



## Wellness Tourism: Resilience from Prolonged COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

Wellness is a growing sector of today's thriving tourism that has increased its activity worldwide for 2 decades. However, the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic for 3 years has been leading to crisis impacts on tourism and hospitality industry. The percentage of population given 1+ dose COVID-19 vaccine, in Thailand is 80.5. In addition, the COVID-19 will be an endemic disease by this coming July. Thus, the wellness tourism business will be at the top demand. The main purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework of wellness tourism resilience after prolonged COVID-19. The literature sources have gathered from research articles, academic article, government policy were retrieved by the concepts of wellness, wellness tourism, COVID-19 prolonged pandemic, and resilience. The thematic analysis was used for data analysis to identify the aspect of wellness tourism resilience. The result was orderly presented. The conceptual framework consisting of three components of demand of healthy, wellness tourism dimension, and consequences. Finally, the conceptual framework could be applied into research as well as designed the wellness tourism business.

**Keywords:** Wellness Tourism, Resilience, Prolonged COVID-19 Pandemic

## Introduction

The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, affecting crisis impacts on tourism and hospitality industry, was inevitably one of the hardest hit over the past few years. Department of Health Service Support (SorPor.Sor.) Ministry of Public Health plays an important role as the main unit in driving the strategy of developing Thailand into a health service center (Hub) that linked to all related businesses. Resilience is the ability in adaptation and curious for improvement. Prolonged COVID19 for 3 years prohibit people, social features, from social activities. People are looking forwards for backing to normal again, next normal, and waiting for social life. Tourism is the answer of choice. It could be expected that wellness tourism will resilient after this prolonged COVID-19 pandemic.

In the southern provinces, the income of tourism and hospitality industry has directly come mainly from the international tourists. The government has consistently collaborated with the private sectors to seek ways for recovering tourism in returning to full potential. The government passed the policies of elevating Thailand into an international tourism hub, with the potential to drive the growth for health promotion and wellness tourism business. As the pandemic situations of COVID-19 have been prolonging, the government focuses more on promoting medical and health tourism. The expenses of the two tourism groups have been estimated to cost around 80,000-100,000 Baht per trip.

‘Smart Health and Wellness City’ is the concept and probable track to support the policy moving forwards. Three southern provinces on the Andaman coast, Krabi, PhangNga, and Phuket, will serve as the must-visit tourist destinations. Phuket had been planning to serve as the best medical and international convention center. PhangNga will be reached out for its excellent in aging services, and Krabi will be renowned for its therapeutic saltwater hot spring. Andaman Wellness Economic Corridor (AWC) project is another big support to the wellness tourism in the ‘Smart Health and Wellness’ city policy (Ministry of Public Health, 2022).

Annual fee waiver for hotel business, 40 baht per year per room (effective July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2022) to heal operators affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The state extends the time for enforcement of the ministerial regulations specifying the characteristics of other types of buildings used for hotel business to the end of the year 2024 in order to allow hotel operators or small accommodation sectors to modify the building to be correct. This makes it possible to use the benefits to reduce investment expenses twice and have the opportunity to participate in government tourism promotion activities, while guests are eligible for a tax deduction. This is expected to result in fair competition on prices, while occupancy rates are more realistic. After applying for a waiver for the renovation of nearly 20,000 buildings of the wrong type from about 40,000 buildings across the country. Relaxation of COVID-19 epidemic control measures to restore tourism, the government allows foreign tourists who have received

conditional vaccination to enter Thailand without quarantine (according to the TEST & GO format) around the end of January 2022.

Trend of Tourism 2022-2024, hotel business is likely to gradually recover from the COVID-19 crisis that has subsided after more widespread distribution of vaccines. Supporting foreign and Thai tourists, the number continues to increase. Foreign tourists are expected to reach 7.5 million in 2022, 21 million in 2023 and 35 million in 2024, which will return to the same rate as before COVID-19 (2019) at 39-40 million. In 2025, while Thai tourists will recover faster from the continuous tourism stimulus measures. As a result, Thai tourists will return to the pre-COVID-19 level in 2024 of 170 million trips. The average occupancy rate will continue to increase, reaching 35% in 2022, 45% in 2023 and 60% in 2024. Hotels in key tourist areas (Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket).

The main tourism destinations in Thailand are Bangkok, Pattaya and Phuket respectively, the revenues are expected to grow from 2022 with reaching 60% occupancy rates in 2024.

