

RESILIENCY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19: How a Farmstay Keeps Up

Mr. Pongpoonat Rungrueng is a creative entrepreneur and dedicated tourism advocate. At only 27, he has opened Rai Keun Rang's Farmstay, an environment-friendly hotel to international and local visitors interested in experiencing the charms of Thai village life. Since the start of the pandemic, Mr. Pongpoonat has been working hard to strengthen his company's branding and marketing strategies so his business can be more competitive.

With the help of MI, through the Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund, his dream of showcasing his restful farmstay might just be within reach. Read his interview and find out what it takes to keep a farmstay afloat in the time of COVID-19.

Why is tourism important? How does this support your community?

Tourism drives the economy of any country. It also helps the development of communities, be it in terms of infrastructure, craftsmanship, community relations, and economy. Overall, tourism, when done right, can have a positive spillover effect in any place.

In Rai Keun Rang's Farmstay, we believe in community enterprise. This is why our staff in the small hotel and restaurant are from Tambon Non Sung, while our ingredients are all sourced in local home gardens. Our business design was made to benefit everyone so farmers, mothers, and others interested in working in our farmstay can find gainful employment or engage in business with us.



What was the status of your business before and during the COVID-19 pandemic? What are the opportunities and challenges your business is currently facing?

My farmstay was actually formed during the pandemic. When my restaurant closed, I wanted to find an alternative source of sustainable income not only for myself but for others.



(cont. from page 1)

As a community-based tourism business, there are multiple avenues for people in my community to earn—be it through employment, business, or support services.

This, of course, requires a lot of hard work and the stall in inbound tourists have greatly affected our income. But I have faith that if we continue to advertise our farmstay, enhance our services, develop more interesting nature-filled activities, guests will come as soon as travel restrictions and strict health guidelines are lifted.

How is MI helping you adapt and apply sustainable and smart tourism practices to help your business?

The MI training on Smart and Sustainable Tourism made me better understand the power of marketing strategies. It also helped me strengthen our organic farmstay brand by working to improve our services according to a specific group of customers. This specialized approach will help us come up with more personal experiences such as guests harvesting vegetables they will have during meals, fishing in the nearby lake, or taking peaceful walks around the village. By keeping true to our eco-friendly brand, our business can thrive in the long-term.



What are your next steps in promoting your business to a wider audience?

Marketing research. During the MI training, we were taught that “knowing your customers” was the first step to ensuring our business will survive. This is why at the moment, I am focused on gathering data about experiences and services that international travellers seek in a farmstay. I am also working with the community to assess what unique food or crafts we can showcase to separate us from other local destination sites. When these are completed, we will package these into our advertising across social media channels, as how MI taught us.

In this downtime, I have also been applying for grant support to help keep the business afloat and fund improvements in our facilities, so when the borders are open guests can partake of our improved farmstay.



What types of support do you and other tourism advocates require to strengthen your business?

Linkages with universities will help us better understand ecological farming techniques and hospitality management in a practical way. The collaboration will also allow students to intern with us, so they can learn first-hand the value of community-based development. Hopefully, this will shore more tourism investments so communities like ours can improve and benefit more.