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Immediate Problem-Solving Strategies for Thai Tour Guides in the Event of a Tourist's Death

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Abstract

This academic article examines the roles and processes of Thai tour guides in problem-solving when tourists die during their tours. Such incidents impact both safety and confidence in Thailand's tourism industry. Based on the author's direct experience with tourist fatalities while working as a tour guide. Tourist guides are essential in these situations, coordinating with tourists and relevant agencies, including emergency medical services, investigative officers, embassies, and tour companies, while also communicating with the deceased's family. The problem-solving process begins with self-control, situation assessment, contacting relevant agencies, and proper problem management, including providing mental health care to affected tourists. This article highlights the necessity of skills such as self-control, leadership, and victim assistance, enabling tour guides to manage complex situations swiftly and minimize the impact on those involved. The article also proposes methods for developing Thai tour guides to enhance their ability to handle emergency situations and elevate safety standards in the Thai tourism industry.

Keywords: Thai Tourist Guides, Immediate Problem-Solving, Tourist's Death

Introduction

Tourism, a cornerstone of Thailand's economy, has historically been a significant contributor to the nation's GDP. This is underscored by the industry's pre-pandemic revenue of 3 trillion baht, which represented approximately 18% of GDP. (Bank of Thailand, 2023). Looking forward, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has outlined its 2025 strategy, "Amazing Thailand Grand Tourism Year," which aims to leverage Thailand's cultural appeal and diverse destinations to attract 39 million foreign tourists and 205 million domestic tourists, generating a 7.5% revenue increase from 2024. The nation's strategic location, abundant tourism resources, and unique cultural characteristics have positioned Thailand as a leading global destination, further solidifying the industry's

crucial role in driving economic growth.

Guides play a crucial role in the tourism industry, acting as hosts, facilitators, and safety providers, while also ensuring memorable experiences for tourists (Mahiphan, 2023). Additionally, they contribute to income distribution by directing tourists to various areas. As of 2024, Thailand features 51,833 licensed tour guides distributed across the country, indicating the nation's preparedness for increased tourism and aligning with policies to promote the industry (Department of Tourism, 2024).

The increasing number of tourists inevitably brings potential travel dangers. Department of Tourism (2017) reported that in 2016, the number of foreign tourists who sustained injuries or lost their lives while visiting Thailand was 701, which rose to 756 in 2017. The Accident Data Center for Road Safety Culture (2023) indicates that in 2022, a total of 6,427 tourists were injured on the roads, with 482 fatalities. This aligns with the World Population Review (2024), which states that Thailand ranks among the top 10 most dangerous countries in the world for female tourists out of 50 countries globally. This is believed to stem from risks related to water safety, road safety, and the potential for tourists to be deceived or exploited.

The data presented highlights the need for relevant agencies to prioritize tourist safety and emphasizes the often-overlooked role of tour guides in managing potential risks and accidents. As on-site representatives of the host country, tour guides bear significant responsibility for ensuring tourists' safety and well-being throughout their stay. Informed by the author's firsthand experience with tourist fatalities while working as a tour guide, this academic article aims to equip the tour guides with the skills to respond effectively to emergencies, particularly those involving injury or death. Furthermore, educational institutions offering tourism programs or the Department of Tourism in Thailand, which develop tour guide training courses, will utilize the fundamental content to establish subjects, incorporate it into course descriptions, or employ it as case studies to cultivate proficient tour guides for the future tourism sector.

Emergency Response and Immediate Problem-Solving

A tour guide's job description extends beyond providing information and caring for tourists to include troubleshooting and problem-solving. Each tour presents its own unique challenges that a tour guide must navigate to ensure a smooth experience. However, some situations may arise that are beyond the capabilities of a single tour guide, such as a tourist experiencing a severe accident resulting in serious injury or death.

