โอกาสทางธุรกิจของธุรกิจภาคบริการของไทยภายใต้นโยบายประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียน
The Business Opportunities for Thai Service Sectors in AEC

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Abstract

Thailand is one of the most famous Asean countries for its impressive historical sites, rich and vibrant culture, beautiful beaches, and scenic countryside. Moreover, Thailand is a country of gentle, polite, and genuinely friendly people. Thailand ranks the first in the categories of warmth and friendliness, affordable accommodation cost and interesting nightlife. However, Thailand may encounter some crises when the ASEAN Economic Community is implemented in a few years. But if Thais and especially the service sectors prepare thoroughly, the AEC would not affect them that badly and they may even find opportunities to earn the benefits from the AEC. This article provided the Thai service sectors the opportunity to understand and get their business ready the business before the start of the AEC so they can avoid all of the business problems and find ways to make their businesses successful in the coming AEC.

บทคัดย่อ

ประเทศไทยเป็นประเทศที่มีชื่อเสียงและน่าประทับใจมากที่สุดประเทศหนึ่งในกลุ่มประเทศอาเซียน เนื่องจากมีความสวยงามทางด้านประวัติศาสตร์ วัฒนธรรม ธรรมชาติต่างๆ รวมไปถึงความสุภาพอ่อนโยนของคนไทย ที่ทั่วโลกให้การยอมรับว่าเป็นประเทศที่ผู้คนเป็นมิตรและอบอุ่นมากที่สุด แต่อย่างไรก็ตาม ในระยะเวลาอันใกล้นี้ ประเทศไทยจะก้าวเข้าสู่ประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียน ซึ่งหากคนไทยและโดยเฉพาะผู้ที่ประกอบธุรกิจภาคบริการไม่ทำความเข้าใจก็อาจส่งผลให้เกิดผลกระทบต่อธุรกิจได้ บทความนี้จึงได้นำเสนอการเตรียมความพร้อมและสร้างความเข้าใจเกี่ยวกับโอกาสต่างๆ ที่จะเกิดขึ้นภายหลังการเปิดประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียน ซึ่งจะทำให้ภาคธุรกิจบริการต่างๆ สามารถหลีกเลี่ยงปัญหาที่อาจเกิดขึ้นและเกิดแนวทางในการประกอบธุรกิจให้เกิดผลสำเร็จในประชมคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียนได้

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From ASEAN to AEC

Figure 1 : Map of ASEAN member countries
Source : http://www.ecberkku.com/index.php?page=read_inside&id=1295

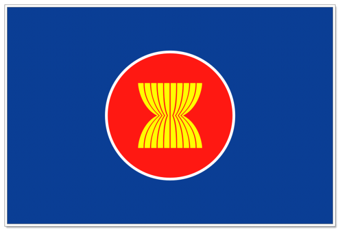

Figure 2 : ASEAN Flag
Source : http://www.asean.org

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been the representative of regional economic cooperation and integration among developing countries, within the structural change of the world economy. In East Asia, ASEAN has been the sole source of regional cooperation. Founded in 1967, ASEAN has promoted deepening and widening of regional cooperation since its founding, deepening its political and economic cooperation and fostering other types of cooperation. The five original members in 1967--Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, Brunei in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999. Consequently, ASEAN presently extends throughout Southeast Asia. (Kuboon Charumanee, 2012 : 1)

ASEAN has implemented intra-regional economic cooperation since 1976. A Common Effective Preferential Tariff (CEPT) scheme to promote the free flow of goods within ASEAN lead the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). The AFTA is an agreement by the member nations of ASEAN concerning local manufacturing in all ASEAN countries. The AFTA agreement was signed on 28 January 1992 in Singapore. When the AFTA agreement was signed, ASEAN had six members, namely, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Vietnam joined in 1995, Laos and Burma in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999. These countries that joined the ASEAN after the AFTA agreement was signed have not fully met the AFTA's obligations, but they are officially considered part of the AFTA as they were required to sign the agreement upon membership into ASEAN, and were given longer time frames in which to meet AFTA's tariff reduction obligations.

