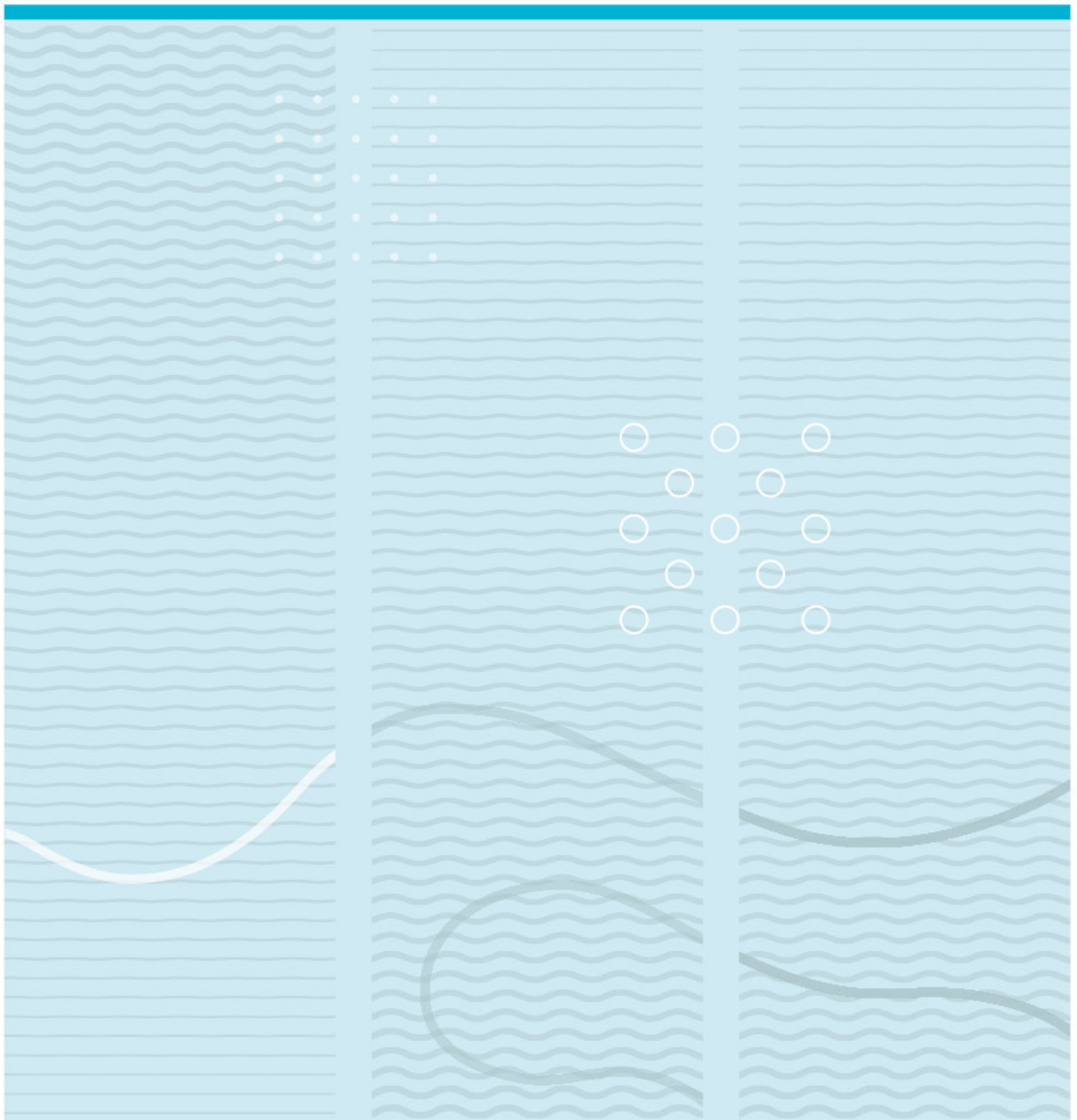


Karen Fossheim

# Sustainable Tourism in Chiang Mai

A study of best Practices, Challenge and Opportunities for Improvement



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This thesis is worth 30 study points

## **Summary**

This research explores the potential economic benefits that tourism can bring to communities while also highlighting the challenges it poses to ensuring sustainable and equitable growth. The study focuses specifically on sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai and how this popular destination is dealing with the challenges of managing its booming tourism sector while also addressing the need for sustainable practices. The study uses a qualitative research approach and recommends adopting sustainable practices that balance economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental protection. However, implementing sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai is a significant challenge that requires achieving a balance between the interests of all stakeholders. This requires a collaborative approach that involves all stakeholders in the decision-making process.

## Abbreviations

1. CGC Chiang Mai Government Center
2. ENGOs Environmental Non-Government Organizations
3. GPP Gross Provincial Product
4. NGOs Non-Government Organizations
5. TAT Thailand Authority Tourist
6. TOT Tourist Organization of Thailand
7. TUI Touristik Union International
8. UNWTO United Nations World Tourism Organization
9. WTO World Tourism Organization



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Summary

Abbreviations

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# Acknowledgment

Tourism can help communities grow economically, but it can also create challenges for sustainable and fair growth (Holden, 2016; Spiliakos, Salim, 2022). Chiang Mai, a city in Northern Thailand, is managing its growing tourism industry while working towards sustainability (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). This study examines the challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai.

The research looks at how to balance economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental protection (Pokharel, 2016). The study takes into account the perspectives of stakeholders to provide a comprehensive understanding of sustainable tourism.

Chiang Mai's tourism growth has led to overcrowding, traffic congestion, and terrible air pollution (Pokharel, 2016; Kirkey, 2020). The path to economic growth must be paved with sustainable practices that promote a healthy environment and vibrant communities (Polnyotee & Thadaniti, 2015). By adopting these practices, we can achieve a thriving economy while minimizing the negative impacts that threaten our planet and its people (Font & McCabe, 2017). Let us work together to build a sustainable future for ourselves and generations to come. Balancing the interests of different groups is important in promoting sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai (Fuente, 2012).

Business owners and tourism operators want to attract more visitors, while local communities and environmentalists are worried about the negative effects of tourism on resources and livelihoods (Kirkey, 2020). Achieving a balance between these interests requires a collaborative approach that involves all stakeholders (Byrd, 2007).

Another challenge is preserving Chiang Mai's cultural heritage. Promoting authentic experiences is necessary to showcase the city's unique cultural identity (Polnyotee & Thadaniti, 2015). Environmental sustainability in tourism destinations is also critical (Helgadottir et al., 2022). Chiang Mai has diverse ecosystems that support local

communities and biodiversity, but tourism has led to deforestation, water pollution, and wildlife exploitation (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023; Kirkey, 2020).

To promote sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai, it is important to develop a sustainable tourism plan that balances the interests of different stakeholders, promotes community-based tourism, and adopts sustainable tourism practices (Polnyotee & Thadanitis, 2015; Hall, 2008; Novelli et al., 2017). The study also recommends promoting cultural tourism that showcases the city's unique cultural heritage.

In conclusion, sustainable tourism can bring economic growth and development to Chiang Mai, but it requires collaboration among all stakeholders (Byrd, 2007; Freeman & Epstein, 1984). By adopting sustainable practices that balance economic growth with cultural preservation and environmental protection, Chiang Mai can create a brighter, more inclusive, and environmentally conscious future.

On my journey to promote sustainable tourism development in Chiang Mai, I am committed to ensuring that the local communities are not harmed. I seek your support and guidance as I work towards creating a brighter and fairer future for the region. I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this project. I would also like to extend a big thank you to my supervisor, Heidi Stavrum, without her, I would not have been able to submit my thesis on time. Thank you once again, Heidi.

<Akkerhaugen/13 May 2024>

<Karen Fossheim>

# 1 Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a driving force behind global economic growth, providing opportunities for job creation, infrastructure development, and overall prosperity (Lee & Chang, 2008; Byrd, 2007). Nevertheless, the rapid expansion of mass tourism has raised concerns about its environmental impact and cultural dilution (Font & McCabe, 2017). To minimize the negative impact of tourism and promote appreciation for local communities' customs, various organizations are implementing sustainable tourism practices (Font & McCabe, 2017). As destinations worldwide face the challenge of balancing the rewards of tourism with its adverse impacts, the need to adopt sustainable tourism practices has become increasingly important (Helgadóttir et al., 2022).

Southeast Asia, a region comprising countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, is undergoing rapid growth and development in various sectors, from tourism to manufacturing, the region is emerging as a hub for innovation and progress (WTO, 2006; Novelli et al., 2017). What sets it apart is its resilience in the face of global financial crises that have affected traditional tourism destinations (UNWTO, 2015). Despite challenges, the region's economic growth continues to outpace many other areas of the world, making it an exciting place to watch (Font & McCabe, 2017).

The region's tourism growth is linked to its strong economic performance, with Thailand attracting significant international tourists, particularly those engaging in nature tourism activities (Chudintra, 1993; Backman & Munanura, 2015). Despite the surge in conventional tourism, there has been a parallel rise in demand for alternative experiences such as volunteer tourism and ecotourism (Walter & Reimer, 2012). However, many providers of unique, small-scale experiences and themselves need to tap into mass tourism markets to succeed (Weaver, 2012).

Thailand's rich natural and cultural heritage offers vast potential for ecotourism, aligning with global trends favoring sustainable tourism (Pokharel, 2016). International tourists seek authentic interactions with Thai culture and nature, driving demand for alternative tourism experiences (Kaosa-Ard, 2001). Although international tourism

greatly benefits the Thai economy, domestic tourism is equally significant, accounting for most tourist trips and revenue (TAT, 2017). With increasing incomes and improved infrastructure, Thais now travel more frequently, highlighting the importance of domestic tourism alongside international tourism (Novelli et al., 2017).

Chiang Mai, a city located in the enchanting landscapes of Northern Thailand, stands out as one of the most fascinating examples of tourism development (Pokharel, 2016). A combination of cultural heritage, natural beauty, and modern amenities make this destination perfect for tourists who want a memorable experience (Kirkey, 2020). The city's must-visit status is due to its rich history, lively traditions, and diverse cuisine, among other aspects and these facets attract travelers from all over the world to explore the city (Kirkey, 2020).

Chiang Mai is a city that is widely known and recognized for its rich cultural heritage, breathtaking natural landscapes, and bustling urban lifestyle (Renard, 1999). Two decades ago, Chiang Mai became an increasingly popular destination for both foreign travelers and local visitors alike (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). Despite the numerous economic opportunities it presents, Chiang Mai also faces several pressing challenges.

One of the most significant issues is the environmental strain that the city is experiencing due to unchecked development and population growth (Kirkey, 2020). Additionally, there is a growing concern about the erosion of the city's unique cultural identity, as traditional lifestyles and practices are slowly being eroded by modernization and globalization. The difficulties at hand are intricate and diverse, necessitating a collaborative approach from all parties involved to tackle them efficiently (Pokharel, 2016).

This study embarks on a journey to explore the intricate dynamics of sustainability within Chiang Mai's tourism sector, recognizing it as a pivotal concern for the region's future trajectory (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). This research aims to pave the way for a tourism model that is both resilient and responsible (Costa, Rodrigues, & Gomes, 2019). Through a thorough exploration of the intricacies of sustainable tourism, the most

valuable insights from a diverse range of sources have been gathered. These sources include the perspectives of locals, tourism business owners, and enthusiastic travelers passionate about tourism's impact on the environment and local communities (Byrd, 2007).

