

A Creative Wedding Event Management for Sustaining Community-Based Eco-Tourism: A Case Study in Thailand

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The research aims to propose a proper model for organizing a creative wedding event to boost Community-Based Eco-Tourism (CBET) in rural areas. It is participatory research. Site observation and in-depth interviews are 10 stakeholders from various organization; local people, the district sheriff, the provincial culture, the national park, the district municipality, the community-based tourism group, the wedding organizers and the educators from a wedding event in themed “Carry Love Covering the Forest” organized in Wiang Sa, Suratthani, the southern part of Thailand were applied. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data. The results found that the managing model for organizing an event tourism in Community-Based Eco-Tourism composes of three stages being pre-event, during-event, and after-event. The research provides a comprehensive understanding management model of CBET. The research makes contribution to develop and manage a new creative event to enhance positive impacts of community-based tourism to sustain, especially in eco-tourism destination.

Keywords: event management, Community-Based Eco-Tourism, sustainable tourism

Introduction

Event as a key marketing of tourism destinations enhances the increasingly global competitiveness of the destination and increases the vast number of tourist as well as stimulates tourist’s expenditure. Thus, event is an important tool in tourism applied to fulfill the tourism capacity as well as developing infrastructure including road, electricity, transportation, accommodation, etc., in destinations. In addition, events can solve the tourist’s demand problem in low season. Planed-event tourism becomes a phenomenon applied in many countries to

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stimulate tourism. Resident perceived that event tourism can benefit socially and economically to the tourism destinations; they believed that they could cope with the occurred negative impacts from the events (Jackson, 2008). Wedding and honeymoon tourism is a part of events (Gets & Page, 2016) which is an important mechanic to induce tourists and enhance tourism income in many countries, especially, Thailand.

Tourism Authority of Thailand revealed that wedding and honeymoon tourism has noticeably grown in Thailand. In 2013, there were wedding and honeymoon tourists 880,000 persons, 48,000 million Thai baht. The wedding couples were 49,760 persons, 2,700 million Thai baht. The top five countries of the couples were from South Korea, India, Japan, USA, and UK. However, the honeymoon tourists were 830,617 persons, 45,000 million Thai bath. Currently, Thailand is top five countries for wedding and honeymoon destination (Hongskul, 2019). The main destinations for wedding in Thailand include Pattaya, Phuket, Ko Samui, Krabi, Chiang Mai, Trang, Trat, Hua Hin-Pran Buri, and Chiang Rai. The Deputy Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) explained that Thailand is the best wedding destination according to 5D: destinations extraordinaire, diverse choices, dream hideaways, delectable tasted, and distinct hospitality (National Thailand, 2018). However, the promotion of Thai government has still done only for private sectors especially, accommodations, wedding businesses and tours; it lacks local community's participation. Although there have been group weddings with special theme from the uniqueness of tourism resources for promoting tourism in many provinces in Thailand such under water wedding in Trang Province, wedding with riding elephants in Loei Province, Authentic Lanna wedding in Chiangmai, etc., local communities such as local home stays, local interpreters, local souvenirs, etc., have been played little attentions from managing the group wedding events.

Additionally, Community-Based Eco-Tourism (CBET) in Thailand has been noticeably growth according to the government stimulating and supporting. Consequently, many CBETs have been similarly developed according to assimilative tourism resources. Different attractive activities have been applied to boost CBET's tourists and income. Similarly, Wiang Sa is a district in Suratthani located in the south of Thailand, while Samui is the most popular destination for foreign tourists in Suratthani. The CBET of Wiang Sa is set in 2018 because of high potential in tourism promoting consisting of unique nature resources such as a long stream, rain forests, and water falls in the Tai Rom Yen National Park as well as communist historical area. However, the destination awareness has still less among both Thai and foreign tourists; moreover, there are other requirements to improve Wiang Sa CBET consisting of expanding tourism season all year as well as similar tourism attractions to the nearby areas. Consequently, a wedding event was offered since a giant couple trees of a *Parashorea stellata* and a banyan tree in the Tai Rom Yen National Park was registered as "legacy of the land award" by the Department of Culture Promotion, Thailand in 2019. The uniqueness of the couple tree is a more 100 years old tree and looks like a couple hugging together. While, the wedding tourism in Thailand is very famous due to the potential of landscape and tourism resources; therefore, many five start hotels and tourism agents have the wedding as a special package to enhance the number of tourists and income. Apart from that, there are special events as a group wedding organized by the local governments integrating with other stakeholder such as diving wedding in Trang Province, Riding elephant wedding in Surin Province, etc. However, these wedding tourism benefits to business sectors such as hotel, restaurants, etc., while CBET's have been less involved and gain less benefits from the wedding tourism. It is questioned how to efficiently apply the wedding tourism to CBET's with less negative and high positive impacts to the locals as well as promoting CBET's objectives.

