



A study of the tourism industry in East Taiwan

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Abstract

Aim: This paper discusses potential strategies for growing the tourism sector in the area. We use Hualien County as an illustration. Hualien County is a region in East Taiwan known for its breathtaking scenery and diverse eco-friendly landscape. A crucial issue is how to effectively boost the regional economy and the tourism sector. This issue is the main focus of the paper.

Methodology: Our qualitative research is based on archival analysis of reports about Hualien's most popular tourist spot and on participant observation. To promote tourism, we conducted a SWOT analysis of the available literature.

Findings: We discovered that the local government should coordinate the culture of festive activities and provide clear publicity for the events. The media should be used in the management of the tourism industry. Cooperation between the government and businesses should enhance the growth of the tourism industry.

Implications/Novelty: The implication is that there may still be unresolved conflicts between the quickening pace of tourism growth and the protection of the area's natural beauty.

Key Words: Industry, Satisfaction, Tourism, Culture

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, an increase in national income and consumer preferences has contributed to a more buoyant economy. People's interest in leisure travel has increased since the two-day weekend was instituted. Leisure activities have overtaken all other industries in Taiwan due to the government's efforts to foster a tourist-friendly environment. To promote tourism and leisure, organic farming, cultural and creative industries, and the integration of Hualien County into the development of the real estate industry, it will not jeopardize the area's natural and cultural resources (Department of the Interior 1984).

Beautiful natural scenery and a wide variety of eco-friendly terrain can be found in Taiwan's Hualien County. Along with its natural landscape resources and thriving cultural traditions, it also boasts some of the world's purest mountain water from springs found only there. Numerous tourists flock here annually because of the beautiful scenery and laid-back vibe. It has gained notoriety globally and offers opportunities to establish carbon-conscious companies. The travel and leisure sector is highly developed. Taroko National Park is where the majority of visitors choose to go. The lakes of Qixing and Carp are also interesting destinations. The largest body of water in Hualien County is Carp Lake. It is located just 18 kilometers from Hualien City and is part of a beautiful part of the Hualien Rift Valley (Shen et al. 2011). A crucial issue is how to effectively boost the regional economy and the tourism sector.

Since the cited studies were conducted some time ago, new research is warranted to determine whether or not the local tourism industry has kept up with the growing number of visitors and their evolving needs, as well as to

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determine what percentage of visitors come from Taiwan versus other countries. Our goals are to understand the state of the tourism and recreation sector in the Hualien scenic area and the development strategy. It is based on an analysis of the literature to increase the region's tourism value. Insights into potential future research agendas will be provided in this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism is a natural and meaningful activity for people. Burkart and Medlik (1981) refer to the sum of phenomena and relationships between people traveling and staying outside the local population, not permanent settlements, and has nothing to do with money-making activities. Bao (2010) describes tourism as a concept that brings the phenomenon of entry, stay, departure from a particular region or country, and matters directly related to it, especially economic matters. Yang (1999) argues that the need for socialization, respect and self-fulfillment can be realized in the journey. This is the most perfect way to meet the needs of the individual through tourism activities to achieve self-development. Zhao (2010) and Kunnu (2016) refers to the tourism as viewing the natural scenery, city scenery and historical sites in the tourist destination. Li (2003) advocates tourism as a comprehensive business, being also the world's largest industry, occupying a very important position in the world economy.

Hualien County Industrial and Commercial Development Investment Promotion Committee, 2016 states that tourism in Taiwan is not only an important industry, it is one of the major industries within Hualien's sustainable development policy. In addition to tourism-related industries, it can lead to investment, to enhance the social employment, and hence tourism services are all important and really beneficial. Foreign exchange income and domestic tourism revenue have grown from 618 billion Taiwan dollars in 2012 to 819 billion in 2015 (Tourism Bureau of the Ministry of Transport 2015). Overall, the development of Taiwan's tourism industry, in terms of total tourism revenue and the number of visitors to Taiwan, looks impressive.

"The terrain of the Home town of the sun"- Hualien has mountains, plains and rivers. The Philippine Ocean Plate and the Eurasian Plate collide with each other to form mountains and valleys, continuing to push, and uplift continental plate. In addition river erosion, alluvial and sea erosion, weathering and other effects, create in the Hualien region a rich and magical geographical landscape. According to the special geographical environment and natural resources policy of Hualien, the development plan aims at tourism, recreation, mineral and water conservancy as the main functions, with care not to damage the natural landscape (Hualien Tourist Information Network 2016).

