

POTENTIAL AND CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN DAWEI, MYANMAR

Zin Nwe Myint¹ and Frauke Kraas²

Abstract

Myanmar had been encouraging tourism since 1988 with the change to a market-oriented policy. To support tourism development, new tourism law and regulations had been established. After 2010, change in the political system gave more power to region and state governments to develop own economic profiles. High expectations to support economic development were set in tourism. Many regional governments encouraged the improvement of touristic infrastructure and sites s. Dawei, capital of Tanintharyi Region, and its surrounding area has great and almost yet underdeveloped touristic potential. It is among the most promising emerging touristic sites of the country. Against this background, this aim of the study is to examine the current situation of tourism development in Dawei in order to understand the potential and problems of further development. Empirical fieldwork is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative statistical data and field observation with predominantly used qualitative methods of 72 semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders from the tourism sector. Finally, an assessment of the current situation and recommendations for further sustainable tourism development of Dawei are combined.

Keywords: sustainable tourism development, Dawei, tourist potential

Introduction

According to UNWTO (2016) 104 million international tourists visited Southeast Asia in 2015. Tourism contributed over \$108 billion to the region's GDP and many international institutions emphasized the importance of tourism to poverty alleviation. However, international tourism rarely brings benefits to the local communities (Hampton et. al., 2017) as it is usually dominated by international hotels and service providers serving the mass tourism market (Scheyvens, 2011). Further, the way in which tourism development is driven by international tour operators, has contributed to widening regional disparities within the countries and regions. In recent years, concepts, policies and approaches to tourism development have started to change. Concepts of sustainable tourism are growingly gaining attention in tourism planning policies by many governments (Hanafiah et. al., 2016: 407). The United Nations defined sustainable tourism development as meeting the need of the tourists and host regions while protecting the opportunities for the future whereas resources should be managed in a way that economic, social, cultural, ecological and life support systems are properly maintained (2001: 12).

With the new government reforms after 2010, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism aimed to support the socio-economic development of local people and the local private sector in a sustainable and inclusive way. Tourism policies were adopted with the Responsible Tourism Policy in 2012 with nine major aims (MoHT, 2012: 8). The new approach seeks to manage tourism sustainably with the aim to combine maximised economic, social and environmental benefits with minimising costs to destinations. Encouraging economic growth, environmental sustainability and social justice alike were declared key targets of the new strategy. It focuses on the responsibility of role-players in the tourism sector and destinations in general to take action to achieve sustainable tourism development (MoHT, 2012: 4). The central government also gave new power to the governments of the states and regions to develop tourism sustainably (<https://tourism.gov.mm/mm/objectives/>).

¹ Dr, Professor, Department of Geography, University of Yangon, Myanmar

² Dr, Professor and Head, Institute of Geography, University of Cologne, Germany

Subsequently, the Tanintharyi Regional Government encouraged tourism development and organised numerous workshops to support tourism development in line with the government policy. Within the Master Plan for Tanintharyi Region, Kawthaung and Myeik were selected as main tourism areas. The supreme islands and beaches of Myeik Archipelago, with more than 800 islands, was selected for its richness in natural resources, corals and traditional cultures attractive to tourists (MIMU, 2014). Dawei and surroundings were designated as location of a new Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and deep sea port.

However, Dawei also has very high potential as prime future tourism destination. Reports and news media raise expectations that Dawei could most likely become a new magnet for international tourists as soon as the highway crossing border with Thailand were finished. More than 330,000 visitors had already passed through the border crossings of Tanintharyi Region in 2016 (Ei Ei Thu, 2018) out of which about 45,000 crossed via the Htee Kee border pass to Dawei (MoHT Dawei, 2017). Given its proximity to Bangkok, the world's most frequented urban tourism hub, and the established extended tourism corridor to Kanchanaburi, it is to be expected that international tourists visiting Thailand would extend their discovery to Tanintharyi Region via Dawei's Htee Kee border crossing.

Against this background, the main research questions are: (a) What potential does Dawei offer for tourism development? and (b) How can this potential be developed in a sustainable and inclusive way benefitting local people?

Aim of the study

The aim of this research is to examine the actual situation of tourism development in Dawei based on sustainable tourism development criteria. The objectives are: to examine the current situation of tourism development in Dawei, to explore the ecological and social potential for further tourism development of Dawei and to give suggestions for sustainable tourism development of Dawei that benefit the local societies.

Dawei: an emerging tourist area

Dawei is located at the southern coastal strip of Myanmar. It is the capital of Tanintharyi Region since 1974, 630 km (391 miles) away from Yangon by motor road, 16.6 miles north of the mouth of Dawei River. Dawei Township has an area of 4268.3 sq. km (1648 sq. miles) and is composed of 15 wards and 17 village tracts (Department of Population, 2017 and GAD, 2016). It has a population of 125,605 (Census 2014) and 136,783 in 2020 (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/>). About 64% of the population lives in urban area, mainly in Dawei.