The research gap is found that the previous research papers mostly focus on destination wedding, while

event tourism wedding, especially focusing on CBET has been neglect. Study the wedding context in each area or country, Suklabaidaya (2008) revealed that factors growing the popularity in wedding tourism rely on runaway couples, exotic marriage rituals, unique experience, legalities, and lastly, expense. While various papers study demand side, especially focusing on couples' behavior to attend a destination wedding such as motivation (Chiapa & Fortezza, 2006), making a decision to choose a destination wedding (Lee, Huang, & Chen, 2010; Deng, 2012; Reisenwitz, 2013; Seebaluck, Munhurrin, Naidoo, & Rughoonauth, 2015; Suthatartrakul, 2017) and some papers focus on management and development the destination wedding (Durinec, 2013; Chiappa & Fortezza, 2015; Rogerson & Wolfaardt, 2015), Adler and Chien (2004) studied the "Wedding Business: A Method to Boost Food and Beverage Revenues in Hotels". Jin, Lee, and Daniel (2017) studied the impact of social media toward wedding. These studies rely on destination wedding focusing on business while the wedding event for tourism is different and still blurs from the academics.

The research was occurred to investigate and to propose a model for organizing a creative wedding event to boost Community-Based Eco-Tourism by studying a creative wedding event in Wiang Sa CBET as a case study in order to propose a model organizing a creative wedding event for CBET. Contributions can benefit to promote CBETs, local governments, tourism managers and academics in the CBET context.

Literature Review

Community-Based Eco-Tourism (CBET)

Irresponsible tourism always leads the community to the depletion of natural resources and ruins the local community. The word so called "Sustainability" seems to be somewhat common nowadays due to the environmental concerns globally. In tourism as well, "travel responsibly" is the trendy term describing the sustainable tourism which the Community-Based Eco-Tourism (CBET) is one of its significant elements. CBET is an ecotourism practice that underlines the development of local communities; the most importantly, the local residents must be willing to involve in directing its development and management (Lonn et al., 2018; Jones, 2005). The primary benefits usually remain within the community. World Tourism Organization: UNWTO (2017) additionally emphasizes that the CBET must minimize the negative impacts on the natural and sociocultural environment as well as support the protection of natural areas by creating mutual economic benefits, while the definition of ecotourism is a tenet focusing on six elements: (1) nature-based, (2) preservation/conservation, (3) education, (4) sustainability, (5) distribution of benefits, and (6) ethics/responsibility/awareness (Donohoe & Needham, 2006). Therefore, the Community-Based Eco-Tourism is concerning the six elements combining with the community. Actually, community is the key formant to drive the successful ecotourism as they are hosts and directly receive the impacts from the ecotourism as well as sustain the ecotourism.

Usually, the residents present the environments and ways of livings with visitors, with an aim to generate the sustainable local economies, including money and employments. Therefore, the success story of CBET may consist of few criteria as follows: (1) The community initiates own local activities, (2) the community leader is appointed to coordinate, and (3) the employments of local resident (Stone, 2015; Jones, 2005; Amat & Abdullah, 2004). Hence, the income from the tourism remains within the community while uplifting the sharing economic benefits. It is recommended that the CBET and responsible tourism should be carefully integrated in the community sustainable development strategies. The reason behind is that CBET gives the necessary tools and knowledge to mainly decrease poverty and increase employments, while the responsible

tourism provides long-term critical thinking and decision-making (Choibamroong et al., 2011).

Event Tourism Wedding Management

The literature reviews have been found that there is less concern in organizing wedding management in community-based tourism context. Most of the research papers focus on wedding tourism with businesses related.

