

Major Tourist Attraction Sites and Tourist Activities in Hpa-an Township

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Abstract

The research paper focuses on major tourist attraction sites and tourist activities in Hpa-an Township that has religious and natural sites. However, most of the tourism sites have natural and religious features because Myanmar traditionally make religious features in sacred and peaceful places such as mountains, caves, and so on. Among the natural tourism sites of Hpa-an, Zwegabin is the most attractive place in the study area. The study area possesses several beautiful caves, but Saddan Cave is a major tourist attraction, and international visitors who come to Hpa-an usually go there. Sixty-nine percent of total tourists come to the study area for relaxation reasons for the purpose of enjoying naturally beautiful scenic views. The main objectives are to describe on the major tourist attraction sites, to present tourist attraction activities and to predict future prospects for the tourism development of Hpa-an. Primary data were mainly applied to the research. SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis is a framework used to evaluate tourist attraction sites.

Keywords: tourist attraction sites, tourist's activities, caves, natural landscape,

Introduction

Tourism is known as a multi-billion dollar industry regardless of the country's level of development (Bojanic & Lo, 2015). Tourism is an important driver of economic and social development and it stimulates local area development (World Bank Group, 2017 & Athanasopoulou, 2013). Tourism is also one of the most important economic activities in the world today (MoHT, 2017).

Eurocham Myanmar (2018) expressed that there is a high potential for tourism development with its diversity of landscapes, cultural sites, and ethnicities in Myanmar, and Myanmar possesses potential tourism sites (MoHT, 2017). According to WTTC (2018), Myanmar Travel and Tourism supported MMK 6,468.9 bn in 2017 (6.6% of GDP), is expected to grow by 5.4% to MMK 6,815.2bn (6.5% of GDP) in 2018 and is forecast to rise by 7.0% to MMK13,371.3bn by 2028 (7.0% of GDP). Pompa & Bissinger (2014) also said that Myanmar has emerged as a hot tourist destination, experiencing rapid growth in tourism.

Yangon (Formerly Rangoon) is the largest commercial city of Myanmar, and it is one of the places where tourists mostly arrive (Janeya, 2017 & Eurocham Myanmar, 2018). Due to different geographical backgrounds, there are many tourist attraction sites in Myanmar that have different attraction.

Kayin state has many natural tourist attraction sites such as mountains, hills, caves, springs, and waterfalls. Hpa-an Township possesses mountains attractive to tourists such as Mt. Zwegabin, Mt. Taung Wine, Mt. Kyar Inn, Mt. Mizan, and Mt. Hparpu. Among them, Mt. Zwegabin is a well-known mountain. It is the most attractive place for tourists. Nowadays, man-made tourist attraction sites have become popular and they are built with the intention of attracting tourists. Man-made tourist attraction sites include theme parks, museums, heritage centres, sports facilities, family entertainment centres, cinemas, cultural attractions, animal parks and shopping centres. The Hpa-an area has man-made tourism sites such as a night market and Chit Thu Myaing Park.

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Therefore, Hpa-an Township possesses natural and man-made tourist attraction sites that support the tourism sector, one of the major economic drivers in the country. Hence, Hpa-an Township was selected as a study area to present major tourist attraction sites and tourist arrivals from a geographical point of view.

The main objectives are

- to describe on major tourist attraction sites,
- to present tourist attraction activities, and
- to predict future prospect for the tourism development of Hpa-an Township

Study Area

The study area is located in the southeastern part of Myanmar, which is a continuation of the eastern highlands. Hpa-an is one of the townships of Kayin State occupying the southeastern part of the country. The capital of Kayin State is Hpa -an, a picturesque town. It is situated on the eastern bank of the Thanlwin (Salween) river.

It takes only a 5-hour drive from Yangon to Hpa-an and easy accessibility between Yangon and Hpa-an Township supports the tourism sector of Hpa-an. There are many activities such as visiting caves (pagoda), trekking, hiking, bird watching, especially bat watching, in the evening on a ship along the Thanlwin River, boat tours, visiting the markets and shopping, cycling, visiting ethnic minorities and others.

