

# INNOVATION DEVELOPMENT TO PROMOTE THE WELLNESS TOURISM BUSINESS IN THE SOUTHERN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR SUSTAINABLY

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## ABSTRACT

The paper aimed to present a model of innovation to promote the wellness tourism business in the Southern Economic Corridor sustainably. Studying by searching for data from documents, academic articles, and research papers. Analyze data by summarizing and interpreting relevant documents and research that concern and present according to the objectives. The result showed that innovation to promote the wellness tourism business in the Southern Economic Corridor sustainably comprises 7 factors as follows: Wellness service innovation, Cultural Innovation, Healthcare Innovation, Experience quality, Perceived tourism value, and Tourism in SEC Sustainability.

**Keywords:** Innovation, Wellness Tourism, Sustainability, Southern Economic Corridor

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a business in the service industry group. It is vital to drive the international and domestic economy. Because it has a direct positive impact on the country's economic system at many levels, such as creating employment and distributing revenue to the tourism businesses and communities in tourist destinations. It is resulting in the improvement and development of tourist attractions, and establishing a basic service system and various facilities to support tourists will likely increase yearly (Economics Tourism and Sports Division, 2020). Tourism has tangible elements such as tourism products and services, and intangible elements such as culture and adventure (Jitayasotorn, 2015). Therefore, in order to be able to support both elements of tourism, both the public and private sectors have improved and developed tourist attractions and created basic service systems and various facilities to support tourists, which are likely to increase every year. Tourism development and promotion is one policy that is important to the development of the national, regional, and local areas (Sujarit and Sujarit, 2017: 54). The government has designated tourism as a strategy for national development and identified Thailand as a leading tourist destination (Teeranon and Sophonjaruskul, 2016: 207). Nowadays, tourism development in many countries is giving importance to wellness tourism which makes a large income for the country each year. The information from the Global Wellness Institute (2018: 1) found that was predicted that the global health tourism market value in 2020 will likely grow from USD 4 trillion to USD 11 trillion in 2025. The ASEAN region, particularly Thailand, experiences a yearly rise in wellness tourism. Thailand was ranked third in tourism competitiveness, following Singapore and Malaysia (WTO 2018: 1). The southern region of Thailand has also been designated for a tourism development plan. From the Cabinet meeting on 21 August 2018 in Chumphon Province. They saw the potential of the area and designated for the development of 4 provinces in the upper southern region, namely Chumphon Province, Ranong Province, Surat Thani Province, and Nakhon Si Thammarat Province in the form of sustainable development of the Southern Economic Corridor. This aims to develop a new economic foundation on existing resources and activities in the region. Besides, it was found that the Southern Economic Corridor has an economic structure that relies on service sectors. Tourism has a variety of tourist attractions that are popular with both Thai and foreign tourists, such as Koh Samui, and Koh Phangan, and many health, natural, and historical tourist attractions (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2019). In managing wellness tourism in 4 provinces of the southern economic corridor, there are many related factors such as wellness service, culture, healthcare service, tourism activities, tourist experience quality, tourism value, and tourism smart technology (Pedro Liberato, Elisa Alen and Dalia Liberato, 2017). From the importance of wellness tourism to the country's economic system, and the importance of the southern economic corridor area. The researcher was interested in studying innovation development to promote the wellness tourism business in the Southern Economic Corridor sustainably. The results of the study will lead to a plan to develop wellness tourism innovations that are effective and beneficial to the Southern Economic Corridor and other sectors, which can be used in the future.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To review the concept, Theory and research related to wellness tourism.
2. To develop an innovative model to promote wellness tourism business in the Southern Economic Corridor sustainably.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to ensure methodological rigor. A structured protocol consisting of database search, screening, eligibility assessment, and thematic synthesis was applied. Academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and ThaiJo were searched using Boolean keyword combinations related

