The Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism:  
A Case Study of Tourism in Thailand

Sangkae Punyasiri.  
Graduate School of Tourism Management,  
National Institute of Development Administration, (NIDA),  
Bangkok, Thailand.  
E-mail: sangkae@gmail.com

Abstract

Thai Tourism Standards Development Project was created by the Department of Tourism and the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) in Bangkok. The project objective was to establish the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’ which will be appropriate and consistent with the quality of the tourism potential of Thailand. The standard draft used the qualitative research in both interview and focus groups to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of the experts from public, private and academic sectors, including the tourists. The standard draft fulfilment evaluated for its content validity by ‘Thailand Tourism Standard Sub-Committee on Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’. The result conformed with the characteristics of the bicycle tourism industry, five components, 14 major criteria and 28 indicators which consist of the Bicycle Routes, the Staff, the Facilities, the Safety, and the Community and Environment. This included the public hearings with the stakeholders considering and criticizing this standard draft. Moreover, the selected bicycle tourism operators from Chiang Mai, Loei, Krabi, and Bangkok were passed through the audit process. Specifically, the intent of the Standard is not to exclude operators from being recognized as bicycle tourism initiatives, but to provide a firm direction to operators on the quality of service that is needed to reassure tourists that they can expect a consistent level of quality and service across all the ‘Thai Tourism Standards’ endorsed by bicycle tourism initiatives.

Key Words: Thai Tourism Standards, Bicycle Touring, Thailand
1. Introduction

The Division of Tourism Services Development, in the Department of Tourism under the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) of Thailand assumes duties and responsibilities related to the development of service standards for tourist attractions and tourism products and services offered by the Thai tourism industry. This includes the support of standards for tour businesses and tour guides as well as the establishment of the development plan for tourist attraction sites and tourism products and services, including coordinating, promoting and supporting the implementation of the plan. Other tasks are specified by law in accordance with the authorities and responsibilities of the Division of Tourism Services Development, or as assigned by the Ministry or Cabinet. The goal is to achieve sustainable tourism development and generate economic, social and cultural benefits for local communities as well as the country (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2011).

In particular, Division of Tourism Services Development recognizes the importance of the tourism standards, which are the approaches used to develop and raise the capabilities of the competitiveness of tourism service of the country among the tourism, globalization and cultural change, in order to have further growth of tourism and economic development in the future. This is especially true regarding tourism based on the tourism activities such as a biking activity for tourists. At present times, traveling by bicycle is popular with the tourists in eco-tourism and cultural attractions such as public parks, national parks, historical-cultural parks and old cities, etc. As for bicycle tourism which is one of the sustainable type of tourism in Thailand (Chutima, 2015). Furthermore, to raise tourism standards and develop tourism activities, the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’ was established and developed with the characteristics of the bicycle tourism industry as well as the components, standard criteria and indicators of this standard. To improve the customer service and safety in Thai Tourism Industry, this Standard is based on the Thai Tourism Standards which were published for those related to enhancing the good image of the tourism industry of Thailand in the international context (Department of Tourism, 2015).

Additionally, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2017) planned to boost Thailand’s cycling profile among local and international bike lovers because Thailand is very popular cycling destination and for many good reasons. The food and lodging are plentiful and cheap, the roads are in excellent condition, as bicycling is a fast-growing trend in travel industry in Thailand. The emerging trends are pointing to the re-emergence of the bicycle as an important leisure and recreational transportation mode. A bicycle tour is a tourism activity which is an increasingly important mode of vacation or holiday form of transport. For the supply side of the bicycle tourism industry to be sustainable in the future, it must provide safety due to such a recent increase in tourist demand (Ritchie, 1998). Research by Sinchai Homchan et al.
(2014) suggested that most cyclists wanted an interpretive program to be developed on the bicycle route so that more knowledge and the fullest enjoyment can be experienced. The interpretive program should give interesting information on attractive sites along the bicycle route and they also suggested the improvement of facilities along the route as well. Hence, these contents are considered and should be provided in this Standard. Therefore, this article aims to propose the concept of the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’ as a way towards developing and promoting this standard, which will hopefully lead to the sustainable development of tourism in Thailand.

