



The Identity of Marukhanakhon Ancient City in Tha Kho Subdistrict, Nakhon Phanom Province, Thailand.

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the cultural tourism identity of Marukhanakhon, an ancient city located in Tha Kho Subdistrict, Nakhon Phanom Province, Thailand. The study aims to identify prominent local identities and synthesize them through the 5F framework for cultural tourism development. A qualitative research method was employed, with data collected from 44 key informants purposefully selected for their expertise in local history, cultural traditions, and tourism development. The research utilized in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field surveys.

The research results reveal the unique identity of Marukhanakhon through the 5F framework, including: 1) The food identity is highlighted by dishes made from Mekong River fish, such as Larb Pla E-Tu (spicy minced fish salad), which reflect a strong connection with the local ecosystem and cultural heritage; 2) The fashion identity is characterized by symbolic colors derived from the Kho fruit or Ceylon oak (orange hue) and a community logo that represents multicultural influences; 3) The folk performance identity demonstrates Thai-Lao cultural integration, using fishing tools into traditional dance performances; 4) The festival identity is evident in rituals and festivals such as the Anya Phra Sai worship ceremony, the Heet 12 Khong 14 traditions (literally meaning “the Twelve Annual Merit-Making Traditions and Fourteen Community Conduct Codes”), and the Tha Kho Fish Festival, all of which provide opportunities for cultural immersion; and 5) The route identity features diverse tourism routes that encompass history, culture, and agriculture, catering to the varied interests of different types of tourists. From these identities, the food and festival identities demonstrate the greatest potential for development as cultural soft power attractions, as they combine authentic local

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experiences with opportunities for tourist participation. This study contributes to the development of cultural tourism by proposing a conceptual framework for community-based soft power strategies, which strengthen local identity while attracting experiential tourists—particularly Millennials and Gen Z travelers seeking genuine cultural connections.

Keywords: Local Identity, Marukanakhon Ancient City, Cultural Tourism, Soft Power, Multiculturalism, Mekong River Basin, 5F Framework.

Introduction

Cultural tourism in Thailand has become a crucial mechanism for economic and social development in the 21st century, especially within the context of using Soft Power to build image and attract tourists worldwide. The Thai government has prioritized promoting cultural tourism through the 5F approach: Food, Film, Fashion, Fighting, and Festival, which enhances the tourism industry and strengthens the country's global image (TAT, 2023).

Northeastern Thailand has high potential for cultural tourism, particularly Nakhon Phanom province, situated on the Mekong River with history dating back to the Sri Kotrabun Kingdom. This province possesses diverse cultural heritage influenced by various ethnic groups including Thai, Lao, Vietnamese, and Chinese, creating a unique cultural identity (Nakhon Phanom Provincial Office, 2023).

Among Nakhon Phanom's historical attractions, Marukanakhon is an important regional cultural heritage site that has not yet been fully developed and promoted. Marukanakhon, mentioned in the Phra That Phanom legend (Urangkathat), was an ancient city closely related to other important cities in the Mekong region such as

Sri Kotrabun, Indapat, and Vientiane. Historical and archaeological studies suggest Marukanakhon was located in Tha Kho Subdistrict, Mueang District, Nakhon Phanom Province (The 10th Regional Office of Fine Arts, Roi Et, 2017).

Despite its historical and cultural significance, Marukanakhon faces several challenges: first, the lack of systematic identification and collection of cultural identities, making it difficult to present clear uniqueness to tourists; second, the absence of appropriate rebranding strategies for contemporary cultural tourism; and third, the lack of integration between government, private sector, and local communities in sustainable tourism development.

According to tourism statistics, Nakhon Phanom received 1.4 million tourists generating 4,200 million baht in 2023, but tourist distribution to secondary attractions like Marukanakhon remains limited, with most focusing primarily on Phra That Phanom (Nakhon Phanom Provincial Office, 2025). Additionally, post-COVID-19 changes in tourist behavior, especially among Millennials and Gen Z who seek experiential tourism and authentic engagement with local culture,



necessitate developing new tourism models to meet these demands.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the Identity of Marugkanakorn Ancient City in NakhonPhanom, Thailand
2. To synthesize these identities using the 5F framework for developing cultural soft power tourism

Related Documents and Research Definition of Tourism

Tourism is not limited to just traveling for relaxation or entertainment, but also includes traveling for meetings, seminars, education, sports, business, and visiting relatives. These travels must meet three main conditions: they must be temporary journeys from one's normal residence to other locations, they must be voluntary, and they must not be for employment or income-generating purposes (Sombat Kanjanakit, 2014).