After considering the viewpoints and know-how of various groups, the research obtained a thorough comprehension of the obstacles and prospects linked with sustainable tourism and has consequently arrived at logical conclusions and suggestions. Utilizing this information, the research has created workable recommendations for the tourism sector in Chiang Mai to progress towards a sustainable future (Fuentes, 2012). With these actionable solutions, we can positively impact the region and its people while still providing enjoyable and meaningful travel experiences (Holden, 2016). Overall, this research aims to create a sustainable tourism model that benefits the tourism industry (Costa et al., 2019).

## **1.1 The aim of this study**

This study aims to explore the current state of sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand, focusing on best practices, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. Through comprehensive analysis, the study seeks to identify successful sustainable tourism initiatives, assess the obstacles hindering further progress, and propose strategies to enhance sustainability efforts in the region. By delving into these aspects, the study aims to contribute valuable insights that can guide stakeholders in fostering more sustainable tourism practices in Chiang Mai, thereby promoting environmental conservation, supporting local communities, and ensuring long-term socio-economic benefits for all stakeholders involved.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

1. What are the challenges and hindrances to implementing sustainable tourism practices in Chiang Mai City, and how can they be overcome?
2. What opportunities exist to enhance sustainability in the tourism industry in Chiang Mai City, and how can they be leveraged to create positive impacts?

## 2 Research Problem and Conceptual Background

Chiang Mai is a popular tourist destination with a rich cultural heritage and natural beauty (Renard, 1999; Kirkey, 2020; Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). However, it is facing challenges due to overcrowding, environmental damage, inadequate waste management, limited public transportation, and commercialization of culture (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). To address these issues, alternative tourist destinations need to be created, sustainable tourism practices need to be promoted, waste management systems need to be developed, alternative transportation options need to be implemented, and responsible tourism practices need to be promoted (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). By working together to address these challenges, Chiang Mai can remain a sustainable and attractive location for visitors (Kirkey, 2020).

### 2.1 Statement of Research Problems

All the way to Northern Thailand, Chiang Mai is a city that boasts a distinctive combination of modernity, natural splendor, and cultural opulence that is truly one-of-a-kind, and this hidden gem is simply waiting to be recovered (Renard, 1999). However, this charming city is currently facing several challenges that threaten its sustainability and natural beauty (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). One of the primary issues that Chiang Mai is currently dealing with is traffic congestion. According to the report of Pongruengkiat et al., (2023) “ In Chiang Mai, residents predominantly depend on personal vehicles for transportation, despite the presence of available public transportation alternatives. This overreliance on private cars has exacerbated issues of traffic congestion and pollution within the city. With a mere 3.67% utilization rate of public transportation, the region has received a 'red' rating for its transport indicator, signifying an urgent need for enhanced sustainability initiatives to diminish reliance on personal vehicles.” (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). The city's exceptional attractions and unique culture have made it a popular destination for tourists from around the world. As a result, during peak season, the number of tourists can be almost as high as the total number of local residents in the province, leading to a shortage of space to accommodate visitors (Kirkey, 2020).



In addition, tourism activities in Chiang Mai are causing significant environmental damage, which is a growing concern for the city's residents (Kirkey, 2020). Tourists are willing to pay more for hotels that have swimming pools or private villa pools, which consume a considerable amount of water resources and put pressure on the local residents (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). The city's waste management system is also inadequate, as the Chiang Mai municipality does not segregate garbage types, leading to the mixture of food waste, plastic, cans, glass, and paper in one garbage can. This practice is harmful to the environment and contributes to unsustainable waste management (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023).

Transportation is another issue that the city is currently facing. Chiang Mai's transportation system is limited, with only a few taxis, color trucks (Song Teaw), Tuk Tuk (three wheels motorcycles), Grab transportation, or Line transportation available, all of which are small private cars and motorcycles that can only accommodate up to two to four people. No city cable, limited line for city buses or no train goes around the city or covers the short distance from downtown to the most popular tourist destinations. Electricity cars are barely seen them on the road. The lack of public transportation makes it challenging for visitors to explore the city and its surroundings (Kirkey, 2020).

Furthermore, the commercialization of culture is also a problem in Chiang Mai. Local people tend to share their culture with tourists instead of preserving it, which can erode the authenticity of traditional practices and customs (Kirkey, 2020). This practice is damaging to the city's unique cultural heritage, as it risks turning the city into a tourist trap rather than an authentic destination (Helgadottir et al., 2022; Novelli et al., 2017; Polnyotee & Thadaniti, 2015).

Despite the challenges, Chiang Mai remains a fascinating and unique destination that has much to offer to travelers seeking an authentic experience (Kirkey, 2020). The city's lush greenery, fascinating temples, and delicious food make it a paradise for nature lovers and food enthusiasts (Renard, 1999). The people of Chiang Mai are friendly and hospitable, and the city's rich history and culture offer a window into Thailand's fascinating past (Renard, 1999; Kirkey, 2022). Despite the challenges, Chiang Mai's



With a population of over 1.6 million residents, Chiang Mai province is a bustling hub of cultural diversity that is home to various minority groups, including the hill tribes (CGC, 2024). These hill tribes are spread across the province's 25 districts and 2,066 villages, making it a melting pot of different customs and traditions (CGC, 2024). The province's economy is multifaceted and relies on various sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, trade, services, and tourism. Tourism, in particular, plays a significant role in driving its Gross Provincial Product (GPP), contributing to the livelihoods of many locals and the preservation of the province's cultural heritage (CGC, 2024).

Chiang Mai, aspiring to be known as the "City of Life and Prosperity", is a place where well-being, tourism, and global trade and investment thrive (Kirkey, 2020). The city is renowned for its warm and friendly locals, who always welcome visitors with open arms, making them feel valued and part of the community, and the city's cultural heritage, natural beauty, and business prospects are always open, inviting visitors to explore and experience the best of Chiang Mai (Kirkey, 2020).

Chiang Mai offers a wide array of attractions and activities that cater to different interests. The downtown area is always bustling with life, with numerous shops, street vendors, and cafes to explore. The night markets are full of unique finds such as handmade crafts, traditional clothing, and local artwork (CGC, 2024). Culinary delights are also abundant, with a variety of street food from different regions of Thailand, as well as international dishes and fusion cuisine (Kirkey, 2020).

For those looking to escape the heat, San Kamphaeng is a small village located 36 km north of Chiang Mai city that offers hot springs surrounded by beautiful greenery and the natural hot water is available for visitors to relax and revitalize both their bodies and minds, with safety measures in place to ensure a pleasant and safe experience (Carey et al., 1997). The province's waterfalls are a sight to behold, with cascading waters and lush green surroundings such as Mae Sa Waterfall and Huay Kaew Waterfall are some of the most popular waterfalls in the province, with well-maintained paths and safety rails for visitors' convenience and safety (Carey et al., 1997).

Ban Mae Kampong, located in Mae On district, is a small village that is home to the Karen hill tribe and offers visitors a glimpse into their traditional way of life. Tourists can

take hiking and trekking trips in the surrounding mountains, such as Doi Suthep, Doi Inthanon, Doi Pui. These trips include visits to natural waterfalls, where visitors can swim and relax, and opportunities to learn about the local flora and fauna from experienced guides (CGC, 2024; Carey et al., 1997).

Chiang Mai province boasts several temples, each with a unique architectural style and history. Wat Phra That Doi Suthep, situated on a mountain, is the most famous temple in Chiang Mai and provides breathtaking views of the surrounding areas (CGC, 2024). The province has many restaurants where tourists can try both the local cuisine, such as Khao Soi and Sai Oua, and international cuisine, including Italian, Japanese, and Indian dishes and much more various type of dishes (CGC, 2024).

The night safari is an exciting experience that allows visitors to spot nocturnal animals and immerse themselves in the province's natural beauty (CGC, 2024). The safari, which is guided by experienced rangers, takes visitors on a journey through the wildlife, where they can see animals like tigers, leopards, and bears up close (CGC, 2024). The mountain views in the province are breathtaking, and for tourists who can afford more, they can enjoy world-standard 5-star hotels that offer luxurious amenities and services (CGC, 2024).

For nature lovers, bird watching, rafting, and homestays are some of the activities that they can enjoy (Kirkey, 2020) They can also take a day trip to visit the province's coffee farms and learn about the coffee-making process (Kirkey, 2020). Visitors can venture outside the city to visit animal camps and see tigers, monkeys, and elephants in their natural habitats. With so much to see and do, Chiang Mai province is an ideal destination for those seeking adventure, relaxation, and cultural immersion (Kirkey, 2020).

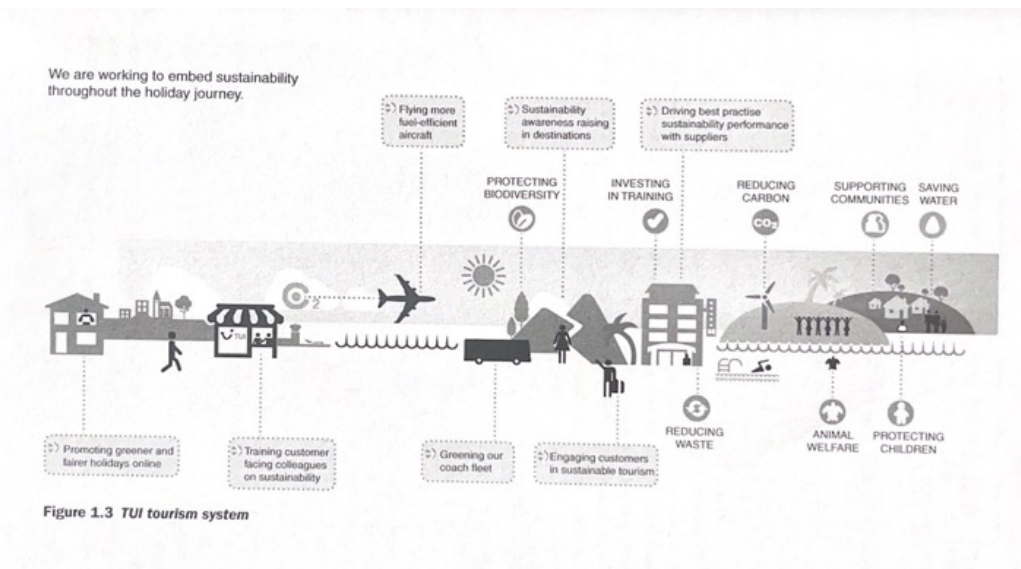
## **3 Relevant Literature Review and Theory**

### **3.1 Tourism vs Sustainable Tourism**

Tourism is an industry that involves many different components that motivate and make it easy for people to travel to different places and environments (Holden, 2016). This industry has a significant impact on economic, cultural, and environmental aspects, which both benefits and challenges the society (Holden, 2016). Boorstin (1961) defined that tourism is a relatively new concept, the word 'tourist' was first used in the early 19th century and travelers were once people who undertook arduous journeys, such as pilgrims (Holden, 2016).

Over the years, travel has evolved from being an adventurous and spontaneous activity to a more structured and organized affair, especially for tourists and with the advent of travel agencies and online booking platforms, travelers now have access to pre-packaged travel deals and itineraries that cater to their specific interests and budget (Holden, 2016). Arranging everything in advance, from flights and accommodation to tours and activities, can make travel planning more convenient and hassle-free (Hall, 2008).

