

# Local wisdom and culture-based health tourism in Ranong province Thailand

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**Abstract.** The study, Local Wisdom and Culture-based Health Tourism in Rayong Province aims to develop a model of local wisdom and culture-based health tourism in Ranong Province through a qualitative study for Ban Hat Som Pan Community, Ranong Province, because of suitable potential for connecting with other health tourism routes in Ranong Province. Data were collected from relevant persons in health and cultural tourism as well as local stakeholders through in-depth and group interviews (four groups: public and private persons relevant to health tourism; experts; local leaders and wise people; and Thai and foreign tourists). The data was put through a content analysis process and triangulation to verify data reliability. The study found that Ban Hat Som Pan Community had natural tourist attractions that facilitated health tourism route creation, as well as health-promoting local wisdom that could be included in the health tourism route. Furthermore, the community cooperations with private and public agencies to connect to the larger tourism route in Ranong Province, diversifying the tourism route as the health route could start from the community and then cover other attractions. The identity of community tourism such as the “Shape Ore, Sift Ore, Soak Ore” was developed alongside the three main activities developed by this study, consisting of 1. Make – Eat, Delicious Medicine through health-promoting local food wisdom and cooking for visitors; 2. Make – Beauty, as the use of local herbs in a traditional cosmetic or skin care spa; 3. Make – Body, as a relaxing or therapeutic massage using locally-produced herbal oil and spring bath to promote health holistically. Along this route, the tourists will be able to spend time traveling and engaging in activities with the locals for recreation and health promotion along the guideline of health tourism.

## 1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a crisis for many industries, especially the tourism and accommodation industries which were virtually frozen overnight, resulting in massive economic damage. Thailand was one of the harder-hit countries as tourism was a major industry in Thailand. On the other hand, tourism, medical and health industries are enjoying growth due to consumers being more health-conscious (TATIC, N/A).

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Thailand, in terms of tourism, has various strengths as a popular tourism destination, such as its location at the heart of Southeast Asia, diversity of natural resources and culture, unique and friendly mannerisms, readiness of the infrastructure (Office of the National Economics and Social Development Council, 2019), and, perhaps another major strength of Thailand, an extensive health tourism service. Health tourism in Thailand included recreation, preventive healthcare, stress relieving, and health promotion in spas, cosmetic treatments, Thai massage, and therapeutic spring baths.

Various Thai provinces, such as Chumphon, Ranong, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai, as well as eastern provinces like Chonburi, Chanthaburi, and Prachin Buri, had various springs and well-known health services as well as all the herbal plantations and processing plants, contributing to the international reputation as a top-5 health tourism attraction (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2013). Prior to the pandemic, in 2016, it was found that over 43.8% of foreign tourists sought Thai spa and massage services, which had their own unique identity through the incorporation of traditional healthcare such as Thai massage, tapping massage, Thai herbal compression or steaming, and consumption of Thai herbs. This leads to the high popularity of Thai massage and spa services among Thai and foreign tourists alike. Many health tourism attractions also had one-stop services such as homestays, local guides, healthy food and drinks, relaxing activities that were related to the local wisdom and lifestyle, and finally good Thai-style hospitality. It could be seen that incorporation of the Thai wisdom in presenting health tourism activities gave a competitive edge to Thailand compared to others (Muenchan et al., 2018)

Ranong Province is another Thai province with outstanding health tourism, abundant natural resources, and beautiful natural tourist attractions that are not any inferior to other tourism provinces. Aside from beautiful and tranquil beaches, abundant seas, 62 islands, natural springs, historical landmarks such as Lam Nam Kraburi National Park, Laem Son National Park, Khao Fa Shee, the Kra Isthmus, hot springs, Ranong King Cemetery and Rattanakosin Palace (replica), Ranong Province also has a unique culture and lifestyle such as wicker and seashell accessories, medical wisdom, the use of herbs and nutritional knowledge, art wisdom, wicker basket weaving, and reed grass brooms. Literature-related wisdom is also rich in Ranong Province due to the mix of Chinese, Burmese, English, Malaya, and local languages. There is also professional wisdom such as mining and fishing. Many areas in Ranong Province are viable for health areas, one is Ban Hat Som Pan Community, dubbed “The Community of Ore Sifting, Forest, Streams, Valleys and Fog”.

