

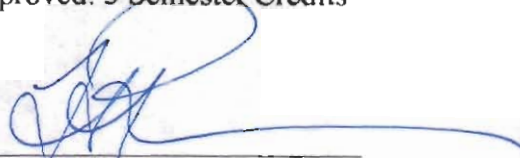
IMPLEMENTATION OF AN EFFECTIVE HEALTH TOURISM DEVELOPMENT
PLAN FOR THAILAND

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to develop health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry use as a guideline for developing health tourism program in Thailand. This study presents general knowledge of health tourism, identifies examples of health tourism of other countries and Thailand as well as combines health tourism and planning knowledge to create a health tourism plan for Thailand. The three objectives of this study were: (1) to provide an overview of health tourism, (2) to compare health tourism of Thailand with other countries, and (3) to develop a health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry.

The methodology used in this study was literature review. The researcher conducted this research by using available print and electronic media to obtain health

tourism information of other countries and Thailand. The collected data from print and electronic resources were reviewed and separated into different categories by following the research objectives.

An overview of health tourism was presented in several issues including the relationship between tourism and health, background and concept of health tourism, type of accommodations and services provided, and the market drivers. Health tourism of Thailand and other countries namely United Kingdom, Malaysia, United States and Croatia were compared by focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of each country. Several factors such as climate and landscape were mentioned as the reasons that distinguish characteristics of health tourism in each country. Health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry was developed to use as a guide for a successful health tourism program in Thailand.

This study attempted to develop a health tourism plan as well as to create better understanding for health tourism in general. The findings from this study should benefit the health tourism industry as well as future research related to this topic. The researcher separates recommendations into two parts, recommendations for practices and recommendations for future study.

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Thanathorn Vajirakachorn

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is the world's leading industry with the most diversity (Gee, 1997). Many nations depend on this gigantic industry as a primary source of the nation's income, employment and infrastructure development. Therefore, those nations have to create the uniqueness to their tourism products or come up with special interest tourism product such as cultural tourism, adventure tourism and health tourism.

Current economic status and other problems in everyday life are major reasons affecting high stress level. People, for that reason, seek some kinds of relaxation to escape from the pressure. Health tourism is one of the choices for people who want to avoid stressful daily life by paying more attention to their health and wellness. Those people who travel to promote their health or cure disease are called health tourists.

According to Gee (1997), travelers are now traveling for different expectation. Rather than going for sight seeing different places or swimming in different seas or oceans, those tourists seek for more meaningful experiences. Health tourism has been developed for centuries since the Greek and Roman periods and has gained much attention in recent years (Didaskalou & Nastos, 2003). However, health tourism is still considered a new segment of tourism in North America (Loverseed, 1998). In other continents such as South America, health tourism has been growing rapidly, as well as in Asia.

Thailand is one of the countries in Asia that is now developing health tourism products to support the needs of health tourists. Thailand has a long history as a tourist

destination. Tourists visit Thailand to experience different culture, food, lifestyle, and also beautiful nature.

Thailand offers diverse international tourist appeal. The country is located in the middle of Southeast Asia and occupies a land area about the size of France (Gibbons & Fish, 1988). Thailand embraces a rich diversity of cultures and traditions. With its proud history, tropical climate and renowned hospitality, the Kingdom is a never-ending source of fascination and pleasure for international visitors (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2003a). The strengths of Thailand are the ease of access from Europe, Australia, Americas, and Asia, and the high quality of tourist facilities and amenities. These strengths have enabled Thailand to become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world.

However, since the economic recession in Thailand during the years 1997-1999, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has launched the new strategy to attract foreign tourists by promoting Thai traditional health care including massage, herbs and authentic Thai food. At the beginning, the purpose of health tourism was to create another way of foreign income to help the hospitality business such as hotels, private hospitals, and golf courses from the recession. Health tourism then became the new trend of Thailand's tourism industry.

The Thai Farmers Research Center Company Limited (TFRC) estimated that health tourism could generate no less than \$115 million in 2001 (Thai Farmers Research Center, 2001). This not only creates foreign revenue, but health tourism also generates local employment opportunity and helps reduce prostitution and sex tourism which were the major problems of tourism in Thailand.

Today, health tourism is a rising star for niche tourism market in Thailand. The Thai government is providing full support for the national health tourism plan. However, there are some problems and obstacles in developing this kind of service industry, which are the lack of cooperation between the governmental departments and the lack of research study in this topic.

Statement of the Problem

Health tourism has been developed un-continuously in Thailand since 19th century. In 1997, Thai economy suffered from the Asian Economic Crisis which affected directly the tourism industry. The Tourism Authority of Thailand, therefore, launched the new marketing plan to promote tourism in the country and health tourism became one of the major products of tourism in Thailand. However, there is no specific study on health tourism in Thailand and the planning process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to develop health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry. This study presents general knowledge of health tourism, identifies examples of health tourism of other countries and Thailand, as well as combines health tourism and planning knowledge to create a health tourism plan for Thailand by reviewing of the relevant literature in spring 2004.

The objectives of the research study are as follows:

1. To provide an overview of health tourism.
2. To compare health tourism of Thailand with other countries.
3. To develop a health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry.

Significance of the Study

The result of this study **will be** used as a guideline for health tourism program in Thailand. Due to the lack of research in this specific topic, this study would be helpful for other researchers, students, government organizations and professionals in health tourism field.

Definition of Terms

The following key **terms will** be used throughout this research.

Health tourism: tourism associated with travel to health spa or resort destinations where the primary purpose is to improve the traveler's physical well-being through a regimen of physical exercise and therapy, dietary control, and medical services relevant to health maintenance. (Gee, 1987, p. 381)

Health (accommodation) establishments: a kind of place that provides special facilities such as spa or fitness, and activities such as massage, medical check up and curing the diseases concerning the customers' objective for encouraging their health or healing illness.

Health tourists: someone who travel to a health establishment with the aim to relax and rejuvenate or someone who travel in search of alternative therapies, plastic surgery or diagnosis. (Ikkos, 2002, p. 1)

Wellness: a state of health featuring the harmony of body, mind and spirit, with self-responsibility, physical care, healthy diet and nutrition, relaxation and mental activity (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001).

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to this study; the most prominent are listed below:

1. The compilation of this research paper is only a literature review; therefore no experimental investigation was attempted or completed.
2. While the researcher tried to review all literature available on health tourism, some research may have been overlooked.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study was literature review. The researcher conducted this research by using available print and electronic media to obtain health tourism information of other countries and Thailand. The collected data from print and electronic resources were reviewed and separated into different categories by following the research objectives.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to examine and integrate concepts and research findings related to health tourism. The topics from the literature included the relationship of tourism and health, concept of health tourism, its history, the market drivers and characteristics of health tourism accommodation. This chapter also explored current development of health tourism in Thailand and other countries namely the United Kingdom, Malaysia, the United States and Croatia. The intent was to provide document and support for the choice of the theoretical framework used in the present study and to examine what has been found in the recent past. The literature review chapter aimed to respond to the first objective of this study, that is, to provide an overview of health tourism.

Tourism and Health Related

Health and tourism share a number of relationships (Hall, 1992). The health of the tourist is the most general relationship between health and tourism. According to Bushell (2000), health related to tourism has been researched largely from the perspective of tourist illness which is in the negative side. Limited research has focused on the positive concept of the value of tourism such as to enhance good health and quality of life for both host and guest. She, therefore, introduced the conceptual framework for consideration of health and tourism interactions that health tourism should include wellness and illness, promotion and prevention.

Alleyne (1990) described that there were three considerations of how tourism and health were associated, for instance, considering the health of tourists, the health of the community (both country of origin and the destination), and traveling for health purposes. It has been estimated that 20-50% of tourists suffer some illnesses during their travel (Alleyne, 1990). Those illness are usually not very serious, however some tourists suffer from the risk taking behavior that is associated with some forms of tourist's high-risk behaviors such as drug abuse, dangerous driving or unsafe sex.

The health and wellness of the tourists is not only important for themselves but also for the community welfare. The transmission of diseases can occur when the traveler travels to different country or goes back to his/her home countries. Traveler with unhealthy condition may deteriorate during the journey (Wilks & Page, 2003). The health services of the destination can be impacted by tourism demand on the local health services. Health service facilities in the local area should be available for both local people and tourists. Alleyne also reported that "the most neglected aspect of tourism related to health is health tourism" (1990, p. 68). This is because health tourism has just drawn our attention for a few years, therefore not many researchers focused their studies in this topic.

Background and History of Health Tourism

Health tourism has occurred since Greek and Roman times and has developed in many countries in Europe and extended to other continents (Didaskalou & Nastos, 2003). In the ancient times, many people traveled to nearby river and mineral springs for their spiritual and curative beliefs and for relaxation. (Goodrich, 1993a) In the United

Kingdom, the development of seaside resorts had its genesis in the British gentry's belief in the curative powers of sea air and bathing in the sea water (Hall, 2003).