The county, with an area of about 4629km², is the largest county in Taiwan, but people only live in 7% of the area. The river accounted for 6%. 87% are mountains, not suitable for residential development. There are 43 mountains which are more than 3000 meters above sea level. The water and soil resources are to be strengthened and conserved under good protection, in order to maintain the most un-spoilt primitive ecological environment. As a result of geographical factors, agriculture, forestry, fishing, animal husbandry, mining and other local resource-based industries have been Hualien region's main basic industries. However, with the development of the eastern region and the guidance of the national policy, the industrial, commercial and tourism industries with high output and high added value have gradually become the main force of the economic development in Hualien County (Industrial Development and Investment Promotion Committee 2015; Bunchutrakun et al. 2016; Nasser 2017).

Carp Lake is the largest lake in East Taiwan. It has developed into a well-known scenic spot and attracted many visitors. Later, due to the change of the route, it resulted in the reduction of tourist crowds. In 2002 the government tried actively to change the status quo, and by active planning has now restored its former elegance, so that it can now be said to be one of the most famous tourist attractions in Hualien. Carp Lake is about 1.6 km from north to south, and at the widest width about 930 meters. Carp Lake presents a narrow oval shape. In the past, there were settlements of indigenous peoples. It lies at the east of the Carp Mountain and was therefore named Carp Lake. After the establishment of the East Rift Valley National Scenic Area, Carp Lake has a seasonal firefighting season in April, and this is complemented by additional recreational resources around it. It is designed as a recreational activity base with boat rides, bicycle rides or waterfront activities (Hualien Tourist Information Network 2016).

Carp Lake scenic area has been conducting a number of tourism activities for many years, and the most famous Water Dance Activities have entered the 12th year. Through media marketing, and vigorous promotion of

international tourism, this has expanded to attract domestic and foreign tourists to Hualien for the length of their stay. According to the information provided by the Tourist Office of Hualien County, 2016 the number of people visiting Carp Lake has increased from 915,708 in 2011 to 1,441,771 in 2015.

Table 1: Carp lake series of large-scale activities

Year	Activities
2010	Pacific International Tourism Festival
2010	Summer Love Carnival
2011	Indigenous United Harvest Festival
2012	Whirlwind Bay Windsurfing Festival
2013	Ampang International Tourism Culture Season
2014	Summer Laser Water Curtain Festival
2015	Pacific Lights Festival
2016	Carp Lake Show Dragon Boat Tournament

Hualien has launched a series of large-scale activities (Table 1). In 2010, Hualien County Government established “The 18-day Pacific International Tourism Festival”, with live broadcasting and strong marketing directed to 23 countries around the world, attracting nearly one million domestic and foreign tourists, thus creating great tourist benefits. It has now become Hualien County’s most important tourist attraction each year (Hualien Tourism Department 2016).

METHODOLOGY

We used a qualitative research method of archives analysis and observation. We applied SWOT as the analysis framework to analyze the Government Reports, and documents, in order to clarify and evaluate the references. We identify the advantages and disadvantages of the internal environment and external environment faced by the tourism industry in Hualien area. The results of the analysis can be used as a reference by relevant units for promoting tourism in Hualien.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) was used to analyze the prospect of tourism development and the strategy (Table 2). We make the following inferences.

Strengths (S)

- The territory has a rich natural ecology and refreshing scenery.
- A range of recreational activities for families, such as water bike, boat, bike, lake-trail, forest trail, and spacious camping grounds.
- Distinct local cuisine visitors will appreciate, such as fried shrimp cake, fresh Shrimps, etc.

Weaknesses (W)

- The impact of natural disasters, especially wind, earthquake and other natural disasters caused by irresistible landslides, flood damage, highway collapse, sea and air transport interruption.
- County financial constraints, as funding is limited.
- Tourism environment insecurity, the area cannot attract tourists to stay for a long time.
- There are very few professionals working in this field.

Opportunities (O)

- The community here has more time to do outdoor activities.
- There is also an opportunity to answer the urgent need to improve the way of transport to Hualien.