This means that you can plan your trip in a stress-free manner, without worrying about the logistics of travel (Hall, 2008). Everything can be taken care of beforehand, making your travel experience smoother and more enjoyable (Hall, 2008). With this approach, you can focus on exploring and enjoying your destination, without any unnecessary distractions (Hall, 2008). While this has made travel more accessible and predictable, Holden argued that it has also taken away the sense of adventure and spontaneity that was once associated with travel (Holden, 2016).



**Figure 2.** TUI Tourism System (Holden, 2016, p13) Environment & Tourism

Touristik Union International (TUI) is a European tour operator that has taken significant steps towards promoting sustainable tourism (Holden, 2016). TUI has integrated sustainable thinking into the entire holiday journey system, with the ultimate goal of creating more environmentally and socially beneficial tourism destinations (Holden, 2016). Their approach is illustrated in Figure 1, which demonstrates how TUI aims to raise awareness of the impact issues that accompany tourism development and create a more enriching experience for tourists (Holden, 2026).

To achieve sustainable tourism, TUI has implemented a process that includes feedback mechanisms linking the places tourists come from with those they visit. This process aims to preserve the natural and built environment, as well as the cultural, historical, heritage, and artistic aspects of local communities. This is achieved by striking a balance between visitor activities and the operations of supporting businesses, all while keeping in mind the cumulative impact on the environment. By doing so, TUI ensures that all stakeholders, including local residents, gain benefits such as income and improved community facilities resulting from tourism activities (Holden, 2016).

Sustainable tourism not only benefits local communities and resources but also provides advantages to the private sector (McCool & Moisey, 2001). Tourists who are satisfied with their tourism experiences are more likely to protect the resources,

understanding their shared ownership of these resources (Bocken et al., 2014). Sustainable tourism serves as a tool for raising awareness about the importance of preserving resources. It is essential to address sustainable tourism challenges effectively and in a timely manner, rather than passing them on to future generations to solve. This approach aligns with the concept of sustainable development, which emphasizes responsible resource management for the benefit of both present and future generations (WTO, 2001).

TUI's approach to sustainable tourism is commendable. By integrating sustainable thinking into the entire holiday journey system, TUI ensures that all stakeholders gain benefits from tourism activities while preserving the environment and cultural heritage of local communities (Holden, 2016). This approach is important for promoting responsible resource management and achieving sustainable development for present and future generations.

### **3.2 Sustainable Marketing**

The concept of sustainability marketing has been around for quite some time now, and it has been defined in various ways by different scholars and researchers (Font & McCabe, 2017; Villarino & Font, 2015; Pomering, 2017; Pomering et al., 2011; Fuentes, 2012; Salim et al., 2022). Sheth and Parvatiyar introduced the concept of “relationship marketing” in 1995, and since then, it has evolved to encompass ecological as well as holistic approaches (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995). According to Fuller (1999), sustainable marketing involves planning, implementing, and controlling product development, pricing, promotion, and distribution in a way that satisfies customer needs, achieves organizational goals, and is compatible with ecosystems (Fuller, 1999). According to the definition provided by Gordon et al., (2011) sustainable marketing prioritizes creating a positive social impact and establishing long-standing relationships, rather than concentrating solely on immediate profits (Gordon et al., 2011). This approach takes a macro-relational perspective and reconfigures the marketing mix to focus on marketing's transformative potential in bringing about institutional change to support sustainable consumption and production (Gordon et al., 2011). In simpler terms, sustainable marketing entails developing and promoting products and services in a way

that benefits both the company and society (Fuller,1999). It involves being mindful of the impact that business activities have on the environment and society and finding ways to minimize that impact while still achieving business goals (Villarino & Font, 2015). Sustainable marketing is thus an integral part of creating a sustainable future by promoting responsible consumption and production (Peattie & Belz, 2010).

The tourism industry is a powerhouse that drives economic growth (WTO, 2003). It's important that we prioritize sustainable practices to ensure its continued success, but the role of sustainability cannot be overstated (Villarino & Font, 2015). A major aspect of promoting sustainable tourism is establishing an engaging relationship with consumers(Villarino & Font, 2015). This involves a careful consideration of several variables that determine the persuasiveness of the message. The first variable is the type of action, which refers to the particular behavior or action that the message is advocating for. The second variable is the message structure, which is concerned with how the message is presented and portrayed. The third variable is the message content, which comprises three crucial factors: social and cultural values and norms, appeal versus logic, and experience level (Villarino & Font, 2015).

In addition to these variables, principles, promises, and partnerships play a significant role in attracting and retaining customers (Pomering, 2017). Price and place are also important factors in marketing sustainability. Price indicates the value of a product compared to other competitor products, while place refers to the location and social and environmental context of the organization (Pomering, 2017). Promise management is another crucial variable that helps to build trust and engagement with customers (Pomering, 2017).

Font and McCabe (2019) suggest that authenticity is a critical factor in marketing tourism and establishing an emotional connection with customers. Personalization is a key tool for attracting repeat customers, and the quality of the product is equally important in providing customers with an exceptional experience. Maintaining communication with customers through social media and face-to-face interactions is



another effective strategy for retaining customers and building brand loyalty (Font & McCabe, 2019).

Environmental strategy, tourism value chain, economic prosperity, and social equity are essential factors that contribute to customer engagement and sustainable tourism (Pomering et al., 2011). By promoting sustainable tourism, organizations can achieve financial stability and long-term success (Peattie & Belz, 2010). Retail organizations are making significant strides toward marketing tourism sustainability and generating profit for the company (Fuentes, 2012).

Sustainable marketing in tourism aims to promote responsible consumption and production practices that benefit both businesses and society (Font & McCabe, 2017). By integrating sustainability principles into their marketing strategies, organizations can develop products and services that satisfy customers' requirements while reducing harmful environmental and social effects (Pomering et al., 2011). Effective Service management is also important for balancing economic growth with environmental and cultural preservation which will be the next discussion (UNWTO, 2015).

### **3.3 Sustainable Tourism Service Management**

Sustainable tourism services management is the approach that seeks to prioritize the well-being of both society and the environment (Chudintra, 1993). By offering products and services that positively contribute to social and environmental outcomes, organizations can enhance the perceptions of individuals' social and environmental welfare (UNWTO, 2015). Hotels can significantly contribute to reducing their environmental impact by adopting sustainable tourism practices (Fluentes, 2012). These practices include reducing energy and water consumption, minimizing waste production, and promoting the use of renewable energy sources (UNWTO, 2015).

Additionally, hotels can support local communities and contribute to community development initiatives by sourcing local products and services and providing employment opportunities (Fluentes, 2012). This sustainable tourism service management approach appeals to guests who prioritize their physical and emotional well-being, aligning with their concerns and values (UNWTO, 2015). By choosing to stay

at hotels that prioritize sustainable tourism practices, guests can make a positive impact on the environment and society (UNWTO, 2015).

### **3.4 Sustainable Tourism Resource Management**

Effective Resource management is also very important to focus in sustainable tourism, requiring a delicate balance between promoting economic growth and preserving natural and cultural treasures. The Manila Declaration of 1980 established this principle, “emphasizing the importance of meeting the needs of tourists while safeguarding the quality of life for local residents, preserving the environment, and conserving scarce natural resources” (UNWTO, 1993).

Chiang Mai is a prime example of effective resource management in sustainable tourism. This city has struck a delicate balance between promoting economic growth and preserving its natural and cultural assets (Kirkey, 2020). To achieve this balance, Chiang Mai has followed the guiding principles outlined in the Manila Declaration of 1980 and Chiang Mai's approach to sustainable tourism ensures that resources are managed in a way that not only meets immediate visitor demands and benefits host communities but also guarantees long-term sustainability and creates growth opportunities (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023).

This approach serves as a blueprint for managing resources in a way that meets the immediate demands of visitors and host communities while ensuring long-term sustainability and expanding opportunities. It provides a framework for managing all resources - economic, social, and aesthetic - in a way that safeguards their integrity and enhances their potential (UNWTO, 1998). Therefore, resource management aims to achieve balanced development by considering factors such as economic viability, cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and social equity in all initiatives.

### **3.5 Sustainable Transportation**

Transportation should be seen as a part of a bigger system that contributes to our development (Litman & Burwell, 2006). We need to think about transportation alongside with other sustainable development sectors to make sustainable choices (

Litman & Burwell, 2006). It's important to consider how transportation is connected to other parts of our lives and find solutions that work for all of them (Litman & Burwell, 2006).

Embracing sustainable local transportation is determined to showcase reverence for the natural assets, local populations, and cultural heritage of a destination (Holden, 2016; Wey & Huang, 2018). Sustainable tourism exerts to safeguard the welfare of local populations and cultural heritage, fostering a sense of interconnectedness between visitors and the community's economic fabric, all while minimizing adverse effects on ecological systems (Gudmundsson et al., 2016). The nature of sustainable tourism lies in curtailing the environmental, societal, and economic repercussions of travel, while concurrently fostering an appreciation for the customs and heritage of neighboring communities (Holden, 2016).

However, numerous challenges impede the realization for sustainable local transportation solutions (Gudmundsson et al., 2016). Infrastructure limitations loom large, particularly in underdeveloped regions, where essential support for sustainable transport options like electric vehicles, cycling lanes, or efficient public transit systems is lacking (Tumlin, 2012). The attempt to upgrade or construct such infrastructure demands substantial investment and meticulous planning (Wey & Huang, 2018).

Furthermore, accessibility issues arise in areas where natural terrain or urban configurations present obstacles to sustainable transportation methods (Wey & Huang, 2018). Whether navigating mountainous terrain or sprawling urban landscapes bereft of efficient public transit networks, accessibility challenges hinder the seamless adoption of sustainable transportation options (Wey & Huang, 2018).

Cultural resistance also poses a formidable barrier, especially in communities entrenched in longstanding transportation practices dictated by cultural norms or traditions (Litman & Burwell, 2006). Overcoming reliance on personal vehicles or motorized transport in favor of alternatives like biking or walking can prove challenging (Gudmundsson et al., 2016). Moreover, economic considerations often present hurdles, as sustainable transportation options may entail higher implementation and maintenance costs compared to conventional modes of transport (Litman & Burwell,

2006). This financial burden poses a significant challenge for destinations grappling with limited resources or competing funding priorities (Litman & Burwell, 2006).

In addition, a lack of awareness and education among both tourists and local residents regarding the benefits of sustainable transportation exacerbates the challenge (Gudmundsson et al., 2016). Educating stakeholders about the environmental, social, and economic advantages of sustainable transportation is important for fostering widespread adoption (Gudmundsson et al., 2016). Regulatory and policy barriers further complicate matters, as existing regulations may not always align with the development of sustainable transportation infrastructure or services (Hall, 2008). Bureaucratic obstacles, conflicting regulations, or resistance from vested interests can impede progress in this realm (Hall, 2008).

Finally, the seasonal variation in tourism demand presents a logistical challenge, necessitating careful planning and resource management to meet peak demand during high season while avoiding overcapacity or underutilization during off-peak periods (Wey & Huang, 2018). However, the seamless integration of sustainable transportation initiatives with other tourism services such as accommodation, attractions, and dining options require coordinated efforts among various stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, tourism stakeholders, and transportation providers (Gudmundsson et al., 2016; Freeman & Epstein, 1984). By embracing a multifaceted approach to address these challenges, destinations can create more sustainable and enriching travel experiences for visitors while safeguarding the environment and enhancing the well-being of local communities (Holden, 2016).

