

# Wellness Tourism Development: Spa for Health in the Hotel Industry and Tourist Perception

Anugool Bhumiwat<sup>1</sup> and Ann Suwaree Ashton<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>National Institute of Development Administration/ Graduate School of Tourism Management, Bangkok, Thailand

<sup>2</sup>National Institute of Development Administration/ Graduate School of Tourism Management, Bangkok, Thailand

<sup>1</sup> Email: Email:apumiwat@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Email: [suwaree.n@nida.ac.th](mailto:suwaree.n@nida.ac.th) or [suwareeashton@hotmail.com](mailto:suwareeashton@hotmail.com)

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## Abstract

Wellness tourism has become significantly popular around the Globe, especially in many Asian countries, such as Thailand, India, Malaysia and Bali. This study's aim is to investigate the relationship between mixed marketing and intention to re-purchase spa for health services. A quantitative approach was employed, and tourists who use spa services in four/five-star hotels located in Southern Thailand were selected as the samples. Data were collected between May and September 2019 and a multiple regression technique was used for data analysis. A total of 413 samples were received, and the results show that a place to provide wellness activity, particularly spa for health, was the most influential factor for tourists to re-purchase. The medium influencing factor was price, and information channels also had an influence on tourists to re-purchase spa for health services. The study provides theoretical and managerial contributions.

**Keywords:** Spa for health management hotel; Wellness Activity Development; Spa tourist behavior; Intention to re-purchase; Wellness attributes; Marketing mixed for spa services

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays tourists are more conscious about well-being than in the past (Ashton, 2018; Konu & Laukkanen, 2010; Konu, Tuohino, & Björk, 2011). There are several types of wellness activity that tourists can choose to take part in when going on holiday. For example, joining in sport/adventure (hard/soft), spa and beauty, spiritual/mind recovery and places providing healthy food (Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015; Foxall & Bhate, 1993; Laing & Weiler, 2008; Rodrigues, Kastenholz, & Rodrigues, 2010; Stănciulescu, Diaconescu, & Diaconescu, 2015). Each activity has its own unique way of creating travel satisfaction and well-being, however this study will focus on the area of spa for health.

Spa has been known as a wellness activity in human life for centuries (Bodeker & Cohen, 2008; Spivack, 1998; Walton, 2012). In the past, the word spa usually referred to a mineral spring at which seekers sought after improved health and gathered to take the water internally or externally, while enjoying leisure entertainment and sociability (Walton, 2012, p. 2). The tradition of spa in the past generally encouraged travellers to settle in places

boasting hot springs and baths, and many of the places were based on former sacred sites (Košić, Pivac, Romelić, Lazić, & Stojanović, 2011; Walton, 2012). For example, one of the most famous and unique traditional spa and health tourism destinations was in Hungary (Michalkó & Rátz, 2010). In contrast, nowadays some spa services have changed the form from traditional spa into spa as a tourism product located within a resort and/or hotel (Loureiro, Almeida, & Rita, 2013; Tsai, Suh, & Fong, 2012).

Notably, spa researches have caught many scholars' attention to investigate, but in different topics, for instance, the effect of atmosphere and involvement on pleasure and relaxation (Loureiro et al., 2013), while several studies explored within the context of push and pull motivation and spa tourist behaviour (Kamata & Misui, 2015; Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2009; Tsai et al., 2012). For example, one studied the influencing factors of spa and wellness tourism on re-purchase/re-visit intention (Ashton, 2018; Awad, 2012). Moreover, tourist decision making in choosing a spa destination has also been investigated (Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014). In terms of spa and mixed marketing strategy a variety of topics have also been explored. Examples of these are: the effect of spa and yield management customer satisfaction and occupancy rate (Adnyana & Darma, 2015); spa study related to branding, consumers' emotional consumption value orientation, and assessment of mixed marketing attributions on brand loyalty (Nam, Son, & Lee, 2015); the evaluation of the relationship between mixed marketing and loyalty through tourist satisfaction - researched in Jordan.

As discussed above, within Thailand these areas have not yet been studied, and past literature has shown that there is a lack of study on marketing mixes relating to spa tourist intention to re-purchase. This Thailand case study aims to bridge this gap.