Cultural tourism is a form of travel in which tourists are inspired or motivated to visit specific destinations with the purpose of observing, learning, exchanging experiences, and absorbing the deep cultural values of local communities. This type of tourism encompasses appreciating creative works, participating in traditions, respecting customs, and engaging in activities that showcase the host community's identity. The essence of cultural tourism lies in mutual respect, learning, and understanding between visitors and cultural hosts, which leads to building sustainable

friendship and peace between different cultures, fostering valuable cultural exchange and understanding between people from different places (Nuchanarath Rattanasuvongchai, 2011).

Phanurungsi Duanhong (2015) studied "Nan, the Living Old Town: The Historical and Cultural Identities" as part of his doctoral dissertation in Sports, Recreation and Tourism at Srinakharinwirot University.

The research found that Nan's historical identity developed from its distinct geographical setting, surrounded by mountains that form the source of Nan River. The city's history is deeply connected to this waterway, with five relocations occurring throughout history due to water-related factors. The historical development can be divided into two major periods: prehistoric Nan and historical Nan. The latter is further divided into four phases: the establishment of Woranakhon-Wiang Nan; the period under Lanna Kingdom; the period under Burmese rule; and the period under Rattanakosin Kingdom until 1931, when the position of Nan ruler was abolished, ending "Nakhon Nan" status and transforming it into a province of Thailand.

Regarding cultural identity, Nan developed its unique characteristics through relationships with more prosperous neighboring kingdoms like Sukhothai, Pagan, Lanna, and Lan Xang. These influences created a cultural blend visible in Buddhist temple architecture with distinct local Nan characteristics. Other unique cultural heritage includes boat racing traditions, religious ceremonies, textile arts, and local performing arts



such as Sor Long Nan (local singing), flowing water pattern textiles, and distinctive dragon-headed boats.

Bunwat Srihwang (2025) has presented a study on soft power identity to promote tourism in Songkhla's old town area, highlighting that identifying cultural capital and local wisdom in this district presents a significant opportunity to elevate tourism in line with the area's potential. This approach responds to tourism promotion policies aimed at projecting the city's soft power onto the international stage, which can effectively elevate various industries at the local level.

From past to present, Songkhla's old town district stands out for its unique artistic richness, abundance of food culture with distinctive local menus and cooking methods, unique characteristics of music, festivals and local traditions, as well as diverse tourism activities that visitors can choose to learn from and experience according to their interests. Additionally, the area features distinctive city architecture and traditional clothing styles that have been preserved since ancient times. These elements reflect the valuable cultural capital and wisdom of Songkhla's old town, showcasing the city's distinctive identity.

This study synthesized and analyzed reliable national-level secondary data covering six key dimensions: art, food, music and festivals, tourism, design, and fashion. If Songkhla's old town can effectively develop its cultural capital and local wisdom identity in these dimensions, it will create opportunities to enhance tourism potential, elevate the quality of life for local residents, and

instill a sense of love and pride for their hometown in youth and future generations in a sustainable way.

Manop Sangchamnong and Aunkrisa Sangchumnong (2023) conducted a study on "Thai-Phuan Soft Power: Thai-Phuan Cultural Tourism in Thailand Towards Development as Cultural Heritage in Thailand's Multicultural Context." This research presented the dissemination of Thai-Phuan cultural heritage through 10 episodes to promote Thai identity through Thai-Phuan arts and culture. These episodes covered the history of the Thai-Phuan ethnic group, their way of life, livelihood practices, Buddhist traditions, customs, beliefs and mysteries in daily life, arts, cuisine, music, performances, and traditional dress.

The methodology employed interviews with 20 cultural tourists at Thai-Phuan cultural tourist destinations, gathering opinions on soft power development to enhance cultural awareness, revitalize cultural heritage, and create value in preserving Thai-Phuan cultural heritage. This was analyzed through the 4A 2R Model framework across all 10 episodes.

Results from the 4A 2R Model analysis showed that all 10 episodes clearly demonstrated the uniqueness and identity of Thai-Phuan culture (Agenda-A1). However, collaboration, support, and management to achieve goals (Actor-A2 and Action-A4) were insufficient due to the limited target audience. The presentation of Thai-Phuan cultural charm was becoming clearer (Asset- A3), but awareness and interest in soft power remained minimal (Reaction- R1), and there was a lack of



clarity in goal-setting and response measurement (Result-R2).