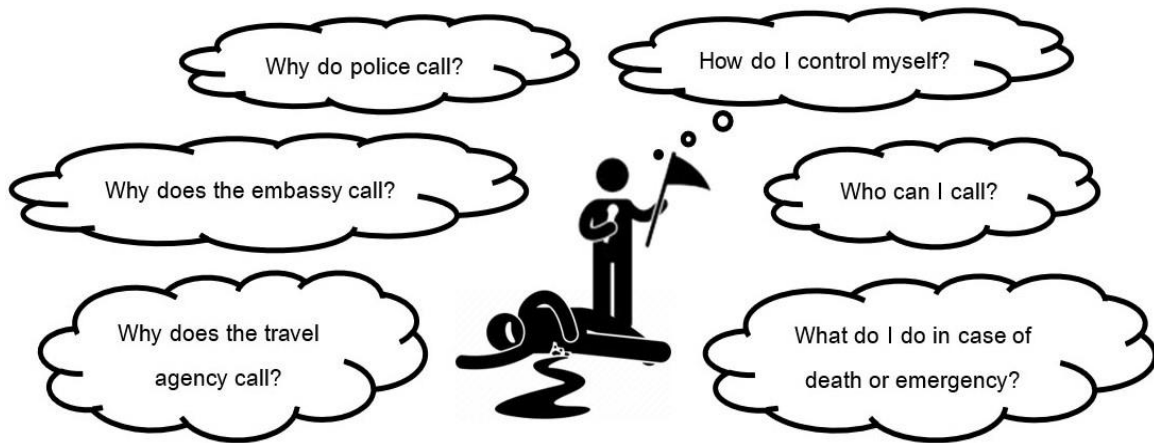


Figure 1 The immediate situation faced by the tour guide when experiencing a serious accident

Figure 1 shows how tour guides can be affected by a serious accident while on duty. They may experience stress, anxiety, fear, and a loss of self-control. To effectively resolve such a crisis, tour guides need to remain aware and implement appropriate problem-solving strategies which include:

1. Self-control

The most critical step for a tour guide when an unforeseen event occurs is to maintain composure. If the tour guide panics, they will be unable to effectively lead and manage others, including potentially distressed tourists. Maintaining composure is essential for taking charge and resolving the situation.

2. Assessment

Before offering help or further assistance, tour guides should assess the situation and evaluate the severity of the tourist's accident. If the injuries are minor, and basic first aid can be given, it should be administered immediately. However, if the injuries are severe or life-threatening, the guide should contact emergency services immediately, such as calling 1669 for the National Institute for Emergency Medicine or the local rescue team. In the case of accidents occurring on islands or at sea, marine rescue teams, which could include teams from national marine parks or naval forces stationed on islands or along the coast, may be available to assist.

3. Situation Report

The tour company functions as the tour guide's employer for a specific tour group and provides support to ensure that tourism management proceeds as planned. When incidents occur, the tour company and the tour guide work together to manage the situation. The tour company's responsibilities include sending assistance, coordinating with relevant agencies (like hospitals, emergency services, police, and insurance), and taking over to resolve any issues that may arise.

Therefore, tour guides play a crucial role beyond providing information and ensuring tourist safety. They are essential in managing and resolving unforeseen issues to guarantee seamless tours. In severe incidents, like a tourist's injury or death, a guide must remain composed, assess the situation, and liaise effectively with relevant authorities. Furthermore, the essential strategies that tour guides must use for dealing with immediate problems include exercising self-control, accurately assessing the importance of incidents, promptly contacting emergency services, and cooperating with relevant authorities. The proficiency of tour guides in handling such problems reflects the Thai tourism industry's ability to manage unexpected events successfully.

Tour Guide's Actions in Case of Tourist's Death

While tour guides are skilled at managing immediate crises, their humanitarian role remains crucial. They are trusted figures for tourists, especially those from foreign countries. Tour guides frequently become the initial source of reliable support for individuals navigating unfamiliar environments (Mahiphan, 2023). This trust is particularly significant during critical incidents, where tourists may face life-threatening situations and instinctively rely on their guides. This reliance highlights a crucial humanitarian aspect of the tour guide's role, extending beyond mere professionalism. Furthermore, tour guides typically accompany tourists throughout their entire trip, which can span from a half-day excursion to a week or longer. This extended interaction positions the tour guide as the person most acquainted with the tourist group, possessing knowledge of their personal information, recognizing their faces, gestures, personalities, and even specific identities to a certain degree. Such information can expedite assistance, aid in legal processes, and facilitate coordination with the relatives of injured or deceased individuals (Wyler et al., 2022). It is important to acknowledge that tourists encounter risks and can experience fatalities due to hazards such as road traffic accidents, drowning, and homicide while traveling abroad. Moreover, as Thailand offers a diverse range of tourism activities and attracts a substantial number of tourists, news reports frequently feature accidents or fatalities occurring during these activities, including deaths resulting from vehicle collisions, motorcycle accidents, falls from trains, rafting incidents, capsizing, drowning, or falls from cliffs, among others.