### **3.6 Stakeholder Engagement in Sustainable Tourism**

#### **Development**

In order to achieve sustainable tourism development, it is important to get support from all parties involved, including governments, the tourism industry, donor agencies, local communities, environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and tourists (Byrd, 2007). Freeman & Epstein

(1984) defines stakeholders as any group or individual who can impact or be impacted by an organization's objectives (Freeman & Epstein, 1984).

According to Goeldner & Ritchie (2005), four primary stakeholders have a significant influence on tourism development: tourists themselves, entrepreneurs who provide tourist products and services, the local government of the host community or region, and the citizens living in the host community or area (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2005). It is essential to recognize that every stakeholder has a critical role in effectively implementing tourism initiatives (Byrd, 2007). Entrepreneurs perceive the influx of tourists as a ripe market for their products and services (Spiliakos, 2018). Their unwavering involvement holds immense importance, as they possess the expertise to cater to the diverse and specific requirements of visitors, ultimately contributing to the overall tourism experience (Byrd, 2007). In today's diverse world, the ability to comprehend and cater to the needs of visitors from different cultures and backgrounds is of utmost importance (UNWTO, 2015). This skill plays a important role in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment that makes all individuals feel valued and respected (Byrd, 2007).

Having the skill of adapting to various communication styles and preferences is as important as having a comprehensive knowledge of cultural differences, customs, and traditions (WTO, 2006). It is important to understand cultural differences, customs, and traditions in depth to be successful in cross-cultural communication (WTO, 2006). Additionally, being able to adapt to diverse communication styles and preferences is equally important in this context, businesses and organizations can create positive experiences and lasting relationships by showing a sincere interest in the specific requirements of each visitor (Bocken et al., 2014). This approach fosters a sense of belonging and trust among visitors and leads to better outcomes (Freeman & Epstein, 1984). Thus, their active engagement ensures that every visitor has a memorable experience and leaves with a positive impression of the destination (Holden, 2016).

Simultaneously, residents who embrace tourists view them as not only patrons but also as investors in their culture and potential sources of employment (Byrd, 2007). Their

active participation in welcoming and accommodating visitors bolsters the sustainability of tourism initiatives by fostering positive interactions and preserving cultural authenticity (Holden, 2016).

Furthermore, members of the local government recognize the significance of tourism to the economic vitality of their region (WTO, 2001). They formulate policies, allocate resources, and implement strategies to harness the potential benefits of tourism while mitigating its negative impacts (Hall, 2008; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2005). However, it's imperative to acknowledge that not all stakeholders wield equal influence over decisions affecting tourism enterprises or their long-term viability (Byrd, 2007). By actively engaging with stakeholders, tourism developers can navigate complex socio-economic landscapes, address diverse interests, and cultivate partnerships that foster sustainable tourism practices, and this approach ensures that all stakeholders' needs are considered, leading to holistic and enduring tourism development (Byrd, 2007).

## 4 Methods

This study aimed to gain a thorough understanding of the notion of sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai city. The study was conducted collaboratively and involved interviews with twelve participants, including tourists, local tourism businesses, local residents, and government officers. Participants were randomly selected to ensure diversity in the sample.

During the interviews, a semi-structured approach was implemented to obtain a thorough comprehension of the participants' viewpoints (Cohen et al., 2018). The interviews were conducted using qualitative phenomenological techniques (Franklin & Blyton, 2011), which allowed me as a new researcher in this field to explore the participants' experiences and meanings associated with sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai City.

The research centered on methods that promote collaboration and incorporate different fields of study to tackle sustainable tourism's social, economic, and environmental aspects (Franklin & Blyton, 2011). The research recognized the complex nature of sustainable tourism and aimed to explore the diverse range of stakeholders within the tourism industry in Chiang Mai City (Bocken et al., 2014). The study included stakeholders are international and local tourists, hotels and restaurant owners, local residents and former and current government officials.

The findings of this study have significant implications for the development of sustainable tourism practices both nationally and globally. The results could assist policymakers and tourism practitioners in developing sustainable tourism practices, not only in Chiang Mai City but also in other popular tourist destinations in Thailand and neighboring Southeast Asia countries.

### 4.1 Interview

As part of comprehensive research seek focusing on sustainable tourism development in Chiang Mai, the interviews were conducted with various stakeholders. Their insights

into sustainable practices, challenges, measurement methods, enhancement opportunities, and community engagement strategies were invaluable to this research. Before going out to conduct the interview, the Interview protocol development designed the outline interview structure, questions, and interview content using the guidelines of Cohen et al., (2018). It includes open-ended questions encouraging participants to share their experiences, opinions, and insights about sustainable tourism (Cohen et al., 2018). The interview questions have been sent to the thesis supervisor for verification. Then the interview started only after approved by the supervisor.

For participant selection, the participants have been selected carefully by addressing ethical considerations such as obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and respecting participants' autonomy and privacy (Franklin & Blyton, 2017; Wood, 2006; Bos, 2020). All participants were fully informed about how their information will be kept and clear information was provided to all the participants about the purpose of the interviews, their voluntary participation, and the handling of data (Wood, 2006; Bos, 2020). Participants that allowed to give interviews have signed their names on the agreement consent form, ensuring their autonomy and privacy were respected (Wood, 2006; Bos, 2020).

The initial focus group comprised individuals associated with local establishments such as restaurants, cafes, hotels, guesthouses, tour companies, and non-governmental organizations. In addition, interviews were conducted with tourists who had selected Chiang Mai as their destination, aiming to discern their motivations for choosing the location, their awareness of sustainable initiatives, the perceived impact of eco-friendly practices, suggestions for improvement, and any additional insights they could provide.

Furthermore, an interview was arranged with a former officer possessing extensive experience in tourism development, offering a comprehensive perspective on the objectives of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), stakeholder collaborations, supportive policies, monitoring methods, challenge strategies, and supplementary insights regarding sustainable tourism development in Chiang Mai (TAT, 2017). There are various methods were employed to arrange interviews with participants. These included reaching out to individuals directly associated with the topic, leveraging



personal connections for introductions, searching for stakeholders' contact information online, and disseminating interview requests through Chiang Mai tourist groups Facebook page. Ultimately, information was gathered from at least 12 active participants, comprising tourists, owners of restaurants and hotels, local residents, and officers, providing a diverse range of perspectives.

Interview sessions typically lasted between twenty minutes to one hour, with participants demonstrating openness and comfort in sharing their views. This interview timeframe allows for flexibility in accommodating participants' schedules and preferences, and this approach ensures that participants have sufficient time to share their insights while minimizing inconvenience (Franklin & Blyton, 2011). Most interviews were conducted in downtown Chiang Mai for easy accessibility, although some sessions took place in Ban Mae Kampong, a Karen hill tribe village about 45 minutes from Chiang Mai, and at the house of a former officer in Mae Rim. This unique setting allowed for interactions with the local community, offering valuable insights into sustainable tourism practices at the grassroots level.

This approach allowed for interactions with different stakeholder groups and offered insights into both urban and rural contexts (Bos, 2020). During a day trip to Ban Mae KamPong, provided a refreshing contrast to the urban environment of Chiang Mai. The interviews were conducted in a professional yet friendly manner, fostering participant satisfaction and ensuring the quality and accuracy of the research findings (Bos, 2020; Frinklin & Blyton, 2011). This kind of interview process also promoted openness and honesty in participants' responses, enhancing the quality and accuracy of the data collected (Franlin & Blyton, 2011).

## **4.2 Observation**

The study on sustainable tourism practices in Chiang Mai places great emphasis on the observation phase, which aims to evaluate various aspects of sustainable tourism practices. In particular, the study focuses on the implementation of environmental conservation practices, community engagement initiatives, and the integration of local culture within tourism activities. To achieve this, various observation sites have been

selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and the different strategies employed for sustainability (Bos, 2020; Franklin & Blyton, 2011; Cohen et al., 2018). These sites include a mix of natural, cultural, and commercial elements, such as Doi Suthep, Wat Phra Singh temple, Sunday Market-Tha Pae Gate (Thanon Kon Dern Chiang mai), Ratchaphruek Garden, Mae Sa Elephant Camp, Ban Mae KamPong, San Kam Pang Hot springs, Mae Rim and Mae On Waterfalls, and the Chiang Mai Night Bazaar.

The observation methodologies used in the study involve a mix of structured and unstructured techniques (Franklin & Blyton, 2011). The structured observations are based on predefined criteria for evaluating environmental conservation efforts, community engagement, and cultural incorporation, on the other hand, the unstructured observations capture spontaneous occurrences and interactions among tourists and residents (Franklin & Blyton, 2011).

To collect relevant data, various tools have been utilized, including observation checklists, field notes, and a mobile phone to take pictures and record the interviews (Cohen et al., 2018). These tools capture specific indicators of sustainable tourism practices, such as community interaction, and cultural preservation (Cohen et al., 2018). The collected observational data underwent in-depth analysis to derive meaningful insights (Franklin & Blyton, 2011). The analysis involved categorization based on predefined criteria and identification of patterns across observation sites (Franklin & Blyton, 2011).

The ethical considerations surrounding data collection have been carefully addressed (Bos, 2020; Cohen et al., 2018). Participants were informed, and measures were implemented to safeguard privacy and confidentiality (Bos, 2020).

I have decided to ensure that I can access observation sites, schedule sessions appropriately, and provide the necessary resources for data collection. To ensure the reliability of the data collected, I have also instituted quality assurance measures. I have documented our findings comprehensively and presented them clearly to provide a detailed portrayal of sustainable tourism practices in Chiang Mai in the findings and results chapter and the reporting includes descriptive narratives, quotes, and visual evidence to help illustrate the findings (Cohen et al., 2018).

### 4.3 Techniques and Tools for Data Collection

The purpose of the research done in Chiang Mai was to investigate the longevity of the tourism sector via different data collection approaches, including conducting interviews, making observation visits, and analyzing content. The researchers utilized tools such as a voice recorder, camera, notebook, pens, printed consent forms, questions, and participant information sheets (Franklin & Blyton, 2011).

The study was conducted with utmost care and rigor, to acquire accurate and reliable data (Bos, 2020). The participants were interviewed in person, and at different tourism spots in Chiang Mai while visited during observation visits. The content analysis was conducted on various written and online materials related to the tourism industry in Chiang Mai, in Thailand and Akkerhaugen, in Norway.

In addition, the study aimed to provide a detailed and insightful analysis of the sustainability of the tourism industry in Chiang Mai. The insights gained from analyzing and interpreting the data collected through various techniques will help identify the challenges and opportunities faced by the industry (Franklin & Blyton, 2011).

The Observation visits to tourist spots and local communities enabled the researchers to immerse themselves in the daily lives and culture of Chiang Mai. The impact of tourism on the city's sustainability was analyzed through the use of ethnographic research techniques that involved observing the interactions between tourists, residents, stakeholders and the environment (Franklin & Blyton, 2011). These observations provided valuable insights into how tourism affects the city's sustainability and community-led initiatives that aimed to preserve cultural heritage sites and advocate for responsible tourism practices were also identified, such as guided tours led by local experts (Polnyotee & Thadaniti, 2015).