The next step is the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), including AFTA, with main objectives are to create a: single market and production base, highly competitive economic region, region of equitable economic development, region fully integrated into the global economy. Since 2007, the ASEAN countries gradually lower their import duties among them and targeted will be zero for most of the import duties at 2015. And Since 2011, AEC has agreed to strengthen the position and increase the competitive edges of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the ASEAN region. (Kuboon Charumanee, 2012 : 3)

Globalization due to the growth of international economic interdependence, especially the growth of the international capital movement, has been the base of development for ASEAN countries since the mid-1980s. However, this led to the Asian economic crisis in 1997, and has also created global imbalances, the subprime loan problem and the current world economic crisis. As part of these structural changes of the world economy, ASEAN has promoted the deepening and widening of its regional cooperation.

AEC or ASEAN Economic Community developed from the ASEAN (The Association of South East Asian Nations) and was established by the Declaration of Bangkok (Bangkok Declaration) on August 8, 1967 by the founder of the first five countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. In 1984, Brunei became a member, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar joined in 1997, and the latest country is Cambodia joined in 1999. Currently, there are 10 members of ASEAN and become an important of economic region which has a large number of population almost 500 million people.

AEC is officially set up in 2020, but the country's member agreed to postpone faster within 2015. The significant progress is subsequently made the Declaration of ASEAN which is effect since December 2009 and enhancing the cooperation of ASEAN into a new dimension in the community by having a strong legal foundation and organization to support the implementation of these goals within 2015.

Currently, the member of ASEAN included 10 countries: Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines,Singapore, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

After the 9th ASEAN Summit in Indonesia on 7 October 2003 (Declaration of ASEAN Concord II or Bali Concord II), ASEAN members' leader agreed to establish an ASEAN Community which consists of three main pillars as follow;

1. ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

2. ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. (Socio-Cultural Pillar).

3. European Security Community (Political and Security Pillar).

According to the ASEAN Economic Community blue print, the AEC is focusing and integrating plan for the economy in the ASEAN which includes the approaches to the AEC, the economy plan in a various fields, and the duration of the implementation measures to achieve the goal in 2015.

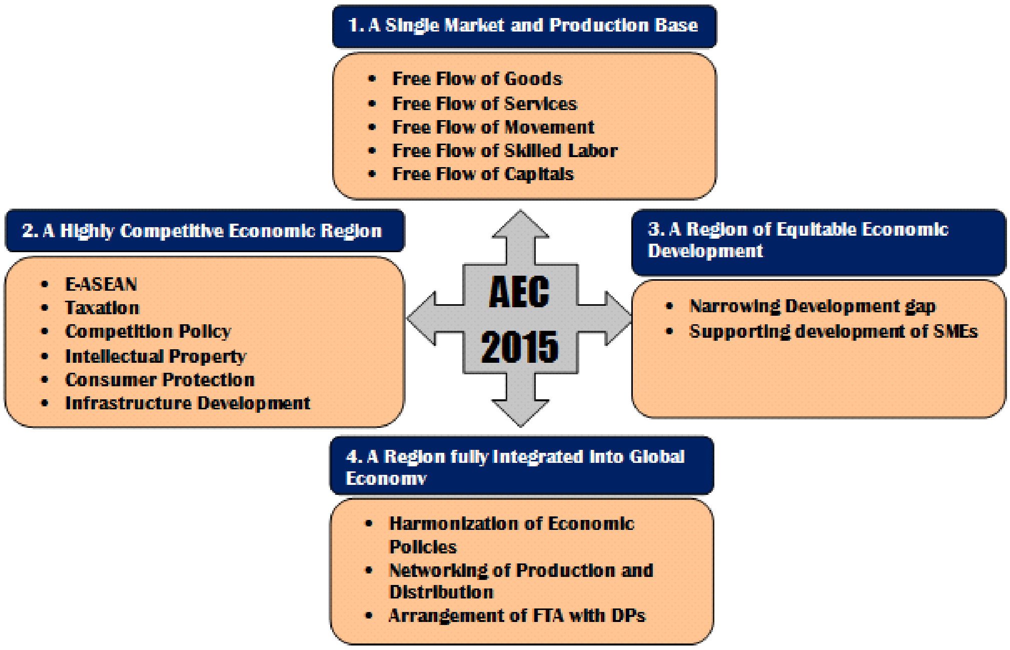

Figure 2 : AEC Structure

From the figure above, the explanation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) are as the following;

1. Single Market and Production Base.

2. A Highly Competitive Economic Region.

3. A Region of Equitable Economic Development.

4. A Region fully Integrated Into Global Economy.

1. Single market and production base.

The Single market and production base is one the most importance strategic for ASEAN. Single market is a type of trade bloc which is composed of a free trade area (for goods) with common policies on product regulation, and freedom of movement of the factors of production (capital and labor) and of enterprise and services that the movement of capital, labor, goods, and services between the members is as easy as within them. The physical (borders), technical (standards) and fiscal (taxes) barriers among the member countries are removed to the maximum extent possible.