The community has been famous for mining for over a century, and now creates an experience and transfers local wisdom through ore sifting, Thai sweets making, and performance of ore sifting dance and other unique local customs. This can be arranged into a tourism route that can tell a clear story about the Ranong ore sifters. Furthermore, the finest tin and clay in Thailand are made into souvenirs, and the tourists are allowed to make some themselves. Despite the abundance of tourism resources and the strategic development plan to turn the community into a health tourism spot, Ban Som Pan Community is a virtually unknown, small community that is overlooked by many tourists compared to other provinces in Ranong Province.

Due to the potential of Ranong Province, and a provincial development strategy, namely promotion and development of local tourism as health tourism, with guidelines such as tourism promotional events, announcements through various media, as well as promotion of gifts and souvenirs. Promotion and development of tourism in Ranong Province are important for the local and eventually national income generation (Noiphlaeng et al., year not specified). The attractiveness of the natural resources and the unique local health wisdom of Ranong Province led the researcher to conduct the study “Local Wisdom and Culture-based Health Tourism in Ranong Province” in concurrence with the “Thailand as a medical hub” tourism promotion strategy, as part of Thailand’s tourism strategy for 2015-2022 to lead

Asia's regional health tourism through creation and dissemination of the tourism image, creation of environment and supporting system for the tourism market, and creation of awareness to improve value of the tourism product. Economic development through tourism is the main policy for national development to improve the nation's competitive edge under supporting factors and utilization of science, technology, innovation, and idea to use the local wisdom as a basis for sustainable and high-quality development. The ASEAN Free Trade Area in 2015 will also promote the growth of the health tourism business in ASEAN, which naturally benefits Thailand, and is an opportunity to expand the investment in health promotion services (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, in Kantana et al., 2020). The study of the model of local wisdom and culture-based health tourism in Ranong Province will be another guideline for the public and entrepreneurs in Ranong Province to use the local identity to distinguish their health tourism-related products and services, promote the transfer of local wisdom and generate sustainable income and jobs for the locals and entrepreneurs.

## **2 Materials and Methods**

The researcher has the research methodology for the study, Local Wisdom and Culture-based Health Tourism in Ranong Province.

### **2.1 Data Collection Tools**

The data collection tools of this study were in-depth interview script, focused group guideline, participant observation, and non-participant observation to obtain comprehensive data. All the tools were verified for reliability and validity by tourism experts.

Data obtained from the in-depth interview was then analyzed with content analysis techniques, covering five main issues:

1. Personal information of the key informants.
2. Tourism resources in Ban Hat Som Pan, Ranong Province.
3. Tourism resources in Ban Hat Som Pan, Ranong Province.
4. Tourism resources in Ban Hat Som Pan, Ranong Province.
5. Comments and suggestions.

### **2.2 Data Processing**

1. Data from the documents, interviews, observations and group interviews were separately recorded based on the research objective.
2. Data from the interviews, observations, group interviews and workshops were categorized based on issues for analysis and synthesis of a guideline for elevation of participatory homestay service quality.

### **2.3 Data Analysis and Presentation**

After verifying validity and reliability of the collected data, the data was then checked and categorized based on the issues, then analyzed with content analysis methods. After than the analysis result was then triangulated to improve reliability and validity.

1. Use the method of agreement to verify theoretical validity and reliability of the documents, based on agreement between various sources, and if there is agreement between them, the documents would be used for reference.

2. Use typology analysis to classify the collected data into groups based on issues. The data was then triangulated, and if there is any discrepancy, the researcher would obtain additional relevant information or verify it again based on relevant theories and concepts.

- The researcher classified data triangulation in the following aspects:

- Locality-based, by cross-checking the data between different areas, starting from the smallest area first.

