

Health Tourism Management: The Case of Thai Health Tourism Industry

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to focus on the mechanism that the state utilizes in supporting and developing the health tourism including the relationship with industry and their roles and responsibilities for creating longevity in the health tourism industry in Thailand. The data for this study was collected through purposive sampling method. In-depth interviews were conducted with thirty (30) managers from the Department of Health Services Support in the Ministry of Public Health and the Department of Tourism and the Tourism Authority of Thailand in the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. The results showed that 3 main public mechanisms for the promotion of health tourism are used for the promotion of the health tourism industry in Thailand. The main mechanisms used in the promotion of health tourism are, the Department of Health Services Support in the Ministry of Public Health, Department of Tourism, and the Tourism Authority of Thailand in the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. However, each of these three-mechanism had unique approaches to managing and promoting health tourism in the country. For example, the Department of Health Service Support monitors the quality control system for health services products and health services businesses, the Department of Tourism establishes the basic foundations of tourism, facilitates tourism in the country. And the Tourism Authority of Thailand markets the brand and identity of the country both domestically and internationally. Moreover, the

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mechanisms that are important in turning policy into action and increasing competitiveness revealed that strong organizations with a specific mission and clear working guidelines had a direct influence on health promotion.

Keywords: Health Tourism, Public Management Mechanism, Thai Organization, Health Tourism Marketing

การจัดการการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพ: กรณีศึกษา อุตสาหกรรมการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพในประเทศไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษามีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษากลไกของภาครัฐที่สนับสนุนส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพ รวมถึงความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างอุตสาหกรรม บทบาท และความรับผิดชอบ เพื่อส่งเสริมการมีสุขภาพยืนยาว โดยการศึกษาใช้วิธีการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกกับผู้บริหาร 30 คน จากรัฐสัมบสนุน บริการสุขภาพกระทรวงสาธารณสุขกรรมการท่องเที่ยวและการท่องเที่ยวแห่งประเทศไทย (ททท.) กระทรวงการท่องเที่ยวและกีฬา ผลการศึกษาพบว่า สามารถห่วงงานหลักที่ดำเนินการสนับสนุนส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวเชิงสุขภาพ คือ กรมสนับสนุนบริการสุขภาพกระทรวงสาธารณสุข กรรมการท่องเที่ยวและกีฬาแห่งประเทศไทย (ททท.) กระทรวงการท่องเที่ยวและกีฬา โดยกระทรวงสาธารณสุขดูแลมาตรฐานผลิตภัณฑ์ที่เกี่ยวเนื่องกับสุขภาพ และผู้ประกอบการธุรกิจเกี่ยวเนื่องกับสุขภาพ ส่วนกระทรวงการท่องเที่ยวและกีฬาดูแลมาตรฐานของโครงสร้างพื้นฐานและสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวก เพื่อการท่องเที่ยวการพัฒนาพื้นที่แหล่งท่องเที่ยวให้เกิดความยั่งยืนการพัฒนาศินค้าและบริการ รวมทั้งการสร้างความเชื่อมั่นให้กับท่องเที่ยวรับรู้และเข้าใจภาพลักษณ์ที่ดีของประเทศไทย ททท. ส่งเสริมตลาดการท่องเที่ยวภายในและต่างประเทศ

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Introduction

Growing demand for health tourism is a global phenomenon, linked to economic development that generates rising incomes and education. At the international level, health tourism is an industry sustained by 617 million individuals with an annual growth of 3.9% annually and worth US \$ 513 billion (Carrera, P.M. & Bridges, J. FP, 2014). In Southeast Asia, the health sector is expanding rapidly, attributable to the rapid growth of the private sector and health tourism which is emerging as a lucrative business opportunity (Chan, 2002).

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (2013) commissioned a study on the capacity and size of the tourist markets for health, golf, marriage and honeymoons, and ecotourism. The study focused on market size to be used as a tool in planning marketing strategy and product or service development to create products and services consistent with the needs of tourists and competitive with other countries. The study found that the total market size in Thailand is 3,750 Million dollars per year with ecotourism as the largest share of the four groups, followed by marriage and honeymoon, health, and then golf. Also, the study noted that the volume of health-related tourism in Thailand increased every quarter, causing the value and size of the market to increase(Henderson, 2003). The results of this study showed that Thailand is the number one destination in the world for health-related tourism (Hall, 2011; Henderson, 2003). In addition, health tourism is a business practice that createslong-term value for many stakeholders through good governance mechanisms (Ardell, 1986; Benson & Stuart, 1992). These mechanisms can lead to sustainable business growth. In order to do so, the public mechanisms must also work well through the environment, culture, and local community (Oppermann, 2000; Mihalic, 2000; Edgell, 1999). Therefore, the government is playing a strong market and promotional role in the health industry. Furthermore, public and private sectors should link to each other in the healthcare systemto consolidate the quality of service, establish the professional job, use the facilities efficiently, and sharing information and research (Mueller, &Yaufnenn, 2001).