Dawei's rich historical background dates back to the 11th century. Numerous ancient pagodas in and around Dawei are attracting domestic tourists. Dawei is also one of the main seaports in Tanintharyi Region, historically also an important trading port. Fishery is the main part of the economy. Additionally, many fishing villages along the coastline now become tourist attraction sites.

Methodology

The study is based on a mixed-methods approach with a strong qualitative social research focus. First, a preliminary investigation of available literature, statistics and reports and a first field visit in Dawei were made. Based on this, guiding questions for semi-structured interviews were created in order to conduct interviews with local stakeholders in tourism and authorities from local government institutions. Almost all hotel and guesthouse owners or managers were interviewed. Further in-depth interviews on potential and challenges of tourism development in the Dawei area

were conducted as second appointment with those willing to share their experience as key informants. Among them were the manager of a large hotel and vice-presidents of the Association of Local Tour Guides of Dawei, and owners of transport services and restaurants. Further interviews with chief authorities of the Tourism Promotion, General Administration and Immigration Departments focused on strategies and future trends of tourism development, with special attention on border and cross-border international tourism in relation with the border pass and town of Htee Kee. A total of 66 interviews were conducted during the third week of April 2017 and additional fieldwork with 6 interviews in late April 2019. All interviews were systematically coded and transcribed.

Out of the total, 17 interviews were made with domestic and international tourists. These interviews reflect the perceptions of the tourist on potential of Dawei. Based on this, a questionnaire survey was made for a better understanding of the perception of tourists on Dawei. The questionnaires were distributed in the largest seven hotels and two guesthouses with a request to the managers to distribute to their guests. In total, 47 questionnaires were collected and analysed. Finally, all primary data from field observation, interviews and questionnaires were used for a comprehensive SWOT analysis.

Potential for tourism development of Dawei

Attractions around Dawei

Dawei possess different types of tourist attractions, differently attractive for domestic and international tourists. Domestic tourists prefer to visit religious sites, some enjoy especially Maung Magan beach. For international tourists, the main attractions are the almost untouched tropical beaches, traditional handicrafts and Dawei town. Further, several ancient towns near Dawei are of interest to international and national archaeologists and historians. Some business tourists are connected with the emerging Special Economic Zone.

Shin Koe Shin Pagoda

Improved motor roads and security have allowed an increase of domestic tourists to Dawei attracted by the nine famous pagodas which names start with “*Shin*”. Domestic tourists believe that if they worship in all of these *Shin Koe Shin* pagodas, their wishes will be fulfilled (Interview-DW01, 2017). These nine pagodas are Shin Pin Khayu, Shin Moakhti, Shin Oak Aow, Shin Dat Wel Pagodas in Dawei Township, Shin Maw, Shin Tauk Htein, and Shin Zalon in Long Lon Township, Shin Tauk Pon and Shin San Taw Pagodas in Thayet Chaung Township and Yay Phyu Township (Maung Thar, 2017).

The most famous of these are Shin Moakhti Pagoda located south of Dawei, Shin Dat Wel Pagoda in the north and Shin Maw Pagoda located on a promontory south of Dawei. Lawka Tharaphu Pagoda, a 74-m long reclining Buddha, remains one of the most popular tourist destinations in Dawei. Myaw Yint Pagoda near the Maung Magan Beach, another popular tourist destination, is located in the centre of the island and was built by assembling huge rocks, making it extremely attractive to tourists. Each of these pagodas is unique and famous pagoda festivals during October attract domestic tourists (Maung Thar, 2017 and Interview-DW01, DW46, DW50, 2017).