Moreover, content analysis of reports and previous research related to sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai added in-depth to the study. A systematic review of existing literature unveiled recurring themes and trends, offering additional context for the investigation (Franklin & Blyton, 2011; Bocken et al., 2014). Reports detailing environmental conservation efforts and community engagement initiatives contributed

to the identification of best practices and areas requiring for improvement (Polnyotee, 2015).

The combination of these data collection methods yielded a comprehensive understanding of sustainable tourism practices in Chiang Mai (Ranklin & Blyton, 2011; Cohen et al., 2018). This knowledge was utilized to inform analysis and formulate recommendations for enhancing sustainability within the city's tourism industry (Franklin & Blyton, 2011). The study aims to foster continued growth in a responsible and sustainable manner by addressing stakeholders' challenges and highlighting effective practices (Novelli et al., 2017; Helgedottir et al., 2022).

The interview phase involved residents, tourists, tourism industry participants, non-governmental organizations, and former government officials from diverse backgrounds. It was a productive and engaging process that led to valuable insights into sustainable tourism practices and effective strategies and obstacles encountered were identified through constructive discussions (Franklin & Blyton, 2011). All data collected during the interviews are kept confidential and secure, with no sharing to third parties (Bos, 2020). Once the research work is submitted to the University of Southeast Norway (USN), all data, including voice recordings, interview transcripts, and pictures, will be securely removed from the computers, voice recorder, and camera.

## **5 Findings and Results**

Undeniable Thailand has seen a steady increase in international tourism before COVID-19 pandemic due to its natural beauty and extensive promotional campaigns. The Tourist Organisation of Thailand (TOT) was established in 1959 and later became the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) in 1979. TAT has been promoting sustainable tourism and Thainess while balancing economic, social, and environmental factors for over 50 years (TAT, 2017). Tourism has both positive and negative effects on local economies and cultural heritage (TAT, 2017).

The objectives outlined in the Tourism Authority of Thailand Act B.E. 2522 (1979) Section 8 highlight the multifaceted role of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), the main aim of TAT is to promote the tourism industry, support Thai citizens employed in tourism-related jobs, and showcase Thailand's diverse attractions including natural beauty, historical sites, cultural heritage, and recreational activities (TAT, 2017). Furthermore, TAT is responsible for ensuring tourist safety, fostering cultural exchange and hospitality among different peoples and nations, and leading the development of tourism infrastructure and facilities to enhance the overall tourist experience (TAT, 2017).

### **5.1 Unveiling Benefits and Challenges of Tourism**

According to the United Nations' World Tourism Organization, sustainable tourism aims to improve social and environmental outcomes through the products and services provided by sustainable tourism businesses (UNWTO, 2015). For instance, it refers to the responsible use of natural resources, cultural heritage, and other elements of the tourism industry in a way that promotes sustainable development (Hlden, 2016). However, the results show that Chiang Mai can be affected by tourism in both beneficial and detrimental ways. On the one hand, it's a recommended approach for development as it requires low initial inputs and provides high returns, which can be reinvested in the local economy (Polnytee & Thadaniti, 2015).

Based on the observation results, when tourists visit Chiang Mai, they spend money on food, accommodation, and shopping, which helps support local businesses. Many

tourists also purchase tickets to visit local attractions, such as temples and museums, or buy souvenirs made by local artisans. The money earned from ticket sales and souvenir purchases can then be utilized to repair and maintain these attractions or support the local economy (Kirkey, 2020).

On the other hand, tourism may not necessarily preserve the cultural foundations from which it draws its attractions (Kirkey, 2020). As more tourists visit Chiang Mai, the city may need to make adjustments to accommodate the influx of visitors, which can lead to changes in the local way of life (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). There is also the risk that tourism can lead to over-commercialization, resulting in the loss of authenticity and charm that originally drew tourists to the city (Helgadottir et al., 2022).

According to the results of this research, tourists can be classified into three distinct types. The first one, Tourist A, is particularly interested in sustainable tourism practices and is likely to prioritize environmentally friendly travel options. The second one, Tourist B tends to have the opposite priorities, with little concern for sustainable tourism practices. Last but not least, Tourist C is more adaptable and open-minded, seeking diverse travel experiences and willing to try new things.

However, all tourists A, B, and C agreed that they love mountains and smaller cities as opposed to large cities and beaches. Chiang Mai has a reputation for being much more authentic in terms of Thai traditions and culture (Kirkey, 2020). It is known for its nature, diverse cultures, and variety of cuisine (Renard, 1999). There are many old and beautiful temples to visit, and tourists love to try local food, street food, and other international cuisines (CGC, 2024). Tourists and local residents also enjoy visiting the Saturday and Sunday markets, which are fun places to shop for handicrafts, get a massage, and try great street food. The tourists' motivation for coming to Chiang Mai is because it is a smaller city and easy to get around in.

“I usually do some research before booking hotels or places to see. The fun part is that if you found the right place that is eco-friendly and they allows you to stay and learn about their cultures and way of living is a bonus of my trip” Said tourist A.

Tourist A is a traveler who is conscious about the environment and interested in learning about different cultures. They prioritize responsible tourism practices by researching before booking accommodations or attractions. Tourist A enjoys discovering eco-friendly establishments that offer immersive experiences that allow them to learn about local cultures and lifestyles. This type of tourist values authentic and meaningful interactions with the destinations they visit, seeking opportunities to engage with communities and gain insights into diverse ways of living (Holden, 2016).

“ I am not a believer in climate change and all that other pseudo-science. It is all a con job. At my age, I have seen so many climate predictions to end the world that it is hard to believe anything they claim today. As for the tourism practices, it is also garbage. You see signs in hotels saying, "Help us save water by reusing your towels and not having your bed serviced", yet the hotel has bathtubs in their rooms, no water restrictors on the taps, and fountains and water features running all the time. So no...I have very little use for sustainability” Said tourist B.

Tourist B can be described as someone who doubts the validity of climate change and sustainability initiatives in tourism. The tourist B expressed distrust in the scientific consensus on climate change, dismissing it as "pseudo-science" and a "con job" based on their experience of witnessing various failed predictions. This tourist was critical of sustainability practices in the tourism industry, seeing them as hypocritical and ineffective. They highlight perceived contradictions in environmental conservation messages promoted by hotels and establishments, pointing out inconsistencies between stated sustainability efforts and observed practices. Tourist B's perspective reflects a skepticism toward environmental concerns and a lack of trust in sustainability initiatives (Holden, 2016).

“My wife and I prefer to stay closer to the airport instead of focusing on sustainable tourism,” Said tourist C.

Tourist C explained that they were motivated to visit Chiang Mai because of the city's smaller size, ease of navigation, and friendly atmosphere. They shared that they appreciated the relaxed and welcoming environment and the absence of scams or overcharging by locals. Although they did not prioritize sustainable tourism, they

acknowledged awareness of sustainable options and expressed a preference for responsible establishments that prioritize honesty and reliability.

The majority of Tourists who visit Chiang Mai are generally not well-informed about sustainable tourism initiatives (Kirkey, 2020). They do not pay much attention to such initiatives and are skeptical about the authenticity of hotels' efforts to improve their sustainability score on booking websites. It appears to them that most of these efforts are simply a marketing tactic to attract tourists who are concerned about sustainability (Holden, 2016). When on vacation, tourists want to relax and enjoy themselves without worrying about environmental concerns such as energy efficiency or water usage as stated by Officer A.

If tourists are interested in wildlife, they prefer to visit places that are not overly commercialized and focused solely on tourist activities (Kirkey, 2020). For them, sustainability means being able to appreciate nature and animals without disrupting their environment (Kirkey, 2020). Therefore, they tend to choose boutique hotels that are smaller and more environmentally friendly.

Sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai offers both advantages and disadvantages for the city's growth (CGC, 2024). Although tourism helps the local economy by generating revenue through accommodations, restaurants, and tourist attractions, there are concerns about its impact on the city's culture and the environment (Kirkey, 2020, Holden, 2016, Helgadottir et al., 2022).

Overall, the recent results for this research have identified three types of tourists, each with different levels of interest in sustainable tourism practices. Tourist A prioritizes eco-friendly options and values immersive cultural experiences, while Tourist B is skeptical towards sustainability initiatives and prioritizes convenience over environmental concerns. Tourist C seeks authentic travel experiences and appreciates the relaxed atmosphere of Chiang Mai but is not particularly focused on sustainability.

Despite varying tourist preferences, Chiang Mai's charm lies in its rich cultural heritage, diverse cuisine, and natural beauty, which makes it a unique destination for travelers looking for meaningful experiences (Kirkey, 2020).



In the upcoming section, we will be discussing the research findings related to Sustainable Tourism and its various aspects, including Sustainable Marketing, Service Management, and Resource Strategy. The primary objective is to provide practical recommendations to businesses and stakeholders on how they can incorporate sustainability principles into their operations. We will examine case studies and industry insights to promote responsible tourism practices in Chiang Mai and ensure the long-term sustainability of the city's tourism industry.

## 5.2 Navigating Sustainable Tourism Marketing, Service Management, and Resource Strategies

The pursuit of sustainable practices in the tourism industry has become increasingly important in the face of environmental challenges and societal concerns (Holden, 2016). This section delves into three key pillars of sustainable tourism: marketing, service management, and resource management and each part is super important in shaping the industry's path to a more eco-friendly future (TAT, 2017; Sheth & Parvatar, 1995; Gordon et al., 2011; UNWTO, 2015, Pomering et al., 2011; Font & McCabe, 2017; Fuentes, 2017). By getting sustainable strategies in these areas, companies and places can reduce their impact on the environment, make the community better, and encourage responsible ways of using and making things more to sustainability development approach (Pomering et al., 2011).



**Figure.3** Navigating Sustainable Tourism Marketing, Service Management, and Resource Strategies

### 5.2.1 Eco-Friendly Tour Packages: Implementing Sustainable Marketing Practices

Sustainable marketing involves developing products and services that meet customer needs while minimizing negative impacts on the environment and society (Font & McCabe, 2017). Scholars such as Fuller (1999), Pomeroy (2017), and Goeldner & Ritchie (2005) introduced the concept of sustainable tourism marketing, emphasizing the importance of aligning marketing practices with sustainability policies, processes, and relationships (Hall, 2008). Sustainable marketing prioritizes positive social impacts and fosters long-term relationships, challenging traditional profit-driven models and an example of sustainable marketing is promoting eco-friendly tourism or highlighting a hotel's commitment to local community development (Gordon et al., 2011).

“99% of tourists could care less about sustainability on vacation. Sure, it makes them feel good about their existence on this planet when they think they are helping elephants at these retreats, or using a business that claims that they practice eco-friendly processes without showing the proof of their actions. When people go on vacation, they are leaving their regular lives in the past and want to try to live an adventurous chapter in their short time away from home” Said official A.

The statement of tourism industry Official A reflects a widely held belief among insiders that most tourists prioritize enjoyment and relaxation over concerns about sustainability while on vacation. They perceive that the majority of travelers are primarily interested in seeking new experiences, having fun, and escaping the monotony of their daily routine, but have very little concern about sustainable tourism (Kirkey, 2020).

