



# The travelling route for gastronomic tourism via salt in western region of Thailand

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## Abstract

This research on upgrading the creative tourism route of Thailand via local food promotion in especially western Thailand, intentionally focuses on the capabilities of some charming tourist attractions which through local food of the western region, could enhance tourism. It additionally explores tourism information for 'food learning' and knowledge acquisition, in the following eight provinces including Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Suphanburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Samut Songkhram and Samut Sakhon. This is in order to design and craft a suitable tourism route for potential tourists interested in the notion of 'food learning'. The research methodology applied consists of qualitative and quantitative aspects. The qualitative aspect analyzes local food secondary data and also involved interviewing food gurus and lifestyle experts and it included surveying tourist attractions and their potential in representing an areas identity in terms of especially food. It also looked at the food culture, tradition and indigenous knowledge based on the concepts of eco-agricultural tourism, community-based tourism and sustainable tourism.

The result of the aforementioned analysis and on-site survey shows that each province has its own distinctive identity and characteristics that can be deployed as tourist attractions. Furthermore, the identity of food culture in the western region can be divided into 2 groups: 1) a group of coastal provinces - Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, Pechaburi and Prachuap Khiri Khan in which emphasis is on seafood nutrient resources, and 2) a group of inland provinces - Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Suphanburi and Nakhon Pathom which stress nutrient resources gained from rivers, hills and agricultural lands. After grouping each province based on its identity and distinctive characteristics, its tourist attractions are linked to each province's existing tourist attractions so as to enable a better design of the tourism route through the avenue of local food promotion. This is then analyzed along with the potential of tourist attractions. After determining the abovementioned tourism routes, a trip plan was created which can be used as a model example for local food learning in each of the three routes. The result was a two-day trip new tourism plan which is suitable for food tourists and learning about culinary aspects of Thailand. It is expected that the commercial potential of these provinces can be enhanced through such a new tourism model being applied in the western region. This can be matched with foreign individual tourism (FIT) as well as the tourists preferences for experiencing and learning about local food in a form of "Tour, Taste and Learn". The data require more work so as to improvement offerings and also to enable the working team in each region office of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to further develop and upgrade the creative tourism route through the use of local food promotion as encouraged in this article.

**Keywords:** Creative tourism route, local food, indigenous food, western Thailand

## Introduction

Research on upgrading the creative tourism route through local food promotion in western Thailand intentionally focuses on the capabilities of some charming tourist attractions which use local food to attract tourists. The western region also currently explores tourism information for 'food learning' in the following eight provinces of Thailand, namely, Nakhon Pathom, Ratchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Suphanburi, Phetchaburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Samut Songkhram and Samut Sakhon. This is important in order to better design a tourism route for potential 'food learning' and culinary experiences for the myriad of tourists gracing the shores of Thailand.



Thailand has three attractive and commercial potential tourism routes, namely:

The 'Salt Route', the 'Jaggery Route' and the 'Fish Route'. The purpose of the Salt Route route is to avail tourists to acknowledge the lifestyle of local people and fishermen living along the Thai Gulf and including learning as to how salt is gathered, salt farming and the utilization of salt for other purposes, apart from being used as a food supplement. In addition, it also focuses on an activity showing how much each coastal province links to its existing natural resources and how this helps contribute to each province's distinctive identity. Among those provinces, there are three that are related to salt farming and processing and these include Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram and Pechaburi. Their tourist attractions along the route are the Learning Center for Indigenous Knowledge of Samut Songkhram, Khokkharom Salt Farm Learning Center, Ban Laem Salt Farmer Group, Ban Laem Agriculturist Group, Kanghunting Sea Salt Group and Home Krateng fishermen.

