

The Readiness for Development Phuket as a World-Class Wellness Tourism Destination

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Abstract

Wellness tourism is one of the key target industries for Asia's economic growth, which is a rapidly growing trend in the world travel industry, with many people seeking out destinations and experiences that promote health and well-being. Little research has been done on developing a world-class wellness tourist destination, especially in Phuket province. By applying tourism elements (10As) to identify the potential of wellness tourism. The objective of this research was 1) To identify the potential for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination. 2) To explore the guidelines for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination. The sample size was conducted with 16 participants from three sectors: the public sector, the private sector, and the academic sector who have working experience for 5 years or over 5 years in wellness tourism and hospitality business in Phuket through an in-depth interview. The result of this study concluded that Phuket has a strong potential for tourism elements (10As). However, high-quality wellness manpower and management systems (2M) are also key for success to improving in terms of specific wellness knowledge and practice, wellness service standards, and innovation for wellness tourism management systems. The results also revealed that the development of a world-class wellness travel destination in Phuket has a high ability to continuously develop to become a healthy city in

the future by applying a multidisciplinary approach that should focus on people, facilities, and health criteria.

Keywords: Development; Wellness Tourism; World-Class; Wellness Destination

Introduction

Wellness tourism has gained significant attention in recent years as individuals seek to enhance their overall well-being through travel experiences. Wellness tourism is a potent confluence of two major factors (tourism and wellness) that have rapidly increased by multi-trillion dollars in recent years. Nowadays, people expect to continue their healthy lifestyles and balance wellness routines with holistic health while they are traveling. As a result, health prevention is increasingly becoming at the core of consumer decision-making regarding travel (Global Wellness Institute, 2022). Wellness tourism is a wide-ranging, multi-faceted concept, encompassing ten elements of the supply chain: hot springs, spas, medical tourism, body and mind care, enogastronomy, sports, nature and environment, culture, spirituality, and events (Dini & Pencarelli, 2021). This type of travel can include everything from spa retreats and yoga retreats to wellness-focused on mind and eco-tourism experiences.

According to the Global Wellness Institute's report in 2018, Asia has the highest growth rate for wellness tourism in the world. This includes businesses related to health, such as health-focused accommodations, spas, clinics, and healthy restaurants. Therefore, the Thai government has policies to promote tourism, including plans to develop Thailand as an international health center and a hub for medical and wellness tourism. This includes developing a high-quality and sustainable tourism industry, promoting health services, and creating academic and research centers. One factor driving the growth of wellness tourism is the increasing focus on health and wellness in society. As people become more aware of the importance of self-care and stress management, they are seeking out travel experiences that support their well-being. Additionally, advancements in technology have made it easier for travelers to research and book wellness-focused trips, and social media has played a significant role in promoting wellness tourism destinations and experiences. Another factor contributing to the growth of wellness tourism is the rise of sustainable travel. Many wellness-focused travelers are also interested in eco-tourism and responsible travel practices, leading to an increase in sustainable wellness tourism experiences. Overall, the trend towards wellness tourism shows no signs of slowing down, as more and more

people prioritize their health and well-being in their travel plans (The Global Wellness Institute, 2018).

The promotion of tourism in Thailand has shifted towards health and beauty, due to the increasing importance placed on health and longevity. This has led to behavioral changes in tourists, who seek cleanliness, hygiene, and flexibility in their travel experiences. Wellness tourism is a growing market and is the fourth largest contributor to the tourism industry, generating 15.6% of total tourism revenue (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2021). It also has a high annual growth rate of 7.5% for the period between 2015 and 2020 (Chulalongkorn University Intellectual Property Institute, 2017). According to the Global Wellness Institute, the global wellness tourism market has a high value of 439 billion USD and is related to other types of tourism (Global Wellness Institute, 2018).

Phuket's wellness tourism industry is a significant player in the global tourism market and is rapidly expanding to cater to the growing demand. The primary product of wellness tourism in Phuket is spa services, which attract both wealthy individuals and socially responsible tourists. As part of this effort, Phuket province plans to establish an International Health and Wellness Center. According to Phuket Province's Gross Provincial Product (GPP) data classified by production sector from 2018 to 2020, the province's income from health and social work activities increased from 2018 to 2020, totaling 4,143 million baht, 4,863 million baht, and 5,171 million baht, respectively (Phuket Provincial Finance Office, 2022). As a result of this, Phuket Province has recognized its potential and has moved to promote health tourism. The long-term goal is to develop Phuket into a global medical and health tourism center (Wellness Hub), with clearly defined objectives outlined in the Phuket Provincial Development Plan 2023–2027 and the Phuket 20-year Development Plan 2023–2042 (Phuket Provincial Office, 2022). With its potential and positive factors, Phuket's wellness tourism industry is set to thrive in the coming years.

However, Phuket has the potential for wellness tourism, but it needs to develop at several points, including wellness expert skills, enhancing language proficiency, ensuring quality standards, effective management systems, increasing spa business value, and developing local identities unique to Phuket's wellness spa promotion (Aksornpairoj, 2020; Weerakit et al., 2019; Chusri, 2020). Additionally, there is a need for empirical studies specifically focusing on the wellness tourism development gap in Phuket by applying tourism elements (10As), considering the unique, potential, and brand image development that influence pushing Phuket as world-class wellness tourism (Klangnurak & Jaroenwisana, 2023). Hence, this study can identify the true and updated

potential of wellness tourism in Phuket and provide a clear direction for the development of wellness tourism to upgrade Phuket to become a world-class wellness tourism destination.

Research objectives

1. To identify the potential for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination.
2. To explore the guidelines for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination.

Literature Review

Wellness tourism definition

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (2021), "Health Tourism" or "Wellness Tourism" is a type of tourist vacation. Visit the most stunning natural and cultural wonders.