Definition and category. Regarding to the definition of wedding tourism, wedding tourism is combining of wedding and travelling. The main reason might be a wedding while travelling is secondary reason. Regarding to the category, planed-event tourism has been separated into four categories consisting of business, festivals and culture, entertainment and sports (Gets, 2008); theme-wedding has not been mentioned in the typology. However, theme-wedding is a part of culture; therefore it might be included in festivals and culture. Meanwhile, Suklabaidaya (2008) categorized wedding tourism into two groups: destination wedding and exotic wedding. However, the exotic can be applied in the destination wedding as well; therefore, other title should be placed. Furthermore, the scope and explanation has still been vague to detect the types of wedding tourism. Consequently, wedding tourism in this study is separated into two categories consisting of (1) destinations wedding (Suklabaidaya, 2008) and (2) event tourism wedding. The different scope is the wedding aim and main host organizing the wedding.

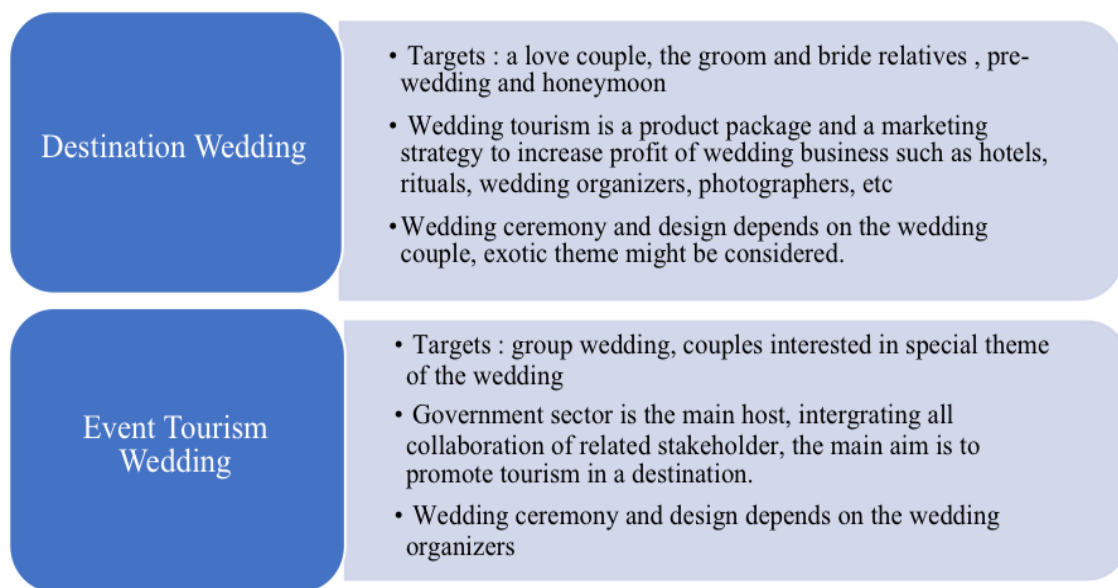


Figure 1. Types of wedding tourism.

From the Figure 1, it can conclude that a wedding organized in communities-based tourism is a kind of an event tourism wedding.

Wedding destinations rely on a love couple, a personalized wedding, the groom and bride's relatives and pre-wedding and honeymoon. Moreover, business is the main host; the tourism wedding is a kind of marketing strategy to promote their benefits (Adler & Chien, 2004). Therefore, businesses related to wedding ceremonies such as hotels, rituals, wedding organizers, photographers can apply this strategy by themselves, while government plays an important role to support the wedding destination through various policies such as alleviated VISA, stay extension, etc. The wedding ceremony and design depends on the wedding couple; exotic

theme can be offered. Therefore, this wedding can be occurred all the time as the customer's requirement.

While event tourism wedding focuses to a group wedding with special theme of the wedding, its objective is to promote the tourism in a destination. The ceremony of the wedding tourism depends on the wedding organizers and project managers. The main host may be government sectors such as sheriff, governor, tourism department or communities-based tourism groups. Everything and every step for all couples are designed and arranged by the main host. This kind of wedding needs high participation from various stakeholder both private and government. The event tourism wedding is a special theme event; therefore, it can be once a year, or a tourism festival in a destination.

Event tourism wedding management. From the type of wedding tourism, it found that event tourism wedding depends upon collaboration among related stakeholder; the management is ability to draw help and mobilize resources from all relevant sectors to achieve the wedding aims; thus, the main aim is not for making a profit. Importantly, local communities should be a main organization to drive the wedding as the local people are persons who receive the wedding impact both in positive and negative.

