

## BETONG: A POTENTIAL WELLNESS TOURISM DESTINATION IN THE DEEP SOUTH OF THAILAND

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**Abstract:** According to the world wellness tourism trend, Thailand has promoted wellness tourism to boost its competitiveness. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the potential of Betong district in Yala province to be a wellness destination in the deep south of Thailand serving both domestic and international tourists. This study applied qualitative analysis to primary and secondary data on tourists' demand for wellness tourism services and the standard of wellness tourism services supplied in Betong. The findings revealed that Betong's wellness tourism services, found to have high market potential, include gastronomy services, Betong hot springs, and historical and community-based tourism destinations. These indicated that Betong has the potential to become a wellness tourism destination. However, Betong has to develop new services like herbal tourism and halal tourism as well as creative tourism products and services to increase its competitiveness and achieve inclusive income distribution and sustainable growth.

**Key words:** Hot spring, Gastronomy, SWOT analysis, TOWS Matrix, modified BCG Matrix

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### INTRODUCTION

Wellness tourism is currently receiving a lot of attention from tourists all over the world, due to the increasing concern among tourist on matters related to health care or rehabilitation in making themselves stronger and live a longer. According to the Global Wellness Institute, wellness tourism is defined as “travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one's personal wellbeing”. As a result, wellness tourism services include various tourism activities, such as sightseeing at natural and cultural sites, learning about local customs, and receiving wellness services in hotels or accommodations such as massages and spa treatments. The global wellness tourism market has increased from \$617 billion in 2017 to \$720.4 billion in 2019 and is expected to fall to \$435.7 billion in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, global wellness tourism is expected to grow at a rate of 20.9 percent per year between 2020 and 2025 (Yeung and Johnston, 2021). Thailand was positioned as the world's fifteen largest wellness tourism expenditures in 2020, with a spending value of \$4.7 billion, and was Asia's fourth largest wellness tourism market after China, Japan, and India (Yeung and Johnston, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on tourism in Thailand.

The numbers of both domestic and foreign visitors were significantly less during COVID-19. However, following the ending of COVID-19 pandemic, there is an increasing interest among tourist towards wellness services, Thailand has seemed to likely attract wellness tourists from all over the world. Betong district in Yala province of Thailand, located at the border between Thailand and Malaysia with latitude 5.773056 and longitude 101.0725, is an attractive tourism destination for both domestic and international tourists especially among Malaysian in the tourism route connecting Hat Yai District in Songkhla Province and three southern border provinces of Thailand, including Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat. Not only having several tourism attractions, but Betong also has a border crossing point between Thailand and Malaysia. As a result, Betong has become the third highest number of Malaysian tourists' destination in the south after Sadao district in Songkhla province and the Su-ngai Kolok district in Narathiwat Province (Praprom and Laipaporn, 2022).

Formerly, Betong was famous for its nightlife tourism that have attracted a large number of Malaysian tourists. However, it had resulted in social problems, especially the problem of human trafficking and the illegal sex trade (Wungaeo, 2014; Ball and Farrelly, 2012). Unfortunately, the unrest that erupted in 2004 caused the tourism situation in Betong and the surrounding areas to continuously deteriorate and affect the travel decision of domestic tourists from other regions of Thailand (Praprom and Laipaporn, 2021). In order to mitigate the impact of the unrest, Thai government thus initiated the economic development plan in the southern border provinces which Betong District is one of the targets following the Stability, Wealth, and Sustainability Triangle project. The government supports the development of the infrastructure linking the existing tourist attractions and develop new tourist attractions with the hope that economic development through tourism will make people in the area to have a better living and reduce the incidence of unrest (Malisuwan et al., 2021). In accordance with the Thailand tourism development policy that focuses on the wellness

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tourism, Praprom and Laipaporn (2021) found that Betong has nine wellness tourism services that most of the tourists who travelled to Betong, were interested in. These services consisted of 1) natural sightseeing, 2) visiting historical and community - based tourism destination,

3) visiting hot springs, 4) patronizing and using beauty and spa services, 5) utilizing traditional massage, 6) visiting religion tourism destination, 7) gastronomy services, 8) visiting street arts and 9) performing health checkup. Moreover, that study also revealed that tourists had different willingness to pay for each service which were determined by characteristics and behaviors of the travelers. For all wellness tourism services, the overall tourists' willingness to pay was 2,587.8 baht per person per trip. Whereas, the Malaysian tourists' willingness to pay were a 2,745.5 baht which is more than the willingness to pay by Thai tourists at 2,114.7 baht per person per trip.