In Europe, many cities have grown up around health facilities and mineral springs. Examples of those cities are Baden, Lausanne, St. Moritz, and Interlaken in Switzerland; Baden-Baden and Wiesbaden in Germany; Vienna, Austria; and Budapest, Hungary. People have used mineral water since ancient times to cure such sicknesses as rheumatism, skin infections, and poor digestion (Goodrich, 1993a).

In the United States, people traveled to mineral springs, seaside resorts and spa since before the Revolutionary War. The popular sites included Yellow Springs near Philadelphia, Stafford Spring in Connecticut, and Berkeley Springs in Virginia. The American Spas attracted the rich and famous people same as European spas (Goodrich, 1993b). However, the spa tourism concept has considerably broadened to include resorts that are not based on hot springs but instead focus on natural resource attributes such as climate (Hall, 2003).

Concept of Health Tourism

Health tourism has been defined by the International Union of Official Travel Organizations, the precursor of the World Tourism Organization, as "the provision of health facilities utilizing the natural resources of the country, in particular of mineral water and climate" (International Union of Official Travel Organizations, 1973, p. 7).

Pollock and Williams (2000, p. 165) gave the definition of health tourism as: "leisure, recreational, and educational activities removed from the distractions of work and home that use tourism products and services that are designed to promote and enable customers to improve and maintain their health and well-being." The potential strategic

linkage between health and tourism is an understanding of changing attitudes concerning health and wellness.

According to Tabacchi, health tourism is "any kind of travel to make yourself or a member of your family healthier" (as cited in Ross, 2001, p. 1). There are also enterprises, however, that go further than Tabacchi's definition to include health services for travelers with special needs, for example herbal healing, traditional massage, meditation, yoga, spas, health centers, and medical checkups.

The concept of health care tourism was developed from medical tourism to health-care tourism to health tourism (Goodrich, 1993a). Health tourism was defined by Goodrich (1993a, p. 37) as "the deliberate attempt on the part of a tourist facility or destination to attract tourists by promoting health-care service facilities in addition to regular tourist amenities".

The study of health tourism in Switzerland by Mueller and Kaufmann focused on wellness tourism, a special segment of health tourism. They explained wellness tourism as:

The sum of all the relationships and phenomena resulting from a journey and residence by people whose main motive is to preserve or promote their health. They stay in a specialized hotel which provides the appropriate professional know-how and individual care. They require a comprehensive service package comprising physical fitness/beauty care, healthy nutrition/diet, relaxation/meditation and mental activity/education (Mueller and Kaufmann, 2001, p. 3).

As shown in Figure 2-1, health tourism is a part of tourism as well as business tourism and other forms of tourism. It can be divided to serve two groups of customers, healthy people and ill people.

For healthy people, health tourism provides illness prevention tourism, which includes specific illness prevention offering individual health services, for example, providing low calorie food and light fitness programs for people who are concerned about cholesterol and heart disease. Besides, it includes wellness tourism offering wellness services for instance, health resorts or spa hotels providing some activities such as massage, scrubs, fitness, meditation, and yoga for people who want to promote their health.

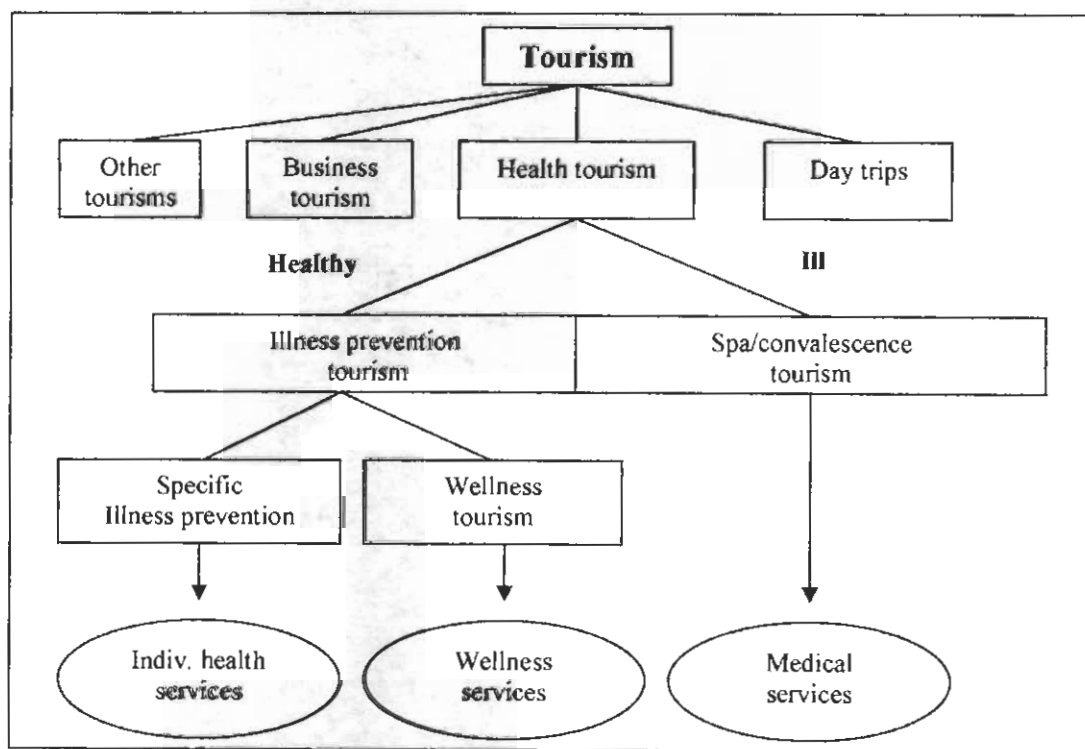


Figure 2-1: Demarcation of health tourism (Mueller and Kaufmann, 2001, p. 4)

For ill people, health tourism provides spa and convalescence tourism, which offers medical services, for example, medical spas or spa hospitals where the guest can relax with healthy activities. This is similar to spa resorts, but they provide medical checkup programs and doctors who can cure diseases and order medicines. This kind of health tourism also provides health and medical treatment, especially for serious illness such as cardiovascular, spinal and plastic surgery.

Hall (2003, p. 275) defined health tourism as “a commercial phenomena of industrial society which involves a person traveling overnight away from the normal environment for the benefit of maintaining or improving health, and the supply and promotion of facilities and destinations which seek to provide such benefits”.

Health tourism has developed as a small but very important market segment which includes developed countries, for instance, Scotland (Hay, 2001), Hungary (Kaspar, 1989), Switzerland (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001), Greece (Ikkos, 2002), New Zealand (Hall, 2003), Israel (Hall, 2003; Niv, 1989), United States (Loverseed, 1998; Pollock & William, 2000; Ross, 2001) and Canada (Loverseed, 1998; Wightman & Wall, 1985), and is also rising in developing countries such as Cuba (Goodrich, 1993a; Youngers, Cameron & Mailman, 1997), Caribbean (Goodrich, 1993b), Croatia (Kusen, 2002), India (Santhanam, 2002), Jordan (Wakeel, 2002), Malaysia (Chaynee, 2003; Razali, 2002), Singapore (Choo, 2002) and Thailand (Taemsamran, 2001; Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2002).

Malaysia is fast-growing in health tourism development. According to the Malaysian Health Ministry, health tourism is defined as “travel for the purpose of enhancing the well-being of the mind, body and spirit of individuals, families and

groups” (Chaynee, 2003, p. 1). Medical care, fitness and wellness are also described as components of health tourism.

From the study about tourism in India, health tourism is defined as “gamut of services ranging from ‘The art of Living’ to the most authentic and original forms of yoga, meditation and Ayurveda, in the ambience of the ocean and the backdrop of lush forests” (Kalyan, Kumar & Bhattacharjee, n.d., p. 4). Table 2-2 shows the components of health tourism in India.

<p>Health Tourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The art of Living - Original forms of Yoga & Meditation - Ayurveda - Herbal Massaging - Spirituality tours - All of the above in exotic, sensuous locations

Table 2-1: Health tourism in India (Kalyan, Kumar & Bhattacharjee, n.d.)

Kusen stated the narrow concept of health tourism in his analysis of health tourism in Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Germany and Italy that

Health tourism is type of the complex economic activity in which important place is given to the expert and controlled use of the natural remedies, methods of physical medicine and programmed physical activities for the purpose of maintaining and improving physical, psychological and spiritual health of tourists and contributing of their quality of life (Kusen, 2002, p. 178).

The health tourists were also defined in Kusen’s study as “tourists and/or hotel guests who spend their times as they wish but part of the day dedicate to the selected medical activities” (Kusen, 2002, p. 177). Thus, health tourism is a product of both

tourism and health sectors. For example, the tourism sector arranges the stay for tourists at the place that provides natural remedies.

There are special conditions that needed to be assured in order to develop health tourism services, namely natural remedies; appropriate tourist catering, medical, paramedical and other facilities; medical supervision, health tourism accommodations; health tourism place (resort); and health tourism destination (Kusen, 2002).