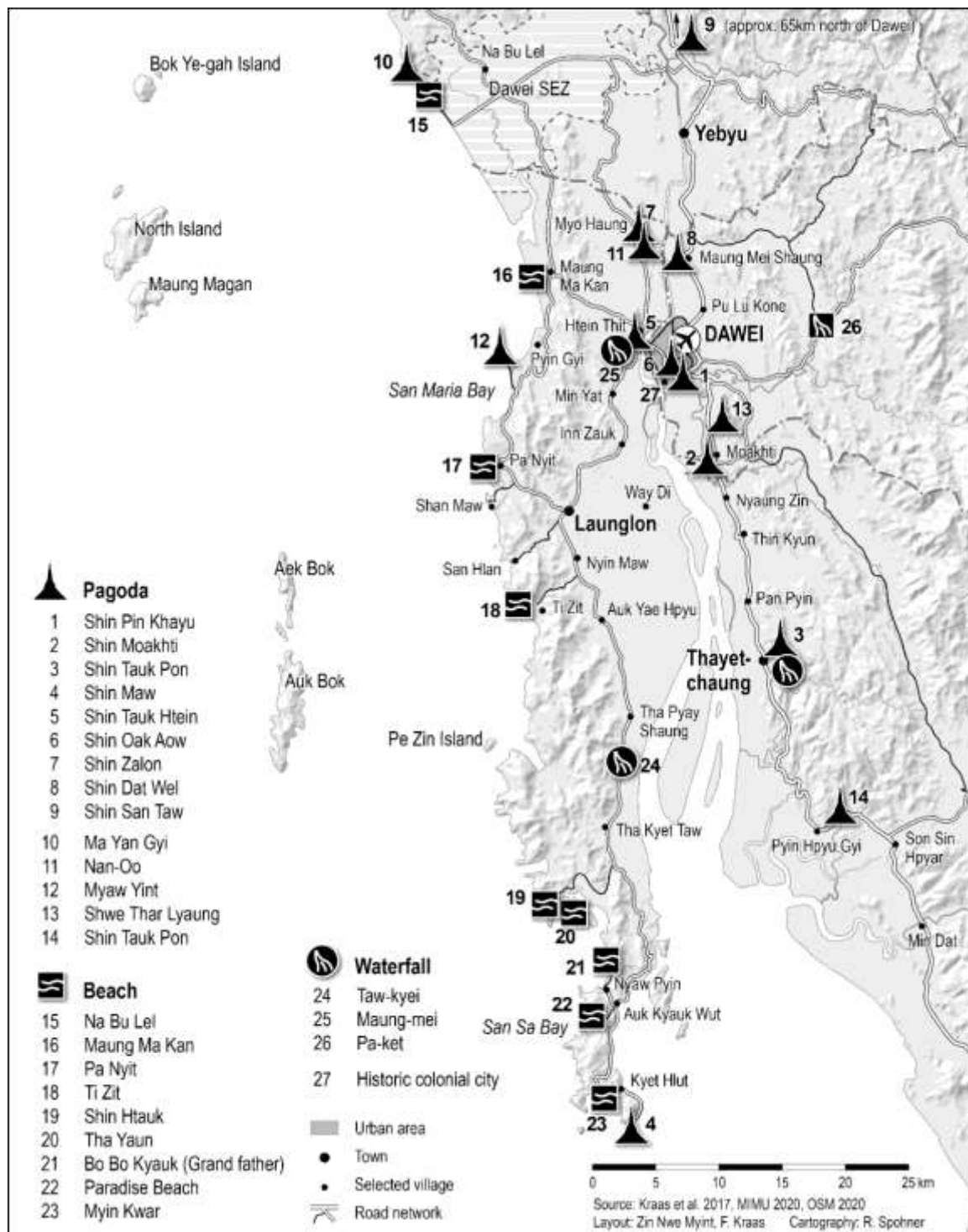


Figure 1 Tourist attraction sites around Dawei

Ancient towns near Dawei

The Dawei area has a long history, documented by ancient settlements which are now left as cultural heritage. They are not yet well known but are familiar to a limited extent to archaeologists and historians. According to Moore (2011: 4-5), the Dawei Cultural Zone stretches about 100 km in a north-south direction, from Aungtha Waddy to Thayet Chaung.

The largest ancient site is **Thagara**, known as *Myo-haung*, old city, which is located 11.6 km north of Dawei. It was included in a list of 47 ancient sites of Myanmar in 2012 (Kyaw

Naing, 2012). With an area of 281 acres, it has an oval-shaped walled site. It is densely populated inside the walls, while the area beyond the wall is primarily rice fields. Two main pagodas are situated within the walled area, Shin Zalon and Nan-Oo Zeidi. Until recently, Thagara was maintained as a very traditional town (Winn Myintzu et. al., 2019: 3). The pure lifestyle deserves very careful handling if opened to tourism, in order to not affect the local communities. Another ancient city is **Mokti**, dating back to the tenth to thirteenth centuries, located 9.6 km south of Dawei near Shin Moakthi pagoda. Its rectangular wall stretches about 800 m from east to west and north to south (Moore, 2011: 9). Once, it shortly functioned as port, under the protection of independent kings, courts, traditions of sovereignty and localism (Moore and Soe Thinkha, 2019: 150).

Apart from these two main ancient sites, five further, smaller ancient sites are scattered around Dawei peninsular. These are Min Yat (opposite Dawei town), Weidi (south of Min Yat at the head of the Dawei River estuary), Taungkwe (on the west side of the southern peninsula), Kyet-yet-twin (on the east side of the southern peninsula) and Thin Bone Kyun (on the east side of the southern peninsula) (Moore, 2011: 10). Stone and earthen artifacts have been found leading to the assumption that a lateritic culture flourished during the 16th to 19th centuries. These sites have minimally explored and potentially, these ancient sites could attract more international scholars and tourists to Dawei.

Beaches and islands near Dawei

Apart from the popular Maung Magan beach, dozens of untouched natural white sand beaches exist along the coastline near Dawei, particularly on the peninsula towards **Dawei Point**. Maung Magan beach, 12 km west of Dawei, has been a famous destination for domestic tourists for 40 years. Its white sand, the casuarina trees (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) along the long shore line, the shallow and gentle continental shelf that allows safe swimming and traditional fresh seafood restaurants at the beach are the main attractions of this place (DW66, 2017). A hot spring in Maung Magan village also attracts tourists.