The significance of this project, as cited above, means the terms of reference define the purpose and scope of a proposed project to establish and develop the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’ which are appropriate and consistent with the quality of the tourism potential of Thailand. This is based on the stakeholder participation, comprising of the operators of tourism, both in the public and private sector and the tourists as both domestic and international tourists. The information on this project study as well as the recommendations of all stakeholders is the guideline for developing and improving this tourism standard, including the characteristics of the bicycle tourism industry as well as the components, standard criteria and indicators of this standard. As a result, it will reduce the restrictions and apply to use this tourism standard that is recognized by those stakeholders involved in the business and tourism in the current situation. Finally, the revision of the characteristics of the bicycle tourism industry as well as the components, standard criteria and the indicators of the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’ will be conducted to scrutinize and analyze. The public will be able to receive information from all those involved in tourism and the published standard for those related to enhance the good image of the tourism industry of Thailand in the international context.

2. Literature Review

1) Concepts of Tourism Standards

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), as a specialized agency, investigated the ‘Quality Standards in Tourism Services’ and suggested that the objectives were to improve the overall quality of products and services within the tourism industry comprising all tourism-related accommodation, restaurants, tour guides, tour operators, and other tourism-related service providers. To raise the levels of demand nationally, regionally and internationally; to promote competitiveness within the industry; and provide valuable and reliable information on quality standards for the tourist and the travel industry. In doing this, the overall strategies were conducted to evaluate the current tourism quality standards situation through initial negotiations with government officials and other key stakeholders of the national tourism industry, to identify the customers’ needs and expectations of the
stakeholders, the local environment, direction, facilities, resources, overall objectives, and any challenges. In addition, the Important of quality standard in tourism service is a management tool that provides companies with a means of monitoring service from the customers’ perspective (Evans & Lindsay, 2010). It was also suggested for the tourist industry to make available UNWTO quality products and services (modules); and to provide technical assistance as indicated in six modules. Furthermore, the outputs from the preparation of this study will be able to be the classification system in place and the information available to stakeholders in the sector; providing capacities built among local inspectors to apply classification criteria. According to International Organization of Standardization (ISO) (2012) this provided practical, internationally harmonized solutions and best practice to help making these goals become a reality. Aiming at excellence and profitability, tourism industry wants to pursue of quality accreditation through the various schemes, such as the eco-labels, ISO and EU Foundation for Quality Management (Kapiki, 2012).

The ASEAN Tourism Standards were established by ten ASEAN member nations, and considered that the standardization of tourism services can help ASEAN to be a Quality Single Destination. There are six ASEAN Tourism standards, which will be guideline for implementation of ASEAN member nations. In Thailand, The Department of Tourism (2013) stated that the quality standards in tourism services meant the development of tourism, the enhancement of services quality, in order that the tourists will enjoy convenience, safety, satisfaction, according to the chosen level of service. Presently, the completely developed 56 Thai tourism standards, covering standards of tourism accommodation, standards of tourism services, standards of tourist attractions, standards of Tourism activities, standards of guided tourism business and guides, whereby, in 2015, there have been over 500 establishments certified as Thailand Tourism Standard, including the accommodation standards, such as home-stay, services standards, such as rental boats and guided tourism, activities standards, such as Elephant Camp for Tourism, etc. Thailand Tourism Standard Certification Marks will make the tourists reliable on safety, attract more quality tourists to Thailand, build good images of the overall tourism, generate income for the country and help with development of sustainable tourism The Department of Tourism (2015).

