that CBT activities should be initiated by determining the core attractive attribute of the destination. This core attractive attribute should be owned or controlled by the community. However, external support may be required to convert a potential attractive attribute into an effective attraction for tourists.

### *3.3.2 Motivating villagers to participate in the homestay business*

There are some homestay communities that have high area potential and could attract tourists to visit but nevertheless become inactive or maintain a low level of activity because only a few households are willing to engage in the homestay businesses. On average, only seven-teen households per community participate in the homestay business. Some villages have ceased operating homestays entirely because villagers were not interested in participating in the homestay activities. This often reflects the fact that homestay projects were initiated by government staff rather than the villagers themselves. Some communities could not continue in the homestay business because their leaders changed, and the new leaders were not interested in continuing the activities. Kunjuraman & Hussin (2017) indicated that members of the local community often face many challenges to actively participate in community-based tourism projects, and this has contributed to the unsustainable development of CBT. Several factors may contribute to the lack of participation by members of rural communities. Aref (2011) identified financial constraints as a key element contributing to poor tourism management which limited the community participation in tourism development in Shiraz, Iran. Kim et al. (2014) identified five barriers to local participation in Houay Kaeng Village in Laos. These included: (1) low education levels and lack of knowledge about tourism, (2) poor living conditions and lack of financial support, (3) lack of time for tourism participation, (4) perception of tourism as a seasonal business generating low incomes, and (5) power disparities, instructional disincentives, and local people’s distrust of authorities. Stone & stone (2011) found that community participation in Khama Rhino Sanctuary Trust, a community-based tourism enterprise in Botswana, was unsatisfactory because of the lack of communal sense of ownership, inadequate employment creation and dependence on external funding, lack of information, loss of benefits, and imbalance in representation on the management board.

### *3.3.3 Developing local capabilities to manage CBT*

Conflicts within the group over the management of homestay tourism were the most frequently mentioned reason why communities in our survey did not continue in the homestay business, even though they had received frequent tourist visits. According to Zielinski et al. (2020), who reviewed many case studies of CBT communities, having mechanisms for the distribution of profits, equity in benefit distribution, and management skills are important factors influencing levels of community participation. These are not major problems when homestays are privately operated businesses but are critical when homestay tourism is a group or community effort. Conflicts over management can arise within the group, particularly when some villagers have doubts

about the transparency with which their leader operates, which can cause them to withdraw from homestay activities. As a field study by the first author in one Thai-Lao homestay community in the Northeast discovered, some villagers were dissatisfied with the opaque way the leader distributed benefits. Although he was supposed to use a rotation system for allocating tourists to different households operating homestay accommodations to spread benefits equally among all members, some members complained about unfair distribution. One homestay group member complained that “*The chairman (of the homestay group) always gave his daughters priority to get guests. He always claimed that it was requested from the tourists to stay at his houses or his daughters’ houses.*” Such imbalances in distribution of benefits are frequently mentioned in the literature on CBT (Suriya, 2011; Kaosa-ard, 2006; Untong et al, 2006; Oula, 2006; Prachvuthy, 2006).

### *3.3.4 Empowering local leaders*

Respondents to our survey most frequently cited having good leaders as the main reason for the long-term success of homestay projects in their communities. Kunjuranan & Hussin (2017) states that one of the challenges in the implementation of homestay programs in Sabah, Malaysia, is the lack of leadership. Local leadership is vital to overcome several problems that may occur within the community. Almost all leaders of Group-high activity homestay communities and Community-based homestay communities included in our survey are community recognized leaders. A recent study by Phupuak et al. (2023) of CBT in Ban Phu village, which is one of the three CBT homestay type communities in our survey, identified good leadership as a key factor in the sustainability of CBT in this village. According to the villagers, they enjoy very high-quality leadership. The chairman of this CBT group is a retired teacher who encourages villagers to participate in homestay activities by making them entertaining and fun. Similarly, Zielinski et al. (2020) in their review of many case studies in tourism found that leadership from within the community, trust in the leadership, and effective individual leadership were critical factors in successful CBT development. The culture of the community is a crucial factor in the success of CBT (Leksakundilok, 2004). The quality of local leadership is also an important determinant of success. In the context of community-based social enterprises, leadership helps detect any emerging opportunities and risks while mobilizing capital and capacities to realize community and social benefits. Having leaders with visionary and participatory qualities can benefit overall sustainability and resilience (Suriyankietkaew et al., 2022). In their study of CBT in Malaysia Nor Ashikin and Kalsom (2010) found that having a leader with a good leadership style helped to mobilize the community members and set them on the right path in developing CBT. They also found that a change in leaders could slow down the rate of development of homestay tourism.

