



THE HEALTH SPA PROMOTION FOR HEALTH TOURISM CENTER IN EASTERN REGION OF THAILAND

Terapong Ayamuang, Ph.D., M.P.H., B.Pharm.Sirindhorn College of Public Health Chonburi, Thailand, terapong@scphc.ac.th

Suwichai Kosaiyawat, Ph.D., Burapha University, Thailand, kosajyaw@buu.ac.th

Worawut Phengphan, Ph.D., Burapha University, Thailand, worawut@buu.ac.th

Abstract- The objectives of this research were to study 1) the current condition and problems, 2) appropriate processes, and 3) the guideline for promoting the health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand. This research used a qualitative research methodology. The data was collected from related documents, field studies, surveys, interviews, observations, and group discussions. The results showed that 1) For the current situation, the spa establishments have a relatively high growth rate and offer a wide variety of services, focusing on holistic and traditional medicine services. Natural resources have been used as capital for locations and raw materials by perfectly combining the vibe of western civilization and creating a unique identity for each establishment. For problems, it is found that there are a lack and the insufficient number of skilled employees, lack of access to finance, and law enforcement issues against the entrepreneurs running covert businesses and damaging the image of the Thai spa and massage business in Thailand. If these problems are solved, it will strengthen and result in the sustainable growth of the Thai spa and massage business in Thailand. 2) For the processes, there should be good management systems in 5 aspects: continuous human resource development, easy access to finance, standardized and sufficient quality raw materials, and systematic management such as facility management, safety management, and cost-effective management system for existing resources. Besides, there should be a variety of information dissemination channels that are up to date and accessible to all target groups. 3) For the guideline for promoting health spa establishments, there is a need to promote and support each other between the public and private sectors, and the health spa establishments should be improved and developed in all 5 aspects. The government should promote policy on research and product development. Different services should be organized in response to the user's needs. In further research, the satisfaction, or needs of the users, especially the elderly tourists, should be studied to use the obtained data as a guideline for human resource development planning to effectively serve the customers and to create a competitive advantage in health tourism at the national level.

KEYWORDS: SPA, HEALTH TOURISM, ESTABLISHMENT, EASTERN THAILAND

I. INTRODUCTION

Health tourism is currently increasing in popularity according to the trend of health care. This is in line with the increase in the number of tourists visiting Thailand, which is the strength of Thailand with many contributing factors such as beautiful and popular tourist destinations, Thai food, herbs, Thai traditional medicine, religions, beliefs, traditions, and politeness and friendliness to tourists. According to a study by Kasikorn Research Center (Kasikorn Research Center, 2019), the average number of foreigners visiting Thailand for medical treatment is 1.2 million per year.

In the view of foreigners, the uniqueness of Health Tourism in the past was Thai massage and Thai spa. Thailand has a variety of resources and wisdom for health promotion that can be classified as health tourism. With the recognition of the importance of health tourism, Thailand has established a 20-year National Strategy (2018 - 2037) on health, beauty and wellness, and Thai traditional medical tourism that suggesting the development and enhancement of the standards of products, services, personnel, entrepreneurs and relevant tourist attractions by focusing on creating differences and outstanding Thai identities at international level in conjunction with the use of Thai knowledge and wisdom in further development along with creativity, science, technology and innovation to create added value to the products and services related to health, beauty, and wellness, and Thai traditional medical tourism. The goals of 2020 are to 1) develop a competitive health service model focusing on foreign target groups (Magnet); 2) promote the development of a city of herbs and health, beauty and wellness, and Thai traditional medical tourism; 3) develop a database of 4 key products to support the Medical Hub policy, 4) improve relevant measures, laws, regulations, notices and regulations to facilitate the implementation of the Medical Hub policy; 5) develop a comprehensive health center of the group of cities of herbs and develop a wellness center model in Thai traditional medicine and integrated medicine; 6) promote investment and the EEC for health care and health promotion service business; 7) promote international medical seminars (Medical MICE); 8) organizing a trade show/Routh show to promote the readiness to

bean international health leader; 9) provide the establishments the model and guidelines for establishing a safe and standardized wellness center in Thai traditional medicine and integrated medicine. According to the strategy to develop Thailand as the Medical Hub 2017 - 2026, the Ministry of Public Health has been assigned as the main administrative unit to drive Thailand's development strategy to become the Medical Hub (Medical Hub policy) since 2004 until now. There are 4 main products as follows: (1) Wellness Hub, (2) Medical Service Hub, (3) Academic Hub, and (4) Product Hub.

