

A Development Strategy for the Leisure Industry in Taiwan

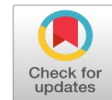
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Abstract: As a result of advances in technology and the increase in GDP, more and more Taiwanese citizens are spending time in leisure activities. The tourism industry is changing its business style to harmonise with developments in the regional economies, and restructuring of industry and local businesses. This study aims to ascertain how to improve local tourist industries, by focusing on how to attract more tourists and to increase revenues from tourism as a leisure activity. We used qualitative research method including interview and we collected and assessed the relevant research material. We used SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) method focusing on management of Li-Chuan Aqua Farm to ascertain the future strategy likely to prove most effective. The solution we proposed was for local landowners and stakeholders to respond to changes in the structure of the industry and to build tourism centres where the customer is at the centre of concern. In this way most advantage will be gained. For a viable enhancement of the leisure industry, the infrastructure must be improved. We suggest the government spares no effort to improve the quality of tourism and eco-friendly leisure activities. Implications are that sensitive appreciation and presentation of scenic, historic, cultural, and ecological features will increase economic potential of local tourism. As to future directions we expect Li-Chuan Aqua Farm to follow this plan and to break new ground and become a market leader in this field.

Keywords: Tourism, Leisure activity, Industry, Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

With the implementation of the “two-day free weekend” policy, there is an increase in the number of holiday travelers and thus a substantial increase in tourists. The Government actively promotes the tourist industry, and has spared no effort to develop the leisure areas of agriculture and fishing in this respect. Therefore, the quality of recreation service provision is particularly important (Xu & Zhang, 2008).

Xu (2012) pointed out that with the advent of the era of economic improvement, recreational activities, including fishing and visiting fisheries, can become an integral part of tourism and of local development. This active participant experience is an important feature of the new tourist industry and a new direction for local development. Active participation in local traditional open air eco-friendly recreational activities is an important feature of enjoyment expected by modern tourists. Therefore, tourist operators need to respond accordingly to changes in the structure of the industry, so as to create active customer-oriented facilities and visitor centers in order to gain competitive advantage (Pathumporn & Nakapaksin, 2015; Luekveerawattana, 2016).

Huang (2005) explained that Taiwan’s accession to the WTO was affected by trade liberalization and internationalization. This also makes small farmers (as the main feature of Taiwan’s agriculture and rural areas) face strong competitive pressure. Zou (2007) examined how in 2001, the “Integrated Recreational Agriculture and Fishing Garden project” planned by the Executive Yuan began. The project aims at bringing together the diverse resources of eco-friendly production activities and lifestyles in the agricultural and fishing villages, and organizing and improving marketing and packaging activities, recreational activities, and enhancing the social and economic viability of the village community.

Huang (2001) described the development of recreational agriculture and fishery activities in Taiwan at all levels in recent years, and how governance has been vigorously improved. In the years of increasingly difficult farming and fisheries management, people need to consider the larger needs for

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recreation and tourism in the larger environment. The existing agricultural and fishery infrastructure can be used as a “recreational industry” concept under the policy.

Duan (2003) has claimed that as society encountered changes in structure and character of the industry, the traditional fisheries must use their existing hardware and software equipment in a diversified way to cope with the needs of today’s society. Huang (2001) has mentioned that in order to further assist the sustainable development of recreational fisheries in the future, it is necessary to carry out in-depth analysis into the resources and experience activities provided by recreational fishing, and also to learn about the environmental resources available to provide appropriate participation experience for visitors. Our paper throws new light on changes required in development of local tourist sites management. It shows the need and scope for more active participatory recreation. Whereas previously tourists were content to be passively driven in coaches around sights, and to get out and take photographs of each other at beauty spots, now tourists are more likely to be interested in sporting activities such as fishing, climbing, canoeing, partaking in local cuisine and cooking, local dances and in eco-friendly activities. They will also be interested in providing feedback at good and bad features of their visit that can be used in an audit for future planning. All this amounts to a new efficient proactive business model for local tourist area management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Leisure” has the meaning of “rest” and “leisure”. It also means “free time for leisure” and “recreation for spiritual or physical strength”. Yan (2008) indicated leisure in terms of action, emphasizing the individual’s sense of existence and practical action. On the whole, leisure is free time, the individual will be fully engaged in their activities, and be rewarded by intense experience. Yet whatever the definition, there are bound to be some restrictions.

