



Evaluation of Tourism Potential and Quality Standards for Cultural Tourist Attractions in Surin Province, Thailand

Sivathida Phumiworramunee¹ Alissara Thammabutr² Chanisara Phetphisetsak³
Suganya Plaingam⁴ Wannisa Ouansoda⁵ Suriya Klangrit^{*6}

Received: 12 March 2026 Revised: 10 April 2026 Accepted: 6 May 2026

Abstract

This study examines the tourism potential and quality standards of cultural attractions in Surin Province, Thailand, through a quantitative survey of 400 purposively selected respondents, including government officials, private stakeholders, community leaders, and tourists. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of 0.89. The findings reveal that Surin Province possesses strong potential for cultural tourism development, with an overall capacity at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.87$). This is supported by positive community attitudes, diverse food offerings, effective safety measures, and well-developed cultural tourism activities, accommodations, and promotional efforts. The quality standards of cultural tourism attractions were also rated at a high level ($\bar{x} = 3.85$), reflected in three key components: tourism appeal characterized by unique local culture and traditions; support capacity through adequate infrastructure and facilities; and effective management focusing on cultural heritage conservation. However, several challenges remain, including limited diversification of tourism products, insufficient promotion of homestay programs, issues in land use management near heritage sites, and limited community participation in tourism planning. Addressing these challenges through participatory, conservation-based, and inclusive strategies can enhance sustainability and equitable benefit distribution. Continuous monitoring, adaptive management, and strategic investment aligned with local cultural values are essential to preserving Surin's cultural heritage while fostering its development as a distinctive and sustainable cultural tourism destination.

Keywords: Tourism potential, Quality standards, Cultural tourist attractions, Community-based tourism (CBT), Cultural heritage management, Thailand

¹⁻⁵ Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Rajamangala University of Technology Isan, Surin Campus, Surin, Thailand

⁶ Master of Arts Program in Global Studies, Graduate School, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand

* E-mail: missuniverse5000@yahoo.com

Introduction

In the past decade, Thailand has faced significant structural challenges to sustainable economic development, including global economic volatility, demographic transition toward an aging society, limitations in labor skills, and rapid technological transformation. These factors have directly affected the country's competitiveness. In response, the Thirteenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027) emphasizes high-value, creative, and sustainable economic development, with a particular focus on enhancing cultural capital and innovation to strengthen national competitiveness (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2023). In addition, Thailand's Soft Power policy under the "5F" framework comprising Food, Film, Fashion, Fighting (Muay Thai), and Festival has been promoted as a key strategy to generate economic value from cultural assets and to strengthen the creative economy alongside cultural tourism development (Royal Thai Government, 2024). In this regard, the tourism sector plays a crucial role in driving Soft Power by transforming cultural capital, local lifestyles, and indigenous knowledge into high-value tourism experiences. Cultural tourism has therefore gained increasing policy attention, with a focus on developing diverse tourism products such as homestays, community-based tourism, cultural markets, and local lifestyle learning activities. These initiatives aim to attract high-quality tourists and create meaningful experiences that reflect local identity (Ministry of Culture, 2023). However, without proper management, such development may lead to over-commercialization, which can undermine cultural authenticity and threaten community sustainability (Klangrit et al., 2021). Consequently, establishing clear quality standards for cultural tourism is essential to ensure balanced and sustainable development.

Although Thailand has continuously promoted cultural tourism, a research gap remains in examining the relationship between cultural capital potential and tourism service quality, as well as tourist satisfaction. In particular, limited studies have compared the effectiveness of community participation in managing cultural tourism destinations, especially in ethnically diverse areas such as Surin Province (Siriphaprapagon et al., 2023). Surin Province, with a history of more than 2,000 years, is home to diverse ethnic groups, including Khmer, Lao, and Kuy communities, which reflect a distinctive cultural identity and strong potential for cultural tourism development (Klangrit et al., 2025). Nevertheless, tourism development in the area still faces constraints in service quality standards, community participation, and sustainable cultural resource management. Therefore, this study aims to examine the potential of cultural tourism and the quality standards of tourist attractions in Surin Province, in order to analyze the factors influencing tourist satisfaction and tourism sustainability.

