

## **Abstract**

This research studies the opportunities and challenges in developing road tourism for group package tours in GMS countries. For the travelers in Asia, group package tours in some countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and Thailand, it is a major mode of outbound travel. This popular mode of outbound travel, including the tour itinerary, meals, transportation and accommodation are pre-arranged and included in one tour-package price. Group package tour mode increases convenience, reduces possibility of hassles and surprises, builds an increased sense of security, and creates social benefits of traveling with a group of people and the convenience of being escorted throughout the trip.

The existing tourism facilities for group package tour, indicators of standard tourism facilities for group package tour and tourism attraction for group package tour along the selected road between Thailand and China were explored by thirteen participants using observation, in-depth interviews and group meeting interview technique to identify the opportunities and challenges in developing road tourism for group package tour in GMS countries.

The result of this research shows that the challenges in developing road tourism for group package tours along the selected road connection between Thailand and China as ranked by thirteen participants. These factors comprise the safety situation which was identified as the greatest challenge while the safe tourism environment stands second; the different rules, policies and regulations in those countries are rated as the third most important challenges. Lack of complete supporting tourism facilities

and needless red tape in the process to cross the border along the road judged was considered the fourth most challenging obstacle by those thirteen participants. Also the opportunities in developing road tourism for group package tours along the selected road connection between Thailand and China are found in current tourism facilities and destination attractions provided along the road which are classified as the most promising. The development of road connection and situation among Thailand, Lao and China rank as runner-up and enhance tourism communication among China, Lao and Thailand and takes the third place. The facility of visa on arrival sometimes has to stand lower category while the promotion of cross-border transport agreement action scores lowest in this category. On the other hand, based on the initial trip from Kunming to Lao, four more items were added into the indicator of standard tourism facilities component, they are electronic blackboard, the sign of space measure, and the sign of road condition and tourism map. Also another five more into existing tourism facilities component, they are the health pharmacy, medical center in tourist attraction, vehicle repair garage, foreign exchange service and tourism storage battery. Meanwhile, the researcher also found that there are six tourist attractions available on the road to develop road tourism for the group package between China and Thailand such as Store Forest, Mojiang Town and Xishuangbanna in China, Chiang Rai, Golden Triangle in Thailand and Luang Prabang in Lao..

The recommendations for group package tour development suggested by this research will be sent to the Chinese government, the Thai government, the Lao government and the travel agencies for further research.