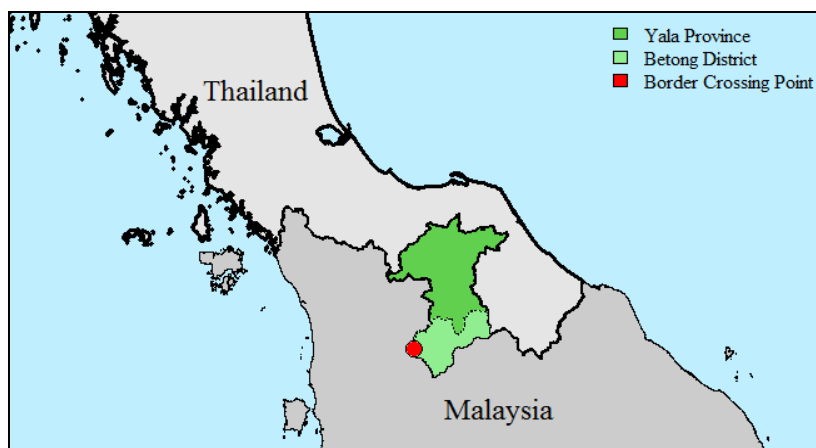


Figure 1. The study area in Betong district, Yala province in the deep south of Thailand (Source: Author)

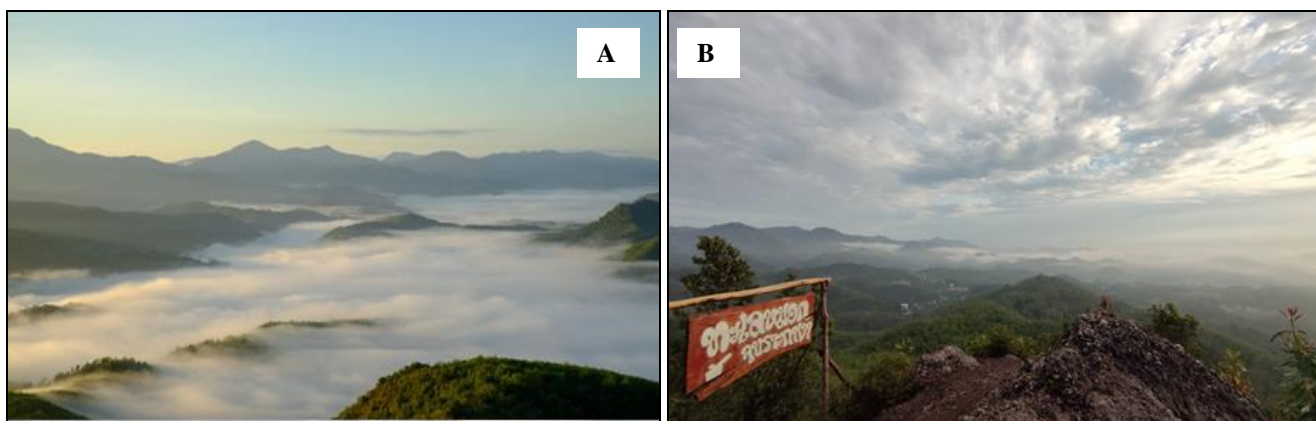


Figure 2. The sea of mist viewpoints in Betong, A) Gunung Silipat viewpoints; B) Jarohganga viewpoints (Source: Author, 2020)

However, only the demand potential analysis from Praprom and Laipaporn (2021) is not sufficient to answer the question of whether Betong has the potential to be a wellness tourism destination or the otherwise. Therefore, this study aims to 1) investigate the supply potential of wellness tourism in Betong and then utilized these findings with the demand potential analysis from Praprom and Laipaporn (2021) to indicate the overall potential of wellness tourism at Betong, then 2) provide the implementation strategies for developing Betong to become a wellness tourism destination as well.

