

Community Storytelling and Narrative Practices in Tourism: A Case Study of Ban Laem Homestay, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand

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Abstract

This study examines the current uses of storytelling in tourism activities and explores community needs for developing and deploying narratives to support creative tourism management, using Ban Laem Homestay, Tha Sala District, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand as a case study. A qualitative research design was employed, drawing on in-depth interviews and participant observation.

The research findings reveal that storytelling plays a crucial role in shaping the tourism experience of Ban Laem by conveying the community's identity, way of life, and collective memory. The narratives employ real-life characters such as fishermen, cooks, and community leaders, which enhances both narrative fidelity and coherence. Natural settings, including mangrove forests, canals, and coastal mudflats, serve as shared storytelling spaces. The sequence of activities, from welcoming guests and engaging in local crafts to reflecting on community values through mangrove planting, forms a coherent structure that demonstrates strong potential for development into an integrated tourism narrative.

The community also articulates several capacity-building needs, including training in language use and audience-appropriate communication, intercultural communication through English, systematic narrative structuring, and the strategic use of stories for marketing and community-based destination branding. Overall, the findings suggest that storytelling is not merely a vehicle for transmitting experiences; it constitutes a valuable cultural resource that can be purposefully cultivated to enhance the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of community-based tourism.

Keywords: Storytelling in tourism, Narrative structure, Performative experience, Creative tourism

Introduction

Community-based tourism (CBT) has gained increasing global and national attention as a sustainable approach that not only generates economic benefits but also promotes local learning, preserves cultural identity, and fosters community participation in development processes (Tolkach & King, 2015; Suansri, 2003). Unlike mass tourism, CBT emphasizes direct engagement with the host community, where visitors can experience everyday life through participatory and immersive activities such as local cooking, agricultural practices, traditional ceremonies, and handicraft making. These experiences reflect local wisdom and

strengthen the connection between visitors and place through lived cultural encounters.

In the contemporary tourism landscape, Pine and Gilmore's (1999) Experience Economy framework emphasizes that tourists no longer seek mere products or services but meaningful, memorable experiences that engage them emotionally and intellectually. Tourism has therefore shifted from mere "visiting" to active "participation" and "immersion," aligning with the principles of community-based tourism, which encourages visitors to take part in the daily life and cultural practices of the host community rather than simply observe them.

In this context, storytelling and performing arts play a vital role in creating immersive tourist experiences. Storytelling conveys the community's history, way of life, and values through well-structured and emotionally engaging narratives. Meanwhile, performing arts, such as local music performances or cultural reenactments presented through interactive demonstrations, enhance authenticity and liveliness. These activities allow participants to connect more deeply with the stories and engage in experiential learning. Examples include tourists cooking local dishes while listening to family stories, taking part in local rituals or festivals, participating in craft demonstrations, or watching and joining in traditional music and performances. These experiences go beyond entertainment, fostering understanding and a deeper emotional connection with the local culture.

Although creative tourism has been widely studied for its role in generating participatory and transformative experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Smith, 2015), research has tended to focus on tourist perspectives rather than the narrative and performative processes emerging from the community itself. There remains a critical gap in understanding how local communities construct and perform their own stories as a means of managing tourism experiences and articulating cultural meanings for visitors.

In the context of Thailand, the Ban Laem community in Tha Sala District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, serves as an exemplary case of a community rich in both cultural and natural resources. These include traditional fishing practices, local culinary arts, mangrove reforestation, and the distinctive lifestyle of Muslim fishing communities. However, existing research has yet to provide a systematic understanding of how the community employs storytelling in its tourism activities, who the storytellers are, what forms of narratives are used, and how these stories create truly participatory and immersive experiences for visitors. In addition, questions remain regarding the community's interest, readiness, and capacity to develop narrative-based tourism experiences that are both meaningful and sustainable.

This gap highlights the need for community-centered research that examines the roles of storytelling and performance in creating participatory experiences. Accordingly, this study aims to explore the current

conditions and needs of the Ban Laem community in utilizing storytelling for tourism management, in order to analyze how tourism activities can generate emotional and participatory experiences for visitors.

This study carries significance for several academic fields, particularly within the contexts of creative tourism and performing arts studies. It demonstrates how storytelling and performance can be applied to create engaging and emotionally meaningful tourist experiences, thereby addressing an existing gap in research that often focuses solely on tourists' experiences. Moreover, the study integrates multiple theoretical frameworks, including Narrative Theory, to analyze the structure and characteristics of narratives used by communities to convey their culture and way of life.