The study recommended supporting research on valuable Thai-Phuan cultural identities that are fading away, with various agencies jointly establishing policies to support, promote, and prioritize the conservation of these cultural heritages to prevent their disappearance. It also suggested guidelines for creating appropriate media or videos. This research highlights the importance of preserving and promoting Thai- Phuan culture through soft power concepts to develop cultural tourism in Thailand's multicultural context, which is crucial for maintaining and promoting Thailand's cultural diversity.

Skaorat Bunwanno and & kettawa Bunprakarn. (2017) conducted a study titled "Takua Pa Living Old Town: Using Ancient Architecture and Town Revival Activities to Construct Local Identity for Nostalgic Tourism Development." The research aimed to examine how ancient architecture and town revival activities were used to construct local identity to develop nostalgia-based tourism. This qualitative research collected data through in-depth interviews with 9 informants, including historical informants, tourism project organizers, community committee members, and tourists, using identity and nostalgia concepts as the main theoretical frameworks, supplemented by representation and cultural tourism concepts.

The study found that Takua Pa's historical local identity has been developed to enhance cultural tourism by utilizing mining- era architecture as tourist attractions. The Sino- Portuguese

shophouses, Tao Ming School building, city walls, governor's mansion, Khun Intr's house, Chinese shrines, and steam boilers have been incorporated into identity construction through storytelling that adds historical value. Additionally, town revival activities were organized through shared social memories, such as opening the "Old Market" area to represent the lifestyle of people in the past.

Other activities included taking photos with street art murals, Takola city gate opening events, and Baba club activities related to clothing, traditions, rituals, and food. These elements were constructed as local identities to develop nostalgia-based tourism. This research demonstrates how cultural and historical heritage can be utilized to promote tourism in a way that responds to the needs of contemporary tourists who often yearn for the past and wish to experience authentic cultural experiences.

Kulkaew Klaykaew (2023) conducted a study on "World Heritage City and Cultural Identity for Tourism: A Case Study of Mueang Kao Subdistrict, Sukhothai Province." The research aimed to examine the context and cultural identity for tourism in communities within Mueang Kao Subdistrict, Sukhothai Province. This qualitative study focused on identifying the area's distinctive cultural identities that could be used to promote tourism.

The study found that the context of Mueang Kao Subdistrict in Sukhothai Province holds historical significance as the site of Thailand's first kingdom, "Sukhothai," which combines the words "Sukha" and "Udaya," meaning "dawn of happiness."



Today, this area has become an important tourism destination for visitors from around the world.

The cultural heritage identities for tourism in the area encompass both tangible and intangible elements, including communities with distinctive cultural heritage identities, which can be divided into three categories:

1. Folk art and cultural identity - referring to the distinctiveness in local wisdom for creating handicrafts and folk arts, such as Sangkhalok pottery making, wood carving, traditional food preparation (Royal Phra Ruang cuisine) in Ban Mueang Kao community, and Buddha image casting and amulet printing in Ban Chetuphon community, which reflect folk art and cultural identity that add experiential value for tourism.

2. Cultural landscape identity - referring to the geographic-cultural distinctiveness related to wisdom and knowledge in ancient city building, old city walls, ancient earthen dam construction (Phra Ruang Dam), connected with the beautiful natural landscape of Khao Luang Sukhothai or Ramkhamhaeng National Park (named after King Ramkhamhaeng), which reflect the beautiful cultural landscape identity of Ban Mont Kiri community, creating recreational value for educational tourism.

3. Historical- sociocultural identity - referring to the distinctiveness as a historical site, the starting point of city building and human settlement in the past, reflecting the ancient and prosperous Sukhothai civilization roots, including the discovery of numerous Tureang kilns that were once production sites for Sangkhalok pottery.

Today, Ban Sri Chum community has become an important learning center, creating historical value for tourism.

The study demonstrates the importance of cultural identity in promoting tourism in World Heritage sites, particularly in historically and culturally significant areas like Mueang Kao Subdistrict in Sukhothai Province, which can be developed as distinctive and unique tourism selling points.