To assess supply potential, analyze market potential and provide implementation strategies for developing wellness tourism in various countries, previous studies mostly employed 6As tourism components framework, SWOT and TOWS analysis and Boston Group Consulting or BCG matrix. As indicated in recent studies, the 6As tourism components, which consisted of attraction, accessibility, amenities, ancillary services, available programs and activities, were generally employed for qualitatively assessing supply potential (Canson and Caelian, 2022; Bernal Escoto et al., 2021; Pattiyagedara and Fernando, 2020). The 6As components indicated the potential of a particular tourism destination in various aspects. The attraction of a destination among the tourists mainly focuses on how attractive is the tourism destination or tourism services offered such as the uniqueness, reasonable pricing, strategic location and favorable weather condition. The accessibility emphasizes on how easy for the tourists to access the tourism services or destination. Then, the amenities provided is another factor that relate to the tourism facilities available in the tourism destination such as accommodations, food providers as well as local markets for shopping. Consequently, the ancillary service is also another relevant factor related to additional services for the tourists such as banking and financial services, telecommunication facilities, and hospital or health services. In the rural area, normally, tourism destination is lacking in terms of the ancillary services and need to be improved (Pattiyagedara and Fernando, 2020). Lastly, the available programs and activities were indicated by the various kinds of tour packages and tourism activities provided in the tourism destination. For assessing and analysis market potential of wellness tourism, SWOT analysis was another methodology widely employed (Fertas et al., 2022; Brisevac et al., 2021; Rahyuda et al., 2021; Paungya et al., 2020; Khanal and Shimizu, 2019). This analysis does not only assess the internal factors indicating strength and weakness of the tourism destination, but also reflects the effects of the external factors, including opportunities and threats of the tourism destination, that can be beneficial or harmful to tourism development as well. Moreover, SWOT analysis provides the inputs for further analysis namely the TOWS analysis. The TOWS analysis is normally used for generating

implemented strategies consisted of Strength-Opportunity strategy, Strength-Threat strategy, Weakness-Opportunity strategy, and Weakness-Threat strategy (Sumanapala et al., 2021).

Likewise, the Boston Consulting Group or BCG matrix is another framework used in various studies by many researchers to formulate the developmental strategy and classify market position or segment of any investigated tourism products. (Bernal Escoto et al., 2021; Jeong Won et al., 2021; Prawira and Budisetyorini, 2021). The BCG matrix provides strategic assessment of the highest potential tourism products and indicates the most effective strategy for fair allocation of resources. For example, Prawira and Budisetyorini (2021) employed the BCG matrix to indicate the market potential of fishing tourism in Lancang Island, Kepulauan Seribu, Indonesia among its competitors and then recommended the strategy to improve qualities of relevant tourism product and services and recommended a marketing strategy through online marketing. The methodologies used in this study mostly based on literature reviews. However, this study additionally utilized Thailand tourism standards which can be obtained from the website of Ministry of Tourism and Sport (<https://tts.dot.go.th>) as another guidelines to assess overall supply potential of each wellness tourism services in Betong. Since these standards bases on numerical assessment. Accordingly, they effectively reveal more precise comparison in overall supply potential of wellness tourism services than 6As tourism components. All findings of this study are hoped to benefits all stakeholders as an information for not only supporting wellness tourism development in Betong but also other tourism destination in the deep south border of Thailand.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study applied qualitative methodology to investigate the potential of wellness tourism in Betong as showed in Figure 3 by employing 6As tourism components and Thailand tourism standard. In addition, this study applied SWOT and TOWS analysis to obtain the implementation strategy and subsequently employed the modified BCG matrix in order to position market potential of wellness tourism services in Betong. Details of the methodology were described as follows.

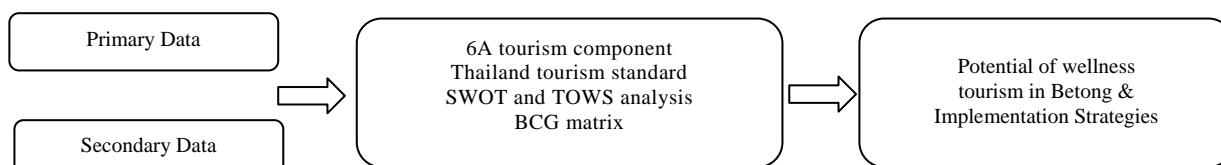


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework Diagram (Source: Authors)

### 1) Key informants

This study focused on the supply-side of wellness tourism in Betong. Therefore, the population of this study included the wellness tourism service providers, government and private organizations involved in this industry. Initially, government and private organizations such as Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), Betong Tourism association, Betong Municipality, Yala Provincial Administrative organizations, etc., were selected specifically as key informants. The snowball technique was then used for the other informants until the data became saturated.

### 2) Data Collection

This study employed both primary data and secondary data. The primary data was obtained by focus group discussion and in-depth interview, whereas the secondary data was related to the demand side data which included proportions of the tourists' utilizing for each wellness tourism services in Betong mainly obtained from Praprom and Laipaporn (2021). The questions in focus group and in-depth interview revolved around 6A tourism components and the standard and potential of wellness tourism services providing included 1) the number of establishments or tourist attractions providing wellness tourism, 2) the potential to serve tourists, 3) standards for providing wellness tourism services (applying Thailand tourism standard), 4) ease for assessing information about wellness tourism services, 5) ease for assessing to wellness tourism service providers, 6) prices, 7) cost structure, 8) critical public policy, 9) key factors affecting the wellness tourism development, and 10) recommendation for wellness tourism development.