to wellness tourism, sustainable tourism, innovation, and the Southern Economic Corridor. Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed publications from 2010–2024 that contributed theoretical or empirical insights. Extracted data were synthesized thematically to integrate conceptual relationships and support the development of the proposed innovation model. To further enhance the rigor of the search strategy, the PICO (Population–Interest–Context) framework was applied. This model is recommended for qualitative and conceptual reviews where the objective is not to evaluate the effect of an intervention but to explore conceptual relationships across contexts. In this study, the PICO elements were defined as follows: Population (P): Wellness tourists and stakeholders involved in wellness tourism activities in the Southern Economic Corridor (SEC). Interest (I): Innovation development, service innovation, cultural innovation, healthcare innovation, technology adoption, and experience quality. Context (Co): Sustainable wellness tourism within the SEC region. Using this framework ensured alignment between search keywords, inclusion criteria, and the conceptual boundaries of the review, thereby strengthening the methodological transparency of the study.

## LITERATURE REVIEWS

### Concepts of Tourism and Wellness Tourism

#### *Definition*

The concept of wellness tourism dramatically broadens the appeal of tourism. It began in the Roman Empire and originated from spas or mineral bathing areas (Komsit Kieanwatana et al., 2014: 77). By definition, wellness tourism is travel for the purpose of promoting one's health and well-being through physical, psychological, or spiritual activities. Some like mindfulness and meditation while others yearn for energizing escapes. Chanatup, et al. (2021) said that wellness tourism refers to travel that involves the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing good health in individuals. Its scope covers all services that are holistic preventative health care and improvement. It is the choice and willingness of the service user to choose to use it. While Rattanapajit, et al. (2017) said that wellness tourism refers to travel that has objectives and activities to promote or treat and restore health, such as traveling to relax at a resort surrounded by nature, in the program, there was an expert meeting to give health advice.

#### *Types of Wellness Tourism*

There are 2 types of Wellness tourism as follows (Khemtongteaw, 2018).

1. **Health Promotion Tourism** It is a trip to visit beautiful tourist attractions in nature and culture to learn about lifestyles and recreation. There will be some time allocated from traveling to health promotion activities at the accommodation or outside the campsite in a correct and academically correct way and with true standard quality, such as Massage Therapy activity, Aroma Therapy activity, Water Therapy activity, etc. Most people prefer to stay in vacation rentals like hotels or resorts that offer quality health and sports centers for promoting wellness.
2. **Health Healing Tourism** It is a trip to visit beautiful tourist attractions in nature and culture to learn about lifestyles and recreation. They will allocate some of their travel time to receive standard medical treatment and rehabilitation in hospitals or nursing homes. This tourism therefore has a travel program that includes a program for receiving treatment services, rehabilitation and medical treatment, and various health services such as physical examination, Treatment of various diseases, dentistry, cosmetic surgery or gender reassignment surgery, etc.

#### *Benefits of Wellness Tourism*

Wellness tourism is a highly sought-after form of travel that aims to promote health and uplift the quality of life for tourists. Additionally, it contributes to improving the environment's quality, creating awareness around the importance of well-being. While there are many health benefits,

such as Traditional Thai massage has many health benefits. Foot massages can prevent constipation, asthma, headaches, kidney disease, stress, and migraines, and improve blood circulation. While the foot massage activity helps prevent certain diseases such as constipation, asthma, headaches, kidney disease, stress, migraines, etc. As for economic benefits, it was found that health tourism is beneficial in economic development at the individual, community, social, and national levels.

### **Sustainable wellness tourism concept**

Bulter (1993, p. 29) said that Sustainable Tourism means that tourism is based on developed by environmental maintenance within the context of the community and does not impair the physical condition and living conditions of human beings both now and in the future. WTO (1997, p. 36) said that Sustainable Tourism is attractive tourism that makes an impression on visitors. It is tourism that responds to tourists and corresponds with tourist attractions. This is consistent with Thailand Tourism (2006) said that Sustainable tourism means tourism that has an important goal of sustainable development. Taking into account the ability to support nature, communities, and traditions. Culture and Way of Life Affecting Tourism Management. Therefore, Sustainable Wellness Tourism means to travel for the purpose of promoting one's health and well-being through physical, psychological, or spiritual activities and based on developed by environmental maintenance within the context of the community. The World Sustainable Tourism Council is a basic guideline for managing tourist attractions towards sustainability in an integrated manner according to the Sustainable Development Goals, and there are 4 principles for Sustainable Wellness Tourism as follows. 1) Economic sustainability, 2) Social sustainability, 3) Cultural sustainability and 4) Environmental sustainability.

