BRAND IMAGE CREATION AND VALUE-ADDED STRATEGIES OF SPA AND TRADITIONAL THAI MASSAGE AS A HUB OF HEALTH TOURISM DESTINATION

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Abstract- Health Tourism is a fast-growing industry, with an increasing number of tourists seeking affordable or specialized treatment outside their home countries. Thailand has always been a popular holiday destination and tourism accounts for about 10 per cent of GDP with expected to continue increasing in the upcoming year because more people are now aware of the importance of their health both physically and mentally. Thus, many attractions have been emerged and developed to attract the tourists. The purposes of this paper were to study the tourists’ satisfaction both Thai and foreigners toward spa and Thai massage business in Thailand, to study the preferable souvenirs design of the tourists, to identified guidelines of value-added creation for spa and Thai massage business, and to developed the brand image creation and value-added strategies of spa and traditional Thai massage as a hub of health tourism destination. Researchers were use mix methods between quantitative and qualitative research. For qualitative data were collected from 10 people who are involved with health tourism such as entrepreneur and governor by using semi-structured interview, including with the focus group discussion, And the quantitative research, 5-points rating scale questionnaires were used as data collection tools to asked 400 people of Thai and foreign tourists’ opinions after taking service of spa. The results of this study provide the strategies which comprises of 1) maintain the wisdoms of traditional Thai massage which are the identify of each regions 2) apply local traditional and culture to promote business 3) keen to use the strengths more intentionally 4) create partnerships 5) develop souvenir is so much more than useful or beautiful 6) create a good image of spa and traditional Thai massage.

Keywords- Health Tourism, Brand Image Creation, Spa and Traditional Thai Massage.

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, Tourism has now been defined as a major of a tool for economic development as well as one of the key industries to generate income for the country. Travel based recreation provides relief from the stresses of daily routine. In addition, Tourism is the reflection of international tourists’ perceptions towards Thailand, especially, health tourism, which has now become a new major tourist attraction of both Thai and foreign visitors. Due to the fact that Thailand has equipped with the latest technology and also providing high quality medical care both modern and traditional medicine. Moreover, Thailand offers medical treatments to patients at lesser cost compared to other competing countries. Besides, there are many amazing tourist attractions such as beaches, forest, mountains, culture, food, entertainment and shopping. For this reason, millions of tourists from different countries around the world will flock to Thailand for vacation, which makes an important contribution to Thailand’s economy annually.

The Health tourism is growing and the increasingly growth trend continues as new generation’s health concerns focus both on body and mind. As a consequence, the increasing numbers of health tourism attractions have emerged or some have already existed for quite some time, then start to develop to better its service system such as Chaeson Hot Spring in Lampang province, Phu Klon in Mae Hong Son province, and Ruksavarin Hot Spring in Ranong province. Based on the rapid growth of health care, Government agencies in many countries, including Thailand, have promoted and supported private health care providers and services for the purpose of expanding international market and drawing more tourists for medical visits, including generating economic benefits from medical tourists and their companies. In addition, there are also alternative health, disease prevention services, such as Thai massage and spa from private sectors.

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand's Health Tourism (2012) the global health tourism market is valued at 1.740 billion baht (58 billion US dollars). South East Asia has a market share of around 15% of world market value. Major medical tourism markets are Singapore, Thailand, India, Malaysia and the Philippines. Singapore has the largest market share, accounts for 33%, worth about 90,000 million baht, followed by Thailand accounts for 26%, valued at 70,000 million baht and India accounts for 19%, valued over 50,000 million baht, respectively.

This fact is consistent with the government policy that aims Thailand to be the Medical Hub of Asia that can generate revenue for the health services industry. The related industries include pharmaceuticals, medical device, Tourism, hotels, food, souvenirs, etc. In addition, it creates local jobs and business opportunities, include service business jobs related to tourism. To this end, the researcher
realizes the significance of the health tourism business, as a result, the study of Thai and foreign tourists’ satisfaction level towards spa and traditional Thai massage business in Thailand has been conducted. This study aims to explore the need for buying souvenirs among tourist during their vacation and to establish guidelines for value added to spa and traditional Thai massage business, including strategic planning, increasing marketing potential and creating a good image as a health tourism hub. For the purpose of, bringing a huge range of benefit to community, as it generates income tremendously to the local community. Plus, all parties benefit from it such as the distribution of income to the local and contributes a sustainable economic development. Tourism also enhances the quality of life of local people, plus it promotes local employment and creates the multiplier effect.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1) To study Thai and Foreign Tourists’ satisfaction level towards spa and traditional Thai massage business in Thailand.
2) To investigate the need for souvenir shopping.
3) To set guidelines for value added to spa and traditional Thai massage business.
4) To formulate a strategic plan to increase marketing potential and create a good image as a health tourism hub.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was a mixed method research design. The research methodology are as follows.