Therefore, this study will focus on the mechanism that the state utilizes in supporting and developing the health tourism in Thailand including the relationship with industry and their roles and responsibilities forcreating longevity in the health tourism industry.

Literature Review

Health Tourism

There is no consensus on the definition of health tourism. For example, the International Union of Tourist Organizations (IUTO) in 1973 recommended that the health tourism defines as providing health and medical facilities and services for tourism that take advantage of a country's natural resources, such as clean air and mineral water. This early definition has since been used as a foundation in the management of health tourism. The main purpose of health tourism is to restore or maintain good health, therefore health tourists may have many different goals that they wish to accomplish which businesses in the health tourism industry can provide as a deliberate service. Such a definition may be interpreted as including a tourist facility to attract tourists by promoting its healthcare services and facilities, in addition to its regular amenities (Dunn, 1965; Ardell, 1986; Hall, 2011 & Richter, 2003). These healthcare services may include medical examinations by qualified doctors and nurses at a resort or hotel, special diets, acupuncture, trans-vital injections, vitamin complex intakes, special medical treatments for various diseases such as arthritis, and herbal medicines (Goodrich and Goodrich 1987:17; Van Spielen 1992).

In some occasion, health tourism known as wellness tourism is sometimes included the context of adventure and sports tourism as being sun and fun activities; engaging activities where the motivation for travel is primarily health; travel for sauna, massage, and other health-related activities; and medical treatment (Hall, 2011). Other definitions are considered health care techniques with therapy to increase well-being, treat and protect against illness. Well-being is being healthy and happy (Smith & Puezko, 2014). Similarly, others seem to suggest that health tourism is a continual improvement in wellness at an individual level including physical surrounding, social roles, culture, and customers play a role to direct people's life (Department of Tourism, 2013; Hodgkinson, 1994; Packer, 2009).

In sum, health tourism is an activity that offers products and services to the health tourism market by providing brand name products and services. Health tourism often takes advantage of natural surroundings, sandy beaches, hiking trails, unique activities, coffee shops, and quality restaurants. It also refers to an absence of disease and full

potential of an individual, given certain conditions, to work or undertake routine activities during daily life and culture. Health tourism utilizes local knowledge, the natural resources, use tourists with a unique perspective on the traditions and culture that define the roots of that knowledge. After clarifying the definition of health tourism, the next section demonstrates how health tourism management can create sustainability in tourism management.

Sustainability in Tourism Management

Health tourism management is a business activity, therefore to create sustainability in tourism management, it is necessary to manage the business sustainably. Panyawaranan (2001) explained that sustainable business practices create long-term value for internal and external stakeholders through good governance strategies that respect the environment, culture, and local community. The economic activity of a business can meet the needs of today's generation without adversely affecting future generations. Panyawaranan (2001) explained that businesses cannot create sustainability if they do not control economic, social, and environmental costs. Business organizations that manage sustainably must adhere to the three pillars of people, planet, and profit.

Additionally, business sustainability leads to sustainable business growth. Following is a list of results stemming from sustainable business practices: 1) Economic Results (profit management) consist of reduce costs in waste and raw materials, mitigate risk and dependencies, maintain market access, increase customer trust and acceptance, and increase brand value and strength2) Social Results (people management) consist of transparency and accountability to society, communications channels with stakeholders, maintain social and communal acceptance of business operations, and show employees the value of their work and create employee loyalty and 3) Environmental Results (environmental management) consist of decrease environmental waste and pollution, decrease encroachment upon and the destruction of nature, increase effectiveness in the use of resources, and innovate in the preservation of nature (Edfell, 1999; Smith & Puczko, 2014)

In order to learn more about the health tourism management, there are many different types of tourism for health tourism including (Smith & Puczko, 1 (2014) Medical tourism is about treatment and restoration for tourists. Medical tourism includes