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2021), "Health tourism" or "Wellness tourism" is a type of tourist vacation that involves visiting the most stunning natural and cultural wonders. The goal is to learn about living and enjoyment. By devoting travel time to health promotion and/or health rehabilitation activities such as seeking health advice and counseling. Proper exercise employs massage, steaming, herbal compresses, meditation practice, physical assessment, medical treatment, and so on, which is tourism that promotes and preserves health and the environment. It is travel that involves people aiming to maintain or promote their health. Its scope includes all holistic preventative health care and enhancement services. It is consumers' choice and desire to employ health promotion services when traveling overseas. Health tourism can be divided into two types (Department of Tourism, 2013) as follows:

1) Medical tourism involves individuals traveling across borders to receive conventional medical care in other countries (Heung et al., 2010).

2) Wellness tourism is travel that involves seeking, maintaining, or enhancing health covering (Global Wellness Institute, 2022).

Additionally, the National Wellness Institute advocates for a comprehensive approach to well-being, emphasizing six key dimensions: emotional, occupational, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual. By focusing on the whole person, environment, lifestyle, and learning, Halbert Dunn defined wellness in 1959 as "an integrated method of functioning that is oriented toward

maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable." Similarly, the six dimensions of wellness (Hettler, 1980) include: 1) intellectual wellness 2) Physical wellness 3) Emotional wellness 4) Spiritual wellness 5) Occupational wellness 6) Social wellness. By prioritizing these dimensions of wellness, individuals can achieve a more balanced and fulfilling life. Thus, it can be concluded that wellness tourism involves traveling to natural and cultural sources for relaxation and learning about physical and mental health and aesthetics while preserving values, quality of life, the environment, and local culture.

The preparation and readiness of Phuket as a wellness travel destination

Phuket has experienced a surge in income from health activities from 2018 to 2020, primarily due to the ease of access by air, boat, and land (Phuket Provincial Finance Office, 2022). Several 5-star hotels provide stay and health-care programs for medical tourists, and there are various health promotion activities available. Phuket Province has received budgetary support to carry out projects and strengthen its potential as a wellness tourism city. The goal is to develop and promote Phuket Province as a medical, wellness tourism, and health center at international standards (Phuket Provincial Office, 2022). Phuket is one of the most prominent destinations for wellness tourism due to its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and diverse wellness offerings.

Additionally, Phuket holds great potential in the fields of international health and health tourism, with a particular focus on spa services. Tourists from Asia, especially Chinese tourists, are drawn to Thai spa services (Phuket Provincial Office, 2022). The anti-aging market is also on the rise, providing a significant opportunity for businesses in the region. There are related service businesses for physical fitness and health nutrition at high levels and beauty care, relaxation, meditation, and educational businesses at moderate levels (Aksornpaioj, 2020; Chaiyasain, 2019). However, Chusri and Lalitsasiwimon (2020) mention that Phuket needs to prepare itself to become a destination for health tourism. This includes developing the skills of personnel in health-related fields, improving language proficiency in foreign languages, and creating a framework for health tourism activities. The majority of health tourists come from Russia, followed by the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, while there are also health tourists from Asian countries such as China, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos (Chusri & Lalitsasiwimon, 2020). It is important to ensure that health tourism services are of high quality and meet international standards to comply with the standards of Thai tourism.

The potential of Phuket as a wellness destination

Phuket Province is located in the southern region of Thailand. Surrounded by the Andaman Sea It looks like the largest island in Thailand. But it is the smallest of the 14 southern provinces. It is 862 kilometers from Bangkok and has a land area of 543 square kilometers. Phuket Province is located on the western coast of Thailand, in the Andaman Sea and Indian Ocean. It has a total area of 570 square kilometers. There are important islands around. There are a total of 32 islands, such as Koh Maprao, Koh Taphao Noi, Koh Lon, Koh Racha Yai, Koh Naka Noi, and so on (Phuket Provincial Office, 2022). The length of Phuket Island from north to south is approximately 48.7 kilometers. The width from east to west is approximately 21.3 kilometers wide. The provincial administration is divided into 3 districts, namely Mueang Phuket District, Kathu District, and Thalung District (Administration Group Strategy of the Southern Provinces on the Andaman Coast (Strategic Management Group, Southern Provinces, Andaman Coast: OSM Andaman, 2021).

A primary survey of the potential of wellness tourism in Phuket Province can be divided according to the type of tourism resources (Phuket Provincial Office, 2022) as follows:

Natural tourist resources: Laem Phromthep, Laem Kating, Yanui Beach, Nai Harn Beach, Patong Beach, Rawai Beach, Kata Beach, Karon Beach, Racha Island, Nai Harn Beach, Nai Yang Beach, Yanui Beach, Kamala Beach, and Surin Beach, and so on.

2) Cultural tourism resources: Phuket's local Thai language, local food, local wisdom, Wild Likay game Grandmother Baba's dress, Wat Phra Nang Sang, Ban Ko Sire Temple, Wat Chaiyathararam (Wat Chalong), Wat Phra Thong (Wat Phra Phut), museums, and so on.

3) Wellness tourism resources, events, and phenomena: vegetarian festival, Laguna Phuket Triathlon, Health Fun Run Phuket, Phuket King Cup Regatta, Health Expo for the Community, Phuket Surf Contest, and so on.

4) Wellness tourism service resources: public utility systems, the GPS gives directions, internet access to tourist attractions, clear and convenient signage, 150 spa shops and 450 health massage shops, 3 public hospitals and 3 private hospitals, and the Phuket Cosmetic Surgery Institute (PPSI), which has received the Joint Commission International (JCI) internationally recognized standard, are some of the most famous in Thailand, as are 18 health accommodation businesses and 15 accommodation businesses with physical rehabilitation programs.

5) Wellness tourism activity resources: the Retreat Program, including the Detox Program, Stress and Burnout Recovery, Weight Control, Spa Revive, Transformative Wellness, Yoga, Thai Boxing, Meditation, Kayaking through the Mangrove Forest, Hiking, a Hot Sand Spa, and cooking Phuket's healthy food.