According to such a development plan, it was found that the tourism revenue from international tourists in 2018 increased by 6.77% from the baseline (2017) which equal to 59,024 million Baht (Patipan Bandurat and Seri Wongmontha, 2020: 287-297), and the performance of health, beauty and wellness, and Thai traditional medical tourism increased by 5% in the 12 months of the fiscal year 2019.

Health tourism is another type of tourism that has received special attention as tourists interest tends to change from before (Jutatip Junead, Angsumalin Jamnongchob, Aran Wanichakorn, and Nattapat Manirochana, 2018: 1-15) For example, tourists suffering from illnesses or having health problems are likely to travel for medical treatment or a trip focusing on health-promoting activities (Pimporn Thongmuang, Vichakorn Hengsadeeikul, and Leudech Girdwiichai, 2018: 88-104) Besides, health tourism is one of the megatrends due to various factors such as holistic health, accelerated life, conspicuous consumption, individualization, a quest for spirituality, and aging populations, etc. This makes people more interested in health care (Supparangn Chanthanawan and Rachada Fongthanakit, 2019: 190-204) and also has a positive effect on the economy such as creating jobs, careers, and tourism revenue (Global Wellness Institute, 2017: 5)

In addition, when it comes to health tourism, most Asian countries mainly focus on medical tourism that actively promotes preventive health tourism. There is the promotion of natural and alternative medicine in some countries such as the Republic of the Philippines, Republic of China (Taiwan). However, it is not widespread and is not as recognized as in Thailand. Therefore, it is a good opportunity for Thailand to further promote health tourism. This is in line with the guidelines for promoting Thailand as a health destination because Thailand has the potential to be a health destination in ASEAN. Besides, Thailand can accommodate tourists from all over the world because it has both natural resources and unique traditions and culture. (Voralak Kiawmeesuan, Santhipharb Khamsa-ard and Pitak Siriwong, 2018: 167-181)

According to the Department of Health Service Support (2020) report on the number of health establishments, there are a total of 6,582 authorized health spa establishments: 1,086 establishments in Health Region 6; 1,046 establishments in Bangkok Metropolis; 1,034 establishments in Health Region 1. In 8 provinces in the Health Region 6 consisting of Chon Buri, Rayong, Samut Prakan, Chachoengsao, Prachin Buri, Sa Kaeo, Chanthaburi, and Trat, the top three provinces with the highest number of authorized health spa establishments are Chonburi (683 establishments), Rayong (120 establishments) and Samut Prakan (75 establishments). Therefore, the area in Eastern Thailand should be promoted as a health tourism center.

Due to the healthy lifestyle, government policies, and the rapid expansion of both domestic and international spa capitalist groups, thus, labor market liberalization nowadays has begun to have a negative impact on the manufacturing and service sectors of the Thai spa business, as the current competition for personnel has caused the shortage of skilled workers and professional skills in the country. Besides, the establishment of new relevant regulations and legal measures to strengthen the screening for employment in health establishments. It is interesting how Thailand plans to develop personnel in health spa establishments both in the short term and long term to keep up with the situation and its rapid growth, especially in Eastern Thailand, which is in the Eastern Economic Corridor Development (EEC) project and suitable as a health tourism hub. This is to generate tourism revenue and maintain competitiveness as the market leader of health spa service providers in ASEAN. (Suratsawadee Sinwat, 2019)

Therefore, the researchers recognize the importance and the need to study and research on promoting health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand for the benefits of Thai health establishments and to respond to the government policies to provide clear guidelines for promotion.

Objectives

1. To study the current condition and problems of health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand.

2. To analyze the appropriate processes of health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand.

3. To present the guidelines for promoting health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand.

Implication

1. Health spa establishments have the guidelines, management methods, and problem-solving approaches for the management of the health tourism center.

2. Obtaining guidelines for promoting the health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand.

3. Relevant agencies, both public and private sectors, in the health spa business and institutes that produce health science graduates, can apply the knowledge gained from this research to further develop and promote health tourism.

4. Spa establishments have appropriate methods and principles for developing the establishments, which will result in higher tourism revenue of the country and sustainable economic stability.

II. METHODOLOGY

In this study, current conditions and problems, including appropriate processes for developing health spa establishments into the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand were investigated. This study is qualitative research and data were collected from related documents, field study, in-depth interview, observation and focus group discussion. The data obtained were analyzed and the results were summarized. Every step of the research is related to each other as follows. (Songkoon Chantachon, 2020: 118-150).

