

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF TOURISM AND THE POSSIBILITY OF DEVELOPING ECOTOURISM IN THE MANNAI ISLAND AREAS, THAILAND

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In these years there are many tourists visiting to the quiet coastal town of Rayong, 210 km from Bangkok faces south onto the Gulf of Thailand to enjoy the marine sports. The Mannai Island, our study site locates in the east part of the Rayong Province. Therefore some tourists to the Rayong coastal town made a side trip to the Mannai Island. In this Island, Sea Turtle Conservation Station (STCS) is established for the biological study and conservation of sea turtles. The STCS has the educational exhibition of sea turtles and other marine endangered species such as dugongs and coral. The STCS is expected to be the facility for environmental education and suitable base of ecotourism in the future. On the other hand, there are some fishing villages and many fishermen are engaged in fishery. Fishery is important industry in Thailand especially in Rayong. Further growth of tourism can have a good impact on the social and the economic condition of local community, while it can be the threats to the natural environment and the sustainable use of marine resources. Under such situation, we are examining feasibility of "Ecotourism" in the Mannai Island areas.

Ecotourism consists of three components such as "tourism", "local community" and "natural environment". The positive participation of local community in the ecotourism is the most important for the success of the ecotourism. And the local community has a strong motivation to participate in the ecotourism since the community expects economic benefits from the ecotourism. Therefore, we firstly researched the current situation of tourism and local communities in the Mannai Island areas, and secondary conducted questionnaire survey of local's awareness of the present situations.

Almost tourists visited to the Rayong areas mainly for relaxation in nice climate and good nature. They had the various traveling patterns so that the amount of expenditure is also different according to the patterns. Many tourists indicated that the natural environment was not good since a large amount of garbage were left on the beach and in the sea. Regarding the awareness of the present economic situation, there is significant difference between fishery community and resort community. We estimated the difference was the reason why the fishermen concerned fishery.