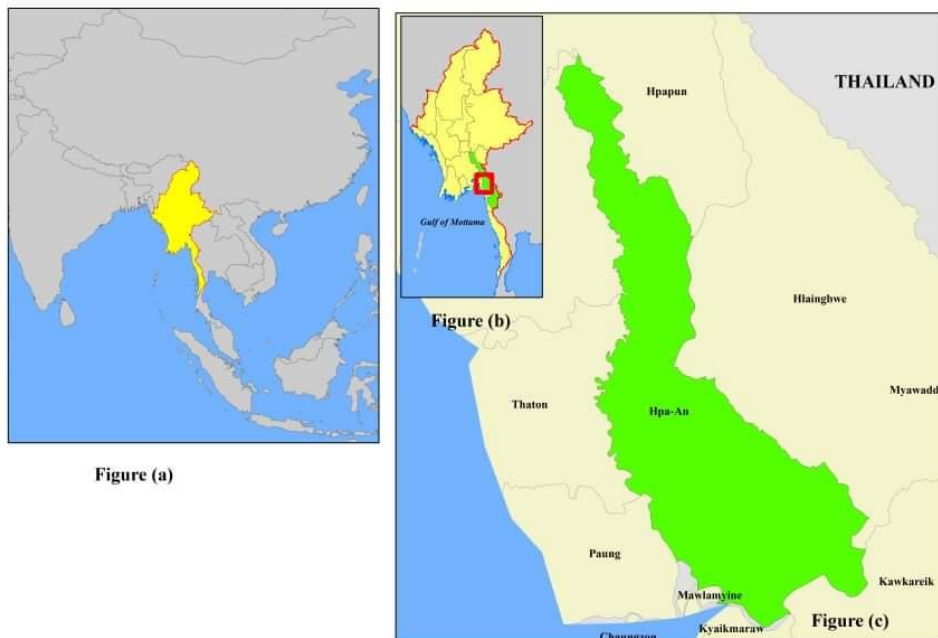


Figure 1: Location of Hpa-an Township in Myanmar

Source: Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2019

Methodology

Primary data were collected from both foreign and domestic tourists by using interviewing methods. To present the paper, interviews and questionnaires are used in data collection. The sampling size is 150 visitors in which 100 domestic tourists and 50 foreign tourists are included. Secondary data were obtained from libraries and departments concerned. Quantitative and qualitative methods were applied in analyzing the research work. In this

research, SWOT analysis was used for tourists' attraction sites. Graphical methods were used to present the situation of the tourism sector of Hpa-an Township.

Results and Findings

Hpa-an is located about 270 kilometers east of Yangon. Hpa-an possesses beautiful karst topography, and it is a pleasant place for international visitors and local pilgrimage.

Tourist Attraction Sites in Hpa-an

Swarbrooke(2001) wrote that tourist attractions are the core of the tourism industry. Hpa-an Township has many attractive sites. Tourists and visitors, as well as pilgrimages, usually go to natural sights such as limestone caves, mountains, and lakes. Therefore, caves are attraction sites, and Hpa-an Township possesses many caves, including Kawkathaung (Kawgun Village Tract), Saddan (Eindu Village Tract), Yathaebyan (Yathaebyan Village Tract), Kawgun (Kawgun Village Tract), Bayintnyi (Bayintnyinaung Village Tract), Lin-noe (Pahtut Village Tract), Htaungwi (Ward-8, Hpa-an Town), Aiksathaya (Naungpalein Village Tract), and Kywemin caves (Kawgun Village Tract). (Figure 2).

All caves possess beautiful stalactites hanging from the ceiling of a cave and *stalagmites* growing from the cave floor that are different from each other in size, shape, and colour that depend on the mineral content of the soil. All caves have Buddha statues showing Myanmar's traditional architecture. These caves are also natural ecosystems in which wildlife such as bats live. These natural features attract pilgrimages and tourists. The peak period for foreign tourist arrivals is between November and March and local tourists typically visit Hpa-an in holidays and weekends due to proximity to Yangon and ease of access.