Regarding to wedding management, there are less papers proposing managing event tourism wedding; thus it is a research gap which is very necessary for developing communities-based tourism being rapid growth tourism in every destinations. However, there are some papers focusing on destination wedding and event management which can be synthesized for event tourism wedding. Witt (2006) applied strategic planning to analyze the wedding management composed of SWOT analysis, human resources, financial management, market segmentation, promotion, and operational management; however, this model might be suitable for the destination wedding focusing business players. However, some issues from Witt (2006) can be synthesized for the event tourism wedding; the strategic pattern will be based upon managing an event tourism wedding.

Considering the wedding organizing, it seems a project to manage; therefore, there are various activities to prepare and do through the process before, during, and after event. Additionally, PDCA—Plan, Do, Check, and Act—Deming's model is widely applied in managing business, in organizing the event tourism wedding, as well. The Deming's model can effectively plan, do, and develop the wedding to better the event's quality.

In the pre-event, it is a planning and preparation stage therefore, SWOT analysis and strategic plan focusing on stakeholder management, marketing management, financial management, and production management. Thus, this stage is very crucial for the achievement of the event tourism wedding. There are many issues concerning for planning the event tourism event such as environment impact, safety and security of the participants, negative impacts towards the community as well as tourism facilities and amenities. In the during-event, it is an implementation stage according to the setting in the pre-event stage; stakeholder management is the main key success in this stage. Sufficient coordinating among different organization of stakeholder is a challenge for the main host of the wedding. Lastly, in the after-event, it is how to sustain the integrations from varied stakeholder as well as how to improve the event for the next event in the future.

Methodology

This research is qualitative research using participatory research from stakeholders in a wedding organized at Wiang Sa District, Suratthani Province, Thailand called "Hob Rak Ma Hom Pa": หอบรักมาหมป่า "Pink Forest Wedding" its meaning "Carry Love to Cover the Forest". To propose a proper model in organizing a wedding event to boost Community-Based Eco-Tourism in rural areas used in-depth interview 10 stakeholders who were key formants, composing of the Wiang Sa District Sheriff, the provincial culture, the Tai Rom Yen National

Park, the Wiang Sa Municipality, four members of the Community-Based Eco-Tourism group, a wedding organizer and an educator who involved in the wedding event organized in Wiang Sa and site observation by the researchers. The semi-structured interview form was applied. The index of item objective congruence of the semi structure was checked via three experts; accepted issues were equivalent and higher than 0.67. The semi-structure interview form consisted of the activities before, during, and after the event. Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the data. Triangulation was applied to address validity of the research result.

Result and Discussion

The participants were 10 stakeholders being key formants, composing of the Wiang Sa District Sheriff, the provincial culture, the Tai Rom Yen National Park, the Wiang Sa Municipality, four members of the Community-Based Eco-Tourism group, an organizer and an educator who involved in the wedding event organized in Wiang Sa and site observation by the researchers.

Pink Tourism Management Model for CBET

According to the in-depth interviews, 10 key formants and the site observation, it might be concluded that the pink tourism management can be separated into three stages consisting of pre-event, during event, and after event.

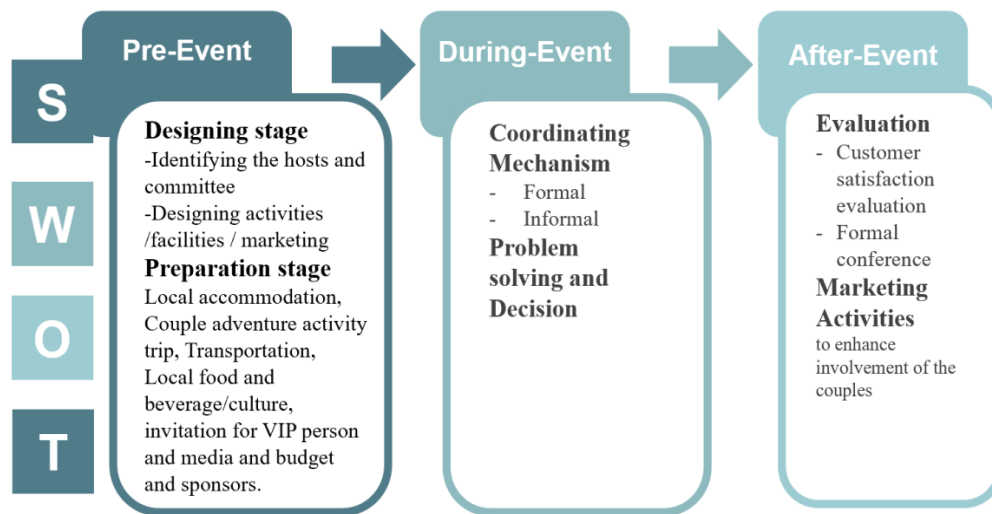


Figure 2. The pink tourism management model for CBET.