For an ASEAN, Single market and production base shall comprise five core elements as follows;

(1) Free flow of goods.

Free flow of goods is one of the principal means by which the aims of a single market and production base can be achieved. . The goal of this principle is Tariff removal or Zero Tariff on all intra-ASEAN goods and enhancing transparency of non-tariff measures and formulating regional rules and regulation consistent with international best practice. A single market for goods (and services) will also facilitate the development of trade, customs and production networks processes in the region and enhance ASEAN's capacity to serve as a global production centre or as a part of the global supply chain by ultimately establishing and ASEAN Single Window (ASW).

(2) Free flow of services.

Free flow of trade in services is one of the important elements in realizing ASEAN Economic Community, where there will be substantially no restriction to ASEAN services suppliers in providing services and in establishing companies across national borders within the region, subject to domestic regulations. Liberalization of services has been carried out through rounds of negotiation mainly under the Coordinating Committee on Services. Negotiation of some specific services sectors such as financial services and air transport are carried out by their respective Ministerial bodies. In liberalizing services, there should be no back-loading of commitments, and pre-agreed flexibility shall be accorded to all ASEAN Member Countries.

(3) Free flow of investment.

A free and open investment regime is key to enhancing ASEAN's competitiveness in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) as well as intra-ASEAN investment. Sustained inflows of new investments and reinvestments will promote and ensure dynamic development of ASEAN economies.

(4) Free flow of capital.

It is a strengthening ASEAN Capital Market Development and Integration. And allowing Greater Capital Mobility by ensuring an orderly capital account liberalization consistent with member countries' national agenda and readiness of the economy

(5) Free flow of skilled labor.

It is allowing for managed mobility

or facilitated entry for the movement of natural persons engaged in trade in goods, services, and investments, according to the prevailing regulations of the receiving country. And to support the VISA facilitation and issuance of employment passed for ASEAN professionals and skilled labor. Moreover, free flow of skilled labor is to harmonizing and standardizing of core competencies and qualifications for occupational trainers' skills. And the last is to promoting skills and job placements and developing labor market information among the member countries.

2. A Highly Competitive Economic Region.

This is one of the key characteristics of AEC. Areas that the ASEAN are looking into are thefollowing:

(1) Competition Policy. The main objective of the competition policy is to foster a culture of fair competition. Institutions and laws related to competition policy have recently been established in some ASEAN Member Countries.

(2) Consumer Protection. The building of an integrated economic region is mindful that consumers cannot be precluded in all measures taken to achieve the ASEAN integration. Consumer protection measures are already being developed in tandem with the proposed economic measures.

(3) Intellectual Property Rights (IPR). IPR can serve as a powerful stimulus to (a) cultural, intellectual and artistic creativity and other commercialization; (b) efficient adoption and adaptation of more advanced technology; and continuous learning to meet the ever-rising threshold of performance expectation. This will also help incubate the culture of creativity and invention.

(4) Infrastructure Development. This covers vast areas for development and cooperation. Among them are :

a. Transport Cooperation. Efficient, secure and an integrated transport network is vital in realizing the full potential of the ASEAN Free Trade Area. ASEAN transport is critical in linking ASEAN with the neighboring Northeast and South Asian countries. Transport cooperation includes, land transport, maritime and air transport.

b. Information Infrastructure. Efforts have been made to facilitate interconnectivity and technical interoperability among ICT systems, leveraging an existing national networks and evolving these into a regional information infrastructure. Equal emphasis has been given in improving trust and confidence in the use of the internet and security of electronic transactions, payment and settlements.

c. Energy Cooperation. Secure and reliable supply of energy including bio-fuel is crucial to support and sustain economic and industrial activities. Regional collaboration in the Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline (TAGP) and the ASEAN Power

Grid (APG) provide opportunities. The APG involves 14 electricity interconnection projects and the TAGP, seven gas interconnection projects.

d. Mining Cooperation. This is aimed at enhancing trade and investment, and strengthening cooperation and capacity in geological and mineral sector for sustainable mineral development in the ASEAN region.

e. Financing of Infrastructure Projects. Putting in place innovative financing schemes to attract greater private sector involvement in infrastructure projects is important.