Kusen (2002) explained that in all types of tourism, there will be some components that related to the prevention and promotion of healthy body, mind and spirit, but only some of them are especially developed for health tourism purpose. In order to improve health tourism product, several issues needs to be understood. First and foremost, the tourism developer should be aware and should have a clear understanding of what kinds of tourism are in use or may actually be developed in response to consumer needs (i.e. wellness tourism, health tourism, medical tourism and hospital tourism). From this basic knowledge, several tourism package possibilities may emanate. This is as each kind would have its characteristic components, services, public relations, etc.

Development of products for health tourism for instance, may entail choosing one or several combinations of potential activities: from medical treatments to rehabilitation, convalescence to recuperation and fitness programs (Kusen, 2002). Also, decisions should be made on which aspects of health should be addressed. The developer should ponder if services should be limited to physical health or if the psychological and spiritual aspects are deemed necessary and may anyway be feasibly incorporated into the whole package. Such decisions would even lead to a wellspring of more detailed selections.

A tourism firm who just wishes to focus on physical health may just offer massages, mud baths, hot springs, pilates classes, saunas, acupuncture services and others. If a physical and psychological package is desired, the previously mentioned activities may be blended with aromatherapy, music therapy and body retreats. Integration of the spiritual aspect may introduce into the package such as spiritual retreats, yoga, meditation, and many more. Thus in a very comprehensive health package should cover physical, psychological and spiritual. It may have a picturesque landscape, cool climate together with massage services with aromatherapy incorporated, saunas, pilates instructors and yoga masters. This kind of health tourism package may be promoted as one big health destination. Of course the health accommodation need not always be big. It may just opt to specialize in particular customer needs in a certain location (i.e. office building, mall, etc). To add more to the dilemma a product developer is facing, small yet important are things as payment mode, the organization's structure and government policies and regulations (Kusen, 2002).

Recently, health tourism became more complicated to include some sort of services that intended to attain excellent physical and mental health. Beauty services are also offered into health tourism program to enhance value of the product. Those services are, for example, aromatherapy, Cleopatra's bath, reiki, shiatsu, yoga, aesthetic treatments, anti-cellulite programs and similar (Kusen, 2002).

We can define the concept of health tourism as a kind of tourism that provides facilities such as spa, fitness, health center and hospital, and activities such as sports, meditation, yoga, massage, medical checkup and cure the diseases concerning about the customers' objective for encouraging their health or healing illness.

Health Tourism Accommodations and Services

Gee (1997) explained that there are three main forms of health tourism accommodations including medical care, fitness and wellness, and rehabilitation and recuperation. For medical care, tourists travel to a facility to obtain a special quality of treatment that is not available in their hometown area. Example of the places would be hospitals or physicians that offer treatments for certain diseases or unique treatments, such as Mayo Clinic in the United States.

Travelers who travel for fitness and wellness may want to visit a destination or facility such as a spa or weight-loss clinic, to engage in preventive health measures such as exercise and weight-loss program. Many hotels and resorts already include fitness and spa into their properties.

Rehabilitation and recuperation customers will travel to a facility that offers special care for people who want to recover from illness. That place might be located in the area that particularly benefit people's health.

Goodrich (1993a) gave some examples of health-care services in the list in Table 2-2. The services were various depending on the regulation and culture of different countries.

<p>Medical examinations in the hotel (cholesterol levels, diabetes, blood pressure, etc)</p> <p>Vegetarian or special diets</p> <p>Transvital injections, and vitamin-complex treatment</p> <p>Daily exercise programs</p> <p>Yoga</p> <p>Acupuncture</p> <p>Thermal swimming pools (indoor and outdoor)</p> <p>Underwater massage (balneotherapy)</p> <p>Body massages</p> <p>Cellulite treatments (cellutron)</p> <p>Saunas</p> <p>Hydrotherapy treatments</p> <p>Fango packs (mud)</p> <p>Special stop-smoking programs</p> <p>Various baths (e.g., eucalyptus bath, and Turkish bath)</p> <p>Herbal wraps and herbal teas</p> <p>Use of sun-bed under supervision</p> <p>Sessions on muscle development and relaxation techniques</p> <p>Beauty treatments, such as facials, cream packs, face peeling, etc.</p>
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Table 2-2: Some typical elements of health-care treatments (Goodrich, 1993a)

In Kusen's study, he clarified the characteristics of health tourism accommodation by using a model (Figure 2-2) to distinguish health tourism accommodations from other kinds of health and medical related accommodations (2002). Kusen started by separating the accommodations into two groups, which were tourism accommodations and medical institutions. Then under the tourism accommodations umbrella, there were wellness tourism accommodations and health tourism accommodations. For the medical institutions, sanatoriums and hospitals were included in this category.

In Figure 2-2, wellness tourism accommodations only offered wellness programs for their guests. Health tourism accommodations offered both wellness programs and health tourism services (medical supervision, natural remedies and health tourism programs). Sanatoriums provided their customers with three different kinds of services which were wellness programs, health tourism services and medical rehabilitation. In

hospital tourism, medical rehabilitation and hospital treatment could be provided only in hospitals.

Tourism Accommodations		Medical Institutions	
Wellness Tourism Accommodations	Health Tourism Accommodations	Sanatoriums	Hospitals
Wellness Tourism	Health Tourism	Medical Tourism	Hospital tourism
Wellness Programs			
	Health Tourism Services - Medical Supervision - Natural Remedies - Health Tourism Programs		
		Medical Rehabilitation	
			Hospital Treatments

Figure 2-2: Health tourism accommodations and their products (Kusen, 2002, p. 179)

Health tourism and sanatoriums were related to each other in the way that they provide health tourism activities but sanatoriums focused more on medical treatments and rehabilitation of various diseases and illnesses (Kusen, 2002).

Health Tourism Market Drivers

There are a number of factors that keep the health tourism market growing continuously. The factors are demographics, economics and lifestyle of people that changed from time to time. In this part, the researcher will explain those factors in detail.

Travelers are becoming more interested in improving themselves intellectually, emotionally, and physically than they are in goals such as making money, getting promoted at work, or acquiring clothes, houses, and cars (Pollock & Williams, 2000). Ross (2001) mentioned that consumers are already well traveled thus they seek for new and different holiday experiences. Seeking a higher quality of life became a powerful motivation underlying most consumer behavior at the beginning of the new millennium. This shifting of customer values trend became the major driver in the health tourism market.

Pollock and Williams (2000, p. 167) stated that 78 million American baby boomers turned 50 in the year 2000. It is this generation that sustained a US\$ 30 billion industry including equipment, clothing, vitamins, sports gear and health club memberships. It is also this generation that is very aware of the advantages of pursuing more healthy lifestyles. Ross (2001) reported that the baby boomer group represented 60 % of the spa market. This trend will probably be most pronounced among baby-boom women who, after years of managing the responsibilities of children and family, will finally be able to satisfy their personal demand for self fulfillment and betterment (Pollock & Williams, 2000).

Retirees or senior people are the other important health tourism market driver. The senior market is likely to be attracted to travel destinations that offer active, healthy,

and sociable amenities (Pollock & Williams, 2000). Health tourism destinations could tap an expanding market of consumers with the time, money, and motivation to maintain good health. At present, only a fraction of health tourism facilities offer medically-based programs designed for mature travelers. These customized programs must include diet and exercise to address specifically chronic diseases related to cardiovascular problems, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis and osteoporosis. The health and fitness patterns of these seniors offer useful insights into their probable future involvement in health tourism opportunities.

Health Tourism in Different Countries

Health tourism has been operated in many countries throughout the world. In this study, the researcher selected some countries where health tourism plays a vital role in the tourism industries.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has been considered the fountain of health tourism in Europe. According to Goodrich (1993a), the ancient Romans and English traveled to Bath in England to bathe and drink mineral spring water for their health purpose. Bath, then, became very popular between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries (Witt & Witt, 1989). In the early seventeenth century, Bath and the spa in Buxton had been very popular among people interested to cure some diseases by using mineral water. A numbers of other resorts such as Scarborough were well-known as medical treatment centers (Holloway, as cited in Witt & Witt, 1989).

Witt and Witt (1989) studied health tourism in the UK by reviewing tourism textbooks, reports and articles which were published before and after 1980. They found

from the textbook that “spas were popular once in the UK, but not so now” (p. 27). However, they founded that successful spas were growing continuously outside of the UK for example, in Russia, Germany and the United States.

There are more than 30 mineral water places available in Britain. The British Tourist Authority marketed those places as spa heritage towns with facilities for leisure, history, shopping and entertainment but not as health spa towns. Witt and Witt (1989) concluded that health tourism in UK was still behind other countries in Europe because of various reasons: poor image of health tourism destination and lack of investment and promotion.

Regarding the definition of health tourism, as a person visits some place away from home for health purposes, health tourism becomes a problem for the British government. According to Ross (2001), the British government provides free medical treatment to citizens of 60 countries which cost the British taxpayers millions of pounds per year. The development of health tourism in this direction, therefore, is something that British people do not seem to be happy with (Are health tourists, 2003).