2) Concepts of Bicycle Tourism Standard

A strongly evidence indicates that the use of bicycles for leisure, recreation, and tourism is popular worldwide (Ritchie, 1998). Bicycle tourists have strong preferences for different types of experiences depending on their bicycle skill level and the make-up of their group. Bicycle Tourism has been defined as an activity that is for holidays, recreation, pleasure, or sports; and to include either overnight stays or day trip (South Australia Tourism Commission, 2005), (Lumsdon, 2000). Another approach to define bicycle tourism is to look at the six characteristic factors: 1) cycling happens far from one’s home; 2) it may be single-
day or multiple-day trip; 3) cycling activity is not focused on competition; 4) the main reason of the trip should be cycling; 5) cycling happens just in a dynamic setting, and 6) type of the trip is recreation or leisure (Lamont, 2009). Mostly, cycling standard focus on safety and quality of cycles, which need to maintain or repair to a good condition of quality (CTC, 1999). In Slovenia, the standard for cycling destinations concerned on seven criteria: Bike information point; cycling friendly accommodation; at least three marked cycle routes; a map of cycle routes; trained cycle tour guides; bicycle rental; and bicycle repair (Rotar, 2012).

Also, Taiwan Bicycle Industry Standard based on ISO 4210 has been implemented as of January 2016, included the North American Consumer Product Safety Commission, the South American ABNT NBT, the JIS (Japanese Industry Standard) and the British Standard (Jan-Willem, 2016). For Thailand, “Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism” was established to determine the criteria for the tour operator who responsible for giving good service to the tourists.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

As indicated in introduction, we have two major research questions. One of them is to establish and develop the bicycle service standard for tourism in Thailand, including the terms and definitions. We will explore the requirement factors used to service the bicycle touring for tourists in Thailand. The second question is to develop the audit process for using in this standard.

3.2 Research Design

The data collection; the standard draft setting; the standard draft fulfilment with a small group discussion between the Department of Tourism officers, tourism standard experts, and the experts from bicycling tour operators, enhancing and evaluating for its content validity of the standard draft setting. Focus groups can be very effective tools for this research because hearing new parroting information from the participants will be very useful. The standard draft comments with a small group discussion was processed by using descriptive analysis of qualitative research, as well as using the Index of the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), (Mehrens et al., 1973), of the standard draft fulfilment evaluated for its content validity by ‘Thailand Tourism Standard Sub-Committee on Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism.’ Therefore, the questions that obtained the IOC score between 0.5 – 1.0 were deemed acceptable. After that, modification and revision of the content of the standard draft comments with the recommendations of the ‘Thailand Tourism Standard Sub-Committee on Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’, until the conclusion of the study is the standard draft paper. Then, selecting four bicycling tour operators to join the assessment program helping to confirm the effective indicators using in this standard. This included the training course
development; the public hearings with the stakeholders considering and criticizing the
standard draft paper; the assessment form setting; the assessment form test; the outstanding
model searching with a project summary of the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’ and
the assessment form test, together with the example of the pilot bicycle tourism industry for
the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’. The public hearing is needed because it is
reasonable to give more people an opportunity to testify the issues. Finally, the report of the
‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’, which was developed in the project of Thai Tourism
Standards Development 2015 (Department of Tourism, 2015) was assessed.

3.3 Data

The total of 50 experts involved the tourism industry are comprised of the operators of
tourism, in both the public and private sector, and the tourists as domestic and international
tourists. The experts in this project were selected to participate in the operation based on the
purposive sampling; a procedure that involves the selection of persons or the key informants,
who represent the desired population. This is a non-probability sampling method which
involves the conscious selection of certain subjects to be included in this study, which
considers the issues of the research questions in a significant approach (Creswell, 2009). The
setting of this project was located in Chiang Mai, Loei, Krabi, and Bangkok, throughout
Thailand. Through the purposive selection technique, these are areas with potential for eco-
tourism and cultural tourism as defined by the Department of Tourism (Department of
Tourism, 2015).

4. Results and Discussion

Result from the standard draft paper which was completed with the public hearings in the
setting of the areas as well as the recommendations relating to develop and improve the
standard draft paper setting, including the conclusion of the project management is the
‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’. The management consultant had collected and
studied information from all the various elements. The results from this study can be
summarized in accordance with the Thai Tourism Standards and can become published as the
established standard for those who are related to enhancing the good image of the tourism
industry of Thailand in the international context. The most significant characteristics of the
‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’ with description and indices are presented.

