

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In Thailand, tourism plays an important role for the national economy of the whole country. It is widely accepted that one of the largest businesses which can generate more jobs, more income for a country is the “Tourism industry”. Economic and Financial Report of the Bank of Thailand ([www.bot.or.th](http://www.bot.or.th)) stated that the 2006 economy improved significantly because of the growth of tourism. There were about 13.8 million foreign tourists visiting Thailand. It has increased about 20% from year 2005. Also, the data from Bank of Thailand showed that income from tourism industry in year 2006 was about 470 billion baht which was about 22% increase from 2005. These numbers showed how important tourism is, not only for the country but for each area/destination as it gets benefit from the tourism industry as well.

In recent years, health and wellness tourism has grown and has taken a major position in attracting worldwide tourists to travel, visit and stay in any destinations which are able to serve their needs and requirements.

Smith and Puzko (2009) introduced that travel can contribute in all aspects of health considering the physical and mental benefits of rest and relaxation, the social aspect of mixing tourists and local people, and stimulation that can come from learning about new places and services. The continually growing tourism market industry in the Kingdom of Thailand includes spa and health business. Thailand is one of the countries in Asia that is now developing health tourism (Vajirakachorn, 2004). health and wellness tourism need to be raised up to attract more attention due to the changes and inquiry of human health trend. Also, hot springs which is believed to be valuable and beneficial for health and to comprises the variable which potentially influences the increasing number of health, wellness and spa tourists, from past to present.

However, tourism brings both positive and negative impact to the country and to the destination. Any stakeholders including government, private sectors or local community need to be aware of and pay more attention to tourism industry. Not only the marketing and promotion sites but the development is to be explored and planned

for future sustainability of nature and the cultural resources of the destination. A development philosophy needs to be integrated which infuses all aspects of planning process, from a site selection, staff training, services delivery through the participation of the local community to ensure sustainability.

### **Rationale**

The recent increase in public awareness of the importance of good health has provided an incentive for countries to develop their mineral hot springs resources and pursue the development of their own health, wellness and spa tourism sector. With growing scientific evidence that minerals obtainable from certain hot springs have special properties which can cure or ease the symptoms of various ailments, the tourism industry has sought to deploy these resources to attract more domestic and international visitors. Natural hot springs and mineral water are playing increasingly important part in health and wellness tourism according to health objectives and wellness trends, a large number of natural hot springs throughout the world have been turned into tourist attractions offering a wide variety of services and facilities. Almost all of the world top hot spring destinations share one in common; they aim to promote health tourism, as evidenced by the fact that health and spa services are indispensable in these tourist sites. However, with the number of health conscious tourists that continuously grow, there is still ample room for health and wellness tourism development in the world market and the sooner Thailand is ready to step onto this bandwagon, the better it will be. Most visitors of hot springs in Thailand go there for recreation, and many sites have been turned into tourist destinations which have won international recognition and appreciation. Thailand is an opportunity for health and wellness image building and development potential of tourism areas whether it is a safe source of services or the international travel route to meet the expectations of glossy health and wellness tourism.

According to the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) more than one hundred hot springs were tagged around Thailand as a natural phenomenon that has water flowing up from underground. Some of the natural hot springs have been conserved for local community and domestic tourist site only, but still have more potential to develop as attractive destinations for international health conscious

vacationers and far sighted investors alike. Ranong province in the southern part of Thailand is obviously endowed with hot springs, some have been developed for recreational, tourism or other purposes, while a number remain completely undeveloped. If the full economic potential of health, wellness tourism and Spa business can be realized in a sustainable manner, they could make a substantial contribution to the local communities, province and even country economy.

This research proposes to make recommendations with a comprehensive planning approach for the development of “Ban Phon Rang” hot spring in Ranong province. A sustainable possibility is explored within the tourism industry in terms of health and wellness tourism destination. The study’s survey and observation found that Ban Phon Rang hot spring is appropriate for development, and is part of the tourism inventory accepting international health and wellness tourists. Its multiple geography qualifications of mineral water, natural resources from Ngao National Park such as water fall, fauna and other natural scenes, prompt the recommendations for the contribution of development plan. This is according to the destination resource and to ground the discussion of sustainable tourism development with local community level to the planning process.