From a practical standpoint, the research findings can inform the design of storytelling content and tourism activities that align with local contexts and respond to visitors' interests. The application of performance and storytelling facilitates performative experiences that encourage visitors not only to observe but also to participate and connect with the community's lifestyle and culture. This approach enhances experiential value, strengthens the community's distinct identity, and promotes sustainable competitiveness in the quality tourism market.

Research objectives

1. To examine the current conditions of storytelling practices in the tourism activities of Ban Laem Homestay.
2. To investigate the community's needs regarding the use of storytelling in community-based tourism management.

Research methodology

Data collection methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach. Data were collected using the following methods:

(1) In-depth interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow informants to share their stories, experiences, and opinions related to the use of storytelling in tourism. The semi-structured format enabled flexibility for probing and elaboration on key points raised by participants.

(2) *Participant observation*

The researcher participated in various tourism activities as a tour leader and participant, such as mud play, local cooking demonstrations, tie-dye making, and mangrove planting. This method allowed the researcher to observe behaviors, interactions, and the atmosphere of storytelling practices in natural settings.

Research area

The study was conducted at the Ban Laem Homestay Mangrove Conservation Community Enterprise, located in Ban Na Thap, Village No. 7, Tha Sala Subdistrict, Tha Sala District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. This community is known for its mangrove conservation-based tourism that emphasizes local participation. The site is famous for activities such as mud play, local cooking, tie-dye production, and hosting visitors on floating rafts in the mangrove area.

Key informants

The key informants consisted of 15 members of the Ban Laem Mangrove Conservation Community Enterprise, representing diverse roles such as community leaders, youth, elders, religious leaders, kitchen operators, cooking demonstrators, fishermen, and other individuals involved in tourism activities. Purposive sampling was applied to select participants who play a direct role in tourism management and can provide rich insights into the use of storytelling from multiple perspectives.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis. The steps included:

- (1) Transcribing interviews and organizing field notes.
- (2) Repeatedly reading the data to gain a comprehensive understanding.
- (3) Coding the data to identify meaningful units and patterns.
- (4) Interpreting and analyzing the data using concepts from Narrative Theory to explain the structural and functional elements of storytelling found in the community's tourism practices.

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was applied by cross-checking data from interviews and participant observations. Member checking was also

conducted by sharing preliminary findings with community leaders to validate interpretations.

Literature review

Understanding the role of storytelling in community-based tourism management requires consideration through multiple theoretical frameworks. Storytelling is not merely a linguistic act that communicates experiences, but a fundamental human structure used to construct meaning about the world and social relationships. In the case of Ban Laem Homestay, Nakhon Si Thammarat, storytelling plays a crucial role in creating images, transmitting identities, and managing tourist experiences. To explain this phenomenon, theoretical perspectives from Narrative Theory, Narrative Paradigm, Narrative Identity, as well as concepts related to place branding and performative storytelling are essential.

Bruner (1991) proposes that human beings construct reality through a “narrative construction of reality,” where stories serve to organize experiences and connect seemingly fragmented events into coherent and meaningful wholes. Storytelling therefore becomes a tool through which communities can explain their world and convey it to others, not only in terms of information but also through emotions, beliefs, and underlying values. In the context of Ban Laem, for instance, the narrative of a fisherman who recalls, “This used to be a sandy beach. When I was a child, I would come here to play and lie on the sand,” does more than record the history of a place. It transforms the landscape into a “landscape of memory,” one that visitors can access through imagination and shared emotional experience. Such narratives go beyond geographical facts, opening dimensions of meaning that cannot be perceived through sight alone.

Fisher (1984) expanded on this idea by introducing the Narrative Paradigm, which views human beings as *homo narrans*, or “storytelling animals.” Storytelling serves as a universal mode of communication that spans across politics, religion, and tourism. Fisher emphasized two key evaluative criteria: narrative coherence, which refers to the internal consistency of a story, and narrative fidelity, which concerns its truthfulness to lived experience. In Ban Laem, the community's narratives hold strong credibility because they are grounded in real life. For

instance, Bang Thaksin's story of his transformation from an illegal worker into a community tourism leader illustrates both coherence and fidelity, allowing visitors to believe and appreciate community-based tourism on a deeper level.

From the perspective of identity construction, Polkinghorne (1995) described emplotment, the process of organizing events into a meaningful story, as central to narrative understanding. The plot structure of Ban Laem's tourism experience typically begins with a welcoming ceremony on the raft, develops through participatory activities such as tie-dye making, reaches its climax in the lively mud play, and concludes with reflective moments like mangrove planting. This sequencing allows tourists to experience not a series of isolated activities but a cohesive "woven story" in which they take an active role. Storytelling in Ban Laem therefore operates not only as oral narration but also as a form of experiential design that aligns with human perception and emotion.