This is a voluntary standard that affords bicycle tourism operators the opportunity to raise
their operational standards above any existing compulsory/legal industry standards to which
they presently adhere to. This will enable them to establish credible international operational
benchmarks, which will assist with both local and international marketing, while continuing
to develop the quality of their human resources for a sustainable future. The major criteria and
indicators of this standard can be used as a guideline for conformance and self-assessment of
the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’. All things considered, this standard deal with the following essential elements of professional bicycle operations: Bicycle Routes, the Staff, the Facilities, the Safety, and the Community and the local Environment. Also, bicycle tourism, as defined by this standard, is an establishment for the promotion of the cyclists’ well-being.

Here is the following result: terms and definitions apply in this standard:

1) Terms and Definitions

Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism: An establishment for the promotion of well-being through bicycle tourism activities focused on five major components: Bicycle Routes, Staff Ability, Facilities, Safety, and Community & Environment Concern, as defined by this standard that the bicycle service manager for tourism must comply and make available for tourists to enjoy cycling on the bicycle routes with regard to the safety of tourists, and tourist resources in site, including a local community participation.

Bicycle: A wheeled vehicle that has two wheels and is moved along by foot pedals; bicycle parts consist of the frame, a saddle or seat, handlebars, wheels, brakes, a crankset, and a chain.

Bicycle Routes: Bicycle routes are tourist attractions which means that route organizers need to be concerned about selecting a suitable destination, which includes a region’s capacity to support cycling, involving the presence and quality of the cycling infrastructure, particularly roads, paths, and trails and also the endowed resources such as the appealing nature scenery. The safety and ease of accessibility during the entire route are also important factors.

Bicycle Service Manager for Tourism: This phrase refers to the operator in tour companies as well as both public and private agencies who is responsible to organize the cycling activities for tourists. They need to be a qualified and experienced individual in the bicycle tourism industry with some experience in management skills.

Cycle Ride Leader: These are specialists in cycling with the ability to ride a street bike for town or city routes and a mountain bike for off-road rural routes and guide the tourists on the bicycle routes correctly, safely and efficiently.

Staff: Trained and certified workers in the bicycle tourism industry who can perform cycling services for clients or tourists on the cycling routes.

2) The Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism

A summary of the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’ including the major criteria and specific indicators, total together as five components for the standards, 14 major criteria and 28 indicators. The first component considers the management of the bicycle routes which require the bicycle routes and the tourists’ data. The first indicator starts from surveying and setting the breakpoints on the bicycle routes in the cycling plan for the tourist. Then explain the carrying capacity to support bicycle tourism in each route plan, and add on the interpretive
program for the bicycle route covering the full distance. To notify the public with notifications of bicycle routes as public concern. In addition, the tourist information shall be recorded, including registration indicators for each trip. It is likely that the important of service characteristics and the need to design routes, which allow social interaction between cyclists. A cycle route usually refers to a component of transport system, which specifically provides for a cycle trip. (Downward & Lumsdon, 2001). This component will help the tourist to select the best route touring program as well.

The second component have three major indicators for the company preparing the staff, the first one concerns for the cycle ride leader who need to notify the terms and conditions of bicycle service to the tourists and put on tourist’s advice and advocacy service or the manual for the bicycle routes. The second one concerns on the bicycle repairman who will provide the basic checking the bicycle for being safe and fit to ride. The last one for preparing the safety cycling insurance agents to the tourists. Well-trained cycling leader will benefit of tourist to enjoy their ride trip.

Third component standard for providing the Tourist’s facilities: (1) Cycling general information services for the route, the country’s local climate, types of terrain, warnings, etc. shall be provided on cycling, (2) The risk of incidents and accidents is required to be clear and forthwith to notify the tourists, (3) Setting breakpoints on bicycle routes appropriately as the cycling of the tourists, (4) Food and beverages shall be offered in the cycling service center, (5) Providing toilets and litter bins, and (6) A questionnaire for obtaining tourist satisfaction and their needs for bicycle tourism activities should be provided. The study by Lee et al, (2014) showed that the Taiwanese bicycle tourist’s elements in contributing to the attractiveness destination are the Tourism resources, the accessibility, amenities, and the complementary services. Moreover, Tourism Region 8 (2011) has a several unique and desirable attributes for the development of cycle tourism. Tourist’s comfort and convenience should be considered in developing cycle touring resources. This includes accommodation, secure bicycle storage, luggage transfer and accessibility to food services as well.