According to this potential, Phuket has the potential to create a future health city, as outlined by the World Health Organization's focus on promoting health and well-being through innovative, diverse, and socially just business practices. The WHO definition of a healthy city is “A livable city that encourages residents to have a good life and creates happiness both physically and mentally”. A healthy city should be a clean and safe city, including access to food, water, shelter, and health care facilities. Critical components required to realize this vision include the involvement of local communities in decision-making processes and a political commitment to enterprise and community development. These objectives align with the WHO's Health21 and European Health for All strategies, as well as the European Health 2020 policy framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Global Wellness Institute, 2022).

Thailand's policy of wellness tourism

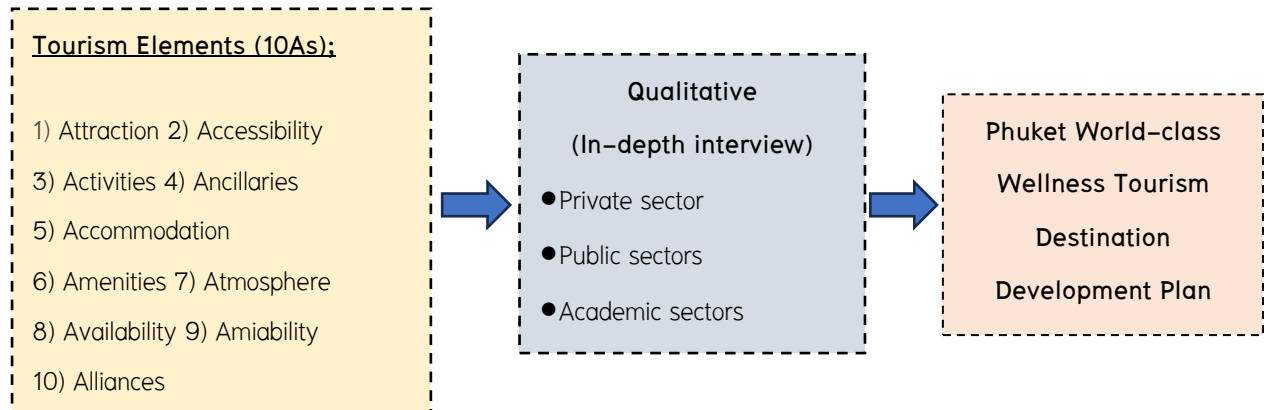
Thailand's 20-year national strategy has targeted the growth of health, beauty, and traditional Thai wellness tourism, echoing the National Economic and Social Development Plan No. 13 (2022–2027) (National Tourism Policy Committee, 2022). The country's public health system has garnered international recognition for its efficiency. As a result, Thailand aims to continually improve the quality and potential of its public health system in the medical and wellness services industry to become the country's future economic driving force. Additionally, Thailand is the fourth-largest health tourism market in Asia, after China, Japan, and India. The spa market in Thailand is the largest in the region, as it offers numerous wellness options. In global rankings, Thailand ranks 17th on traditional and complementary medicine and 18th on healthy eating, nutrition, and weight loss. Spa treatments in Thailand typically incorporate traditional Thai and herbal remedies, with Thai massage being a highly regarded practice (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDB), 2021).

This is also related to the Andaman Development Plan (2023–2027) and the Phuket Development Plan (2023–2027), which display that Phuket is committed to building partnerships with prestigious educational institutions worldwide to advance international educational programs. The aim is to bolster the province's status as a leading healthcare center and to promote tourism through Medical and Wellness Health Center hotels, which prioritize providing top-notch medical services. Specifically, the province is focusing on developing world-class SPA entrepreneurs as well as catering to the needs of elderly and retired individuals to generate revenue. To achieve this, the province is following tourism guidelines and striving to become an international medical hub and wellness hub that is a world-class destination. The focus is on strengthening high-value medical services in areas such as beauty, surgery, dentistry, health check-ups, and health rehabilitation, and ensuring the provision of exceptional healthcare services. These efforts will help Phuket establish a relationship with the collaboration not only in Medical and Wellness Health Center hotels but also in multi-sectors, resulting in a steady stream of revenue for Phuket, Thailand, from the tourism industry, especially in the medical and wellness tourism sector (Phuket Provincial Office, 2022). To become a medical hub and wellness hub, Phuket established the "Phuket Model Healthy" initiative, which comprises six key components, each with a unique focus area represented by the acronym "HEALTHY," including H (human resources development), E (education), A (advertising and marketing), L (laws and regulations), T (technology), H (happiness), and Y (your support), as a guideline to develop Phuket into a healthy city.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



The researcher defines the conceptual framework according to the concept of tourism elements (10As) (Wongmonta, 2022) that are the main concept for applying in this research, including 1) attraction, 2) accessibility, 3) activities, 4) ancillaries, 5) accommodation, 6) amenities, 7) atmosphere, 8) availability, 9) amiability, and 10) alliances to explore the potential of wellness tourism in Phuket and create effective guidelines for developing Phuket.

This research uses a qualitative method by conducting in-depth interviews with three sectors: the private sector, the public sector, and the academic sector, which strongly affect Phuket wellness tourism development. This information is valuable for developing Phuket's world-class wellness tourism destination branding and plan.

Methodology

This research investigates the guidelines for developing Phuket wellness tourism as a world-class wellness travel destination. The study used the in-depth interview method to collect and analyze data on the development and promotion of wellness tourism in Phuket.

Data Collection

The research employed the qualitative method using an in-depth interview to gather data on 16 participants from 3 sectors who have working experience in the tourism industry for 5 years or over 5 years as top executives, management representatives, and lecturers. including 1) the public sector (e.g., Phuket Provincial Tourism Authority of Thailand (Phuket), Phuket Provincial Public Health, Phuket Provincial Office of Tourism and Sport, Phuket Provincial Office) 2) the

private sector (e.g., Phuket Hotels Association; southern chapter, private hospitals, Phuket Chamber, Phuket Spa Association, tour agency, Phuket Tourist Association), and 3) the academic sector related to wellness tourism and hospitality in Phuket (e.g., lecturers in tourism).