Niramon Khomwan (2014) conducted a study on "The Identity of Bang Plee Ancient Market Community, Samut Prakan Province." The research aimed to analyze the identity of the Bang Plee Ancient Market community using qualitative research methodology. The study targeted key informants including formal community leaders, informal community leaders, shop owners, and residents living within the community, collecting data through document research and field data collection using various tools such as field surveys, non-participant observation, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and small group meetings, which were then analyzed through inductive interpretation to form conclusions.

The research found that the Bang Plee Ancient Market community possesses identities that reflect the community's sense of self, built on shared cultural traditions, lifestyle patterns, and collective acceptance by community members, which have been practiced continuously until becoming a distinctive community lifestyle culture. The study identified six key community identities:

1. The riverside market merchant lifestyle,



which is an authentic way of life still remaining in society

2. Traditional architectural building patterns

3. The Rap Bua (Lotus Receiving) Festival, which is an ancient tradition and the only one of its kind in Thailand

4. Luang Por To Buddha image, revered by people nationwide and enshrined at Wat Bang Plee Yai Nai.

5. Local desserts and foods, including Sai Bua dessert, Kala dessert, and sun-dried snakehead fish

6. Folk games and activities, including mango seed windmill making, boat racing, and sea boxing

The study also found that some identities still exist in the community, including the riverside market merchant lifestyle, traditional architecture, the Rap Bua Festival, Luang Por To Buddha image, and the local food of sun-dried snakehead fish. Some identities have disappeared and have not been revived, such as the local desserts Sai Bua and Kala, and the folk game of mango seed windmill making. Additionally, some identities that had disappeared have been revived and adapted to fit changing social conditions by incorporating them into community traditional events, such as the folk activities of boat racing and sea boxing.

The research concluded that the Rap Bua Festival is considered the most prominent and strongest community identity, with latent potential that can be utilized as capital for future community development, reflecting the importance of preserving and promoting community cultural

identities for sustainable development.

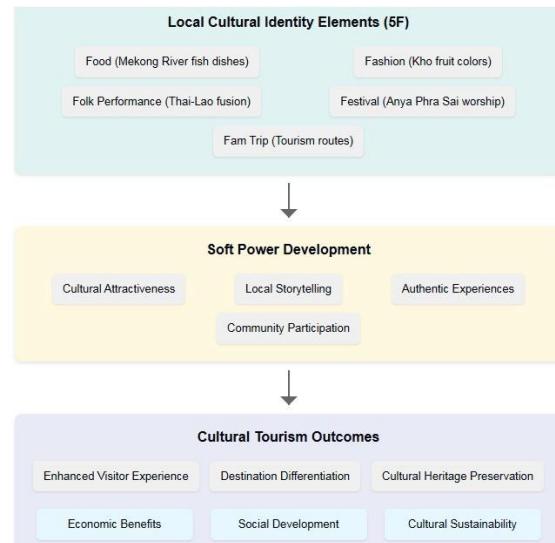


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology



Figure 2: Three-Phase Research Process

This research employed a qualitative approach using mixed methods to study the identity of Marukanakorn City in various dimensions. The study utilized descriptive and exploratory research approaches in Tha Kho Subdistrict, Mueang District, Nakhon Phanom Province, the area presumed to be the site of ancient Marukanakorn City. The research was divided into three main phases: document study, field data collection, and data analysis.



The qualitative research sample consisted of 44 participants selected using non-probability sampling, particularly purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on specific qualifications and expertise related to tourism, history, and important traditions and culture of Marukanakorn City. Selection criteria included: a minimum of 5 years' experience in local cultural activities, recognized knowledge of local history or traditions, active involvement in tourism development, or official positions related to cultural heritage management. These criteria ensured that participants could provide rich, reliable information about the area's cultural identity. Participants were divided into three main groups: 10 government representatives (from Tourism Authority of Thailand, Nakhon Phanom Provincial Office, Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, Provincial Cultural Office, Tha Kho Subdistrict Administrative Organization, and academics from Nakhon Phanom University), 4 private sector representatives (from Nakhon Phanom Chamber of Commerce and Provincial Tourism Industry Council), and 30 community representatives (8 local scholars, 14 local leaders, and 8 members of Tha Kho Subdistrict tourism community).

