

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS RETRACING THE NAGA BELIEFS “THE NAGA ROUTES”

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the condition of tourist attractions retracing the Naga beliefs “The Naga Routes”. The data was collected from offline documents using purposive random sampling by identifying the searching keyword “Naga” to search through the search box of Princess Maha Chackri Siridhorn Anthropology Centre Library and National Library which consisted of 61 documents, and the data was also collected from online sources by searching with the keyword Naga, then brought the data to use in the in-depth interview of the organization that related to the tourism of each province as well as the people using a snowball sampling. In other words, from the suggestions of the sample from in-depth interview of the organization and non-participant observation of the tourist attractions that appeared the stories related to the Naga found that there were 99 tourist attractions covered the area of 7 provinces along the bank of Mekong River in the Northeast of Thailand including Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Ubon Ratchathani, Mukdahan, and Amnat Charoen.

This paper is a part of the dissertation entitled Tourism Route Branding Retracing the Naga Beliefs “The Naga Routes” which belong to Nathaorn Noppakor advised by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Jantima Kheokao the advisors from the curriculum of Doctor of Communication Arts, Majoring in Marketing Communication, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce (UTCC)

Introduction

The story of the Naga serpent is found in various parts of the world, particularly in Southeast Asia, as evidenced by the tales of the Naga in the Tripitaka, a significant scripture of the Theravada Buddhism (Maha Kavi, Soi Sakam, and Kritsakon Silakom, 2016), the legend of the Naga in the Urangkhatat (Somboon Boonrit, 2017), and the legend of the Naga in the Red Cliff of Lady Ai (Pathom Hongsuwan, 2016), among others. However, the story of the Naga that appears in every legend often involves mystery, sanctity, and miraculous influences, leading to the Naga being revered as the Lord of the Mekong River in Thailand (Chitakorn Aempan, 2002). This shows the respect, honor, and veneration of the Naga as a deity governing the Mekong River region. The belief in the Naga has led to diverse perspectives, not merely viewing it as a simple story, but as a symbol of the relationship between humans and Nagas, between human lifestyle and nature conservation through the dimension of belief (Suchat

Busayanon, 2021). This makes places associated with the Naga story attract people to visit, pay respects, and ask for blessings for wealth, luck, and job success (Arthika Pangnga and team, 2017).

Tourist destinations associated with the Naga story are found in many areas, especially in provinces along the Mekong River. Nowadays, tourists prefer to travel, pay respects, and explore various Naga-related places. This trend is evident from the content created by many influencers and YouTubers focusing on belief-related themes, which have gained significant popularity. Coupled with transportation, a crucial factor in travel, it is found that the Department of Rural Roads has initiated the "Naga Path" road project to support the development of tourism in the Mekong River Basin, covering seven provinces starting from Loei, Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Amnat Charoen, to Ubon Ratchathani, with a total distance of approximately 750 kilometers (Department of Rural Roads, 2020). This is a significant factor demonstrating the tourism potential of various tourist destinations located in the development coordinates of the above project. Considering the tourist attractions of the seven provinces above, it is found that all seven provinces have tourist attractions related to the Naga story, such as Pon Chai Temple in Loei Province (Loei Provincial Office, 2020), Thai Temple in Nong Khai Province (Nong Khai Provincial Office, 2020), Naga Cave in Bueng Kan Province (Bueng Kan Provincial Office, 2020), Phra That Phanom Temple in Nakhon Phanom Province (Nakhon Phanom Provincial Office, 2020), Phra Phutthabat Phu Manorom Temple in Mukdahan Province (Mukdahan Provincial Office, 2020), Sirinaka Cave in Amnat Charoen Province (Amnat Charoen Provincial Office, 2020), and Pa Dom Forest Temple in Ubon Ratchathani Province (Ubon Ratchathani Provincial Office, 2020), all of which promote tourism along the Mekong River.

Regarding research related to the Naga story in Thailand, it is found that there is no research objective to create a tourist route following the belief in the Naga. Therefore, from the aforementioned data, it indicates an opportunity for study, leading to the research on "Tourist Attractions Following The Naga Belief: The Naga Path".

Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to create a tourist route following the belief in the Naga, known as "The Naga Path".

Scope of Research

The research area for this study is defined as seven provinces, namely Loei, Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Amnat Charoen, and Ubon Ratchathani.

Definition of Terms The "Naga Path" refers to a tourist route along the Mekong River, starting from Loei, Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Amnat Charoen, and Ubon Ratchathani provinces, following the transportation development plan of the Department of Rural Roads for the development of scenic routes, known as the "Naga Path".

Concepts Related to Tourist Routes A tourist route is a path that combines various activities and attractions under a single theme to stimulate opportunities for operators through the development of supplementary products and services (Greffé, 1994). It is a designated route for tourists to easily, conveniently, and safely visit various points of interest (Wipawan Pinkeaw, 2008). It is a road, river, canal, or footpath used as a route for tourist attractions, which is a network system used to connect different parts of a city (Kunwara Suwanpimol,

2005). It is a route for tourists to travel or decide to visit various tourist attractions easily, conveniently, safely, and enjoyably (Sitha Kongsana, 2006).

According to Tourism Western Australia, a quality tourist destination should consist of five components: attractions, accessibility, amenities, accommodation, and activities (Australia, 2008).

From the above definitions and concepts, it can be concluded that a tourist route is a path developed using a particular product or theme that can link various tourist attractions together for the convenience of tourists' travel planning. The route should be clear enough for tourists or visitors or residents in the city to be able to connect different important parts of the city. The principles and considerations for arranging a tourist route for evaluating the potential of tourist attractions for the creation of a tourist route following the belief in the Naga, "The Naga Path", used in this research are: (1) attractions, (2) accessibility to tourist attractions, (3) amenities, (4) accommodation, (5) activities, and (6) travel routes connected with other tourist attractions.

Research Method The objective of this research is to create a tourist route following the belief in the Naga, known as "The Naga Path". Data was collected from offline documents through purposive sampling, using the keyword "Naga" through the information search channels of the Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre Library and the National Library, totaling 61 documents. Online data was searched using the word "Naga". The data was then used to conduct in-depth interviews with organizations related to tourism in each province and individuals using snowball sampling. Non-participant observations of tourist attractions related to the Naga story were made, covering seven provinces along the Mekong River in the Northeast, including Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Nakhon Phanom, Bueng Kan, Ubon Ratchathani, Mukdahan, and Amnat Charoen, totaling 99 locations.

Research Results The analysis of data from documents, in-depth interviews, and non-participant observations found a total of 99 tourist attractions related to the Naga. The process of creating a tourist route following the belief in the Naga, "The Naga Path", in this study is presented as follows: Step 1: Selecting Geography For this research, seven provinces were selected for the "Naga Path", namely Loei, Nong Khai, Bueng Kan, Nakhon Phanom, Mukdahan, Amnat Charoen, and Ubon Ratchathani.

Step 2: Selecting the Type of Route For this research, the "Naga Theme" was chosen for creating the tourist route.

Step 3: Studying Basic Information For this research, the conditions of tourist attractions and the communication of Naga content in the "Naga Path" were studied from the collected data before creating the tourist route.

Step 4: Compiling a List of Tourist Attractions Data was collected from documents, in-depth interviews, and non-participant observations.

Step 5: Evaluating the Potential of Tourist Attractions Related to the Naga The potential of tourist attractions was evaluated by considering all the attractions found in Step 1 according to six criteria: (1) attractions, (2) accessibility to tourist attractions, (3) amenities, (4) accommodation, (5) activities, and (6) travel routes connected with other tourist attractions. The evaluation found 99 attractions that met the evaluation criteria, divided into (1) Loei province, 8 places, (2) Nong Khai province, 21 places, (3) Bueng Kan province, 11 places, (4)

Nakhon Phanom province, 13 places, (5) Mukdahan province, 10 places, (6) Amnat Charoen province, 7 places, and (7) Ubon Ratchathani province, 29 places.