The interview takes about 1 to 1 and a half hours per interviewee. The qualitative study was conducted using an in-depth interview technique, with open-ended questions lasting around one hour to one and a half hours per participant, and collected the data from October to December 2023. The research process started with the primary data, followed by the collection of secondary data from concepts, theories, documents, academic articles, and related research. The second data design is an in-depth interview, which contains important questions (World Health Organization, 2018; Department of Health, Ministry of Public Health, 2023) including the guidelines for developing wellness tourism in Phuket regarding 10 As (Attraction, Accessibility, Activities, Ancillaries, Accommodation, Amenities, Atmosphere, Availability, Amiability, and Alliances). Qualitative research tools are developed from academic documents and concepts, with content consistency being assessed through the Content Validity Test. The quality of the tool is determined by the reliability of questionnaires, with the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC) being used to determine content consistency. The questionnaire is considered complete and suitable for use if the calculated value (IOC) falls between 0.90 and 0.70 after being revised based on expert suggestions.

Data analysis

The researcher used the data from the qualitative data collection to examine the results and ensure their correctness. This study employed the content analysis approach. The content of the interview data was examined. Prioritize all content groupings, including analysis, categorization, and summarization of essential concerns. Qualitative data analysis from interviews involves four essential steps: content Analysis, triangulation, data display, and conclusion. The conclusions reached through interpretation are then cross-checked for accuracy using an internal audit method to ensure the study's completeness and reliability.

Results

Objective 1: To identify the potential for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination

The result of this study displays that Phuket has a high potential for tourism elements (10As) to become a wellness tourism destination. Interviewees emphasized the increasing importance of Phuket's readiness to welcome international tourists. This is because Phuket is known as one of the world's leading global travel destinations and already has complete facilities and services to meet the needs of all types of tourists. According to the result, it can be divided by using tourism elements (10As), manpower, and management (2M) as follows:

In terms of attractions, Phuket is a world-class tourist destination with many natural resources (i.e., sea, beach, good environment, and mountains) that are suitable for traveling for natural therapy and man-made tourist attractions (water parks, spas, Thai massage, sports, and temples) that are variety and quality. Similarly, the interviewee from one of the private sectors mentions that *"Phuket is a top 5 Island in the world. Tourists can find everything in Phuket. Tourists can find everything in Phuket."*, the interviewee from one of the public sectors mentions, *"Phuket has been known as a world-class tourism destination in the Sun Sand Sea for a long time"*, and the interviewee from one of the academic sectors mentions *"Phuket has a multi-culture and is popular in spa, massage, and water sports"*. These sources confirmed that Phuket has several tourism resources for tourists, not only the Sun Sand Sea (natural resources) but also culture and other man-made tourism resources.

In terms of accessibility, Phuket offers convenient transportation options for tourists, including car rentals, taxis, and public vehicles. The international airport supports tourists from various countries, and there is access to health tourism information online and offline. The interviewee from one of the private sectors mentions, *"Phuket is a transit hub for water, air, and sea."*. The interviewee from one of the public sectors mentions *"Phuket has an international airport and a lot of direct flights from many countries such as; Australia, Middle Eastern countries, Korea, and European countries."* The interviewee from one of the academic sectors mentions *"The transportation in Phuket is convenient and varied. Moreover, tourists can select price based on budget. For wellness access service is quite easy due to most of wellness service is in the hotel"* On the other hand, one of the private sectors mentions that *"Phuket does not have much alternative transportation."* However, the province's limited public transportation system, including rental cars, taxis, and private cars, is insufficient to meet the needs of tourists. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian War have led to higher air ticket prices, making it difficult for tourists to access various attractions. Private smart buses and Po-tong (local buses) are the only options, causing traffic congestion and negatively impacting the image of the province. Despite these

issues, Phuket has good infrastructure, public utilities, a safe communication system, and 1000 WiFi access points, including free WiFi in front of Patong Beach.

In terms of activities, Phuket province offers diverse tourism activities like yoga, sound therapy, spas, healthy food, and stress reduction therapy. Similarly, the interviewee from the private sector mentions that *“wellness activities, especially sports events and competition, can create a lot of revenue in Phuket.”* The interviewee from the public sector mentions that *“Phuket has varieties of wellness activities such as yoga, spa, muay Thai, cooking, and many kinds of therapies provided by experts.”* The interviewee from the academic sector mentions *“meditation, spa, sport, and so on.”* According to the information and results, Phuket has a high potential for wellness tourism activity, covering six dimensions of wellness elements (spiritual wellness, emotional wellness, intellectual wellness, social wellness, physical wellness, and vocational wellness).

In terms of ancillaries, Phuket offers a variety of wellness tourism ancillaries, including health restaurants, massage shops, and health centers. It also offers 24-hour convenience stores, hospitals, and health food stores. Additionally, the province has the potential to organize wellness tourism events, particularly spa activities and sports on land and sea. The interviewee from the private sector mentions that *“wellness ancillaries should include wellness activities, healthy foods, and spas.”* *“Phuket has wellness ancillaries that respond to tourists’ demand, such as; department stores, international healthy food and beverages brands, and so on.”* The interviewee from the public sector mentions that *“wellness ancillaries in Phuket have a high potential to welcome wellness tourists.”* The interviewee from the academic sector mentions, *“It is ready for service for the tourist, but the ancillaries should go together with the main wellness tourism package in the hold trip.”* This information indicated that all sectors agreed that Phuket has high potential in wellness tourism ancillaries, in both international brands and local brands, and is ready to welcome wellness tourists.

In terms of accommodation, Phuket Province offers a variety of accommodations catering to various market segments, including wellness accommodations. These accommodations provide health programs, food, a spa, a Muay Thai school, and health accommodation, catering to top-tier standards and brands in the country. In the same way, the interviewee from the private sector also mentions, *“Many wellness hotels and resorts in Phuket are not only high-brand chain hotels such as Thanyapura Sport and Health Resort, Banyan Tree Luxury Wellness Resort, and so on, but also local accommodations such as Tiger Muay Thai, which sells muay Thai courses with*

accommodation and trainers in the package.” The interviewee from the public sector also mentions *“a lot of wellness hotels and general hotels in Phuket.”* The interviewee from the academic sector also mentions that *“nowadays, accommodations in Phuket have a high potential to include wellness programs or services as their ancillaries and special activities such as yoga on the beach, walks on the beach, and cooking classes.”* *“Wellness accommodation is located around Phuket, which covers 3 districts: Kathu, Muang, and Thalung.”* This information shows that most accommodations in Phuket respond to this opportunity to provide a wellness service in their hotel and represent wellness programs such as spas, healthy food, and Thai massage as alternative activities to increase income apart from rooms.