Foroudi et al. (2016) further noted that storytelling helps construct narrative identity, a self-concept shaped through the stories one tells and performs. In Ban Laem, Bang Thaksin's personal transformation story symbolizes the community's collective narrative identity, demonstrating resilience and renewal through tourism. This story functions like a biographical brand, reflecting the community's determination, hope, and potential. Tourists thus encounter not only individuals but also the evolving identity of the entire community.

According to Saraniemi and Komppula (2019), storytelling plays a pivotal role in place branding, as it not only conveys the external attributes of a destination, such as its scenery or attractions, but also shapes the "mental image" that visitors construct. Stories about local cuisine, curry pastes, tie-dye fabrics, and mud play that embody joy and abundance form essential components of Ban Laem's tourism brand. These narratives allow visitors to perceive the community's identity and to appreciate the cultural meanings embedded in its food and crafts. Storytelling, therefore, is not a supplementary element of the experience but a central mechanism in shaping place identity, deeply intertwined with local people and culture.

Garanti et al. (2024) broadened this perspective by introducing the concept of sustainable place branding, in which storytelling not only fulfills tourists' expectations

but also helps preserve cultural and environmental values. In this sense, storytelling functions both as an attraction and as a means of conservation. In Ban Laem, activities that incorporate stories, such as cooking, natural-dye tie-dye making, and therapeutic mud spas, serve as more than forms of entertainment. They express the community's identity and cultural continuity. Through these performative narratives, the community builds both external and internal branding grounded in the principles of sustainability.

Urry and Larsen (2011), in *The Tourist Gaze*, argued that tourists do not merely see places; they look through "social and cultural frames" that determine what is worth seeing. In this sense, storytelling in Ban Laem frames tourists' perception. For example, recounting the transformation from a sandy beach to a mangrove forest helps visitors see beyond the scenery to understand the area's ecological and historical changes. Storytelling thus functions not as simple description but as a tool of perception and interpretation.

Additionally, Kusumah and Andrianto (2023) introduced the concept of narrative crafting and storytelling techniques, emphasizing that storytelling is not limited to verbal communication but encompasses actions, performances, and multisensory experiences. It includes using sensory stimuli to describe place, creating emotional connections with local figures, demonstrating cultural practices, and using cultural artifacts as narrative media. Ban Laem clearly applies these ideas through Bang Man's singing, local cooking participation, and direct involvement in mud play. These performative acts not only convey information but create "shared experiences" in which audiences become participants and co-performers. Such performative storytelling enhances enjoyment, emotion, and lasting memory.

Luo and Huang (2023) also highlight the performative power of storytelling in shaping a sense of place. Their study shows how performances, songs, and dramatized rituals connect identity, production, and visitor experience through four circuits—production, representation, consumption, and identity. These performances create authentic cultural meanings and strengthen emotional attachment to the place. Applying this framework to Ban Laem clarifies that local songs and dramatized actions, such as those performed by Bang Man, serve not only as entertainment but also as

cultural branding that reinforces the community's coastal Muslim identity. Storytelling, therefore, becomes both cultural performance and place-making, linking emotion, identity, and sustainability.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives reveals that storytelling at Ban Laem Homestay operates on multiple levels: constructing narrative identity, ensuring narrative fidelity and coherence, organizing experiences through emplotment, reinforcing place branding, and generating performative and participatory experiences. These narratives allow tourists not only to understand the place but also to feel part of its story, carrying these meanings beyond their visit and sharing them within wider cultural and social networks.

Therefore, the theoretical framework affirms that Ban Laem Homestay is more than a site of community-based tourism. It is a living narrative space in which storytelling functions as a mechanism for meaning-making, value transmission, and sustainable development.

Empirical finding

1. Storytelling and narrative techniques in Ban Laem Homestay tourism

Community-based tourism in Ban Laem Homestay, Nakhon Si Thammarat, is characterized not merely by the presentation of natural resources or local products but also by the presence of storytelling that conveys ways of life, beliefs, history, and people's emotional attachment to place. These stories serve not only to communicate information but also to evoke emotions, meanings, and mental imagery for visitors. This aligns with Narrative Theory, which views stories as fundamental structures of human experience (Bruner, 1991) and as a means by which people construct meaning and communicate with others.

When examining the storytelling practices within Ban Laem Homestay through the components of narrative structure, several key features emerge that reflect the current conditions of tourism management.

(1) Characters and storytelling through real lives

The heart of storytelling in Ban Laem Homestay lies in the use of real community members as narrators. Villagers are not merely tellers of stories but are authentic owners of lived experiences intertwined with inherited memories and beliefs. The presence of "living

characters" distinguishes Ban Laem's narratives from academic or exhibition-style presentations. These stories carry genuine voices, emotions, and sincerity that visitors can directly perceive, echoing Bruner's (1991) concept of narrative as a basic framework through which humans make sense of the world. The villagers' storytelling is thus not just the transmission of information but the re-creation of meaning that connects past, present, and future.