Participant Group	Subgroup	Number
Government Representatives	TAT Officials	3
Provincial Officers		5
University Academics		2
Private Sector	Chamber of Commerce	2
Tourism Industry Council		2
Community Representatives	Local Scholars	8
Local Leaders		14
Tourism Community Members		8
Total		44

Figure 3: Distribution of Research Participants

Data collection methods included four main approaches: studying documents and research related to the history, archaeology, and anthropology of Marukanakorn City and the Mekong River Basin region; conducting in-depth interviews using semi-structured question guidelines with government and private sector representatives, with 2 sessions of 45-90 minutes per person; focus group discussions with community representatives, organized into 3 separate groups of 8 - 12 participants each, lasting 2-3 hours; and field surveys to search for archaeological and cultural traces, along with photography, video recording, and observation of community lifestyles.

Key questions used in the interviews and focus groups included: - "What do you believe makes Marukanakorn unique compared to other historical sites in the region?" - "How do local food traditions connect to the identity of the community?" - "What cultural elements from Marukanakorn's past continue to influence present-day community practices?" - "Which cultural aspects do you believe have the strongest potential for tourism development?" - "How could the community's cultural identity be preserved while developing tourism?" The research tools included interview forms that had been validated for content validity by experts, observation forms, and audio and visual recording equipment. Data analysis employed content analysis and thematic analysis methods, including data preparation, coding, categorization, theme creation, and interpretation. Initial coding identified over 50 cultural elements, which were then categorized



into the 5F framework. The reliability of the findings was verified through triangulation, member checking, and review by three experts. The research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Nakhon Phanom University, approval number HE 29/68, adhering to principles of respect for persons, beneficence, justice, and confidentiality.

Research Findings

Element	Key Characteristics	Tourism Potential	Soft Power
Food	Mekong River fish dishes; Tha Kho Herb Chili Paste	High	Strong
Fashion	Orange color from Kho fruit; Thai-Lao influenced clothing	Medium	Moderate
Folk Performance	Thai-Lao fusion dance with fishing equipment	Medium-high	Strong
Festival	Anya Phra Sai worship; Tha Kho fish festival	High	Very strong
Fam Trip	Three tourism routes (historical, cultural, agricultural)	High	Strong

Figure 4: Summary of Marukhanakhon's Cultural Identities (5F Framework)

The study on the identity of Marukanakorn City in Tha Kho Subdistrict, Mueang District, Nakhon Phanom Province identified several distinctive identities, including Food, Fashion, Folk Performance, Festival, and Familiarization Trip (Fam Trip). The findings are as follows:

1. Food: Local Mekong Riverside Culinary Identity The local food of Tha Kho tourism community reflects multicultural influences from various ethnic groups living in the Mekong River Basin. The study found that most foods that constitute Marukanakorn's identity use ingredients from the Mekong River, which is an area of high biodiversity.

As a local elder explained during a focus group discussion, 'We've fished from the Mekong

the same way for generations — it's more than food, it's our identity. Our Lab Pla E-Tu cannot be found anywhere else because it depends on the unique fish from our section of the river.'

The outstanding food identity of the area is fish-based cuisine, featuring fresh Mekong River fish prepared and creatively adapted as community specialties. One distinctive dish is "Lab Pla E-Tu" (spicy minced fish salad), made from fish caught exclusively in the Mekong River. This dish is characterized by its dry texture and is served with fresh vegetables grown by locals along the Mekong riverbank, providing chemical-free, fresh produce that enhances flavor and nutritional value.

Besides fresh fish preparations, the community also processes Mekong River fish for preservation. A popular processed product that has become a renowned identity is "Tha Kho Thai Herb Chili Paste," which combines Mekong fish with locally grown herbs, using innovative production techniques to extend shelf life, making it an innovative food with potential for future development.

Another signature dish is "Grilled Mekong River Fish," using various fish caught by local fishermen in the community. This traditional fishing has been inherited from the Marukanakorn era to the present day. Local fishermen possess specialized techniques and methods for fishing, reflecting long-accumulated local wisdom. Consequently, most people in the area combine fishing with agriculture, creating a food identity closely linked to local lifestyle and culture.

2. Fashion: Clothing and Cultural Identity



The clothing and textile crafts of Marukanakorn people reflect ethnic diversity and cultural inheritance through community dress. The study clearly shows that an important clothing identity of Tha Kho Subdistrict from past to present emphasizes color, which is directly linked to the topography and environment where the community resides.

The village name "Tha Kho" derives from a large Kho tree that once stood in the old town area. For this reason, villagers prefer to use the color of Kho fruit—orange—as the main color in their weaving and clothing design. This color has become a unique feature that connects to the community's history and natural environment.