In terms of amenities, Phuket's healthcare facilities are comprehensive and appropriate for individuals of all ages (Wellness for All). Whether it is a public space for health, the availability of infrastructure and super infrastructure in Phuket is at a good level. The establishment has high standards, sophisticated equipment, and makes use of technological advances. The interviewee from the private sector also mentions, *“Infrastructure in Phuket is good but needs more development to increase its potential and is still concentrated in some areas.”* The interviewee from the public sector also mentions that *“Phuket has complete infrastructure and super infrastructure such as a standard road, internet, wifi (4G /5G), electricity, and water, but needs to keep it clean and sustainable”.* The interviewee from the academic sector also mentions, *“Phuket has complete health facilities but needs to increase safety. The transportation system is good but it is challenging. The priority problem that needs to be solved is the traffic jam problem”.* It supports the idea that Phuket has full amenities for tourists and facilities for all ages, religions, and nationalities. But we still need to improve to be better and more sustainable.

In terms of atmosphere, Phuket, known for its beautiful natural sea, good weather, and sufficient water, is an ideal location for wellness tourism due to its high potential and relaxing atmosphere, making it a good opportunity to develop into a world-famous wellness tourist destination. The interviewee from the private sector also mentions, *“Phuket is located in a good location with good weather. It also has a variety of atmospheres and tourism that can be a choice for wellness tourists, such as cultural tours, food tours, island tours, temples, and adventure activities.”* The interviewee from the public sector also mentions, *“Phuket has an international atmosphere and beautiful nature suitable for tourists to come to relax and refresh.”* The interviewee from the academic sector also mentions that *“Phuket atmosphere is good for wellness tourists due to fresh air at P.M.O.5, beautiful beaches, rich culture, and variety of wellness tourist*

destinations. *But the garbage problem on land and at sea is still a big problem for Phuket. It can destroy the atmosphere and make it dirty. The local government should solve this problem immediately*". It confirms that Phuket is suitable in terms of the physical environment to be a health tourism destination. Because it is a world-class tourist attraction, there is nature to relax and relieve fatigue, including the sea, mountains, fresh air, and wellness activities. Moreover, tourists can visit for wellness tourism along with other kinds of tourism such as gastronomy tourism, sport tourism, and cultural tourism on the same trip.

In terms of availability, in Phuket, wellness tourism programs are frequently paired with short-term and long-term hotels as well as supplementary facilities such as day spas. The majority are included in the general tourist program, with only a few specialty programs. The Tourism Authority promotes Phuket tourism by emphasizing the complete picture of the nation rather than wellness tourism. The interviewee from the private sector also mentions that *"wellness availability in every sector is ready to be a wellness tourism city in the future. The most important thing is that the manpower to work in wellness is still not enough. It needs to produce a lot of wellness experts."* The interviewee from the public sector also mentions, *"Phuket is ready to promote wellness tourism. According to the Thailand strategy plan and Phuket development plan, the government supports medical and wellness tourism by providing a budget to build Andaman healthcare centers and promoting medical and wellness tourism internationally."* The interviewee from the academic sector also mentions, *"In terms of wellness tourism readiness, Phuket still lacks wellness tourism promotion to tourists. Only a small number of tourists know that Phuket has a wellness tourism package. Moreover, tour agencies can create wellness tourism programs specially and adapt wellness activities into tour programs for alternative packages."* It confirms that Phuket is quite ready to be an international wellness tourism destination in the future. However, Phuket needs to produce more wellness experts and promote it globally.

In terms of amiability, Phuket is a welcoming host for health tourists, with Thai hospitality and advanced service skills. It welcomes people of all genders and ages, including LGBTQ and disabled people, due to its long-standing tourism presence. The interviewee from the private sector also mentions, *"Every sector has the potential to welcome everyone. But Phuket needs to set wellness hospitality standards, and the community also needs to recognize wellness tourism elements and develop together with other sectors."* The interviewee from the public sector also mentions, *"Phuket is known as a world-class tourist city. Welcoming tourists is sure to impress them. Many people said that they would come back to Phuket again because the locals are*

friendly and kind. However, the service and reception of medical tourists who are luxury tourists are different from general tourists. The private sector is already ready, but the government and community sectors still need to develop.” The interviewee from the academic sector also mentions, “People in Phuket are ready to be a good host because they have language skills to communicate with tourists especially the new generation, and service skills. However, people who work in wellness tourism should recognize and have more wellness skills to recommend and provide service. So, training to up and reskills is very important.” It can be concluded that Phuket is a popular tourist destination with a reputation for friendly and welcoming locals. However, to develop wellness tourism, Phuket needs to set standards and recognize wellness elements to enhance Thai hospitality and advanced service skills. Phuket welcomes people of all genders, ages, and backgrounds, including LGBTQ and disabled people. The locals are ready to be good hosts, with language skills and service skills, but require additional training to upskill and reskill in wellness tourism.

In terms of alliances, the collaboration of various sectors, including government, private, academic, and community, has been enhanced through MOUs and continuous participation in integrated work. The interviewee from the private sector also mentions that “public sector (e.g., hospital, spa, hotel, tour agent, investor), private sector (e.g., Tourism Authority of Thailand, Ministry of Tourism and Sports), and community sector work together to develop Phuket in the same way and with the same goal of being able to survive even if faced with a crisis.” The interviewee from the public sector also mentions that “Phuket can be a best practice for the strong alliance to develop tourism because every sector did their duty perfectly. Public sector and private sector can support the community”. The interviewee from the academic sector also mentions “collaborate with the public sector, community sector, and private sector, such as the public sector providing rule and control law and the private sector providing help for the public sector to develop and share knowledge.” Hence, it confirmed that every sector has a strong alliance. They work together based on the roles and duties of each sector.