The story of Bang Thaksin vividly illustrates a narrative of life transformation from involvement in illegal work to becoming a leader and founder of the community tourism enterprise. His story constructs the narrative identity of Ban Laem, representing not only a personal journey but also a symbol of social change. Tourists who listen to his story often perceive a sense of moral inspiration and value in sustainable choices. Such experiences embody Fisher's (1984) notion of narrative fidelity, which asserts that a story's truthfulness to lived reality fosters trust and acceptance among audiences.

Meanwhile, Ka Nee, Ka Da, and Ka Sopa offer another dimension of narrative, presenting stories grounded in everyday life and family wisdom. Tales of local cuisine, clay spa treatments, and tie-dye production are conveyed not only through words but also through embodied performance. Tourists engage with all their senses by smelling local herbs, tasting homemade food, and touching and dyeing fabrics. These are "embodied narratives" in which visitors become part of the story through hands-on participation. When tourists grind curry paste or tie fabric strings, the community's past transforms from distant history into a shared lived experience woven between hosts and guests.

Bang Man adds further depth to the community's storytelling through the use of music and song. His compositions, such as "Ban Laem Homestay" and "Ao Thongkham (Golden Bay)", act as "narrative performances" that vividly evoke scenes of local life and coastal landscapes. Even visitors who do not directly take part in activities like mud play or mangrove planting can still connect emotionally through the songs. As Bang Man explained, "My songs help them see the picture. Some tourists don't go into the mud, but when they hear the song, they can still imagine it." This illustrates how artistic storytelling not only preserves

memory but also opens new pathways for people to access and connect with experiences.

On another level, Jubai and Bang Don represent the behind-the-scenes figures whose narratives reflect dedication and continuity. Although not always in the spotlight, they are the ones who maintain the raft, repair facilities, navigate the boats, and introduce the mangrove ecosystem. Their stories exemplify a narrative of commitment, revealing the unseen labor that sustains the rhythm of tourism and reinforces its authenticity. During boat rides, their explanations of mangrove species and marine creatures integrate ecological knowledge into the visitor experience, fostering greater awareness and appreciation of environmental conservation.

The integration of these diverse voices makes Ban Laem Homestay a site of “polyphonic narrative”, a story told through multiple community perspectives rather than a single narrator. These stories possess narrative coherence, a continuity of experience, and narrative fidelity, an authenticity that resonates with the audience. Together, they form a living narrative that communicates, inspires, and strengthens visitors’ emotional connection to the place.

Ultimately, the living characters of the community are the heart of Ban Laem’s storytelling. They are not actors but embodied witnesses who transform their lives and memories into meaningful stories. Their storytelling is not a mere act of narration but a process of creating shared experience between storyteller and listener. This dynamic represents the essence of Narrative Theory manifested in the practical and performative context of community-based tourism at Ban Laem.

(2) Setting: From physical landscape to a landscape of memory

The setting of Ban Laem Homestay is more than just a backdrop to tourism activities; it is animated, agentic, and actively participates in narrating the place to visitors. Mangrove forests, tidal mudflats, tidal channels, the sky, and the sea breeze all serve as co-narrators that invite guests to interpret the interconnections among people, the sea, food, and livelihoods in meaningful ways. Activities such as “Sipping Coffee with the Sunrise” are not simply about serving coffee but about crafting a sensory experience in

which morning light, aroma, and the atmosphere attune participants’ senses to absorb the community’s stories.

Viewed through Bruner’s (1991) framework, such staging guides visitors’ movement from a landscape of action, which includes hands-on activities such as paddling, mud play, and mangrove planting, toward a landscape of consciousness where they begin to grasp the value of mangrove conservation, recognize mud as a symbol of fertility, and connect fishing livelihood to the community’s sense of dignity. As the physical setting changes with each activity, it becomes more than a site; it functions as a dynamic process that invites visitors to co-interpret and co-create meaning alongside the community.

The boat gliding along the canal serves not only as a means of transportation but also as a storytelling stage. The boatman, such as “Taam Gif,” guides passengers to observe various mangrove species, turning the journey into a living narrative that gradually unfolds with the boat’s movement. The floating raft, where guests are welcomed and meals are served, functions as a ritual space that reinforces the sense of community and generosity. Tasting local dishes such as ‘Khao Niao Sangkhaya’ (sticky rice with custard) and ‘Khao Man Kaeng’ (rice with curry) allows visitors to experience the community’s culinary stories in tangible, multisensory ways.

