

Original article

## DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES AND IMPACTS OF MUAYTHAI SPORT TOURISM IN PHUKET

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## ABSTRACT

This current study aimed at investigating behaviors of Muaythai tourists, potential and opportunities of Muaythai sport tourism development, impacts of Muaythai sport tourism and guidelines for Muaythai sport tourism development in Phuket. Study samples included 384 foreign tourists who were practicing Muaythai and watching Muaythai fights in Phuket and other 30 participants from tourism experts, physical educators, and sport management experts, Muaythai camp operators, and related people from government and private sectors in Phuket. Mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to collect data, and to analyze the data in the ways of descriptive statistical analysis and content analysis. The results have revealed that Muaythai tourists visited Phuket because they wanted to practice and watch Muaythai. Their travel goals were to exercise and learn Thai martial arts and cultures. Regarding this, Phuket had the potential and opportunities to develop Muaythai tourism which was very popular among tourists. Moreover, Phuket was the priority destination of Muaythai sport tourism development as it offered several famous boxing camps, skillful boxers, high standards of competition venues, and natural and cultural tourist attractions. Also, many Muaythai products and services from Phuket were exported to other countries through proactive marketing approaches including expanding purchasing channels and developing a variety of Muaythai training courses. The services and products included Muaythai instructors, Muaythai performances, and the organization of Muaythai fights abroad. Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket had great impacts on visitor spending (SDG1, SDG8) followed by jobs and income opportunities (SDG1, SDG8) and well-being of tourists (SDG3) respectively. For the guidelines of Muaythai sport tourism development, they consisted of 1) infrastructure, 2) attraction, 3) activities, 4) accessibility, 5) amenities, 6) accommodation, and 7) sport tourism success stories.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sports Tourism is one of the tourism industry sectors that shows significant potential impact on the country's overall economic system. Currently, sports tourism has gained attention from both Thai and international tourists who are interested in Thailand's diverse sports tourism destinations that attract various groups of visitors. Sports tourism possesses unique characteristics that distinguish it from typical tourism, as it encompasses both tourism and sports aspects. From a tourism perspective, it involves interconnected businesses within the tourism supply chain, with main components including accommodation, transport, activity, and food and craft. Additionally, sports tourism includes other supply chain elements, such as tourism planning stakeholders including sports travel planners, sports tour operators, and sports travel agencies. It also involves various input providers, such as sports venue or activity facility owners, sporting equipment stores, and food and beverage establishments<sup>1</sup>.

Muaythai is another sport that shows significant potential in terms of sports tourism. The characteristics of this sport align with sports tourism trends both in small-group tourism and in connecting with cultural tourism or tourism that closely relates to local experiences. The integration of Muaythai learning tourism with other tourist activities has high potential and can be implemented in many different ways. Muaythai is both a cultural practice and a sport. Culturally, it is a martial art with aesthetic value, historical significance, and unique characteristics that represent local wisdom. It serves as a cultural medium that conveys Thai uniqueness and identity to the global audience, making it an effective tool for cultural learning tourism and local experiences<sup>2</sup>.

Currently, Muaythai has become one of the country's potential cultural assets (5F) that can be promoted as strong soft power and serves as a crucial driver in creating economic value. According to the economic value assessment of the sports industry in 2023, data revealed that, interestingly, the Muaythai market is valued at over 100 billion baht, 40% of which is from training sessions, 35% from Muaythai equipment sales, and 25% from event organization. Therefore, Muaythai is more than just a sport; it is a significant soft power that drives the economy and builds Thailand's reputation. Global travelers show great interest in visiting Thailand to experience this uniquely identifiable sport<sup>3</sup>.