Among many other splendid beaches, the white sand beach of Nabule lies 18 km north of Maung Magan. At its northern part a hillside pagoda allows beautiful scenery. San Maria Bay, about 45 minutes by car south of Maung Magan, is located on the road to Myaw Yint Pagoda. The pagoda's shrine is on a headland 500 m north of San Maria Bay, on a long footbridge to the sea, with beautiful scenery. Tizit Beach, further south beyond Dawei, can be reached on the way to Launglon village. A number of beautiful fishing villages lie by the wayside. Further south of Tizit, many small beaches and islands form a line on Dawei peninsula. The most beautiful among them are Grandfather Beach (Pho Pho Kyauk), Shin Htauk, San Sa Bay, Myin Kwar. Shin Maw Pagoda at the tip of the peninsula looks like the crowning glory. All the beaches are almost untouched. However, infrastructure is very limited and roads leading to the beaches are bad, also for the surrounding rural settlements and fishing villages. Very limited beach huts (like bamboo bungalows) are available as accommodation at some beaches. Most visited sites are Myaw Yit Pagoda and Maung Magan, Grandfather, Nabule, Paradise and Ti Zit Beaches (Interview-DW04, DW47, 2017).

Many islands of various sizes have ecologically rich landscapes with many diverse species of fauna and flora. Lounglone Bok Island and Pe Zin Island on the Andaman Sea are the most visited islands in Dawei. Tourists can engage in activities such as snorkeling, fishing and boat trips. The Moscos Islands are a string of small unpopulated islands about 15 km off the coast. Some of these untouched islands can be reached by boat from Maung Magan village even though their accessibility is as yet too limited (Interview-DW056, 2017).

Fishing villages

The numerous traditional fishing villages, such as San-Hlan, Pa-Nyit, Hsin-phyu-taing and Nyau-pyin Villages offer interesting insights for domestic and international tourists (Valentin, 2017).

Waterfalls

Several waterfalls, such as Taw-kyei Waterfall at Taw-kyi Village, Maung-mei Waterfall at K-myaw-gyi Village in Laung Lon Township, Tha-yet Chaung Waterfall, Pa-ket Waterfall at Pa-kari Village of Dawei Township and the 12 miles Waterfalls at Yay-phyu Township offer pleasant recreation sites (Valentin, 2017).

Dawei urban heritage

During colonial time, Dawei was known as Tavoy. In 1989, the city's name was changed to Dawei and the name of Tenasserin was changed to Tanintharyi Region (GAD, 2016). In the old parts of Dawei town interesting colonial architecture, with many old wooden, thatch-roofed bungalows and brick and stucco mansions can be explored. This authentic urban heritage is an attractive asset for domestic and international tourists. Further, the lively Central and Mingalar Markets are of interest to tourists.

Cultural museum of Dawei

A new cultural museum, opened in November 2015, displays cultural and many ancient Pyu artifacts excavated from ancient sites. Traditional handicrafts from the Dawei area such as the making of mats, pipes, wooden shoes, traditional customs and dances etc., are explained and displayed. Until April 2017 no entrance fees were collected. Then 200 Kyats were charged for domestic visitors (rising to 300 Kyats in 2019) and 5000 Kyats for international tourists. If international tourists want to visit the museum, they need to contact tour guides. In 2017, between 100 and 180 international tourists per month visited the museum (Interview-DW45), in 2019 already between 200 and 250 visitors per month were registered (Interview-DW112, 2019).

Traditional crafts

Particular interests especially to international tourists are sites where traditional crafts are produced (DW106 to DW111 in 2019). Most attractive because of their uniqueness and rarity are the many cashew nut, cheroot and fish cracker factories in Dawei. Local potteries, weaving (especially local *loungyis*), wood carving and wooden boat-making sites are also of great interest. Furthermore, tourists can explore the production of brooms, wooden shoes, sunshades and grass-mats. While in many parts of the world traditional handicrafts have been replaced by the industrial fabrication of goods, often using substitutive materials, here local crafts-persons still preserve and use their skills.

Dawei SEZ

In 2008, the plan to establish a Dawei Special Economic Zone (DSEZ) north of Dawei was introduced and a Memorandum of Understanding was signed with Thailand. The development was halted in 2013. In 2015, it was then transformed into a trilateral project between Myanmar, Thailand and Japan (Blank/Efron/Migacheva, 2019). In October 2019, the Myanmar government invited international investors, such as from Singapore, India, Malaysia, Thailand, China, South Korea, Vietnam and Australia (Aung Loon, 2020). After completion, the DSEZ is expected to be one of the largest industrial parks in Southeast Asia, eight times larger than Thilawa SEZ (with 196 sq. km). DSEZ is located on the northern bank of the Dawei river estuary, about 630 km south

of Yangon and about 138 km west of the Myanmar-Thailand border at Baan Phu Nam Ron. Thus, it will be linked via Bangkok with the Eastern Seaboard (Thailand) and further the Phnom Penh to Ho Chi Minh axis (Isono/Kumagai 2013). Dawei Deep Sea Port is part of the SEZ development project. DSEZ and its port has a huge potential to attract more business tourism to Dawei.