In terms of wellness tourism management, wellness tourism management in Phuket Province focuses on integrated management, sustainability, and improving marketing strategies. Every sector is working towards a sustainable, low-carbon city, and the wellness tourism management system emphasizes sustainable practices, quality health services, and the potential for future wellness exhibitions and conferences. This approach is aimed at enhancing the perception and knowledge of wellness tourism internationally. The interviewee from the private

sector also mentions, *“After COVID-19, it shown that Phuket has a high potential of health management. This situation builds every sector stronger, especially the public and private sectors, due to every sector working with good collaboration.”* The interviewee from the public sector also mentions *“private sector work as a leader; public sector work as a central coordinator and supporter of the community and private sector. Because the public working system is slow and waiting for the order from the boss takes time.”* The interviewee from the academic sector also mentions, *“Going to be better due to wellness tourism in Phuket has just started to promote. It still needs time to set up a one-stop service system to support the wellness working system and sustainable”*. It supports the result that Phuket has a good wellness management system. However, it should be more developed in people to have holistic knowledge, a system of one-stop service, and fast work to make it better and ready for the future.

In terms of wellness personnel, to enhance competitiveness in wellness tourism by planning clear strategies, including collaboration with other agencies, connecting health tourism with nearby areas, and establishing a network for resource exchange. The focus is on marketing to the quality market group and increasing safety capabilities to ensure tourists' trust and confidence in traveling to Phuket. Phuket also has plans to modernize the Wellness Andaman Center and increase the capacity of the private sector. The state's support for education, healthcare professionals (manpower), and environmental awareness is crucial for addressing the future. The interviewee from the private sector also mentions, *“Improve wellness tourism services by increasing awareness of holistic health by cooperating with educational institutions and the Department of Labor to help develop the potential of wellness tourism personnel.”* The interviewee from the public sector also mentions *“supporting wellness education by providing a budget and course for upskills and reskills, controlling service and skill standards to wellness personnel and to be a leader to create a clear wellness development and promotion plan and goal.”* The interviewee from the academic sector also mentions, *“Improve students in the new generation by adding wellness subjects or topics into the curriculum to let them learn and practice skills to become wellness experts or manpower in the labor market. Moreover, the academic sector can do the research to study, develop, and promote wellness tourism in Phuket.”* It analyzes that every sector has the same opinion that needs to develop wellness manpower skills in the future.

Objective 2: To explore the guidelines for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination.

According to all of the potential, the majority of respondents mention that Phuket has an identity that sells diversity, such as local foods, seafood, beaches, events, multi-culture, wellness tourist attractions, and Thai herbs. Moreover, the respondents also indicated that Thai service style (Thainess style), quality standard, reasonable price, and wellness skills of employees are the main reasons that can motivate tourists to repurchase and revisit wellness tourism in Phuket. Similarly, Dechwitthayanusak (2012) mentions that the advantages of spas in Phuket are clean facilities, expert personnel, affordable pricing, and high-quality services. The respondents also suggested that Phuket should promote the overall image of Andaman. Hence, this information shows that Phuket has a high potential to be promoted as a world-class wellness tourist destination, owing to Phuket being known as a world-class tourist destination and providing world-class service to tourists around the world. It is confirmed that Phuket can develop a wellness tourism brand image into a world-class wellness tourist destination soon.

In conclusion, Phuket has emerged as a world-class tourist destination, boasting an array of tourism resources ranging from natural and cultural to man-made attractions. Additionally, the province offers convenient transportation, robust infrastructure, and public utilities. Phuket is also well-suited for wellness tourism, including ancillary activities. Various accommodation options cater to different market segments, including those seeking wellness accommodations. The province also has high-quality healthcare facilities and a relaxing atmosphere, making it an ideal destination for wellness tourism. Collaboration among the public, private, academic, and community sectors is fostered through MOUs and continuous participation in integrated work. The management of wellness tourism in the province prioritizes integrated management, sustainability, and improving marketing strategies to enhance competitiveness.

Discussion

Objective 1: To identify the potential for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, world tourism trends and tourist behavior changed because most people started to concentrate on how to make themselves healthier and have more free time. Wellness tourism is the right response for them (Global Wellness Institute, 2022). For this reason, tourists are increasingly interested in wellness tourism. This directly affected every sector in Phuket, which started to recognize and try to change and pay attention to wellness services, development and promotion plans, and moving forward in elevating Phuket to a full wellness

tourism city. Moreover, it was found that Phuket can be a world-class tourist destination that offers a variety of man-made attractions and wellness activities, including water parks, spas, Thai massage, sports, and temples. According to this potential, it confirmed that the strength of Phuket's wellness tourism resources are from man-made tourism resources along with the relaxing atmosphere of the Sun Sand Sea (Klangnurak et al., 2023). It offers convenient transportation options, including car rentals, taxis, and public vehicles, but has a limited public transportation system. Additionally, Phuket offers diverse tourism activities, such as yoga, sound therapy, spas, healthy food, and stress reduction therapy, with high potential for wellness tourism activities covering six dimensions of wellness elements (spiritual wellness, emotional wellness, intellectual wellness, social wellness, physical wellness, and vocational wellness) (Aksornpairoj, 2020; Phuket Provincial Office, 2022). Phuket also offers various wellness tourism ancillaries, such as health restaurants, massage shops, health centers, 24-hour convenience stores, hospitals, and health food stores. Phuket offers a variety of accommodations catering to various market segments, including wellness accommodations that provide wellness programs, food, spas, and Thai massage services. Healthcare facilities are comprehensive and appropriate for individuals of all ages, and the atmosphere is known for its beautiful natural sea, good weather, and sufficient water. As a result, it truly confirmed that Phuket is a ready-to-be welcoming host for wellness tourists, with Thai hospitality and advanced service skills in the present.

Objective 2: To explore the guidelines for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination.