The wellness tourism services investigated in this study were focused on nine wellness tourism services including 1) sight seeing at Aiyerweng Skywalk and other sea of mist viewpoints, 2) visiting historical and community-based tourism at Piyamit Tunnel, Chulabhorn Pattana 10<sup>th</sup> community and winter flower garden, 3) visiting Betong and Nakor hot spring, 4) beauty and spa services, 5) traditional massage services, 6) religion tourism, 7) gastronomy tourism services in municipal area and non-municipal area, 8) visiting street arts and 9) health checkup services. Then, the thematic analysis and triangulation technique were also applied prior to the data analysis.

### 3) Data Analysis

The information and data collected from focus groups and in-depth interviews were categorized and analyzed with the secondary data following strictly to the objectives of the study. This study employed five qualitative methods characterized as follows. The first step focused on the strength, weakness opportunity and treat (SWOT) analysis of wellness tourism in Betong. Then, the second step was to analyze the potentiality of supplying wellness tourism services in Betong by employing 6As tourism components and standards for providing wellness tourism services. Each 6As tourism components were evaluated from primary data and then categorized into three levels: Good, Moderate and Poor, whereas standards for providing wellness tourism services following Thailand tourism standard were evaluated by key informants. There are 5 levels of assessment in standards for providing wellness tourism services namely quoted as-follows: a) poor (0-50 points), b) moderate (51-60 points), c) Good (61-70 points), d) very good (71-80 points), and e) excellent (81-100 points).

The third step was utilizing the modified BCG matrix to determine the feasible wellness tourism services. This study alternatively applied the proportion of tourists' service usage from Praprom and Laipaporn (2021) which reported in percentage and points of standards for providing wellness tourism services as a measure used to indicate overall demand and supply potential in all nine types of wellness tourism services instead of using the growth and market share of each tourism services following the previous study since those two latter data were not available. However, the proportion of tourists' usage and points of standards for providing wellness tourism services were gathered from different sources and assessment basis. Therefore, both indicators were consequently adjusted to a Standard Score (T Score) as illustrated in the following formula (Romano, 2018).

$$T_i = \left[ \left( \frac{x_i - \mu}{\sigma} \right) \times 10 \right] + 50 \quad (1)$$

Where  $T_i$  was a calculated T-score,  $x_i$  was indicator, that included proportion of the tourists utilizing each wellness tourism service and evaluated scores of wellness services standards.  $\mu$  and  $\sigma$  are mean and standard deviation of each indicators respectively. These T scores have their mean equal to 50 and their standard deviation equal to 10. Finally ending up with the TOWS matrix analysis to provide the recommendation for policy implementation in developing Betong into becoming a wellness tourism destination.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Praprom and Laipaporn (2021), there were nine wellness tourism services used by most tourists. The overall supply of those services was consequently assessed to verify their potential as follows.

### 1) SWOT Analysis of Overall Supply of Wellness Tourism Services in Betong

The SWOT analysis showed that there were various internal and external factors that might affect the performance of wellness tourism services in Betong. The internal factors, strength and weakness, as well as the external factors, opportunities and threat, were subsequently described as follows.

The first strength of wellness tourism supply of Betong is the weather. Betong is named as "a city in the mist" by its cool weather. Moreover, Betong has low air pollution indicated by a small amount of PM 2.5 throughout the year. Secondly, Betong also has various tourist attractions, including natural, cultural, and community-based attractions that are ready to provide wellness tourism services as well as new tourist attractions that local tour operators and government agencies have tried to develop to capably cater for tourists' attraction continuously. Thirdly, Betong has the wisdom of using herbs that is passed down from generation to generation. Herbal products and treatments were considered as products accepted and liked by tourists and the general public. Lastly, Betong has its own identified authentic local ingredients or sources for cooking such as Betong's chicken, watercress, grass carp, aquaculture Tilapia fish raised in flowing waters, etc. With local culinary wisdom, these fresh ingredients have become famous local dishes that every traveler must try.

