

# A BRANDING OF MUAY THAI AND TOURISM IN THAILAND

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## Abstract

*Promoting Thailand as the leading tourism destination in the region of sports tourism targeting high potential segments such as sports tourism is one of the primary goals of the Thai government. The popularity of Muay Thai over the past decade has made “Muay Thai” a recognized sport around the world, it is also gaining interest from foreigners, especially in the Americas and Europe. From the potential markets from foreign tourists to Muay Thai, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand has expressed the branding of Muaythai and Thai tourism by developing more diversified and available products. Muay Thai products and services to attract an increasing number of tourists to muaythai. Conclusion that the strategic marketing of the Tourism Authority of Thailand which creates the brand loyalty of Muay Thai tourist fans is a fantastic strategy to get the tourists come back, visit and use the Muay Thai products and services again.*

**Keywords:** *Muaythai, Branding, Tourism*

## Introduction

Thailand is among the top tourism destinations in the world with its unique culture and natural offerings, its hospitality, and its location at the center of Southeast Asia. According to the assessment of Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) by World Economic Forum, Thailand was ranked #35 from 141 countries assessed and was particularly strong on Natural Resources (#16), Air Transport Infrastructure (#17), and Tourist Service Infrastructure (#21) (The Ministry of Tourism and Sport of Thailand, n.d.). Therefore, promoting Thailand as the leading tourism destination in the region of sports tourism targeting high potential segments such as sports tourism is one of the primary goals of the Thai government. This plan aimed to increase income from the existing sports infrastructure, and use sport tourism to help the promotion of awareness and interesting in sport and exercise among Thai people (Department of Tourism, 2015). In addition, the development of sports tourism is also encouraged by focusing on Thailand's own products to match the needs and behaviors of tourists. The target markets of sport tourism are mentioned with 5 special categories: 1/ natural sport tourism, 2/ man-made sport tourism, 3/ natural and man-made sport tourism, 4/ tourism sports events and 5/ traditional sports. Moreover, Thailand has enough of its own products and services to serve these potential target markets. Therefore, the awareness of products and services that need to

be met according to international standards and the marketing competitiveness of Thailand needs to be enhanced at the international level.

Traditional sport is a sport activity that has attracted tourists to visit or participate in and it is part of the way people live in the community, it is also an invaluable local community culture. Some traditional sports have gained popularity and become international sports today like Muaythai and it has become famous and popular all over the world. The popularity of Muay Thai over the past decade has made “Muay Thai” a recognized sport around the world, it is also gaining interest from foreigners, especially in the Americas and Europe. Additionally, live broadcasts of Muay Thai matches on television have boosted the popularity of Muay Thai throughout the country. This has made it possible for people to watch matches from home without traveling to boxing stadiums. Furthermore, Muay Thai is similar to a lifestyle, which has led to a new era of fitness centers and gyms that include Muay Thai courses. Muay Thai is the most calorie-burning form of exercise and it has been a new trend in sports training among many fan groups. With over 300 million practitioners worldwide, Muay Thai is the most popularly practiced and 'diet' sport on earth. Many Muay Thai training camps exist in Thailand and many foreigners want to learn Muay Thai. (Supachai & Samart, 2020).

From the potential markets from foreign tourists to Muay Thai, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports of Thailand has expressed the branding of Muaythai and Thai tourism by developing more diversified and available products. Muay Thai products and services to attract an increasing number of tourists to muaythai. Muay Thai Tours are being designed to suit tourists and their needs. There are many standard boxing stadiums that have been built up in the main tourist destinations such as Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Phang Nga, Samui, etc. At the same time these stadiums open Muay Thai courses suitable for foreign tourists, they can practice and also experience real matches with Thai fighters. Moreover, the camps have provided Muay Thai lessons and produced quality professional boxers. The camps also offer a gym in the same compound for the general public who want to practice Muay Thai for exercise, for weight loss and to enjoy it as a sport. Ancient Muay Thai emphasizes the practicality and survival unlike Muay Thai in the ring which is rather a sport. Certain techniques of ancient Muay Thai are prohibited in the ring, resulting in radical differences between the learning of Muay Thai and ancient Muay Thai. Ancient Muay Thai branched out into distinct groups based on the regions while the differences can be distinctively found in the Wai Khru rituals, walking styles, fighting tips and tricks as well as unique hand wrapping and binding.

Furthermore, Muay Thai themed accommodation is also a special product that the Thai Government has chosen that matches target market needs and the quality levels of competing products. Most of them are a simple hostel style that focus on comfort. There are private and shared rooms, as well as a gym for punching, kick-boxing and boxing equipment for use while staying there. In particular, luxury hotels provide a world-class fitness center that gives importance to Muay Thai. Guests can learn the basics of the sport, or perfect their technique with a professional trainer. From individual fitness training sessions to the Muay Thai Adventure Package, there's a class to suit every ability. It is the only innovative massage in the world that integrates the art of self-defense, including punches, elbows and knees to the amazing craftsmanship of muscle relaxation.

Muay Thai live show takes tourists back in time to experience the legend of Thai boxing from its history and its development, to becoming an art that protects the nation. Some Muay Thai souvenirs can be easily found in tourist destinations, especially in department stores in Bangkok; such as at ICONSIAM, the newest luxury department store on the bank of the Chao Phraya River with its ICONCRAFT zone; Siam Discovery has the Discover Thai zone; Absolute Siam Store, 1st Floor of Siam Center; Asiatique, as well as souvenir shops in major shopping areas frequented by international tourists. Besides this, another style of Muay Thai product is games, it is a reflection of the expansion of two aspects that has made Muay Thai become more known. When people play games, they become really interested in Muay Thai and come to train, or for those who already practice Muay Thai will have increased fun when they play a game because they already know and understand this sport. Not only this, Muay Thai in games has successfully created harmonious integration that has made the nation's culture spread to contemporary pop culture. Muay Thai does not only tell about the source that has roots in Thailand and is an effective martial art, but also informs about the culture under Buddhist philosophy; e.g., Wai Khru, paying respect to elders, dedication to masters, and auspiciousness that is difficult to publicize to people of different cultures to understand and accept.

Importantly, social media is powerful for a brand of Muay Thai because it creates two-way interactions between fans and brands. By social media, Muay Thai create a lifestyle and sense of community among fans. Especially, the Muaythai is currently attracted many people to the posts with 14,709,492 posts with the Hashtag #Muaythai (Muaythai, n.d.).

## **Conclusions**

Over the past 5 years, Thailand has seen phenomenal growth in its tourism industry, both on the number of tourists and on the income generated. It has become the world's 11<sup>th</sup> destination in terms of international arrivals, welcoming almost 40 million international tourists in 2019. Therefore, the strategic marketing of the Tourism Authority of Thailand which creates the brand loyalty of Muay Thai tourist fans is a fantastic strategy to get the tourists come back, visit and use the Muay Thai products and services again.

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