physical examinations, treating disease, gender reassignment surgery, orthopaedics, cosmetic surgery, dental services, and other types of surgery (Richter, 1989; Richter, 1998). Medical tourists are those that have some form of the disease and require treatment and restorative services. 2) Spa tourism focuses on relaxation through water-based body treatments. Types of treatments include mineral water, mineral or thermal pools, steam rooms and saunas, and the use of spa products that are used in treatments, rehabilitation, and relaxation (Hodgkinson, 3 (1994). Thalasso tourism is tourism for the purposes of Thalassotherapy, a type of skin care treatment that uses mineral extracts from deep sea water, known to have more than 80 different types of minerals, that are quickly absorbed into the skin to deliver moisture to the innermost layer of cells (Richter, 1999; Nahrstedt, 2004). Brown seaweed controls how the skin attracts and retains moisture and balances the skin's moisture levels. Sea salt stimulates skin cell renewal, protects against sagging, delays ageing, and moisturizes the skin. 4) Holistic tourism is travel that incorporates traditional health care techniques with therapy to increase well-being and treat and protect against illness (Smith & Kelly, 2006). Well-being is being healthy and happy. Mental health means being happy, joyful, active, and free from stress. Physical health means to be strong and active, full of energy, and free from disease. Social health is defined as being able to live together in peace and harmony and ensuring that basic services are provided for. Spiritual health is happiness that comes from understanding nature and the meaning and purpose of life, increasing knowledge and awareness. 5) Spiritual tourism, such as traveling to peaceful locations or performing religious acts, is a mental development that leads to a happier life (Hofer, 2003). and 6) Yoga, for yoga and meditation tourists, is not about religion, but it is about the body, mind, and spirit becoming as one to bring physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual balance (Chan, 2008).

The health tourism is touted to be very important for the health business because it is essential and valuable to raise healthy life. Additionally, it is expanding rapidly in cities with a higher standard of living and a greater focus on personal health (Hofer, 2003). These people seek a better quality of life through these activities and engage in activities that increase physical, mental, social well-being, and lead to a longer and healthier life. Furthermore, to create business sustainability, corporate leaders must focus on the environment and society, monitor costs, develop a corporate culture

that accepts the environment and the community, and continually set environmental and social goals.

Public Mechanism to Support Health Tourism

The following section focuses on how the government is playing a strong cooperation and promotional role in the health tourism. This is a trend in Asia, especially in Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia who would like to be the main regional hubs for the health and medical tourism where medical tourist visas are available and government agencies have been established with the mandate to increase medical tourist inflows (Pocock & Phua, 2011). Government in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam are also promoting the health industry through the cooperation between public and private sector encouraging foreign investment in healthcare industry (Smith & Kelly, 2006)

Consequently, in India, the government is providing more infrastructure. They have a public and private sector partnership model at both central and state level to improve healthcare infrastructure to provide efficient services and innovative delivery models. Furthermore, the government of India has responded promptly to tap the potential of this sector. In its effort to capitalize on this opportunity the government has undertaken measures to promote India as global health destination (Chinai & Goswami, 2007). The National Health Policy 2002 strongly encourages medical facilities to provide service to users from overseas (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare 2002). The Indian Ministry of Tourism has started a new category of visas for medical tourists call the “M” visa. Efforts are underway to improve the airport infrastructure to ensure smooth arrival and departure. If the present trend continuous, trade in health service will become one of the biggest sectors in India (Hazarika, 2010).

In Malaysia, as early as 1998, the Malaysia government had identified health tourism as a growth drive under the Eighth Malaysian Plan and established the National Committee for the Promotion of Health Tourism comprised of airlines, hospitals, travel and tourism agencies and the Malaysia Industrial Department Authority to address issues related to marketing, promotion, and tax incentives (Henderson, 2003).

Like other Asia countries, the Philippines supported the development of medical tourism through a host of fiscal incentives such as tax holidays. The government also

tried to spearhead the public and private sector partnership with the Philippine Medical Tourism Program (PMTP). The PMTP brought together government department, especially the Department of Health, Department of Tourism, Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Foreign Affairs along with private sector representatives which include the hospital service sector, real estate developer (Henderson, 2003)

In addition, there is more need to establish linkage between the public and private healthcare system, since this could help augment the financial capacity of the public health sector, improve the overall availability and quality of service. The linkage could be established through professional exchanges, cooperation in training, use of facilities, sharing information and research.

In sum, the government is noticeably playing a strong cooperation and promotional role in the health industry. This is a clear trend in Southeast Asia and the mechanism could also be introduced to channel resource to promote healthcare industry and establish with the mandate to increase the tourist inflow.

Methods

Data Collection and Procedure

This is a qualitative research paper. The researcher collected the data through the collection and synthesis of secondary data generated from government policy, industry management mechanisms, and cooperation, along with primary data collected through stakeholder interviews with policy managers within the government at the department level. Thirty (30) managers were interviewed from the Department of Health Services Support in the Ministry of Public Health and the Department of Tourism and the Tourism Authority of Thailand in the Ministry of Tourism and Sports.

In addition, there were two main data collection tools used in this research. The first tool was the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews with relevant government agencies, associations, and senior managers. The second was to outline observations made within the field of study. There were two main sources of information for observations made. The first came from initial observations of the researcher. The second came from a review of existing literature. The researcher defined important observations coming from the literature review as any that describe management styles in the health

tourism industry, managerial methods, the behavior of tourists in relation to services received, the relationship between established health and spa related tourism programs and the environment, and consumer behavior. All information received from observations and interviews was recorded in writing, audio, and video (See Figure 1).