Additionally, the community expresses its culture through a distinctive community logo. The logo features geometric patterns that are symmetrical and prominent, composed of angular forms connected like traditional fabric patterns or ancient designs from Isan and Mekong River Basin cultures. The gold or yellowish-brown color used in the logo represents elegance, value, and connection to the long history of Tha Kho Subdistrict.

The logo's structure shows connections between different directions—north, south, east, and west—symbolizing Marukanakorn's role as a cultural center in ancient times. This symbol continues to be used and passed down to the present, reflecting pride in the community's cultural roots.

The clothing style that constitutes the community's fashion identity resembles Lan Xang

art, especially the wearing of shirts made from traditional woven fabric, often embroidered or woven with village symbols. For lower garments, people typically wear sinh (traditional skirts) with patterns and weaving techniques influenced by Laos, demonstrating cultural blending and wisdom exchange among Mekong River Basin communities. The community preserves and passes on traditional weaving techniques and clothing styles while adapting them to appeal to younger generations and tourists, reflecting a blend of cultural heritage conservation and development to meet contemporary changes.

3. Folk Performance: Mekong River Basin Cultural Fusion

The study found that Marukanakorn's folk performances distinctively demonstrate a fusion of Thai, Lao, and Mekong River Basin cultures. A key performance art is a dance that reflects the identity and lifestyle of Tha Kho Subdistrict residents, which has been passed down since the ancient times of Marukanakorn City.

This performance plays an important role in welcoming ceremonies for visitors, reflecting the community's hospitality and good hosting. A distinctive feature of the performance is the incorporation of occupational tools, especially fishing equipment, as part of the show, reflecting the importance of the Mekong River and fishing to the community's way of life.

The dance style resembles performance arts from the Northeastern region and Laos, a unique characteristic indicating ethnic roots from people who historically lived on both sides of the



Mekong River. This cultural fusion reflects the close relationship between people in the Mekong River Basin region, with long-standing cultural exchanges and cross-border movements.

Preserving and passing on these folk performances not only maintains cultural heritage but also conveys historical stories and community lifestyles through performance arts, effectively creating impressions and understanding about Marukanakorn's cultural identity for tourists and visitors.

4. Festival: Important Rituals and Traditions
The traditions and rituals of Tha Kho Subdistrict reflect beliefs and cultural inheritance that have existed for a long time. One of the important rituals still practiced is the worship of Pu Ta Anya Phra Sai, an important figure respected by the people of ancient Marukanakorn.

A 72-year-old community elder shared during interviews: 'The Anya Phra Sai worship ceremony is what binds our community together. Young and old participate together, and it's how we pass our stories to the next generation. Tourists who attend often say they feel the spiritual connection to our past.'

Pu Ta Anya Phra Sai is very important to the community's history as he was a pioneering leader who laid foundations since the time of old Marukanakorn City. Due to this importance, the Tha Kho community holds an annual worship festival in the early year. This ritual not only shows respect for ancestors but also maintains relationships within the community and connects present-day people with the area's long history.

Additionally, another important festival indicating traditional cultural inheritance is the Heet 12 Khong 14 tradition, influenced by Northeastern Thai culture passed down to the present day. Heet 12 refers to traditions practiced throughout the 12 months, while Khong 14 represents guidelines for people's lives in society.

The Fish Festival at Tha Kho is another important annual tradition reflecting riverside lifestyles and the community's connection to the Mekong River. This festival is held during the fish abundance season, approximately November to December each year, featuring various activities such as exhibitions about traditional fishing lifestyles, demonstrations of ancient fishing tools, Mekong River fish cooking contests, and importantly, celebrations with meals prepared from Mekong River fish. This festival not only preserves local food culture but also builds community unity and attracts tourists to experience riverside lifestyles.

Maintaining and passing on these traditions demonstrates the community's awareness of cultural heritage value and the importance placed on connecting the past with the present. These festivals and traditions are not only spiritually and culturally significant but also have potential for development as cultural tourism activities that can attract tourists to experience and learn about the community's way of life and beliefs in depth.