Figure 2: Tourism Sites of Hpa-an Township
Source: Field Observation & GAD Data

According to the questionnaire results, the most popular tourist attraction sites are as follows:

In Hpa-an Township, there are 3 mountains that are well known in the tourism sector. They are Mt. Zwegabin and Mt. Pharpu, located on opposite side of the Shweyinmyaw Pagoda. Mt. Kyarin is located in Ward-1 and it is lower than Mt. Zwegabin. But, most tourists go to Mt. Zwegabin, a traditionally well-known mountain located in Hpa-an Township. Mt. Zwegabin is one of the well-known mountains in Kayin State and it is a prominent land mark of Hpa-an Township as well as Kayin State (Plate 1). 37 percent of domestic tourists and 43 percent of foreign tourists visit there (Table 1). The second most interesting place is the Kyaukkalal Pagoda, located in the middle of a pretty artificial lake, and it possesses a large piece of dramatic rock and a scenic pagoda.



Plate:1 Beautiful Views of Mt. Zwegabin
Source: <https://www.tripadvisor.com>



Plate:2 Beautiful Views of Kyaukkalal
Source: <https://www.tripadvisor.com>



Plate:3 Unique Sadan Cave
Source: Author (24.11.19)



Plate: 4 Unique Kawgun Cave
Source: Author (24.11.19)

It is also a very nice area for tourists. Twenty-two percent of domestic tourists and twenty-one percent of foreign tourists go to Kyaukkalal for recreation as well as to pay homage to Lord Buddha (Plate 2). Cave tourism is increasingly important as tourists are motivated to visit caves for their inherent natural landscape features. Caves are parts of nature or ecotourism sites that attract tourists from different parts of the world (Rindam, 2014). Among the caves of Hpa-an Township, Sadan Cave is one of the most popular tourist sites. (Plate 3). Twenty-one percent of domestic tourists and twenty percent of foreign tourists go to the Sadan Cave due to the unique landscape of the cave. Visitors will be pleasantly surprised because of the paintings of the Sadan Cave and the historical, religious and cultural architecture of Kawgun Cave are very interesting. There are lots of clay tablets on the walls of the rock cliff, and Buddha images are unbelievably and sophisticatedly carved on the walls and all the ceiling. Kawgun Cave is the fourth-most popular place for 10 percent of domestic

tourists and 5 percent of foreign tourists. Kawgun Cave has a unique beauty that attracts more domestic and foreigners (Plate 4).



Plate:5 Yathaypyan Cave

Source: Author (24.11.19)

Table 1 The most popular tourists' attraction sites in Hpa-an

Popular Sites	Domestic Percentage	Foreign percentage
Mt Zwegabin	37	43
Kyauk Ka Lat Pagoda	22	21
Sadan Cave	21	20
Kawgun Cave	10	5
Yathaypyan Cave	8	4
Others	2	7

Source: Field Survey (2019)

Yathaypyan Cave is the fifth major tourist attraction, and according to questionnaire result, 8 percent of domestic tourists and 4 percent of foreign tourists are interested in the nature and beauty of Yathaypyan Cave (Plate 5).