Foreign tourists tend to travel and learn Muaythai more intensively than Thai tourists. They usually stay at camps until they can learn and practice effectively<sup>4</sup>. According to a survey by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Muaythai camps in Thailand increased from 3,957 camps in 2015 to 5,100 camps in 2019, distributed across Bangkok, Northern, Central, Western, Northeastern, and Southern regions<sup>5</sup>. The growing number of Muaythai camps indicates the potential to accommodate tourists interested in Muaythai activities in Thailand. In 2019, foreign tourists' expenditure on Muaythai activities in Thailand was approximately 18,003 million baht, generating an overall economic impact of about 41,653 million baht<sup>2</sup>. According to foreign tourist data in 2016 by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the top 10 nationalities learning Muaythai were the United Kingdom (11,219 people), followed by Australia (6,800), France (5,852), Germany (4,688), Sweden (4,253), Russia (2,183), Denmark (1,855), Japan (1,841), New Zealand (1,781), and Spain (1,633). The most popular provinces for learning Muaythai were Phuket, followed by Bangkok and Surat Thani<sup>5</sup>.

Upon examination of the research literature related to sport tourism, as evidenced by studies from Singsatit et al. (2020), Kaisornrat (2020), Rattanadecho (2020), Kumsri et al. (2021), Srimaca and Muneenam (2021), Panpayak and Singkram (2023), and Techapuvadolvitit (2024), it was found that the majority focused on analyzing the behavioral patterns of sport tourists<sup>2,4,6,7,8,9,10</sup>. Furthermore, these studies investigated the potential and opportunities within the sport tourism sector<sup>2,4,8,11,12,13</sup>, which aligns with findings from Klaisang

(2019), Singsatit et al. (2020), Worapinit and Jantararakolica (2020), Kumsri et al. (2021), Wimonthada and Klangkon (2021), and Srimaca and Muneenam (2021). Additionally, research has addressed the impacts of sport tourism, as highlighted by Centre for SDG Research and Support (2016), Yuvanont (2018), Singsatit et al. (2020), World Tourism Organization (2020), and Kumsri et al. (2021), encompassing various dimensions including: Partnerships and community involvement, Support of the locals, Sport Events, Sport events for a cause, New sport, Technology, Combining sport tourism with other tourism resources, Safety, Participation of residents, Consideration of women, Enhancement of accessibility, Sustainable use of natural resources, Environmental measures, Educating tourists and the locals, and Encouraging interactions<sup>2,8,14,15,16</sup>. Moreover, studies concerning sport tourism development approaches, as substantiated by Klaisang (2019), Singsatit et al. (2020), Kumsri et al. (2021), Wimonthada and Klangkon (2021), Srimaca and Muneenam (2021), Mattayakorn and Sudhinont (2021), and Techapuvadolvitit (2024), identified that sport tourism development frameworks encompass: Infrastructure, Attraction, Activities, Accessibility, Amenities, Accommodation, and Sports Tourism Success Stories<sup>2,4,8,10,11,13,17</sup>.

Due to tourists' traveling behavior seeking new destinations for experiences during their trips, along with the increasing role of technology in tourism that not only makes travel more convenient and easier but also allows tourists to access new destinations more readily, these factors affect sports tourism. This study will reveal the behavior of Muaythai sports tourists in Phuket province, the potential and opportunities of Muaythai sports tourism in Phuket province, including the impact of Muaythai sports tourism in Phuket province, to serve as guidelines for further development of Muaythai sports tourism in Phuket province.

### Objectives of the study

1. To examine the behavioral of Muaythai sport tourists in Phuket province
2. To assess the potential and opportunities of Muaythai sport tourism development in Phuket province
3. To evaluate impacts of Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket province
4. To propose guidelines for Muaythai sport tourism development in Phuket province

### METHODS

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study was conducted with approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Phuket Rajabhat University (COA No. PKRU2567/17).

#### Population and Sampling

1. The study focused on foreign tourists who participated in Muaythai training and attended Muaythai events in Phuket province. Due to the absence of official statistical data on Muaythai tourists in Phuket, the sample size was determined using Roscoe's (1969) formula, with a maximum acceptable error of 1/10 of the population standard deviation and a statistical significance level of .05 for an unknown population<sup>18</sup>. The calculated sample size was 384 respondents. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed as follows: Stage 1 Survey and Selection: 1) Surveyed and selected Muaythai camps accommodating foreign tourists in Phuket. 2) Determined a sampling ratio of 30% of Muay Thai camps from each district in Phuket. Stage 2 Camp Selection: Simple random sampling was conducted through a lottery method from the following districts 1) Mueang Phuket District (21 camps): Maneesin Muaythai, Jaroenthong Muaythai Gym Phuket (T&T Boxing),