Step 6: Presenting the List of Evaluated Tourist Attractions From the evaluation of the potential of tourist attractions in Step 1, it was found that a total of 99 attractions passed the evaluation, as follows:

Order	List of tourist attractions that passed the evaluation	Geographical coordinates
จังหวัดเลย (8 แห่ง)		
1	Kudpong Public Park (Ong Pu Lai Kam Ma)	17.48483, 101.72924
2	Phu Bo Bhit	17.49305, 101.77388
3	Sakai Walk Chiang Khan	17.81946, 101.55435
4	Wat Sri Khun Meuang	17.8937, 101.65239
5	Wat Maha That	17.8951, 101.65703
6	Wat Tha Kaek	17.90487, 101.68331
7	Kaeng Kud Ku	17.90651, 101.70193
8	Lan Pratimakorn Phaya Anantara Nakathibodi	18.02482, 101.88768
จังหวัดหนองคาย (21 แห่ง)		
9	Nong Pla Buek	18.20786, 102.12536
10	Wat Pha Tak Suea	18.03639, 102.30463
11	Wat Tham Si Mongkhon (Wat Tham Phiang Din)	17.96186, 102.30214
12	Wat Hin Mak Peng	17.9834, 102.42853
13	Wat Phra Phutthabat Weng Kum (Wat Phra Phutthabat Ko Kaeng)	17.96561, 102.44894
14	Wat Aranyawat	17.96438, 102.50036
15	Lan Bering Wiang	17.95923, 102.58948
16	Wat Tha Duam	17.95362, 102.59775
17	Wat Phra That Bang Phuan	17.74446, 102.68196
18	Asia Pacific Trade Center (Grandfather Sri Suttho Natakhn)	17.86922, 102.74092
19	Lan Nam Phu Phaya Nak	17.87908, 102.74078
20	Wat Hai Sop	17.88334, 102.74293
21	Wat Lamduan	17.88699, 102.75226
22	Wat Pho Chai	17.88491, 102.75733
23	Wat Sirimaha Chaiyan (Phra That Lo Ha Nong)	17.89743, 102.7697
24	Sala Kaeo Koo	17.88704, 102.78141
25	Wat Luang Chetiyaram	18.01515, 103.07087
26	Wat Thai	18.02451, 103.07607
27	Wat Chomnang	18.03113, 103.08016
28	International Buddhist Park	18.15595, 103.13847
29	Wat Ratcha Phon Ngoen	18.262, 103.18123
จังหวัดบึงกาฬ (11 แห่ง)		

Order	List of tourist attractions that passed the evaluation	Geographical coordinates
30	Lan Phaya Nak, Tambon Pak Khat Municipal Ground	18.30822, 103.30043
31	Wat Pa Tham Phra Wanaram	18.34958, 103.2529
32	Wat Ahong Silawas	18.42431, 103.4707
33	Wat Pa Mueang Hueng	18.28283, 103.8678
34	Wat Chedi Yaki Ri Wi Han (Phu Tok)	18.13185, 103.88065
35	Wat Tham Si Phrom	18.14812, 104.03415
36	Wat Tham Saeng Tham	18.00446, 104.1069
37	Bueng Khong Long	18.01527, 104.02166
38	Phu Luang National Park (Tham Naka Cave)	17.95228, 104.10451
39	Wat Huai Hin Bap	17.9291, 104.09405
40	Wat Pa Kinri (Tham Kinri Naka)	17.94474, 104.12991
Nakhon Phanom Province (13 locations)		
41	Samanasak Don Pho Monastery	17.99222, 104.17631
42	Tham Naki Cave	17.98489, 104.12735
43	Wat Somporn Wanaram	17.93179, 104.21919
44	Wat Phutthanimitam	17.75165, 104.38884
45	Wat Phra Bat Wain Pla	17.50225, 104.72072
46	Wat Okat	17.40181, 104.78853
47	Lan Pratimakham Angsri Sattananakharat	17.39933, 104.79055
48	Wat Maha That	17.39145, 104.79218
49	Wat Phra In Plang	17.38877, 104.79275
50	Wat Mruk Khanakorn	17.09665, 104.76225
51	Wat That Noi Sri Boon Rueang	17.01851, 104.72886
52	Wat Hua Wiang Rangsi	16.94832, 104.72952
53	Samanasak Don Pho Monastery	16.94264, 104.72383
Mukdahan Province (10 locations)		
54	Kaebao Reservoir (Phaya Sripuchong Mukdhanachara)	16.80204, 104.73315
55	Wat Mon Phiram	16.68239, 104.75219
56	Wat Pho Sai	16.61131, 104.73594
57	Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge No. 2 (Phra Phaya Anantanakaraj)	16.60072, 104.7356
58	Wat Phra Phutthabat Phumonrom	16.50019, 104.7286
59	Wat Pa Phu Hang	16.4569, 104.61049
60	Wat Dan Phra Inthar	16.38863, 104.42561
61	Wat Win Chai Mongkhon	16.33309, 104.91582
62	Phaya Naga Don Tan Palace	16.3261, 104.92868
63	Wat Bupphannok	16.28064, 104.97175
Amnat Charoen Province (7 locations)		