1) Quantitative methods
The questionnaire was used to collect the data about the attitudes, preferences and the needs of souvenir shopping of health tourists in Thailand. The population were altogether 400 tourists, who used spa services from all 4 regions. They were divided into 4 groups of 100 tourists from the northern, southern, northeastern and the last group combining of the eastern and the central parts of Thailand respectively. Each group of 100 consisted of 50 Thai and 50 foreign visitors. The data were analyzed to identify the percentage, mean, standard deviation to illustrate the results and the evaluation of this study.

2) Qualitative Method
The researcher interviewed 10 key informants, who were qualified as the stakeholders in the field of health tourism in Thailand, such as spa business operators. Representatives who plays important roles from the Association of policy makers and planners. For this purpose, the data could be used to determine the guidelines for value added spa business and also provides a strategic plan to increase the market potential and create a good image as a health tourism hub. The combination of Unstructured and the Semi-structured interviewed was used to collect the data. The questions were open-ended questions which provided the researcher with the ability to probe the participant for additional details. The interview was recorded and the photos related to tourism in the area were also taken.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

Among the 400 samples who participated in the study of Thai and Foreign Tourists’ satisfaction level towards spa and traditional Thai massage business in Thailand, the result showed that the majority of the participants were college degree female, aged between 41-50 years old, average monthly income were between 30,001-40,000 baht and worked in private companies. While the foreign participants were mostly college degree female, aged between 51-60 years, the average monthly income were between 80,001-90,000 baht and worked for the private companies as well. The results revealed that 52.5% of the participants preferred traditional Thai massage, followed by aromatherapy massage, Thai Herbal Compress Massage, steam bath and beauty spa package respectively. Moreover, 31% of the participants’ favorite spa products was skin creams, essential oils, fresh herbs and herbal extracts, respectively. The reason why they came for the service was for relaxation and relief from fatigue. The service price ranges from 501 - 1,000 Baht for 30-60 minutes. Most of them usually come with friends on Sundays. The findings were also shown that 49.25% of the participants were satisfied with the service standard, followed by professional service, value and effectiveness and price respectively. Regarding the spa decorating design, 76.5% preferred the natural design spa over the modern one, followed by a vintage and Balinese ones respectively.

With regard to the need for souvenir shopping of health tourists in Thailand, it could be divided into 5 categorizes based on the share market as follows;

1) In term of product, most health tourists preferred the authentic style of souvenirs that serve as a symbol of Thai identity, followed by beauty, varieties, novelty and practical products respectively. Even more, beautiful, stylish and unique packaging was also preferable.
2) Pricing is the most important factor to health tourist when buying products that value for the money. The second important is that they were more likely to buy the products that had a fixed price with a tag on it. In addition, the bulk discount pricing was also important.
3) Place - Most of health tourist preferred convenient place to buy products where they had spa service. Some of them chose to buy at store branches, order through the
internet, telephone order and mail order respectively.

4) Promotion was the most preferable factor that health tourist needed when buying souvenirs and advertising in various forms was the secondary factor when making decision to buy souvenirs.

5) People - Health tourists are the most likely buying souvenirs from English speaking sales associates who was skilled and nice. Chinese and Russian speaking sales associate were also preferred respectively.

On account of the results of satisfaction analysis and the study of the need for souvenir shopping of health tourists in Thailand, the logo of the co-branding of spa and Thai massage in Thailand under the name “The Identity of Spa and Nuad Thai” were designed, as well as the design of souvenirs for spa and Thai massage. Together with the product design as a souvenir for business of Spa and Nuad Thai as following logo;

“The Identity of Spa and Nuad Thai” logo is derived from the Thai spas and massage identities from all regions of Thailand. It was made up of the followings factors; 1) Royal Thai Massage, Narayana Medication Sutra, Rishi practicing physical exercises from the central part of Thailand 2) Thai Tradition massage of Lanna features the Tok-Sen, Yum-Khang, and Hak-Sen from the North 3) Manohra dance from the south was applied to use in a massage and 4) E-san Traditional Thai massage or Khid-Sen massage and Yoo-Karma (Interdiction) from the Northeast is the unique massage. Massage Identity from each region gathers in a circle with a yellowish soil background (CMYK value of 17 43 80 6), which is a natural ancient color. Its yellowish color is derived by dissolving yellow soil in water, then filter out dirt and grit. After that, dry up the yellow soil and grind it for the future use. It is believed that yellow is the color of the precepts and also the color of life and the prosperity (Chalermchai Suwannawattana, 2010). While Brown (CMYK value 51 71 82 72), which is the element of the outermost of the logo, gives a sense of stability, reduces the feeling of insecurity, healing sorrow and relaxation.