These scenes also reflect communal memories. For example, Bang Don said, “This used to be a sandy bay. There was a beach here. I used to walk and flirt with girls right here.” Such stories transform the landscape from a physical environment into a space of memory that holds both personal experiences and the collective remembrance of the community. The transformation from sandy beach to mangrove forest thus represents not only natural change but also a narrative of adaptation and survival.

In another register, the setting operates as a performative space. Tourists do not merely listen; they enter the mud with Bang Don, co-demonstrate cooking with Ka Sopa, or co-dye fabrics with Ka Nee. The setting is thus not only narrated but animates the narrative through participants’ embodied actions, resonating with performative storytelling where space and deed generate narrative force.

The setting arrangement of Ban Laem serves as a strategic device for constructing a sense of place and

expressing values of collaboration and hospitality. The boat and canal reflect the community's deep connection with the sea and its commitment to conservation, while the mudflat symbolizes joy and abundance. Through the deliberate use of these settings, Ban Laem is remembered not just as a natural attraction but as a meaningful landscape that visitors carry with them and retell long after their visit.

Therefore, the settings in Ban Laem Homestay function as "co-narrators" that transform tourism into a meaningful experience. Visitors are not just observers or listeners but active participants in a living landscape, where their engagement enriches the community's stories, making them more authentic, compelling, and powerful.

(3) Plot: From life events to an activity structure

The plot at Ban Laem Homestay is not authored by a playwright but emerges from the arrangement of lived experiences into a structure that visitors can follow and co-enact. The story is a trajectory of activities sequenced in time: welcoming on the raft, sunrise coffee, boating through channels, hearing about the former sandy beach, mud play, and mangrove planting.

When viewed through Bruner's (1991) framework, these plot structures clearly reflect a narrative progression from beginning to development, climax, and closure. The story begins with the introduction, where visitors get to know the community through a welcoming ceremony. It develops through hands-on learning activities such as cooking or fabric dyeing. The climax emerges during the lively mud play, filled with laughter and the creation of shared memories. Finally, the narrative closes with reflective acts such as mangrove planting, symbolizing a commitment to the future and harmony with nature.

An analysis based on Freytag's Pyramid reveals that the storytelling structure of Ban Laem follows a clear narrative arc. It begins with the exposition through welcoming activities and introductions to the community. The rising action unfolds through hands-on experiences connected to local ways of life. The climax occurs during the mud play, where collective joy and emotional engagement peak. The falling action takes place through conversations and reflective exchanges, while the resolution emerges in the act of planting mangroves, symbolizing the community's hope for the

future. Thus, the plot functions not only as a sequence of activities but as a meaningful storyline that integrates emotion, participation, and cultural symbolism.

Interestingly, the narrative structure of Ban Laem is not fixed but flexible, adapting to the participation of visitors and changing environmental contexts. For instance, Bang Don often recalls the former sandy beach when passing the area that holds his youthful memories; Tam Gif shares stories about the storm disaster that led to the community's relocation to its current site at Ban Laem; while Ka Nee demonstrates tie-dye techniques whenever guests express interest. These examples reflect Polkinghorne's concept of "emplotment", in which storytelling serves to organize experience, transforming scattered events into coherent and meaningful narratives.

Consequently, visitors are not passive recipients but co-plotters, shaping each performance through questions and practice. While no two narratives are identical, a shared arc remains: a journey from sensorial contact with nature toward grasping the value and meanings of conservation and communal life.

(4) Themes: Meanings woven into the narrative

The thematic structures of storytelling at Ban Laem Homestay are not accidental but have evolved through the community's long-standing coexistence with nature. These interwoven narratives embody deep values for both storytellers and listeners. Viewed through Narrative Theory and Fisher's framework, these themes act as structures of meaning that link experience with value, transforming Ban Laem tourism from a commercial activity into a site of learning and inspiration.

a. Conservation as the foundation of community resilience and sustainability: Stories about mangrove forests, coastal mud, and the release of berried crabs transcend ecological data to become lived practices. Visitors are not taught through complex academic terms but are invited to feel and understand through sensory experience. What may seem like simple mud play becomes an encounter with ecological abundance, as one local remarked, "The mud has no smell. Our people just play freely." Such genuine accounts illustrate narrative fidelity by reflecting real community experiences that naturally inspire belief and emotional connection.