Order	List of tourist attractions that passed the evaluation	Geographical coordinates
64	Wat Methasitaram (Phra That Nasi Da Ya Phaya Nakh Khu)	16.26559, 104.98917
65	Sangkha Kaengsung Monastery	16.17828, 105.01645
66	Wat Khok Sa-at	16.07972, 104.62593
67	Wat Pa Kut Nam Kham	15.96696, 104.57215
68	Wat Samran Niwet	15.86812, 104.6272
69	Wat Phanawichai	15.82021, 104.67385
70	Wat Amnat Charoen	15.68246, 104.65542
Ubon Ratchathani Province (29 locations)		
71	Nong Bua Daeng Monastery (Nakha Cave)	16.07764, 105.08931
72	Wat Pho	16.04292, 105.22346
73	Wat Phra To (Wat Pak Saeng)	15.93403, 105.3375
74	Wat Non Sawang Sila Ampha	15.82556, 105.36306
75	Samphan Bok	15.79702, 105.39657
76	Wat Suan Hin Pha Nang Khoi	15.71372, 105.59364
77	Wat Pa Phu Pang	15.64953, 105.48453
78	Wat Phu Chan Daeng Phawana Ram	15.6006, 105.30049
79	Wat Phu Yod Ruay	15.6413, 105.32845
80	Wat Pha Taem Rom Yen Wana Ram	15.39977, 105.49277
81	Wat Tham Patihan	15.59998, 105.57379
82	Wat Tham Wang Pha Phaya Nak	15.37966, 105.47722
83	Wat Tham Khuha Sawan	15.32271, 105.48777
84	Wat Tham Waeng Sintchai	15.31715, 105.50146
85	Wat Khong Chiam	15.31715, 105.50146
86	Sangkha Phra That Phu Lao Niam	15.26317, 105.30311
87	Sangkha Patibat Tham Silarn	15.30974, 105.55692
88	Wat Don Tha	15.26317, 105.30311
89	Wat Pa Phra Phutthabat Phu Din	15.27218, 105.27451
90	Wat Non Pho Ngam	15.1732, 105.22571
91	Wat Pa Pak Dom	15.30628, 105.16281
92	Wat Luang	15.22484, 104.86004
93	Wat Tai Phra Chao Yai Ong Tue	15.22726, 104.86627
94	Wat Thung Si Mueang	15.2297, 104.86111
95	Wat Chaeng	15.2366, 104.86011
96	Wat Mahawanaram	15.23502, 104.86324
97	Wat Phra That Nong Bua	15.26333, 104.83901
98	Wat Pa Nong Lek	15.47918, 104.85792
99	Wat Nong Lak	15.65087, 104.68772

Step 7: Grouping of Tourist Attractions In this step, seven patterns of relevance were found that could be used to group tourist attractions, as follows:

1) Religious group: Refers to "historical" tourist attractions that are outstanding in terms of architectural buildings or constructions, which are buildings or constructions that have the appearance of Naga incorporated in various parts of the building or construction, or have stories of Naga related to the building or construction. There are 29 attractions in this group.