In the event of a tourist's death, the relevant agencies or officials will be responsible for coordinating the incident and contacting the tour guide via telephone to request information. The mentioned parties are:

1. Investigative Officers

Srima (2022) states that when a death occurs, the on-site investigative officer is responsible for conducting an autopsy to determine the cause of death and identify the deceased. In the context of tourism, a tour guide, due to their close proximity to tourists, can play a key role by providing essential information. The autopsy is performed at the location where the body was found by an investigative officer and a forensic pathologist. If a forensic pathologist is not available, the autopsy can be conducted by a doctor from a government hospital, a public health office, a private

hospital, or a volunteer doctor. According to Chulalongkorn Hospital (2019), after the autopsy, the body is kept in the hospital's mortuary until relatives claim it. A tour guide may need to act as an interpreter to facilitate communication between the police and other tourists. Once the investigative officer has gathered all the necessary information, they will coordinate with relevant agencies, such as the Tourist Police, Immigration Police, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for further assistance. The U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Thailand (2023) explains that if an American tourist dies in Thailand, the Embassy will locate and contact the next of kin as soon as possible. The procedures and processes involved may vary depending on factors such as nationality, the laws of the deceased's home country, and the specific circumstances of the case.

2. Embassies or Consulates

In the event of the death of a foreign tourist, there will be procedures in place to assist the citizens of each nation. One of the operational steps involves embassy or consulate officials contacting those involved in the incident or possibly a tour guide to inquire about information or the safety status of other tourists who are their citizens. For example, in the case of the death of an American citizen, the U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Thailand (2023) outlines the following steps: (1) Follow up and inform the heirs of the deceased; (2) Coordinate communication with Thai police, hospitals, and relevant agencies regarding the care of the body; (3) Arrange for the handling of the body or the repatriation of the body to the home country; (4) Coordinate the management of various related expenses; (5) Assist in collecting and sending the personal belongings of the deceased to the heirs; and (6) Issue a death certificate for the American citizen abroad. It should be noted that the assistance procedures of embassies or consulates may vary depending on the nationality of the tourist.

3. Relatives of the Deceased

When the family of the deceased is informed, they may contact the tour guide to inquire about the events and circumstances that occurred, as well as to ask about the condition and safety of other tourists who were with the deceased. Additionally, the family may continue to communicate with the tour guide to receive updates until they travel to Thailand to arrange for the funeral or to repatriate the body.

Overall, tour guides play a critical role as primary coordinators in the event of tourist fatalities. Beyond managing the immediate situation, they must also serve as pillars of support for the tourists. Tour guides are obligated to collaborate with relevant agencies, such as law enforcement, embassies, and the deceased's family, to provide information, facilitate autopsies, and coordinate the repatriation of the remains. Additionally, tour guides may need to act as interpreters in certain situations to aid the investigative process, as well as to offer emotional support to the affected tourists. Effective management strategies will help mitigate adverse effects and bolster confidence in the tourism sector.

Providing Care for the Bereaved Family

Generally, tourists travel in various configurations: alone, in couples, married pairs, families, or groups. Consequently, unexpected events or serious accidents resulting in death can leave other members of their party bereaved. This creates a uniquely challenging position for tour guides, who must manage the situation while also providing emotional support to tourists grieving the loss of a loved one, spouse, friend, or family member. Breaking such news is difficult, as Kannika (2022) explains that bad news like death disrupts normalcy, causing both mental and physical distress, including loss, pain, and health issues like appetite loss, insomnia, indigestion, abdominal pain, and headaches. If not properly addressed, it can also trigger negative emotions like anger, sadness, shame, guilt, boredom, frustration, despair, depression, anxiety, and confusion, leading to mental imbalance. The Clinical Medical Education Center, Ministry of Public Health (2008) provides a step-by-step process for communicating news of death as follows:

1. Provide self-introduction.
2. Greet the persons involved and ask for their name, surname, and relationship to the deceased.
3. Inquire the informant about the last observed health condition.
4. Assess and inquire the informant to understand the illness.
5. Gradually provide vital information, recounting the sequence of events slowly regarding the changes in the health condition, continuing from what the relatives know.
6. Pause the narration if the informant interrupts, and during the doctor's account, allow the relatives to ask supplementary questions at intervals.
7. Evaluate the relatives' knowledge, understanding, feelings, expectations, and concerns regarding the information provided.
8. Respond to the relatives' awareness after receiving the information as follows:
 - 1) Offer comforting words and show empathy.
 - 2) Remain silent at times while observing the informant's demeanor.
 - 3) Provide the informant with an opportunity to express their feelings.
 - 4) Display empathy through attentive body language, including appropriate physical contact, thoughtful facial expressions, and maintaining proximity.
9. Assist relatives in planning and providing support in handling matters related to the death.

Additionally, caring for tourists who have lost a loved one is equally important. Tephan (2022) explains the situation of losing a loved one by stating that the feelings that follow this loss are referred to as "grief." This is a response that individuals experience towards loss. Grief can manifest both externally through behaviors such

as crying, being lost in thought, or internally through feelings of longing and reminiscing about the past. Everyone's expression of grief can vary, and it can be categorized into four stages which are:

1. Denial

This is the initial stage where individuals begin to acknowledge their loss. The first response is often a refusal to accept the reality, which may manifest as behaving as if nothing has occurred. Denial is a component of the grieving process that allows individuals time to gradually process their emotions.

2. Beginning to Accept the Reality

As the truth is repeatedly revealed, individuals will be forced to confront the reality of the situation. The inevitable consequences include feelings of pain and potential expressions of anger, stemming from disappointment or directed towards those responsible for the loss.

3. Acceptance of Reality

Individuals gradually come to realize the loss and accept that their beloved has indeed been lost. This leads to profound sorrow, which may include symptoms such as insomnia and loss of appetite. The visible suffering will necessitate the management of the grief experienced.

4. Returning to a Normal State

Individuals can commence the process of reorganizing their lives and adapting their roles to accommodate life without their loved one. This arises from both rational and emotional acceptance that a genuine and irreversible life change has occurred. While experiencing sorrow and grief is natural, it is crucial to acknowledge that the departed will not return, regardless of the depth of emotion.

When a death occurs within a tourist group, the critical strategies that tour guide must manage the situation delicately, both in conveying the unfortunate news and in caring for the bereaved. The process of communicating the news should be structured and empathetic. Simultaneously, it is vital to allow the bereaved to express their grief naturally, which may include stages of denial, initial acceptance, and gradual adjustment. Care should encompass both psychological support and practical assistance to enable the bereaved to cope with their sorrow and recover appropriately.

Tour Guides and Skills for Troubleshooting

The tour guide profession necessitates the integration of diverse skills to address immediate challenges. Daily operations involve various issues, both minor and major, requiring resolution. These may include familiar, routinely resolved problems or significant, previously encountered challenges. While specific skills for problem-resolution vary, they may involve integrating inherent knowledge, quick thinking, analysis, synthesis, and refinement. Important skills for tour guides include leadership, communication, presentation, coordination,

management, and problem-solving. Tour guides should continually review, practice, and recognize the importance of essential skills for critical situations and serious immediate problems. The crucial skills are:

1. Self-control

This skill refers to the ability of a guide to confront problems or serious events independently. Therefore, self-control is an essential skill before one can manage others. Thanawatapichat (2022) explains that self-control is a characteristic of individuals who can adjust or manage their emotions from undesirable behaviors towards the desired target behaviors by utilizing their ability to control themselves, exercising patience, and making sacrifices. Sawatsrisrengkar (2021) outlines the development of self-regulation skills into eight practices that should be consistently trained and applied, which include:

1.1 Utilize integrity as a guiding principle, which means employing honesty as the foundation for self-governance. This can be accomplished by

- 1) Acting as an example of good conduct for the team,
- 2) Cultivating an environment of trust among members,
- 3) Participating only in ethical actions, and
- 4) Adhering to one's moral principles

1.2 Preparedness for change entails personal development geared towards readiness for transformation. This involves

- 1) Engaging in activities that lead to direct and immediate change, avoiding procrastination or the use of excuses and
- 2) Cultivating adaptability to all situations, while upholding a positive mindset and integrity as guiding principles for all actions.