### *3.3.5 Ensuring continued government support to homestay communities*

Most informants we interviewed in Inactive homestay communities pointed out that they had ceased operating after they lost support from the government. This is a particular problem for the eighteen homestay communities (34%) that were established on the initiative or with the strong encouragement of government agencies. The informants stated that after the homestays were established, they did not receive any further support from the government. Continuation of government support was not assured in the long-term because the government staff who initiated the projects had been replaced by new staff who had other priorities. However, almost all informants interviewed in Group-high activity communities and Community-based homestay communities stated that they regularly received support from government organizations. Support was provided in several ways such as bringing tourists to the

community and providing training in tourism management for the villagers. Thus, continuing government support is a crucial factor in the success of homestay development projects. Wisnumurti et al. (2019) pointed out that the major roles of government in supporting CBT are making regulations that support sustainable tourism, e.g., spatial planning that prioritizes the needs of communities and guarantees the preservation of sacred areas. The government should also facilitate improvement of the capacity and skill of the community in tourism management. Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014) in their study of Mae Kampong, a showcase CBT community in Chiang Mai province in northern Thailand, found that transformational leadership, in addition to fortunate geographical conditions and generous external support, had been an important determinant of its successful development of CBT. Oka et al. (2021) indicated that in Indonesia, funding support from the government for tourism development was perceived positively by local people. In northern Thailand, a study by Witchayakawin (2022) found that the Thai government had played a crucial role in encouraging a high level of participation in CBT by providing funds to support the launching of CBT programs and activities and organizing training workshops for community members.

The different types of homestay communities identified in our research were found to face different key challenges to their further development (Table 3). Thus, in the case of Type 1 (Inactive) homestay communities, the key challenges are developing tourist attractions and motivating villagers to participate in tourism activities. There is only one urgent challenge to develop CBT for Type 2 (Private entrepreneur) communities, which is to motivate more villagers to organize a group to manage tourism, rather than leaving control of this activity in the hands of a single household. Regarding type 3 (Group-low activities) communities, the main problem is low economic viability due to the low number of tourists visiting the area. Therefore, this type needs to develop attractions and obtain external support to bring more tourists to boost economic viability. The key challenges of Type 4 (Group-High activities) communities are to increase community participation in the tourism activities and development of local capabilities to manage CBT. Finally, Type 5 (Community-based homestay tourism) needs to find ways to sustain the homestay activities by improving local capabilities for CBT management and empowering local leaders.

**Table 3.** The key challenges facing different types of homestay communities

Types	Attracting tourists	Motivating villagers	Developing local capabilities	Empowering local leaders	Ensuring continued government supports
Inactive	☐	☐			
Private entrepreneur		☐			
Group-low activities	☐				☐
Group-high activities		☐	☐		
Community-based tourism			☐	☐	

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Over the past 20 years, the Thai government has provided substantial financial and administrative support to many villages in the Northeast in order to spur rural development by promoting community-based homestay tourism. The results have been decidedly mixed, with only half of the officially recognized homestay communities still active and only three villages having community-based tourism according to the government’s criteria. Therefore, if development of community-based homestay

tourism villages is the sole measure of success, we would have to conclude that this program has been a failure.

However, if we broaden the measure of success to include increasing the economic welfare of some members of rural communities, even if not the villages as whole communities, then the program can be judged to have achieved somewhat greater success. Thus, the communities that have adopted alternative models of homestay tourism, including homestay tourism managed by private entrepreneurs and by groups of villagers, have also provided economic benefits to at least some members of these communities. We suggest that government agencies concerned with promoting the development of homestay communities in the Northeast should broaden their objectives to include development of homestays managed by private entrepreneurs and groups of villagers, in addition to CBT homestays. These alternative management models are already found in 13 of the villages which still have active homestay operations.