It is important to study the influence of mixed marketing and spa tourist behaviour for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is crucial to know how tourists behave toward spa products and services, resulting in helping with marketing strategic planning success (Sarker, Aimin, & Begum, 2012). Furthermore, understanding the features of spa products and services lead the way and offer the best answer on how to achieve sustainable well-being for us all, including spa tourists (Bodeker & Cohen, 2008). Finally, the successful spa resort management relies on knowing which spa services to offer customers, hence helping in economic improvement and gaining higher income for relevant stakeholders (Bacon, 1998).

## **2. Literature Review**

This section will discuss the literature review relevant to this study, including the concepts of service mixed marketing, consumer behaviour, and wellness tourism related to spa for health in the hotel industry.

### **2.1 Concept of Service Mixed Marketing**

Traditional mixed marketing theory consists of 4 components: product, price, place, and promotion (McCarthy, 1964). Mixed marketing refers to marketing tools or strategies related to products, creating satisfaction, and good relationships between products and consumers (Dominici, 2009; Goi, 2009). The development of mixed marketing has gone further by adding three Ps to the four Ps: physical evidence, participants, and process. It is, especially, the best measurement tool for service management (Collier, 1991; Enache, 2011). However, some

scholars comment that personalization is also crucial for marketing strategy, and constitutes an element of mixed marketing, alongside product, price, place, promotion, personnel, physical assets and procedures, to form a new marketing mix, the 8ps (Goi, 2009). In addition, the purpose of service marketing is to provide the highest level of customer satisfaction in which many scholars have applied the 8Ps for study in the service industry (Hejase, Hamdar, Orfali, & Hejase, 2012; Išoraitė, 2016).

In summary, for this study, the service marketing mix of 4Ps is adopted to measure spa activity; the main components include spa product, a place to provide spa service, spa prices, and promotion channels. Therefore, it can be said that mixed marketing principles help to support the marketing plan, implementation and evaluation. Moreover, spa tourist intention to re-purchase certainly depends on how they are satisfied with the service provider performance; then decision making to return might occur (Awad, 2012). It is, therefore, to know each tourist behaviour segmentation, in turn helping the service provider in planning and providing great spa facilities for the customer (Hashemi, Jusoh, Kiumarsi, & Mohammadi, 2015).

Tourists, before making a decision to purchase or not, will however search for information, evaluate and select store choices and purchases, and evaluate post-purchase (Edwards, 1954; Payne, Bettman, & Luce, 1998).

## ***2.2 Consumer behaviour and wellness tourism related to marketing strategy***

Currently, successful tourism destinations must provide distinctive and new tourism products, especially addressing special interest niche markets, such as wellness tourism (Rodrigues et al., 2010). Likewise, the competition in service marketing is dynamic; the service provider must value customers by anticipating and responding to their needs promptly and try to do better than their competitors (Peter, Olson, & Grunert, 2005). The most important thing to do in market segmentation is to identify each consumer group and their unique needs, purchase processes, and develop the product and service to suit individual groups (Peter et al., 2005). For instance, wellness products must provide physical activity combined with relaxation of the mind and intellectual stimulus, enhancing well-being through a balance of the body, mind, and spirit (Rodrigues et al., 2010). Commonly, the theme of a well-being setting includes setting up the place for a feeling of comfort, peace and quiet, with personal touches, especially friendly or family orientated service with food related to healthy well-being (organic, vegetarian, and consideration to those with food allergies) (Page et al., 2017). Similarly, tourists are becoming more aware of their own well-being, and demand products and services perceived to be well-being related that might be offered through online resources (Page et al., 2017).

On the other hand, wellness tourism has long been associated with spas and health facilities, including outdoor recreation and adventure; hence, personal positive experience with a place is linked to place attachment, as such the setting must meet tourist demand (Kulczycki & Lück, 2009). In addition, places for wellness tourism can be specific, having a natural setting, with natural beauty, and be in an undeveloped environment (Moscardo, 2011).

Promotion and information channels are important for destination development (Ashton, Scott, & Choibamroong, 2019; Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie, & Winter, 2014). Some examples propose that the role of web-based channels play an important factor in informing tourists, and influence their decisions, especially information on medical tourism (Lunt, Hardey, & Mannion, 2010; Moghavvemi et al., 2017).

