

# **Urban Waterway Tourism and Waterfront Development**

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## **Abstract**

In the past, people highly used waterways for urban activities including transportation, agriculture, lifestyles, religious, culture and special events. At present, people still use waterways in the same way and also include tourism activities. Urban activities can be function as tourism resources. Many waterfront projects have been developed in order to service urban residents and facilitate tourism development. Therefore, sustainable development and community-based planning and development along waterways and waterfront are needed to sustain urban environment, culture and also benefit to tourism development.

## **Introduction**

Water is one of important factors for human being. It is normally used for consumption, agriculture, fishing and producing process in many industries (Saraubol, 2532 B.E.: 64-65). People use waterways for transportation, trading, irrigation and drainage. Waterways are also utilized as a place for recreation and a place for holding traditional ceremonies. In the past, waterways were used as a boundary of the ancient towns. Many cities are located near the main rivers to take advantages from waterways (Saraubol, 2532 B.E.: 70-71, Boonnak, 2525 B.E.: 174). Because waterway was a major means of transportation, many rich cultural and historical heritages were built along the river for convenient access.

In recent decades, there is a new function of waterways. The natural, cultural and historical elements of waterways can be used as tourism resources. A lot of canals and rivers have been reclaimed and used as tourist routes. Urban waterway tourism has been used to be a contributor of economic development of water-based cities. It has been vigorously promoted. Many waterfront development projects are being created to serve not only local people but also tourists. However, like other kinds of tourism, the development of waterway tourism does cause impact on local environment. Improper waterway tourism development will result in severe negative impacts. Therefore, it is necessary to provide the appropriate planning for waterway tourism development.

## **Tourism Planning and The Development of Waterway Tourism**

Beside generating more income and increasing job opportunities, waterway tourism also plays an important role to help making the rivers and canals more livable. It does not only accelerate the revitalization of the river environment but also help conserving historical heritages and cultural activities. Buildings along the waterway, which have potential for tourism development, are re-used and renovated. Waterway tourism also helps encouraging the restoration of waterfront area for different purposes. Some waterfront areas are developed to serve as a place for recreation. Waterway tourism supports numerous private

businesses. Some hotels, housing and commercial areas are developed. Many facilities are provided to meet the needs of visitors and residents such as tourist information centre, film theatres, retail shops and restaurants. New tourism business such as boating, canoeing are created. Public transport and accessibility to the river are provided. Walkway and bike way along the canal are constructed. It can be said that waterway tourism is a contributor for urban waterfront development. It makes cities more attractive and competitive and helps creating good living and working environment.

However, inappropriate waterway tourism development can result in negative impacts. The conflict of land use between local residents and tourists, the obstruction of local use of waterways, the environment deterioration and the depletion of native flora and fauna are some examples. Other negative impacts are unintentionally destruction of the architectural buildings and historical heritages and visual impact because of poorly designed buildings. Therefore, to prevent the negative impacts and use of waterways effectively, planning should be carefully done. This will help protecting waterfront areas for overuse, promoting the less popular sites to visitors, preventing disorderly urban waterfront development and protecting natural, cultural and historical heritages.

To achieve successful waterway tourism development, the sustainable development concept has frequently been used in many countries. It takes into account the environment, culture, history and economic development of local community. The sustainable tourism development can be called a new tourism (Mowforth and Munt, 2003), alternative tourism, new age tourism (Gee, et al., 1997: 124) or new form of tourism (France, 1997:15). Butler (1993:23) defined the sustainable tourism development as following.

*Tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an indefinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (human and physical) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well being of other activities and process.*

The report about Waterways for Tomorrow (National Conference) conducted by Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, England mentioned that the development of waterway tourism should respond sensitively to existing conditions. It should strengthen the “sense of place”. The holistic view of development and the on-going management should be provided to maintain quality of waterways. Clear vision of tourism development on the waterways can assist in maintaining and developing them for the benefit of the nation and for local communities in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way. Moreover, this kind of tourism development will help conserve the waterways while maximizing the opportunities for leisure and recreation. Tourism market needs are provided and tourism resources will retain their attractiveness (TISTR, 1997). By the sustainable tourism development, waterway tourism will not result in adverse environmental, social and cultural impacts because the holistic view of development is concerned with the participation of all parties involved.