### **Innovation Theories**

Innovation, for its part, can refer to something new or a change made to an existing product, idea, or field. One might say that the first telephone was an invention, the first cellular telephone was either an invention or an innovation, and the first smartphone was an innovation. Besides, Innovation is a broad category, relative to the current knowledge of the analyzed unit. Any idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption could be considered an innovation available for study (Rogers, 1983). Tourism business operators can create and use innovation in their business because innovation in the travel and tourism industry can take many different forms. It essentially refers to the many ways in which businesses and corporations update the experience that customers and tourists have when travelling (MySmartJourney, 2022). The tourism industry is one of the main engines of the world economy. It is constantly changing to respond to the fluctuating needs of customers so technology innovation is present in all the scopes of tourism. The travel and tourism industry needs to continuously adopt innovative strategies in order to make tourism businesses more efficient, keep costs down, and maintain a competitive edge.

### **Basic theoretical concepts of technology acceptance**

Technology is giving customers a lot more power and independence on their trips. It becomes clear just how influential technological innovation has become. However, if visitors want more independence, travel technology and innovation make this possible. Since customers can do things for themselves, it frees up time for employees who can redirect their time to other issues and processes. This makes it possible for tourism businesses to improve efficiency, which increases customer satisfaction. For example, tourism technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), etc. However, in technology acceptance, Davis (1989) said that the technology acceptance model (TAM) explains the acceptance of information systems by individuals. TAM postulates that the acceptance of technology is predicted by the users' behavioral intention, which is, in turn, determined by the perception of technology's usefulness in performing the task and the perceived ease of its use. It is shown in Figure 1.

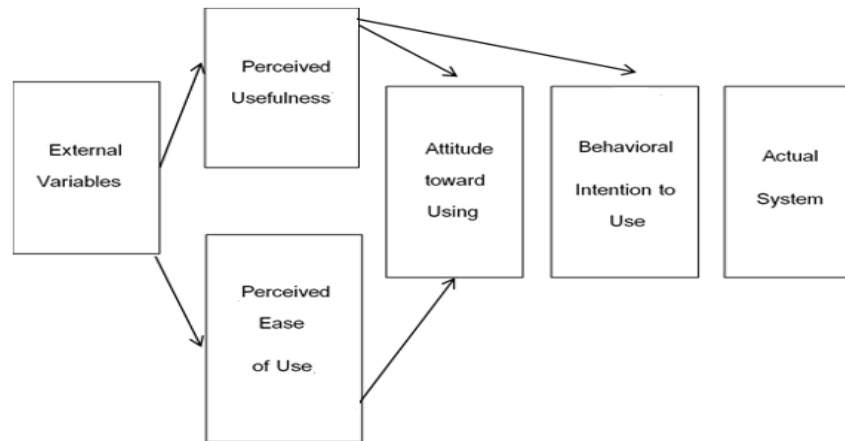


Figure 1: Technology Acceptance Mode  
From: Davis (1989)

In summary, implementing innovative technology in the tourism industry can efficiently and sustainably manage Wellness Tourism.