Step 1 Study of concept, theories, relevant papers, and exploration of the preliminary data: In this step, current conditions and problems of health spa establishments and health tourism in Eastern Thailand were studied to determine the conceptual frameworks and create key informant interview. The interview form was submitted to the advisor for consultation and consideration of content, language, and coverage and then submitted to experts for instrument integrity testing.

Step 2 Study of appropriate processes for promoting the health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand. The qualitative approach was used and the data were collected from related documents and field study using survey, observation, in-depth interview with the key informants and those involved in health tourism management. The field study was conducted at 3 spa establishments to collect data. The issues related to the management process of successful business spa establishments were as follows: 1) human resource development, 2) capital - money, 3) raw materials, 4) management, and 5) information.

In order to obtain complete and practical information, concepts and related theories were used in the development of coherent interviews and observational questionnaires. After that, the data were analyzed and examined by the experts to be used as a tool to determine the guideline for promoting the management of health tourism.

Step 3 Study of guidelines for promoting the health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand.

By using the data obtained from analysis of problems, processes, management of successful business spa establishments, as well as government policies for presenting the ideas and testing of suitability and possibility of implementing the opinions from the focus group discussion voluntarily participated by the informants, the results were concluded after and the focus group discussion.

Key informants

Key informants consisted of health entrepreneurs from the private sector, academics, public servant/government officials as follows:

1) Practitioners in health spa establishments from the private sector in 3 provinces, 3 persons/establishment for a total of 15 people which were 3 health spa entrepreneurs, 3 health spa operators, and 9 providers in health spa establishments

2) Six academics, public servants/government officials consisting of 1 Director of Health Spa Division, Department of Health Service Support, Ministry of Public Health, 1 Head of Consumer Protection Group, Chonburi Provincial Public Health Office, 1 Director of Abhaibhubejhr College of Thai Traditional Medical College Prachinburi, 1 Director of Chonburi Provincial Tourism and Sports Office, and 1 Director of Prachinburi Provincial Tourism and Sports Office.

Government sectors: We interviewed people involved in health tourism; people who play a role in policymaking, regulating regulations and standards in health tourism; government officials who perform facilitation duties, public relations, encouraging and promoting activities under the health tourism promotion policy.

In this study of the health spa promotion for health tourism center in Eastern Thailand, purposive sampling was used and the field data were collected in Chonburi, Prachin Buri, and Chachoengsao. This is because: (1) These provinces have popular health establishments and are successful in health tourism. (2) There are recognized health establishments that received awards in health tourism from the Ministry of Tourism and Sports located in these provinces. (3) Health entrepreneurs in these provinces have developed their businesses through community involvement by using cultural capital and local wisdom to generate income for the people in the communities. These establishments are recognized by the people in the community and that province. (4) These establishments have been in service for not less than 10 years, with at least 1,000 visitors a year, and have received a valid operating license.

Research instrument

The research instrument used in this study consisted of structured interviews, in-depth interviews, observation forms, and focus group discussion. The research instrument developed by the researchers in this study were presented to the experts for content validity to cover the details of the topics studied. The interview form was then revised for clarity to be used in actual data collection. Besides, note-taking materials and equipment, audio recorders, and cameras were also used for data collection.

Data analysis

After the data collection using interviews, the researcher wrote a detailed memo of every interview in order to process the preliminary information by studying and interpreting the phenomena. This is to organize information into categories. In the synthesis and analysis of data, data from interviews and documents were categorized according to the topics studied and analyzed to draw fact-based theoretical conclusions in the study area. Completeness and reliability were verified by triangulation to obtain information according to the purpose of the research. If any part was found to be incomplete, additional data collection was conducted for missing data. The data were presented using descriptive analysis in order to explain the purpose of the research by analyzing the theoretical concepts, including conceptual frameworks and related papers. The data was presented with illustrations.

III. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the results can be divided into 3 parts. Part 1 is the current condition and problems of health spa establishments as a health tourism center in Eastern Thailand. Part 2 is the appropriate processes of health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand. Part 3 is the guidelines for promoting the health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand. The details are as follows:

Part 1: Current condition and problems of health spa establishments as a health tourism center in Eastern Thailand. It was found that to serve as the health tourism center, three elements must be taken into account for good image and reliability: public relations through verbal word-of-mouth, personal needs, and previous experience of users in the use of products and services. These are direct information that results in the attitude, concept, and preference of the potential customer toward the establishments.

