

AGRITOURISM, A SERENE EXPERIENCE FOR MICE VISITORS

MARKET TREND



AS THE AGRITOURISM IS BECOMING POPULAR, MANY FARMLANDS WERE TRANSFORMED TO WELCOME TOURISTS IN ORDER TO GENERATE SUPPLEMENT INCOME. **SOME OF THE SITES CAN ALSO SUPPORT MICE ACTIVITIES.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Agritourism is a type of niche tourism that bring visitors to a farm or ranch. A wide variety of unique activities can be done such as picking fruit, horseback riding, winemaking, attending harvest festival, etc. These unique experiences are attractive to many tourists including incentive group. In Thailand, the country was blessed with fertile lands that are suitable for cultivation and husbandry. Thus, agriculture had been the main industry for a long time. As time passes, many agricultural sites have been developed to welcome visitors and become agritourism sites. Some of them were transformed to support several business activities including MICE. For example, Suan Sampran offers and excellent choices of venue for meetings and corporate events with the setup of fully equipped indoor rooms or beautiful natural outdoor setting.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR MICE:

- Technavio, a leading market research company, forecasted that the global agritourism market will grow at a compound annual growth rate of nearly 18% during 2019 - 2023
- Agritourism can be divided into 3 types which are direct market agritourism, education & experience agritourism and recreation & event agritourism.
- Thailand had more than 1,200 agriculture sites nationwide that support several types of tourism including community based tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism and agritourism, according to Mr. Bhumisak Rasri, the director of the Agricultural Economics Operation Centre (AEOC).
- Suan Sampran, a famous agritourism site in Thailand, provides numerous activities that related to agriculture and has a space for meetings and events with the maximum capacity of 500 persons.

NEW EXPERIENCE WITH AGRITOURISM

Agritourism or agrotourism is a type of niche tourism that is organized around farming, food production or animal husbandry with the propose for leisure and education. It is the way to add value to farm or ranch which is beneficial to farm owners as it preserves agricultural land and generates additional income by attracting tourists to visit their farms. Visitors are encouraged to do a wide variety of activities such as picking fruits or vegetables, exploring corn mazes, feeding animals, learning about flora and fauna, etc. In present, agritourism is becoming popular around the world as it provides unique experiences which are attractive to many tourists. According to Technavio, a market research company, the global agritourism market will grow from \$42.42 billion in 2018 to \$97.05 billion in 2023, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of nearly 18%. The recreation and event agritourism, which MICE is also included in this type, contributes about \$24.18 billion in 2018 equivalent to 57% of the total market value. Factors that are expected to contribute to the growth of global agritourism market include the rapid expansion of global travel and tourism industry, the growing demand for outdoor recreational activities among millennials, the growing popularity of travel applications and online booking, the increasing availability of alternative payment methods and technological advancements.

FORMS OF AGRITOURISM

The scope of agritourism varies depending on the type of farm and the availability of land but it can be classified into three basic groups which are direct market agritourism, education & experience agritourism and recreation & event agritourism.

DIRECT MARKET AGRITOURISM

Agriculture products that are sold to consumers either at fairs and markets or on farm itself are considered as direct market agritourism. In addition, roadside stands and on farm store are included in this type of agritourism as well. Even though farmers sell goods that somewhat similar to the products in supermarket, their goods are more appeal as it can be delivered with freshness directly to consumers. Thus, direct market agritourism can usually be found in almost every farm. For example, Greendale Farm in England has divided a portion of their farmland to build a shop and café that provide with a variety of locally sourced produces to visitors including hand-made pies, fresh meats, local cheese, freshly baked bread, new cached fish, etc.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE AGRITOURISM

This type of agritourism helps educate visitors about agriculture, raise awareness to preserve farmland and share agricultural heritage and rural lifestyles which are beneficial to local community, economy and environment. It involves visitors at the farm to do various activities that present with knowledge or hands-on experience such as livestock learning, cheese making, wine tasting and farm tours. Farms has added these activities to diversify their business and be marketed as tourist destination which make them more attractive to tourists. For example, Hidden Villa in the United States welcomes more than 30,000 visitors every year to participate in one of experiential education and responsible agriculture programs such as hand milking, regenerative gardening, food literacy, hands-on pruning techniques and farm-to-table class.

RECREATION AND EVENT AGRITOURISM

By utilizing land for other marketable uses, recreation and event agritourism takes place at the farm which provide leisure and entertainment to visitors. Farmlands has been developed to support other activities including horseback riding, corn labyrinth and harvest festivals which help farm owner generate supplement income and promote farm popularity. For example, sunflower festival has been held annually at Hokuryu farm, which is the largest sunflower farm in Japan with 1.5 million sunflowers of 30 kinds, to promote farm's reputation. As a result, the Hokuryu farm currently is the most famous sunflower field in Japan, and it is able to attract approximately 200,000 tourists per year. Besides an eye-catching landscape, the farm also provides exciting activities such as navigating sunflower maze, riding the tractor train and watching cultural performance to make farm and festival more appeal to visitors.