Saphan Hin Muaythai, Tiger Muaythai, Unit27, Phuket Dragon Muaythai, BeFitreat Phuket, Ratchai Muaythai Gyms, Suvit Muaythai Boxing Phuket Fight Club, Chokchai Muaythai Camp Phuket, Eagle Muaythai, Muaythai Phuket, Republic Phuket Stadium, Old Dawg Coaching and Physiotherapy, AKA Thailand Muaythai, MMA & Fitness camp, Powerhouse Phuket, Fighter Gym, Kingka Muaythai, Muaythai Camp, and Chang Gym. 2) Kathu District (3 camps): Phuket Kings Muaythai, Patong Muaythai Camp, and Kamala Muaythai Gym. 3) Thalang District (8 camps): Phantip Muaythai, H2O Sportz Phuket, Sumalee Boxing Gym, Muaythai Camp, Surakit Gyms, Revolution Muaythai Camp, Sootai Muaythai Phuket, and Cherngtalay Muaythai & Bundasak Muaythai Gym.

Stage 3: Respondent Selection.

2. Key Informants: The study included 30 key informants comprising Muaythai camp operators in Phuket province, tourism experts, physical educators, and sport management experts. The selection of key informants employed triangulation sampling<sup>19</sup>, utilizing multiple selection methods to ensure diverse informant perspectives. The data verification process adopted the triangulation technique<sup>20</sup>, specifically method triangulation, which involved multiple data collection approaches, including observation, interviews, and document analysis. The sample size determination followed Morse's (2010) recommendation of 30-50 participants for qualitative research<sup>21</sup>. The actual number of participants could be reduced upon reaching data saturation, considering the ability to establish meaningful connections among the collected data to address the research questions.

### Research Instruments

1. Questionnaire Set 1 was designed to investigate Muaythai sport tourist behavioral in Phuket province. The development process involved reviewing relevant literature and research on Muaythai sport tourism behavior. The questionnaire collected data on personal characteristics and behavioral from foreign tourists who attended Muaythai training sessions and events in Phuket. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert Scale with responses ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The interpretation criteria were established as follows: mean scores of 4.21-5.00 indicated the highest level, 3.41-4.20 indicated high level, 2.61-3.40 indicated moderate level, 1.81-2.60 indicated low level, and 1.00-1.80 indicated the lowest level. The questionnaire underwent content validation by five experts who possessed expertise in physical education and Muaythai, sports tourism, sports management, or related fields, and held a minimum qualification of a master's degree. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) evaluation yielded an overall consistency value of 0.91. Following expert recommendations and subsequent revisions, the questionnaire was pilot tested with 30 foreign tourists in Phuket who were not part of the main study sample. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.84.

2. Questionnaire Set 2 was developed to examine the impacts of Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket province. The instrument was constructed through a review of relevant literature and research on Muaythai sport tourism impacts<sup>6,22</sup>. The questionnaire collected data from key informants, including Muaythai camp operators in Phuket province, tourism experts, physical educators, and sport management experts. The instrument utilized a five-point Likert scale with responses ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The interpretation criteria were established as follows: mean scores of 4.21-5.00 indicated the highest level, 3.41-4.20 indicated high level, 2.61-3.40 indicated moderate level, 1.81-2.60 indicated low level, and 1.00-1.80 indicated the lowest level. The questionnaire underwent content validation by five experts who possessed expertise in physical education and Muaythai, sports tourism, sports management, or related fields, and held a minimum qualification of a master's degree. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) evaluation yielded

an overall consistency value of 0.88. Following expert recommendations and subsequent revisions, the questionnaire was pilot tested with 30 key informants who were not part of the main study sample. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.86.

3. Interview Guide Set 1 was developed to investigate the potential and opportunities of Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket province. The instrument was constructed through a comprehensive review of literature and research related to the potential and opportunities in Muaythai sport tourism. The study employed semi-structured interviews with key informants, including Muaythai camp operators in Phuket province, tourism experts, physical educators, and sport management experts. The interview guide underwent content validation by five experts who possessed expertise in physical education and Muaythai, sports tourism, sports management, or related fields, and held a minimum qualification of a master's degree. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) evaluation yielded an overall consistency value of 0.90. The interview guide was subsequently refined based on expert recommendations before implementation.

