CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Theoretical Background

Nan Province was established around 800 years ago at the same time as Sukothai Province. The fascinating history of Nan involves with many intertwining stories of Nan people presented in unique Lanna culture, memorable history, archeology, and various ecosystems that brought Nan become treasured hidden destination for tourists.

Nan is located in the northern part of Thailand (Figure 1-1). Nan currently has seven national parks, covering approximately 4,863 square kilometers. Most areas of Nan are predominantly mountainous and covered by forests. About 44% of the areas are classified as 1A-watershed zones, which are headwaters for many important rivers such as Nan, Wa, Sa, Haeng and Pad rivers.

Even mountains and forests at the Phi Pan Nam Range and the Luang Prabang Range serve as natural fortress hiding Nan from outsiders. The appreciation of beauty and fascination of its natural environment is currently the prime interest among tourists. As with this aspect of interest, increasing numbers of tourists seem to realize the importance of nature conservation, and ecotourism has become more popular recently (Department of National Park [DNP], 2004).

In 2004, 445,988 tourists visited Nan and 94.53% were Thai (Tourism Authority of Thailand [TAT], 2005). Among all tourists who visited Nan, 61,308 or 13.75% visited Sri Nan National Park (SNNP) which was the highest number of tourists compared to other national parks (DNP, 2005). The area of Sri Nan, covering 1024 square kilometers, made up with massive mountains and hill ranges

with several spectacular natural environments. Many types of forests and tremendous species of flora and faunas exist within the park. In addition, the Sao Din, a natural earth pillars formed by erosion located at the south of the park, creates an amazing appearance destination.

One of the ideas for ecotourism is causing minimal environmental damage to the tourist sites (Ceballos - Lascurain, 1996; Page and Dowling, 2002; Green Globe 21 International Ecotourism Standard, 2004). Especially in mountain tourism, tourists are attracted to the mountainous destination for many reasons, including cool climate, clean air, unique landscapes and wildlife, scenic beauty, local culture, history and heritage, and nature-related activities and sports. Consequently, tourism may have a wide impact on mountain ecosystems, communities and economics (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2007).

To date, the tourist's number in SNNP has been increasing and some negative impacts on its natural environment have appeared but the study on the potential of tourist sites and the management plan for ecotourism has never been conducted. Therefore, this research aims to identify and assess appropriate parameters that can indicate the potential of each tourist site and to apply environmental management system (EMS) for ecotourism management in SNNP.

In this study, some appropriate parameters were identified and assessed in each tourist site. Moreover, EMS was applied as a method that integrate functional elements to achieve the principles of Ecotourism which further evaluate, manage, and reduce the negative environmental impacts in the tourist area.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 To determine parameters that indicates the potential of each tourist site.

1.2.2 To assess the potential of each tourist site in Sri Nan National Park.

1.2.3 To develop the management plan for ecotourism in Sri Nan National Park.

1.3 Anticipated benefits

1.3.1 This research will provide the appropriate parameters that can indicate potential of tourist sites for Sri Nan National Park.

1.3.2 The result of tourist site potential will be a useful standard for the monitoring program of Sri Nan National Park in the future.

1.3.3 This research will provide ecotourism management plan for Sri Nan National Park and may be useful to the ecotourism development of other national parks in Nan Province.

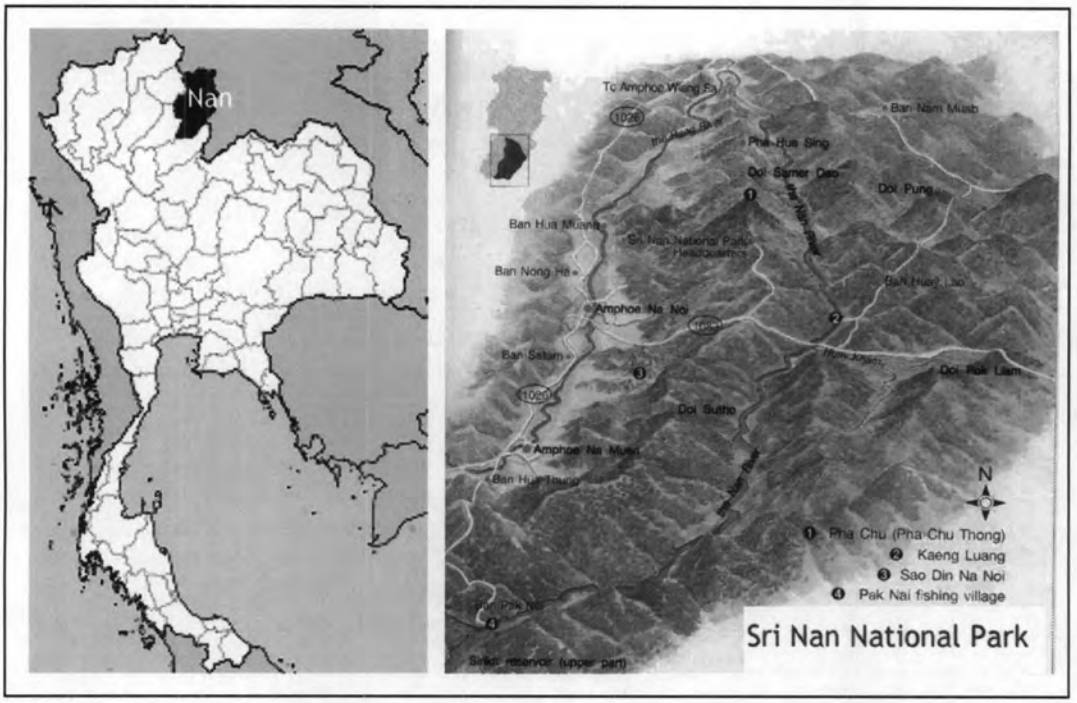

Figure 1-1 Location of Nan Province and Sri Nan National Park, Thailand