Pre-Event in the Pink Tourism Management Model

The pre wedding event can be separated into three stages: (1) SWOT analysis, (2) designing stage, and (3) preparation stage. The designing includes identifying the host, strategic plan, designing activities, venue, and other facilities such as food and beverages, transportation, and marketing.

SWOT analysis. The CBET and the sheriff conferenced leading to analysis the strength, weakness, opportunity, and threats of the area before planning the wedding event in the community. The internal factors were clarified as strengths including abundant natural attractions, participation of community, readiness of community-based tourism group, promotion of local governments, local culture such as authentic cuisine, local performance, Thai wedding tradition, etc. However, there were some points still being weaknesses consisting of

readiness of local home stay, internet and telephone network and accessibility—1 hour by car from the airport. The opportunity included the trend of marriage, valentine day, belief of couple in marriage registration, while pandemic COVID 19 was a crucial threat.

Designing stage. Identify the hosts and committee: It is the most important to set the host and committees, because it is important mechanic to drive and operate the project. In this project, there was the Wiang Sa District Sheriff to manage the wedding. Power in command, integrated center with other organizations and funding are required for the main host, while the committee were integration of related parties consisting of local governance, university, community-based tourism group, local business, and local people.



Figure 3. Stakeholder related in pink tourism management.

Designing the wedding strategic plan. This stage included setting wedding plan, objectives, wedding theme, market targets leading to design other activities, later. The strategic plan was done by conferencing stakeholder with the sheriff being a chairman, while the objectives were to promote the tourism destination, to increase numbers of tourists and income to local people, to promote good love and families as well as to enhance natural conservative awareness. Therefore, the wedding theme was “Carry Love to Cover the Forest” or “Pink Tourism”. The targets were two groups: The first was couples who wanted to register marriage certificate in the valentine day and couples with any kind of love who wanted to conquer the waterfall in the Tai Rom Yen National Park, two days trip. All couples can take photo with the couple tree—the legacy of the land-linking to the belief that love will endure similar with the couple tree.

Designing activities. This stage should be concerned about local participation, local tourism resources and target couple’s behavior. Therefore, the activities were organized into two days. The first day was for the couples who wanted to conquer the waterfall program. After registration, they changed their shirts to a signature T-shirts with screen “Carry Love to Cover the Forest”, and met the local interpreters explained about the 5 km trail to the waterfall with five games for the love couples. During the trail, couples can enjoy the nourishing forest, giant trees and stream. After that, the couples can enjoy authentic local Thai cooking at the local home stay led by the home stay host. All activities were designed to create the couple’s new local experiences and natural conservation awareness in the contexts of the destination. Furthermore, participations of local people were local interpreters and home stay which can increase extra-income for locals, while hotel and resort businesses have been applied in the general wedding events. In this stage, education institutes might take important role to

nourishing and training local interpreters and set and develop the home stay’s standard, service quality, etc., with local uniqueness.

Designing other facilities. All facilities were designed via the board such as venues, food and beverages, home stay, transportation and park, the advertising and application. The landscape and decorations were designed by the local organizer; however, the finals were in the board. Importantly, job assignments were also held in the board meeting. All stakeholders were assigned the jobs with considering their capability as well as volunteering.

Designing marketing. Both offline and online should be considerably applied to communicate with target. Clear understand about the behavior of target or couples who love eco-tourism, application date, page, Facebook, local newspaper, and local radio were applied to release the project. There was holding a press conference with newlyweds who applied for the event. Page was an online channel to apply and communicate with targets. VDO and poster were also applied for advertising in social online.



Figure 4. Sample of poster in the wedding event and the press conference. Source: Nakphin (2020).

Preparation stage. There were covered six areas related to organizing the wedding for sustaining eco communities-based tourism consisting of local home stay and local accommodation, couple adventure activity trip, transportation, local food and beverage/culture, invitation for VIP person and media, lastly budget and sponsors, according to Figure 5.

