

Center for Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM)

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba

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Case Study Name:	Integrated coastal management and sustainable tourism: A case study on the reef-based SCUBA dive industry from Thailand		
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Region:	Southeast Asia		
Country:	Thailand		
Ecosystem Type:	Coral reef, coastal marine		
Social Characteristics:	Coastal community		
Scale of Study:	Community, National		
Resource Type:	Tourism, ecotourism		
Type of Initiative:	Community initiative, environmental planning		
Community-Based Work:	Resource management, conservation		
Keywords:	Marine protected areas, coral-reefs, diving, impacts, communities, conservation, lessons, Thailand		

Summary:

Coastal ecosystems are amongst the most productive ecosystems in the world. Reef-based tourism, one of the multiple uses in coastal zones, has become more important in terms of magnitude and contribution to national economies as well as to the wellbeing of local communities. However, in the absence of proper controls and enforcement, unplanned tourism growth can cause environmental degradation and social and cultural conflicts which undermine the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry. The concepts of integrated coastal management (ICM) and sustainable tourism development (STD) have been proposed as the way forward in dealing with such constraints and pressure. Nevertheless, given the scale of tourism in the world's coastal zone, one of the greatest challenges faced by coastal managers is giving tourism development a proper place within ICM. This study provides insight into key issues confronting the management of reef-based dive tourism and proposes a way forward for sustainable dive tourism based on the frameworks of ICM and STD. Koh Tao in Thailand, which is well-known as the busiest diving center in Southeast Asia, was selected as a case study. Data collection was undertaken using a mixed social research method of surveys and interviews. The results show that the dominance of dive tourism over other land-based and marine-based sectors, a lack of government support, and a complexity of social factors have made the implementation of ICM and STD in Koh Tao nearly impossible. In response, the study suggests a new paradigm for the management of reef-based SCUBA dive tourism integrating the management and governance frameworks of ICM and STD with the voluntary management strategy and community-oriented approach. The study concludes that the internationally accepted management frameworks are not always transferable. Each locale must select or adapt appropriate strategies for its own needs considering the biophysical, socio-cultural and managerial settings.