### **Statement of the Study**

Ranong is the first southern province on the western coast, located 568 kilometers from Bangkok. It is also known for its long rainy periods, which lasts for 8 months each year. Ranong occupies an area of 3,298 square kilometers with the Kra Isthmus which is the narrowest part of the Malay Peninsula, and is bordered by Myanmar and the Indian Ocean to the west. Within its complex area Ranong contains various natural attractions and is blessed with mangrove forest and natural hot springs. “A city of hot springs” is an ordinary Ranong province slogan, and it was confirmed recently that local development plans are aimed to promote their hot springs sites as health and wellness tourism destination. Whilst health and wellness tourism is growing steadily, it has been observed that many of the hot springs sites in Ranong are under developed in health and wellness elements. That caused the researcher’s interest in any contribution to integrate the tourism development plan and seek the challenges of that

place to include with other international hot spring destinations in sustainable health and wellness tourism development framework.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To conduct the involved community study and tourism resource audit of Ban Phon Rang (BPR) hot spring destination.
2. To conduct a SWOT analysis of Ban Phon Rang (BPR) hot spring to become an international health and wellness hot spring destination.
3. To propose recommendations for sustainable health and wellness tourism development of Ban Phon Rang, hot spring in Ranong province.

### **Significance of the Study**

Although the potential and impact of tourism in Thailand have been well discussed, the underlying health aspects; hot spring tourism elements have not been objectively studied much. This research paper can reveal invaluable information on how to implement the plan of a sustainable development of tourist destination for hot springs in Thailand suitable for current and future trends. Further, the plan is to draw a significant of development in tourism. Nowadays, the empowerment from people involves in decision making that influences the quality of their life and enable to sustain. For a country to be successful in branding and promoting health and wellness tourism with the goal that is to balance all relevant in circle of sustainable development.

### **Scope of the Study**

The subject of this research study is the sustainable health and wellness tourism development. It is specifically a case study of Ban Phon Rang hot spring site in Moo 3, Bang Rin sub-district, Mueang district, Ranong province. Ban Phon Rang hot spring physically is located in the area of Nam Tok Ngao National park's endowment, which is full of natural environment such as forest, fauna, water fall, river and headwaters including thermal hot springs. There are both natural hot springs and manmade bath tubs to extend thermal water in visitor areas. However some

recommendations are made here to be harmonious with the Natural Park Act B. E. 2504, the Mineral water and Groundwater Resources regulations.

### **Limitation of the Study**

#### **Limitation of Area Study**

Tourism resource audit to be applied and used within research Mueang district, since the focus is the hot spring located in Mueang district, Ban Phon Rang is one of hot spring sites in Ranong that be approached in 2008 – 2012 Ranong development plan to be the tourism attraction of an international hot spring destination for health and wellness tourism visitors.

Bang Rin and Ngao sub districts will be studied according to community participatory of sustainable tourism development.

**Limitations of Context Study**, there are some limitations to this study; the most prominent are listed below:

This research has a check list of Mueang district only for community study and tourism resources audit information.

Environment of health and wellness tourism in Ban Phon Rang hot spring is to study and obtain a check list in order to conduct a SWOT analysis for sustainable development recommendations.

With complexity of Ranong local authority layer, the provided data are duplicate, overlapped and lost in some areas.

There is no account and in depth analysis of hot spring tourism demanded (Cooper and Cooper, 2009). Compilation of some data to this study is mostly available thru literature review, tourism journal, travel documents and some internet websites; therefore no experiment investigation was attempted such as a case of worldwide international hot springs destinations revealed.

## Definition of Terms

**1. Sustainable Development** is a process oriented and associated with managed changes that bring about improvement in conditions for some involved in such development, similarly sustainable tourism is conveniently defined as all types of tourism that are compatible with or contribute to sustainable development (Liu, Z., 2003).

**2. Health Tourism** refers to a kind of tourism that provides facilities such as spa, fitness, health center and hospital and activities such as sports, meditation, yoga, massage, medical check-up and cure the diseases concerning the customers' objective of encouraging their health or healing illness (Vijirakachorn, 2004).

**3. Wellness Tourism:** According to Mueller and Kaufmann (2001), wellness tourism is the sum of all relationship, phenomena resulting from a journey and residence by people whose main motive is to preserve or promote their health.

**4. Thermal Spring, Hot Spring** is any geothermal spring, a spring with water temperatures higher than that of its surrounding, a natural resource produced by the emergence of geo-thermally heated groundwater from the earth's crust. They can be found all over the earth, on every continent and beneath the ocean (The Department of Thailand Tourism).