During-event in the pink tourism management model. In this stage, the pink event is occurred. All

activities were run according to the schedule; a university holds a rule as an organizer. First day, all couples joined the activities conquering the waterfall program and stay with home stay for one night. Several interested local cultures such as local food and beverage and local performances were applied in the program. The second day was the day of love or the valentine day; the couples participated in the marriage registration ceremony which was designed based on local Thai culture. The sheriff, dressed as forest goddess, is the person who signs the marriage registration, while the couples wore local Thai costume which was included in the program. After the registration, the couples and other attendances went to the national park to grow a tree to witness of their love and take a photo with the 100 years couple tree.

Important task in this stage is coordinating each part; morning and evening brief, formal meeting, were brought to monitor all missions. Line group, informal channel, was applied to coordinate all jobs. However, radio transmitter was applied to communicate in some areas with no internet and telephone signal, especially in the national park. The main organizer to run activities, lecturer from a university, is very crucial in making a decision or solving a problem. However, some issues must be jointly decided with the community and the sheriff or related organization.



Figure 5. Preparation components of a creative wedding management for sustaining eco-community based tourism.

After-event in the pink tourism management model. The project applied in-depth interview attendances for their attitudes and satisfaction on all activities in the program, which was responsibility of the lecturers. The feedbacks also can get from page of the project as well as attendance's Facebook. All information was illustrated in a meeting after the wedding event. There were some marketing strategies to remind attendances. Page of the project's still shows VDO and photos that all attendances can download. The page has still movement such as photos of the trees grown by the attendances in the wedding event.

Conclusions

The results of this study showed the management of a creative wedding event for Community-Based Eco-Tourism. The three steps of the event were pre-event stage, during event stage, and after event stage. In the pre-stage, SWOT analysis participated with community was firstly occurred to check the readiness of organizing an event. After that design strategic plan, activities, facilities, and marketing followed by preparation stage.

During stage focused on coordinating, implementation, and solving the problems occurred. Lastly, after event stage mentioned performance of the event and marketing activities to keep in touch with couples. Importantly, the wedding event can be distinguished by the context of culture and nature in the tourism destinations. Uniqueness of nature being 100 years couple trees and authentic Thai culture wedding were designed in the event, which were a magnet attracting many couples to join this event. The event can give the couples a good and memorable experience for their married life. In addition, all facilities used in the event were local people and community-based tourism group; therefore, the income can be truly distributed to locals. The role of the government sector is extremely important in job management. Local government—the sheriff was a director to coordinate others related sectors of local governments. Furthermore, village chef was the coordinator with local people.

Discussion and Suggestion

This research finding contributes to eco-tourism management, in order to create an activity boosting number of visitors as well as destination awareness, simultaneously, increasing nature conservation awareness of both attendances and local people, and lastly, enhancing persistence of local Thai culture, additionally, providing comprehensive understanding in organizing a creative pink event management in eco-tourism destinations relying on involvement of community which has been still neglected from research academic.

Firstly, CBET should start from analyzing strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats. The internal factors that can be strengths and weakness focusing on attractions both in nature and culture, participation and readiness of local people, involvement of local governments and also tourism facilities such as accommodation, accessibility, internet and telephone, etc. External factors should be considered such as customer's behavior, marriage law, pandemic, natural disaster, political, etc. To improve the weakness, education and training should be addressed to enable community ability (Munikrishnan, Rajaratnam, Mura, & Nair, 2015) in some issues such as hospitality and process for local home stays and local interpreters. Moreover, involvement of different networks can also decrease weakness, especially sponsor and other resources (Munikrishnan, Rajaratnam, Mura, & Nair, 2015).

It is important to note that main host is very crucial in managing the wedding event for CBET. The local governments or CBET groups have different advantages and disadvantages. However, government agencies are primarily better in attracting different departments to join easily, particularly supporting in budget and other resources needed. Importantly, local people and CBETs must participate in planning and implementing in the wedding event. Most of facilities emphasize on CBET's facilities such as home stay, food and beverage, etc. Thus, it is different from the other wedding tourism event stressing on business rather than CBET. The wedding trip and activities should be designed based upon uniqueness and exotic of natural and cultural resources in the destinations which can create memorable experience for couples (Chiapa & Fortezza, 2006; Seebaluck, Munhurrin, Naidoo, & Rughoonauth, 2015). The highlight of this wedding ceremony is combining culture and way of life of the area in designing the elements and atmosphere. Additionally, marketing should integrate both offline and online media being consistent with target's behavior (Seebaluck, Munhurrin, Naidoo, & Rughoonauth, 2015). Lastly, planners should consider evaluating the performance as well as feedbacks from every stakeholder; as a consequence the wedding event quality can be improved further.

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