4. Interview Guide Set 2 was developed to explore development guidelines for Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket province. The instrument was constructed through a review of literature and research related to Muaythai sport tourism development. The study employed semi-structured interviews focusing on development guidelines across seven key dimensions<sup>2</sup>: 1) Infrastructure, 2) Attraction, 3) Activities, 4) Accessibility, 5) Amenities, 6) Accommodation, and 7) Sports Tourism Success Stories. Data were collected from key informants, including Muaythai camp operators in Phuket province, tourism experts, physical educators, and sport management experts. The interview guide underwent content validation by five experts who possessed expertise in physical education and Muaythai, sports tourism, sports management, or related fields, and held a minimum qualification of a master's degree. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) evaluation yielded an overall consistency value of 0.92. The interview guide was subsequently refined based on expert recommendations before implementation.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher personally conducted data collection through questionnaires administered to foreign tourists who participated in Muaythai training and events in Phuket province, and through interviews with key informants including Muaythai camp operators in Phuket province, tourism experts, physical educators, and sport management experts. All data collection was conducted with voluntary consent from participants, who retained the right to refuse participation or withdraw at any time.

### **Data Analysis**

1. Analysis of Muaythai sport tourist behavior in Phuket province using frequency and percentage calculations
2. Analysis of Muaythai sport tourism impacts in Phuket province using mean and standard deviation (S.D.)
3. Analysis of potential and opportunities for Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket province using content analysis
4. Analysis of development guidelines for Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket province using content analysis

## RESULTS

### *Behavioral of Muaythai sport tourists in Phuket province*

The findings revealed that the majority of Muaythai tourists in Phuket were male (67.71%), with female participants comprising 32.29%. The age distribution showed a predominance of participants aged 30-39 years (37.50%), followed by 19-29 years (28.38%), and 40-49 years (18.49%). Regarding occupational background, businesspeople constituted the largest group (29.43%), followed by government and state enterprise officials (23.44%), and students (22.13%). The geographical distribution indicated that participants primarily originated from Australia (20.57%), China (14.06%), and Russia (13.28%). Income distribution analysis showed that the majority earned between USD 3,001-4,000 (25.26%), followed by USD 2,001-3,000 (22.14%), and USD 4,001-5,000 (20.83%). In terms of travel patterns, most participants traveled with friends (27.34%), while others traveled alone (22.40%) or with family (20.83%). Transportation preferences during their stay indicated a predominant use of public transportation (27.87%), followed by motorcycles (26.04%), and private cars (18.75%). Information sources about Muaythai tourism in Phuket were predominantly social media platforms, with Facebook being the most utilized (75.52%), followed by websites (66.15%), and TikTok (55.99%). Accommodation preferences showed that hotels were the most popular choice (43.75%), followed by apartments (25.00%), and Muaythai camps (15.63%). Daily accommodation expenditure typically ranged between 2,001-3,000 baht (26.04%), 1,001-2,000 baht (25.00%), and 3,001-4,000 baht (18.23%). The analysis revealed that the primary purposes for visiting Phuket were Muaythai training (57.29%) and spectating Muaythai events (48.18%). Key motivational factors included physical exercise (41.14%), experiencing Thai culture and traditional wisdom (31.77%), and acquiring self-defense techniques (29.95%). Regarding visit frequency, first-time participants constituted the largest group (31.77%), followed by those making their third visit (24.48%), and second-time visitors (19.53%). Seasonal distribution of visits showed peak attendance in February (25.52%), followed by August (15.63%), and December (11.46%). Duration of stay varied, with the majority staying 1-2 weeks (31.25%), while others opted for 3-4 weeks (27.08%), or 1-2 months (17.19%). Complementary activities during their Muaythai-focused visits included exploring natural attractions such as mountains and coastal areas (49.48%), participating in other sports activities including surfing, diving, golf, and yoga (47.40%), and engaging in cultural tourism through visits to local communities and museums (46.61%). The decision to engage in Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket was influenced by several key factors, with 48.44% of participants citing the diversity of tourist attractions and activities in the province, 47.40% noting the beautiful natural scenery, and 46.61% mentioning the available tourist facilities and amenities. Specifically, tourists expressed interest in experiencing recreational activities (51.56%), exploring unique community characteristics (48.18%), and participating in local community activities (46.88%).