**5. Mineral Water** The department of Thailand Tourism, referred to as the USFDA classifies mineral water as water containing at least 250 parts per million total dissolved solid (TDS), coming from a source tapped or bore more holes or spring, and originating from a geologically and physically protected underground water source. No minerals may be added to the water.

## The Conceptual Model of the Study

According to the research objectives and framework it is concluded and analyzed by literatures review, relative data and information available and the sustainable tourism development and principles are referred to match to local resources and possibility. International hot springs destinations study to bring back the definition of health and wellness tourism in term of worldwide trends. All these subjects mentioned are identified within a research conceptual framework in the next paragraph.

Conceptual framework of research study

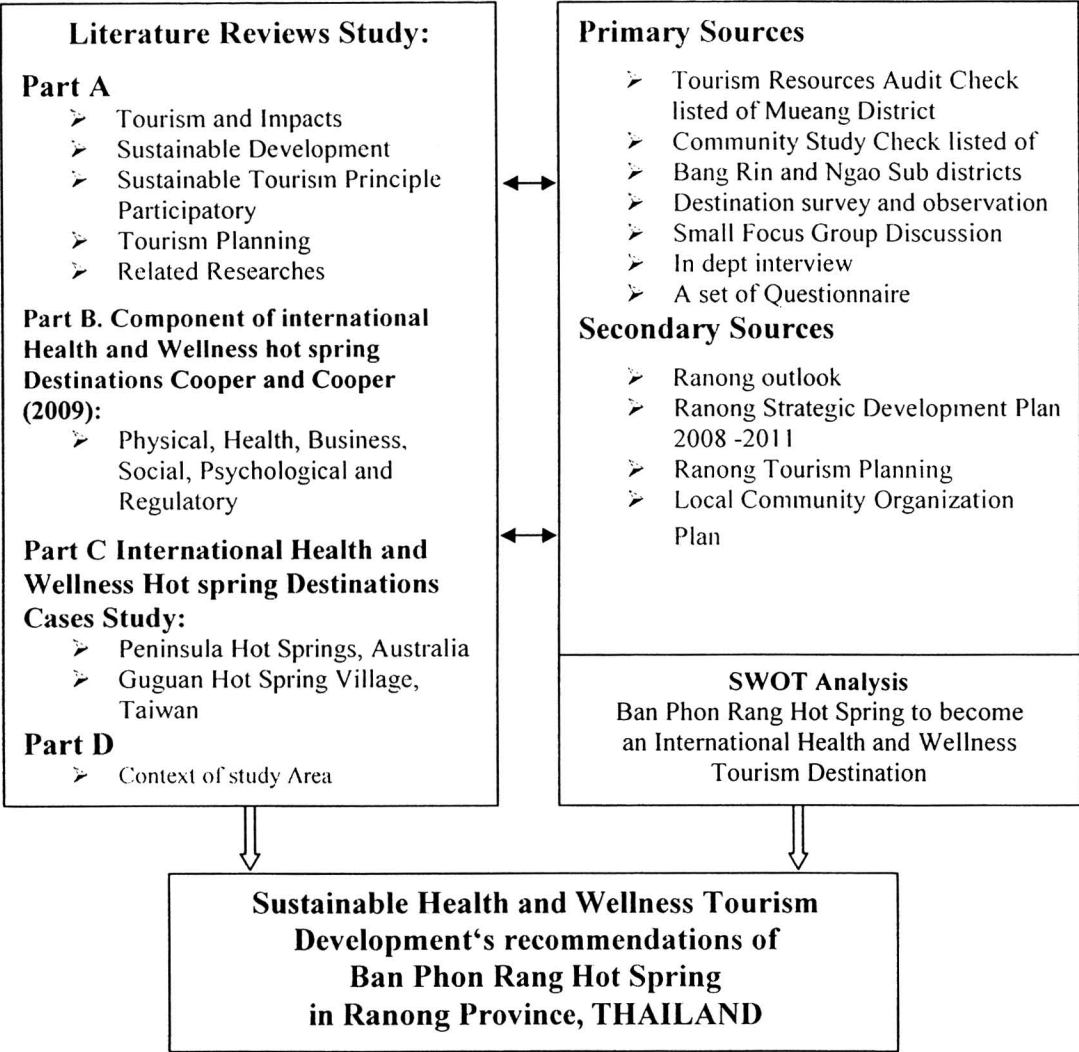


Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the study “Sustainable Health and Wellness tourism development of Ban Phon Rang hot spring in Ranong Province