



International Conference on Communication, Management and Information Technology (ICCMIT 2015)

Guidelines on Health Tourism Management for Middle Eastern Tourists in Phuket Province

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Abstract

There are three objectives in this study, 1) to study the behaviour and needs of Middle Eastern tourists for health tourism, 2) to study elements of health tourism for Middle Eastern tourists, and 3) to study guidelines on health tourism management for Middle Eastern tourists. The sample in this study is 400 Middle Eastern tourists, and 10 government staff. The research tools used were questionnaires and interviews. The study found that the Middle Eastern tourists have high needs in health tourism which are as follows: 1) fair prices 2) embedding intensity 3) aromatherapy IP terminals 4) souvenirs for home, and 5) public transportation. Following the average analysis (t-test), it revealed that these aspects have a statistical difference of 0.05 between the sexes with regard to health tourism. Moreover, seven aspects that have a significant statistical difference at 0.05 were age, education, income, occupation, status, experience and nationality with regards to health tourism. According to the study, indicators which were claimed to assist in managing health tourism include; 1) variety of activities 2) Islam friendly accommodation 3) public transport 4) promotion of health tourism 5) access to prayer rooms 6) access to health tourism information, and 7) fair price of souvenirs. Furthermore, guidelines on health tourism management for Middle Eastern tourists in Phuket Province include; 1) Tourism Authority of Thailand and travel agency should be given more variety, especially the health based activities. 2) Sub-district administrative organization should have measures in place that harmonize with the Middle Eastern tourists' needs. 3) Tourism Authority of Thailand should be studied in order to persuade Middle Eastern tourists to buy more souvenirs from the tourist attractions. 4) Thailand Government should be supported in arranging accommodation to be in line with Islamic principles. 5) Sub-district administrative organization have to arranged places for Middle Eastern tourists to praying particularly for ladies. 6) Thailand Government should inform the tourists from the Middle Eastern countries about activities involved in health tourism in Phuket. 7) Sub-district administrative organization should be executed in order to

make all tourists feel safe, and also to protect them from being taken advantage of with regards to hiked prices.

Keywords: Tourism Management; Health Tourism; Middle East Tourists

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Peer-review under responsibility of Universal Society for Applied Research

1. Introduction

Recently, the health tourism industry has been steadily growing in Thailand, even competing with neighboring countries such as Singapore and Malaysia⁴. This is due to Thailand having the advantage of strength on the service side of operations. For example, being gentle and mild with patients, this creates a good impression for those who use the service². The target consumer of health tourism in Thailand is the Middle Eastern tourist market. They have high purchasing power. Therefore, Thailand will be encouraging more and more Middle Eastern tourists to travel to Thailand, therefore it is necessary to prepare the destinations for Middle Eastern tourists. Middle Eastern tourists in Thailand equate to 3.02%¹ of the total number of tourists. A survey of needs of the Middle Eastern tourists found that most Middle Eastern tourists need health services such as Thailand's traditional health remedies, cosmetic spas, and beauty therapy. These are the services that tourists arrange themselves, so lower prices and convenience in accessing these services particularly traditional Thai massage which is well known throughout the World².

To recognize the importance of managed health tourism in Thailand for Middle Eastern tourists, the researchers have studied guidelines on health tourism management for Middle Eastern tourists in Phuket province. This study will approach the development of the tourism industry in Thailand and increase the competitiveness of the tourism industry on the global market.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The concept of management*

³ The concept of management mentions that the management must consist of 2 or more people in the organization collaborating with each other in order to achieve the stated objectives. The executive is a person who manages resources, which are people, money, materials and methods so as to achieve the objectives focusing on utilizing resources efficiency.

2.2 *Concept of health tourism*

Health tourism means travelling or sightseeing at tourist attractions (natural attractions, and cultural attractions). The objectives are, 1) to study the ways of life of the native population and to relax at the beautiful natural locations, and 2) to partake in activities for health and treatment⁴.

2.2.1 *Types of health tourism*

Health tourism is divided into 2 main types⁵, which are health promotion tourism and health healing tourism.

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