### *Potential and opportunities of Muaythai sport tourism development in Phuket province*

Phuket province demonstrates significant potential and opportunities for Muaythai sport tourism across several dimensions. First of all, the province has established itself as a premier destination for international Muaythai tourists, particularly attracting new target markets from Russia, China, Germany, and Australia. This popularity can be attributed to Muaythai's growing recognition as Thailand's traditional martial art and self-defense system. Secondly, the province's strength lies in its renowned Muaythai camps that cater specifically to tourists, featuring skilled fighters and standardized competition venues. Thirdly, Phuket's diverse tourism assets, encompassing both scenic landscapes and rich cultural attractions, create favorable conditions for Muaythai-related tourism and service businesses. In addition, a notable trend is the increasing participation of

female practitioners in Muaythai exercise programs, accompanied by a rise in international female athletes competing in Muaythai events. Also, the industry has responded with the development of various Muaythai products and services, including equipment, training programs, martial arts performances, and international competition organization. In addition, the educational aspect has evolved through the development of diverse training programs that integrate local wisdom and cultural heritage. These programs have been extended to accommodate longer stays for tourists, targeting both existing and new market segments. Lastly, the creation of Muaythai learning guides specifically for tourists in Phuket further enhances the learning experience.

These capabilities position Phuket to effectively accommodate tourists, particularly the growing Chinese market segment, which has shown increasing interest in Muaythai as a martial art. The appeal of Muaythai to the Chinese population, representing the world's largest demographic, presents significant opportunities for continued growth. This has led to the development of targeted products and services aimed at maintaining existing market segments while meeting their specific needs and preferences.

#### *Impacts of Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket province*

The overall impact of Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket was found to be at a high level, with a mean score of 3.75. When examining individual factors, visitor spending (SDG1, SDG8) showed the highest mean score of 3.87, followed by jobs and income opportunities (SDG1, SDG8) with a mean score of 3.85, and tourist well-being (SDG3) with a mean score of 3.82, as detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1** Mean and Standard Deviation of Impacts of Muaythai Sport Tourism in Phuket

Impacts of Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket	Mean	S.D.	Level
1. Jobs and income opportunities (SDG1, SDG8)	3.85	0.76	High
2. Visitor spending (SDG1, SDG8)	3.87	0.81	High
3. Competitiveness (SDG1, SDG8)	3.80	0.84	High
4. Well-being of tourists (SDG3)	3.82	0.83	High
5. Welfare of the locals (SDG3)	3.68	0.75	High
6. Jobs and income opportunities for all women and girls (SDG5)	3.65	0.72	High
7. Athletes as a role model for all women and girls (SDG5)	3.60	0.89	High
8. Accessibility (SDG11)	3.75	0.79	High
9. Enhancing awareness and encouraging environmental measures (SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, SDG15)	3.70	0.84	High
10. Promoting mutual understanding (SDG16, SDG17)	3.78	0.85	High
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.75</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>High</b>

From Table 1, it was observed that visitor spending (SDG1, SDG8) demonstrated the highest mean score. This can be attributed to the tendency of sport tourists to exhibit greater expenditure patterns than average tourists, particularly for equipment rentals, instructor fees, participation costs, and related expenses. Sport events, including those of smaller scale, serve as significant attractors for both participants and spectators, whose financial disbursements at the destination directly contribute to economic benefits. Furthermore, sport tourists typically engage with various additional attractions at their destinations, resulting in