- An opportunity to train local professional manpower, and to use natural reserves and natural resources, and properly to safeguard ecological conservation.
- To seek co-operation with other industries in the area, for mutual benefit under the strategic alliance and integrated marketing.
- As the number of tourists increases, the visibility of the area is increased.

Threats (T)

- Adjacent towns and surrounding areas are providing competitive tourist attractions.
- Training of man-power, and suitable development of local resources: the preparation work for this is not easy, and takes time
- Threat of over-development or inappropriate building work spoiling areas of natural beauty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We made a study of up-to-date National and local Hualien Government Reports into the revenue generated by the tourism industry. We review local tourism as a part of sustainable development policy in Hualien County, and of the policy of eco-friendly development which does not spoil the natural landscape.

Tourist companies should take advantage of these strengths by ensuring that tourist site development does not spoil the natural landscape, and by taking advantage of the spacious area to establish unobtrusive buildings in local materials and style. Companies need to address insecurities by lobbying government locally and nationally to improve safety of sites and access. If funding from county is limited, it may be made up for by private investment in a profitable industry. An active drive towards attracting more workers is needed (Shen et al. 2011).

A collaboration between national and local government and private operators both in companies and as individual households, can take advantage of the above opportunities, by opening up eco-friendly and activity-based attractions, taking care of above all not to spoil the historic and natural features of the area. Manpower training could increase the local employment opportunities. These opportunities should be seized promptly by companies who also should maintain good relations with local authorities (Wang and Pfister 2008)

The threats should be faced by maintaining appropriate small impact local vernacular designs for buildings. The threat of spoiling the landscape by over-development or inappropriate building work has to be minimised by effective development and strict implementation of regulations to protect areas of outstanding natural beauty (Wray 2011).

To ensure that Hualien is an essential area for visitors, the local government should co-ordinate the culture of festive activities, and give clear publicity to the events. Managing the tourism industry should use media and events to increase the popularity of the local. Efficient management and maintenance of this facility should improve tourist satisfaction. The development of the tourism industry should be improved by co-operation between government and entrepreneurs (McGehee and Andereck 2004).

The implications are that there may yet be unresolved conflicts between rapid expansion and development of holiday hotels to maximise revenue from accelerating demand, on one hand, and on the other hand, concern to preserve unspoilt natural amenities of the landscape that people come to visit.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Through the study and understanding of Hualien County, it is recommended that the Government should continue to actively promote the development of tourism under the principles of Eastern Region tourism, so that tourists enjoy high quality enjoyment and service. It is hoped that the central Government, local Governments and enterprises will think along these lines, and will open up a greater variety of resources.

At the same time, it is important to protect areas of outstanding natural beauty from being spoilt by excessive or inappropriate building works. Some balance should be sought between developers anxious to maximize profits from tourism, and those concerned to protect the outstanding natural beauty that tourists have come to visit.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

Limitation of this study was that it is limited to one area, and may not reflect problems in other parts of the country. Future studies of tourism in this area are needed to see how far the strategies outlined in local and national government plans are implemented, and to elicit active feedback from tourists and from local community.

Table 2: Carp Lake tourism development strategy

Internal Environmental Analysis	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
External Environmental Analysis		
	S1: Rich natural ecology. S2: Refreshing scenery. S3: suitable for family size leisure activities.	W1: Facing natural disasters, traffic disruption. W2: traffic is not convenient, long travel time. W3: Tourism quality cannot attract tourists to stay long.
Opportunities (O)	SO	WO
O1: Government policies and regulations.	SO1: Week off two days, one case off.	WO1: Passive to active.
O2: Facilities management system.	SO2: To provide friendly and convenient transportation	WO2: to strengthen marketing and increase exposure.
O3: Differentiated services.	SO3: Strategic alliance, integrated marketing.	WO3: Expand the target market and positioning.
O4: Visibility and exposure opportunities.	SO4: the implementation of control and maintenance facilities. SO5: High job opportunities increase.	WO4: Traffic is not convenient.
Threats (T)	ST	WT
T1: Mainland visitors off limits.	ST1: Vertical integration, innovation services.	WT1: Cross-Strait political influence.
T2: More competitive attractions around.	ST2: To expand diversified tourist sources.	WT2: Substantial expertise and sufficient manpower.
T3: The industry strategic alliance.	ST3: Build network marketing, adhere to quality.	WT3: The county government financial constraints.

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