*Hotels in major tourist provinces and central provinces: Revenues will gradually improve in 2023-2024, mainly in line with the recovery of domestic tourists. From government stimulus measures. Hotels in other provinces: Revenues are still slowly recovering. The occupancy rate trends to be low. Because most of them (MOTS) support tourists traveling through to go to the provinces, regional centers / major tourist attractions. Entrepreneurs, especially SMEs, have a high chance of closing their businesses.*

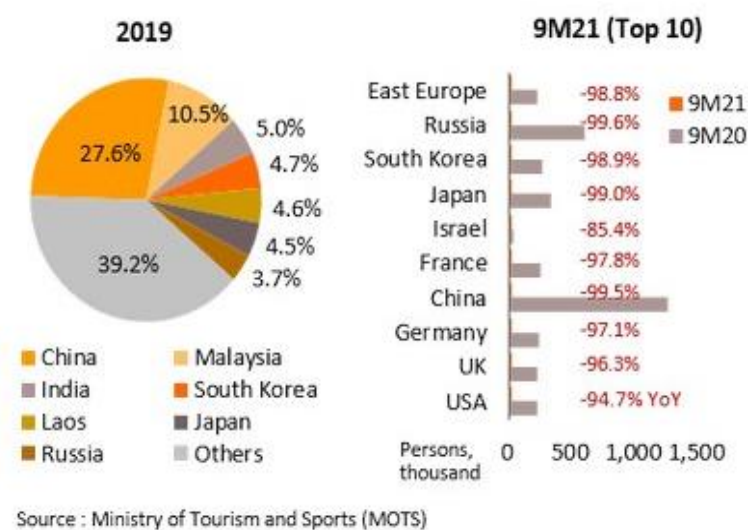


Figure 1 International Tourist Arrivals (9M21).

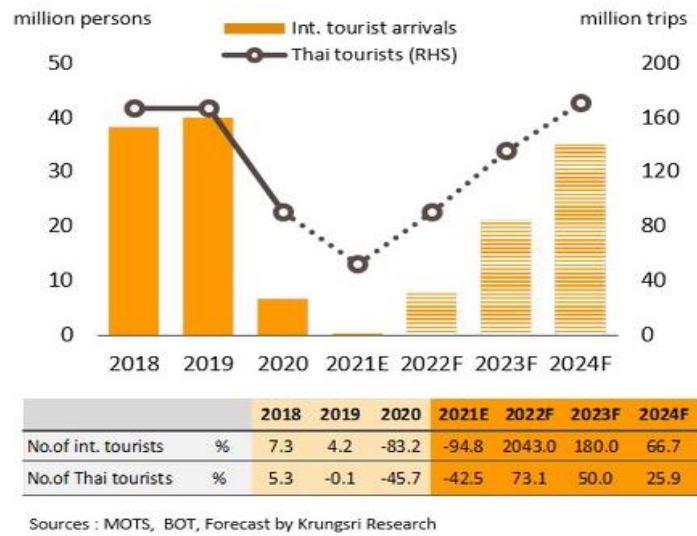


Figure 2 Tourist Numbers in Thailand.



Figure 3 Occupancy Rate.

## Literature Review

### Wellness

World Health Organization (WHO) defines the wellness as “the optimal state of health of individuals and groups,” and wellness is expressed as “a positive approach to living. Wellness is an active process of growth and change to reach your fullest health and well-being. It is associated with actively pursuing activities, making choices and lifestyle changes, controlling risk factors that can harm a person, focusing on nutrition, having a balanced diet, and following spiritual practices that lead to holistic health (WHO,

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2022). The wellness consists of state of healthy in physical, intellectual, emotional and environment dimension. Promotion of wellness, thus, 4 dimensions should be completely included.

### **Wellness tourism**

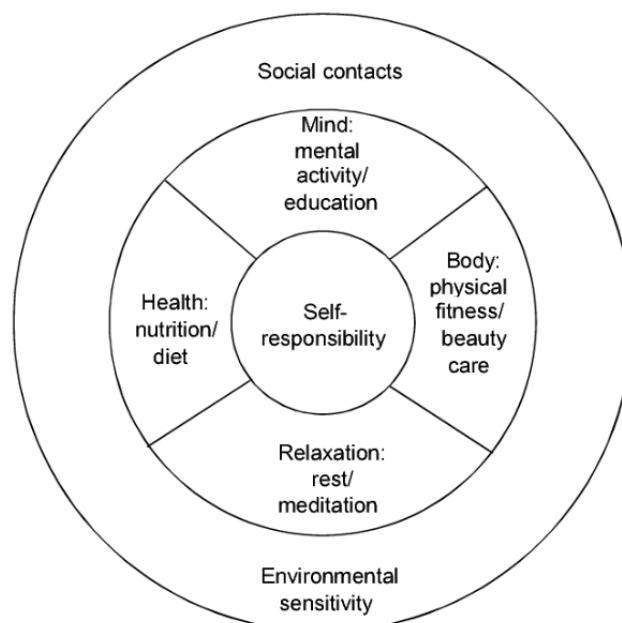
Wellness tourism is a type of tourism focusing on “normal cure or heal the illness” by travelling and experiencing nature. Wellness tourism means the visiting of natural, beautiful, cultural place to decrease tension from daily living as well as the experiencing the way of life. The wellness tourism provides the tourist opportunity of harmonize with the nature resulting in healthier and stronger, both mind and body. The payment for health and wellness tourism is 61% larger than the general tourism (Dini & Pencarelli, 2022). The growth of health tourism coming from the growth of middle income people, non-communicable disease impact, and tourism trend of touching new experiences (Dini & Pencarelli, 2022).