This study addresses several research questions related to cultural tourism development in Surin Province. First, it seeks to determine the level and components of cultural capital potential in Surin Province. Second, it examines the relationship between tourism potential and tourist satisfaction, including whether and how they are related. Third, it investigates how community participation influences the sustainability of cultural tourism management. Finally, it explores appropriate approaches for developing cultural tourism standards in alignment with Thailand's Soft Power 5F policy framework. The expected findings of this study are anticipated to provide both policy-level and practical contributions. At the policy level, the results may serve as empirical evidence to support the formulation of cultural tourism development strategies under the Soft Power 5F framework and the Thirteenth National Economic and Social Development Plan, thereby enhancing Thailand's international competitiveness. At the practical level, the findings may assist local communities and relevant stakeholders in improving service standards, tourism management, and cultural resource conservation. This, in turn, is expected to enhance tourist satisfaction, generate community income, and promote long-term sustainable tourism development.

Research Objectives

1. To assess the cultural tourism potential of cultural tourist attractions in Surin province, Thailand
2. To evaluate the quality standards of cultural tourist attractions in Surin province, Thailand

Literature Review

Concept of Tourism Potential

Tourism potential refers to the intrinsic value and readiness of a destination to attract visitors and contribute to industry growth. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports defines potential as the value inherent in unique characteristics that create memorable experiences (Čulić et al., 2021). It also represents the underlying ability to support development, transformation, or sustainable management. Evaluation typically considers attractiveness and readiness, categorized as high, moderate, or low. Key factors include natural beauty, cultural and historical value, and local ways of life (Yan et al., 2017). Accessibility transportation routes, modes, and distance from cities is equally vital, along with infrastructure such as accommodations, dining, medical services, utilities, and safety systems. Environmental quality, including climate, pollution control, and ecological sustainability, further shapes tourism potential identifies four indicators: motivational factors (natural and cultural attractions), complementary factors (environmental and political stability), support services (shops, accommodations, information), and transport infrastructure. A scholar emphasizes spatial uniqueness, accessibility, management capacity, activity diversity, and community participation. Prior to planning, assessing opportunities, risks, and engagement is essential to align tourism strategies with sustainability. Together, these frameworks highlight that tourism potential, particularly for cultural heritage attractions like Surin, depends on a holistic integration of attractiveness, infrastructure, management, and community involvement.

Concepts and Criteria for Evaluating Quality Standards

Quality standards of cultural tourism attractions can be systematically assessed through national and international frameworks. In Thailand, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2007) identifies three dimensions attractiveness, support capacity, and management. Attractiveness includes cultural value uniqueness of lifestyles, traditions, arts, history, community attachment, and preservation alongside accessibility, safety, and activity diversity. Support capacity concerns infrastructure availability and potential for development, supported by government, private, and community collaboration. Management emphasizes sustainable practices including conservation, restoration, service delivery, impact monitoring, and community participation. Indicators cover preservation, service systems, dissemination of knowledge, and local income generation. Complementing this, ICOMOS highlights ethical communication of heritage value. Its seven principles stress accessibility for diverse audiences, multidisciplinary interpretation, contextualization within broader histories, authenticity, integration with site management, inclusivity, and continuous professional development (ICOMOS Thailand, 2007). When combined, these frameworks provide a comprehensive model addressing both tangible aspects safety, services, infrastructure and intangible values authenticity, heritage meaning, and community engagement. For Surin, applying this dual-lens ensures evaluation not only measures readiness and management capacity but also communicates cultural significance effectively. Thus, a high-quality cultural tourism attraction harmonizes operational excellence with heritage integrity, enabling sustainable tourism that respects local culture, empowers communities, and offers meaningful learning experiences for visitors.

Related Research Studies

The development of a framework to evaluate tourism potential and quality standards in Surin is informed by various studies on cultural resource assessment, marketing, community participation, and sustainability. Thawornwisit and Wongmonta (2021) developed a GIS database of 378 cultural sites in Nan province, revealing underutilization and underscoring the need for systematic evaluation a concept relevant for Surin. Wonglangka and Han (2024) explored heritage tourism strategies, stressing segmentation and diverse routes, offering insights for tailored development in Surin. In marketing, Chaiyos emphasized public relations and online media to strengthen local identity and attract tourists. Community-based tourism models proposed by some scholar highlight local learning, landscape use, and human resource development, aligning with goals to empower Surin’s communities. Similarly, Krudnak and Sungrugsa (2023) showcased community engagement through contemporary art in Phetchaburi, a model transferable to Surin’s ethnic and artistic diversity. Beyond Thailand, studies in Luang Prabang indicate tourism can boost economies but also risks cultural erosion and inequality, stressing the need to balance growth and preservation. Collectively, these works provide tools and strategies for resource evaluation, value promotion, community involvement, and sustainable management critical for building a robust framework to advance Surin’s cultural tourism in line with sustainable development principles.