The critical weakness of Betong wellness tourism supply is standard of quality of tourism sites, especially the toilets hygiene and waste management such as unmanaged rubbish. Improper quality standards enormously affected tourists' first impression. These reflected to the inadequacy of knowledge and improper management among local tourism service providers. Public transport was the second weakness that has caused difficulties among tourists to get to the attractions area outside the municipal area. Shortage of service provider was the third weakness. Despite being well known in Thailand, there are very few beauty and spa providers in Betong due to the lack or limitation among local entrepreneurs' in terms of monetary funding for investment in this type of business. Hence, there is not enough provider to serve the tourists' demand for these services. Lastly, a lot of tourism attractions established by public sector have been abandoned or have not been used to their fullest capacity, such as wellness service promotion center, indicating public loss in investment opportunity.

The significant opportunity of wellness tourism supply in Betong is continuous tourism demand of Malaysian tourists. It was clearly found that Malaysian tourists prefer to visit Betong which was indicated by their have continuously inquiries to the travel agencies, despite the pandemic, and had expressed their intention to travel to Betong after the outbreak situation improves. Secondly, Betong was the Thai government's development target in the Triangle of Stability, Wealth, and Sustainability project. This has subsequently caused high investment in terms of infrastructure, such as Aiyerweng Skywalk and Betong International Airport, that has attracted and facilitated tourists traveling. Lastly, the global health care trend has expanded continuously. This has then created more demands among tourists toward herbal products and wellness services in Betong. During the COVID-19 pandemic, several herbal pharmacies in Betong had to export herbal products to serve Malaysian tourists who used to buy these products but could not come to Betong. The serious threat found in this analysis was the effect of the COVID-19 to Malaysian economy. The COVID-19 affected the Malaysian consumption (Shah et al., 2020). The Malaysian ringgit has faced devaluation significantly due to the pandemic (Shahrier, 2022). Subsequently, it has caused Malaysian tourists to have less spending power. In addition, tourism regulations have become more complex and has affected the convenience of serving tourists. Traditional massage, beauty and spa services have to discontinue following government regulations during the pandemic. To further aggravate the condition, the unrest in southern Thailand has not yet been resolved. While the past image of Betong as a famous destination for night life tourism still persist in the mind of the tourist, undoubtedly, it is still a factor affecting the tourists' decision, especially family tourists.

### 2) The Supply Potentials of Wellness Tourism Services in Betong

The supply potentials of wellness tourism services in Betong were separately analyzed by using the 6As tourism components and employing standards for providing wellness tourism services as an overall supply potential indicator as shown in Table 1. Wellness tourism services in Betong are located in many areas, both in municipal area and non-municipal area. Following the 6As components, most of the wellness tourism services were found to be in the categories of

good and moderate attractive, except for the health checkup services which was in the category of poor attractive. The accessibility of these investigated services was generally good due to the high investment on infrastructure developments by the government following the Triangle area project. However, the wellness tourism services in remote area such as sightseeing at the other sea of mist viewpoints (Kunung Silipat, Kunung Tohni, and Jarohganga) and visiting Nakor hot spring were found to be moderately attractive since their locations were in the jungle with only walking route or narrow road, thus making tourists difficult to travel. Amenities components of investigated wellness tourism services were generally moderate. Only sightseeing at other sea of mist viewpoints and visiting street art had poor amenities components, since there were less tourism facilities in remote areas and the street art had limited public information on their location. Tourists had only one option of obtaining information that is via online. Most of wellness tourism services in Betong were limited by the traveling package of tourism agency and could be arranged in various programs following different demand of tourists.

However, the investigated wellness tourism services did not have various activities whereby many services were found to have poor activities components. Lastly, the ancillary services components of wellness tourism services in non-municipal area were found to be poor which was in contrast to the services within the municipality area where several ancillary services were readily available. Consequently, for those tourism destinations in non-municipal areas, the wellness tourism services provided has to be developed as stated in the previous studies (Pattiyagedara and Fernando, 2020). According to standards for providing wellness tourism services, most of investigated wellness tourism services in Betong have standard scores higher than 50 except for the sightseeing activities at other sea of mist viewpoints which were found to be of poor standard.