In the 'Jaggery Route' palmyra palm learning has been applied as the communication tool to link with various learning aspects including agriculture, indigenous knowledge and Thai desserts, related to palmyra palm jaggery and also sugar. Jaggery is a traditional cane sugar consumed in Thailand. It is palmyra palm sap in which molasses and crystals have not separated and can vary from golden brown to dark brown in colour. It is at least 50 percent sucrose and 20 percent invert sugar and 20 percent moisture while the remaining 10 percent is wood ash, fibres and protein (Rana, 2017).

Pechaburi is the province that is totally related to palmyra palm cultivation and processing, with a constant long-term palmyra palm history. The purpose of this route is to learn the local people's lifestyle in an area in which the palmyra palm plays a vital role in daily living. This includes a palmyra palm climbing demonstration, jaggery boiling and dessert recipes made from jaggery. The activities have been launched to symbolize Petchaburi as the authentic city of desserts through the step of exploring the province's most popular desserts. Both main dishes and accompanying desserts have unique tastes in Petchaburi District and Tha Yang Districts respectively. The tourist attractions along this route are Wat Na Phrom Dessert Community – Wat Na Prom Cultural Temple Court - Phra Nakhon Khiri Historical Park (Khaowang) – Muang Petch Popular Shop Tour – rice field – palmyra palm forest – Tha Yang Fries Noodle Thai Style – Pon Kharmwan Shop.

The 'Fish Route' purpose is to learn more about the lifestyle of local people who are known to be fishermen and consumers of fish from both fresh water and the sea. The activities along this route focus on the importance of fish as the main food resource of Thai people since the old days. It is this feature which has created the particular identity of this local area. The tourist attractions along this route include Kaeng Krachan Dam – Sun Dried Squid in Pran Buri District – Pechnairoo Shop – Prachuap Khiri Khan Coastal Aquaculture Research and Development Center – Milkfish Processing Community Enterprise Group.

### **The Salt Travel Route**

Food is an essential element of daily living and also the main part of everyone's life. It provides energy and all life has evolved to depend on it to survive. Consequently, human beings search for food sources leading to social organization in various forms since the earliest ages when humans were hunter until the present time in which there are many agriculturalists who utilize diverse technologies to produce food for human consumption. Without the many food changes in human history, humans might well have become extinct. Food is the root of all civilizations and without food, civilization cannot be sustained. Since humans have been developed by food, it is also common knowledge that humans have extensively utilized food



in various ways, to sustain themselves. In all civilizations throughout the world, food then has hugely contributes to survival and in forging inter-societal linkages. Apart from goods exchange, there have been and continue to be cultural and religious exchanges and therefore global change is the result of past and present global food demand (Standage, 2011). Thai food history is similar to other areas; demand on each food type causes a linkage of agricultural goods exchange. Moreover, since Thailand is the source of many rivers, this factor then supports the transportation network to be more convenient for the exchange of needed goods. For most Thai people, rice plays a vital role as the main staple food, and many people are thus involved in the agricultural sphere in order to gain needed rice production to feed the need from the masses.

In addition, due to having many rivers in Thailand, Thai people then have an intimate relationship with the rivers causing “fish” to become a long-time favorite menu of Thai culinary range. This includes tasty grilled fish, dipped with chili sauce or fresh vegetables that can be found along nearby swamps or the edges of forests (Sirijanya Propriet, 2010). In case there are leftover fish, these can be processed and preserved as spare food in the form of dried fish, salted fish, and even pickled fish. The process of preservation is intricate, and it is obvious that “salt” is the main contributor for the preservation of most food types.

Salt is also an essential component of everyone’s daily life throughout the world and in every civilization, there has been always a story of salt. It can be therefore said that “salt” has played a vital role in human history; for example, in the ancient China, salt was a rare item since it was expensive and under the control of the royal bureaucracy. However, in Thailand, due to its smaller size when compared to China, and its location boasting long beaches along the entire country, a salt shortage situation has never transpired. During wartime, there should be at least rice and salt as the needed provisions; for example, during signing of the Bowring Treaty between the British Empire and the Kingdom of Siam which served to open up Siam to western influence and trade, Siam agreed not to monopolize the salt trade according to a British request, but it reserved the right not to export rice and salt during wartime. Consequently, this shows the importance of salt (Bunnaroth Buaklee, 2015). In term of the salt background in Thailand, salt can be found in two sources, sea salt and rock salt (salt from stone and soil layers). For this research, sea salt found in many locations of researched areas is what is to be inferred.

