

FLOATING MARKETS: BALANCING THE NEEDS OF VISITORS AS A TOURIST ATTRACTION AND LOCALS WAY OF LIFE. A CASE STUDY OF TALINGCHAN FLOATING MARKET, BANGKOK THAILAND

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Abstract *A floating market in Bangkok and its vicinity in the Thai Central plains is usually packed as a tourism product that offers visitors an opportunity to experience local ways of life as in the past. An interview and observation were carried out on September 29, 2012 to get the opinion of international, local visitors and local vendors about Talingchan Floating Market. The Talingchan floating market attracts the locals, families, students and international visitors. Results based on observation and analyses of interviews indicate that Talingchan floating market is an authentic canal-side community market, not a thematic floating market village. The results generated a snapshot of both visitors and community sentiments with understanding of the triple bottom line effects of tourism on Talingchan floating market. There is a clear demonstration of the linkage between tourism and canal side community that has played important role in reducing poverty in the area and dispersion of tourism earnings to local community. The researcher sees the market's potential to develop further provided fresh challenges are adequately addressed without damaging culture and environment by making necessary changes to present it as an attractive tourist attraction and to ensure its future sustainability.*

Keywords: *Floating Market, Talingchan, Sustainability, Tourism, Local Community*

INTRODUCTION

Rivers and canals are synonymous with Thai life and culture which are closely associated to rivers as source of food, transport and relaxation (TAT, 2011). Thailand's rivers nurture and support local communities as their traditional transportation channel (TAT, 2010). Gampell (2002, p.6), explained that 'decades before the advent of rapid transit systems and sleek air-conditioned cars, Bangkok residents travelled the capital's intricate network of waterways in small wooden boats'. According to TAT (2004, p.1), early encounters of Western diplomats when they first sailed into the ancient Thai capital of Ayutthaya were canals (Klongs) with waterborne communities, thereby dubbing the Kingdom "Venice of the East". Suthitakon, et al. (2012) insists that floating markets have been a famous tourist destination

for more than four decades, with 25 well-known floating markets located in the central region of Thailand. Thailand has many picturesque floating markets where goods are sold by itinerant vendors who ply rivers and canals in their boats, delivering commodities to people's homes or meeting to exchange goods in traditional ways (TAT, 2011). Tourism organizations such as, TAT, travel agencies, tour operators as well as hoteliers have successfully marketed and promoted floating markets in Thailand. Floating markets have a special place in travel publications and post cards and have been an indispensable part of a local sight-seeing itinerary. Floating markets have continued to draw attention of international tourists by offering unique Thai experience. Early origin of Thai settlers along the rivers maintained that people needed rivers for water, rice planting and for commuting in a natural and convenient way in the absence of well-developed

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