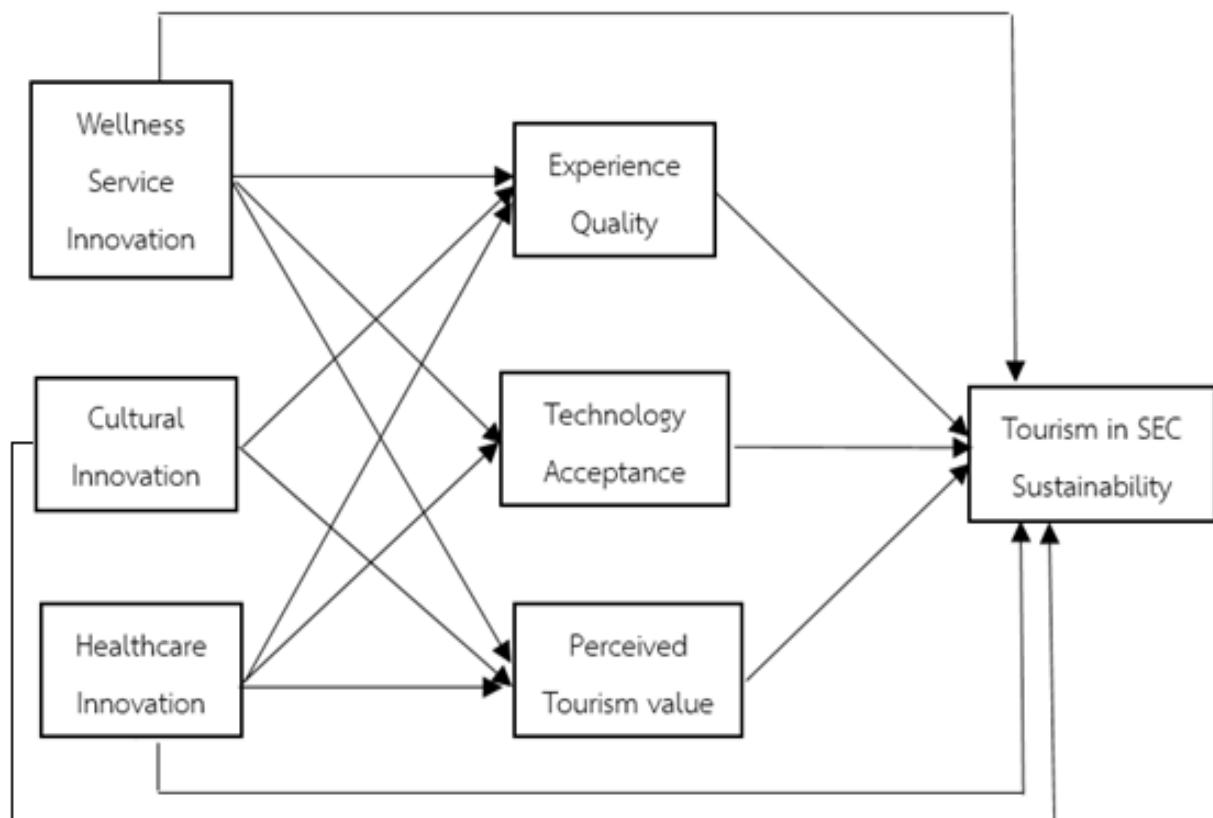
## RESEARCH PAPERS

Pedro Liberato, Elisa Alen, and Dalia Liberato (2017) Smart tourism destination trigger consumer experience: the case of Porto. This paper aims to emphasize the increasing importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in smart tourism destinations, their integration into the activity of tourism companies, and their interaction with visitors/tourists. In summary, it is intended to evaluate the city of Porto and how the use of technology before, during, and after the visit influences the tourist experience. The results showed the importance of internet access at the destination, especially in places like airports and hotels, since most tourists are primarily using their mobile devices and computers during the trip, and the existing information technologies available in the destination (internet, smartphones, or other mobile devices and applications) are considered very important in explaining tourists' experience. Rattanapajit, N (2019) Factors Influencing the Elderly's Health Tourism Behavior in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. The objectives of the study are to (1) examine the elderly's health tourism behavior relating to their personality traits and interests in the health tourism activity model and (2) investigate factors affecting their health tourism behavior in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. The results showed that; The elderly's health tourism activities in Nakhon Si Thammarat Province consisted of Thai massage, traditional massage, herbal massage, and essential oil use. The reasons for traveling were to relax and visit relatives and friends, and the time spent for traveling was about twice a year. Top tourist attractions were natural tourist destinations such as seas, waterfalls, and mountains. Receiving tourism advice from family and relatives, the elderly spent the money economically during the travel with them by car. Most of them traveled for convenience's sake and had no need to travel during the tourism festival. The expenses for each travel were below 2,000 baht and most senior citizens obtained the tourism information from television media. Factors affecting the elderly's health tourism behavior were age, educational level, income, and health conditions. In addition, no significant differences were found among respondents' sex on their health tourism behavior. Those with introverted personality traits had more health tourism behavior than those with extroverted personality ones. Napaporn Janchai (2020) Tourists' Confidence towards Healthcare Service Quality. This research aimed to analyze the perception of service quality and the confidence of international tourists towards the healthcare service business, analyze demographic factors that affect the perception of service quality and confidence, and analyze the factors of service quality perception that affect the confidence of international tourists towards the healthcare service business. The research found that international tourists