High-quality wellness manpower and management systems still need to improve in terms of specific wellness and holistic knowledge and training in hard and soft skills (e.g., languages, technology, communication, problem-solving), wellness service standards, and innovation for wellness tourism management systems (Weerakit et al., 2019; Aksornpairoj, 2020). Similarly, Lee and Kim (2015), Chaiyasain (2019), Pencarelli (2019), Dini and Pencarelli (2021), and Klangnurak et al. (2023) also highlighted the digital revolution in the travel and tourism industry, emphasizing the importance of technology in shaping the future of tourism. This suggests that future research on wellness tourism development in Asia should consider the role of digital platforms and technology in promoting wellness tourism offerings and enhancing the overall tourist experience in the future. The key findings from an in-depth interview revealed that wellness tourism in Phuket can be enhanced by implementing effective strategies, enhancing tourists' trust, and guiding public-private partnerships to create a wellness tourism strategy plan, a new brand image, a

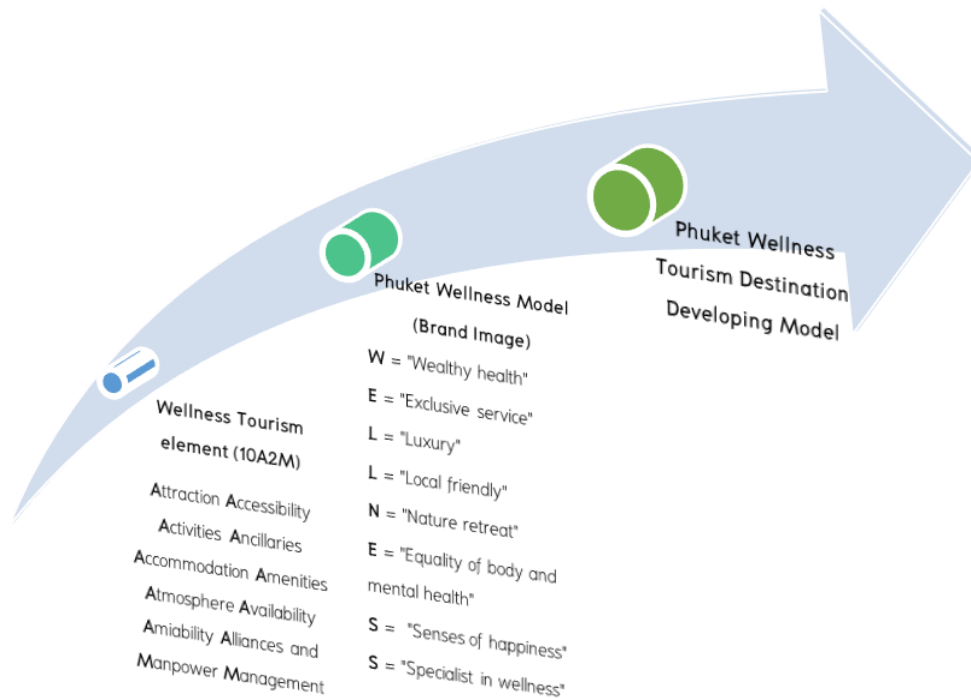
marketing plan, and enhancing service quality (Weerakit et al., 2019). Heung and Kucukusta (2013) and Aksornpairroj (2020) also confirmed that developing wellness tourism has to focus on resources, development, marketing, and the importance of strategic resource management and effective development and marketing strategies. Thus, to enhance competitiveness and growth in the wellness tourism business, Phuket plans to plan clear strategies, collaborate with other agencies, connect wellness tourism with nearby areas, and establish a network for resource exchange.

New Knowledge

According to the findings, developing world-class wellness tourism destinations cannot be successful if wellness destinations lack quality manpower and a good management system. Thus, it can create new wellness tourism development models with the 10A-2M model, including Attraction, Accessibility, Activities, Ancillaries, Accommodations, Amenities, Atmosphere, Availability, Amiability, and Alliances (10A), with Manpower and Management (2M). The finding also presents Phuket W-E-L-L-N-E-S-S for all models, which shows Phuket's brand image that comprises eight key components, each with a unique and mission brand identity of Phuket wellness tourism represented by the acronym "WELLNESS," including W = wealthy health and E = exclusive service (universal service/universal design). L = luxury; L = local friendliness; N = nature retreat; E = equality of body and mental health; S = senses of happiness. S = specialist in wellness. Hence, this is a new knowledge key model that this research found, and this can be a guideline for other cities to explore themselves to find their potential and identity to become wellness tourism destinations in the future

Figure 2

The Stairway Model of Success in Phuket World-Class Wellness Tourism Destination Development



Conclusion

Objective 1: To identify the potential for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination.

The result of this study concluded that Phuket has a strong potential for tourism elements (10As). Likewise, some participants mentioned that Phuket has wellness experts in the wellness industry, but there is not enough manpower for future demand. Currently, Phuket plans to develop wellness manpower skills to further enhance its position in the wellness tourism market, and the management system of the province is on the way to adding value and developing world-class quality. However, the most important and basic thing for developing wellness tourism in Phuket is a good management system (work integrated, collaboration, marketing strategy), wellness knowledge (holistic, region condition, first aid, basic wellness), and personal skills (languages, technology, personalized service, education) to improve the quality, add value, and upgrade wellness service into world-class wellness services. But the development should go together with promoting to create new branding that *“Phuket is a true wellness tourist destination for all,”* which means friendly to everyone's health (local people and tourists). According to the result, it

concluded that the Phuket W-E-L-L-N-E-S-S model and Wellness Tourism Element (10A 2M) are the main keys to developing a world-class wellness tourism destination in Phuket.

Objective 2: To explore the guidelines for developing Phuket wellness tourism to become a world-class wellness tourism destination.