Dawei and Kanchanaburi: Sister Cities

Due to improving accessibility, more people are crossing the border in both directions. In order to mutually tap economic opportunities, it has been proposed that Dawei and Kanchanaburi should co-develop as Sister Cities along the 160 km Phu Nam Ron – Dawei route. If this proposal is approved, the route would connect Dawei Deep Sea Port at the Andaman Sea, which might become one of the largest ports in the region, via a land bridge with Laem Chabang Deep Sea Port at the Gulf of Thailand (<https://www.go-myanmar.com/dawei-tavoy>).

Arrival of tourists in Dawei

All interviews with travel and tour companies, hotel and guesthouse owners, restaurants and cafés underline a remarkable, accelerating number of tourist arrivals since 2011 and even further after 2015. The peak times of arrival of domestic tourists usually over the Thingyan (water festival) period, during which all hotels, guesthouses and monasteries in Dawei are completely occupied by tourists. As this is one of the longest holiday periods in Myanmar, people from different parts of Myanmar visit Dawei – which is too far away from central Myanmar for most travelers to access during shorter holiday periods. About 500 to 850 45-seater buses usually arrive in Dawei during the *Thingyan* period. The second peak season for domestic tourists is during the Christmas holidays and the Thadinkyut festival period in October (Interview-DW16, DW47, 2017). The number of domestic tourist to Dawei increased about three times during the last couple of years due to improved motor roads and security (Interview-DW16, DW16, 2017 and DW106, 2019). The Ministry of Hotel and Tourism in Dawei (Dawei MoHT) had estimated the number of domestic tourist to Dawei has obviously increased, about 10 times, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Arrival of domestic tourists to Dawei

Year	Total Arrival
2013	7116
2014	15824
2015	29004
2016	60426
2017	88164
2018	79608
2019	69493

Source: MoHT, Dawei, 2020

The number of foreign visitors in the Dawei area has constantly increased over the last few years: while 12,025 foreigners arrived in 2013, the numbers increased to 58,853 in 2015. The highest numbers of arrivals are counted during the dry season between November and April. The majority are foreign individual travelers (FIT) while package tourists are very rare (Myitmakha News Agency, 2016). According to a news report, 65% of both local and foreign tourists prefer to visit the beaches, 30% prefer eco-tourism and only 5% pilgrimage (Ei Ei Thu, 2018).

As the Htee Kee border gate is relatively close to Bangkok, international tourists use the improving connectivity to Dawei. According to Dawei MoHT, international tourists entering Myanmar from the Htee Kee border gate increased from 42,224 in 2014 to 46,896 in 2015. Compared to Myeik and Kawthaung, Dawei is the nearest access point to Yangon so that especially Thai tourists choose Dawei as initial destination (see Table 2) before traveling to the country's religious and commercial capital, Yangon, from where they can continue to classical tourist sites in central Myanmar (Ei Ei Thu, 2018).

Table 2 Arrival of Thai visitors via Htee Khee border gate from May 2013 to 2018

Months	Year					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
January	nil	1160	433	1117	853	958
February	nil	1232	602	1306	535	686
March	nil	1101	395	1409	667	744
April	nil	732	449	1522	888	706
May	65	492	479	1191	660	1093
June	216	585	740	661	546	477
July	723	637	383	541	485	413
August	576	632	514	357	538	438
September	830	689	613	511	400	545
October	844	751	499	434	643	814
November	1217	1397	691	600	722	1073
December	1077	728	1060	864	821	884
Total	5,548	10,136	6,858	10,513	7758	8831

Source: Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, Dawei District, 2017, 2019

Since 2015, caravan tours have also been allowed by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MoHT). To date, staff from Dawei MoHT have guided more than 40 caravan trips that passed through Dawei. The number of caravan cars varies from one to 15 cars in one tour. Normally, they stop at hotels due to the lack of proper places with required infrastructure for caravans halts (Interview-DW01, 2017).

Accessibility

Dawei can easily be reached by motor roads, rail, air and water-way. The national high-way from Yangon via Mawlamyine and Dawei to Kawthaung connects Dawei with other destinations in the north and south. Dawei can be accessed from various parts of Myanmar by motor road. The distance from Dawei to Yangon (564 km) usually takes about 11 hours by express bus, from Dawei to Myeik about 8 hours, further to Kawthaung another 14 hours. As the motor road has been much improved during the last few years, far more domestic tourists than in previous years travel to Dawei. During the dry season of 2016-2017, 310 buses from Yangon to Dawei and further from Dawei via Myeik to Kawthaung were organised by 29 travel associations. Due to the upgraded roads and modern highway buses with advanced technology travel time has been much reduced in recent years (Interviews-DW04, DW26, 2017 and DW11, 2019).

The Yangon-Dawei railroad runs parallel to the motor road, ending at Dawei. It was constructed in 2005 and completed in 2006. For the distance of 628 km, the travel time from Yangon to Dawei takes about 27 hours (Kyaw Naing, 2012) which is beyond convenience for both international and domestic tourists.