Official A suggests that some tourists may engage in sustainability-related activities, such as visiting eco-friendly businesses or elephant camps, more for self-gratification than genuine concern for environmental or social issues. These activities may make tourists feel good about themselves, giving them a sense of contributing positively to the world, even if the impact is superficial or minimal (Kirkey, 2020).

Furthermore, Official A implies that tourists often take a break from their usual responsibilities and concerns while on vacation, prioritizing leisure and adventure over conscientious behavior. In this context, sustainability may take a backseat to more immediate desires for excitement and relaxation.

Overall, the perspective of Office A highlights the tension between the desire for enjoyable and carefree vacations and the growing pressure to engage in sustainable practices while traveling. It underscores the need for tourism stakeholders to strike a balance between promoting sustainable tourism marketing and meeting the diverse expectations and preferences of tourists (Freeman & Epstein, 1984).

*Case Study- Ecofriendly tour package in Chiang Mai:* To cater to this growing demand, several tour operators in Chiang Mai have introduced eco-friendly tour packages that promote sustainable practices and responsible tourism. These packages are designed to provide visitors with authentic and meaningful travel experiences while minimizing the negative impact on the environment and local communities (Font & McCabe, 2017).

The typical activities offered in these packages include trekking in eco-sensitive areas, visiting local communities to learn about traditional crafts, and participating in conservation projects (Amentitiz, 2022). For example, companies like Eco-Tours Chiang Mai offer tour packages that include eco-activities such as “Hidden jungle trek in Ban Mae Kampong,” “Half day cooking class at the organic farm,” “ Mae Rim elephant sanctuary tour” and “ Book a tour-Plant a tress”. These activities not only allow visitors to appreciate the natural beauty and cultural richness of the region but also provide opportunities to learn about and contribute to local conservation efforts (Carey et al, 1997; Holden, 2016).

Tour companies or operators who offer eco-friendly tour packages emphasize their commitment to sustainable tourism and their support for local communities (Hall, 2008) They work closely with local organizations and communities to ensure that their tours are designed in a way that benefits both visitors and locals (Hall, 2008). For example, they partner with local leaders to provide visitors with handcrafted souvenirs or donate a portion of their profits to support conservation projects in the area. By offering eco-friendly tour packages, tour operators in Chiang Mai aim to attract environmentally

conscious travelers who are looking for authentic and ethical travel experiences (Holden, 2016). These packages provide visitors with the opportunity to explore the beauty and cultural richness of the region while making a positive contribution to the environment and local communities (Kirkey, 2020; Pongruengkiat et al., 2023).

From the case study above, the implementation of a strategic marketing plan is very important in achieving the strategic goals of tour operation companies (Pomering, 2017). They focus on the mission of the company and enable the effective management of various variables about customer and public costs, through the marketing mix method (Pomering, 2017). As there are four types of marketing mix options, namely Place, Product, Price, and Promotion, to attract customers, it is important to have a product of impeccable quality (Pomering, 2017). The profitability of an organization is greatly influenced by the location where it is situated (Villarino & Font, 2015). The Price of the products also plays a critical role in attracting customers and must be reasonable (Font & McCabe, 2017). Promotion is equally important, and companies must leverage various channels to promote their products effectively. The marketing mix varies for different businesses and offers optimal results (Pomering, 2017). Successful promotion and sales of products ultimately contribute to the sustainability of the organization. In the context of tourism marketing, effective marketing can result in significant gains and profitability for the organization, leading to a successful future (Pomering et al., 2011).

### 5.2.2 Green Initiatives in Hospitality and Dining: Promoting Sustainable Tourism Service Management

Sustainable tourism service management emphasizes the well-being of people and environmental awareness (Holden, 2016). Well, businesses aim to offer products and services that contribute positively to social and environmental outcomes (Bocken et al., 2014). This includes reducing energy consumption, minimizing waste production, and supporting local communities (Font & McCabe, 2017; Villarino & Font, 2015). By promoting sustainable practices, organizations appeal to those who prioritize responsible travel (UNWTO, 2015). For instance, hotels and restaurants may advertise

efforts to preserve natural habitats or support local artisans, attracting environmentally conscious travelers (Spiliakos, 2018).

Based on the observations and visiting results, in both the hotel and restaurant sectors of Chiang Mai, there is a growing emphasis on implementing green initiatives to promote sustainable service management. These businesses recognize the importance of enhancing the welfare of both individuals and the environment by providing products and services that positively impact social and environmental aspects (Spiliakos, 2018). The Key initiatives include the reduction of energy usage, minimizing waste generation, and supporting local communities. By advocating for sustainable practices, these establishments attract travelers and diners who prioritize responsible tourism and dining experiences (Polnyotee, 2015).

In Chiang Mai's hospitality sector, numerous hotels have embraced sustainable tourism service management practices to mitigate their environmental footprint and contribute to local communities (Kirkey, 2020). These green hotels prioritize initiatives such as reducing energy and water consumption, implementing effective waste management strategies, and sourcing locally produced goods (Kirkey, 2020). In addition, they offer eco-friendly amenities and promote responsible tourism practices among their guests. Through their commitment to environmental stewardship and community support, these green hotels play a vital role in promoting responsible travel experiences and fostering a sustainable future for Chiang Mai's tourism sector (Kirkey, 2020, Polnyotee, 2015).

“ yes, during the low season when competition is high, we try different promotions to attract visitors. We're also focusing on new marketing systems that promote sustainability across all sectors. We need to team up with local communities to bring in tourists, and we make sure everyone benefits from what we earn. We see that working together with local communities like this helps us attract more tourists.” Said guest house owner A.

In the same vein, Chiang Mai's dining establishments are also incorporating eco-friendly measures to reduce their ecological footprint and encourage sustainable eating practices (Pokharel, 2016). Many restaurants prioritize sourcing local and organic

ingredients, reducing food waste through composting or donation programs, and implementing energy-efficient practices in their kitchens (Kirkey, 2020). Some establishments also offer plant-based menu options to cater to environmentally-conscious diners (Kirkey, 2020; Pokharel, 2016). By integrating these sustainable practices into their operations, restaurants in Chiang Mai not only contribute to environmental conservation but also provide diners with the opportunity to support responsible dining experiences (Kirkey, 2020; Renard, 1999).

“Running our small restaurant alone is tough, so we team up with our neighbors to share local products and support each other. Instead of buying vegetables from the market, we grow them in our garden for freshness and to avoid chemicals. It makes me happy to see customers enjoy our delicious and fresh food.” Said local restaurant owner

A.

The results show us that, the tourism industry in Chiang Mai is getting more aware and committed to sustainability, and that's good news. Both hospitality and restaurant sectors are adopting eco-friendly initiatives to be more environmentally friendly (Spilakos, 2018). By promoting responsible practices and supporting community initiatives, these establishments contribute to the preservation of Chiang Mai's natural and cultural heritage while providing visitors with memorable and environmentally conscious experiences (Polnyotee, 2015; Kirkey, 2020).

### 5.2.3 Balancing Growth and Conservation: The Essence of Sustainable Resource Management in Tourism

The World Tourism Organization (2004) defines sustainable tourism as an approach that takes into account the present and future needs while protecting resources for economic, social, and aesthetic purposes that include preserving cultural integrity, ecological processes, biodiversity, and life support systems (WTO, 2004). The efforts to achieve sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai are focused on preserving natural and cultural resources, such as wildlife sanctuaries and historical sites, to prevent overexploitation (Holden, 2016).

In Chiang Mai City, promoting sustainable tourism through local experiences is highly concerning in reducing the negative impact on the community and environment (Helgadottir et al., 2022). Offering unique cultural immersion opportunities through bundled local experiences can create positive and memorable experiences for visitors, encouraging responsible tourism behaviors and contributing to the preservation of local resources (Polnyotee, 2015). A notable example of this approach is the Lapland Sustainable Tourism project in Finland, where tourists can participate in activities like reindeer sledding, fishing, and northern lights expeditions to learn about local culture and traditions (Lapland, 2023).

Similarly, in Chiang Mai, tourists can engage in various local activities, such as cultural festivals, organic farming, visits to animal camps, local village tours, and waterfalls (Kirkey, 2020; Helgadottir et al., 2022). These experiences provide tourists with authentic insights into the local way of life while also supporting local communities and promoting sustainable tourism practices (Polnyotee, 2015). By participating in these activities, tourists contribute to the preservation of Chiang Mai's natural and cultural heritage while fostering economic opportunities for local residents (Helgedottir et al., 2022).

#### *Case Study: My Family visiting Ban Mae Kampong, Karen Village*

Ban Mae Kampong is a village of Karen hill tribe in the Mae On district of Chiang Mai province, Thailand. Ban Mae Kampong offers visitors the chance to experience both the area's natural beauty and cultural heritage. Surrounded by lush forests and stunning waterfalls, it's an ideal spot for exploring. Ban Mae Kampong is a small village located in the mountains near Chiang Mai in Thailand. It is a perfect destination to escape the hot temperatures that can reach up to 42 degrees Celsius and the air pollution caused by forest fires, land burning, and overcrowding during the water festival season in downtown Chiang Mai.

During the water festival season, many tourists come to Chiang Mai to celebrate, but the local residents head to the mountains to enjoy the fresh air, cooler weather, and peaceful surroundings. Ban Mae Kampong is a great place for escaping from the city to

experience the traditional way of life of the local people and enjoy the beauty of the nature.

Hiking is one of the popular activities in Ban Mae Kampong. The village is surrounded by lush green forests and beautiful waterfalls, and hiking up to the steep track to the waterfall is a must-do activity. The hike is challenging, but it is worth it as it offers breathtaking views of the natural surroundings.



**Figure 4.** View from the Eco-Trekking to Parking Log of Ban Mae Kampong

In addition to hiking, visitors can also enjoy the local food and learn about the customs and traditions of the Karen people from the community members. Eco-trekking is another popular activity in Ban Mae Kampong, allowing visitors to explore the surrounding forests and waterfalls while learning about the local flora and fauna. During our trek, we even saw many snakes!





**Figure 5.** A local Restaurant in Ban Mae Kampong

Guided treks are available for those who want to explore the area with a knowledgeable guide. These guided treks lead you through scenic trails, and offer opportunities for birdwatching, wildlife spotting, and enjoying the natural beauty of the area. However, if you are a budget-conscious tourist, you can take the trails by yourself to feel more free and enjoy nature. But we didn't take one.

In Ban Mae Kampong, many families offer the opportunity for tourists or visitors to stay in traditional Karen homes through homestay accommodations. This immersive experience allows visitors to gain insight into the daily routines and customs of the Karen people, promoting cultural exchange and understanding. We did not stay overnight in the homestay accommodations and instead made our trip back home before dark.



**Figure 6.** Home Stay in Ban Mae Kampong

We noticed that the community of Ban Mae Kampong is committed to sustainable tourism practices, including waste management, organic farming, and eco-friendly infrastructure. People who visit can discover more about these efforts and help out by getting involved in local projects or buying handmade goods and other products produced by the community.

Visiting Ban Mae Kampong provides numerous benefits for both visitors and the local community. Tourism income generated from homestays, waterfall treks, and cultural activities provides a source of livelihood for residents of Ban Mae Kampong, reducing reliance on traditional livelihoods such as agriculture (Polnyotee, 2014).