The fourth component considers the preparation of the tourist’s safety which are listed: (1) Introducing the tourists to bike riding with the bicycle routes and list a of the bicycle types on offer, (2) Checking tourist’s cycling dress is appropriate for the bicycle routes, (3) Testing and demonstration of cycling before serving the bicycle tourism activity, (4) Essentially the items of bicycle equipment shall be checked: e.g. bike helmets, (5) Providing the staff to assist the tourists along the routes when required, (6) Providing an emergency rescue service to tourists on site, (7) Alerting a public rescue service as necessary, (8) Plan for delivering patients to hospital or to a physician when the emergency rescue service has been used. Additionally, Thailand Cycling Club (Chutima, 2015) estimates 200,000 cyclists mostly wearing lycra and helmets, and cycling for health and recreational reasons.
The last component of this Standard concerning for the Community and the Environment. The service provider need to communicate with the local community to better understand and describe using the bicycle routes in the local community’s area, and trying to encourage the environmental awareness and environmental responsibility during then trip. Moreover, the supportive and distribution of income in the local community should generate positive economic as Lumsdon (2000) showed the tourism transport facilities can contribute to rural tourism economies, especially in the villages and small towns through the route they pass. As bicycling is a method of tourism transportation that is healthy, environmentally responsible, and economically sustainable (Lee, 2015).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This article aims to propose the concept of the ‘Bicycle Service Standard for Tourism’ which was developed in the project of Thai Tourism Standards Development in 2015 by the Division of Tourism Services Development in the Department of Tourism and the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA). This Standard provides a broad umbrella of performance to be an indicator for the coordinated management of tourism products that are offered by the Department of Tourism under the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) of Thailand. Specifically, the intent of the Standard is not to exclude operators from being recognized as bicycle tourism initiatives, but to provide a firm direction to operators on the quality of service that is needed to reassure tourists that they can expect a consistent level of quality and service across all the ‘Thai Tourism Standards’ endorsed by bicycle tourism initiatives. This level of trust also includes the major criteria that relate to the Bicycle Routes provided, the Staff, the Facilities, the Safety, and the Community and local Environment as well as significant indicators of this established Standard. The following recommendations are focus on data collection required to provide an appropriate guide for cycle tourism in Thailand.

Recommendation 1: The Department of Tourism under the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) of Thailand has already published the documents to the tourism operators, as well as for members of the public who would be interested in seeking further information on the Internet, especially on the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS) website. However, the MOTS officers should play a very important role to promote this standard by inviting the cycling tour operators to join the free training program. It is suggested that by using the “Bicycling Service Standard for Tourism” to develop the service quality of the cycling tour operators, throughout Thailand.

Recommendation 2: The Department of Tourism and Thai Cycling Association should joint funding research concerning cycling tour and the potential for cycle tourism. Furthermore, more research is needed to study: the cycle tourist satisfaction for cycling trip,
the need of the Infrastructure Development to encourage more cycle touring, and the expenditures of touring cyclist in Thailand.

This is, thus, a positive way towards developing and promoting this Standard which will hopefully lead to the sustainable development of tourism in Thailand in the future.

References

Jan-Willem van Schaik, 2016, Taiwan Bicycle Industry Standard’ Incorporates Global Standards. Bike Europe Connecting professionals.


Evans, R.J. & Lindsay, M.W., 2010, Managing for Quality and Performance. South-Western Cengage Learning, USA.


Lee, R., 2015, Bicycle Tourism Plan for Economic Development: A Template for rural Agricultural Towns and A Case Study for the City of Winters, California. Thesis presented to the Faculty of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo.


Tourism Region 8, 2011, Cycle Tourism Assessment and Strategy Study. Bike on Tour, IBI Group.