To be successful, government agencies need to better appreciate the extent to which local conditions influence the implementation of development projects. Many homestay community development projects have been initiated without first assessing the potential of specific villages to attract sufficient numbers of tourists, the extent to which villagers are interested in, and willing to participate in homestay activities, the quality of local leadership, and the community capacity to manage CBT and ensure equitable sharing of benefits, and the likely stability of government financial and technical support. In future projects, to develop homestay tourism, government agencies should carry out careful assessments of target communities to ensure that they have the capabilities needed to develop and manage successful homestay tourism.

---

**Author Contributions:** The corresponding author was responsible for conceptualization, data collection, data analysis, and initial draft writing. The co-author provided essential supervision throughout the research process and contributed significantly through detailed proofreading and constructive feedback on the manuscript.

**Competing Interests:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

**Acknowledgments:** This research was financially supported by the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) and The Thailand Research Fund (TRF) (MRG6180132). The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the funding agencies.

---

## REFERENCES

- Acharya, B. P. & Halpenny, E. A. (2013). Homestays as an alternative tourism product for sustainable community development: A case study of women-manage tourism product in Rural Nepal. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 10(4), 367-387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2013.779313>
- Aref, F. (2011). Barriers to community capacity building for tourism development in communities in Shiraz, Iran. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(3), 347-359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2010.517314>
- Armstrong, R. (2012). *An analysis of the conditions for success of community-based tourism enterprises*. ICRT Occasional Paper No. OP21. International Centre for Responsible Tourism.
- Blackstock, K. (2005). A critical look at community-based tourism. *Community Development Journal*, 40(1), 39-49. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsi005>
- Brohman, J. (1996). New direction in tourism for third world development. *Annual of Tourism Research*, 23(1), 48-70. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(95\)00043-](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(95)00043-)

7

- Dodds, R., Ali A. & Galaski, K. (2018). Mobilizing knowledge: determining key elements for success and pitfalls in developing community-based tourism. *Current Issue in Tourism*, 21(13), 1547-1568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2016.1150257>
- Goodwin, H. & Santilli R. (2009). *Community-based Tourism: A success?* ICRT Occasional Paper No. OP11. International Centre for Responsible Tourism.
- Hall, C. M. (1996). *Introduction to Tourism in Australia: Impact, Planning and Development*. Longman Cheshire.
- Kala, D., & Bagri, S. C. (2018). Barriers to local community participation in tourism development: Evidence from mountainous state Uttarakhand, India. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 66(3), 318-333.
- Kaosa-ard, M. (2006). Tourism: Blessings for All? *Journal of GMS Development Studies* 3, 1-24.
- Kim, S., Park, E., & Phandanouvong, T. (2014). Barriers to local residents' participation in community-based tourism: Lessons from Houay Kaeng Village in Laos. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 12, 01045. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20141201045>
- Kontogeorgopoulos, N., Churyen, A. & Duangsaen, V. (2014). Success factors in community-based tourism in Thailand: The role of luck, external support, and local leadership. *Tourism Planning & Development*, 11(1), 106-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2013.852991>
- Kontogeorgopoulos, N., Churyen, A. & Duangsaen, V. (2015). Homestay tourism and the commercialization of the rural home in Thailand. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 20(1), 29-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2013.852119>
- Kunjuraman, V. & Hussin, R. (2017). Challenges of community-based homestay programme in Sabah, Malaysia: Hopeful or hopeless?. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 21, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2016.10.007>
- Kunjuraman, V. (2022). Local community participation challenges in community-based ecotourism development in Sabah, Malaysian Borneo. *Community Development Journal*, 57(3), 487-508. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsaa065>
- Leksakundilok, A. (2004). *Ecotourism and community-based ecotourism in the Mekong region*. Working paper series No. 10. Australian Mekong Resource Centre, University of Sydne.
- Lopez-Guzman, T., Borges, O. & Cerezo, J.M. (2011). Community-based tourism and local-socio-economic development: A case study in Cape Verde. *African Journal of Business Management*, 5(5), 1608-1617. <https://doi.org/10.5897/AJBM10.429>
- Mbaiwa, J.E. (2005). The socio-cultural impacts of tourism development in the Okavago Delta, Bostswana. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 2(3), 163-184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766820508668662>
- Moscardo, G. (Ed.). (2008). *Building community capacity for tourism development*. CABl. <https://doi.org/10.1079/9781845934477.0000>
- Muller, S., Huck, L. & Markova, J. (2020). Sustainable Community-Based Tourism in Cambodia and Tourists' Willingness to pay. *ASEAS-Austrian Journal of Southeast-East Asian*, 13(1), 81-101. <https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-0030>
- Murphy, P.E. (1985). *Tourism: A community approach*. Methuen.
- Nitikasetsoontorn, S. (2014). *The success factors of community-based tourism in Thailand* [PhD Thesis]. School of Public Administration, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand.
- Nor Ashikin, M. N. & Kalsom, K. (2010). The challenges of community-based homestay programme in Malaysia. *Proceedings of Regional Conference on Tourism Research: The state of the art and its sustainability*, 13-14 December 2010,