Table 1. The supply potentials assessment of nine wellness tourism services by 6As tourism components and Standards for providing wellness tourism services (Source: Authors)

Wellness Tourism Services	Components of Tourism (6A)						Standards for providing wellness tourism services (Total 100 points)
	Attraction	Accessibility	Amenities	Available Package	Activities	Ancillary Services	
1.1 Sightseeing at Aiyerweng Skywalk	Good	Good	Good	Good	Poor	Poor	Moderate (59.54)
1.2 Sightseeing at other sea of mist viewpoints (Gunung Silipat, Gunung Tohni, and Jarohganga)	Good	Poor	Poor	Good	Poor	Poor	Poor (48.23)
2. Historical and Community-Based Tourism (Piyamit tunnel, Chulaborn Pattana 10th, Winter flower garden)	Good	Good	Moderate	Good	Poor	Poor	Good (70.75)
3.1 Betong Hot Spring	Moderate	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good (71.67)
3.2 Nakor Hot Spring	Moderate	Poor	Moderate	Moderate	Good	Poor	Moderate (52.18)
4. Beauty and Spa	Moderate	Good	Moderate	Good	Good	Good	Excellent (82.87)
5. Traditional Massage	Good	Good	Moderate	Good	Poor	Good	Excellent (90.72)
6. Religion Tourism	Good	Good	Moderate	Good	Poor	Good	Good (60.74)
7.1 Gastronomy Tourism (municipal area)	Good	Good	Moderate	Good	Poor	Good	Excellent (91.37)
7.2 Gastronomy Tourism (non-municipal area)	Good	Good	Moderate	Good	Good	Poor	Excellent (88.59)
8. Street Arts	Moderate	Good	Poor	Good	Poor	Good	Moderate (53.29)
9. Health Checkup	Poor	Good	Moderate	Moderate	Poor	Good	Good (77.85)

Table 2. Indicators and standard scores for demand and supply of nine wellness tourism services in Betong (Source: Authors)

Wellness Tourism Services	Indicators		Standard Scores	
	Demand (Percentage)	Supply (Points)	Demand (Scores)	Supply (Scores)
1.1 Sightseeing at Aiyerweng Skywalk	87.75	59.54	61.70	42.94
1.2 Sightseeing at other sea of mist viewpoints (Gunung Silipat, Gunung Tohni, and Jarohganga)	87.75	48.23	61.70	35.75
2. Historical and Community-Based Tourism (Piyamit tunnel, Chulaborn Pattana 10th, Winter flower garden)	74.75	70.75	55.80	50.06
3.1 Betong Hot Spring	79.25	71.67	57.84	50.64
3.2 Nakor Hot Spring	79.25	52.18	57.84	38.26
4. Beauty and Spa	34.00	82.87	37.32	57.76
5. Traditional Massage	53.75	90.72	46.28	62.77
6. Religion Tourism	49.75	60.74	44.46	43.70
7.1 Gastronomy Tourism (municipal area)	65.50	91.37	51.61	63.16
7.2 Gastronomy Tourism (non-municipal area)	65.50	88.59	51.61	61.40
8. Street Arts	50.00	53.29	44.58	38.97
9. Health Checkup	16.25	77.85	29.27	54.57

### 3) The Assessment of Wellness Tourism Services in Betong by Modified BCG Matrix

Indicators of demand and supply were used to generate modified BCG matrix obtained from the tourists' proportions utilizing each wellness tourism service from Praprom and Laipaporn (2021) and points of standards for providing wellness tourism services of each service assessed in this study. These indicators were transformed into standard score (T-Score) as shown in Table 2 and then modified BCG matrix was generated as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4 showed that there are four wellness tourism services in the raising star quadrant (S) with high proportion of tourist usage and high standard of tourism service, namely: 1) gastronomy services in municipal area, 2) gastronomy

services in non-municipal area, 3) visiting Betong hot spring, and 4) visit historical and community-based tourism destinations. Although these services were better than the others, they still have development gap in order to increase their competitiveness. The services in the question mark quadrant (Q) of the modified BCG matrix with high proportion of tourist usage and low standard of tourism service include 1) Sightseeing at Aiyerweng skywalk, 2) Nakor hot spring, and 3) Sightseeing at the other sea of mist viewpoints. It was found that the potential demand in these services were high, but their supply standard was lower than the other area. Thus, improvement is needed in terms of their standard and related tourism components such as accessibility, cleanliness, and waste management, etc.

In the cash cow quadrant (C) with low proportion of tourist usage and high standard of tourism service, there are three wellness tourism services that prevailed comprising of these services as follows: 1) Thai traditional massage, 2) spa and beauty services, and 3) health checkup service. All three services are considered to have high standard of supply, since they have been regulated by their corresponding public authorities. However, sound marketing strategies are needed in order to promote these services to encourage more tourists demand after the COVID-19 pandemic. The last quadrant of the modified BCG matrix is the dog quadrant (D) which comprised of religious tourism service and leisure services in listening to music, reading and watching art. These two services exhibited low proportion of tourist usage and low standard of tourism services. According to additional interviews held with tourists and entrepreneurs in Betong District, most of them agreed that religious tourism was not the first choice to visit among general tourists, because they were less famous and less attractive than other attraction in the neighboring provinces. Moreover, most of the street art did not reflect the way of life, legend, history, and identity of Betong, which is found to be very much different than the street arts at the old town in Songkhla province, Thailand or the street arts in Penang, Malaysia, that were more unique and have better story telling.