Conceptual Framework

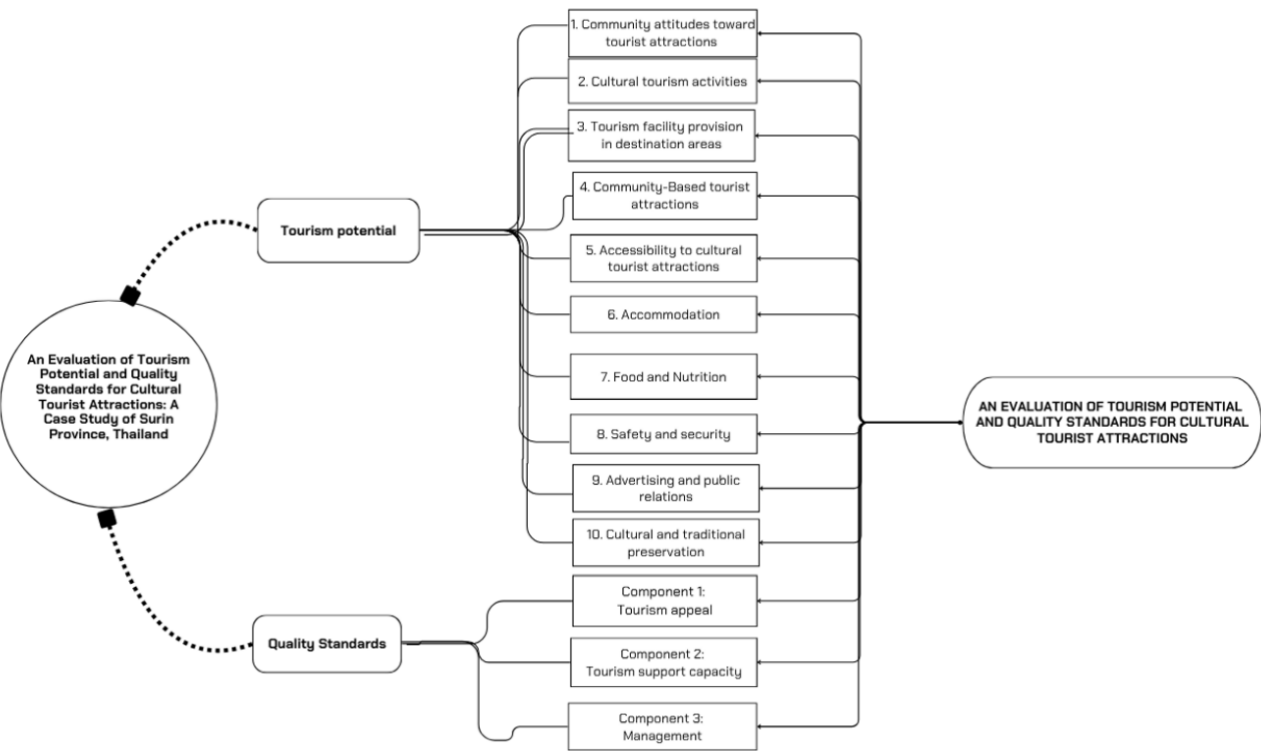


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research methodology to assess the tourism potential and quality standards of cultural tourist attractions in Surin Province, Thailand. The research focused on four districts Mueang Surin, Tha Tum, Sikhorphum, and Samrong

Thap selected for their cultural heritage significance and consistent tourist popularity based on Tourism Authority of Thailand data, as well as the presence of district cultural centers that preserve and revitalize local arts, traditions, and lifestyles. The target population comprised stakeholders in cultural tourism. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 400 participants, including 25 government officials, 25 private sector representatives, 25 community leaders, and 325 domestic and international tourists, ensuring diverse perspectives on tourism development. A structured questionnaire was used as the main research instrument. It was developed based on a review of relevant literature, research objectives, and previous studies on cultural tourism and quality standards. The questionnaire was pilot tested for reliability, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of $\alpha = 0.89$, indicating high internal consistency, before being revised and finalized for data collection. Data were collected through fieldwork conducted between October 2020 and October 2021 across the selected districts. Data analysis was performed using SPSS for Windows. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, including frequency, percentage, mean ($\bar{X}$), and standard deviation (S.D.), in order to summarize and interpret the levels of tourism potential and quality standards of cultural tourist attractions.