In the event that, there is a logo on souvenir’s label was the results of the findings in this study that the tourists bought souvenir so they would remember the image of spa and Thai massage better. However, researchers were designed souvenirs with the identity of Spa and Nuad Thai logo, for example:

The summary of increasing market Strategies and improving good image as a health tourism hub are as follows:
1) Maintain Traditional Wisdom of Thai Massage and Spa which is the unique of each region such as Tok-Sen, Kird-Sen of the north, Mahnora massage, the stone treatment, Sea Gypsy treatment, Thai Remedial Massage (Transverse Friction, Kird-Sen, Reed-Sen, Yieb-Sen, Duong-Sen, Goad-Sen, Yik-Sen, Pra-Kong Sen and Tai-Sen), Interdiction of the Northeast including the Royal Thai Massage. Narayana Medication Sutra, Rishi practicing physical exercises from the central part of Thailand.

2) Places and local culture should be highlighted. For example, Lanna style should emphasize in the North. In addition to that, Northern herbs such as Acacia should be utilized as well as the music from Northern Thai music instruments while performing massage. Furthermore, massaging should be gentle along with talking nicely to customers. On the other hand, the southern style should emphasize the seaside style. Srivijaya Art or the Muslim style should be applied to decorate spas. Southern folk herbs such as pomelo, dahlia should be used and southern music such as Manohra song should be played while doing massage. Besides, bamboos and silk from the Northeast should be used and indigenous music from Khene, Wet and Drum roll should be played while performing a massage. Finally, in the central Thai, the light sentimental music should be played, the outfits should be contemporary Thai style. The use of flower aromas and Thai herbs can be advantage.

3) Processing the variety of herbs in Thailand into health products could strengthen and improve the strong point. Plus, service mind must be reinforced nationwide. In addition, having abundant of natural resources can be used as the main ingredient in spa products, such as fruits, flowers, trees, herbs, etc. and it will save costs and will not cause allergies. More importantly, spa facilities in Thailand are suitable for developing into unique traditional Thai medical treatment as Destination Spa. Most of all, a reasonable price as compared to quality is important, too.

4) Building business partnerships between government agencies, private sectors, associations, entrepreneurs, and academia as to build competitiveness.

5) Develop a diversity of beautiful and useful souvenirs that meet the needs of tourists. The relevant agencies should assist to find the distribution channel of the community, marketing Plan and coaching good practice in selling online.

6) Publicize a positive image of Thai spa and massage businesses and encourage tourists to a better understand Thai massage. The most important thing to do is to correct the negative image of Sex tourism. Online Media both formal and informal need to be used as tool to promote spa business and massage. Moreover, data base of qualified spa businesses and massage should be available for public access to impress tourists and for word-of-mouth marketing to attract and keep repeat customers.

V. DISCUSSIONS

Applying the concept of tourism market development by branding Thai spa and massage business which most of them were found as Consumer Product Brands presentation of information. This finding was in line with the study of Aziz et al., 2012 who revealed that it created more opportunity to reach the target group and brought in the highest value customer. It was also found that Service Brands presentation of information was consistent with the study of the World Tourism Organization (2009). In other words, the reputation of the brand relied on the interaction between the service provider and the tourists. Besides, Place Brands should be applied as a tool to make tourists learn and understand the life style of the people in the community. This finding supported what Elliot (2011) stated that the overall economic activities and the perception of tourists towards location and activity were related to tourism. In addition, the brand presentation of information that introduced the significance of tourism activities (Thematic Brands) should be utilized as well.

In terms of branding strategies or selling point of tourism products and services, Public relations was important to raise awareness of tourists. Highlighting places, Identity and local culture can be implemented in business and attracted tourists. These findings were in line with the results of what Lee (2011) revealed that tourists Brand awareness was unique and connected to the community. Moreover, community played an important role in branding due to the fact that local attractions had potential to draw more tourists to visit. Plus, creating awareness through the use of the logo was another channel for visitors to recognize a good image which was consistent with the findings of Chusak Marketing Consulting (2011) and Hosany et al. (2006) who identified that positive emphasis and sensory experiences should be established to tourists for the purpose of creating emotional identity for tourists.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by the budget Fiscal year 2017. The researchers would like to thank those who are involved in health tourism in Thailand, local government agencies, spa business operators, Thai and foreign tourists who provided useful information for this research.

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