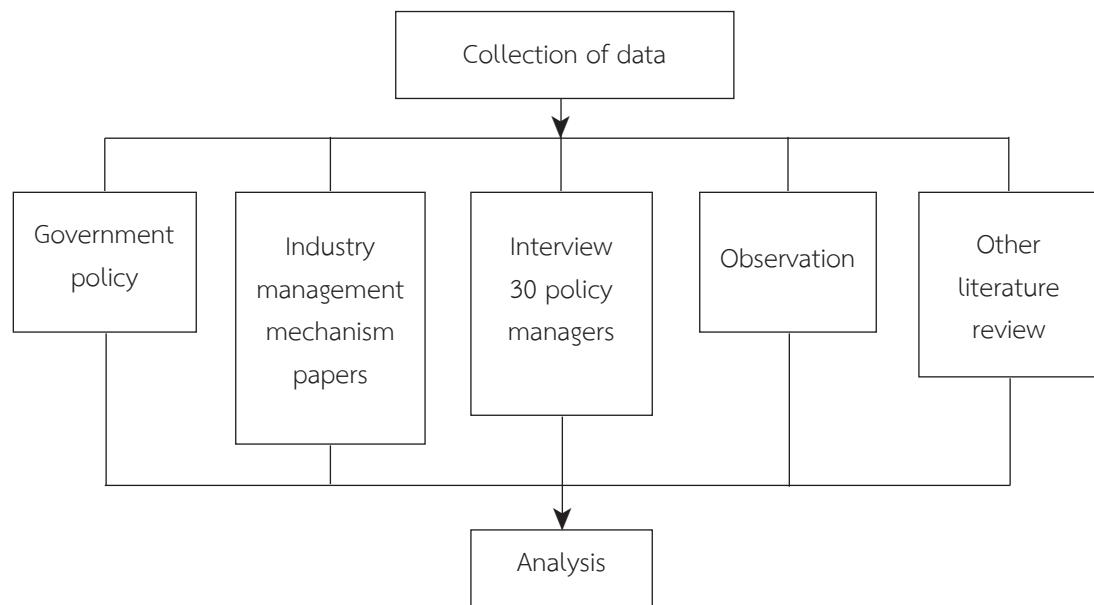


Figure 1: Research Methods

Source: Author's analysis

To ensure the credibility of the data, the researcher used only information that was gathered from credible sources in managerial positions, as per policy. If there were concerns about inconsistencies in the data, that information was then compared to data from similar sources within the tourism management industry until the researcher was confident in the accuracy of the data collected. Individuals participating in the research all cooperated fully on confirming the accuracy of any information provided and were asked to provide confirmation through phone calls, emails, and reports. The above steps were necessary to ensure the credibility of the data before any evaluation was done. During interviews, the researcher also used repetition in questions to ask the same question in different ways to reach saturation point until she was certain that there was no new information to be gained. This research did not raise any ethical concerns for

those managers who opted to participate in the data collection process. The names of those that participated will not be published to prevent any damage or loss of reputation in an instance where there may have been inconsistencies in the information provided by different sources.

Results

The response of 30 managers at top management was analyzed and arranged into 3 main public mechanisms for the promotion of health tourism. The main mechanisms used in the promotion of health tourism are 1) the Department of Health Services Support in the Ministry of Public Health, 2) the Department of Tourism, and 3) the Tourism Authority of Thailand in the Ministry of Tourism and Sports.

1) The Department of Health Services Support has developed two strategic plans. The first plan is to turn Thailand into the Center for Excellent Health Care for Asia. The main services of the first strategic plan are medical services, health services, health products and Thai herbs. The second plan is for Thailand to become a world-class healthcare provider in line with the country's strategic direction and policy with the goal of becoming a leading medical hub and world leader in health services in five years (2014-2019). Four main centers of service include the Center for Health Promotion Services, Health Services Center, Academic and Research Services Center, and the Medical and Health Products Center.

The Department of Health Services Support facilitates the market for health products and services in the health tourism industry. Important products in the health tourism industry include Thai massage services, health spa services, long stay health care services, and health tourism services that benefit from the distinct knowledge, abilities, and capabilities of Thailand. According to Dr. Taret Krasanayarawiwong in an interview:

“...The Department of Health Service Support will support the health tourism industry by bringing health and tourism activities together. Health products and services are those that promote health and well-being, such as massage and spa. We define those that take advantage of health services as those who are generally of good health and make generous use of their social security to engage in health-related services ...” (December 12, 2014)

The Department of Health Service Support has multiple mechanisms which are used in engaging the strategy for health promotion. To ensure that these mechanisms continue to work by managing production standards and moving the industry forward, a single governing body should be created that can move strategic policy forward. In addition, the Department manages health tourism and health services businesses in the health tourism industry. The Department also monitors standards for products that can affect health, such as with spas, massages, and beauty products. The goal of health tourism is closely related to health and well-being, which is to promote good health through restorative services or stress and fatigue relief. According to Dr.Taret Krasanayarawiwong in an interview:

“...strategy incorporates multiple mechanisms. Health products must meet minimum standards, while a single office should provide recommendations on the mechanisms that can drive the industry forward and so there needs to be a continued push towards forming a central governing body or, at a minimum, a vice president that plays a part. As of now, this has not yet happened because of both the pros and cons of the issue. There are times when the health of Thais is secondary to the almost singular focus on standards or problems when the Ministry of Tourism is only focused on promotion and advertising. Regardless, we are always watching the industry and getting together ...” (ibid)

Furthermore, the Department creates standards for spa and massage companies in Thailand. They oversee standards for each establishment, services offered, personnel employed and required skill set to be utilized. The implementation of these standards ensures excellence in personnel and knowledge development. These standards can assist organizations in achieving maximum efficiency.

For business owners in the health services field, there are multiple laws related to operating a spa or health massage center. Businesses are constrained by the Public Health Act, which empowers local governments to establish service standards for businesses specified in the Public Health Act that could be deemed as possible health concerns. Owners of these types of establishments must decide if their business will include traditional massage, hot compress, a swimming pool, exercise services, etc.

If the business is to include any of these types of activities, it must register with the local government and request clearance first. The Ministry of the Interior has deemed any business that includes massage, steam baths, or hot compress, a social matter under the Services Act and owners must register their organization. If a company fails to register, it will be classified as an entertainment venue and massage parlor and the burden is on the business owners to seek certification from the Ministry of Public Health to confirm that it is not. The Services Act of the Ministry of the Interior states that any business failing to receive certification from the Ministry of Public Health will be deemed a services site and will be subject to zoning restrictions.

There are two exceptions to receiving certification from the Ministry of Public Health. The first exception is for medical services centers to be certified as defined by the Sanatorium Act and the second is for an unlicensed clinic to make declare as a healthcare establishment by requesting a certificate from the local government and more. According to Karasanayarawiwong and Sonthirak in an interview:

“...it can be seen that when those subject to the law are unprepared, the law does not allow for those people to be competitive. Understanding the law is confusing enough, but when those who actually created the law don’t understand it, don’t make an effort to understand it, and are not interested in understanding it, that department is no longer able to execute policy or policy mechanisms. This is a weakness that is preventing sustainability. (September 24, 2014).

Therefore, the government mechanisms in managing the health tourism and spa services industry can help to create sustainability. Government agencies generally tend to work within their own sphere of influence or responsibility. Whenever agencies get together, it creates the appearance that they are ready and willing to work together, but once they retreat back to within their own agency, performance indicators and job descriptions require government employees to complete a specific set of work as assigned and there are no performance metrics to measure the extent and success of cooperation or define cooperation criteria. Hence, agencies relevant to the health tourism industry separate their responsibilities. There is a team that works on tourism, a team that works on health, teams that do research and focus specifically on research, etc. According to Sonthirakin an interview:

“...business entrepreneurs operate under different models. As an example, there are different groups of spa owners that have different goals. A single mechanism that spans the entire industry that is used to drive growth does not consider the value of developing an ability to compete and build upon a foundation of knowledge. Knowledge consists of brainstorming and building upon concepts. There is no blueprint that explains what to avoid, what to develop, and what to fix, which is a weakness that prevents these mechanisms from creating sustainability...”
(ibid)

2) The Department of Tourism is to promote Thailand as a competitive tourist destination where revenues are distributed fairly, evenly, and sustainably. Their vision is to create “Thailand as a World Class Health Care Destination” to strengthen the image of health tourism in the health services market, while the Department of Health Service Support aims to turn Thailand into the Health Center of Asia. The vision is for Thailand to become an international destination for health tourism within five years (2014-2019). The goal is to increase health tourism and help tourists understand the benefits of health services.

On one hand, health tourism is tourism to engage in body and mind health or rejuvenation for tourists that either is already in good health or tend to be older and have more financial stability. Long stay or homestay health services; hotels; health resorts; resort and spas; or religious stays to study religion, meditate, and eat well are all considered part of health tourism. Their roles are responsible for the development of infrastructure and tourism facilities, such as creating logistics systems, maintaining facilities, building tourism networks, building or restoring tourist destinations to create sustainability, and developing tourism products and services that build confidence and promote tourism.