In addition, the concept of environmental-oriented approach should be considered to prevent the impact on local environment. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required for large-scale and sensitively located development projects. In some urban areas, especially in the nature and undisturbed areas, ecotourism may be an appropriate form of

waterway tourism. This is because the objectives of ecotourism are to balance the demands and conservation for environmental and natural resources, to encourage educational experiences by environmental education activities and to recognize the right of local community to participate in tourism activities (TISTR, 1997). In 1996, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) defined Ecotourism, which has been used by many countries as following.

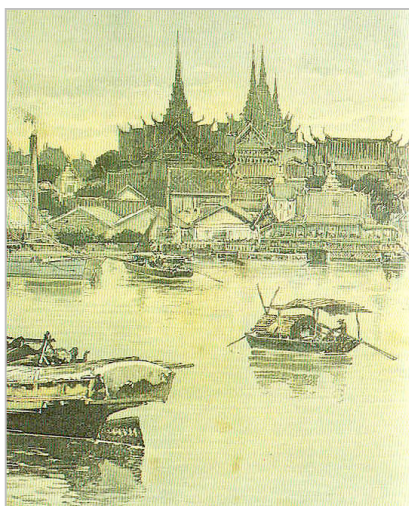
*Environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations.*

(Ceballos-Lascurian, 1996)

As mentioned before, waterways are main circulation of water-based cities. Therefore, waterway tourism development will inevitably affect local people settled down along the rivers and canals. The community-based approach is used to encourage the community involvement in tourism development. It is defined by France (1997:16) as a type of tourism run by and for local community. The aims of this approach are to prevent conflicts and deliver real sustainability outcomes for local community. It will support community to take care of its natural resources.

### **Urban Waterway Tourism in Thailand**

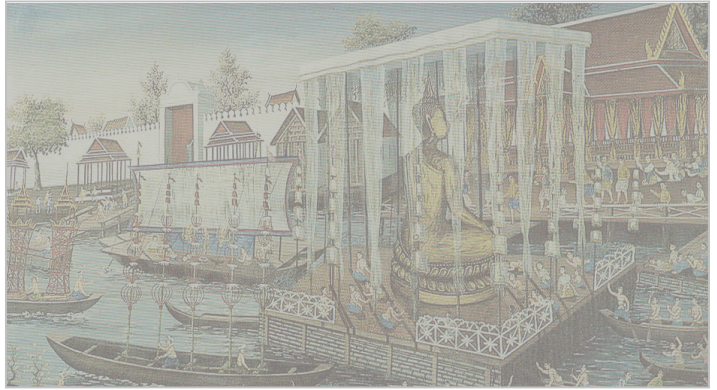
In the past, Thai people normally settled down along the main rivers and used waterways for many purposes such as for consumption, agriculture, recreation, and many more. Rows of houses lining along the river were often seen when traveling along the river and canal. Waterways were used for transportation both casual travel and commercial use. In old Bangkok, barges were served as residences and vehicles for transportation especially goods transport. Talad Nam or Thai floating market was often seen at the junction of rivers or canals. Waterways were also used for Thai ceremony and religious purpose because many Thai ceremonies and people' way of life are related to the river (Chumsai na Ayudthaya, 2539 B.E.). Some examples are the royal barge ceremony and Loy Kra Thong. In addition, waterways were used for recreational purpose such as boat racing, swimming and many more.



**Fig. 1** “The Grand Palace” seen from the river. The Illustration was appeared in colour on the front page of Le Petit Journal, Paris, 12<sup>th</sup> August 1893.



**Fig. 2** The settlement along the main river  
(Picture from Van Beek, 1999)



**Fig. 3** The arrival at Ta Phra of the Sukhothai Buddha statue destined for Wat Suthat, in the Varophatphiman Hall, Bang Pa-in, painted by Nai Won.