2) Geological group: Refers to "natural" tourist attractions that are outstanding in terms of natural formations resembling Naga, and also includes caves, islands, rapids, waterfalls, and water sources. Stories related to Naga are associated with these places. There are 32 attractions in this group.

3) Festival group: Refers to "cultural" tourist attractions that are notable for being places where festivals or traditions involving Naga stories are held. There are 32 attractions in this group.

4) Guru group: Refers to tourist attractions with stories about Naga related to encounters with Naga by gurus at those places. These stories have been disseminated and have become legends. There are 10 attractions in this group.

5) Urangkhathana group: Refers to tourist attractions mentioned in Urangkhathana legends, Phanom Thath legends, or related stories. There are 9 attractions in this group.

6) Mahorot group: Refers to "historical" tourist attractions that are outstanding for large (larger than average human size) Naga sculptures. There are 57 attractions in this group.

7) Arisakawan group: Refers to tourist attractions where tourists can make merit. All 99 attractions allow tourists to make merit at the sacred objects of the attractions.

Step 8: Designing the Tourist Route

1) Consideration of transportation routes: There are 3 airports in the Naga route area, namely Ubon Ratchathani International Airport, Nakhon Phanom Airport, and Loei Airport, and a nearby airport, Udon Thani Airport. These 4 airports can be used to help design the tourist route. 2) Consideration of transportation routes in conjunction with groups of tourist attractions: The attractions in each group identified in step 3 are geographically located in Google Maps to find attractions located within the boundaries of the tourist route pattern, considering the transportation in the previous step. The result is 9 proposed routes for the Naga belief route.

Step 9: Evaluation of (Draft) Tourist Route The study can present (draft) tourist routes following the Naga belief "Naga route". There are 9 routes, namely Arisakawan, Religious, Geological, Guru, Urangkhathana, Festival, Bunyaphisangkhan, Archaeological, and Kuhasthana. In the evaluation step of the (draft) tourist route, 2 activities are used, namely:

1) Trial tourism activity following the Naga belief "Naga route" in route 7 "Bunyaphisangkhan". This activity was held on September 9-11, 2023. The researchers evaluated the (draft) tourist route following the Naga belief "Naga route" in scene 7 "Bunyaphisangkhan" by group discussion with 6 sample tourists who traveled on this occasion. The conclusion from the group discussion is that all 6 trial tourists have the same opinion, that is, they are impressed with the organized route. When considering the potential of the tourist route, namely (1) Attractiveness of tourism (2) Access to tourist attractions (3) Facilities (4)

Accommodation (5) Activities (6) Travel routes connecting with other attractions, all 6 trial tourists have the same opinion, that is, the organized tourist route has interesting stories at every place, facilities, accommodation, activities are complete and meet the needs. In terms of travel routes connecting to other attractions, although some places are far apart, they do not feel tired because there are other activities such as stopping to eat, stopping to shop at various points along the way. However, in terms of access to some tourist attractions, it is difficult because the roads are not very convenient, coupled with some points where the internet cannot be used.

2) Activity of critiquing (draft) tourist route following the Naga belief "Naga route"

Conclusion of critiquing (draft) tourist route following the Naga belief "Naga route"

order	details	Confirm			Recommendation
		Agree	Refine	Disagree	
1	Asirakangwan	✓	-	-	Caution should be exercised when using words due to their delicate nuances.
2	Satsanakar	✓	-	-	One must exercise caution in the use of words due to their subtle nuances.
3	Tharani Santan	✓	-	-	One must exercise caution in the matter of word usage due to its subtle intricacies
4	Legendary sites	✓	-	-	-
5	Mythical sites	✓	-	-	Caution must be exercised in the matter of word usage due to its delicate nuances
6	Festivals	✓	-	-	-
7	Sacred pilgrimage sites	✓	-	-	One must exercise caution in the matter of word usage due to their subtle intricacies
8	Archaeological site	✓	-	-	-
9	Cave site	✓	-	-	One must exercise caution in the use of words due to their delicate nuances