(5) Taxation. Complete the network of bilateral agreements on the avoidance of double taxation among all member countries by 2010, to the extent possible.

(6) E-Commerce. To lay policy and legal infrastructure for electronic commerce and enable on-line trade in goods with ASEAN through the implementation of the e-ASEAN Framework Agreement based on common reference frameworks.

3. A Region of Equitable Economic Development.

(1) SME development. The ASEAN Policy Blueprint for SME Development (APBSD) 2004-2014 outlines the framework in the ASEAN region. Its objectives are:

a. to accelerate the pace of SME development, optimizing the diversities of ASEAN member countries;

b. enhance the competitiveness and dynamism of ASEAN SMEs by facilitating access to information, market, human resource development and skills, finance and technology;

c. strengthen the resilience of ASEAN SMEs to better withstand adverse macroeconomic and financial difficulties.

d. increase the contribution of SMEs to the overall economic growth and development of ASEAN as a region.

(2) Initiative for ASEAN integration (IAI). To allow ASEAN member countries to move in a unified manner, it is important that the deepening and broadening of the integration of ASEAN is accompanied by technical and development cooperation. This is to address the divide and accelerate the economic integration of the less developed ASEAN member countries so that the benefits of ASEAN integration are shared and enjoyed by all members.

The IAI was launched in November 2000 and is aimed at giving direction and sharpening the focus of collective efforts to narrow the development gap within ASEAN. The IAI currently covers the following priority areas: infrastructure, human resource development, ICT, capacity building for regional economic integration, energy, investment climate, tourism, poverty reduction and improvement in the quality of life.

Meeting the AEC challenge will require the CLMV countries to develop policy to enhance economic growth, strengthen economic competitiveness, increase domestic and foreign direct investments, expand private sector enterprises with meeting its public goals.

4. A Region fully Integrated Into Global Economy.

To enable ASEAN businesses to compete internationally, make it more dynamic and stronger segment of the global supply chain and to ensure that the international market remains attractive for foreign investment, it is crucial for ASEAN to look beyond the borders of AEC. External rules and regulations must increasingly be taken into account when developing policies related to AEC.

(1) Coherent Approach Towards External Economic Relations. All ASEAN shall work towards maintaining "ASEAN Centrality" in its external economic relations, including but not limited to its negotiations for free trade (FTAs) and Comprehensive Economic Partnerships (CEPs) agreements. This shall be done through:

a. Review of FTAs/CEPs commitments vis-à-vis ASEAN internal integration.
b. Establishment of a system for enhanced coordination, and possibly arriving at common approaches and/or positions in ASEAN external economic relations and in regional and multilateral fora.

(2) Enhanced Participation in Global Supply Networks. This shall be done by:

a. Continuing the adoption of international best practices and standards in production and distribution, where possible.

b. Developing a comprehensive package of technical assistance for the less developed ASEAN member countries to develop their industrial capability and production to enhance their participation in regional and global integration initiatives.

Many developing countries perceive tourism as a fast track to economic growth. They assume that tourism development requires less investment than other industries; and they believe tourism to be an effective means of creating job opportunities and increasing local income.

Thailand has long ascribed to this point of view; and it has devised a tourism marketing approach which encourages low-, medium-, and high-cost mass tourism to nearly all regions of the country. With the ubiquitous "Land of Smiles" advertising slogan promoted around the world, Thailand has become one of the best known, and most sought after, international tourist destinations.

Despite this success, however, the tourism industry in Thailand is not without problems and controversy. Critics charge that tourism promotion in Thailand has aimed at quantity rather than quality. The explosion of tourism has brought uneven distribution of financial benefits, in favor of large enterprises, while costs are shouldered by local people who have no direct gain from tourist promotion. Worse still are the environmental effects of unbridled tourism development. While the Thai tourism industry touts and actively markets the country's unique cultures, this commercialization of culture also causes its erosion or corruption. Additionally, interaction between rural Thai dwellers and sophisticated urbanites from more developed countries introduces values, behavior and attitudes which may have corrosive or negative effects on local residents.