The price of products and service should be reasonable and give value for the money the consumer pays (Ashton, Scott, Solnet, & Breakey, 2010). Likewise, in relation to wellness tourism, for example spa activity, the quality

and value impacts consumer satisfaction and loyalty intention (Han, Kiatkawsin, Jung, & Kim, 2018; Han, Kiatkawsin, Kim, & Lee, 2017). However, price setting for wellness products and activities can vary depending on individual to individual, hence to set the price, the company/business owner must consider market segmentation, especially age group and length of stay (Masiero & Nicolau, 2012).

This section dealt with consumer behaviour and wellness marketing elements, including place, product, price and promotional information. Concluding, places for wellness must respond to consumer needs, especially in supporting the well-being demand. Wellness products need to be distinctive based a combination of benefits to physical needs, relaxation, mind/spiritual retreat, and balance of both body and mind. For price, consideration must be given to each segmentation market, such as age group and length of stay.

### **3. Methodology**

This study adopted a quantitative approach using random survey technique with spa tourists. The Southern region of Thailand was selected as the study area, being a popular spa tourism destination, hence making it easy to find target samples for the data collecting process (Han et al., 2018; Hejase et al., 2012). This study selected spa tourists who use the products and services within four and five-star hotels. The samples, however, must have had at least one time using the spa services in the hotel where they stay.

The research instruments were developed from past studies relevant to mixed marketing and intention to revisit (Išoraitė, 2016). The research instrument was tested for validity and reliability. The results of a pilot test with 30 samples were checked and changed if found to be unreliable. Once checked again for reliability the main study was conducted, and results showed all scales were above the accepted level, Cronbach's Alpha at 0.75 (Creswell & Ivankova, 2004; John & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Moreover, multiple regression technique was performed to test the hypotheses by measuring the relationship between the mixed marketing components, the four P's: product, price, promotion and place, and tourist intention to revisit the spa venue. The section below shows samples' profiles, and the hypotheses test results.

### **4. Results**

A total of 413 samples were collected, the proportion of female to male being almost half each (female 51%, male 49%). Over 60% were married and the majority had a bachelor degree; 61% were of an Asian background, 20.6 % from Europe, 12.8% from the American zone, and 5.8% from Australasia (As seen in Table 1).

Table1: Sample profile n=413

Sample profile		No.	Average (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	<b>211</b>	<b>51.1</b>
	Male	202	48.9
<b>Status</b>	Single	133	32.2
	Married	<b>249</b>	<b>60.3</b>
	Separated	31	7.5
<b>Age group</b>	18-25 ปี	31	7.5
	<b>26-35 ปี</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>35.8</b>
	36-45 ปี	85	20.6
	46-55 ปี	64	15.5
	56-65 ปี	63	15.3
	65 ปีขึ้นไป	22	5.3
<b>Education</b>	Below high school	4	1
	High school	7	1.7
	Diploma	59	14.3
	Bachelor	<b>249</b>	<b>60.3</b>
	Master degree	76	18.4
	PhD	18	4.4
<b>Occupation</b>	Government	85	20.6
	Employment	<b>135</b>	<b>32.7</b>
	Self employed	74	17.9
	Trader	7	1.7
	Student	28	6.8
	Retired	74	17.9
	Not identified	10	2.4
Income	Less than <\$US 15,000	19	4.6
	>\$US 15,000 - 20,000	17	4.1
	> \$US 20,000 - 25,000	37	9.0
	> \$US 25,000 – 30,000	95	23
	> \$US 30,000 - 35,000	134	32.4
	>\$US 35,000	111	26.9

**4.1 Pearson correlation coefficient measurement**

Prior to performing a multiple regression, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient was tested to check the level of relationship between dependent and independent variables. As seen in Table 2, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) results between the marketing mix and spa tourist intention to re-purchase is statistically significant ( $p < .000$ ). There is a positive moderate level ( $.41 < r < .70$ ) between mixed marketing, including information channels, spa service prices, spa products, place to provide spa service and tourist intention to re-purchase. It can be summarized that for the best relationship among the four components of mixed marketing, information channels and spa service prices have the best relationship with spa tourist intention to re-purchase  $r = .683$  and  $.622$  respectively, followed with spa product,  $r = .542$ ; place and time to provide spa service had the least correlation,  $r = .493$ .