Results

Demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the 400 respondents in the study "An evaluation of tourism potential and quality standards for cultural tourist attractions: a case study of Surin province, Thailand" provide meaningful insights into the population engaged in cultural tourism. The majority of respondents were female (60.50%), while 39.50% were male. In terms of age, the largest group was 30-39 years old (33.00%), followed by 40-49 years (25.50%), 20-29 years (25.30%), 50-59 years (11.00%), under 20 years (3.50%), and over 60 years (1.80%). Regarding education, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (69.00%), followed by those with less than a bachelor's degree (24.30%) and more than a bachelor's degree (6.80%). Marital status data indicated that the majority were married (53.80%), followed by single (41.80%), divorced (3.50%), and widowed (1.00%). For occupation, the largest segment comprised small business owners (31.80%), followed by officers (30.30%), company employees (21.80%), others (8.30%), state enterprise employees (6.80%), and retired civil servants (1.30%). In terms of monthly income, the highest proportion of respondents earned between 10,001-20,000 THB (40.50%), followed by 20,001-30,000 THB (29.80%), less than 10,000 THB (9.50%), 30,001-40,000 THB (9.00%), 40,001-50,000 THB (5.80%), and more than 50,000 THB (5.50%). This diverse demographic profile reflects the broad spectrum of individuals involved in Surin's cultural tourism sector and provides a valuable foundation for planning sustainable and inclusive tourism development strategies.

An evaluation of tourism potential for cultural tourist attractions

Table 1: Tourism potential for cultural tourist attractions

Tourism potential for cultural tourist attractions	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	S.D.	Level of Opinion
1. Community attitudes toward tourist attractions			
1) Support for community-based tourism management	3.85	0.865	High
2) Participation in providing opinions, planning, and development	4.08	0.809	High
3) Promotion of creative learning in the community based on local wisdom	4.04	0.692	High
Overall	4.20	0.757	High

Tourism potential for cultural tourist attractions	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	S.D.	Level of Opinion
2. Cultural tourism activities			
1) Organize tourism activities that reflect the culture of the local community	3.96	0.852	High
2) Promote activities that foster relationships between local residents and tourists	3.98	0.828	High
3) Develop tourism activities based on the philosophy of sufficiency economy	3.94	0.858	High
4) Provide clear and realistic tourism programs that align with the actual conditions of the community and are accessible to the public and tourists	3.89	0.870	High
Overall	3.94	0.694	High
3. Tourism facility provision in destination areas			
1) Create and offer local cuisine and traditional dishes	3.96	0.847	High
2) Provide public utilities (electricity, water supply, telephone, and internet access)	3.83	0.893	High
3) Employ local tour guides	3.68	0.951	High
4) Provide transportation services for site tours	3.72	0.968	High
5) Ensure availability of clean and private restrooms	3.77	0.925	High
Overall	3.79	0.707	High
4. Community-Based tourist attractions			
1) Promote the quality and preservation of archaeological sites	3.94	0.992	High
2) Preserve and pass on stories and legends related to archaeological Heritage	3.84	0.938	High
3) Organize cultural learning activities between local communities and tourists	3.75	0.948	High
Overall	3.84	0.837	High
5. Accessibility to cultural tourist attractions			
1) Develop and improve the local landscape	3.88	0.972	High
2) Provide clear and visible directional signage	3.76	0.969	High
3) Maintain and ensure safety within the community	3.70	0.949	High
Overall	3.78	0.865	High
6. Accommodation			
1) Provide creative lodging that reflects the community's unique identity	4.07	0.862	High
2) Maintain cleanliness and ensure accommodation meets quality standards	3.89	0.895	High
3) Promote homestay-style accommodation	3.83	0.899	High
Overall	3.92	0.758	High
7. Food and Nutrition			
1) Use locally sourced ingredients and prepare food hygienically	4.00	0.920	High
2) Provide clean drinking water that has undergone a purification process	3.95	0.860	High
3) Ensure food containers such as bowls, plates, spoons, shared utensils, serving ladles, and rice containers are clean and odor-free	3.85	0.848	High
4) Manage waste in a sanitary and environmentally friendly manner	3.83	0.941	High
5) Creatively design menus featuring local cuisine	3.90	0.717	High
Overall	4.00	0.920	High
8. Safety and security			
1) Establish emergency response protocols for assisting tourists in case of illness or accidents	3.98	0.885	High
2) Provide basic first-aid medications that are readily available and not expired	3.81	0.901	High
3) Implement security patrols to ensure the safety of life and property such as vehicles	3.77	0.863	High