5. Familiarization Trip: Tha Kho Community Tourism Routes. Tourism route and activity development in Tha Kho Subdistrict has been

designed to reflect the diversity of tourism resources in the community,

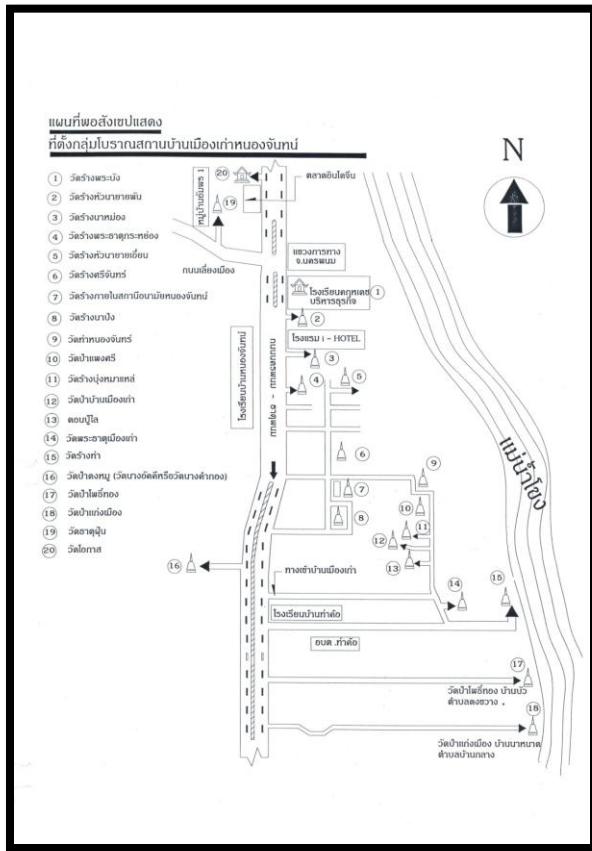


Figure 5: Map of Tourism Routes

A local tourism guide emphasized during interviews: 'These routes weren't randomly created— they reflect how our community naturally organizes itself. The historical route follows actual ancient paths, while the agricultural route showcases living traditions that connect us to our ancestors. Each visitor can choose the experience that speaks to them most.'

Familiarization Trip divided into three main routes with different highlights:

1. Tha Kho Subdistrict Tourism Route: This route emphasizes experiencing the community's

history and culture holistically, starting from the Ban Tha Kho Herbal Garden Commemorating the Royal Honor, where tourists are welcomed by community leaders and learn about history from Marukanakorn City to Nakhon Phanom. Then visiting Wat Tam Rang, an ancient temple in Tha Kho Subdistrict dating back to the Sri Kotrabun era, followed by paying respects at Anya Pha Sai Shrine, a sacred place revered by villagers. Lunch features local food of Tha Kho people and processed herbal products from the community. The afternoon includes visits to Wat Kon Sao and activities at Phra That Sri Kotrabun across the Mekong.

2. Ban Tha Kho Agricultural Tourism Route:

This route combines historical learning with experiencing the community's agricultural lifestyle, starting at Ban Nong Chan archaeological site, presumed to be the area of Sri Kotrabun City. Then visiting Ban Tha Kho Herbal Garden Commemorating the Royal Honor, an agricultural tourism attraction and study center for self-reliant natural lifestyles. Continuing with paying respects to the Golden Buddha image at Wat Pho Sai and visiting Wat Chonlatham Bunyawat. The afternoon includes experiencing activities with community entrepreneurs, such as making herbal compresses, weaving bags from plastic fibers and natural materials, making organic bamboo shoots, making Bai Sri, making traditional sticky rice dumplings, and processing various local foods.

3. Historical Tourism Route: This route focuses on in-depth learning of the area's history and archaeology, starting at Wat Rang Na Mong, where Buddha image heads, bodies, and ancient



roof tile pieces and smoking pipe parts are still found. Continuing to Wat Rang Sri Chan with its pagoda and ancient mound, along with sandstone and wooden Buddha images. Then visiting Wat Rang Na Pang with its pagoda, vihara, and ordination hall, including a sandstone Buddha image in subduing Mara posture. The afternoon includes visits to Pu Lang Health Center, Wat Tha Nong Chan, Don Kaew Kong, and Wat Pa Phaeng Sri. Concluding with a visit to Wat Ban Mueang Kao (Wat Tam Rang), an archaeological site registered as a national important ancient monument.

The development of these diverse tourism routes helps meet the needs of tourists with different interests, whether those interested in history and archaeology, local wisdom and lifestyle, or comprehensive cultural experiences. This type of familiarization trip not only helps tourists learn and understand the community's identity in depth but also distributes tourists to various attractions in the community, creating economic distribution and benefits throughout. This approach also creates opportunities for community involvement in tourism management, from being local guides to providing food and beverage services, selling community products, and demonstrating local wisdom, which strengthens the community and promotes sustainable cultural heritage conservation.