Furthermore, The Department has developed the ASEAN Spa Standards, which includes four main courses: preparing entrepreneurs and service providers in the Spa industry, preparing spa operators for ASEAN, developing entrepreneurial skills, and Thai Massage service providers. The Department is attempting to increase awareness among business owners in the tourism space about their responsibility towards the

environment, support knowledge creation in tourism services, share learning experiences, and allow for the region and the owner to both benefit equally. In order to sustainability in managing health tourism, there should be cooperation between business owners and state mechanisms and collaboration. According to Kasaenusuwan in an interview:

“...currently the Department of Tourism is beginning to increase communication between agencies and has established groups to increase cooperation in the areas of distribution services and the development of tourist destinations. The Department of Tourism has created product and services standards in five strategic areas and has been promoting the systematic integration of relationships on a consistent basis in health and spa tourism to promote sustainability ...” (July 31, 2014)

The Department played an early role in the health and spa tourism industry and has been involved since 2005. The Department first became involved in the industry when it was informed of the creation of the TC 228 board by the Thai Industrial Standards Institute (TISI). It is a belief that Thailand should be the leader in developing wellness spa standards worldwide, which included wellness spas, medical spas, and spa therapy. In order to do so, the Department has set a voluntary system of standards for working with business owners. ISO specifies that businesses must have standards in place towards environmental policy, decreasing consumption, eliminating waste, and decreasing pollution; similar to the standards that have been set forth by Spa ASEAN. The Department also supervises the tourist industry throughout the process from upstream to downstream. The Department of Tourism has established 14 standards in the management of tourist destinations, that includes tourist destinations for adventure, nature, hiking, bird watching, flora and fauna viewing, elephants, and others.

For tourism management, the Department has been successful in collaboration, creating partnerships to establish standards to improve the healthcare tourism industry. They found the partners that work closely with the Department. They are the Thai Spa Association, SpaConfederation, the ASEAN Department of Tourism, the Department of Health Services Support (Ministry of Public Health), the Department of Trade (Ministry of Commerce), the Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Agency, the Ministry of the Interior (Entertainment Services Act), the Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Camping, and Hiking.

3) The Tourism Authority of Thailand has been promoting tourism in Thailand for more than half a century. The Tourism Authority of Thailand created the vision that has made Thailand one of the top countries internationally for tourism marketing in the new century. One of the top priorities of the Department is sustainability in tourism and promoting the unique identity and elegance of Thailand to bring an equilibrium to the economy, society, and environment. The Tourism Authority of Thailand Act 1979, section 8 has empowered the Tourism Authority of Thailand to undertake the following: 1.) Support tourism and the tourist industry, while creating jobs; 2.) Promote the natural beauty, archaeology, antiquity, history, art, culture, athletics, and cultural technology of Thailand to encourage tourism; 3.) Ensure the safety and comfort of tourists; 4.) Promote friendship and a mutual understanding between Thais and other countries through the medium of tourism 5.) Increase tourism and build the basic factors of comfort and convenience for tourists to enjoy.

Additionally, the Tourism Authority of Thailand enacts policy through innovation and a network based on the foundation of quality aimed at the preservation of nature and culture under the principles of good governance. The goal is to achieve integration, create value within business sectors, and drive economic and social sustainability. They are marketing agency tasked with promoting tourism and the tourism industry in Thailand by marketing the many strengths of Thailand, such as the natural beauty, architecture, antiquity, history, art, culture, and abroad array of tourist activities to encourage tourism and promote mutual understanding and friendship between Thais and foreigners. They offer communications services that promote the tourism market, such as information about the tourism market, market conditions, and trends in tourism via a tourism marketing database system. They also provide information and recommends marketing opportunities for the benefit of both domestic and international business owners, which includes local organizations and the general public. They offer a commercial forum for tourism-related services to business owners through different promotional events, sales seminars, consumer events, and more. Thus, they also provide informational services to facilitate travel for both Thais and foreigners. Information services provide at the international market and domestic market levels. For example, at the international level, the Tourism Authority of Thailand has been creating trust and a positive image continually since the year of “Travel Like a Thai”, under the campaign “Discover Thainess”

in 2014, which strengthened the image of brand “Thailand.” The promotion focused on creating happiness like a Thai, a strength that differentiates Thailand from other countries. The campaign focused on tourist destinations, lifestyles, culture, customs, communities, and a sense of “Thainess” and local knowledge. The identity of Thainess was coupled with the variety of products and services available to tourists to meet their wide-ranging needs. The many types of lifestyles and opportunities created the overall message that was communicated through online and offline channels.

In any event, they create products and activities that can be enjoyed by tourists throughout the year to create happiness and fun “like a Thai” during the year of “Travel Like a Thai” to encourage tourists to stay longer and spend more. In addition, businesses are encouraged to innovate by finding ways to use existing products in the tourism industry to create additional value by developing, and designing products and services that increase market value for tourists in each target group. Yet, they increase the quality of the market by focusing on wealthier individuals and special interests’ groups that tend to spend more while on vacation. Four groups to focus on including Golf, Weddings & Honeymoons, Health & Wellness, and Ecotourism. Communications need to be tailored to fit the narrative sought by those groups to increase the relative value of the services offered to each group. Communications can then be supplemented with the recommendation of additional products and services that fit their needs and lifestyles.

