

# Overview of Policy Frameworks on Spas in Thailand

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## Abstract

This study is an overview of policy frameworks on spas in Thailand. Spa business is one of the main health care services in Thailand and attracting vast amounts of tourists each year. Therefore, it is of utmost interest for the government to establish a framework maintaining and developing the spa sector. This includes policies, strategies and standards. The content covers human resource, service, pricing, image, labor, marketing and health promotion service.

**Keywords:** Service Quality, Standards, Policies, Spa, Thailand

## 1. Introduction

One of the main contributors to Thailand's gross domestic product (GDP) is its tourism industry. With a total contribution of over 82.5 billion USD, or 20.6 percent of Thailand's annual GDP, in 2016 and increased by 9.4 percent in 2017, it has been proven to be an essential part of Thailand's economy. Naturally the Thai government has a high interest in maintaining the flourishing tourism industry and its continuous growth. For this purpose several policies are installed. A main goal of these policies is to establish Thailand as the "tourism hub of Southeast Asia".

The promotion of healthcare tourism in Thailand, making Thailand not only the tourism hub but also the healthcare tourism hub of Southeast Asia, is a subordinate item in the policy regarding general tourism. To reach this goal the Thai government has put special emphasis on providing world class medical therapies and highly professional staff to anyone choosing Thailand as their place of treatment. In detail, the Ministry of Public Health launched its first five year strategic plan in 2004 with the goal to promote "Thailand as World Class Healthcare Destination". Due to the success of this first plan a second five year plan has been put into action in 2010 continuing the establishment of Thailand as "The Center of Excellent Healthcare in Asia". However, the plan focused on the following three aspects. The first aspect is the medical healthcare business, in particular medical treatment aimed at foreign tourists who want to access Thailand's excellent medical expertise. The second aspect is the constitutional business, including traditional Thai massage and spa treatments. The third and last aspect is the international trade with traditional Thai medicine and herbs in cosmetics, alternative medicine and supplementary food. (Ministry of Public Health, Thailand, 2011)

As seen above, spa treatments are one of the main healthcare services in Thailand. The spa business is one of the main sectors of the tourism industry in Thailand attracting vast amounts of tourists each year. In 2017, the spa business has had a gross income of 33.5 billion Thai Baht which is steadily increasing year by year. Therefore, the Thai government established a policy pushing Thailand to become the "Capital Spa of Asia" or "Thailand as a World Class Spa Destination" by putting special emphasis on its distinctive features. In 2016 the Ministry of Public Health counted 2,053 spa establishments being legally registered. Out of these establishments 1,790 are located in Bangkok and 263 in other regions of the country, with 3 in the northern region, 23 establishments in the north-eastern region, 113 located in central Thailand and 124 establishments in the south.

As shown earlier, the revenues in the spa business are rising, and hence it is in its best interest for the government to support and nourish this business sector. A possible point of influence is the installation of service quality control. Due to the fast growth of the spa sector such a control is essential in order to maintain a globally competitive level of service quality and therefore a competitive domestic market.

At present, there are 3 Ministries in Thailand that are in charge of the spa sector, namely Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Tourism and Sports and Ministry of Commerce.

## 2. Policy Framework for Spas

The Thai government policy since 2004 has been pushing Thailand as a "World Class Spa Destination". The government entrusts the Ministry of Public Health with the responsibility of developing strategies and work plans. The related development strategies for spas are as follows;

- (1) Human resource development for service, including entrepreneurs, service providers in the field of management, marketing and human resource management. Its aim is to improve the quality of service.
- (2) Service standard development, measures to promote and support businesses that are lacking in the development process to upgrade standards. These measures include expert consultation for the development of standards and provision of loans under condition to improve service facilities and acquire necessary equipment.
- (3) Pricing standard development to reduce competition among entrepreneurs having a negative effect on standard of service and service prices. These effects are a channel for concealed services that affect the overall

picture of health tourism.

(4) Image development in the massage profession by promoting a better public perception, for example by bringing successful people to public attention in order to attract more people into this profession. Its aim is to reduce the human resource shortage.

(5) Labor development, including studies and evaluation of labor demands for formation of a general guideline for working conditions. Moreover, it includes the development of curriculum standards based on professional qualifications and of standards for personnel to meet the market's needs and support the expansion of health services in the present and future.

(6) Marketing development, including the development of a multilingual website for health services in Thailand and organization of activities and exhibitions for these activities.

(7) Health promotion service development, to promote and support services to advance general health, excellence, uniqueness, Thai identity and quality to meet the standards. The plans are as following;

- Promote and develop establishments to be certified for quality and meeting the standards as required by law.
- Promote spa establishments to meet international standards.
- Promote spa establishments to be recognized by international organizations.
- To certify the quality and standards of establishment of Thai entrepreneurs who operate spas in foreign countries.
- Develop Certified Body domestically and internationally.
- Promote Thai entrepreneurs overseas to join the supervision board and be the representative to work together with the Thai government
- Promote the Thai spa and massage to become a world cultural heritage certified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Develop a national examination for future spa employees.
- Negotiate with oversea institutes to accept the qualification of Thai staffs that have graduated in Thailand via the national examination in order to qualify the international standard and enabling them to acquire a license to work abroad.
- Develop educational institutes that provide staff for spa sector. These institutes should provide knowledge and learning according to the curriculum by the Ministry of Public Health.
- Consider the private sector to be involved in the training of human resources in healthcare including undergraduate and postgraduate degree.

From the above, policies and strategies are established. Moreover, the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand brought forth standards for spa establishments. These standards are as follows;

(1) Service quality standard, to examine the accuracy of service quality to provide customer satisfaction.