Tourism potential for cultural tourist attractions	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	S.D.	Level of Opinion
4) Ensure communication tools are available to directly contact responsible authorities during emergencies	3.81	0.906	High
5) Maintain public safety within the community	3.84	0.736	High
Overall	3.98	0.885	High
9. Advertising and public relations			
1) Produce brochures to promote local tourism attractions	3.95	1.017	High
2) Plan and disseminate tourism information related to archaeological sites	3.84	0.966	High
3) Collaborate with relevant agencies to advertise and promote archaeological tourism	3.84	0.961	High
Overall	3.87	0.871	High
10. Cultural and traditional preservation			
1) Maintain traditional houses or historical homes that reflect local culture to attract tourist interest	3.77	0.932	High
2) Collect and document local cultural knowledge for accurate dissemination to visitors	3.95	0.916	High
3) Implement community and school plans for the restoration, preservation, and transmission of local culture, arts, and folk games	3.81	0.891	High
4) Continue traditional ways of life, such as offering alms to monks, temple merit-making, and paying respect to ancestral spirit shrines	3.82	0.921	High
Overall	3.83	0.767	High

The evaluation of tourism potential for cultural attractions in Surin province found overall potential at a high level across ten key dimensions. Community attitudes scored highest ($\bar{x}$ =4.20), reflecting strong willingness to participate in tourism planning, though support for community-based management was slightly lower ($\bar{x}$ =3.85), suggesting a need for leadership capacity building. Cultural tourism activities rated highly ($\bar{x}$ =3.94), with strong interaction between residents and tourists, though programs aligned with community conditions require improvement. Tourism facilities scored well ($\bar{x}$ =3.79), particularly in culinary offerings ($\bar{x}$ =3.96), but use of local guides was limited ($\bar{x}$ =3.68). Community-based attractions also rated high ($\bar{x}$ =3.84), with emphasis on archaeological preservation, though cultural learning activities need expansion. Accessibility scored 3.78, with landscape development strong but safety measures and signage needing improvement. Accommodation ($\bar{x}$ =3.92) reflected cultural identity through creative lodging, though homestays require further development. Food and nutrition scored highest overall ($\bar{x}$ =4.00), with strengths in hygiene and local sourcing, but waste management lagged ($\bar{x}$ =3.83). Safety and security ($\bar{x}$ =3.98) showed strong emergency preparedness, though security patrols require reinforcement ($\bar{x}$ =3.77). Advertising and PR ($\bar{x}$ =3.87) were effective, particularly brochures, but collaboration with agencies and promotion of archaeological sites need improvement. Finally, cultural preservation ($\bar{x}$ =3.83) was strong in documenting knowledge but weaker in maintaining traditional houses ($\bar{x}$ =3.77). Overall, Surin demonstrates high cultural tourism potential but requires targeted improvements in management, safety, and heritage preservation to achieve sustainable growth.