3. Person-based, by collecting data from various groups of people such as knowledgeable persons, practitioners and the general public and cross-checking the data to determine the consistency or conflict. The checking process started from the smallest level first.

After the analysis and verification process, result of the analysis process was then presented, grouped by the research objectives. Then, a conclusion and discussion were made.

### **3 Result and Discussion**

The study found that Ban Hat Som Pan has various natural tourist attractions, local wisdom, and culture that can be used to promote health, create a health tourism route and connect with nearby communities or Mueang District, such as the opening public and private hot springs, or other tourism facilities such as accommodations and restaurants. The community has the ability to form a cooperative network with outside service sectors and diversify the tourism routing. Still, the three aspects of the model wisdom-based community health tourism route, or “Shape Ore, Sift Ore, and Soak Ore” were still adhered to, in order to allow the tourists to truly enjoy the “Ore Towns” and hot springs of Ranong Province. Then, the tourists can select local wisdom-based health activities in the community and Ranong Province. The activities are split into three main types: (Figure1)

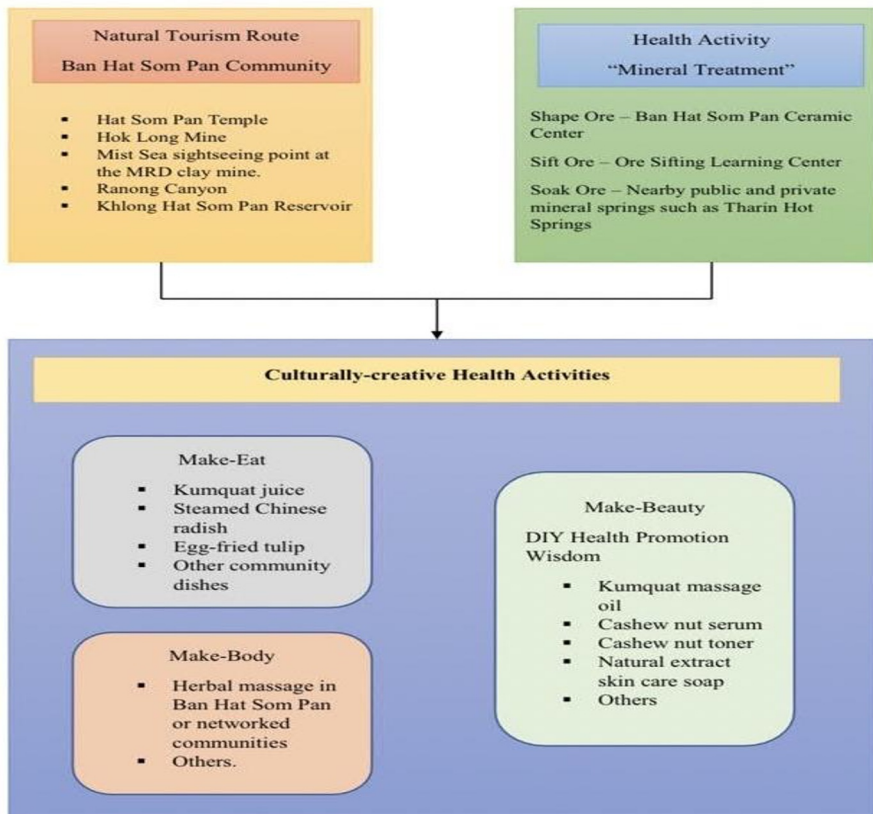
Make-Eat. Local dish-related activities were hosted, such as cooking for the tourists, or have cooking workshops, based on the principle of health promotion

- through herbs. Here the tourists will learn more about Southern Thai food-related wisdom with a flavor of Chinese ancestry.

- Make-Beauty, is an application of local herbs in spa treatments such as demonstration and making of massage oil, aroma oil, soap, facial and body care cream from natural extracts to promote physical and aesthetic health.