Development Strategies Derived from TOWS Matrix Analysis

Following the SWOT analysis and the BCG matrix analysis, the TOWS matrix was subsequently analyzed as follows. According to the strength and opportunity of wellness tourism services' supply in Betong, the local wisdom and food ingredients as well as herb are found to be very unique. Some of well-known menus showed in Figure 5. Therefore, to serve to the continuously increasing number of tourists' demand, the first aggressive strategy was inventing the new products and tourism activities by applying local wisdoms and local natural resources, such as mineral water facial spays from Betong hot spring or Nakor hot spring (Figure 6) and instant food mixed with local herbal ingredient. In addition, the government should have clear development goals and continuous support especially in the area of investment in research and development. Consequently, the private sector will then be able to expand the wellness tourism market more easily.

Furthermore, travel agencies and local tourism services providers should focus on the global wellness tourism trends and needs of tourists, especially Malaysian tourists, which are considered as important markets in Betong. The strategy on increasing the variety of wellness tourism products and services as well as developing and maintaining tourist attractions to better serve tourists should be looked into seriously. For the strategies

from the combination of a weakness and opportunity of wellness tourism services' supply in Betong, the most important point is to improve the cleanliness of the tourism attractions, increase the standard of wellness tourism services and develop tourism components that is still considered as weakness. Moreover, the public transport link in Betong should be established as well as providing opportunities for the private sector to participate in transport services through public private partnership (PPP) or introduction of private on-demand transportation services such as Grab or Uber car. Park, Kim and Pan

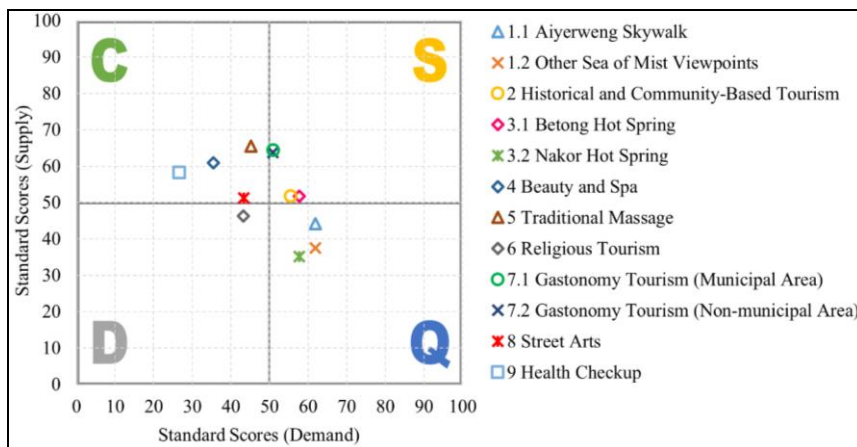


Figure 4. The modified BCG Matrix of wellness tourism services in Betong (Source: Authors)

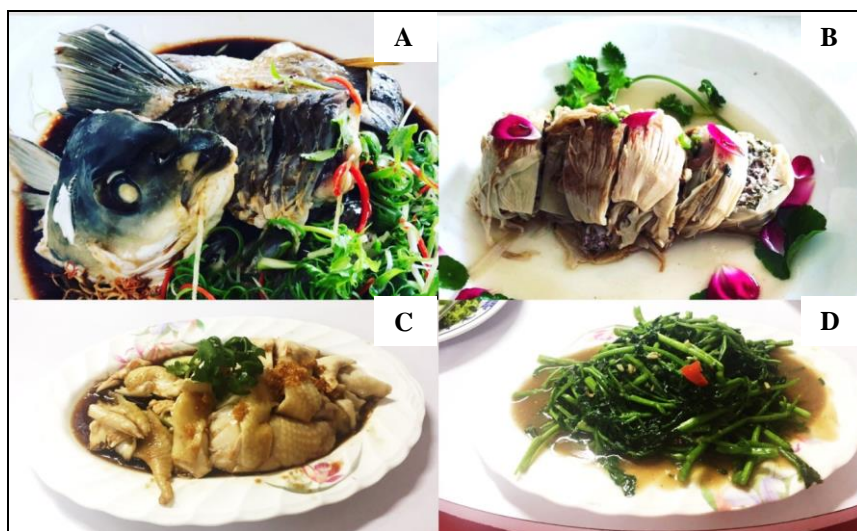


Figure 5. Well-known menus in Betong, A. steamed grass carp with soy sauce, B. rolled bamboo shoot with minced pork, C. chopped Betong chicken, D. stir-fried watercress (Source: Authors, 2021)