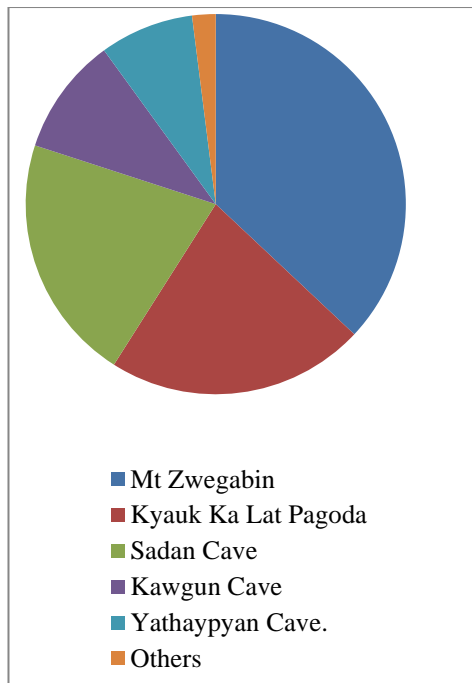


Figure 3 Domestic tourists' attraction sites in Hpa-an
Source: Based on table 1

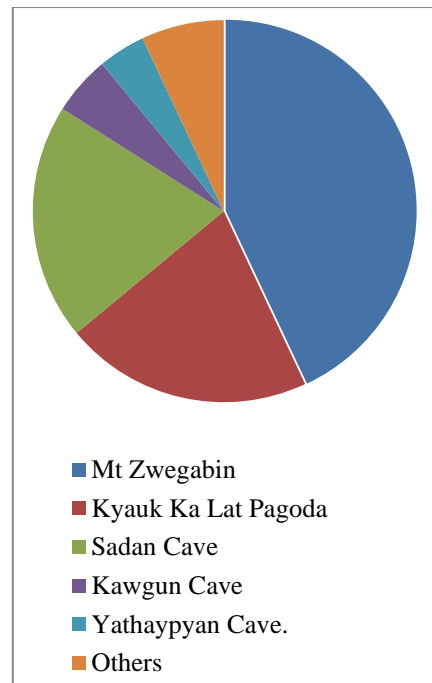


Figure 4 Foreign tourists' attraction sites in Hpa-an
Source: Based on table 1

SWOT analysis on the tourist attraction site in Hpa-An Township

The SWOT framework is credit to Albert Humphrey who developed the approach at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) back in the 1960s and early 1970s. SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis is a framework used to assess internal and external factors, as well as current and future potential.

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats affecting tourism in Hpa-an Township are as follows:

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitable climate/ attractive climate - Easy accessibility - Natural landscapes and cultural tourism sites - Safe and secure - Political stability - Friendly people - Local cuisine - Traditional religious architecture - Man-made tourism sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need for protection and conservation, - No air trip and no railway line, short length of stay - Human resource management - Potential environmental damage due to the absence of good visitor management - Pollution problem (waste and air pollution by bats)

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create new attraction sites and district attraction places - Tourist potential from Thailand, such as Myawaddy and Maesauk by car - Concentrated tourism sites - Ecotourism development - Special events and festivals (e.g., Kayin New Year festival) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Treat to the natural environment due to over- tourists and mass tourism - Increased competition from other tourism sites (e.g. Dawei or Mawlamyine) - Need conservation - Poor condition of earth roads - Wastes from construction, light, and noisy species, especially bats, live in untouched environment - Lack of notice board on the way to high mountains, caves ,and streams

Assessment on Tourist's Activities

Activities are one of the factors that pull tourists in. Attractions are often reinforced by special activities. Activities provide interesting or entertaining diversions for visitors. Activities enhance variety and can make a visit more enjoyable. The study area is a 5- hour drive from Yangon, which is the most attractive for foreign tourists. There are many activities such as visiting caves, trekking, hiking, bird watching, boat tours, visiting the markets and shopping, cycling, visiting ethnic minorities and others.

Many visitors travel around the study area by bicycle, auto-cycle bike, and small bus. There are several visitors taking a boat ride in Sadan Cave. Yathaypyan Cave is very beautiful for sunset views and attracts more tourists.

According to questionnaires, the highest activity is visiting caves, with 45 percent of total domestic tourists. This activity has the second highest percentage of foreign tourists, with 24 percent. For foreign tourists, the highest activity is trekking and hiking activities. It is 35 percent of total foreign tourists. This activity is second highest percentage of domestic tourists with 21 percent. Boat tours are a third activity for both tourists, with 12 percent (domestic) and 20 percent (foreign). Market visits and shopping are 12 percent of domestic tourists and 5 percent of foreign tourists. (Table 2). All tourists are satisfied with visiting the study area due to natural and cultural tourism, and they can do many activities at all tourism sites.

Table 2 Tourists activities in Hpan-an Area

Activities	Domestic Tourists Activities	Foreign Tourists Activities
Visiting caves	45	24
Trekking /hiking	21	35
Boat tour	12	20
Visiting the markets and shopping	12	5
Cycling	2	4
Visiting ethnic minorities	4	5
Others	4	7

Source: Field Survey (2019)