The levels of wellness tourism are 1) tourism for health improvement, tourism for health rehabilitation or disease recovery, and 3) tourism for health treatment (Krassanairawiwong, 2022). The tourism for health improvement is the most popular one because people concern more on their health. This type of tourism activities includes the silent spa, on-demand meditation, yoga class, detoxification, aromatherapy, mud therapy, thalassotherapy, biking, mountain biking, and healthy food program. The model of wellness tourism. Tourism for rehabilitation is the one focusing on the best environment such as ozone place, sea shore, or mountain. Since, healthcare service cost in Thailand is lower comparing to those cost in Western countries. Thus, international patients prefer to have their treatment in Thailand such as dental care, orthopedic care or beauty care. This group of tourists, thus, spends their time for treatment and travel.

For wellness tourism model, Esfandiari and Choobchain (2020) study revealed the benefit during wellness tourism consisting of an establishing friendly and supportive relationship and spending time with families and friends. The effect of wellness tourism included feeling of inner peace and stress relief, feeling refresh, relief of physical fatigue and relief of physical pain. Smith and Kelly (2006) proposed a holistic wellness tourism consisted of new age tourism, spiritual and religious, yoga, outdoor sport and adventure, and volunteer tourism (Figure 1) (Industry Team, 2021). Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) presented the classical model of wellness tourism consisted of mind, body, relaxation and health dimension (Figure 2) (Krungthai Compass, 2021).



**Figure 1** Holistic representation of wellness tourism (Smith and Kelly, 2006 cited in Quintela, Costa, and Correia, 2016, p. 9).



**Figure 2** Wellness tourism model (Mueller and Kaufmann, 2001).

**Prolonged COVID-19 Pandemic** seem to negative effects for Life for instance regarding stress, coping and mental outcomes.

**Resilience of Wellness tourism** has been widely measured to investigate how destinations, organizations, and communities respond to crises and disasters (Seokho Han et al., 2022).

### **Post COVID-19 Trend of Wellness Tourism**

The 'Open City' policy from several countries will be expected for not full offer. Travel bubble will be the choice among the limitations as well as 'Once in a Lifetime Adventure'. In addition, tourist focuses more on wellness, environment and social protection which leads to sustainable tourism. Bundling package responded to tourists' need and expectation on health and wellness as well as the standard and quality services will be the trend of tourism after the prolonged COVID-19 outbreak. This is the challenge for tourism entrepreneur. Technologies and facilities have to be concerned for more convenience for the services.

### **Methods**

This article aimed to develop a conceptual framework of wellness tourism in resilience from prolonged COVID-pandemic. The concept needs to be clarified were "wellness" and "wellness tourism". The common detail of COVID-19 is briefly presented. The literature review from 30 sources was conducted to cover all concepts was used to classified the dimensions of wellness tourism in resilience from prolonged COVID-19 pandemic. Then, the conceptual frameworks of wellness tourism in resilience from prolonged COVID-19 pandemic will be framed. Implication of the framework will be mentioned as well.

### **Results and Discussions**

The result is to build the conceptual framework consisting of three components. First, the antecedent of wellness tourism is the demand of healthy consisting of demanding for health improvement, rehabilitation from disease and disability, and seeking for better treatment in terms of quality and cost. Second, the dimensions of wellness tourism are healthy body, healthy diet, healthy mind, healthy spirit activities, and volunteer activities for devotion. Healthy body included sports, exercise and beauty such as hiking, biking, mountain biking, swimming, yoga, spa, massage and etc. Healthy diet is the diet program for better health as well as diet for detoxification. Healthy mind includes experiencing the nature, serene and peaceful environment. Healthy spirit consists of religious activities, meditation, or giving others. Devotion is 'prefer to help activity' which will bring pleasure and happiness. Third, the consequence consists of the effect for individual and community. For individual, there are health improvement, inner peace, and family/friend supportive relationship. The community will gain income and cultural propagation. The summary is in Figure 4.



**Figure 4** Conceptual framework of wellness tourism for resilience from prolonged COVID-19 pandemic.

### Suggestions

The conceptual framework of wellness tourism for resilience from prolonged COVID-19 pandemic developed from literature review. The framework consisted of 'demand of healthy' as an antecedent of wellness tourism, six dimensions of wellness tourism, 1) Healthy body activities, 2) Healthy diet, 3) Healthy mind activity, 4) Healthy spirit activities 5) Volunteer activities for devotion and Intellectual activities And consequences both individual and community. The model could be applied for further research as well as to design the wellness tourism ecosystem.

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