Malaysia

Health tourism has been developed in Malaysia by the Ministry of Health since 1997 as a strategic plan (Visit Malaysia, 2004). The plan is now under the Ministry of Health and the Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry’s supervision. Health tourism was considered as one of the tourism sectors that have high potential which helped increase foreign income for Malaysian economy (Chaynee, 2003; Razali, 2002; Ten incentive, 2002).

More than 91,000 tourists visited Malaysia for health purpose and brought in USD 7.1 million earnings in 2001 (Visit Malaysia, 2004). Chaynee (2003) reported that the number of tourists visiting Malaysia were from Singapore, China, Thailand and India. However, foreign health tourists were from Brunei, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Vietnam (Visit Malaysia, 2004).

In 2003, there were 44 private hospitals that provided health tourism programs with support of the Malaysian government. Local hotels were also working with medical centers to offer health-check packages or medical holidays to the health travelers (Chaynee, 2003). Health services were in the area of general surgery, cardio-thoracic surgery, orthopedic surgery, neuro-surgery and cancer treatment (Razali, 2002).

According to Chaynee (2003), Malaysia is expecting to earn from health tourism as much as USD 580 million by 2010. He mentioned Malaysia's advantages: the country has a potential to attract Islamic medical patients from Middle East because of its religious background for example halal food (Islamic food) and Islamic practices in hospitals. Moreover, the cost of healthcare in Malaysia is cheaper than its regional competitors such as Singapore and Australia.

United States

In the United States, people have been visiting spas since the colonial times and much longer if one is thinking about Native Americans (Loverseed, 1998). However, only around 1% of the population visit spas each year. Loverseed reported that between 1986 and 1992 the revenue from spa business raised by 10% per year and has doubled since then. It was estimated that health and spa tourism industry in the US generated more than USD 700 million annually. Another report by the International Spa

Association showed that the number of spas rose 52% between 1997 and 1999, 70% increase in the number of spa visitors (as cited in Ross, 2001).

Loverseed (1998) explained that there are three types of health tourism venues in the US health tourism market: destination spas, resort spas and day spas. Destination spas regularly offer medical component in their programs which also have doctors, nurses and health counselors working as consultants. Resort spas usually provide relaxation activities for example aromatherapy, massages and hydrotherapy together with natural attractions such as beaches or mountains. The size of a resort spa is much bigger than a destination spa. A resort spa generally has 100 to 600 units while a destination spa provides between 20 and 30 rooms. Day spas offer only treatment without accommodation, however they are considered faster growing than destination spas and resort spas.

Ross (2001) reported the four factors that propel health tourism market in the United States. First, 78 million baby boomers were looking for travel opportunities that suit their health requirements. It was reported that 60% of the spa market were represented by the baby boomers. Second, American people are fascinated with alternative therapies for health maintenance and remedy. The study showed that 42% of Americans spent money for non-traditional medical products and treatments for more than USD 21 billion.

Another factor was that travelers are searching for different holiday experiences. A variety of aspects of health tourism can satisfy those needs. The last factor was healthcare system in some countries such as England and Canada. The long waiting lists and expensive medical care in those countries were the major reasons to seek faster and

cheaper medical services in other countries. Ross (2001) stated that Americans may begin to look for alternative medical services from different countries since they are likely having the same problem as in Canada and England.

Croatia

Health tourism has been known in Croatia for a long time, however it attracted Croatian tourism professionals and scholars after the 39th International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (AIEST) Congress in 1989. The Commission for Health Tourism and Natural Health Remedies with the Academy of Medical Science of Croatia was formed to be in charge of the development of health tourism in Croatia (Kusen, 2002).

There are many criteria for the regulatory health tourism framework such as a holistic understanding of health and contribution of health to the quality of life. Appropriate use of natural health resources, appropriate application of the medical and paramedical procedures and application of other procedures for maintenance and improvement of health and the quality of life and the appropriate medical supervision were included in the guiding framework of health tourism in Croatia as well (Kusen, 2002). Table 2-3 described specific health tourism activities that were offered in Croatia.

Kusen (2002) explained that some of the activities provided were appropriately developed with the adequate number of staff while some of them were insufficiently developed. Most of the activities were intended to improve only physical health, while psychological and spiritual parts were somewhat overlooked.

<p>A. Compulsory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - medical supervision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o initial and final examination o program and supervision of activities - application of the natural remedies - other scheduled activities <p>B. Optional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - diagnosis - physiotherapy - kineziotherapy - sport and recreation - psychological treatments - mental fitness programs - special programs such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o health promotion o wellness programs o special diets o medical program o and similar
--

Table 2-3: Specific activities offered in Croatia (Kusen, 2002)

Croatia offered mainly natural remedies services, which are “fundamental resources in the development of health and spa tourism” (Kusen, 2002, p. 181). Natural remedies were generally classified as sea climate, mountain climate and thermal spring water. Two types of health tourism accommodations in Croatia mentioned in Kusen study were health tourism resort and health tourism destination.

Health tourism resort is mostly based on the natural remedy resources which are located nearby the property. The surrounding area should be associated with unpolluted environment, well organized facilities and surrounding space, and suitable utilities and transportation support. Health tourism destination is a tourist place which provides a wide area for health tourism usage (Kusen, 2002).

Health tourism destination can be classified into three categories, spa destination, seaside destination and mountain destination. Spa destination is quite a limited place

offering mainly the usage of thermal spring water and sanatorium. Seaside destination is located by the coastline with the construction of sanatorium. The natural remedies founded would be the usage of seaside climate and the sea water. Mountain destination offers more natural treatments including mountain climate, thermal and mineral spring as well as sanatorium (Kusen, 2002).

Health Tourism in Thailand

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) ranked Thailand as one of the top three most popular tourist destinations in Asia. Tourism is the industry that generates the second highest foreign income to Thailand (Rittichainuwat, Qu, & Mongkhonvanit, 2002). Thailand is famous for its impressive historical sites, beautiful beaches, rich culture and friendly people (Khaosa-ard, 1994).

The trend of health consciousness boosts spa and health resort business around the world, including Thailand. Health tourism development project was introduced as an alternative tourism product after the Asian Economic Crisis in 1997. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), therefore, launched the health tourism marketing plan to promote tourism in the country and health tourism has been developed continuously since then. As the tourism industry has been negatively affected by the Iraq war, as well as deadly SARS and bird flu viruses, the government and private sector are counting on health tourism to help maintain the economic status of the country (Kositchotethana, 2003). Moreover, the TAT and Thai government hoped to reduce or delete sex tourism image by promoting the country as a health tourism destination and changing the bad image of female masseuses.

The TAT started promotional program for health tourism with the first Thailand Health Travel Mart in 1999 and the second time in 2000. Continuing to 2001 and 2002, the TAT and the Department of Export Promotion jointly hosted the first and second Thailand Health and Beauty Show in Bangkok. Those health and travel shows were very successful with more than 50,000 visitors (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2002).

In 2002, the number of foreign travelers seeking treatment in Thailand grew by 13% over the early year with the sum of almost 633,000 foreigners visiting Thailand for medical treatment various from dental care to spinal surgery or even sexual transformation surgery (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2003a). Taemsamran (2000) reported that Thailand offered traditional alternative medicines, oriental exercise (yoga, qigong and tai-chi) and meditation in order to attract non-Asian travelers. The Thailand Ministry of Health projected that the Thai hospitals will receive a total of 730,000 foreign patients and would generate around USD 400 million of foreign income at the end of 2003.

According to the TAT, there are four kinds of health tourism accommodations in Thailand including destination spa, health resort, medical spa and day spa (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2003b). Hospitals also play a vital role to attract foreign patients by coordinating with private spa companies and establishing full-service medical spas which provided medical check-up services such as blood chemistry, urine analysis and analysis of body composition and metabolism analysis, together with general spa services including aromatherapy, traditional body massages and acupressure (Taemsamran, 2001).

Tourism Planning

In order to succeed in any kind of work or business, planning is a very important step that brings the industry to goals. Similar to other industries, the tourism industry needs to have an effective plan to become successful. The tourism industry has specific characteristics that could not be found in other industry (Morrison, 2002).

Kotler, Bowen and Makens (1999) explained the first step of planning in the tourism industry - the business mission needs to be defined by management. After management has defined the mission, the objectives and goals can be developed for the planning period. The next step is to formulate the strategy for achieving the goals, and then develop the program that suits the strategy.

Once the strategy and program are set, the next step is to implement the program. To successfully implement the program, Kotler, Bowen and Makens pointed out that resources including skillful employees are required to carry out the strategy. Feedback and control are the last two steps after implementation. Management needs to monitor development and feedback from the process which may have an effect on the adjustment of mission, goals, strategy, program and implementation.