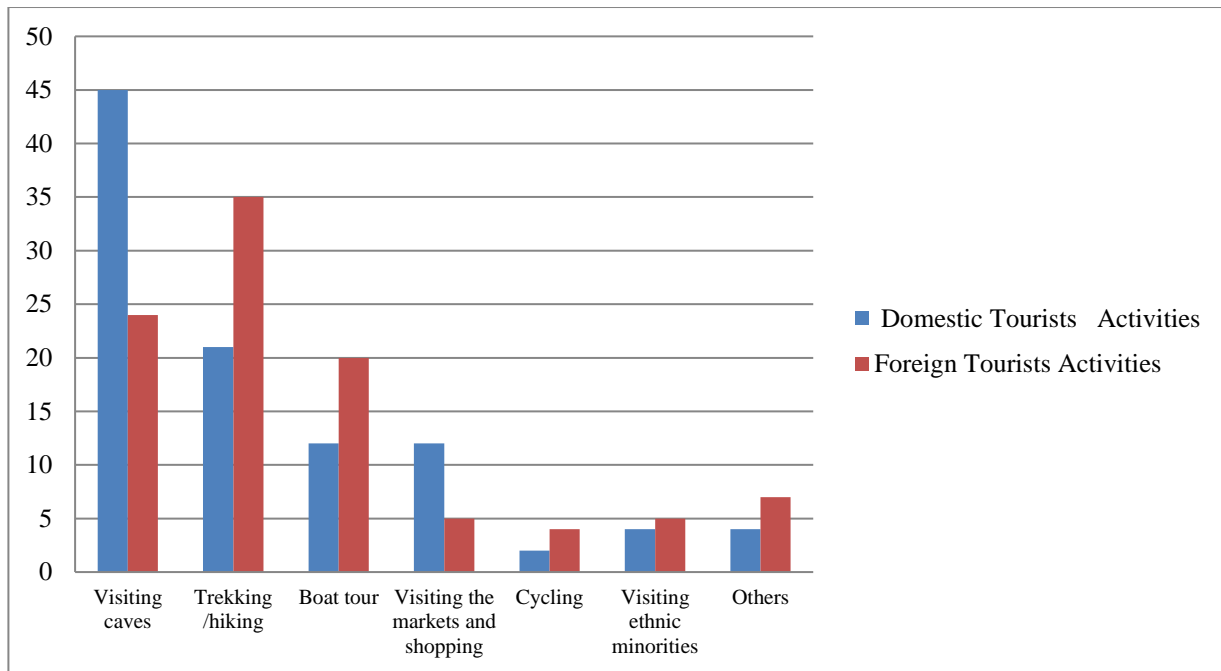


Figure 5 Tourists activities in Hpa-an Township

Source: based on table 2

Conclusion

Kayin State has massive potential for ecotourism and natural tourism. The areas surrounding the study area are gorgeous in terms of natural resources and unique culture and lifestyle. To develop tourism in these areas the involvement of the host community plays one of the vital roles.

Tourism is a booming global industry that supports economies of developing countries and is a profitable industry. Without attractive tourist sites, there would not be tourism development. Hpa-an Township possesses many potential natural, traditional and cultural tourism sites such as Kawkathaung, Saddan, Yathaebyan, Kawgun, Bayintnyinaung, Linnoe, Htaungwi (Ward-8, Hpa-an Town), Aiksathaya (Naungpalein Village Tract), and Kywemin caves. The activities of tourists are varied in Hpa-an Township. According to questionnaires survey, visiting caves ranks first among the other activities, with 45 percent (domestic) and 24 percent (foreign). Domestic tourists are interested in visiting the Pagoda within the caves, while foreign tourists are interested in the natural landscape.

The unique landform and karts' topography attract international tourists, and religious symbols within the caves and the beautiful land form do local pilgrimage. For attraction sites, respondents enjoyed the activities. Tourists' safety plays an important role in tourism development.

People's lack of awareness about tourism development has been identified as a weakness affecting this area's tourism development. Some caves are deteriorating, and they need maintenance to last a long time. Financial support is one of the needs for tourism development because it is needed for upgrading, maintenance, etc. To develop the local area through tourism, it is needed to produce local handicrafts, such as souvenirs produced in Hpa-an Township for the purpose of attracting tourists. It is also needed to maintain untouched wildlife species and unspoiled habitats and to conserve the existing cave environments that are natural and cultural tourism sites.

It is necessary to conserve, promote, and utilize the potential of tourism resources. To maintain and conserve the area, economic and technological elements should be planned to meet the need for the development of tourism in the area. Financial and technical assistance are also needed in training staff and teaching new skills. To fulfill the needs for tourism development and to conserve tourism sites, the tourism sector of Hpa-an Township will develop and support the local economy.

On the other hand, further research such as conservation, wild life habitat, local people's perception, authorities' opinion, etc., should be done to develop the tourism sector and tourism sites in Hpa-an Township.

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