In addition, stories about planting mangroves or releasing berried female crabs serve as meaningful conclusions to the journey. When tourists take part in planting trees or releasing crabs, they are not simply engaging in recreational activities but are participating in a “story of conservation” that the community has created. By integrating these actions into the narrative structure, tourism at Ban Laem not only reflects the past and present but also opens the door to a shared future.

b. Generosity and coexistence as sources of peace: Stories from elders about sharing food during hard times or helping one another in difficult fishing seasons highlight that survival is a collective effort. This same ethos extends to how guests are received. Hospitality here means sharing rather than service. Storytelling thus preserves and passes on a culture of generosity, allowing visitors to feel the community’s warmth and spirit.

c. Transformative life change as growth and strength: Bang Thaksin’s journey from illegal labor to conservation-based tourism transcends the personal to become a shared story of hope and resilience. Behind the smiles and joyful activities lies a story of struggle and renewal, one that empowers both storytellers and listeners with the belief that change is possible.

d. Identity and pride as foundations of community: Stories of local cuisine, curry pastes, tie-dye fabrics, and fishing life demonstrate that Ban Laem is not just a coastal community but a place of unique cultural value. Every dish and handmade fabric embody inherited wisdom and collaboration between people and nature. Pride is expressed not through boasting but through hands-on practice that invites visitors to take part.

Together, these four themes— conservation, generosity, transformation, and identity— shows that storytelling at Ban Laem is not merely a sequence of events but a structure of meaning that shapes how visitors perceive and interpret their experiences. In comparison with Fisher’s framework, these narratives demonstrate both narrative fidelity, as they align with the lived realities of the community, and narrative coherence, as they are organized with structure and continuity. As a result, visitors not only receive these stories but also believe in them and share them with others.

For instance, stories about mud, once regarded as dirty, have been redefined at Ban Laem as symbols of fertility and joy. When paired with hands-on

participation, these stories become memorable experiences that visitors often recall and retell, saying that “Ban Laem is where mud is not dirt, but life itself.” Similarly, stories of the vanished sandy beaches that have transformed into mangrove forests help visitors recognize environmental change and appreciate the importance of conservation.

From an academic perspective, these themes are more than subtopics of storytelling; they constitute structures of meaning that shape how tourists perceive and interpret their experiences. Having clear thematic foundations allows the narratives of Ban Laem to extend beyond individual listeners, spreading through networks of retelling and reinforcing the community’s identity and sustainable tourism brand.

Values of storytelling and interpretation

Storytelling at Ban Laem holds multidimensional value that extends beyond tourism promotion. At the emotional level, stories foster empathy and a sense of belonging, allowing visitors to connect personally with the community’s struggles and aspirations. At the cultural level, storytelling functions as a medium for transmitting local wisdom, religious beliefs, and ecological ethics rooted in the Muslim coastal worldview. The interpretive process transforms tourism into an act of cultural learning where visitors gain awareness of sustainability and shared responsibility.

For community members, storytelling provides reflective and transformative value and it enables self-recognition, pride, and collective empowerment. The act of narrating personal experiences (such as Bang Thaksin’s transformation or Bang Man’s songs) strengthens local identity and preserves intangible heritage through performance and memory. These interpretive encounters illustrate that storytelling is not merely an accessory to tourism, but a vital process of meaning-making, shaping relationships between people, place, and the environment.

Community needs for storytelling capacity-building

Interviews reveal a clear desire among Ban Laem members to strengthen storytelling skills so that tourism delivery better meets visitor expectations. Despite rich cultural capital, such as local history, fishing livelihood, religion, and social transitions, current modes of

delivery can be fragmented and less compelling than desired.

(1) *Storytelling as a trainable skill*

Informants note that storytelling requires training in language, voice, pacing, and audience adaptation. Because audiences span children, youth, adults, seniors, and international visitors, effective narration must be audience-responsive. For example, Bang Don's personal recollections about mangroves generate vivid imagery. With training to link these to coastal ecological knowledge, his stories could couple affect with environmental literacy.

(2) *Intercultural communication and language*

The ability to communicate stories across cultures requires community members to recognize and understand the diverse backgrounds of visitors, including those of different religions, regions, or nationalities. When local storytellers can articulate and present their narratives with sensitivity to cultural diversity, it enhances visitors' appreciation and emotional connection to the community. Moreover, proficiency in English plays an important role in opening visitors' perception and understanding of the community's stories, thereby enriching their overall experience.

(3) *Structuring and connecting content*

There is a need to move from ad hoc narration toward clearly structured arcs—with beginnings, bodies, and reflective closures. A typical arc might introduce village history, weave in contemporary lifeways and activities, and conclude with take-away values. Such structure enhances memorability and value linkage.

(4) *Participation and role distribution*

Capacity-building should diversify narrators—beyond a few lead figures—to include cooks (culinary stories), fishers (maritime practices), and youth (community change). Distributed authorship enriches the offer and reduces single-point dependency, supporting long-term sustainability.