AGRITOURISM AND MICE INDUSTRY IN THAILAND

THAILAND, THE PERFECT PLACE FOR AGRITOURISM

Agriculture sector in Thailand had been the main industry for many years as the country was blessed with fertile lands that are suitable for cultivation and husbandry throughout the country. As time passes, many agriculture areas have been developed to welcome visitors and become tourist attractions that can support several types of tourism including community based tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism and agritourism which Thailand has more than 1,200 sites nationwide in 2016, according to Mr. Bhumisak Rasri, the director of the Agricultural Economics Operation Centre (AEOC). Moreover, the estimation of Thai agritourism market value in 2018 is approximately at 15.7 billion baht which calculates by using KU-OAE Foresight Center (KOF) assumption in 2016. The assumption estimated from the data including 1) a number of Thai traveler in agritourism trip which is calculated from 2.5% of total number of traveling equivalent to 3.27 million agritourism trips. 2) The value of spending per trip per person which is calculated from 3.5% of total GDP equivalent to 605 baht. 3) The total expense of international traveler in Thai agritourism which is calculated from 0.73% of total expense in Thai tourism equivalent to 13.78 billion baht. Besides, with the diversity of tradition way in agriculture and agricultural sites that spread across the nation, Thai agritourism provides varied opportunities for tourists to feel a first-hand experience of Thai rural lifestyles, obtain knowledge about agriculture in Thailand, explore the unique cultural heritage and travel to environment-friendly locations. Visitors can enjoy various types of activities, for example, observing bamboo weaving at Bang Chao Cha or participating in the rice terrace farming process at Ban Mae Klang Luang.

All forms of Agritourism in Thailand can be seen throughout the country. The interesting agritourism sites of each type are shown as follow,

- **Suphattra Land**, a popular orchard in Rayong, manages area around 800 Rai which has more than 25 kind of fruits. It opens for visit all year round, but the most suitable time is during April to June. Visitors can enjoy tasting and purchasing different type fruits depending on the season directly from the orchard.
- **Somdet Phra Srinagarindra Park Sam Phraya**, where it's managed under Chaipattana Foundation, is the information center that shares knowledge about sustainable agriculture. There are several demonstration programs that visitors can learn including integrated farming systems, new theoretical agricultural practices and environmental conservation.
- **Royal Park Ratchaphruek**, where it's located in Chiang Mai, hold an annual flora festival every year during the Thai winter season which is usually around November to February. The park are incredibly picturesque and expansive with the size over 800,000 square meters. It serves as a display that is used for agriculture, education, science and research. Visitors have to buy a ticket to enter and discover countless numbers of exotic plants and flowers from all around the world.

GOOD PLACES FOR MEETINGS AND INCENTIVES

Numerous agricultural sites have been developed to be able to welcome MICE visitors. One of them is Suan Sampran, a famous agritourism site at Nakhon Pathom. It provides an excellent venue for meetings, seminars, conferences and training programs with natural outdoor setting from different gardens and green area as well as indoor meeting rooms that are fully equipped. Moreover, Suan Sampran also has an experience over 40 years in organizing events for corporates and incentives. The events are done by specialize team and provided with the supply of organic produces from local farmers. The venue can support an outdoor event with the maximum capacity of 500 persons with a full indoor backup facility. Another example of agritourism site is ChokChai Farm at Nakhon Ratchasima. It has an invigorating space for meeting with a fully equipped seminar room in the midst of the forest. In addition, ChokChai Farm offers packages that design for any organization to build personnel competency and boost team solidarity with in-farm group activities.

LEVEL-UP THAI AGRITOURISM WITH MICE

Agritourism in Thailand has a lot of growth potential, thanks to the strength of both Thai agriculture and tourism industry. However, to further improve the popularity of Thai agritourism, it requires the cooperation from several sectors including MICE industry. MICE take role as a necessary helper that will enhance agritourism sector in a few ways. Firstly, events that have been held annually like PB Valley Grape Harvest at Nakorn Ratchasima or Coro Field Harvest festival at Ratchaburi are appeal to visitors as they can enjoy their time with a variety of activities. Visitors' satisfaction form events will help increase the reputation for the farm which will attract more tourists to the site. Secondly, exhibitions such as Chanthaburi Fruit Festival and World Jasmine Rice Festival at Roi Et help promote direct agritourism by utilizing the uniqueness and high quality of local agricultural products which can generate considerable amount of income to farmers and open new opportunity for farms and products to be widely recognized. Lastly, Meeting and incentive are the additional sources of revenue for agriculturists. As they always encounter with the uncertainty in price of agriculture products every year, many farms have adapted to diversify revenue by dividing their lands to do other business activities. Some of them were transformed to be able to support meeting and corporate event resulting in the improved quality of landscape and facilities in agricultural site.