An evaluation of quality standards for cultural tourist attractions

Table 2: Quality standards for cultural tourist attractions

Quality standards for cultural tourist attractions	Mean $\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level of Opinion
Component 1: Tourism appeal			
1.1 Cultural and artistic value			
1) Uniqueness of local lifestyle, indigenous wisdom, and knowledge	4.04	0.692	High
2) Continuity in preserving cultural traditions and customs	3.94	0.694	High
3) Aesthetic beauty in arts and culture	3.79	0.707	High
4) Ability to transmit local wisdom and knowledge across generations	3.84	0.837	High
5) Traceable history of cultural and traditional heritage	3.78	0.865	High
6) Emotional connection to the local community	3.92	0.758	High
7) Strong commitment to preserving cultural identity	3.87	0.871	High
Overall	3.88	0.7749	High
1.2 Physical potential and organization of tourism activities			
1) Accessibility to tourist attractions	3.84	0.966	High
2) Tourist safety and security	3.95	1.017	High
3) Diversity of tourism activities	3.84	0.961	High
Overall	3.87	0.871	High
Component 2: Tourism support capacity			
2.1 Capacity to develop basic infrastructure and facilities	3.94	0.992	High
2.2 Capacity to improve tourism based on external factors	3.84	0.938	High
Overall	3.89	0.965	High
Component 3: Management			
3.1 Management of tourist site conservation			
1) Management of the preservation and restoration of the sites	3.94	0.992	High
2) Management of land use	3.75	0.948	High
3) Management of monitoring and evaluating changes caused by tourism	3.84	0.938	High
Overall	3.84	0.837	High
3.2 Tourism management			
1) Management of services and public utilities for tourists	3.72	0.968	High
2) Management of tourism activities	3.77	0.925	High
3) Management of knowledge dissemination and awareness-building	3.83	0.893	High
4) Participation of local communities in tourism management	3.68	0.951	High
5) Income generation for the community through tourism	3.96	0.847	High
Overall	3.79	0.707	High

From Table above, the evaluation of quality standards for cultural tourist attractions in Surin Province showed an overall high-quality level ($\bar{x}$ =3.85). Three key components were assessed. First, Tourism appeal received a high score ($\bar{x}$ =3.88). The uniqueness of local lifestyles, indigenous wisdom, and knowledge was rated highest ($\bar{x}$ =4.04), while traceability of cultural heritage was lowest ($\bar{x}$ =3.78). Physical potential and activity organization also scored highly ($\bar{x}$ =3.87), with tourist safety the strongest point ($\bar{x}$ =3.95), but activity diversity and accessibility slightly weaker ($\bar{x}$ =3.84). Second, Tourism support capacity scored ($\bar{x}$ =3.89 overall. Infrastructure and facility development was rated highest ($\bar{x}$ =3.94), while the ability to enhance tourism through external factors was lower ($\bar{x}$ =3.84). Third, Management obtained strong ratings. Conservation management averaged $\bar{x}$ =3.84, with preservation and restoration highest ($\bar{x}$ =3.94) and land-use management lowest ($\bar{x}$ =3.75). Tourism management scored $\bar{x}$ =3.79, with income generation for communities rated highest ($\bar{x}$ =3.96), but community participation in management lowest ($\bar{x}$ =3.68).

Discussion

The evaluation reveals that Surin's cultural tourist attractions hold strong potential, particularly in cultural value, safety, and infrastructure, positioning the province as a leading cultural tourism destination. Its unique identity, indigenous knowledge, and traditional lifestyle can form a distinct tourism brand, supported by systematic cultural management models. However, challenges include limited activity diversity, weak land use management, and low community participation. Expanding interactive offerings such as festivals, craft workshops, and storytelling can strengthen engagement (Moscardo, 2021). Balanced land use planning is necessary to prevent degradation of heritage and natural resources, while participatory approaches and capacity building are vital to foster ownership and align tourism with community needs (Butler, 1991). Continuous monitoring and stakeholder feedback will ensure standards and adaptability (Chen et al., 2017). Quality standards also scored high, especially in cultural value, visitor safety, and infrastructure, providing a foundation for Surin to become a cultural tourism model. Leveraging local identity and practices can enhance branding (Panich et al., 2014), while documenting best practices supports wider application. Yet, low scores in activity diversity, land use, and community involvement highlight gaps. Solutions include expanding interactive experiences, integrating conservation with land use (Pereira et al., 2021), and fostering inclusive participation (Brooks et al., 2023). Regular evaluations are essential to maintain competitiveness. In sum, Surin demonstrates strong potential, but strategic improvements in activity diversification, community engagement, and sustainable land use are critical for long-term inclusive development. (Chuamuangphan, 2026)

New Body of Knowledge

The new knowledge has shown that Surin demonstrates high potential for cultural tourism development. Key enabling factors include positive community attitudes toward tourist attractions, food and nutrition, safety and security, cultural tourism activities, accommodation, advertising and public relations and the key components of quality standards are, tourism appeal, reflected in cultural and artistic value and the uniqueness of local lifestyle and wisdom; tourism support capacity, evident in the ability to develop infrastructure and facilities; and management, highlighted by effective conservation and restoration of cultural heritage sites.