- Make-Body focuses on therapeutic and relaxing massage in combination with spring bath. The massage uses local-made herbal oil to promote health in a holistic manner.

The three activities were parts of a holistic health promotion approach, whether by consuming as medication, beauty care through chemical-free, local-made products, and body massage. Along the model tourism route, the tourists will be able to spend time and engage in activities with the locals for relaxation and health promotion in accordance with the health tourism guideline.



**Fig. 1.** Model of local wisdom-based health activities in Ban Hat Sompan, Ranong

## 4 Conclusion

The result of the study, according to the objective of developing the model health tourism route based on the local wisdom and culture in Ranong Province, leads to the following discussion:

1. The study of the health tourism route in Ranong Province, using Ban Som Pan Community as the center, showed that the tourism routes could be divided into the current tourist attractions in Ban Som Pan Community, nearby health tourism attractions, and other tourism support facilities. The study of the Ban Som Pan and Ranong Province tourist attractions revealed that the province has plentiful streams and natural flora, a good place for natural tourism. An abundance of ore resulted in many springs. This concurs with Rakpong Khorlue et al. (Journal of the Association of Researchers, 2021: Online) that gave information about the tourism resources of Ranong Province, tourism readiness and potential, local lifestyle and tradition, plentiful natural resources (such as the sea, the mountain, and waterfalls), well-known diving sites, hot springs, and local wisdom that are the strength of the province for culture-based health tourism.
2. The study of the local wisdom and culture in Ban Som Pan Community, Ranong Province for health tourism routing showed that the tourists were interested in activities based on the local wisdom such as ore sifting, traditional cooking, and making products from local ore and herbs. The tourists normally would be happy and get a good experience when engaging in

activities with the community. Such activities could be integrated into local wisdom-based health tourism to promote health in a holistic way through community tourism. This finding concurs with the study by Saowarot et al. (2023) about the condition and needs for health tourism with Thai culture and wisdom in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province from the view of the stakeholders, which found that if tourism could integrate Thai wisdom-based healthcare as part of the activities, the tourists will learn more about self-care, and local income and employment, especially among the elderly, will increase. The elderly can serve as teachers of local wisdom or guides so they can participate more in tourism value generation, building awareness about Thai wisdom and medicine, and health-related recreational activities.

3. It will be a chance for Ban Som Pan Community to develop into other form of tourism base on the study of the local wisdom and culture in Ban Som Pan Community, Ranong Province for health tourism routing such as community-based tourism homestay. The result of the study in “Vital Factor for Homestay Operation of Tourism Natural Environment in COVID-19 Period” show that Tourist’s attitude in tour program offering by homestay owner compare with house satisfaction in 1 : 1.51 times. The motivation of the visitor to come and experience the community can increase by the tour program that include cultural and rural attraction.

4. Development of the model health tourism route based on the local wisdom and culture in Ranong Province was a development of a model health tourism route from the already-existing natural tourism route and activity in the community, combined with newer health promotion activities based on the local wisdom. In this part, Thai and foreign tourists tested the model route, and then a website was created and leaflets disseminated for the tourists to learn about the new kind of tourism in Hat Som Pan. Marketing efforts are heavily done on digital media to meet the needs of the current tourism market, in concurrence with the research project of Mahasarakham University (ThailandPlus, 2022) about community-managed health tourism in Mahasarakham Province to accommodate high-quality tourists. The study found that the community potential development by weaving stories with digital technology could meet the market needs especially in two groups: the local & regional seekers that were interested in recharging themselves, balancing their health, or paying respect to shrines, as well as enjoying a wide range of food and activities (festival or recreational); and relationship enhancement tourists that enjoy the beautiful scenery, natural relaxation, and safe and hygienic food. There is a community development effort through the use of digital technology to present products and services on social media, aiming to generate awareness and income for the community enterprises in the three areas. Such a research project was a development effort by the community to create a model tourism area for the province, that could lead to utilization and expansion through cooperation with tourism allies inside and outside the province, as well as sustainable tourism management in the future.

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