Sea salt is the salt that is produced by the evaporation of water from the sea brine. After the brine is diluted and evaporated by sunlight, the remaining parts are the crystallized salt. For salt farming, farmers run their salt field seasonally from the end of October onwards and in November when rain is scarce, farmers tend to drain seawater from “trapped fields” and create into “crystallizing fields”. During this process, seawater in large quantities will be added continuously in order to increase the intensity of the trapped water and eliminate dirt and sludge deposits. Next, the water will go into “Na Shue” - a resting field, where the seawater makes contact with sunlight and gets heat from it and then it evaporates until reaching its saturation point and becomes crystallized. After that, it is drained into “Na Plong” where the most salty water can be seen in the form of salt crystals. This stage lasts for 9-10 days and the salt crystals are then gathered and utilized for both food and medicine production needs (Ruengchai Raksriakorn, 2008). From the ancient times, salt has been also considered and used as a herbal medicine due to its cooling effect for healing and neutralization of body chemicals, blood stream relaxation, bile build up relief as well as being used as a laxative medicine. Salt, therefore, is used as one of the main ingredients of many medicines such as those used for treating constipation, for relieving diarrhoea, nasal congestion and inflammation and by some people who use mild saline solutions to wash the internal nasal cavities so as to relieve congestion or for sterilization. Drinking water mixed with some small proportion of salt can also help relieve a dry feeling, and with the intense saline, it can arouse neutralization by vomiting and especially for people who consume poisoned food (Noppadol Vechasawadi, 2000). In addition, the most outstanding property of salt is unavoidably the contribution it



makes for food preservation for items such as fermented and pickled fishes of the southeastern region that are the favorite food of Thai people. They consume such foods throughout the year.

Preservation of agricultural products or food with salt has long been used since the ancient times in order to prevent them from spoilage and extend food availability especially, in case of oversupply. Food preservation is therefore a solution to keep foods lasting longer. In the past, an especially during wartime in many places around the world, people needed salt to keep their food supplies lasting as long as possible and it was an easy method and applicable for many kinds of foods such as meat, seafood including vegetables and fruit. Mixing salt with agricultural products made them salty and caused conditions for microorganism growth affecting food spoilage to dissipate (Kularut, 2009). Apart from the aforementioned preservation, “Shrimp Paste (or Ka-Pi in Thai word)” is another new product from the salting process and is also a well-known in goods from the Samut Songkhram province. This has been recognized as the favorite product of Thai people from early days. The fermentation process is rather simple but takes a long time. The raw materials consist of finely crushed shrimp or krill which is mixed with salt whereas a quantity of salt may be varied subject to each family’s formula. The fermentation lasts approx. 1-2 weeks by putting it in a bamboo basket. During the said period, there will be some water drained from fermented shrimps and after the end of the drainage, it is spread out on a bamboo mat to be dried by sunlight. After it is half dried, it is pounded thoroughly until it becomes a pink or purple sticky paste. The color of the shrimp paste depends on the type of raw materials used. To maintain the validity of a shrimp paste, it will be put in a container such as a fastened jar or earthen jar to prevent air entering which will cause the effect of the product smelling horribly. Normally, the short-term fermentation takes about 4 - 6 months whereas the product using a large quantity of salt will take at least 8 months before the product is palatable for consumption by humans or it is considered fine when its texture appears rather dry (Thailand's Encyclopedia for Youth, Volume 19 No. 3).