Discussion of Research Findings

Destination	Primary Identity Elements	Key Differences from Marukhanakhon
Nan (Duanhong, 2015)	Mountain-river geography; Lanna-influenced architecture	Marukhanakhon has stronger Mekong-Lao cultural connections; less developed physical heritage
Songkhla Old Town (Srikhwang, 2025)	Chinese-Portuguese architecture; coastal trading heritage	Marukhanakhon emphasizes river-based livelihood; less commercial development
Sukhothai (Klaykaew, 2023)	World Heritage monuments; highly developed archaeological sites	Marukhanakhon offers more living cultural traditions; less monumental but more experiential
Bang Plee (Khomwan, 2014)	Market lifestyle; Rap Bua Festival	Marukhanakhon's festivals are less known but more authentically preserved
Thai-Phuan communities (Sangchamnong, 2023)	Clearly defined ethnic identity; established cultural narratives	Marukhanakhon has more multicultural influences; less clearly defined ethnic boundaries

Figure 6: Comparative Analysis of Marukhanakhon with Other Cultural Tourism Destinations

The study of Marukanakhon Ancient City's identity reveals significant cultural elements through the 5F framework. The food identity most strongly connects to the Mekong River, featuring distinctive dishes like "Lab Pla E-Tu" and herb chili paste, aligning with Kultaew Klaykaew's (2023) findings that food identity serves as valuable cultural capital for tourism. This culinary identity offers the highest economic potential for immediate tourism development, as it combines authentic local experiences with tangible products that visitors can purchase. From a cultural capital perspective, the fashion identity, characterized by Kho fruit colors and multicultural logos, reflects Thai-Lao cultural blending, supporting Manop Sangchamnong's (2023) research on traditional clothing as cultural heritage. However, unlike the Thai-Phuan identity that Sangchamnong studied, Marukanakhon's fashion elements currently have moderate tourism potential due to limited production capacity. Strategic development of this element would require capacity building among local artisans and establishing stronger distribution



channels for handmade products.

The study of Marukanakhon Ancient City's identity reveals significant cultural elements through the 5F framework that distinguish it from other historical sites in Thailand. Unlike Nan (Duanhong, 2015) which developed through mountain geography, or Songkhla (Srihwang, 2025) with its coastal influences, Marukanakhon's river-based identity is closely tied to the Mekong's ecological and ethnic complexity, creating a distinctive character within Thailand's cultural landscape.

The diverse tourism routes showcase the area's potential for varied tourism experiences, aligning with Bunwat Srihwang's (2025) research on multidimensional tourism development. However, challenges remain, particularly in integrating stakeholder cooperation and developing distinctive branding, as noted by Manop Sangchamnong (2023) and Narongrith Sumalee (2020).

Research Recommendations

Practical Recommendations:

1. Develop integrated marketing strategies that emphasize the distinctive Mekong River-based cultural identity of Marukanakhon to differentiate it from other historical tourism destinations in Thailand.

2. Prioritize capacity building for local food producers and festival organizers to enhance their ability to serve tourists while maintaining authenticity.

3. Establish a coordinating body that includes government agencies, private sector

representatives, and community leaders to ensure coherent development of Marukanakhon's cultural tourism.

4. Create interpretive materials that effectively communicate the cultural significance of Marukanakhon's traditions and practices to visitors, particularly for the historical tourism route.

5. Develop targeted marketing approaches for younger travelers (Millennials and Gen Z) who seek authentic cultural experiences and are likely to share their experiences through social media.

Research Recommendations:

1. Conduct economic impact studies to measure the contribution of cultural tourism initiatives to local livelihoods in Marukanakhon.

2. Evaluate the effectiveness of soft power promotion strategies in attracting domestic and international visitors to lesser-known cultural destinations.

3. Develop and test sustainable community-based tourism models specifically designed for multicultural heritage sites in the Mekong River Basin.

4. Conduct comparative studies with other successful Mekong Basin cultural destinations to identify transferable success factors.

5. Investigate methods to engage younger generations while adapting traditional cultural elements to contemporary contexts. 6. Undertake longitudinal studies tracking changes in cultural identity perceptions among locals to understand social impacts as tourism develops in historically significant destinations.



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