Tourism industry is very dynamic and frequently experiencing changes from both internal and external, thus planning is required to guarantee success. Morrison emphasized that "Planning is a must in today's business environment" (2002, p. 61). He explained that there are five tasks that need to be done in order to accomplish the goal. They are called the PRICE model which included planning, research, implementation, control and evaluation. Morrison's PRICE model is quite similar to Kotler, Bowen and Makens' tourism plan, however, some steps are different (see Figure 2-3).

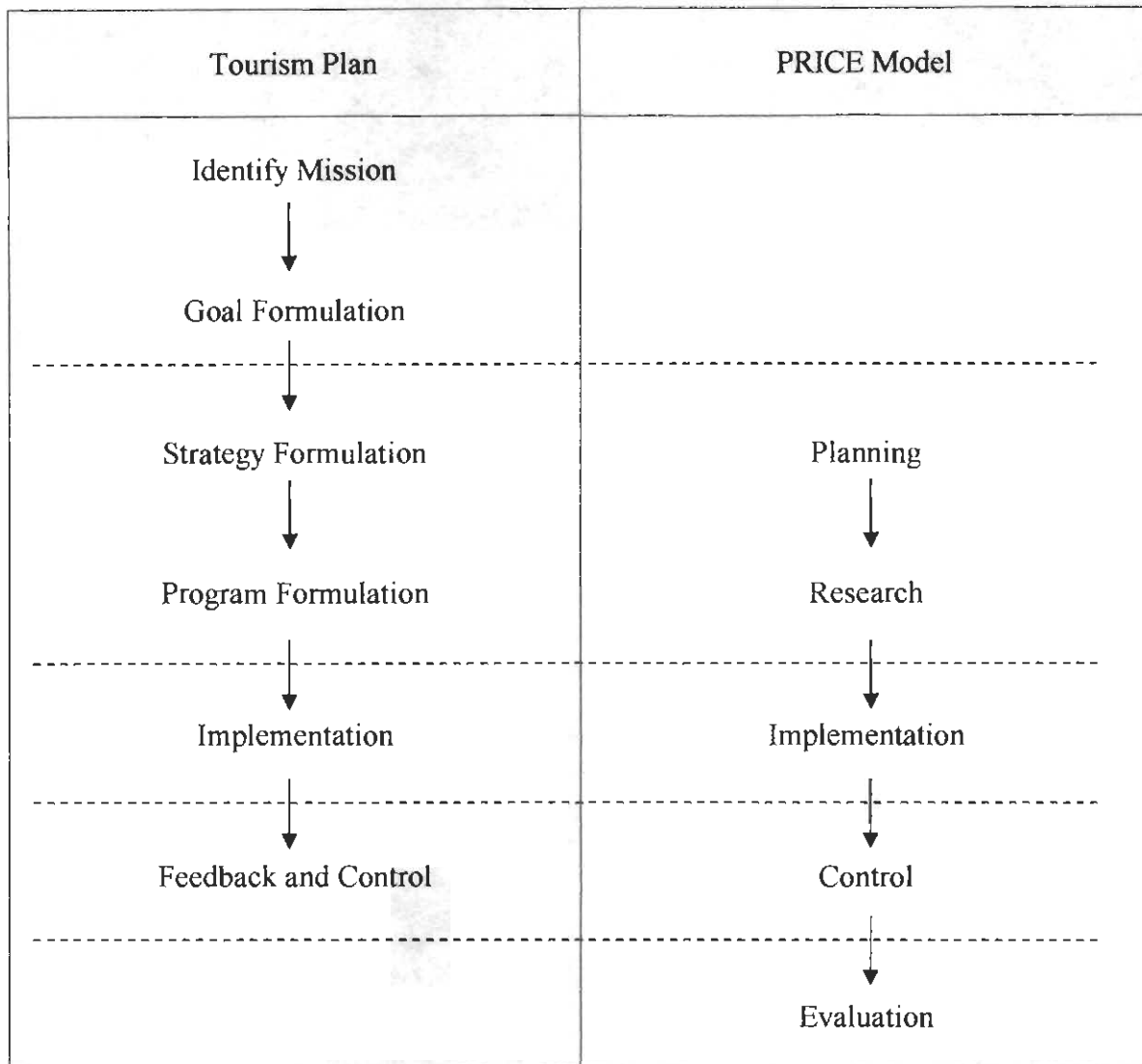


Figure 2-3: Comparisons of the Tourism Plan and the PRICE Model

Summary

Health tourism has been associated with people's life for more than a century. It has been developed differently regarding to culture and traditional of each country. The health tourism industry, in some countries, has decreased in demand. In some other countries, on the other hand, health tourism plays an important role improving economic

status and image of the countries. Concepts of health tourism are various according to the country of origin and the purpose of research studies from different researcher's perspectives.

The next chapter provides the method and procedure that were used in order to obtain information needed for the study. The limitations of the method are also noted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter included information about the methodology and process of conducting this study. Limitations were also discussed at the end of the chapter. The methodology used in this study was literature review. The researcher conducted this research by using available print and electronic media to obtain health tourism information of other countries and Thailand.

Description of Methodology and Process

The World Tourism Organization (as cited in Gee, 1997) explained the research method using literature review. The process involves a number of stages, namely:

1. Recognize and define the problem

As mentioned in the **Statement of the Problem** in Chapter 1, the researcher defined the problem about health tourism development in Thailand. There is no specific study on health tourism in Thailand and the planning process.

2. Specify data needs

The data needed in this study was published data, available in print and electronic media containing general knowledge and research studies of health tourism in other countries and Thailand. The literature provided information on the history, definitions, structure and implementation plan of health tourism.

3. Evaluate and choose secondary data

Credible sources on the World Wide Web such as World Tourism Organization (WTO), Tourism Authority of Thailand and other health tourism provider websites were

reviewed and used as part of resources. Articles from academic journals in hospitality and tourism field and newspapers were also used in this study.

4. Collect desired data

Both printed and online data were collected as major data of this study. The researcher used internet search engine website such as Google and typed key words, for example, health tourism, health tour, wellness, tourism and health and health tour in Thailand. Websites were particularly chosen for credibility and reliability. Articles from academic journals were sought using internet databases such as ProQuest, WilsonWeb, EBSCOhost as well as library periodicals service.

5. Process and analyze the data

The collected data from print and electronic resources were reviewed and separated into different categories by following the research objectives, which are:

First, this study intended to provide an overview of health tourism. Information about health tourism in general was used to respond to the first objective. Second, this study aimed to compare health tourism of Thailand to other countries. Data on health tourism operation in Thailand and other countries were analyzed to answer the second objective. Last, this study purposed to develop a health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry. All of the data from print and electronic sources were used to provide an effective health tourism development plan in Thailand.

6. Interpret result, draw conclusions and formulate recommendations

The findings will be presented and discussed in the following chapter. Conclusions and recommendations can be found in the final chapter.

Limitations

The limitations of this research method are as follows:

1. Lack of research study focusing on health tourism due to not many academic journals or books published in health tourism topic. Moreover, some of those journal or books were published in foreign languages such as German, French, Spanish, and etc.; which was beyond the researcher's ability to understand. This, therefore, caused some failure to collect data related to the topic.
2. The data used in this study was written document from printed and online resources which may be affected by cultural differences. This, therefore, may lead to misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the literature.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results and discussion of the findings from the collected data. The researcher conducted the study by reviewing secondary data as described in Chapter Three. This chapter provides organized data that meet the objectives of this research. The results of the data were categorized by the following research objectives.

The first objective is to provide an overview of health tourism. Information about health tourism was described thoroughly in the literature review chapter. In this chapter, therefore, the researcher will restate only briefly. The second objective is to compare health tourism of Thailand with other countries. The third objective is to develop a health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry.

An Overview of Health Tourism

In this study, the researcher explained an overview of health tourism in several issues including the relationship between tourism and health, background and concept of health tourism, type of accommodations and services provided, and the market drivers. Health tourism was explained earlier in this study as a kind of tourism that responds to the customers' objective either to promote their health or heal the illness by providing facilities such as spa, fitness, health center and hospital, and activities such as spots, meditation, yoga, massage, medical checkup and cure the diseases.

Tourism and Health

Tourism and health has been associated in many ways including health of tourists, health of the community and people traveling for health purposes (Alleyne, 1990). Health tourism considering tourism and health interaction should include wellness and illness, and promotion and prevention (Bushell, 2000).

Background of Health Tourism

In ancient times, people traveled to mineral springs for curing illness, relaxation and spiritual beliefs. It has been referred from some researches that health tourism occurred since Greek and Roman period (Didaskalou & Nastos, 2003). It has been developed from time to time in many countries in Europe, Asia and America. Nowadays, health tourism becomes popular and many countries have tried to develop their health tourism products in order to respond to this trend.

Concept of Health Tourism

A variety of researchers in health tourism and related topics attempted to explain the concept of health tourism differently by their research goals. In this study, the researcher selected similar ideas about health tourism from those researches to find out the general thought of health tourism. Health tourism can be defined as a form of tourism which attempts to attract tourists who travel for their health purposes by providing health facilities and activities that suit health tourist's needs.