## Methodology

As per the abovementioned, the result of the research on the project for upgrading the creative tourism route through local food promotion in western Thailand consisting of eight provinces; Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, Rachaburi, Nakhon Pathom, Kanchanaburi, Suphanburi, Phetchaburi and Prachuap Khiri Khan, shows that “salt” is the one essential raw material in local food creation in western Thailand. Salt was also used as a core material for story-telling and bringing people to travel to each place concerned with its production. At the beginning of this research, the research team conducted the research and studied primary information such as the lifestyles, local foods, food stories, foods used in festivals and food origins of all eight provinces using a desk study approach and a literature survey (Poj Sajja, 1997) in order to collect general data and then analyse those information. This had to be done first so as to then design the travel route in which three provinces are considered concerning salt use, salt farming and food processing by salt. The provinces considered were Samut-Sakhon, Samut Songkhram and Petchaburi. The designed travelling routes of this research were therefore based on the tourist attractions of the three provinces as per the following details.

**Samut Sakhon province:** The salt farms are mostly found in the areas near the sea due to the clay conditions of soil capable of maintaining water from absorption. A local food concerned with salt is known as Seabrite or Cha-Khram. Having many mangrove forests, enables the Samut Sakhon people to always use crops from the mangrove forests for their cooking and Cha-Khram is the favorite crop. To use Cha-Khram for any meal, it is required to boil it and squeeze the water out before cooking it such as the top part of of Cha-Khram which is used in a sea crab curry dish. This was previously a daily menu but nowadays, hardly no one knows this dish.



**Samut Songkhram province:** There are only a few of natural resources in this province. However, its location near the coast of the Thai Gulf, gives it a natural heritage for salt farms and shrimp paste production from krill, which required careful attention in term of cleanness, freshness, dried processing and storage according to the local indigenous knowledge of food production. Various dishes use salt as an ingredient such as inter alia:

1. Khlong Khone shrimp paste - produced by the black-eyed krills and which have delicious taste and are mostly produced in Ban Khlong Chong, Khlong Khone Sub-district, Muang, and Samut Songkhram. This is a product of the local community enterprises and the production starts from a sea krill fishery and the krill is fermented with salt and dried by sunlight. The authentic shrimp paste can be purchased in the sub-district at cheap prices. In addition, there are also homestay services in this sub-district together with activities with an eco-concept which are specially arranged for tourists.
2. Fish sauce – pickling fish sauce of the Mae Klong people uses small white sea salt due to its suitable intensity of salt which causes fish sauce to be hygienic and also gives it a good smell which is different from the usual fish sauce of other sources.
3. Pickled Cockle or Hoy Khrang Dong in Thai – is the native menu of Samut Songkhram and due to the long-term use of this type of food preserve, Hoy Khrang Dong has maintained its particular identity and good taste.

**Petchaburi province:** Salt farming is one of the key occupations of local people in Ban Laem. The processing requires special techniques which represent old tried-and-tested local wisdom on techniques. In term of local food, tourists generally prefer to buy varied desserts, and take this back as a souvenir, rather than dishes. The meat dishes which reflects Petchaburi' s identity such as Hua Tan (head of palmyra) curry, sweetened squid and fried palmyra jaggery are presently rare items and none are available to be sold or even accessible in shops. Thus most tourists therefore enjoy local dishes and rare items at the local shop instead of taking them home. The examples of rare items are Tha Yang fried noodles Thai Style, Thai vermicelli eaten with curry, fried fish patty and rice in ice water. A variety of desserts can be conveniently bought from various souvenir shops located along the way back from both downtown and the surrounding area of Khao Wang (Phra Nakhon Khiri) including a spot at Phetkasem Road. Such desserts include Thai coconut custard, toddy palm cake, sweet palm kernels, deep fried cracker, desserts made from egg yolks (Thong Yib and Thong Yod), fruit jams and Thai caramel.