Yu (1998) mentioned that this is a personal feeling of being relaxed, uninhibited, free and free, comfortable, unrestrained state. In her article “Family Leisure”, Jian (2004) argues that leisure activities may have different characteristics depending on factors such as leisure programs, leisure attitudes, motivations and leisure interests. So people should choose their own leisure activities appropriately for each individual. In order to make recreational activities maximize their function and value, so as to achieve their purpose.

The development of the tourism and leisure industry has affected retail, catering, personal services, business services and so on. It has also greatly helped and improved the current job market in Taiwan (Chen & Huang, 2006). According to UNWTO released in January 2014 analytic report (Wikipedia, 2014; World Tourism and Tourism Council, 2013), (using the world’s top 50 ranking industries as the basis), Taiwan’s international visitor growth rate (9.64%) in 2013 is at the 10th place in the world, and the growth rate of tourism income (12%) is the 8th in the world. This is ahead of Macao, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and other countries. Lin and Wang (2008) set tourism as an important strategic industry for development in the “Study on the Development of Kaohsiung’s Tourism Industry”.

The tourism and leisure industry is also in a good position to form its own agenda due to regional economic developments, industrial characteristics and the gradual transformation of industrial structure. In recent years, the tourism and leisure industry has become a new direction for local development in many rural and marginal areas where traditional industries are declining (Xu & Zhang, 2008). Li (2010) detailed the development of tourism and leisure industry trends in the current situation, improving the active local economy, to meet the needs of tourists. Song and Li (2010) showed how it is possible to use typical regional attributes to establish tourist centers, each with a special local attraction. Leisure development is thus able to form a new pattern.

It can be seen that the development of tourism and leisure industry has become a major industry that can promote national economic development, create local employment opportunities, enhance living standards and increase foreign exchange earnings. Li and Hou (2004) pointed out that people are in a post-industrial stage, in the process of changing from industrial to cultural production. In this process, the new job opportunities will be mainly in the business of cultural activities. More and more people’s lifestyles and content are connected with seeking various types of new valuable experience, distinct from

the previous era of accumulating consumer goods. This is why that the central government and local governments are vigorously promoting the development of tourism industry. The government can create local employment programs by actively building and developing local tourism resources, integrating local natural ecology, an eco-friendly and sensitive environment, and seasonal festivals, thus boosting local economic prosperity (Ye, Xu & Garry, 2011). Therefore, tourism and leisure industry in the 21st century will be worth development in the promotion of important emerging local industries, but also be an important key choice for individuals planning their lives.

Cheng and Hou (2000) define “leisure agriculture” as the use of rural landscape, natural environment and environmental resources, combining agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishery production, agricultural business activities, farming village culture and farm life. Recreational agriculture is a new kind of business that aims to provide leisure for the people and to enhance the people’s experience in agriculture and rural life. Li (2010) pointed out that leisure agriculture has its industrial characteristics and mission, the main principle is to make “local agriculture” business-oriented. Leisure agriculture means the use of agricultural business activities, rural life and culture, pastoral landscape and other resources, with agricultural production and marketing activities related to the concept.

Tourism and Leisure Fisheries White Paper (1999) defines that recreational fishing is concerned with fishing facilities, fishing village space, fishery production sites and products, fishery management activities and ecology, natural environment and human resources in the fishing village. Huang (2005) pointed out that the number of recreational fishing areas in Taiwan is increasing and fishing fields and fishponds are all over the province. The fishing resources are fully utilized by the managers to design a variety of interactive participant experiences and activities to meet the demands of tourists in order to gain the competitive advantage.

Cai (2011) explains that Li-Chuan Aqua Farm is a Christian-based community, that aims to help farmers improve farming management for the development of community. They have introduced ecological principles into developing the active productive life of the local industry. Li-Chuan Aqua Farm has developed from its origin as a fish breeding area, to a new pathway integrating culture and ecology. Xu (2012) explains that service quality is the key to the success of Li-Chuan Aqua Farm management. They need only to provide customers with more satisfaction, in order to attract more customers for coming to visit, to expand consumption, expand sales and profits and maintain operations.

Gao (2006) has shown how industrial characteristics, regional economic development, industrial restructuring, local autonomy and community factors, gradually formed the character of the area. Li-Chuan Aqua Farm reflects a love of God that informs the quest for an eco-friendly productive life that respects the environment, and an orientation towards the human customer rather than towards the profit mentality. This is reflected in the voices of customers and in the media reports. On every holiday there are always crowds, and it has become a model for recreational fishing.