However, the progress of road construction results in decrease of water transportation and change people's way of life. Means of transportation was shifted from waterways to streets. The crucial role of waterways was depreciated. Some river environmental problems occurred because waterways were abandoned. Although there was a critical change in the city, waterways are still playing an important role in the suburb area and some urban areas. Waterways are still used for living, agriculture, fishing, transportation, commercial use and leisure. Some Thai traditional activities still exist. For example, people living along the river donate food to monks in the early morning and Buddha image is floated along the river for people to pay respect each year. In addition to daily recreational activities, the activities related to Thai culture such as boat race and Loy Kra Thong are still held.



**Fig. 4** Thai life style in relation to the river



**Fig. 5** Thai traditional activities, Chakpra  
(Picture from Chumsai na Ayudthaya, 2539 B.E.)



**Fig. 6** Loy Kra Thong Festival  
(Picture from Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT))



**Fig. 7** Boat racing  
(Picture from Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT))

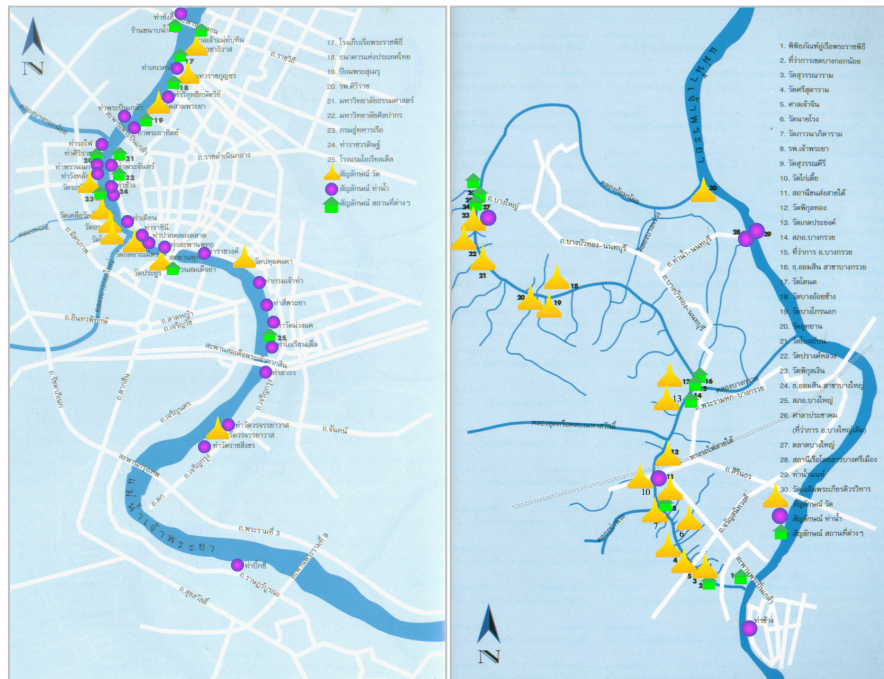
The natural, cultural and historical elements mentioned before can be attractive tourism resources. They can be magnificent views for tourists when traveling along the river. Like those in many European cities, waterways in Thailand have been used as tourist routes. Nowadays, many waterfront projects are being developed to facilitate tourism development. Lots of canals and rivers have been reclaimed and used as waterway tourism. The city boat tour has been supported in many Thai potential water-based cities both in urban areas and in suburb areas. The Chao Phraya River and Bangkok Noi River (The old Chao Phraya River) are very good examples. This kind of tourism supports the old image of Bangkok, once known as Venice of the East. It can attract a large number of tourists by playing a major role of tourist transportation as we can see many long-tailed boats in the Chao Phraya River throughout the day. People traveling along the river will see various kinds of rich cultural heritages along the river and many interesting urban activities. In suburb area, tranquil boat ride is one of interesting tourism activities. It is usually one of activities in a tourist program. Another example is Floating market at Damnern Saduak, Ratchaburi, one of famous Thailand's attractions that invites tourists from all over the world.