increased overall expenditure patterns. Regarding jobs and income opportunities (SDG1, SDG8), this phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that sport tourism, similar to other tourism segments, generates employment and economic opportunities, including those for disadvantaged demographic groups. The specialized nature of sport tourism products and experiences necessitates the engagement of local residents as instructors and guides, who typically command premium compensation for their specialized expertise and skills. Moreover, the sport tourism sector stimulates entrepreneurial activities, fostering the establishment of new business ventures catering specifically to sport tourists, such as equipment rental services, specialized transportation providers, and other related commercial enterprises. Concerning tourist well-being (SDG3), this aspect can be explained by the fact that sport tourism significantly contributes to the enhancement of participants' physical and mental well-being, facilitating the maintenance and improvement of their overall health status. Participants in sport tourism activities frequently experience positive emotional states associated with their engagements, including enjoyment, exhilaration, a sense of camaraderie with fellow travelers, and heightened feelings of accomplishment and self-esteem. Furthermore, sport tourism serves as a particularly beneficial medium for young individuals, enabling them to achieve both educational and personal developmental objectives while simultaneously engaging in pleasurable social interactions with peers.

*Guidelines for Muaythai sport tourism development in Phuket province*

**Infrastructure:** Phuket offers three main transportation routes. Land transport includes Highway 402 as the main route, public transportation within the province, and taxi services for Muaythai sport tourists. Motorcycle and car rentals are available for tourists to explore the surrounding areas. Air transportation plays a crucial role through Phuket International Airport, offering direct flights from China, Australia, Korea, Malaysia, and other countries. Sea transportation includes one deep-water port at Makham Bay, Wichit Sub-district, with 55 piers throughout Phuket and five private marinas located on the island's northeastern coast, facilitating goods transportation and convenient travel to various islands in Phang Nga Bay and around Phuket.

**Attractions:** Phuket, known as a Muaythai city, is a premier southern Thailand destination for international tourists. The province is renowned for its azure seas, clear waters, white sandy beaches, and abundant natural attractions. It features Thailand's most prominent island chains, cultural attractions, local community lifestyles, museums, historical sites, and religious places. The province offers diverse amenities including peaceful resorts, nightlife entertainment, and various shopping venues, ranging from leading department stores to local markets, health services, and gourmet experiences.

**Activities:** Muaythai camps in Phuket integrate traditional boxing with tourism activities, offering diverse programs such as learning four regional Muaythai styles, ancient Muaythai, and traditional wai kru ceremonies, effectively targeting tourist interests.

**Accessibility:** Travel to Muaythai facilities is convenient and safe via private cars, motorcycles, or public transportation, with clear signage and paved roads.

**Amenities:** Amenities are one of the crucial factors contributing to the effectiveness of Muaythai sport tourism. Essential facilities at Muaythai camps include fitness centers, swimming pools, standardized boxing rings, medical rooms, and Muaythai equipment shops. In addition, camps also emphasize nutrition through organic food services and beverage bars, with numerous shops and restaurants in surrounding areas. They also offer vehicle rental services and tour program counters.

Accommodation: Various accommodation options are available for Muaythai tourists, with detailed information and pricing (daily and monthly rates) displayed on camp websites. Direct bookings are possible through websites or phone calls. Community partnerships provide additional accommodation options.

Sports Tourism Success Stories: Phuket's Muaythai camps design activities to enhance sport tourism experiences by organizing boxing competitions and martial arts demonstrations.

## DISCUSSION

### *Behavioral of Muaythai sport tourists in Phuket province*

Muaythai sport tourists in Phuket demonstrate diverse objectives, primarily focusing on Muaythai training and event attendance. Their main motivations include physical exercise, art and cultural learning, understanding Thai way of life and wisdom, and self-defense training. During their Muaythai-focused visits, tourists often engage in nature-based activities, exploring mountains and seas, and participate in other sports activities such as surfing, diving, golf, and yoga. The key factors influencing tourists' decisions to choose Phuket for Muaythai sport tourism include the diversity of tourist attractions and activities in the province, scenic natural landscapes, and comprehensive tourist facilities. Most tourists seek experiences characterized by enjoyment, local uniqueness, and community-based learning activities. As Kaisornrat (2020) notes, sports tourism destinations must provide essential tourist facilities and services to support various tourism activities, including accommodation, hospitality services, entertainment, and diverse tourism experiences. The specific activities may vary by location, depending on the environmental conditions and destination context<sup>6</sup>. This aligns with Muangchuen's (2015) assertion that modern and sufficient equipment and facilities should be provided, supported by information technology (IT) systems to enhance service delivery<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, Poonchob and Teerakathiti (2017) emphasize the importance of continuous service quality improvement, including professional expertise, etiquette, respect, and communication skills<sup>23</sup>.