Step 10: Presentation of the Tourist Route From the results of the study, the following tourist routes following the Naga belief "Naga Route" can be presented:

1: Arisakawan: This route is for making merit at sacred objects and Naga. The journey starts from Loei Airport to Ubon Ratchathani International Airport or vice versa. It includes a total of 99 attractions covering Naga belief attractions in 7 provinces.

2: Religious: This route includes attractions with architecture decorated with Naga in buildings and temples. The journey starts and ends at Ubon Ratchathani International Airport. It includes a total of 6 attractions, all located in Ubon Ratchathani province.

3:Geological: The journey starts and ends at Nakhon Phanom Airport. It includes a total of 10 attractions covering 2 provinces, namely Nakhon Phanom and Bueng Kan.

4:Guru: The journey starts and ends at Loei Airport. It includes a total of 4 attractions, all located in Loei province.

5:Urangkhathana: The journey starts and ends at Nakhon Phanom Airport. It includes a total of 4 attractions, all located in Nakhon Phanom province.

6:Festival: This route is different from others as it cannot be completed in one go but must be planned in advance to coincide with the festival times at various attractions. Therefore, the airport closest to the attractions can be chosen. It includes a total of 32 attractions covering 7 provinces in the "Naga Route".

7:Bunyaphisangkhan: This is a route following the Naga's characteristics. It is an attraction in the "Mahorot" group. The journey starts at Ubon Ratchathani International Airport and ends at Nakhon Phanom Airport. It includes a total of 14 attractions covering 4 provinces, namely Ubon Ratchathani, Amnat Charoen, Mukdahan, and Nakhon Phanom.

8:Archaeological: The journey starts and ends at Udon Thani Airport. It includes a total of 10 attractions, all located in Nong Khai province.

9:Kuhasthana: Most of the attractions are caves. The journey starts and ends at Ubon Ratchathani International Airport. It includes a total of 9 attractions, all located in Ubon Ratchathani province.

Discussion of Research Results

The study found 99 tourist attractions that passed the quality assessment criteria based on the 5A's theory. It is explained that quality tourist attractions must consist of 5 components (Australia, 2008):

- Attractions
- Accessibility
- Amenity
- Accommodation
- Activity
- Travel routes connecting with other attractions

All data was used to create tourist routes by grouping attractions that share the same core story. There are 9 routes in total, including:

Arisakawan: This route is for making merit at sacred objects and Naga. The data shows that there are 99 activities for making merit.

Religious: This route allows tourists to visit architecture decorated with Naga in buildings, temples, and shrines.

Geological: This route follows natural attractions such as Naga Cave and Naki Cave.

Guru: This route follows the traces of gurus who have stories about Naga and various teachings.

Urangkhathana: This route is for visiting attractions in the group of Urangkhathana legends, which have stories related to Naga.

Festival: This cultural tourism route includes annual festivals at various attractions and stories related to Naga.

Bunyaphisangkhan: This route follows attractions that have the characteristics of Naga, such as Naga of the birthday, Naga of the four clans, Naga of the Naga chief, Naga of the Naga Phibhop, Naga of the Urangkathana legends, and Naga sculptures larger than humans.

Archaeological: This route follows archaeological sites that have stories about Naga.

Kuhasthana: This route follows the belief in Naga, where most of the attractions are caves.

All 9 routes have the core belief in Naga, which aligns with Greffe, 1994, who stated that a tourist route is a route that combines various activities and attractions under one core story. It also aligns with Vipawan Pinkeaw, 2020, who stated that a tourist route is a way to guide tourists to interesting points at various attractions easily, safely, and enjoyably while gaining knowledge.

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