Yet, they expand the quality leisure segment, the largest segment of the tourism market in Thailand, by focusing on increasing the total number of tourists in the quality leisure segment. The quality leisure market can be expanded by exploiting existing tourist destinations for first-time visitors who have never been to the country or by creating successful partnership opportunities that promote sales opportunities both within and without the tourism industry and introduce new products in the market for repeat visitors. There should be a focus on promoting quality destinations, including participation in and/or hosting promotional activities, that encourage tourists to want to visit Thailand again. They create an ASEAN Travel Center. They advertise Thailand as the hub for travel in ASEAN and as the gateway for tourism in the ASEAN region and develop partnerships in the sales promotions industry. This also includes enticing others from neighboring countries to visit Thailand.

At domestic market level, they encourage domestic tourism from the four large mainstream groups: families, the elderly, the working class, and students through a continuous advertising and public relations campaign using available communications channels. Most importantly, social media and the social network community should be used to increase market penetration, which should be supplemented with festivals that entice Thais to travel throughout the country. Hosting national festivals, providing a forum for new tourism ideas to be presented, and creating opportunities for business owners to market their products and services directly to tourists can be used to attract and entice this target market.

They promote travel and tourism for groups with specific tastes and lifestyles by focusing on the following three target groups: green tourism, religious tourism, and corporate travel. The Tourism Authority of Thailand should partner with businesses to market products and services that are in-line with the interests and actions of each target group and work to develop new and innovative products to support the continued expansion of a market where tourists are further seeking value and personal interests.

They encourage tourism from traditional tourist areas to other provinces that have not been traditional tourist destinations. Expansion can be created through collaboration with local partners to establish road shows and consumer fairs to encourage Thais to increase travel to those locations. The Tourism Authority of Thailand should also take advantage of the liberalization of the AEC, which has encouraged Thais to increase land travel, by encouraging Thais to visit provinces within Thailand on their way to neighboring countries, along with holding activities and fairs in different regions to market each region and create a unique regional identity.

They encourage offseason travel – encourage Thais to travel on weekdays by holding consumer fairs and providing a forum for businesses to present their products and services at discounted prices directly to their target market to encourage purchases. The Tourism Authority of Thailand should partner with hotels and airlines to provide special pricing for tourists during normal working days, as well as advertise the benefits that tourists can receive by choosing to travel during the week, such as the convenience, tranquillity, savings, etc.

Discussion

The objective of this paper was to study the public mechanism that utilizes in supporting and developing the health tourism in Thailand. From the findings, they illustrate the two key issues that can contribute to more understanding about the health tourism for sustainability. The first issue is public mechanism involvement that showed the strong support to promote the health tourism (See Figure 2). The second issue is people within health wellness. First, these three Departments are a fact in tourism and in the modern world that health tourism can't work successfully without them because the Departments have the authority to provide the political stability, security, the legal environment which tourism requires. One thing in common, these Departments would push Thailand to be world class of health tourism destination. By doing so, the Department of Health Support Service created the strategic plan which helps Thailand to become a leading medical hub. The Department of Tourism is responsible for the development of infrastructure and facilities to provide the convenience and comfort travel to the customers. Then, the Tourism Authority of Thailand tried to promote the tourist industry through creating a job, promote cultures ensure the safety and comfort of tourist including promoting friendship and mutual understanding. They act as an agency to help to upgrade the health tourism to perform high standard. They providesupporting the health tourism by bringing health and tourism activities together so that it can create good health and more jobs. Then, these Departments engage the strategy for health promotion by managing production standards, then monitor those standards so that the business can achieve maximum efficiency.