Liu (2008) has shown that recreational fishing and aquaculture fisheries are attracting tourists, not only by the development of a variety of food ingredients, but in successful marketing of a profitable health product. Li-Chuan Aqua Farm has also set up a restaurant, so that visitors enjoy the fishing, but also visit the restaurant to taste the authentic flavor of fresh caught local food.

Li-Chuan Aqua Farm holds human life as one of its core values. It continues to refine its working farm management, so that the Li-Chuan Aqua Farm can offer quality products, and boasts restaurants and parks thronged with tourists due to its famous reputation. Considering the management of Li-Chuan Aqua Farm, one finds in the management not only a diversification of management towards ecotourism, recreational experience, aquatic product cultivation, organic vegetable cultivation and animal husbandry, but also that they have put a lot of effort into traditional handicraft production and marketing, and preservation of specialties of local culture and artwork, and caring for those social vulnerability, and promoting other cultural activities.

METHODOLOGY

We used qualitative research methods in conducting interviews with the manager at the Li-Chuan Aqua Farm, and discussed problems and future development. We also reviewed the literature and made ob-

servations on the conditions at the farm. We applied SWOT as an analytical framework that is used by organizations to identify, collect, control, analyse, and synthesize environmental situations (Lin, 2013; Xie, 2004). This research is to examine the internal and external environment of Li-Chuan Aqua Farm, to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the internal environment, the opportunities and threats of the external environment, and formulate business development strategies.

SWOT ANALYSIS OF LI-CHUAN AQUA FARM

Strengths (S)

- Wealth of tourism and leisure resources: Due to the mild climate of the eastern region and the abundant natural recreational resources, the local culture, landscape, industry and human resources provide the conditions and potential to develop tourism and leisure. The results showed that the distinctive flavour of local food, the characteristic culture, the natural landscape and the community care are the competitive advantages of the Li-Chuan Aqua Farm, and this has a positive effect on the development of the tourism and leisure industry.
- Diversified experience: Although Li-Chuan Aqua Farm is the main body, but it also has ancillary developments in traditional handicraft production and the preservation of the characteristic culture and art. Thus a variety of related activities also enrich the visitors to the recreational fishing area, so that the operation of the fisheries becomes more dynamic and attractive.

Weaknesses (W)

- It needs to improve the overall environment and the building.
- It still needs community organization resources for integration.
- As the location is rather remote, there are few stores around, and this is affecting the length of the time visitors stay.

Opportunities (O)

- Tourism and leisure flourishing: With economic development, leisure travel has attracted more people's attention. In order to meet the diversified recreation and leisure expectations, tourists have been able to design different theme tours according to their preferences.
- Government's Attention to tourism and leisure industry: Government has been placed on tourism investment and development in various regions, such as leisure agriculture counselling, community building, cultural preservation and other programs.

Threats (T)

- The area is surrounded by many tourist attractions, and there is a perceived lack of joint business strategy. This is likely to be threatened by excess competition.
- The development of recreational fishing grounds may influence the balance between nature and human ecology, unless done carefully with some expert guidance from biologists.

CONCLUSION

Tourism and leisure industry is quite different from the marketing of general commercial products. In the study of the tourist industry and one's position in the "leisure market" positioning, one has to think of the interests of tourists in the context of preserving the natural environment.

The leisure industry should integrate local natural resources, culture and lifestyle, so that visitors have the depth of experience and a feeling of cultural sensitivity (Song & Li, 2010). This combination of focus on natural scenery, deep cultural traditions and cultural characteristics, is the reason why European tourism has continued to flourish for decades (Yan, 2008). From the Li-Chuan Aqua Farm management analysis point of view, Li-Chuan Aqua Farm is an ideal place for tourists to relax and enjoy active recreational fishing. While planning development of tourism and leisure, we must also think about this important issue: the preservation of local unique natural, ecological and cultural features.

The inference of this study is that eco-tourism in Taiwan is still in its infancy. Farmers and managers are recognising its potential, and seeking guidance to make site management more effective in this context. This study provides a beginning of exploration and discussion of market-oriented sensitive eco-tourism.

The implications are that if these suggestions are followed through with attention to feedback and audit, this may provide a format for a successful updating of the local tourist industry. In future research it will be interesting to see the feedback from tourists, the difficulties encountered, and how these could be usefully fed into a continuing management audit cycle.

The limitation of this study is that it is mainly focused on one site, the Li-Chuan Aqua Farm. Thus it may not be representative of all other sites. However we have no reason to believe it is untypical, and await studies of other sites with interest.

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