Health Tourism Accommodations and Services

Health tourists travel to different health destinations for different purposes. Therefore, each of the destinations should provide unique type of accommodations and services. In order to distinguish health tourism accommodations from other kinds of

accommodations, it was clarified that health tourism accommodations offer regular wellness programs as well as health tourism services including medical supervision, natural remedies and health tourism programs (Kusen, 2002).

From the literature there are three forms of health tourism accommodations (Gee, 1997). The first one is medical care. Tourists visit medical care place in order to get treatment for certain deceases. Next one is fitness and wellness places such as spa or weight-loss clinic targeting health tourists who want to maintain good health and prevent illness. Rehabilitation and convalescence is the last type of health tourism accommodations. The place offers special care for people who want to recuperate from illness. This kind of place is usually located in the area that benefit to people's health.

Health tourism market drivers

From literature review, the researcher found that demographics, economics and lifestyles are the major factors stimulating health tourism market. People now tend to seek higher quality of life with healthier lifestyles including eating healthy food, doing healthy activities and traveling to health tourism destinations. Tourism businesses see this trend as an opportunity to make profit by providing health tourism accommodations and services that meet the needs. The rising number of senior citizens, who have time, money and motivation to maintain good health, is another major driver to arouse the health tourism market (Pollock & Williams, 2000).

Comparing Health Tourism of Thailand with Other Countries

For this topic, the researcher aimed to compare health tourism of Thailand with other countries to find out the differences and similarities based on information from the literature review. The four countries are United Kingdom, Malaysia, United States and

Croatia, where health tourism played an important role in their tourism industries, were selected to make comparison in this study. The researcher determined the strengths and weaknesses of health tourism in each country as shown in Table 4-1 and 4-2.

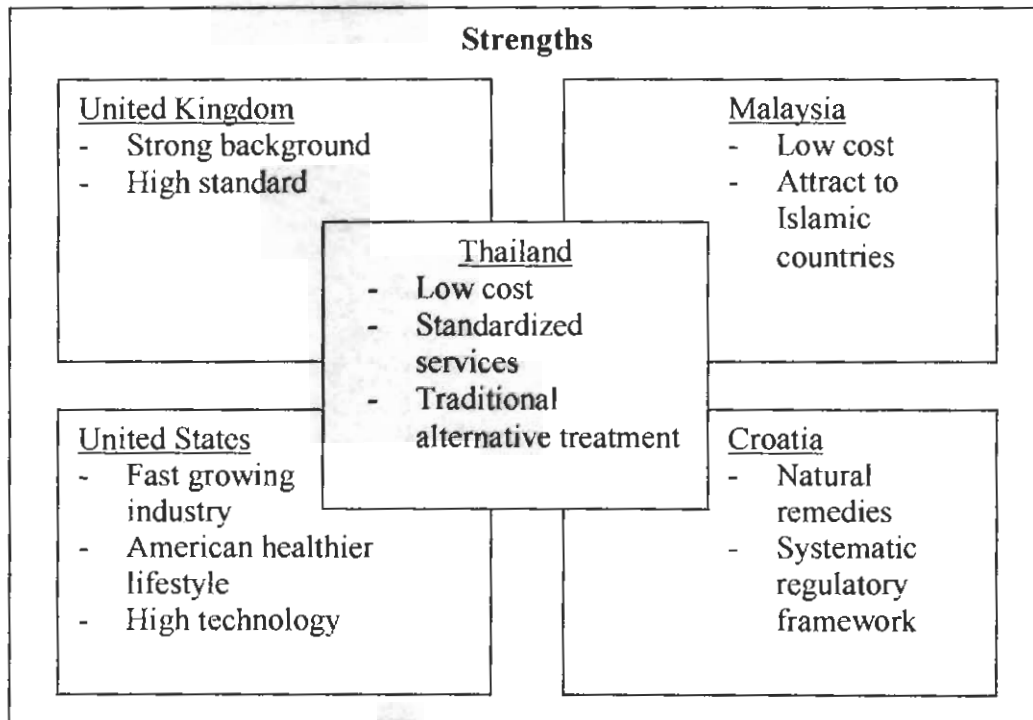


Figure 4-1: Comparing strengths in health tourism

Figure 4-1 shows health tourism strengths of the five countries chosen in this study. Thailand's strengths are low cost of health tourism products and services, and standardized services provided. Thailand also has its traditional alternative medicines and massage which could attract health tourists who fascinate in traditional treatment. In the United Kingdom, British people obtain more knowledge in traveling for health purposes and spa usage because the country is considered as the foundation of health tourism. Another advantage is the customers could feel confident about high medical standard offered in the United Kingdom. In Malaysia, health tourism is supported by the Malaysian government and it is considered as a strategic plan to increase income.

Malaysia's advantages are the cheaper cost of health care than its regional competitors and Islamic practices in the country which could lure Islamic health tourists from Middle East and other Islamic countries.

The United States also has long history about people visiting spas. An interesting point is that health tourism and spa business are growing rapidly in the country. This could motivate health tourism providers in the United States to improve their products and services quality in order to maintain and increase the number of customers. A rising number of American people interested in healthier lifestyle could be another factor supporting the growth of health tourism industry. As well as the United Kingdom, the United States offers high technology in healthcare system to their customers.

Health tourism in Croatia has been developed under the Commission of Health Tourism and Natural Health Remedies. The strength of Croatia is that health tourism in this country offered mostly natural remedies from natural health resources which could attract health tourists who love natural environment and treatment. The systematic health tourism regulatory framework has been applied to control the use of natural health resources, appropriate application of the medical and paramedical procedures and application of other procedures for maintenance and improvement of health and the quality of life and the appropriate medical supervision. This framework for this reason helped maintain the suitable growth of health tourism development in the country.

Figure 4-2 shows health tourism weaknesses of the five countries chosen in this study. Thailand has strong image of sex tourism destination. By using the word 'massage', tourists may think about health tourism service or massage parlor and prostitution. Sex tourists may expect to get prostitution service from health tourism

destination and health tourists may be upset by getting the service at massage parlor. The major problem in Thailand is the lack of government budget for improving the standard of health tourism destinations to be acceptable throughout the country. The lack of budget could also affect the lack of research in health tourism field.

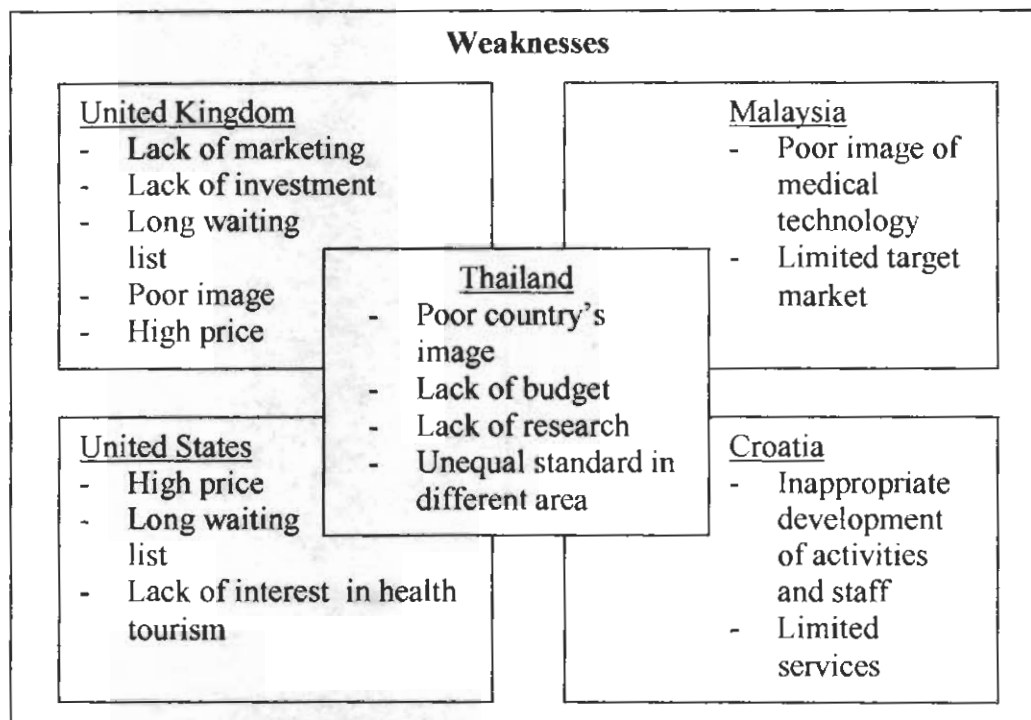


Figure 4-2: Comparing weaknesses in health tourism

In the United Kingdom, the British Tourist Authority marketed mineral water places as spa heritage towns but not health spa towns. This, therefore, might motivate tourists to visit those towns for other purposes but not for their health. The United Kingdom also has poor image of health tourism and lack of promotion and investment. Long waiting list to obtain service and the expensive cost of care may encourage patients to travel abroad. For Malaysia, health tourists may hesitate to get health tourism products and services because of the poor image of medical technology. Malaysia also has limited

target group, which is Islamic people, hence if the country continues to market to only one group, it will lose potential customers from other religious.