Making the users satisfied with the services is absolutely essential. The service providers must have the ability to offer products and services that meet the expectations of the service users in order to maximize their satisfaction. The Health spa business is in a period of high growth and it is necessary to find its own strengths and develop such strengths to gain an advantage over competitors by highlighting differentiation or improving services all the time. Moreover, the customer's behavior must be studied periodically to prepare for or adapt to any changes that may occur at any time and competitor analysis needs to be conducted to find suitable and competitive marketing strategies. For example, location and store design are the most important factors when selecting or deciding on a service. The location must be convenient for transportation and easily accessible. Environment and safety, suitability to geographical characteristics, climate, transport routes, standard factors, recognition and staffing, employee skills, and providing advice on a range of health issues to customers are also very important. This is because people who come to health spas want to stay healthy and relax their body and mind, and most of them do not know and understand the actual advantages or benefits of services in the spas or different types of massages. For the factors related to types of health spa services, spa customers pay more attention to safety and privacy, the service providers, therefore, need to explain or reassure the customers and the equipment used must be clean, hygienic, and safe.

Part 2: Appropriate processes of health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand. There are 5 main steps as follows:

1. Personnel or human resource development: Entrepreneurs should develop their employees to have good interpersonal relationships, cheerful with a good personality, good manners, service mind, proper dress, and dedicated to service. Besides, the entrepreneurs should provide their employees with

knowledge, competencies, and expertise to meet professional standards to build trust and confidence among customers.

2. Finance and price: The entrepreneurs should adjust the service fee to suit the service. There should be multiple service rates, for example, each service should be priced per hour or per time, while an all-inclusive service package should offer a discount because this package often offers several types of services available at the same time. However, regular customers should be charged the membership price. As for the payment, the payment should be made by credit card or electronic method instead of cash in principle, for systematic and standardized payment. There should be sources of funds that entrepreneurs can borrow at low-interest rates or a secure fund from the government sector, private sector, or financial organization for improvements, business expansion, employee benefits, and other administrative expenses as required by each spa establishment as appropriate.

3. Raw materials, products, and services: The entrepreneurs should provide a variety of products and services such as herbal oil massage, cream massage, Thai massage, foot massage, and herbal steam. In addition, the health spa establishments should have a full range of services and collaborate with multidisciplinary practices, including physicians, nurses, physical therapists, and dietitian therapists, as customers have a wide range of health needs in addition to strength and beauty, wellness and health are also important.

4. Management: There should be participatory management. The entrepreneurs should provide ancillary services such as beverages for customers. Spa services must be of quality according to the complete procedures with punctuality, comfort, and speed. In addition, there should be publicity and contact channels via the website, including regular communication with the service users to inform any new promotions. The involvement of the community and the networks will further enable the community to reach and recognize the value of sustainable health tourism in the future.

5. Information and distribution channels: The entrepreneurs should have clear guideposts or allow users to contact via telephone and the internet. Service hours should be reasonable. Most customers come for the service on public holidays or Saturdays and Sundays, so the service hours should be expanded on holidays and there should be a variety of communication channels, especially the Internet, for convenience.

Part 3: The guidelines for the promotion of health spa establishments as the health tourism center in Eastern Thailand. The details are as follows:

Personnel or human resources should be promoted by providing interested and qualified personnel with the opportunity to attend training courses related to services and health tourism, with the establishment responsible for all training costs. Once the person has passed the training courses, they must return to work for the establishment by entering into a written employment contract similar to the type of fund reimbursement, stating the period of reimbursement. If entrepreneurs want the qualified employees to stay with their organization and do not want to face employee turnover problems or have to change staff all the time, they should pay more attention to their personnel, open up and listen to problems, act as good supervisor and adviser and practice fairness management. In addition, adequate and appropriate wages, benefits, and compensation for living situations are the first major factors affecting the quality of work life. Rewards to improve staff morale should be used through welfare incentives such as scholarships, child tuition allowance, self-development opportunities, career advancement paths for employees, and creating a friendly and warm work environment to foster engagement and loyalty to the organization, creating a suitable working environment and study the behavior of each employee to better understand the employee subordinates. Networking methods can also be used to exchange or borrow service workers between cooperating establishments. In case of lack of staff in capital and management, the establishment should be supported by several sectors, including the government sector, private sector, and independent organizations to provide loans at low-interest rates or joint investment as a partner to operate or expand a business, open branches both domestically and internationally with a contract as a mutual agreement for both short term and long term.

For raw materials or products and public relations of information promoting health, tourism should be in the same direction. For example, the use of the names that express Thai identities and preserve Thai-style products such as perfumed powder, white clay, and Thai traditional medicinal plants. The government may organize an exhibition for products based on Thai wisdom in order to promote Thai products to foreigners. Besides, the public and private sectors should establish schools or institutions to provide training and development of the Thai massage spa business with the same standard and direction, as well as to develop a systematic curriculum.