By water, there are two routes, northwards from Dawei via Mawlamyine to Yangon and southwards from Dawei via Myeik to Kawthaung. Speed boats are running southwards on a daily basis by private companies. These are used by considerable numbers of passengers in order to reduce the travel time (Kyaw Naing, 2012). Further, daily flights connect Dawei with Yangon, and also with Myeik and Kawthaung.

Dawei lies relatively close to the border with Thailand. A constantly improved motor road connects Dawei in the east with Myitta town and with the border town of Htee Kee. Its trade centre at the border opened in March 2013 (DW01 and Dawei MoHT, 2017). Even if the distance between Dawei and Htee Kee is only 160 km (97 miles), travel time in the dry season is between five and six hours by car due to the road conditions. From Htee Kee trade centre the road to Bangkok – running via Phu Nam Ron and Kanchanaburi (1.5 hour drive) to Bangkok (further 2.5 hour drive by car) – is more convenient. Four buses per day run from Kanchanaburi to the border town of Phu Nam Ron. Motorbike taxis are also available here. From **Dawei to Thailand**, daily minibuses to Htee Kee can be booked through most hotels and guesthouses in Dawei (<https://www.go-myanmar.com/arriving-and-departing-over-land>).

Accommodation

Until 1995, there was only one guesthouse in Dawei. After the government began to encourage tourism development and with the improvement of motor road conditions and security, tourist arrivals to Dawei gradually increased, especially in the last few years. Until 2012, three hotels with a total capacity of 61 rooms were opened (Kyaw Naing, 2012). By 2020, with increasing numbers of hotels and guesthouses, the total room capacity had increased to 614 rooms (Table 3). Additionally, some guesthouses under the license of the Township Development Committee, had up to 15 rooms of various sizes (Dawei MoHT, 2017).

Moreover, many domestic tourists usually stay at monasteries free of charge or for a little donation to the monastery. During Thingyan holidays (April), all the monasteries in Dawei are completely crowded and even some schools have to be used as accommodation for visitors (Interview-DW01, DW30, 2017).

Table 3 Number of hotels and guesthouses in Dawei in 2020

Year	Hotel	Guest House	Total number of rooms
2013	2	nil	90
2014	8	1	358
2015	8	1	358
2016	10	2	432
2017	10	4	461
2018	11	4	483
2019	11	5	503
2020 July	14	6	614

Source: MoHT, Dawei, 2020

Food services

A special touristic asset in Dawei is its own traditional food culture. Among the many restaurants and café, most are below standard for international visitors, even though some restaurants started to upgrade their services in the 1990s. Also, most of the restaurant owners usually expect domestic tourists (Kyaw Naing, 2012); which is still true in recent years for the majority of the restaurants (Interview-DW101, 2019). With further improvement efforts of hotels and guesthouses, higher standards of food services are gradually reached and some high standard restaurants opened after 2015 (Interview-DW16, DW22, 2017) and in 2019 already five were explicitly recommended (Interview-DW101, 2019).

Infrastructure

The most important need for tourism development in Dawei is sufficient and reliable electricity supply. In 2017, the price of electricity in Dawei was 300 Kyat per unit, whereas in Yangon it was 50 Kyat per unit. In consequence, most of the hotels and guesthouses cannot reduce room rate as they have to pay for expensive diesel engine for electricity supply. Some guesthouses cannot supply 24 hours electricity but only until 9:00 or 10:00 p.m.. Restaurants also face difficulties to store food appropriately (Interview-DW59, DW65, DW66, 2017).

Furthermore, the problem of shortages in water supply during the dry season and in some part of Dawei urban areas was mentioned. Also the sidewalks and internal roads are narrow and partly in bad situation which often is causing road accidents (Interview-DW47, 2017).

Security, tourism policies and tourism governance

Security being among the most important issues in any tourism development, since several years Dawei is safe for tourists for any place to visit. Although very limited number of tourism police (only four) are existing, the whole area is safe for tourists from threat or crime. Local communities and voluntary groups also care for the tourists especially at Maung Magan Beach (Interview-DW27, DW48, DW65, 2017 and DW106, 2019).

A particular problem is the unclear tourism policies on the national level and the regional (Tanintharyi Region) and local levels. Unclear sharing of responsibility between the regional and national governments creates numerous problems, such as in respect to functional processes, like the extension of hotel licenses, which are difficult, time consuming and cumbersome. Even though the Tanintharyi Region Tourism Development Committee organizes the procedures, a lack of information and deficits in power sharing processes and functionality of hinder decision making (Interview-DW15, DW50, DW56, 2017).

Divergent understanding of “zoning” in tourism planning create problems and gaps between government authorities, business people, tour guides and local environmentalist (Interview-DW50, 2017). A lack of basic zoning for types of tourist planning and infrastructure in Dawei leads to coordination problems, such as lacking construction guidelines for hotels and guesthouses or the establishment of proper waste management systems. Responsibility among different institutions drives local people into taking the initiative in waste management (Interview-DW56, 2017).