perceived the overall service quality of the healthcare business at the highest level in all five aspects, including Assurance, Reliability, Empathy, Responsiveness, and Tangibility, with the means of 4.36, 4.34, 4.29, 4.28, and 4.27, respectively. The tourists also had confidence in the overall healthcare business at the highest level, with a mean of 4.36. The demographic factors that affect the service quality perception include sex, the continent of residence, education, and average annual income, and the demographic factors that affect confidence in the healthcare business are sex and education. The factors of service quality perception affecting the confidence in healthcare business included Empathy, Tangibility, and Responsiveness with effect sizes 0.270, 0.244, and 0.170, respectively. Therefore, the development of the three aspects of service quality perception mentioned above affects the confidence of international tourists in the healthcare business. Sasikarn Plaikumpol (2022). Sustainable Tourism Management: Floating Market of the Central Region. The objectives of this research were as follows: 1) To describe the context of sustainable management of floating market tourism in the central region. 2) To identify the problem of sustainable management of floating market tourism in the central region. 3) To present a sustainable management model for floating market tourism in the central region. The results showed. 1) Floating market management was implemented by the floating market committee and focused on creating economic sustainability by generating local income and showing social responsibility. 2) The sustainable management problem of floating market tourism in the central region is a structural problem of the system. This is a matter of clarity in the authority of the relevant agencies, including problems in coordination. 3) The floating market tourism management model is to create participation between government sectors and floating market administrators, and shop operators by holding regular brainstorming meetings and allowing the community to participate in expressing opinions and making decisions.

## SUMMARY

From the literature reviews can design the conceptual framework as follows the Figure 2.



Each component in Figure 2 is now explicitly linked to the literature:

Wellness Service Innovation → improves service efficiency and differentiation (Rogers, 1983).

Cultural Innovation → enhances authenticity and local identity (Sujarit & Sujarit, 2017).

Healthcare Innovation → strengthens trust among wellness tourists (Janchai, 2020).

Experience Quality → drives satisfaction and repeat visits (Liberato et al., 2017).

Perceived Tourism Value → shaped by experience, innovation, and cultural richness.

SEC Sustainability → rooted in environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability principles (WTO, 1997). This model results from integrating themes, not isolated findings, addressing the Reviewer's concern about justification.

## CONCLUSION

This review synthesizes multidisciplinary literature to develop an innovation-driven model for sustainable wellness tourism in the Southern Economic Corridor. By integrating theories of innovation, sustainability, service quality, and technology adoption, the study contributes a coherent conceptual foundation for future empirical research.

## RESEARCH GAPS

Through the thematic synthesis, three primary research gaps were identified: (1) a lack of integrated innovation-based models for sustainable wellness tourism; (2) limited empirical research specific to the Southern Economic Corridor context; and (3) insufficient examination of the interaction between technological innovation, cultural value, and experiential quality in shaping sustainable tourism outcomes. Addressing these gaps will support future model validation and broaden the theoretical foundations of wellness tourism innovation.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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