### *Potential and opportunities of Muaythai sport tourism development in Phuket province*

Phuket demonstrates significant potential for Muaythai sport tourism, primarily due to the growing international popularity of Muaythai as Thailand's traditional martial art and self-defense. The province has established itself as a premier destination for Muaythai sport tourism, featuring renowned training camps, skilled fighters, and standardized competition venues. According to Yomdit (2018), Thailand possesses strong potential in utilizing Muaythai as a strategic tool for tourism promotion. This potential stems from the intrinsic value and reputation of Muaythai arts, its rich historical and cultural heritage, and the artistic elements of traditional techniques. Their research found that European tourists, who primarily discover Muaythai through social media, demonstrate strong faith, confidence, and positive attitudes toward the sport, leading to repeat visits<sup>24</sup>. Phuket's appeal is enhanced by its diverse tourism offerings, including natural attractions such as seas, beaches, waterfalls, mountains, and national parks, alongside cultural attractions. Business operators demonstrate strong customer understanding and consistently deliver impressive experiences. There has been a continuous increase in tourists from Russia, China, Germany, and Australia, with a notable rise in female participants in Muaythai training and exercise programs. The export of Muaythai products and services, including instructors, martial arts demonstrations, and international competitions, supports both sports and cultural tourism development. Proactive marketing strategies include expanding distribution channels through international exhibitions, road shows, and developing diverse training programs integrated with local cultural wisdom. These programs often extend tourist stays in Thailand. In this regard, international tourists tend to

engage in more immersive Muaythai learning experiences compared to their Thai counterparts, demonstrating a greater commitment to in-depth understanding of this traditional martial art. These foreign visitors typically establish extended residencies at training camps for a significant duration until they achieve satisfactory levels of theoretical comprehension and practical proficiency in the discipline. Likewise, Singsatit et al. (2020) confirm Thailand's potential in developing sports tourism marketing through Muaythai, highlighting two key aspects: 1) Thailand's position as a health tourism destination using Muaythai, particularly attracting Chinese tourists as a new target market, and 2) the opportunity to develop diverse tourist attractions combining geographical beauty with cultural interest, thus serving as the opportunity for operating Muaythai business for tourism and services<sup>2</sup>. The Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2024) reports that Muaythai sport tourism generates significant economic benefits, both direct and indirect. Direct benefits flow to hotels, transportation services (airlines, public transports, vehicle rentals), restaurants, tour operators, and other tourism services such as spas, water parks, and museums, including souvenir shops and community tourism activities. Indirect benefits extend to agriculture, raw material producers for food and souvenirs, hotel supply manufacturers, and construction activities. Furthermore, this sector creates significant employment opportunities and generates direct tourism tax revenue<sup>25</sup>.

#### *Impacts of Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket province*

Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket demonstrates significant impacts across multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These impacts include visitor spending (SDG1, SDG8), jobs and income opportunities (SDG1, SDG8), tourist well-being (SDG3), competitiveness (SDG1, SDG8), promotion of mutual understanding (SDG16, SDG17), accessibility (SDG11), enhanced environmental awareness and measures (SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, SDG15), local community welfare (SDG3), employment and income opportunities for women and girls (SDG5), and the role of athletes as role models for women and girls (SDG5). As noted by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2020) and Centre for SDG Research and Support (SDG Move) (2016), tourism can contribute significantly to sustainable development and the achievement of the 17 SDGs when properly developed and managed. Sports tourism, as a distinct segment, contributes uniquely to sustainable development through its characteristic elements: engagement in physical activities, opportunities for interactions, and high development potential across diverse locations. The impact on visitor spending (SDG1, SDG8) is particularly notable, as sports tourists typically demonstrate higher expenditure patterns compared to average tourists, encompassing equipment rentals, instructor fees, and participation costs. Even small-scale sporting events attract both participants and spectators, generating direct economic benefits for the destination. Additionally, sports tourists tend to engage with other local attractions, further increasing overall spending<sup>14,16</sup>. Regarding jobs and income opportunities (SDG1, SDG8), sports tourism creates diverse employment opportunities, including positions for disadvantaged groups. Depending on the nature of sport tourism products and experiences developed, local residents can work as specialized instructors and guides, often commanding premium wages for their expertise. The sector also stimulates new business development in areas such as equipment rental and transportation services. In terms of competitiveness (SDG1, SDG8), sports tourism enhances destination attractiveness by diversifying tourism offerings. This diversification typically results in extended visitor stays and increased spending. Furthermore, sports tourism products and events can effectively address tourism seasonality by attracting visitors to less-visited areas during off-peak seasons.