(2) Staff skill standard, to examine knowledge and skills of the staff to guarantee a secure service.

(3) Product tool and equipment standard, to provide good quality products, instruments and equipment for the offered services.

(4) Organization and management quality standard, the establishment concerns the importance of management efficiency.

(5) Ambient standard, to establish a surrounding environment catering to all of the customer's five senses, such as sight, taste, hearing, smell and touch.

Standards	Indicators
<p><b>Service quality standard</b></p>	<p><b>1. Provide four services in the establishment including;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hydrotherapy treatments</li> <li>- Thermotherapy treatments</li> <li>- Cryotherapy treatments</li> <li>- Massage</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Additional services including;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Body treatment</li> <li>- Facial treatment</li> <li>- Additional technique for relaxation such as sound therapy, meditation, yoga and oxygen therapy, etc.</li> <li>- Provision of healthy food and beverages with additional dietary consultation</li> <li>- Detoxification</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Processes in the service including;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide a written spa program and menu to customers, including times and rates.</li> <li>- Provide standardized treatments.</li> <li>- Provide manual treatment and immediate staff response</li> <li>- Provide a safety system during the service.</li> <li>- Evaluate the customer satisfaction in order to further improve service.</li> <li>- Provide appointment, cancel and transaction service.</li> <li>- Offer spa products and souvenirs for customers.</li> <li>- Provide information and advices on services.</li> <li>- Evaluate quality of the provider after service.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Staff skill standard</b></p>	<p><b>1. Operator for spa service, Manager of spa services;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Able to speak Thai and foreign language.</li> <li>- A leader, motivating and being responsible for employees and service quality in order to bring forth customer satisfaction.</li> <li>- Interacts with customers and gets customers' feedback about accommodation in spa establishment.</li> <li>- Able to do domestic and international marketing for spa service.</li> <li>- Provide staff training for best service quality.</li> <li>- Able to handle, manage and take care of environment for customer satisfaction.</li> <li>- Able to work with other teams and departments in the spa establishment.</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Service provide;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Service providers pass spa specialized training by the regulation of Ministry of Public Health, Thailand.</li> <li>- Fluent in spoken Thai and able to speak at least one foreign language.</li> <li>- Responsible for service and treatments to provide customer satisfaction.</li> <li>- Provides polite and friendly service.</li> <li>- Has a strong sense of responsibility.</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Spa receptionist / guest relations officer</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has at least a diploma degree or equivalent.</li> <li>- Fluent in spoken Thai and able to speak at least one foreign language.</li> <li>- Provides polite and friendly service</li> <li>- Able to provide information on treatments and products.</li> <li>- Able to solve the customers' problems.</li> </ul>

Standards	Indicators
<b>Product tool and equipment standard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Products for use and sale have to pass the standard of the Food and Drug Administration or identify the source production.</li> <li>- Import products from overseas have to have a Certificate of Manufacturer or Certificate of Free Sale</li> <li>- Products for use and sale need to have quality control.</li> <li>- Products for use and sale need to be safe and have product liability.</li> <li>- Products for use and sale should provide labels with the correct details according to Thai law.</li> <li>- Products for use and sale are kept in proper packaging and temperature.</li> <li>- Product tools and equipment used in the spa should have certified standards and user manuals.</li> <li>- Tools and equipment are well maintained.</li> <li>- Tools and equipment are cleaned after use.</li> </ul>
<b>Organization and management quality standard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have an organization chart and provide job descriptions.</li> <li>- Have a clear command line.</li> <li>- Have a hiring system and clarify the compensation correctly according to the Thai Labor Law.</li> <li>- Have a Human Resource Development Plan.</li> <li>- Have a Manual of Operation to maintain service standards.</li> <li>- Provide an annual accounting system and evaluate the business performance according to international standards.</li> <li>- Have an inventory control system.</li> <li>- Provide corporate social responsibility.</li> </ul>
<b>Ambient standard</b>	<p><b>1. Location and surrounding area;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide natural and traditional Thai decoration.</li> <li>- Reception and treatment area should be separated to not disturb other customers.</li> <li>- Located in a befitting landscape.</li> <li>- Provide clear establishment layout in each spot.</li> <li>- Provide clean sanitation.</li> <li>- Provide relaxing and appropriate light.</li> <li>- Provide relaxing and appropriate aroma.</li> <li>- Provide relaxing music.</li> <li>- Have a safety system.</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Facilities;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide lockers for customers to safely store belongings.</li> <li>- Provide relaxation area.</li> <li>- Provide healthy beverages for customer.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide a reading area.</li> <li>- Provide a consultation area.</li> <li>- Provide a meditation area.</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Conservation and environmental protection;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has an environmental policy such as environmental protection and reduce global warming standards.</li> <li>- Use water efficiently and manage wastewater.</li> <li>- Trash separation and recycling</li> </ul>

### 3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Tourism industry is one of the main contributors to Thailand's gross domestic product (GDP). Therefore, the Thai government maintains to develop this sector. One of policies is to promote "Thailand as World Class Health Care Destination". This is done by supporting traditional Thai massage and spa treatments. The spa

business is one of the main health care services in Thailand and attracting vast amounts of tourists each year. Therefore, to maintain the service quality, the Thai government established policies, strategies and standards to developed spas in Thailand. The contents include human resource, service, pricing, image, labor, marketing and health promotion service.

The overview of the policy framework on spas in Thailand can be suggested for future study and researcher such as governmental use, business and academic field. This paper will become the database of policy framework on spas in Thailand.

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