The researcher found that only one percent of the United States population visited spas each year. The researcher believes that it is because the high price of the products and services, and the long waiting list. The weaknesses of Croatia health tourism industry are the inappropriate development of activities and staff and the limited service provided. Some activities in the psychological and spiritual aspects were insufficiently developed, while the physical part was well improved. The number of staff was also improper, for example, there were more people working for one particular part than other parts. Croatia mainly offered natural remedies as its health tourism product. This may cause the lack of development in other health tourism products such as surgery or medical treatment and the country might lose potential customers who seek for those services.

Every country has different strengths and weaknesses depending on its climate and landscape. Culture and policy were also important to the development of health tourism in each country. In addition to the cost of care and the long waiting list, the level of technology provided in each country was another factor that distinguished the level of services and the group of customers.

Health Tourism Plan for Thailand Tourism Industry

For the last objective of this study, the researcher intended to develop the health tourism plan for Thailand. The researcher modified this health tourism plan from Kotler, Bowen and Makens' tourism plan and Morrison's PRICE model which were explained in Chapter 2.

Health Tourism Plan

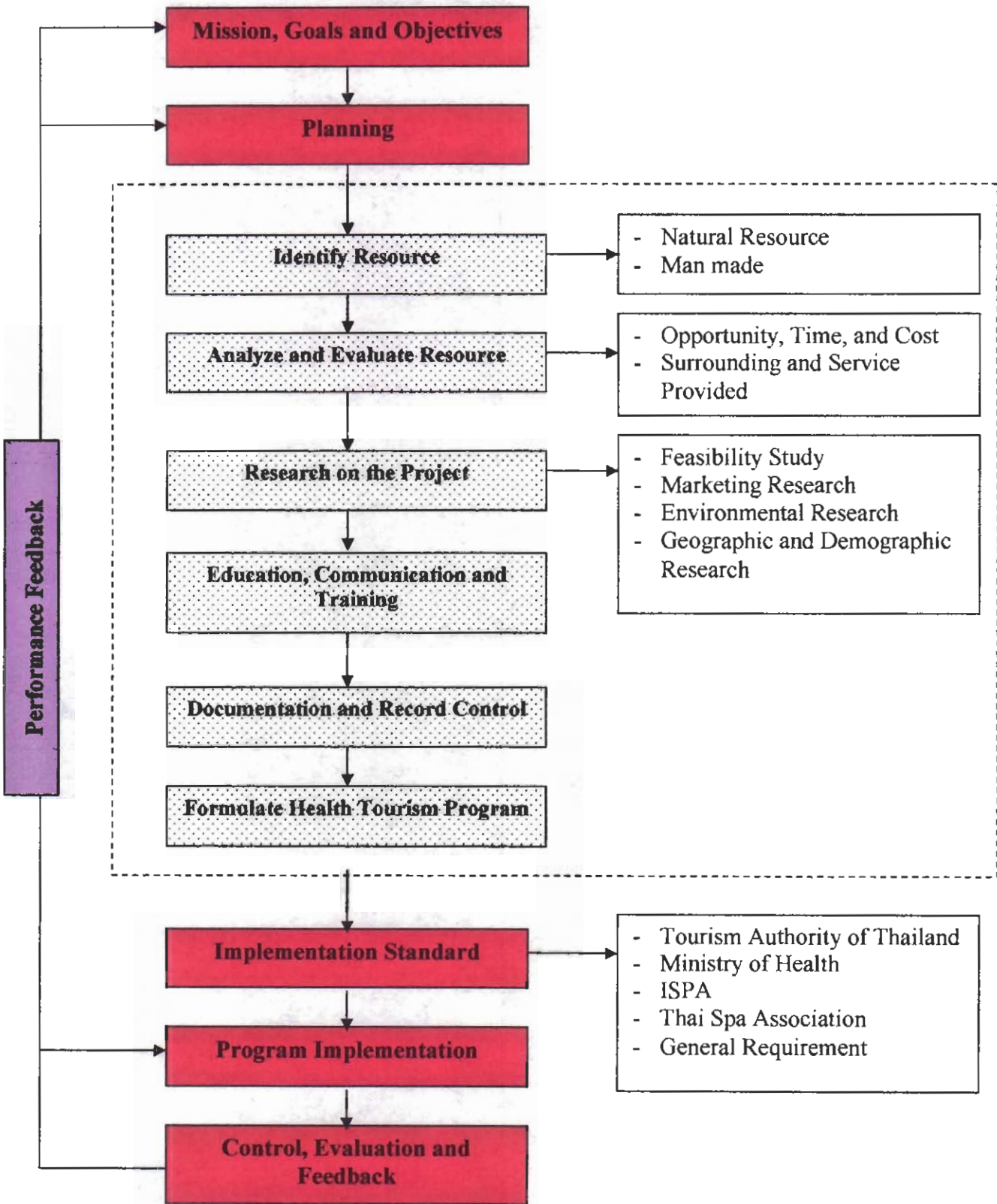


Figure 4-3: Health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry

The health tourism plan consists of five steps (see Figure 4-3). This model describes the health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry in order to use as a guide for health tourism providers. The information appearing in the plan, therefore, was based on Thailand tourism industry.

Mission, Goals and Objectives

The provider needs to identify mission, goals and objectives regarding the health tourism plan in order to develop and promote health tourism in Thailand. In this step, the provider must define various scopes such as its products, market segments, positioning and competence. The provider also needs to create the project policy to control working processes throughout the project.

Planning

Planning stage aim is to identify the resource of health tourism project such as natural or man made resources. After identifying the resource, the next step is to analyze and evaluate the chosen resource through opportunity, time, cost, surrounding and service provided. Research must be completed in order to provide information regarding this health tourism project. In this planning stage, furthermore, effective and efficient education, communication and training program should be developed as well as documentation and record control process. Lastly, the provider should formulate health tourism program to meet the goals and objectives of the project.

Implementation Standard

The purpose of this stage is to implement standards on health tourism to this health tourism plan. The requirements of Tourism Authority of Thailand, Ministry of

Health, International Spa Association (ISPA) and Thai Spa Association should be concerned and followed.

Program Implementation

Once health tourism program has been formulated and adjusted to meet the standard requirements, implementation of the chosen program is the next step. This program should correspond to the concept of health tourism which aims to provide health facilities and activities that suit health tourist needs either for health promotion or prevention.

Control, Evaluation and Feedback

Control, Evaluation and Feedback are the last three steps of the health tourism plan. The provider needs to monitor and evaluate the overall performance of health tourism plan and provide feedback from the process. From the feedback, the provider may provide recommendations which affect the improvement of mission, goals, objectives, program planning and implementation processes.

Summary

The literature research was conducted to address the objectives of this study. This chapter presents the findings which are summarized as follow:

1. An overview of health tourism were presented in several issues including the relationship between tourism and health, background and concept of health tourism, type of accommodations and services provided, and the market drivers.
2. Health tourism of Thailand and other countries namely United Kingdom, Malaysia, United States and Croatia were compared by focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of each country. Several factors such as climate and landscape

were mentioned as the reasons that distinguish characteristics of health tourism in each country.

3. Health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry was developed to use as a guide for a successful health tourism program in Thailand.

The next chapter will cover summary, findings and conclusion of this research. Recommendations for practitioners in health tourism industry and for the future research will be presented. Lastly, the reflection of the researcher on this research will be discussed.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the summary, findings and conclusions of this research. Recommendations for practitioners in health tourism industry and for the future study will be discussed. In addition, the reflection of the researcher on this research will be described at the end of the chapter.

Summary

Health tourism has become one of the major tourism products of Thailand since 1997. Unfortunately, there was no specific study on health tourism in Thailand and the planning process. The purpose of this study was to develop health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry to use as a guideline for developing health tourism program in Thailand.

This study presented general knowledge of health tourism, identified example of health tourism of other countries and Thailand, as well as combined health tourism and planning knowledge to create a health tourism plan for Thailand. The three objectives of this study were:

1. To provide an overview of health tourism.
2. To compare health tourism of Thailand with other countries.
3. To develop a health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry.

The methodology used in this study was literature review. The researcher conducted this research by using available print and electronic media to obtain health tourism information of other countries and Thailand. The researcher defined the problem about health tourism development in Thailand, and then gathered available published data

from reliable resources, containing general knowledge and research studies of health tourism in other countries and Thailand. The collected data from print and electronic resources were reviewed and separated into different categories by following the research objectives. After summarizing the data, the researcher responded all of the objectives and developed health tourism planning framework for Thailand tourism industry.

Findings

The literature review was used to acquire health tourism knowledge in order to achieve the goal of this study. Findings were discussed based on the objectives of the study.

Objective 1: To provide an overview of health tourism.

The researcher intended to provide an overview of health tourism in several issues including the relationship between tourism and health, background and concept of health tourism, type of accommodations and services provided, and the market drivers. Information about health tourism was described in the literature review chapter and the previous chapter.