To summarize, the above table provides the list of factors and issues that tourism and hospitality businesses must consider. These are the main areas of concerns for all firms in the tourism and hospitality industry. They should prepare for these issues to ensure that they can survive and outperform their competitors in the long run. (Chanin Yoopetch, 2012 : 6)

Although the path towards the AEC has taken some time and may face further delay, the overall target will eventually have to be met. While there may be some negative impact on certain businesses, on balance the increase in cooperation and competition in the region will be beneficial, as demonstrated by the strength and role of the EU to the world economy. Therefore, the valid question for Thai service business is: how and when to respond to the changing business environment. (EIC, 2012 : 54)

It is essential to start exploring opportunities while making preparations for the increased competition in the period ahead. Investors and business operators should familiarize themselves with the rules and regulations which are about to change owing to the various agreements under the AEC. Moreover, they need to study the markets and relevant businesses to have an early start. "Understanding the competitors and preparing ourselves," is an old Thai saying, which may actually be one of the basic strategies in facing opportunities and challenges.

Each business should know what its core competency is because fully leveraging it will be advantageous in tapping the opportunities from the ASEAN markets, each with interesting features. Thai businesses will need to go abroad more, using ASEAN as a starting point in strengthening its position. Although Thailand may be at the advantage at this level of competition, regional cooperation is likely to intensify to another level, for example, the ASEAN+3, where competition will be fiercer with China, Japan, and South Korea.

NOW, the service sectors in which Thailand has the ability to compete and clearly has the advantage should start entering the ASEAN arena now,

Key Factors Affecting Tourism and Hospitality Firms	
Economic Situations	◆ Local economic situation ◆ Regional economic development ◆ Global economic development
Tourism Resources	◆ Collaboration between private and government agencies in conducting tourism resource development planning (integrated plans and strategies on tourism resource management) ◆ Tourism network development ◆ Development of new tourism destination ◆ Maintenance of quality of tourism resources (including cultural and natural resources) ◆ Adoption of sustainable tourism programs by stakeholders of the tourism and hospitality industries
Crime	◆ Crimes against tourists ◆ Business crimes, including electronic crimes
Human Resources and Labor Concerns	◆ Wage rates ◆ Employee retention ◆ Labor force work ethics ◆ Availability of management professionals ◆ Availability of skilled and unskilled workers
Business Development	◆ Competition from other areas ◆ Marketing problems ◆ Business planning
Business Climate	◆ Health insurance cost ◆ Energy cost ◆ Deteriorating public infrastructure
Regulatory Compliance	◆ Complying with environment regulations ◆ Complying with workplace safety regulations ◆ Product or service liability issues ◆ Business zoning/Building requirements

Source: Adapted from Dudensing et al. (2011)

especially for the sector which has been fully liberalized or has reduced most barriers. As competitors will think alike and share the same interest, it is important to start early and be at an advantageous point. For instance, for the healthcare service of hospital, most financial ratios show that Thailand has the advantage, and its reputation has been widely accepted. Despite the delay in increased ceiling for foreign shareholding, healthcare is one of the priority integration sectors which is expected to meet the target date soon. The rising demand from each countrydue to insufficient number of domestic service providers and higher share of elderly and middle-income class will result in reduction in barriers to facilitate more ASEAN investment. Indonesia, for example, set the size of the hospital at 200 beds for ASEAN investment, and 300 beds for investors outside ASEAN.

For certain sectors which have already been liberalized and Thai business is ready to invest but is faced with a structural problem on cost, it is better to wait for the right moment. An example of this is the problem of market size, which will have implications on the type of investment. While there may not be limitations by the host country, it may not be cost effective for investors at this stage. Healthcare service in Laos is a case in point. It is quite liberalized, but few investors have made an investment, only Thailand and Vietnam on lab services, such as ultrasonography, x-ray, and CT scanner. This may largely be due to the small size of market, and the fact that the well-to-do in Laos often choose to receive treatment abroad. Thus the appropriate investment at this stage may rather be advertisement and packaged medical tour to Thailand.