By engaging with visitors and sharing their cultural heritage, residents of Ban Mae Kampong can preserve and promote traditional local customs and traditions for future generations. Through sustainable tourism practices and environmental education initiatives, the community works to protect the natural resources and biodiversity of the surrounding forests and waterways (Spiliakos, 2018).

Overall, visiting Ban Mae Kampong offers a meaningful and enriching travel experience that supports sustainable tourism development and contributes to the well-being of the local community and environment (Holden, 2016).

## **5.3 Greening Travel: Challenges of Public and Private Transportation in Chiang Mai City**

Traveling sustainably is important for demonstrating appreciation for a host country's resources, people, and heritage (Carey et al., 1997). Sustainable tourism aims to minimize the negative impact of tourism on the environment and local communities while maximizing the benefits (Amenitiz, 2022). According to Font and McCabe in 2017, sustainable tourism can contribute to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, generate income and employment opportunities for local communities, and promote cross-cultural understanding (Font & McCabe, 2017).

However, Chiang Mai is facing significant transportation infrastructure challenges, particularly concerning both public and private transportation within the city and to the nearby tourist spots (The Nation, 2020). Despite being one of the top tourist destinations in the country, the city lacks adequate public transportation options such as buses, cable trains, or sky trains for both city residents and tourists to use daily.

As a result of observation visits and interviews, it was discovered that there is a heavy reliance on private cars and bikes among local residents and rental cars and bikes among tourists. This heavy dependence on private vehicles is exacerbating traffic congestion and environmental pollution, making it difficult and unpleasant for both locals and tourists to navigate the city (Sipinski, 2023).



**Figure 7.** April is the peak of the pollution in northern Thailand with Chiang Mai shrouded in a toxic haze [Lillian Suwanrumpha/AFP]Environment News/Al Jazeera (Sipinski, 2023)

According to the United Nations population data (2024), the rapid growth of Chiang Mai's population has increased from 191,000 in 1989 to 1.3 million in 2024 (World Population Review, 2024). Further compounding transportation issues, the city is facing overcrowding concerns, especially with regards to transportation infrastructure and services (The Nation, 2020).

"20 years ago, it only took me 3 to 5 minutes to drive from my home in the San Sai district to downtown Chiang Mai. Today, during weekdays and rush hour, it takes me hours just to get into and out of the city. Even on weekends and non-rush hour times, it still takes me more than 30 to 45 minutes to drive to the city. We try to avoid going to the city if we don't have to do anything important," said a local resident

A.

A Local resident A has reflected on the significant changes in transportation and traffic congestion that have occurred in Chiang Mai over the past two decades. In early year 2000, the journey from the local resident A home in the San Sai district to downtown Chiang Mai was relatively quick, taking only 3 to 5 minutes. However, the situation has drastically deteriorated since then. Currently, the commute takes hours during rush hour and 30 to 45 minutes during non-rush hour times.

As a result of the increase in travel time, local resident A and others in the community have started to rethink their trips to the city, opting to avoid unnecessary visits if possible. The prolonged travel times and congestion have not only impacted individual convenience but also disrupted daily routines and activities (Salim et al., 2022).

“The previous governor of Chiang Mai said, they would build underground cable cars but until today there is nothing I can see. The government not yet approved the project or they have already thrown the proposal away in the trash. Chiang Mai is not Chiang Mai that I used to live before” Said a local resident B.

A local resident, B, expressed disappointment over the delay in the proposed construction of an underground cable car in Chiang Mai. According to the previous governor, the project was in the works, but there has been no visible progress yet. It is unclear whether the government has approved the proposal or if it has been discarded.

In short, the lack of proper public transportation and the heavy reliance on private vehicles in Chiang Mai is not only causing traffic congestion and environmental pollution but also making it difficult for locals and tourists to travel around the city (Kirkey, 2020). Chiang Mai has changed from the place they used to know as a pretty city to the overcrowding and polluting city (Pongruengkiat et al., 2023).

To tackle the transportation challenges faced by Chiang Mai and promote sustainable tourism, the city has taken the initiative to implement eco-friendly transportation systems. These include electric tuk-tuks, bicycle rentals, and shuttle services that run on renewable energy sources. The main goal is to encourage the use of these modes of transportation to reduce carbon emissions and minimize the environmental impact.

“Practice what you preach. During the dry season, shut down all the fountains and water features. Put in truly viable eco-friendly transportation alternatives to motor vehicles. You really want to show a difference, outlaw or heavily tax petrol motorcycles and make everyone pay for an electric scooter or motorcycle. Where is the electric subway or elevated trains for Chiang Mai?” Said tourist B.

However, to fully realize the benefits of these initiatives, improvements in infrastructure and public awareness campaigns are necessary. Investments in charging stations for electric vehicles, dedicated bike lanes, and better public transportation systems are needed to enhance accessibility and reduce dependence on private cars.

“Sustainable and eco-friendly should be a core common practice. It should be a continuous educational subject to teach and be passed from generation to generation in order to sustain the tourism economy. However, it is maybe a challenge and hard to be adopted by undeveloped or developing countries as tourism is a main source of the nation’s income.” Said tourist A.

Moreover, promoting packages that combine sustainable accommodation with eco-friendly transportation options can further attract environmentally conscious travelers and reduce the city's carbon footprint. Collaborations between hotels, guesthouses, and transportation providers can also enhance the overall visitor experience while promoting responsible tourism practices.

“Where are the hundreds of EV charging stations throughout the city to encourage EV vehicle purchases. There should be several dozen EV charging stations in every parking lot and garage at the very least. Even though LED lighting is cheaper to use, it still uses an extreme amount of electricity to operate the many electric advertising boards and huge store signs on businesses.” Said tourist B

By raising awareness among both tourists and residents about the advantages of sustainable transportation and actively investing in infrastructure improvements, Chiang Mai can mitigate transportation-related challenges and establish itself as a sustainable tourism destination (Polnyotee & Thadaniti, 2015).

“I hope one day Thailand will stop using so many plastics for everything.” Said tourist A.

## 5.4 The Challenges of Stakeholder Engagement in Sustainable Tourism Development

Sustainable tourism is important for economic growth, and everyone needs to get involved to make it happen. That means stakeholders like local communities, business owners, government agencies, and NGOs all need to work together (Byrd, 2007). When we all work together, we can create policies and practices that benefit both visitors and the local community (Freeman & Epstein, 1984). Everyone's needs and ideas should be considered to make sure everyone benefits (Byrd, 2007).

It's interesting to note that in places like Chiang Mai, it's important for all stakeholders to work together when making decisions that impact tourism businesses (Spiliakos, 2018). However, there seems to be a lack of collaboration among them now, it appears that hotels and tour companies are working together to share tourists during the day and ensure that they stay overnight at the hotel. This way, the income from both the hotel and tour packages is shared equally (Byrd, 2007). On the other hand, local restaurant owners are struggling to attract enough customers due to the competition from numerous restaurants and street food stalls. Some of these restaurants are more focused on greedily sharing their customers rather than supporting each other.

“I don't make income from my restaurant during low season, I have to work as a Grab driver just to pick up and deliver both guests and food around the downtown area.

There are too many restaurants and I can't compete with others if I have to focus on sustainable services and resources. Because organic products are more expensive and if I can't sell them all, I will only waste it” Said local restaurant owner B.

But not everyone has the same experience in what happens with local restaurant owner B. We need to make sure that everyone's voice is heard, especially those who might not have as much power. If everyone's included, everyone benefits. Everyone's interests need to be balanced to make sure everyone gets something out of it.

“Return tourists are very good for us, they bring their friends and family when they come back to visit us. Before they might contact an agent to come to us, but later they

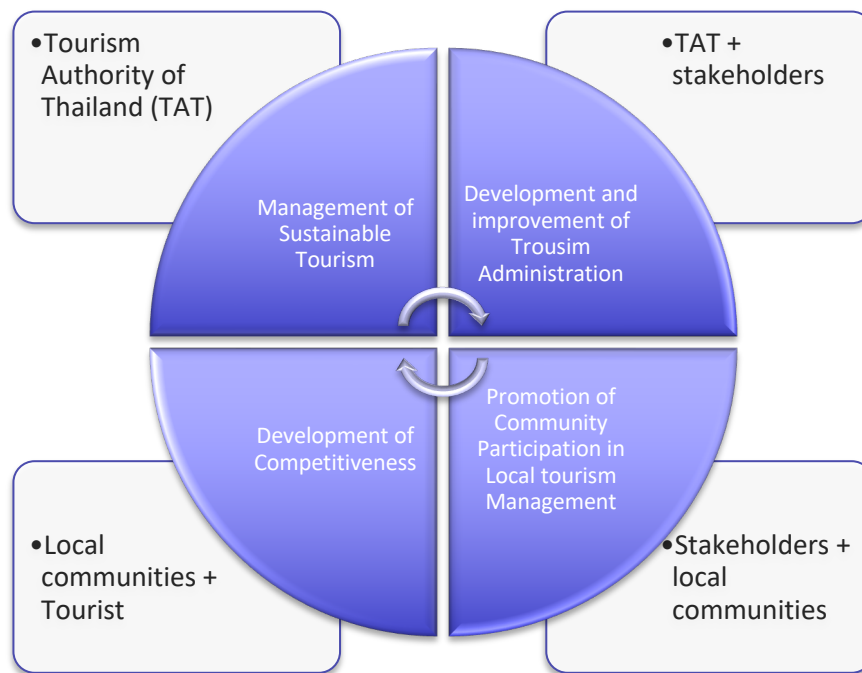
can come directly to us. They came as a tourist but later they became one of our members and work together with us.” Said a NGO worker.

Chiang Mai provides an example of how various stakeholders working together can result in the establishment of a tourism destination that is sustainable (Byrd, 2007). The region's focus on preserving the natural environment, cultural heritage, and community involvement has resulted in a tourism industry that benefits both visitors and locals (Freeman & Epstein, 1984). The city's efforts towards sustainable tourism can be seen in the implementation of eco-friendly practices, promoting responsible tourism, and supporting local businesses (Byrd, 2007).

In addition, Chiang Mai's emphasis on community-based tourism has allowed travelers to experience the local way of life while also providing income and empowerment to the local community (Polnyotee, 2015). All of these initiatives have helped make Chiang Mai a truly unique and sustainable destination for travelers seeking an authentic cultural experience through the local communities, business owners, government agencies, and NGO workers could work together towards this common goal. However, despite the progress made so far, Chiang Mai still has a long way to go (Byrd, 2007).

By working together, the people in Chiang Mai want to create tourism that helps everyone. We need everyone's ideas and voices to make sure we create sustainable tourism that works for everyone. The Chiang Mai's Sustainable Tourism Development Guidelines have been developed as a part of this research findings.





**Figure 8.** Chiang Mai’s Sustainable Tourism Development Guidelines

Sustainable tourism management involves overseeing and regulating tourism activities to ensure they are aligned with sustainability principles and minimize negative impacts on the environment and local communities (Byrd, 2007; Freeman & Epstein, 1984). This responsibility primarily falls under the purview of the *Tourism Authority in Thailand (TAT)*. The promotion and regulation of tourism activities in the country is the responsibility of the Tourism Authority, and it has an important role in ensuring that these activities are sustainable.