Discussion: Potential and challenges for tourism development in the Dawei area

Tanintharyi Region as a whole has, as discussed, huge potential for tourism development. Since the government and the private sector have started cooperation, these potentials have been explored and gradually expanded (Thiha Ko Ko, 2019). However, for sustainable tourism development, a comprehensive plan and proper guidelines are needed for the whole Tanintharyi

Region. Building upon these, further specific place-based management plans are needed for each local area, such as Dawei, Myeik and Kawthaung. Like in many tourism studies, a systematic SWOT analysis provides a deeper understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, built on which feasible suggestions for more sustainable tourism development can be established. An initial systematic SWOT analysis for tourism development in Dawei shows numerous unique assets (Table 4).

Table 4 Assessment for sustainable tourism development of Dawei

Components of tourism		Strengths (internal)	Opportunities (external)	Weaknesses (internal)	Threats (external)
Attractions	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural and untouched beaches • Famous Shin Koe Shin Pagodas • Colonial buildings/ urban heritage • Ancient cities • Traditional fishing villages • Hot spring • Water falls • Rich biodiversity • Mangrove ecosystems • Coral reefs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many potential eco-tourism sites • Strong community participation and desire for tourism development • Functioning local business community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge on environmental conservation • Skills in the tourism sector • Lack of budget in local communities • Preparedness of the local people • Lack of linked touristic offers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deforestation • Depletion of biodiversity • Growing socio-economic disparities • Mistrust in local government institutions • Land grabbing
Accessibility	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good north-south motor road connections • Rail connection with Yangon • Frequent waterway connections • Airport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dawei deep sea port and SEZ • Close to border with Thailand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delay in construction of Dawei SEZ • Road connection to Thailand not yet optimal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertain foreign direct investment (both in tourism and industry) • Possible dependency on foreign investment
Accommodation	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing number of hotels and guesthouses • Increasing level of quality in accommodation • Reputable monasteries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest by business people in investing in hotel sector • Qualification of good tour guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively high room rates (in Myanmar in general) • Low standards of accommodation • Little collaboration between hotel and guesthouse owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicting land use: DSEZ versus tourism • Potential loss of tourism market
Infrastructure	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved motor roads • Improved airport and port facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closeness of border to Thailand • Establishment of Dawei SEZ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient electricity supply • Water supply problems in dry season 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No or low investment in Dawei SEZ

Components of tourism		Strengths (internal)	Opportunities (external)	Weaknesses (internal)	Threats (external)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved connectivity of railway 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protests by local people on many construction sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dominance of foreign investors
Human Resources	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendliness and hospitality of local people Thai language skills in the population University of Dawei can support upgrade of knowledge and skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return of migrant workers with foreign skills Cultural closeness to Thailand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low command of English language Low level of skills and experiences in the tourism sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of local workers because of labour migration to other countries Neglect of local population in land compensation and fair share
Government/ Institutional policies	•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong willingness from government for tourism development Strong commitment of local administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouragement from government for tourism development Increased power of regional government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inconsistency of policies between local government institutions Slow administrative procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change of policies if incompatible Adoption of irrelevant policies

Method source: SWOT method based on Gutierrez et al. (2005). Data source: Interviews with local institutions, experts and (inter)national tourists in 2017 and 2019, additional phone interviews in 2020.

As tourism development in Dawei mainly depends on natural landscapes, such as beaches and forests, eco-tourism bears high potential. In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the area, proper protection and conservation of the environment should be given top priority in capacity-enhancement programs for community participation and in the establishment of a responsible tourism development strategy.

Detailed operational guidelines are also needed, to provide baselines for the types of boats and vehicles to be licensed to transport tourists and to promote locations for community-based tourism. Safety should be fully guaranteed in all respects. Procedures for emergency cases – like boat accidents, health-related emergency care etc. – should be prepared efficiently. In all cases, competent management is essential (Si Thu Aung Myint, 2019).

The involvement of communities is particularly crucial to the success of tourism development while the implementation of responsible tourism and residents' attitudes may directly affect the development of the tourism industry. However, the central principle of community participation in planning tourism development has proven difficult to achieve (Hanafiah et al., 2016). For proper responsible tourism development with community participation, part of the profit must be used to upgrade the living standard of the local people. Local people should be given priority with job opportunities.

Conclusion

Myanmar is encouraging tourism to be a major component of the state economy. New laws, rules and regulations have been established and now a responsible tourism policy has been adopted with the goal of fostering sustainable tourism development. Residents play a pivotal role as primary stakeholders in tourism development. Local community support is the key element of any successful tourism development – as tourism planners and other authorities engaged in the tourism industry have to be concerned with the communities' views on development plans. However, listening to the local people's perceptions and desire in planning processes for tourism development is yet very rare in Myanmar. This should be changed in the future to allow mutual benefits for both local people and investors – and to achieve long term sustainable development. Further detailed studies are needed for Dawei to ensure sustainable tourism development with community participation.