Despite the media's on-and-off reporting on political instability, the Thai economy has performed stronger than expected. The important support from private consumption and investment triggered more business and economic activities, especially in the second and third quarters of 2012. The overall investment in Thailand increased 15.5% in the third quarter. The expected economic growth for 2012 was around 5.5 % while the expected growth rate for 2013 is approximately 5 %. (Chanin Yoopetch, 2012 : 6)

For Thailand's tourism market, short-term tourism market appears to be quite positive due to constant increase in the number of visitors from around the world and the signs of recovery of the US economy-the world's largest economy-such as improving employment rate, despite the chronic economic crisis in Europe. In addition, the number of international tourist arrivals is expected to be around 21 million by the end of December 2012, with total revenue estimated at Baht 920 billion. In the long run, Thailand should have positive market potentials due to the arrival of Asian tourists, especially from ASEAN countries. One major tourist attraction in the near future would be the Formula One race to be hosted by Thailand in 2014.

Another supporting factor for Thai tourism and hospitality is the reopening of Don Mueang airport, increasing the capacity of the airports and airlines (especially the low cost carriers) in serving their customers. This is an opportunity for both existing and new airline companies to compete and to further develop the airline industry.

ASEAN economic development is on the rise and the trend indicates it will continue into the next decade at least. At the moment, both tourists and business travelers from the region drive the significant increases in the number of visitors to Thailand. Another important group is tourism and hospitality business developers, seeking for opportunities to expand their business even as Thai companies also search for further expansion.

One of the ASEAN countries with an estimated high business and economic expansion is Myanmar. From several crucial changes in the countries, including the historical visit of US President Barack Obama, the country has been spurred to develop its tourism and hospitality industry in all aspects, including tourism education, hotel quality and quantity, and transportation and infrastructure improvement in order to be prepared for continuous development. The average daily rate (ADR) has increased 350% since 2007, providing the clear evidence of the country's increasingly improving tourism performance. Countries with established infrastructure, such as Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, must improve their infrastructure, especially in the areas close to the borders of their neighbors. Tourism logistics for all land, air and marine transportations are key for the effective connectivity among neighbors. Thailand is located in the center of the region, thus it should have more advantages in the logistic network. The main question is how can Thailand capitalize on this strength to and take advantage of upcoming opportunities. (Chanin Yoopetch, 2012 : 6)

Clearly, there are great opportunities for Thai tourism and hospitality firms to grow internationally in all sectors, including travel agency, tour operator, hotel, spa and airlines. Thailand's economic development in the coming year relies on the improvement of infrastructure to meet international standards in supporting the creation of the ASEAN regional transportation network. Moreover, a key resource for the development is always human resources. Human resources must be ready to work and cooperate with international partners to build and develop business opportunities, The communication skills of human resources at all levels are crucial for long-term tourism and hospitality business growth. In this area, companies should invest and emphasize on learning, training and capacity building to ensure high quality service for all the visitors.

Tourism resources are among the most important factors for the tourism industry. Some tourism destinations are popular only for a short period of time while some continue to develop and cope with the continuously increasing number of visitors over the years. The main point is the quality of tourism resources and the introduction of new tourism destinations in the area. For example, Singapore continues to sustain the attention of visitors with new attractions, like the Universal Studios and Gardens by the Bay, despite the city-state's limited land resources.

Crimes in the tourism business sector and crimes against tourists are also real challenges to tourism development in any country. Safety is one of the top priorities for tourists when they plan their trips. The destination with a high crime rate can expect a declining number of visitors in the long run.

Human resources and labor concerns are the core of tourism and hospitality businesses. However, the cost of managing human resources can be very expensive for the companies and the cost is highly related to the availability of skilled and unskilled labors.

Business development and business climate are related to the growth opportunities and many of these factors, such as the deterioration of public infrastructure or the unavailability of street signs, cannot be controlled by the firms. If necessary, private companies have to invest in order to provide better services to their customers.

Operating in domestic or international markets, the firms have to comply with the existing laws and regulations. It is crucial to all firms to learn and understand in detail all the important regulatory issues to prevent legal problems in the future.

Every business will sooner or later need to face the impact from the AEC. The Thai service businesses should use their advantage and find the right timing for an upgrading to access the ASEAN market. This involves studying the market potential, rules and regulations under the ASEAN agreements, domestic rules, and having the right business model to create an advantage. The competency and expertise in a particular field will also be one of the critical success factors in the competition for ASEAN investment in services, whose growth has already surpassed that of manufacturing. Most importantly, all the adjustments have to start now because the AEC does not begin in 2015. Furthermore, economic integration does not end with the AEC. There will be more cooperation and competition from the ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6, and TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) in the near future. (EIC, 2012 : 55)

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