Health has been one of the major reasons for people to travel for more than a century. In ancient times, health tourism attractions were in the form of using mineral water and natural remedies to cure deceases. Health tourism has been developed from time to time and became an important tourism product in many countries throughout the world. The researcher found that the trend in seeking for healthier lifestyles was a major reason stimulating health tourism market.

The concepts of health tourism were various depending on the researchers and their research goals. In this study, the researcher defined health tourism as a form of

tourism which attempts to attract tourists who travel for their health purposes by providing health facilities and activities that suit health tourists' needs. The health tourism accommodations, therefore, should provide a multiplicity of services such as medical supervision, natural remedies, fitness and other health promotional programs.

Objective 2: To compare health tourism of Thailand with other countries.

This study aimed to compare health tourism of Thailand with other countries to find out the differences and similarities based on information from the literature review. The researcher found three key factors, namely quality, price and service provided, that could be used to compare health tourism in each country. Today, quality of products and services is one of the customer's major concerns in any business. The customers could feel confident about high medical standard offered in the United Kingdom as well as the high technology in healthcare offered in the United States. However, Thailand, Malaysia and Croatia attempted to develop their medical technology and healthcare standard to compete with other countries.

Price of health tourism products and services were various. In developed countries such as the United States and United Kingdom, health tourism costs more than in developing countries such as Croatia, Malaysia and Thailand. For this reason, people from those developed countries may search for cheaper and reliable places to travel for their health purposes. The literature review showed that there was a wide range of health tourism products and services provided in different countries. For example, Croatia mainly offered natural remedies as its health tourism product while Thailand offered a variety of products and services, such as traditional alternative treatment along with plastic surgery and weight loss program.

Objective 3: To develop a health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry.

The researcher developed a health tourism planning framework for Thailand tourism industry. The planning process can be used as a guide to develop a health tourism program in Thailand. The health tourism plan consists of five important steps which are (1) identifying mission, goals and objectives, (2) planning the program, (3) implementation standards, (4) program implementation and (5) control, evaluation and feedback. Feedback could result in changing or improving mission, goals, objectives, program planning and implementation processes.

Conclusions

While it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding such a varied knowledge base, several conclusions can be reported.

First of all, through the review of literature, the researcher found that the purpose for traveling to health tourism places such as mineral springs or spas has changed. People in Greek and Roman periods seemed to travel for spiritual belief purpose. Goodrich reported that in the ancient times, many people traveled to nearby river and mineral springs for their spiritual and curative beliefs (1993a). Now people tend to travel mainly for health purposes including diseases prevention and health promotion by visiting health tourism destinations or resorts.

Secondly, health tourism can be pictured as a big system including several stakeholders which play an important role in health tourism operation (see Figure 5-1). In general, health tourism stakeholders include government organizations such as the Department of Tourism and the Ministry of Health. International Spa Association could control the standards for every health tourism place.

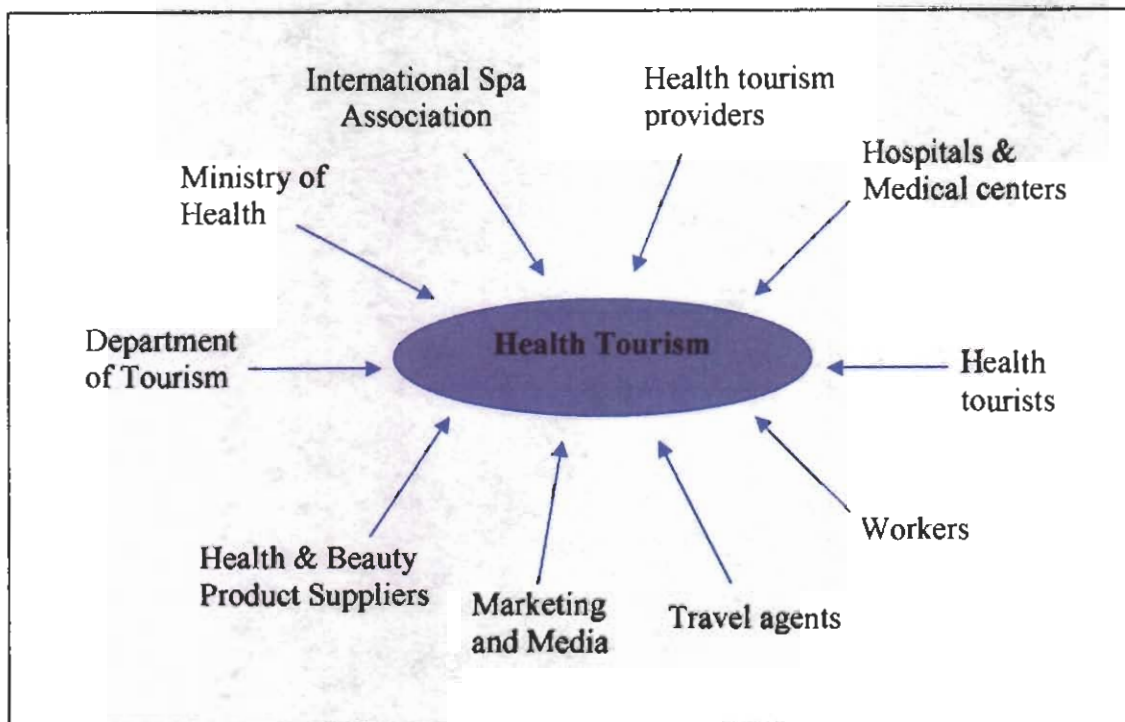


Figure 5-1: Stakeholders of health tourism industry

Health tourism providers and hospital and medical centers should coordinate in order to provide health tourism services that meet the tourists' needs. Health tourists are the primary factors stimulating all activities in health tourism industry. Workers in health tourism businesses are another important stakeholder in health tourism industry. The workers usually are persons who interact with health tourists and create good impression of health tourism. Travel agents may work together with marketing and media sector in order to promote health tourism to the potential target market from both domestic and international. Health and beauty product suppliers perform as the basis that makes health tourism a successful industry.

Lastly, the researcher would like to point out some important components that influence the development of health tourism in different countries. The first component is the nature, namely geographies and climates. The second factor is the technology which

differentiates the level of **health tourism** products and services in each country. The third one is the culture of the host community and the guest. Frustration may occur when the culture of health tourism providers and tourists are dissimilar. The last component is the funding from government and private organizations. Health tourism industry may not be able to improve its products and services if there is no financial support from the government and private **sectors**.

Recommendations

This study attempted to develop a health tourism plan as well as to create better understanding for **health tourism in general**. The findings from this study should benefit the health tourism industry as well as future research related to this topic. The researcher separates recommendations into two parts. The first part is the recommendations for practice and the second part is for future study.

Recommendations for Practice

1. Health tourism is one of the fast growing segments in **tourism industry**. Research on health tourism and related topics should be done continually in order to obtain up-to-date information of the industry. In addition, research on **health tourism** should be conducted in the area of development of health tourism, products and services provided and organizations that control **health tourism in each country**.
2. In order to apply the **health** tourism planning framework provided in this study to the health tourism projects, health tourism providers should **adjust the content** in each step to fit the real **situation** for the best result.
3. Because of high **competition** in health tourism market, health tourism provider should design the theme for products and services provided to make those

products or services different from others. However, each product and service should be developed **under** the concept of health tourism.

4. The countries that **provide health** tourism should establish a specialize organization to **supervise and manage** health tourism businesses in their countries. The organization may work for an individual country or for a group of countries such as The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the European Union (EU) in order to form standards and control the development of health tourism products and **services**.

Recommendations for further research

1. This research was **conducted** in the United States while the main goal is to develop health tourism plan for Thailand tourism industry. Further research may replicate this study; however, it should be done in Thailand.
2. This study focused on health tourism in Thailand. Further research is recommended to study health tourism development of other countries. Study of health tourism products and services available in different countries **should be** completed.
3. This study investigated an overview of health tourism. Further study **is** recommended to **explore in depth** each component of health tourism.
4. A survey and interviews should be conducted in order to obtain more **realistic** information from **health** tourism providers or health tourists.
5. The health tourism **planning** framework developed in this study has **not been** applied to any health tourism organization yet. Further research should **implement**

this health tourism plan as a case study to one or more organizations and evaluate how effective this plan is.

Reflections

The researcher has learned several things from doing this research. First, health tourism is a new topic in tourism research. Therefore, it was hard to achieve enough information compared to other kinds of tourism. The researcher would prefer to do this research again but use survey or interview methods instead of literature review.

Secondly, the researcher would like to attend strategic management classes before developing a health tourism plan in order to understand more about the strategic management plan. In this study, the researcher relied primary on management books.

Finally, the researcher did not spend much time discussing with the research advisor. However, the researcher obtained valuable recommendations from every discussion with the research advisor. The researcher would meet and discuss with the research advisor more often in the next time of doing research.

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