Efforts to develop and improve tourism administration in Chiang Mai aim to enhance administrative processes and structures for effectively managing and promoting sustainable tourism practices (Byrd, 2007; Freeman & Epstein, 1984; Hall, 2008; Bocken et al., 2014). This requires collaboration between the Tourism Authority in Thailand and various stakeholders involved in tourism management. The management and regulation of tourism in Chiang Mai ensures a positive impact on the local economy and environment. There is a need to balance the interests of different stakeholders, including tourists, local communities, and businesses.

The promotion of community participation in local tourism management emphasizes actively involving local communities in decision-making processes and tourism

management initiatives (Font & McCabe, 2017; Carey et al., 1997; Salim et al., 2022; Villarino & Font, 2015). This approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among local residents, contributing to the sustainable development of tourism in Chiang Mai. Stakeholders and local communities play crucial roles in this aspect. They have a unique understanding of the local environment, culture, and traditions and can provide valuable insights into tourism management practices. Tourism activities can be better integrated into the local economy, and the benefits of tourism can be distributed more evenly among all stakeholders by actively involving local communities.

The development of competitiveness in Chiang Mai's tourism industry aims to enhance its attractiveness and sustainability by promoting sustainable practices, innovation, and quality service delivery (Pomering, 2017; Pomering et al., 2011; Fuentes, 2012; Holden, 2016). This involves collaboration between local communities and tourists to create a vibrant and competitive tourism sector. The tourism industry in Chiang Mai is highly competitive, and there is a need to continuously innovate and improve service quality to attract more visitors (Kirkey, 2020). Promoting sustainable practices that preserve local culture and traditions can help the tourism industry ensure its long-term sustainability while protecting the environment (Salim et al., 2022). This way, the industry can contribute to the preservation of local culture and traditions while also helping to protect and sustain the environment (Helgadottir et al., 2022).

## 6 Discussion

The research underscores the critical role of stakeholder engagement in advancing sustainable tourism initiatives in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Collaborative attempts between local communities, owners of businesses, government agencies, and NGOs are identified as key drivers for implementing effective policies and practices that benefit both tourists and host communities (Byrd, 2017; Holden, 2016; Pongruengkiat et al., 2023).

Chiang Mai is a well-known spot that captures the attention of visitors worldwide (Renard, 1999; Pongruengkiat et al., 2023, Kirkey, 2020). The city's numerous tourist attractions are not the only things that contribute to its popularity. In addition to these attractions, factors such as accommodations, facilities, and safety also play a significant role in attracting visitors (Kirkey, 2020). To ensure that tourism in Chiang Mai remains sustainable, this study proposes a development strategy that focuses on four key elements: tourist attractions, accessibility, facilities, and safety (Holden, 2016). Each element addresses environmental, social, and economic challenges and offers solutions to ensure the long-term sustainability of tourism in the region (Polnyotee & Thadaniti, 2015; Helgadottir et al., 2022). Implementing this sustainable tourism development strategy will help preserve and conserve Chiang Mai's resources for future generations (Hall, 2008; Holden, 2016).

### 6.1 Challenges of Implementing Sustainable Tourism in Chiang Mai

The research seeks the challenges of implementing sustainable tourism, which involves promoting and developing local services that align with ecological, social, and economic sustainability principles (Hall, 2008). Sustainable tourism aims to minimize negative impacts on the environment, society, and economy while maximizing positive impacts, but it also presents challenges (Font & McCabe, 2017). Managing tourist flows to

prevent over-tourism, balancing economic development with conservation efforts, involving local communities, and changing consumer behavior are some of the challenges of sustainable tourism (Byrd, 2007). Sustainable tourism initiatives promote less-traveled destinations and encourage off-season travel, prioritize sustainable development, empower local communities, and raise awareness among tourists to address these challenges (Salim et al., 2022).

In Chiang Mai, a popular tourist destination, several challenges arise when it comes to implementing sustainable tourism practices (Salim et al., 2022). These include stakeholders' collaboration, traffic congestion, air pollution, overcrowding in the downtown area, and finding suitable solutions for these problems (Kirkey, 2020).

### **6.1.1 Challenge One: Failure in Stakeholder Collaboration**

The results of this research show that stakeholders such as government agencies, business owners such as (hotels, guest houses, tour companies/agents, restaurants, etc), local communities or residents, and tourists or visitors have conflicting interests and priorities, hindering collaborative efforts.

To overcome silo mentalities and foster collaboration through open dialogue and shared decision-making processes is highly recommended (Byrd, 2007; Freeman & Epstein, 1984; Moir, 2001)

### **6.1.2 Challenge Two: Traffic Congestion**

The traffic congestion is a significant issue in downtown Chiang Mai due to the rapid increase in population and tourism based on the result of observation visits and reports from various research (PoKharel, 2016; Kirkey, 2020; Pongruengkiat et al., 2023). The influx of vehicles, including personal cars, rental vehicles, and tour buses, contributes to congestion, making it difficult for both residents and tourists to navigate the city efficiently.

One solution to this problem is to implement sustainable transportation options such as electric tuk-tuks, bicycle rentals, and shuttle services powered by renewable energy (Wey & Huang, 2018; Gudmudason et al., 2016). Stakeholders can create dedicated

lanes for bicycles and pedestrians and improving public transportation infrastructure can encourage people to use alternative modes of transportation and reduce reliance on private vehicles. Chiang Mai Traffic Offices should encourage residents to use more public transportation rather than to use their on private cars.

### **6.1.3 Challenge Three: Air Pollution**

The air pollution is another significant problem in Chiang Mai, especially during peak tourist seasons. The high volume of vehicles on the roads contributes to air pollution, exacerbated by agricultural burning practices in surrounding areas. This leads to haze and health concerns for residents and visitors alike (Sipinski, 12 April 2023).

To decrease air pollution, we need to enforce stricter emissions standards for vehicles and promote electric/hybrid cars. There should also be regulations put in place to limit agricultural burning. To improve air quality, investing in green spaces and urban forestry projects can be beneficial as they absorb pollutants and offer natural filtration (Pokharel, 2016; Fuentes, 2012).

### **6.1.4 Challenge Four: Overcrowding Population in Downtown**

Overcrowding in the downtown area is another problem that strains local infrastructure and services and detracts from the quality of life for residents and the visitor experience.

To address this issue, tourists should be encouraged to visit less-visited areas and travel during the off-season. Developing infrastructure and attractions in outlying areas can distribute tourist traffic more evenly and reduce pressure on the downtown area (Polnyotee & Thadanitis, 2015; Carey et al., 1997; Holden, 2016; Mowforth & Munt, 2015).

Finding sustainable solutions requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, businesses, local communities, and tourists. Engaging stakeholders actively involved through participatory decision-making processes, implementing sustainable tourism management plans, and fostering community

involvement are essential for finding sustainable solutions (Byrd, 2007; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2005; Amentitiz, 2022).

### **6.1.5 Challenge Five: Resistance to Change**

The last and most stubborn one, Encountering resistance from stakeholders who have grown accustomed to traditional practices can become a major hurdle in implementing sustainable tourism initiatives. Hence, it is important to recognize this potential problem and take necessary measures to address it (Wey & Huang, 2018). By emphasizing the advantages of sustainable tourism and effectively communicating them, we can assist stakeholders in comprehending the significance of accepting change and adopting new methods (Hall, 2008; Holden, 2016).

With a bit of effort and collaboration, we can strive towards developing a tourism industry that is more sustainable and responsible, and that benefits everyone involved. By providing education and training programs to increase awareness and build capacity for sustainable tourism practices to each and every sector of stakeholders (Byrd, 2007). Schools and educational institutions need to encourage students and researchers to do more research on the sustainable tourism development field, thus there will be more successful case studies to demonstrate the benefits of sustainability to garner support and momentum for change (Freeman & Epstein, 1984; Chudintra, 1993).

## 7 Conclusion

Chiang Mai is a beautiful city with a flourishing tourism industry (Kirkey, 2020; Rehard, 1999; Pokharel, 2016). Balancing economic growth with sustainable development is a challenge that many tourist destinations face (Helgadottir et al., 2022, Amentitiz, 2022; TAT, 2017; Bocken et al., 2014). However, this is also the case with this destination. To address this challenge, Chiang Mai can embrace sustainable practices and encourage responsible tourism to mitigate the negative environmental impact of tourism (Font & McCabe, 2017; Holden, 2016).

By adopting green industry practices, businesses in the city can benefit in multiple ways - they can attract eco-conscious customers, preserve natural resources, and achieve economic growth (McCool & Moisen, 2001; Mowforth & Munt, 2015; Moir, 2001; Gudmudson et al., 2016; WTO, 2003; Pomeroy, 2017). The society at large will also benefit from such practices, as they contribute to sustainable development and help preserve the city's rich heritage for future generations (Kirkey, 2020).

With a focus on sustainability, Chiang Mai can continue to offer tourists a memorable experience while ensuring that its natural resources remain intact (TAT, 2017; CGC, 2024). By prioritizing sustainable development, the city can become an exemplar of responsible tourism and show the world that economic growth and environmental conservation are not mutually exclusive goals (Kirkey, 2020; Pongruengkiat et al., 2023; Pokharel, 2016).

Integrating tourism research with other sciences and utilizing diverse research methods can result in more effective and impactful outcomes (Hall, 2008; Fuentes, 2012; Weaver, 2012; Chudintra, 1993). I strongly encourage further research on sustainable tourism development in Chiang Mai and other major cities that have high potential as tourist destinations for travelers around the world.

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Figure 7. April is the peak of the pollution in northern Thailand with Chiang Mai shrouded in a toxic haze [Lillian Suwanrumpha/AFP]Environment News/Al Jazeera (Sipinski, 2023)

Figure 8. Chiang Mai's Sustainable Tourism Development Guidelines

# Annexes

Interview questions for this research

Questions for international and domestic tourists

1. What motivated you to choose Chiang Mai as a travel destination?
2. How important is sustainability to you when selecting travel destinations and activities?
3. Are you aware of any sustainable tourism initiatives in Chiang Mai? If so, which ones?
4. How do sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly accommodations or responsible tour operators, influence your travel decisions?
5. What suggestions do you have for improving sustainability efforts in Chiang Mai to enhance the tourist experience?
6. Do you want to add anything that I haven't asked or any other comments on this issue?

Questions for Officers

1. What are the main objectives of the tourism office regarding sustainable tourism development in Chiang Mai?
2. How does the tourism office collaborate with local stakeholders, such as tour companies, hotels, and restaurants, to promote sustainable practices?
3. What policies or regulations are in place to support sustainable tourism in Chiang Mai, and how are they enforced?
4. How does the tourism office monitor and evaluate the impact of sustainable tourism initiatives in Chiang Mai?
5. What strategies are being considered or implemented to address any challenges or gaps in sustainable tourism development in Chiang Mai?
6. Do you want to add anything that I haven't asked or any other comments on this issue?



## Questions for companies/hotel/restaurant owners

1. Can you describe the sustainable tourism practices currently implemented by your companies/hotel/restaurant in Chiang Mai?
2. What challenges do you encounter in implementing these sustainable practices, and how do you address them?
3. How do you measure the effectiveness of your sustainability initiatives, and what metrics do you use?
4. What opportunities do you see for further improving sustainable tourism efforts in Chiang Mai, and how do you plan to capitalize on them?
5. How do you engage with local communities and authorities to ensure your sustainability efforts align with their needs and expectations?
6. Do you want to add anything that I haven't asked or any other comments on this issue?