**Fig. 8** Long-tailed boats, a popular mode of transportation for tourists (Picture from Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT))



**Fig. 9** Floating market, Ratchaburi  
(Picture from Chumsai na Ayudthaya, 2539 B.E.)



**Fig. 10** Map of Bangkok waterway tourism  
(Picture from Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT))

## Waterfront Development & Urban Waterway Tourism in Thailand

In the city, waterfront can be a major public open space for people. Waterfront areas owned by public are normally developed for public purposes in response to urban activities such as recreation, commercial use, transportation and many more. In response to urban waterway tourism, waterfront has been developed to serve both residents and tourists. Therefore, some elements are developed to facilitate tourism activities. Moreover, the waterfront development will help supporting the importance of the places and strengthen image of the city. Some potential waterfront areas are waterfronts of religious area, fortress, historical heritages and special architectures.

In order to develop waterfront area, land-use planning should be provided and elements that are related to specific purposes should be created. Many public-owned waterfronts are developed to be a public park while open space around historical heritages or other unique architectures are developed to create a good panoramic view from the river. In many Thai waterfront areas, open spaces for special events or festivals are provided to serve both local people and visitors. Santichaiprakarn park, one of the good example located in the Rattanakosin Island, is defined as the conservation area of Bangkok. The land around the fortress was reclaimed to be a public park. It does not only serve local residents but also tourists traveling in Rattanakosin Island. Therefore, many cultural activities are provided to attract tourists. These activities will help promote Thai culture in return.



**Fig. 11** Santichaiprakarn, reclamation area to be a public park



**Fig. 12** Royal Barge Ceremony  
(Picture from Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT))

Some waterfronts have been developed for commercial use by constructing retail shops or restaurants to take an advantage of beautiful riverside view. This kind of waterfront development is utilized mostly in private areas or, in some cases, private companies have to rent the areas from the public. Some waterfronts have been developed for mixed use by dividing the area into many zones. Each zone is designed for different use such as commercial use, cultural activities, recreation and transfer points. Some waterfronts of religious area are developed for religious and recreational purposes. Moreover, new special events have been initiated to attract tourists such as “The River of Kings”. This special event is held at the waterfronts of the Grand Palace and historical heritages. Meanwhile, some traditional events have been revitalized and promoted for tourism development.



**Fig. 13** Riverside restaurant, private-developed waterfront



**Fig. 14** Public-developed waterfront for commercial use, Pitsanulok

Nevertheless, many waterfront development projects result in severe problems such as environmental degradation, obstruction of people's way of life and etc. The construction of embankment in some places reduces connection of the land and the river, deteriorates the magnificent view both to the river and from the river and obstructs people to do some water-related activities. A large number of problems mentioned before are mostly resulted from poor planning and management. To prevent these problems, appropriate planning and design are important. In addition, the sustainable development should also be concerned. The environmental and community-based approaches should be taken in to consideration. A guideline to control the development along the river should be considered in addition to the waterfront development in some areas. This will help making waterfront more attractive and create a successful waterway tourism that meets the needs of tourists and local people.



**Fig. 15** The embankment obstructs people from fishing along the river



**Fig. 16** The embankment deteriorates the magnificent view both from and to the river

## Conclusion

Changes the use of waterways affected the waterfront development inevitably. Nowadays, urban waterway which has been used for transportation, agriculture, religious, life style, culture and special events, has another function to serve as a tourist route. Therefore, present waterfront projects have been developed in response to both local needs and tourism. Although cruising along the river in Bangkok is renowned as a major tourist attraction, the exploitation of waterways for tourism in some regions is also existed. A lack of appropriate development, government support, co-ordination of all parties involved and budget are some of normal limitations. Moreover, some waterways and waterfronts were not developed in the appropriate ways which will result in deteriorate of local way of life and river environment. As known that tourism will help generate economic benefits, waterway tourism will be a good choice for water-based city development. However, careful tourism development should be concerned to help conserve people' way of life cultural activities and historical heritages along the river as well as the river environment. In order to use waterways and waterfronts effectively, the government should be carefully developed a master plan and guideline for waterfront and tourism development. This should be concerned not only by public-developed projects but also private-developed project. Sustainable development and community-based planning and development along waterways and waterfront will create a strong image of the city and balance the use of waterways and waterfront between local residents and tourists.



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