(5) *Storytelling for marketing and branding.*

Members explicitly seek to deploy narrative for marketing and brand-building. Story is framed not only

as memory transmission but as strategy to translate community values into legible images for audiences.

a. Storytelling as a tool for differentiation

Many local residents recognize that Ban Laem possesses rich natural and cultural resources, such as mud play, mangrove planting, and seafood cooking. However, they note that these activities might resemble those in other community-based tourism destinations if they lack distinctive meaning or narrative. Storytelling, therefore, is seen as the key to shaping Ban Laem's unique identity. Personal stories have become inimitable selling points because they are deeply rooted in real experiences and the lives of local people.

b. Storytelling for emotional and experiential engagement

Modern tourism marketing no longer focuses solely on selling products but rather on selling experiences. Storytelling thus serves as a mechanism that enhances the emotional dimension of physical activities such as mud play or mangrove planting. As Bang Don explained about the mangrove forest, "This is what used to be the beach... every tourist who comes here is amazed." His story evokes a sense of wonder and helps visitors connect emotionally with the transformation of the landscape. This aligns with Pine and Gilmore's (1999) concept of the experience economy, which highlights that storytelling and aesthetic expression can transform ordinary services into memorable experiences.

c. Storytelling as a means of building authenticity

Another key finding is that storytelling can help establish authenticity in tourism. Today's travelers increasingly seek genuine experiences rather than commercially fabricated ones. Local stories, such as the hardships of fishing or the everyday practices of Muslim life, constitute valuable cultural capital that should be presented honestly. As Bang Don reflected, "That's just how it is here in our fishing community. It's a cycle—making nets, repairing nets, fixing boats." Although such stories are not often shared directly with tourists, if told appropriately, they can foster understanding and respect for the community's resilience. This approach represents a form of marketing that does not embellish but instead sells the truth of the community.

Comparative Framework for Storytelling Application

This study also proposes a transferable narrative framework that other community-based tourism destinations can adapt. The storytelling journey can be understood through four interconnected stages

(1) Introduction

This stage focuses on introducing both characters and place. At Ban Laem, the warm welcome ceremony on the raft sets the tone and establishes the sense of community identity. In other destinations, similar ritualized greetings or orientation activities can be used to foster immediate connection between hosts and visitors.

(2) Immersion

Once visitors are oriented, they engage their senses through tactile and olfactory experiences. In Ban Laem, this includes mud play and local cooking, which stimulate sensory awareness and emotional participation. Communities elsewhere can apply this by incorporating hands-on or sensory-rich activities that draw visitors deeper into local culture.

(3) Climax

This is the peak of shared emotion and participation. The moments of laughter and music during mud play at Ban Laem illustrate collective joy that strengthens social bonds. Comparable activities that inspire group involvement or shared challenge can help other communities build emotional resonance among participants.

(4) Reflection

The final stage encourages meaning-making and personal insight. At Ban Laem, mangrove planting symbolizes continuity and responsibility, allowing visitors to reflect on their relationship with nature and the community. Other destinations may conclude their storytelling experiences with symbolic or reflective acts that encapsulate the learning journey.

Together, these four stages form a dynamic process of engagement beginning with introduction, deepening through sensory immersion, reaching emotional climax, and closing with reflection. They demonstrate how storytelling can transform tourism

from passive observation into a co-created, meaningful experience for both hosts and guests.

These techniques collectively illustrate how storytelling can shift from being descriptive to experiential and participatory, creating memorable tourism narratives that enhance visitor connection and promote cultural sustainability

Summary and discussion

The findings from the study of Ban Laem Homestay clearly demonstrate that storytelling is not a supplementary element of tourism but rather its core, shaping the character, experience, and value of travel. Local narratives are employed to construct meaning, convey identity, and determine how visitors perceive and remember the place. Storytelling thus serves as a key mechanism in managing community-based tourism.

At Ban Laem, storytelling functions as a form of “organizing reality,” echoing Bruner’s (1991) argument that human beings make sense of the world through narrative structures. Stories shared by local residents, such as the transformation of the landscape from sandy beaches to mangrove forests, or personal memories tied to specific locations, are not merely historical accounts but acts of transforming the physical landscape into a “landscape of memory” that tourists can access emotionally and imaginatively. Through such narratives, travel becomes more than an act of seeing; it becomes a process of internalizing meaning.

Moreover, the findings align with Fisher’s (1984) Narrative Paradigm, which proposes that the power of storytelling lies in narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. For instance, Bang Thaksin’s story of his transition from illegal work to community-based tourism exemplifies both structural continuity and authenticity to lived experience. These authentic narratives foster trust and emotional connection between tourists and the community. Thus, storytelling at Ban Laem functions not only as communication but also as a means of cultivating mutual understanding and credibility.