At present, for the guidelines for health tourism, the Ministry of Public Health have prepared a standard of health tourism to ensure the customers the safety of the use of herbs, with the supervision, protection, and safety standards in 5 areas as follows: 1) health spa business establishment standard, 2)

health spa operator standard, 3) health spa service providers standard, 4) health spa business service standard, and 5) safety standard for health spa activities. Besides, there are also criteria for quality certification of health spa establishments according to the Ministry of Public Health announcement, which sets the criteria for quality certification for health spa establishments. There are 5 other standards, namely personnel, service, products and equipment, administration and organization management, and the location to ensure better-standardized health spa establishments.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

1. Suggestions for the application of research results

1.1 Create cooperation between educational institutions, entrepreneurs, establishments, associations, organizations, or professional bodies to cooperate in creating courses, developing teachers, developing teaching and learning processes, in order to produce the graduates following the Needs of the Thai spa industry.

1.2 To be integrated with the establishments, such as teaching planning, learning with hands-on operations at the establishment to develop working skills, provide opportunities for learners to learn communication skills, learning skills for communication, teamwork, and interaction with customers. This gives the learners a critical thinking process of solving problems that leads to the production of efficient personnel that meet the needs of the facility.

1.3 This concept can be used to develop personnel in the health tourism business because at present there is no cooperation from all sectors, both public and private sectors. Therefore, network partners in Eastern Thailand should be created to exchange and develop knowledge among the entrepreneurs and service providers in the spa business simultaneously.

1.4 Develop information on promoting the development of establishments in the health tourism business by adopting technologies in the operations for reducing operating costs and more efficient access to information. For example, establishing a database of service providers, the database of establishments, the database of personnel, network partners, public relations information, organizing activities, and human resource development in each province in Eastern Thailand.

2. Suggestions for future research

2.1 Research should be conducted to compare the satisfaction, or needs of health tourism service users in tourist destinations in Thailand for more reliable research findings.

2.2 The training and vocational development needs of employees in health tourism should be studied to apply the research results in planning for human resource development.

2.3 The needs of elderly tourists should be studied to be used as a guideline for personnel development planning for effective services for the elderly and competitive advantage in health tourism at the national level.

REFERENCES

1. Department of Health Service Support. (2020). *Report of the number of establishments in health service business by area*. Retrieved March 12, 2020, from http://203.157.7.49/securereport/myReportViewer.aspx?reportpath=/HSS_SPA_Report/Spa
2. Global Wellness Institute. (2017). *The Global Wellness Tourism January 2017*. Retrieved
3. From <https://static1.squarespace.com>
4. Jutatip Junead, Angsumalin Jamnongchob, Aran Wanichakorn, and Nattapat Manirochana. (2018). The Study on Potential of Thai Identity in Spa business and Traditional Thai Massage toward world Class Health tourism sector. *Panyapiwat Journal*. 10(2) 1-15.
5. Kasikorn Research Center. (2019). *Medical-tourism continued to expand in 2018*. Retrieved November 13, 2019, from <https://www.kasikornbank.com/th/personal>
6. Patipan Bandurat and Seri Wongmontha. (2020). A holistic marketing strategy for spa businesses to welcome Chinese tourists. *Journal of Multidisciplinary in Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3(2) 287-297.
7. Pimporn Thongmuang, Vichakorn Hengsadeeikul and Leudech Girdwiichai. (2018). The Marketing Strategies Model for Health Spa Business in University of Thailand. *Research and Development Journal Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University*. 10(2) 88-104.
8. Sonkoon Chantachon. (2020). *Culture Qualitative Research (Fieldwork)*. Faculty of
9. Humanities and Social Science Rajabhat Maha Sarakham University.
10. Suratsawadee Sinwat, (2019). *Ethnic Chong way of Life: The wisdom of growing and breeding herbs*. Chanthaburi Province, Rambhaibhanni Rajabhat University.

11. SupparangnChanthanawan and RachadaFongthanakit. (2019). Factors affecting decision making on using Spa services towards consumers in Chatuchak District, Bangkok. *Journal of the association of researchers*. 24(3) 190-204.
12. VoralakKiawmeesuan, SanthipharbKhamsa-ard and PitakSiriwong. (2018). Guidelines for potential development of Spa Business focus on expectation of foreign tourists in Huahin District, Prachuapkirikhanproviencie. *Dusit Thani College Journal*.12(2) 167-181.