*Guidelines for Muaythai sport tourism development in Phuket province*

The development framework for Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket encompasses seven key components: Infrastructure, Attraction, Activities, Accessibility, Amenities, Accommodation, and Sports Tourism Success Stories. Na Nakorn (2015) emphasizes the crucial importance of creating impressive experiences, unique selling points, and compelling narratives<sup>26</sup>. Similarly, Singsatit et al. (2020) studied management models for sports tourism using Muaythai martial arts and identified Tiger Muaythai as an exemplary camp demonstrating effective sports tourism management. Their research outlined seven essential components for a model Muaythai camp: Infrastructure, Attraction, Activities, Accessibility, Amenities, Accommodation, and Sports Tourism Success Stories. Tiger Muaythai has designed its activities as a Complex Mix Martial Arts Center, integrating Muaythai products with other activities. The camp offers diverse programs including: 1) traditional and modern Muaythai training from basic to professional levels, 2) yoga courses for health-conscious tourists, 3) weight loss programs incorporating Muaythai, 4) martial arts demonstrations and competitions, and 5) recreational and social activities including dance floors and communal dining experiences. The research emphasizes that operators must leverage Muaythai arts and local cultural wisdom to develop unique business opportunities that generate national income<sup>2</sup>. Importantly, community involvement is crucial for sustainability and local prosperity. As Seedapeng et al. (2016) notes, when communities perceive positive changes in their economic, social, cultural, and environmental conditions, it tends to lead to sustainable sports tourism development<sup>27</sup>.

**CONCLUSION**

Regarding behavioral, Muaythai sport tourists in Phuket primarily visit for training and spectating purposes, with objectives encompassing physical exercise, cultural learning, lifestyle understanding, and self-defense training. Tourists often combine their Muaythai activities with nature-based tourism and other sports activities. Contemporary tourist behavior reflects a search for new destinations and experiences, facilitated by increasing technological integration that enhances both travel convenience and destination accessibility. Phuket demonstrates significant potential for Muaythai sport tourism, establishing itself as a premier destination for international tourists, particularly attracting new target markets from Russia, China, Germany, and Australia. This appeal is attributed to Muaythai's growing recognition as Thailand's traditional martial art and self-defense. The province features renowned training camps, skilled practitioners, and standardized competition venues. The diversity of tourism offerings, combining scenic landscapes with cultural attractions, creates favorable conditions for Muaythai tourism business development. The impacts of Muaythai sport tourism in Phuket demonstrate alignment with multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The sector influences visitor spending and creates economic opportunities (SDG1, SDG8), while promoting both tourist well-being and local welfare (SDG3). It enhances market competitiveness (SDG1, SDG8) and fosters cultural understanding across communities (SDG16, SDG17). The development of this tourism sector has led to improvements in accessibility (SDG11) and increased environmental awareness (SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, SDG15). Additionally, it has contributed to gender equality through employment opportunities and the establishment of athletic role models for all women and girls (SDG5), demonstrating the multifaceted social and economic benefits of this specialized tourism sector. Development guidelines encompass seven key components: Infrastructure, Attraction, Activities, Accessibility, Amenities, Accommodation, and Sports Tourism Success Stories. Community participation is crucial for sustainable development and improved local living standards. However, challenges include potential infrastructure strain, traffic congestion, increased waste management demands, and

population density issues. Positively, these challenges have fostered increased environmental conservation awareness among local residents.

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