### **The Learning Center for Local Wisdom of Samut Songkhram or Salt Farming School**

In this center, the activities and expertise in salt use of Samut Songkhram have been planned to and used to explain how to undertake salt farming, how to classify type of salts, use Cha Khram (a plant growing in salt farm only) for cuisine, process salt into various products such as common salt, spa salt, etc. The activities are conducted by passing through 10 learning stations such as making salted eggs with salt flour, making ice cream, making beauty powder from gypsum, using salt and sludge to produce salted eggs and utilizing seaweed gained from salt farms as fertilizer for plants. Using seaweed, poses a waste problem for salt farmers and they need to spend time and money to employ workers to sift it. Initiating and applying seaweed for plants is one method to increase nutrients for plant growth and also for the increased sugar content of fruit with long life. Used as a fertilizer it also helps promote cropping of coastal plants and vegetables. In addition, those stations include knowledge of sea salt, solar cells, Indian marsh fleabane tea, flower of salt soap and salt soap.

#### **1. Khoke Kham Salt Farming Learning Center of Samut-Sakhon**

The knowledge of salt farming has been passed on as an aspect of local wisdom on water management at Khun Luephong' s house. He has devoted his house to knowledge sharing for young generations and tourists so they can to learn how difficult salt farming can be. It is



stressed that the ancestors needed to work very hard before obtaining salt products in order for salt farming to be maintained as a suitable vocation by future generations.

## **2. Ban Laem Salt Farmer Group of Ban Laem District, Phetchaburi Province**

Passing-on of knowledge is also conducted by the manager of the Ban Laem Salt Farmer Group. He starts by describing the process of salt washing for distribution to the food industry and other relevant business units. The primary objective of this activity is for the benefit of commercialism and not necessarily for tourism. Thus, the activity area is not that well-organized as its target group is not tourists.

## **3. OTOP Safety Food Manufacturing and Distribution Center for Khlong Khone Shrimp Paste**

A demonstration of shrimp paste processing is made by Khlong Khone villagers, well known as the experts for savory shrimp paste which is the signature food item of Samut Songkhram. The knowledge of the shrimp paste background, the difference between shrimp paste made from krill and shrimp including their remarkable characteristics, and the production process deployed which is different in finer- details from other areas, is what is discussed at length. Khlong Khone shrimp paste has no artificial preservatives and is thus a natural product that tourists love.

## **4. Kanghunthong Shop – Salt Spa of Petchaburi**

This shop applies a pure salt from Petchaburi and combines it with Thai herbs such as cassumunar ginger, zedoary, turmeric, tanaka and wild turmeric for various types of beauty skin care products which are used to clean and enrich the skin. This allows it to stay smooth and shiny and have a herbal fragrance. In addition, it helps one to relax and de-stress. Salt also helps sterilize microorganisms, cleans skin and maintains skin moisture making it smoother. The Thai herbs cassumunar ginger, zedoary, turmeric, tanaka and wild turmeric, help lessen skin flakiness and also have a herbal natural fragrance which relaxes one from stress through various activities such as salt farming knowledge sharing, creating a DIY salt spa, facial massages and scrubs, foot massages, body massages, massages with milk salt and herbal salt scrubs and also popular foot soaks for relaxation.

## **5. Home Kra Teng Chaolay Restaurant and Homestay**

In Khlong Khone, there are several accommodations which promote fishing and natural activities for tourists. The word “Home Kra Teng”, comes from “Kra Teng” or fishermen cottages built in the sea for guarding cockle farms from huge winds and waves. Since these cottages are temporary abodes, they are not too sturdy and tend to wobble in windy conditions with high waves. This then is the background of Thai word “Kra Teng” reflecting the undulating movement of the cottages. “Home Kra Teng Chaolay” was appraised by the research team and considered as the potential and appropriate homestay for resting and touring on the designed traveling route. This is due to its sturdy cottages which are built firmly and securely in a location which is relatively free from harsh waves and windy conditions. Moreover, the activities arranged for tourists clearly reflect and deliver the spirit of local fishermen such as a demonstration of mussel farming, mud sea long tail boat trips, mud sea lane surfing, a feeding mangrove forest monkeys tour or fishing at the terrace of each cottage, including water skiing that has never been offered before in any area of Khlong Khone.