1.3 Identifying one's vulnerabilities involves eliminating existing personal weaknesses. This can be achieved by

- 1) Cultivating self-awareness to identify personal strengths and weaknesses and
- 2) Evaluating potential factors that may cause instability or psychological fragility, resulting in poor decision-making or inappropriate behavior.

1.4 The cultivation and development of discipline refers to the enhancement of self-discipline. This necessitates a commitment to incorporating positive initiatives into one's work and diligently striving to achieve objectives without succumbing to discouragement.

1.5 To adjust negative thoughts refers to the alteration of negative cognitive patterns. This can be accomplished by

1) Analyzing any arising negative thoughts rationally and objectively to identify inherent flaws in those thoughts and feelings and

2) Identifying the cause of the problem and maintaining a positive outlook.

1.6 Maintaining composure in stressful situations necessitates self-regulation. This refers to the ability to remain calm and collected when faced with challenging and pressuring circumstances. Individuals who may find themselves in situations where they may struggle to control their emotions are advised to adhere to the following guidelines.

1) Temporarily remove oneself from the situation, perhaps by isolating oneself.

2) Regulate your breathing by inhaling deeply and exhaling slowly. Center your attention on the rhythm of your breath to clear your mind and detach from the situation. The more one practices self-regulation, the more adept one becomes at managing oneself.

1.7 Prior to responding to a difficult or stressful scenario, one should always consider potential adverse outcomes that could arise.

1) Reflect on previous situations where self-regulation was absent, resulting in raised voices or reprimands.

2) Reflect upon the adverse outcomes that resulted from those inappropriate actions, such as a loss of trust from subordinates or superiors.

3) Reflect upon whether the impending actions are suitable and the potential long-term consequences that may ensue.

1.8 Self-assurance, which can be developed and strengthened, is another crucial component of self-regulation. It is the unwavering belief in one's own ability to achieve a goal.

1) Reflect on past experiences of success.

2) Involve in positive communities or societies that encourage self-assurance. Observing the accomplishments of individuals with similar skills and abilities can inspire the belief that one can also achieve success.

3) Bolster self-assurance by maintaining a positive mindset regarding one's abilities and effectively managing stress - either through relaxation techniques to alleviate pressure or by considering the adverse outcomes of emotional dysregulation - will bolster self-assurance.

2. Leadership Skills

A tour guide must be a leader not only in terms of navigation but also in managing, supervising, facilitating, and decision-making for the tour group under their responsibility. Therefore, a tour guide's demeanor

must always demonstrate leadership qualities in all aspects, which will instill confidence, comfort, and a sense of safety in tourists during their travels. Consequently, a good leader must possess inherent leadership qualities. Hollander (1978) explains that leadership is a process of influence whereby a leader seeks to affect followers' behaviors to align with desired outcomes. Similarly, Wanichwassin (2017) states that leadership is a process through which a leader persuades and exerts influence, authority, and charisma over followers through relationships built on trust and appropriate support based on the existing context. Thus, a tour guide must cultivate themselves to be a leader with a public spirit, selflessness, responsibility, and a focus on the collective benefit over personal gain. They must consistently practice these principles, as the profession of a tour guide is one of giving providing knowledge, guidance, care, and assistance to others. If a tour guide maintains their role as a giver, it will reflect generosity, kindness, and compassion towards tourists. Pitipornwiwat (2024) describes the development of leadership that earns recognition from followers as follows:

- 1) Developing a leader's mindset involves viewing problems and obstacles as opportunities for learning and self-improvement.
- 2) Practicing effective communication skills entails listening, speaking, reading, and writing with clarity, interest, and relevance, avoiding any vague or convoluted expressions that may confuse the audience and hinder understanding.
- 3) Establishing credibility requires consistency in words and actions, as always following through on commitments fosters trust and reliability.
- 4) Developing decision-making skills involves the ability to analyze information, evaluate alternatives, and make rational choices. This is crucial as decision-making in emergency situations requires speed, accuracy, and an understanding of complex circumstances.
- 5) Enhancing emotional intelligence (EQ) entails mastering self-regulation of one's emotions, as well as the ability to understand and manage the emotions of others.
- 6) Applying leadership skills in real-life situations.

