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Cultural Influences on Environmental Management in Small-sized Hotels: Evidence from a Thai Tourism Destination

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Abstract

This paper explores how cultural values shape business motivation and environmental management practices among small-sized hotels (small-sized hotels (SSHs)) in Thailand. Using Nong Khai Province as a case study, the research examines the perspectives of hotel owner-managers and local government officials responsible for environmental regulation within a tourism and hospitality context. An interpretive qualitative methodology was adopted, employing semi-structured interviews and participant observation with 25 SMH owner-managers and seven government officials.

The findings reveal that small-sized hotels (SSHs) are predominantly lifestyle-oriented enterprises, motivated by family well-being, social position, and local business opportunities rather than profit maximisation. Environmental practices are implemented selectively and are strongly influenced by Thai cultural values, including seniority, hierarchy, *kreng jai* (consideration for others), and patron–client relationships. Government enforcement of environmental regulations is similarly shaped by these cultural norms, favouring informal negotiation and encouragement over strict legal sanctions.

The paper argues that standardised, exogenous environmental management frameworks promoted globally are often misaligned with local socio-cultural realities. It contributes to social sciences and tourism literature by demonstrating the need for culturally sensitive approaches to environmental governance in small-scale hospitality businesses, particularly in developing-country destinations.

Keywords: Tourism and Hospitality; Small-sized Hotels; Environmental Management; Culture; Thailand; Sustainability