**Table 2: Mixed Marketing and Intention to Re-purchase Pearson Correlation Coefficient**

Mixed Marketing and Spa Tourist Intention to Re-purchase	Pearson Correlation	Correlation /Significant level
Spa Product	r	.542**
	p	.000
Place to provide spa service	r	.493**
	p	.000
Information channels	r	.662**
	p	.000
Spa service prices	r	.683**
	p	.000

**4.2 Hypotheses results**

This study aim is to investigate the relationship between mixed marketing and intention to re-purchase with the wellness activity. This study raised four hypotheses, stating that mixed marketing elements, comprising product, place, promotion, and price of spa service to be used as an independent variable is positively related to spa tourist intention to re-purchase.

The results revealed that three mixed marketing factors are statistically significant in relation to spa tourist intention to re-purchase. The marketing mix contributed toward spa tourist intention to re-purchase and explained a total of 53% of the variances in intention to re-purchase ( $R^2 = .513$ ),  $P < 0.001$ ). There was a positive and significant relationship between three mixed marketing factors toward intention to re-purchase: place and time to provide spa ( $\beta = .410$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ), information channels ( $\beta = .178$ ,  $p < 0.003$ ) and spa service prices ( $\beta = .219$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (As seen in Table 3).

Table3: Multiple regression results: mixed marketing and spa tourist intention to re-purchase

Mixed Marketing /Spa tourist	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig	R <sup>2</sup>
	B	Std.Error	$\beta$			
Place to provide spa service	0.206	0.048	0.410	4.275	0.000	.513
Information channels	0.118	0.039	0.178	3.028	0.003	
Spa service prices	0.146	0.066	0.219	2.217	0.028	

Note: Dependent variable: Intention to re-purchase ( $R^2 = .513$ ),  $P < 0.001$ )

## 5. Discussions

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between mixed marketing and intention to re-purchase spa for health within the four and five-star hotel. There were four elements of mixed marketing that this study measured: the relationship between spa products, place to provide spa services, price, promotion channels and intention to re-purchase. It can be summarized as results revealed, that three important elements of mixed marketing are needed to consider when developing wellness tourism. Thus, the most important elements are: to provide a place for spa activity, information channels, and spa service prices, all influential for tourists to re-purchase. It can be concluded that of the four hypotheses tested, three hypotheses were supported, with one rejected, (as seen in Table 4).

For the first market element, place, it can be summarized that if one unit of place improves, then the intention to re-purchase will increase by almost 50%. Likewise, Kulczycki and Lück (2009) confirmed that a great place setting influences tourist loyalty, hence leading to tourist intention to re-purchase.

For the promotion element, it is most important to provide information channels through websites. This study confirmed that information channels must cover all the necessary details about wellness packages/programs. However, this result is in line with past studies in terms of the importance of online promotion. A study carried out by Moghavvemi et al. (2017) supported that for the medical tourism context the most important channel for promoting the product is online, where tourists can obtain the best information and are able to make decisions through the company website.

The element of price for wellness activity: this study revealed that price influence on tourists to re-purchase is about 6.6 percent. It must be good value for the time and money spent, especially, the price detail must be clear and suitable for all tourist types. Similarly, past studies have proposed that setting the price of spa for health activity must be based on market segmentation, and should consider young to retirement ages, due to the ability of their financial situation (Masiero & Nicolau, 2012).

**Table 4: Summary of hypotheses test results**

Hypotheses	Hypotheses	Results
H1a	Spa Product - positively related to spa tourist intention to re-purchase	Rejected
H1b	Place and time to provide spa service - positively related to spa tourist intention to re-purchase	Supported
H1c	Information channels - positively related to spa tourist intention to re-purchase	Supported
H1d	Spa service prices - positively related to spa tourist intention to re-purchase	Supported