After collecting all concerned and required information, the research team then designed the travelling routes for food learning based on a theme of salt story tracking, which can be used as an exemplified guideline for a two -day leisure trip that is appropriately matched with taking holidays during weekends (Wutthiphat Vimuktanon, 2012). The following are the proposed carefully designed itinerary activities that could be arranged for this trip which is designed for a two-day adventure in Thailand which could be part of a broader tour package as well.



## Day 1

- 08.00 a.m. Departure from Bangkok to the Learning Center for Local Wisdom of Samut Songkhram, Muang District at a distance of 80 kilometers (from the Victory Monument) and approximately 60 minutes travelling time. Here, the visitors will learn the process of sea salt production from the local 'wisdom scholar', Mr. Soraphong Buaroye (Kru Toe – Salt Farm scholar). The speaker will introduce the local way of life as he is a sea salt farmer. He explains how to produce the salt and other products from salt, the process of ancient ice-cream making in many different flavors and also speaks about the famous Samut-Songkhram cockle preservation recipes. There will be also a workshop in which tourists will make the salted eggs by using the white soil from the sea salt field to marinate an egg. They will also get to know "Shakhram" (Seablite) and other local vegetables which are used for cooking.
- 12.00 a.m. Travel to the restaurant and the accommodation at "Home Krateng Chaolay" and enjoy a luncheon with typical Thai seafood and see a wide variety of seashells at the floating cottage.
- 1.00 p.m. Learn the fishermen' s lifestyle in the area of Khlong Khone mangrove forest. Visit a large oyster farm made of bamboo, the mussel farm, and "Kra Teng" floating cottage used for taking care of the mussels. Feed the mangrove forest monkeys along coastal areas. Inspect the fertile mangrove forest for aquatic animals. Surf on a board to collect cockles. Participate in an activity of cockle farming. The highlight of this day is then the water skiing activity which follows.
- 7.00 p.m. Dinner and leisure time.

## Day 2

- 08.00 a.m. Breakfast at the accommodation.
- 09.00 a.m. Departure from Samut Songkhram to a destination in Bann Laem, Phetchaburi. Experience sea salt farming and an authentic Thai lifestyle. Along the way there is plenty of beautiful scenery and sea salt pans and fields, which are termed the 'white gem' of the Thai Gulf.
- 11.00 a.m.. Direct to Kanghunthong Shop, the only salt spa residence in Thailand. Learn how sea salt is produced for commercial use at Baan Laem District, Phetchaburi. Watch a video presentation on the background of salt and how salt production is carried out. Try to create a DIY salt spa and experience the spa therapy, facial scrub, foot spa and facial massage using salt products.
- 2.00 p.m. Lunch
- 3.00 p.m. Learn the intricate process of marinating shrimp as the production process of shrimp paste and buy interesting souvenirs at Je Jim Shop, Khlong Khone District, Samut Songkhram.
- 6.00 p.m. Return to Bangkok.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this proposed trip using the above itinerary is to learn more about the lifestyles of local people and fishermen and their daily activities in the Thai Gulf including their salt background, salt farming and utilization of salt apart from being used only as a preservative. The arranged activities are also reflect how much coastal areas are linked to the natural resources available in the identified areas. This helps form the unique identity of each targeted area. After determining the abovementioned tourism routes, the trip plan was set up to be used as an example or as a model for local food learning in the three identified routes.

The model can be applied for tourists in the form of a two-day trip. It is expected that the commercial potential of these provinces can be used to create a new tourism model in the



western region and it can be matched with foreign individual tourism (FIT) needs as well as the tourists preferences for local food knowledge acquisition in the form of a “Tour, Taste and Learn” event or tour. The above data require much refinement so as to enable a working team in each regional office of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) to further develop and upgrade the creative tourism route through local food promotion and ideas as proposed in the above article.

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