Acknowledgement

This research paper was derived from a field excursion of fourth year geography students to Dawei in April 2017 and a further research stay in April 2019. Many thanks go to the organisers of the field excursion and to Daw Khin Moe Moe Aye (Lecturer, Geography Department of the University of Yangon) and Dr. Kyaw Naing (Associate Professor, Geography Department of Dawei University) for their support during the fieldwork. Special thanks go to all the interviewees who gave their time for the interviews and to all the authorities who supported us.

References

- Aung Loon (2020) The development of Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ) expected to be delayed due to the outbreak of COVID-19. [<https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/development-dawei-sez-expected-be-delayed-again.html>] (accessed on 8.4.2020)
- Blank, J., Efron, S., K. Migacheva (2019): "The Project May Serve the Nation - But What About Us, Who Live Here?". Villagers' Views of the Dawei Special Economic Zone, an Internationally Funded Infrastructure Project in Myanmar. Santa Monica.
- Department of Population (2017) The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Tanintharyi Region Report, Census Report Volume 3-F. (https://www.dop.gov.mm/sites/dop.gov.mm/files/publication_docs/dawei.pdf)
- Ei Ei Thu (2018) Dawei poised to become major tourist destination in Myanmar. Myanmar Times, 25 January 2018. [<https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/dawei-poised-become-major-tourist-destination-myanmar.html>]
- Isono, I., S. Kumagai (2013) Dawei revisited: Reaffirmation of the importance of the project in the era of reforms in Myanmar. ERIA Policy Brief. Jakarta.
- Kyaw Naing (2012) Geographical Assessment on the Potential Ecotourism Sites in Dawei District, Tanintharyi Region. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Geography, University of Yangon, Yangon/Myanmar.
- Maung Thar (2017) Dawei Shin Koe Shin. New Light of Myanmar, 9 May, 2017 Newspaper (in Myanmar Language)
- Hanafiah, M.H., Azman, I., Jamaluddin, M.R., Aminuddin, N. (2016) Responsible Tourism Practices and Quality of Life: Perspective of Langkawi Island Communities. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 222, pp. 406 – 413 [DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.05.194]
- Moore, E. (2011) Dawei Buddhist culture: a hybrid borderland. *Myanmar Historical Research Journal*, Vol. 21, June 2011, pp.1-62. [[https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/12179/1/Dawei_Thagara_MHRJ_2011_\(21\)-EMoore.pdf](https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/12179/1/Dawei_Thagara_MHRJ_2011_(21)-EMoore.pdf)]
- Moore, E. (2011) The Early Buddhist Archaeology of Myanmar: Tagaung, Thagara, and the Mon-Pyu Dichotomy. [<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/2793577.pdf>]
- Moore, E., Soe Thainkha (2019) The Ancient City of Mokti in the Tenth to Thirteenth Century CE Bagan Period. *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 149–84 [DOI: 10.1355/sj34-1e]
- Myitmakha News Agency (2016) Number of foreign tourists visiting Dawei rises this year. February 24, 2016. [<https://www.globalnewlightofmyanmar.com/number-of-foreign-tourists-visiting-dawei-rises-this-year/>]

- Si Thu Aung Myint (2019) Tapping the tourism potential of the Myeik Archipelago.
(<https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/tapping-the-tourism-potential-of-the-myeik-archipelago/>)
accessed on 19-7-2020
- Thiha Ko Ko (2019) Government calls for sustainable tourism investments in Tanintharyi.
(<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/govt-calls-sustainable-tourism-investments-tanintharyi.html>)
- United Nations (2001) Managing Sustainable Tourism Development. ESCAPE Tourism Review No. 22. United Nations Publication, ST/ESCAP/2141, Bangkok.
(http://www.unescap.org/ttdw/publications/tpts_pubs/pub_2265/pub_2265_ch1.pdf)
- Valentin, A (2017) Baseline Assessment and Responsible Tourism Strategy for Tanintharyi: Balancing the future of Tanintharyi's tourism development. (<https://chm.cbd.int/api/v2013/documents/F7636AF4-F0E7-CAAE-ED0A-CE0E9F3A7F9C/...pdf>)
- Winn Myintzu, Soe Thainkha and E. Moore (2019) Traditional Design in an Ancient Village of Tanintharyi. Nakhara: Journal of Environmental Design and Planning, Volume 17, pp. 1-24. [<https://ph01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/nakhara/article/view/215713/152985>]
- <https://www.mmtimes.com/business/24492-tanintharyi-tourism-committee-to-draft-master-plan.html>
- <https://tourism.gov.mm/mm/objectives/>
- <http://www.gad.gov.mm/en/content/data>
- <http://www.thaibizmyanmar.com/en/thai-myanmar/Non-paper%20-%2025%20Jan%202018%20-%20Overview%20of%20Tanintharyi%20Region.pdf>
- <https://www.go-myanmar.com/arriving-and-departing-over-land>
- <https://www.daweiinformation.com/copy-of-see>
- https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Infographic_TanintharyiRegionProfile_UNHCR_June2014.pdf