(2020) showed that Uber plays a key role in the expansion of the tourism economy in sub-Saharan African countries, whereas poor public transport was a hindrance to tourism in remote areas. Additionally, the Betong international airport should be promoted as a main alternative traveling route for both domestic and international tourists. Nonetheless, tourism authority of Thailand and relevant government agencies should support the Betong private sector in developing entrepreneurial skills and professional skills for wellness tourism services. This can be done through the introduction of a low interest source of funds that will allow the business to expand correspondingly to the growth of the wellness tourism market in the future.



Figure 6. Nakor hot spring (Source: Authors, 2021)

Based on the elements of strength and threat of wellness tourism services' supply in Betong, the first diversification strategy is to promote and improve Betong tourism image. Although the unrest in the deep south of Thailand persists, but Betong is still considered as attractive for tourists to visit, especially Malaysian tourists. This is because tourists visiting Betong feel safer compared to other nearby areas such as Narathiwat, Pattani and Yala. Therefore, relevant government agencies should encourage the tourism festival in Betong continuously following the Triangle of Stability, Wealth, and Sustainability project in order to stimulate both domestic and international tourists throughout the year. According to the weakness and threat of wellness tourism services' supply in Betong, one of the defensive strategies is to develop skills in providing halal wellness tourism services as an alternative tourism services to accommodate Muslim tourists from the deep southern provinces and Malaysia by inventing and promoting "halal" travel package. Corresponding to Dabphet (2021), providing quality halal services has a significant influence on increasing overall Muslim tourist satisfaction. Additionally, due to the complexity of the standard of tourism service and relevant regulations, the government agencies should facilitate local tourism entrepreneurs to improve their potential to meet those existing standard and regulations. Lastly, the tourism image of Betong should be improved in many ways such as by establishing new street arts that reflect history and way of life in Betong or rebranding Betong tourism from nightlife tourism to wellness tourism destination in the deep south of Thailand.

## CONCLUSION

According to the BCG matrix analysis in this study, the results showed that most of investigated wellness tourism services possess market potential, except for health checkup services. The wellness tourism services in the raising star quadrant that have the highest market potential include gastronomy services in municipal areas, gastronomy services in non-municipal area, visiting Betong hot spring, and visiting historical and community-based tourism destinations. With this analysis which obtained by both demand and supply indicators, it can be concluded that Betong has market potential to be a good wellness tourism destination. Additionally, the result from SWOT and TOWS matrix analysis revealed that to increase wellness tourism competitiveness, it has to invent new wellness tourism services. Since Betong is strategically located in the tropical forest zone, it has a great potential of tourism supply by initiating a unique service product offering called the "forest therapy" as the new wellness tourism services. However, further research and investigation need to be carried out in order to discover the suitability of the forest area that can enhance, facilitate and support the forest therapy program. Moreover, our finding indicated that Betong has the potential to be developed as a hub for herbal tourism since Betong is rich with herbal products that are famous to both domestic and international tourists as well as possessing the local wisdom of herb utilization and raw material to produce herbal medicine. Therefore, herbal tourism has a great potential to be a new development target for the Betong tourism. Moreover, in order to expand Betong tourism market, the concept of halal wellness tourism services have to be viewed seriously and should be supplied and strategized properly to serve existing demand. Tourism authority and government agencies should support Betong tourism entrepreneurs by providing training program about halal wellness services such as halal spa or halal massage or anything related to halal industry. The Prince of Songkla University Halal Institute could play an important role in taking advantage of the growing needs towards halal tourism in Betong. To further improve the infrastructure facilities for tourism, transportation in Betong should also be developed by connecting various available transport services to create a seamless tourism that can make tourists more comfortable in traveling, feeling safer and having lower traveling costs.

Furthermore, in order to increase the competitiveness of local entrepreneurs all tourism stakeholders in Betong should focus on the development of entrepreneurial skills, especially skills related to the development of local based ingredient food, local based material goods and services while tagging to concept of creative economy.

This can be done by adding value to local wisdom and creating a new experience for tourists through community-based tourism management. Consequently, these will also generate distribution of profits and reduce the impact of tourism. Although our findings provide useful information to the development of Betong as a wellness tourism destination, however further studies are needed in offering additional information and implementing policy following our recommendations.

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