From the perspective of structuring experience, the findings align with Polkinghorne’s (1995) notion of emplotment. At Ban Laem, activities such as welcoming guests on the raft, sipping morning coffee, playing in the mud, and planting mangroves are intentionally designed to follow Freytag’s Pyramid, consisting of exposition,

rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. This structure allows visitors to feel that they are part of a coherent and complete story rather than participating in isolated activities.

The narratives of Ban Laem also play a role in constructing narrative identity at the community level, consistent with the framework of Foroudi et al. (2016). Stories of life transformation told by Bang Thaksin and of inherited wisdom shared by Ka Nee and Ka Da not only shape individual images but also contribute to the formation of a renewed collective identity. Visitors remember Ban Laem not merely as a coastal destination but as a community characterized by adaptability and the capacity to build a sustainable future.

From a marketing and branding perspective, this study supports the argument of Saraniemi and Komppula (2019), who emphasized that storytelling serves as a key instrument in destination branding. Narratives surrounding food, curry pastes, tie-dye textiles, and mud play create a unique identity for Ban Laem that cannot be replicated elsewhere. This aligns with Garanti et al. (2024), who proposed that storytelling can promote sustainable place branding by preserving both cultural and environmental values while simultaneously responding to tourist expectations.

Furthermore, the findings correspond with Urry and Larsen's (2011) concept of The Tourist Gaze, which posits that tourists' ways of seeing are shaped by social and cultural frameworks. Stories about the transformation from sandy beaches to mangrove forests encourage tourists not only to view nature but also to interpret the landscape through the community's narrative framework, deepening their understanding of conservation values and the adaptive resilience of coastal life.

At the same time, storytelling in Ban Laem reflects the concept of performative storytelling (Kusumah & Andrianto, 2023), which recognizes that storytelling is not limited to spoken or written words but encompasses performance, action, and sensory experience. Stories conveyed through Bang Man's songs, Ka Sopa's cooking or the participatory mud play activities transform storytelling into a living, multisensory experience. Tourists do not simply listen to stories; they actively participate and become co-creators of the narrative alongside the community.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate a strong alignment with multiple theoretical perspectives. Storytelling at Ban Laem Homestay operates on several interconnected levels: constructing personal meaning, organizing experience, shaping community identity, reinforcing place branding, and creating shared performative experiences. This confirms that storytelling is the heart of community-based tourism management. One that does not only respond to market demands but also preserves and enhances the cultural and environmental values of the community. Storytelling thus emerges not merely as a tool but as a driving force that sustains both meaningful experiences and long-term community development.

Implications

From a practical perspective, storytelling serves as both interpretation and co-creation. It allows tourists to become co-authors of local experiences, fostering empathy and understanding. The findings suggest three applied contributions:

(1) Capacity-Building Framework

Develop workshops focused on performative storytelling, English for narrative communication, and reflective facilitation.

(2) Participatory Narrative Design

Encourage collaboration among community members to design tourism narratives integrating sensory elements, songs, and rituals.

(3) Destination Branding through Storytelling

Use authentic personal stories as key branding materials to strengthen Ban Laem's image as a sustainable, community-based destination.

Limitations and future research directions

This study has several limitations. Data were collected from 15 informants within one coastal Muslim community, so the findings mainly reflect that cultural and ecological context. Other community types may reveal different storytelling dynamics. The reliance on qualitative methods, especially interviews and observation, may also have been influenced by researcher presence and timing.

Future research should expand comparative studies across different cultural and environmental settings to explore variations in narrative expression. Mixed or longitudinal approaches could examine how

storytelling evolves over time or in response to seasonal and social changes. Broader cross-community studies could lead to a more comprehensive model of performative storytelling for sustainable tourism.

Recommendations

1. The findings indicate that storytelling serves as the core of community-based tourism management in Ban Laem. Therefore, in practice, the community should be supported in systematically developing storytelling skills through workshops on communication arts, language use, and contemporary storytelling techniques such as performative storytelling. This will help ensure that stories are conveyed in ways that appeal to diverse tourist groups. Such initiatives would cultivate a pool of community storytellers rather than relying on a few individuals, thereby enhancing the long-term sustainability of tourism management.

2. In terms of activity design, emphasis should be placed on closely integrating storytelling with hands-on experiences such as tie-dye making, cooking, mangrove planting, and mud play. Each activity should include accompanying narratives that help participants understand its cultural and environmental context and value. The aim is not only to provide enjoyment but also to promote experiential learning that connects visitors with the social, cultural, and ecological dimensions of the community.

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

Generative AI tools are used to improve the readability and language of a manuscript.

CRedit author statement

Khalid Midam: Writing-Original draft preparation, Conceptualization, Methodology.

Rewadee Ungpo: Develop an article outline, review and edit the original manuscript.

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