The development of health tourism has gained significant attention in recent years due to its potential economic benefits and positive impact on the healthcare industry. As the demand for health and wellness travel increases, it is crucial for destinations to develop comprehensive strategies to attract health tourists and provide high-quality services. From the research results, it can be concluded that developing a health tourism plan for Phuket Province will help it become a world-class destination. It is necessary to consider the development of potential in the Marketing Mix (10As) principles of tourism components, including the development of personnel skills and systematic management (2M). In addition, the research also found that innovations, standards, laws, religious restrictions, personnel skills, and knowledge of holistic health are also important. That will help strengthen the capacity for health tourism in Phuket, including creating cooperation or a network of cooperation is considered necessary to help develop and promote health tourism in Phuket province to be more efficient.

Table 1

Summarize the key destination development plan of Phuket as a world-class wellness tourist destination (10A 2M)

Key variables	Appearance (Plan Content Topics)	Detail Content Topics
Attraction	-Wellness tourism product and service development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop and recover new and old wellness tourist attractions. - Preserve culture by cultivating local people to love and cherish resources. - Allocate a budget plan to develop and restore wellness tourist attractions. - New Landmark for promoting wellness tourism
Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Transportation - wellness information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convenience public transportation for all to decrease the traffic jam problem - Phuket wellness tourism Application

Key variables	Appearance (Plan Content Topics)	Detail Content Topics
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Wellness tourism route – Wellness tourism program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organize wellness, health, and medical event and meeting conference in Phuket. – Provide specialized interest tourism packages and activities for wellness tourists that include 6 dimensions (e.g., spa, mental health, nutrition, beauty care, physical fitness, and education).
Ancillaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – International standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Develop every local wellness ancillary to meet a world-class wellness tourism standard
Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Truly wellness accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Upgrade local brand accommodation to wellness accommodation – Training employees to have holistic advance & basic, technology wellness knowledge and religious condition to truly serve wellness tourists – Training in the use of modern health equipment
Amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Universal design for all – Wellness product 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Wellness center universal for all – Wellness hotel universal for all – Wellness tourist attraction universal for all – Develop organic and local products to international standard
Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Clean and safety – Wellness Tourism Zoning – Stable, balanced, and sustainable ecosystem – Livable & health city 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The abundance of resources – Plan for wellness tourism service areas systematically and appropriately – Create public spaces that are conducive to promoting the quality of life both physically and mentally to promote a healthy city – Develop a clean and safe physical environment that meets standards.
Availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Truly wellness tourism program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Combine wellness tourism with another type of tourism (e.g. food tourism + wellness tourism, creative tourism + wellness tourism, marine tourism + wellness

Key variables	Appearance (Plan Content Topics)	Detail Content Topics
		tourism) – Provide a true wellness tourism package for wellness tourists covering 6 wellness dimensions (e.g. Detox package, Thai boxing package, Spa package, Nutrition package) with experts in wellness resort
Amiability	–Wellness community-based tourism – Being a good host	– Upgrade community products that friendly to wellness tourism to international standard – Training local people about basic wellness tourism and holistic knowledge and religious condition – Insert English for tourism into the curriculum at all levels of education in Phuket – Improving quality of life and health of local people and tourist
Alliances	–Strong networking for work integrated both inside and outside the country – Active marketing and Public Relations	– Creative Collaborate and work integrated with every sector (e.g. Community, public, private, and academic) inbound and outbound. – Develop wellness tourism networks in Andaman (Phuket, Ranong, Krabi, Phang Nga, Satun, and Trang) and Asia to connect wellness tourism routes – Sharing resources, and promoting economic and social sustainability with the network – Increasing distribution and improving multi marketing channels (online & offline).
Manpower	– Professional wellness personal	– Advanced & basic holistic knowledge (e.g., nutrition, physical fitness, first aid, activities, medicine, religious condition) – upskill and reskills in wellness (e.g., languages, technology, personalized service)
Management	– Advance health management system	– Strong law in the wellness businesses – Active marketing strategy – Clear development goal

Key variables	Appearance (Plan Content Topics)	Detail Content Topics
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Effectiveness and efficiency of quality controlling and supporting system – Health care services covering all areas for both locals and tourists – One-stop health service system – Sustainability management (Social & Culture, Economy, Environment) – Environment and pollution management system (e.g. water, air, green public area, garbage, quality of air, climate change)

Suggestions

1. Suggestion for usage

The result of this research can be useful for the public, private, and academic sectors as a guideline for developing Phuket's wellness tourism capacity and wellness tourism strategy plan. According to the result, the researchers expect that Phuket should develop, namely by distributing income so that everyone can live and have a living wage that is balanced with income. It will improve the economy and the well-being of local people. The fact that Phuket has buildings such as wellness centers or others cannot adequately create the image of Phuket health tourism, and other aspects must be developed as well. In addition, health service personnel must have more specific knowledge of customer service. For example, each religion has different services due to various religious restrictions; mix religions to create more interesting health activities; differentiate yourself from others; provide basic advice on health information; and so on. This knowledge is really important for not only wellness employees but also for every sector that relates to the tourism and hospitality industries. Moreover, storytelling should be created to add more interest and value to wellness tourism in Phuket, such as the story of sand spas in the Mai Khao community, the story of Thai herbs and benefits, and the story of local food and ingredients. There should be additional studies on providing meditation services such as mental training activities and practicing meditation in Phuket because it can be used as a selling point in Phuket wellness tourism and increase the potential of wellness tourism in Phuket to touch a world-class standard

and become a world-class wellness hub in the future. Hence, to develop wellness tourism, Phuket needs to set standards and recognize wellness elements to enhance Thai hospitality and advanced service skills. However, various sectors, including government, private, academic, and community, have collaborated through MOUs and continuous participation in integrated work. Wellness tourism management in Phuket Province focuses on integrated management, sustainability, and improving marketing strategies, aiming to enhance the perception and knowledge of wellness tourism internationally.

2. Suggestions for Future Research

For future research, the researcher suggests studying wellness tourism along with medical tourism to get more insight into health tourism development and to use the information obtained to further develop Phuket as a center for international health hubs to support Thailand's strategic plan and Phuket's development plan successfully. Moreover, future research should study more about wellness manpower competency development to find ways to develop the capabilities of health personnel to have quality and be able to meet the needs of the current labor market.

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