3. Victim Assistance Skills

During a tour, unforeseen incidents that may jeopardize the safety and well-being of tourists can occur. As such, prioritizing tourist safety throughout the tour is of utmost importance, given the unpredictable nature of accidents. Tour guides must, therefore, be vigilant in maintaining safety, taking preventive measures against potential hazards, and possessing the knowledge to administer basic assistance to tourists. Tachasathien (2007) explains that assistance encompasses initial care that addresses both minor and major, even life-threatening, health issues. Consequently, to assist is an essential skill that tour guides, who work in close proximity

to tourists, must be knowledgeable about and able to perform effectively. Tour guides must also consistently review their assistance knowledge to assist tourists, colleagues, and themselves should any accidents occur. Given the potential for tour guides themselves to experience accidents, their own safety is also paramount. If a tour guide were incapacitated, they would be unable to lead and care for the tourists, potentially resulting in the tourists needing to care for the guide instead.

Individuals who aid victims should possess knowledge and principles that will enhance the efficacy of the aid and ensure safety for both the rescuers and the victims. Kwanyuen (2016) has delineated the essential elements for those who will assist the injured as follows:

- 1) Maintain composure, evaluate the causes, and assess the injuries of the individual requiring assistance.
- 2) Evaluate the safety of the scene and the individual requiring assistance.
- 3) Determine whether it is possible to provide assistance through basic first aid.

In some cases, accidents may result in severe injuries that necessitate treatment by specialists. Hence, the tour guide should assess the injured tourist's condition and evaluate their own capabilities to determine the level of assistance they can provide. If they can only offer basic support or cannot provide assistance at all, they should promptly notify emergency hotline service at 1669, the National Institute for Emergency Medicine (NIEM), to facilitate further assistance according to the following procedures.

- 1) In the event of a medical emergency, it is important to remain calm and promptly contact the emergency medical service at 1669.
- 2) Inform the nature of the incident, including the number and condition of any patients or injured persons.
- 3) Clearly indicate the location of the incident, the route, and the specific point where it occurred.
- 4) Identify gender, age, and the number of patients or injured persons.
- 5) Indicate the level of consciousness of the patient.
- 6) Identify potential recurring risks, such as being in the middle of the road or in a natural gas vehicle.
- 7) Provide the name of the person reporting along with a contact telephone number.
- 8) Follow the initial guidance provided by the officials.
- 9) Await the arrival of the rescue team to transport the patient to the hospital.

The above evidence indicates that tour guides must possess a diverse skill set to effectively manage unforeseen circumstances. Critical skills that must be employed in emergency situations include self-control to

manage pressure, leadership to confidently and appropriately handle situations, victim assistance to assist injured tourists, and coordination with relevant agencies, such as the emergency hotline 1669. These skills necessitate continuous training and preparedness, ensuring that tour guides can manage unexpected events smoothly and safely for both themselves and the tourists.

Conclusion

This article emphasizes the significant role of tour guides in managing complex emergency situations, such as tourist fatalities during tours. It highlights that tour guides' responsibilities extend beyond tour leadership, encompassing a crucial intermediary role in coordinating between tourists, relevant agencies, and the families of the deceased. Addressing these events necessitates the experience, knowledge, and problem-solving skills of tour guides to systematically mitigate adverse impacts and progressively improve the situation. The article analyzes the opportunities for tour guides to handle distressing situations, such as attending to the emotional needs of tourists or delivering bad news to bereaved families. It discusses the essential skills for tour guides to address immediate issues, including self-control, leadership, and the ability to assist accident victims, which are vital elements that enable tour guides to manage emergencies swiftly and appropriately. Furthermore, the article underscores the importance of developing Thai tour guides to enhance their capacity to manage unforeseen events. The information and experiences presented in this article will be beneficial in enhancing the capabilities of Thai tour guides and fostering confidence in the potential of the Thai tourism industry.

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