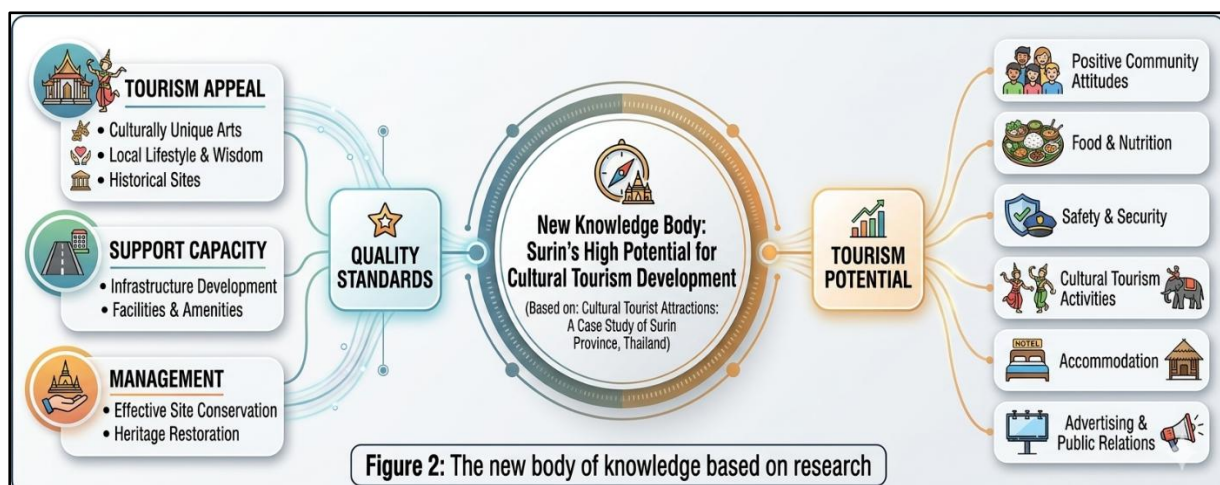


Figure 2: The new body of knowledge base on research

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study concludes that Surin Province holds strong potential for cultural tourism, supported by favorable community attitudes, cultural activities, accommodation, and

preservation efforts, with an overall capacity of $\bar{x}=3.87$. Respondents, mostly female, aged 30-39, with stable incomes, reflected diverse perspectives on tourism development. Strengths include cultural and artistic value, safety, and infrastructure, with quality standards rated highly ($\bar{x}=3.85$). However, weaknesses remain in public safety measures, clarity of tourism programs, promotion of homestays, and land use management. Limited community involvement in tourism planning also highlights the need for greater inclusivity. Addressing these gaps through participatory approaches, improved program design, and sustainable management will enhance Surin's competitiveness. Overall, while Surin has strong cultural foundations, strategic improvements are essential to ensure long-term sustainability and inclusive cultural tourism development.

Recommendations

1. To enhance tourism potential in Surin province, community-based tourism should be strengthened through model destinations that promote local ownership and participation, aligned with SDG 11 on sustainable communities. Cultural experiences should be developed into structured activities such as cultural trails, workshops, and heritage learning. Tourism facilities, especially homestays and food services, must meet certified quality and hygiene standards in line with SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production. Safety systems, including emergency response and community security networks, should be improved. Tourism planning should be co-designed with stakeholders to ensure sustainability. Promotion should integrate collaboration among local authorities and digital platforms, highlighting Surin's cultural identity and diversity. Cultural preservation should be embedded in tourism through heritage, crafts, and local traditions, in alignment with the Lower Northeastern Economic Corridor (Lower Isaan) development framework to support sustainable regional growth.

2. Quality standards development, Surin should leverage strengths in cultural value, safety, and infrastructure to position itself as a national cultural tourism model. Best practices in management and conservation should be documented and standardized for replication. To address weaknesses, tourism activities should be diversified with interactive experiences, while land use planning must balance development and conservation. Greater community participation through capacity-building and participatory planning is essential. Tourism programs should integrate cultural, historical, and lifestyle aspects cohesively, while continuous monitoring and evaluation systems are needed to maintain quality and adapt to changing demands.

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