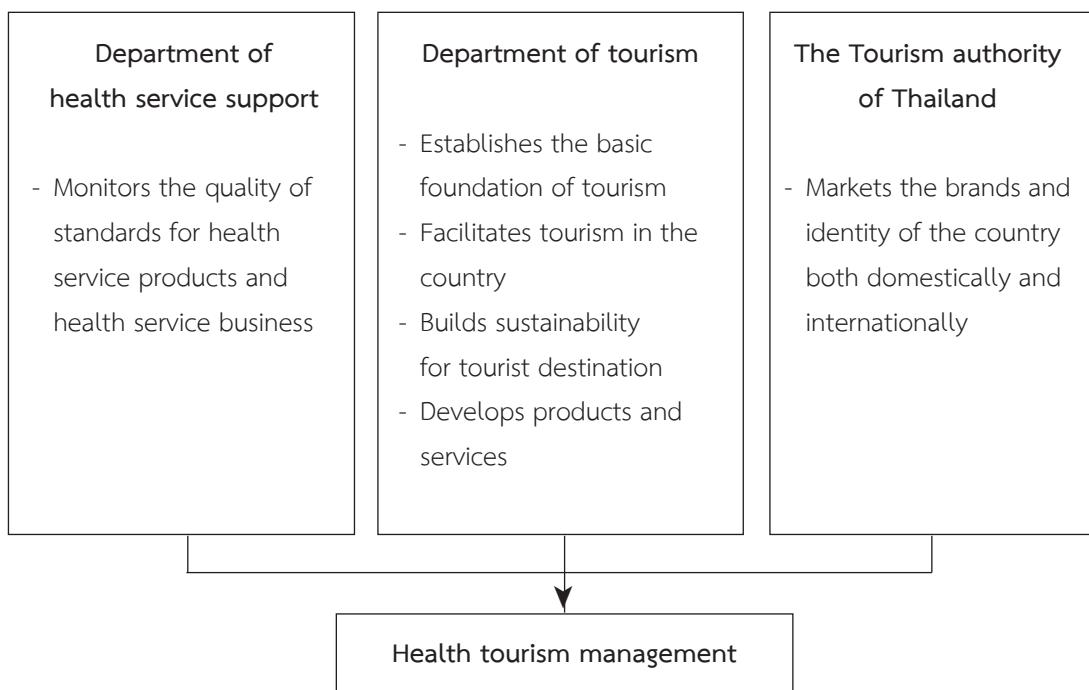


Figure 2: Promotion of the Health Tourism

Source: Author's analysis

Consistent with previous studies, the research found that countries like Singapore, Malaysia saw the opportunity to promote and invest the health industry in order to raise up the economic income. Like Indonesia and the Philippines, the government saw a goodwill between public and private sectors offers an opportunity that should not be missed. It can be used not only to foster new partnership but to ensure that partnership is truly in the interests of international health. Therefore, the government in many countries are increasingly dependent on it. Thailand has no exception. It is special significance intent on achieving sustainable development. That's why the role of government needs to support and promote health tourism. The government has a crucial role to play in providing the necessary policy guidelines, the environment, infrastructure and management.

Second, from the findings, it shows that many people are increasingly interested in health tourism and principle of health wellness to change their lifestyle. It is consistent with Richter (2003) suggested that the tourism world's largest industry is

expected to grow to 1.6 billion arrivals by 2020. People are more focus on themselves for healthier. It is about self-development and the reconciliation of body, mind and spirit which involves looking beyond the self in a spirit. So, it can make people better adapt to fulfil their life success. It refers to understand, self-better, creates life goals and enhance the ability to handle stress. Additionally, health and wellness are a way of life oriented toward optional health and well-being in which body, mind, spirit are integrated to live more meaningful in the society.

Conclusion

In sum, the research can conclude into 5 points. They are: 1) There are three agencies that work towards achieving the goals established to create sustainability in the health tourist industry: Department of Health Services Support, Ministry of Public Health and the Department of Tourism and Tourism Authority of Thailand of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports. The Department of Health Service Support monitors the quality of standards for health services products and health services businesses. The Department of Tourism establishes the basic foundations of tourism, facilitates tourism in the country, builds sustainability for tourist destinations, develops products and services, determines tourism support factors, and communicates the strengths and identity of the country. The Tourism Authority of Thailand markets the brand and identity of the country both domestically and internationally. To market the quality and value of Thailand in the international market, the Tourism Authority of Thailand must assist in the creation of innovative products and services, target higher quality segments, expand the size of the quality leisure market, and turn Thailand into the tourist hub for the AEC. To grow the domestic market, it is necessary to encourage travel among the mainstream market segments, increase tourism among special interest groups, open new tourist markets in the country, and encourage tourism outside of peak periods. Aside from the aforementioned strategies, the government, the public, and local governing bodies need to be involved in the management of tourism resources. 2) Mechanisms that are important in turning policy into action and increasing competitiveness are strong organizations with a specific mission and clear working guidelines. Integration between government agencies and the government and the public and private sectors is crucial to success. The three Departments should be able to integrate the health tourism policies

so that the health tourism can be promoted and competitive with other countries, leaded to sustainable growth, and worked well through the environment, culture and local communities. There needs to be a system of continuous integration with clear indicators that can monitor and evaluate the success and effectiveness of integration. 3) There should be a governing body for the health and spa tourism industry that can translate policy into action in accordance with the national strategy and mission. This governing body should then authorize industry-specific organizations to manage sub-tasks of the national strategy and work with those organizations to evaluate the effects. 4) There needs to be a blueprint for how the work is to be accomplished. There needs to be personal responsibility or a definitive organization that can answer to how the work is progressing, where problems exist that require cooperation, or which blind spots require improvement, what are the risks, etc. and 5) Regardless of whether the strategy was created by the old or new government, it is the responsibility of the current government to follow the blueprint created and be prepared to pivot when problems arise to achieve established goals and follow the principles of good governance.

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