- Penang, Malaysia, 66-67.
- Oka, I., Murni, N. G. N. S., & Mecha, I. (2021). The community-based tourism at the tourist village in the local people's perspective. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 38(4), 988-996. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.38401-735>
- Oula, T. (2006). Financial Benefits and Income Distribution of Community-based Tourism: Nammatt Kao and Nammatt Mai, Lao PDR. *Journal of GMS Development Studies*, 3, 69-81.
- Pasanchay, K., & Schott, C. (2021). Community-based tourism homestays' capacity to advance the Sustainable Development Goals: A holistic sustainable livelihood perspective. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 37, 100784. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100784>
- Phupuak, P., Choenkwan, S., & Rambo A.T. (2023). Factors affecting the sustainability of community-based tourism in a Phu Thai village in Northeast Thailand. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Nakhon Phanom University*, 13(2), 17-33.
- Prachvuthy, M. (2006). Tourism, Poverty, and Income Distribution: Chambok Community-based Ecotourism Development, Kirirom National Park, Kompong Speu Province, Cambodia. *Journal of GMS Development Studies*, 3, 25-40.
- Pusiran, A. K., & Xiao, H. (2013). Challenges and community development: A case study of homestay in Malaysia. *Asian Social Science*, 9(5), 1-17. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539%2Fass.v9n5p1>
- Rojrungsat, P. (2010). *Community tourism*. Odeon store printing. [In Thai]
- Rozemeijer, N. (2001). *Community-based tourism in Botswana: The SNV experience in three community-tourism projects*. SNV Botswana.
- Stone, L. S., & Stone, T. M. (2011). Community-based tourism enterprises: Challenges and prospects for community participation; Khama rhino sanctuary trust, Botswana. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(1), 97-114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2010.508527>
- Suriya, K. (2011). *An Economic Analysis of Community-based tourism in Thailand* [PhD Thesis]. Georg-August University of Goettingen.
- Suriyankietkaew, S., Krittayarangroj, K. & Iamsawan, N. (2022). Sustainable leadership practices and competencies of SMEs for sustainability and resilience: A community-based social enterprise study. *Sustainability*, 14, 5762. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14105762>
- Telfer, D. & Sharpley, R. (2008). *Tourism and development in the developing world*. Routledge.
- Thongma, W. (2017). *Community-Based Tourism for improving the quality of life of communities in forest land areas*. Majoe University. [In Thai]
- Timothy, D. J. & Boyd, S. W. (2003). *Heritage Tourism*. Pearson Education.
- Untong, A., Phuangsaichai S., Taweelertkunthon N., & Tejawaree J. (2006). Income Distribution and Community-based Tourism: Three Case Studies in Thailand. *Journal of GMS Development Studies*, 3, 57-68.
- Vo, N. T. Q. (2020). Community-based tourism and destination attractiveness: From theory to practice. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Sports*, 49, 24-36.
- Wisnumurti, A. G. O., Candranegara, I. M. W., Suryawan, D. K., & Wijaya, I. G. N. (2019). Collaborative governance: synergy among the local government, higher education, and community in empowerment of communities and management of potential tourism village. *Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research*, 154, 112-115.
- Witchayakawin, P., Aziz, Y.A., Mahomed, A.S.B.B., & Abdullah, N.H.B. (2022). Comparing stakeholder participation in Community-based tourism (CBT), example from Thailand. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 41(2), 531-540 <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.41201-531>

0.30892/gtg.4 1226-860

Zielinski, S., Kim, S., Botero, C. & Yanes, A. (2020). Factors that facilitate and inhibit community-based tourism initiatives in developing countries. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23(6), 723-739. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2018.1543254>