**5.1 Theoretical Contributions**

The contributions of this study can be drawn out in both academic and managerial perspectives. The academic contribution derived from this study maps out the tourist behaviour and the intention to re-purchase spa for health services development model. Resulting from final findings, the model consists of four elements of mixed marketing under a wellness tourism development. The first component is a place for wellness activity, by creating an atmosphere and theme embedded with the wellness concept. Especially, there must be peace, quietness and comfort, with a personal touch by providing a warm welcome and friendly atmosphere. Furthermore, the theme of the place can be a setting according to place location, such as near the sea, mountains or forest. In addition, the spa for health can be related to a spiritual theme and the atmosphere can be a setting based on a religious or non-religious theme, such as a Buddhism theme or other belief if suitable. Secondly, a spa for health activity must be created based on the well-being attributes, especially physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. Physical well-being activities can be pursued based on spa and health related action (Azman & Chan, 2010). Mental health well-being is related to self-control, especially for dealing with a life crisis stage successfully (Windle, Hughes, Linck, Russell, & Woods, 2010). Emotional well-being is about people understanding themselves; it helps in creating a joyful life, overcomes sadness quickly, and promotes a pleasant life (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010; Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander, 2002). Spiritual well-being will help people discover spiritual self-awareness; accordingly, spa activity helps in mind and soul treatments renewing spirituality, thus gaining a peaceful mind and happiness (Ashton, 2018).

Thirdly, information channels development: the design of websites and channels must be set based on the target market, consistent, be suitable for each characteristic group, and include social networks and organization official websites. Finally, give good price with value: especially, the value for both monetary and none-monetary price must be worth the time and money that tourists spend on the spa for health activity. The price also should be available to all market segments, such as low and high income, and all age groups (as seen in Figure 1).



Place	Wellness activity attributes	Information	Price
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Wellness atmosphere</li> <li>•Peace&amp;quiet</li> <li>•Feeling comfort by personal touch</li> <li>•Theme</li> <li>•Sea scenery</li> <li>•Resort/forest</li> <li>•Blend with religions setting</li> <li>•Local culure unique style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Physical</li> <li>•Mental</li> <li>•Emotional</li> <li>•Spiritual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Social network</li> <li>•Orgnanization official website</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Price available to suit all budets (age group, income)</li> <li>•Price/value for money</li> <li>•Value for time spent (not wait too long to be served)</li> </ul>

**Figure 1: Wellness Activity Development in the Hotel Industry**

**5.2 Practical Implications**

For the managerial contribution, this study provides a wellness tourism development guideline for all stakeholders, especially hotel, spa and resort, and travel agent. To increase the ability for competitive advance one must consider the important wellness health components, in particular the foundation of a mixed marketing strategy, the place for spa activity related to wellness attributes, and the method of promotion and availability of price for all market segments. For instance, a place for organizing wellness activity: this can include spa, sport and healthy food. The location of all wellness activities must be located in suitable environments providing healthy food. Spaces for sport and spa services must have a good atmosphere that helps to relax and aid mind recovery. The activities must consider a blending of wellness attributes, including spa and beauty to promote physical, mental, emotional and spiritual happiness. For marketing wellness activities successfully one must consider the information that covers all the important information that tourists need to know. For instance, the place should be located in a green environment with authentic activity, accordingly the design of the promotional information on a website must emphasize on these keywords to attract readers when they search online. Finally, prices must accompany good value, and especially must be in line with the target market income, from low budget to exclusive level. Good price is to have good value for both time and money. The quality of products and service must be suitable with the price of each activity and program. Overcharging will dissuade customers.

**5.3 Limitations and Future Research Recommendations**

The limitation of this study is the time taken for collecting data in a low season, and it takes time to obtain sufficient data for analysis, however the researcher was able to collect enough information to perform data analysis. Future research might look at the tourist perception on wellness factors, such as how they perceive physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual improvement. In addition, a qualitative study should be

conducted with wellness tourists, and scholars should explore at a daily spa on wellness factors, for such as how customers are satisfied, and their intention to re-purchase.

## 6. Conclusions

It can be concluded that this study provides invaluable insight and knowledge on wellness for health tourism development. Wellness activity within a hotel especially includes spa, yoga, meditation, healthy food, and sport activity (e.g. beach volleyball, swimming, ballroom dancing and swimming). The place to set up these activities, such as spa, yoga and meditation will need to have a good atmosphere, quietness and a tranquil environment. The place must be clean and scented with herbal aromas made from nature. Price was not a major concern for tourists however due to data being collected in four/five-star hotels, and ranged from mid to executive quality with medium to high price. The information can be used for the well-known websites that tourists mostly use.

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