# THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF A SECONDARY CITY ON THE EAST COAST BY E-DELPHI TECHNIQUE IN DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY, TOURISM IMAGE, AND DEMAND OF TOURISM

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## Abstract

The objective of this research was to study the opinions of experts on the development of tourism in secondary cities on the East Coast of Thailand, considering the dimensions of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand, including present guidelines for tourism development in secondary cities on the East Coast utilizing the e-Delphi technique. This study was of a future-oriented nature utilizing the electronic Delphi process with five experts consulted for brainstorming, consideration, diagnosis, and decision-making. The results of the research revealed 23 guidelines for tourism development of a secondary city on the East Coast which passed the consensus of experts; this accounted for 60 percent of the total guidelines generated. The results of the research show that the eastern coastline should have a strategic plan in place. The community should make available buses to service the tourist area and these should be easy to access. The staff at the attractions must always provide good and accurate service to instill consumer confidence in the services available. The community should establish a project to publicly promote their location as an interesting tourist area. They should also ensure that the original way of life is preserved within the community, presenting interesting and unique tourist attractions. The relevant agencies must develop a place which is safe in all respects, screening for Covid-19, and providing people with knowledge and understanding of the attractions through storytelling.

**Keywords:** Secondary City on the East Coast, Service Quality, Tourism Image, Demand of Tourism

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the Thai cabinet approved a tax measure to promote tourism in secondary cities. This measure allows residents to bring their expenses from tourism in a secondary city for a tax deduction of up to 15,000 baht in order to increase the number of tourists entering secondary cities. There are a total of five secondary cities in the eastern region, namely Sa Kaeo, Nakhon Nayok, Prachinburi, Chanthaburi and Trat (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2018). Chanthaburi and Trat are considered to be the two secondary cities in the eastern region that are predominantly adjacent to the coast. Chanthaburi city was founded around the 18th Buddhist century, with the Chong people, a tribe of the Mon family (Khmer) being the first indigenous people to settle in the eastern forest (Chanthaburi Provincial office, 2019). With regards to Trat Province, the word Trat is presumed to be distorted from the word "Krat", which is the name of a type of tree, found in abundance in ancient times, used to make brooms. Trat Province appeared as a city in the reign of King Prasat Thong as a seaside town under the foreign affairs department which was related to finance of one of the seaport cities and was deemed a place of importance, as it was suitable for a sea harbor for transferring, buying, and selling (Trat Provincial office, 2019). These two provinces of Thailand contain the secondary cities of the eastern seaboard of Thailand. They each contain many important attractions with outstanding natural beauty, as well as interesting culture and history.

Chanthaburi province contains many tourist attractions, such as Kung Wiman Beach, Chanthaboon Riverside Community, Khao Khitchakut National Park, and Queen Maria Patisonthiramon Cathedral. Trat province maintains the tourist attractions of Koh Chang, Koh Kood, Koh Kradat, and Koh Kham, which are shown on the map of tourist attractions in figure 1. The above attractions are unique, charming, and fascinating, in terms of history, culture and surrounding nature. This research will cover these two provinces, which both contain secondary cities of the East Coast. Currently, the tourism industry in Thailand has been severely affected by Coronavirus 2019 (or Covid-19), with a severe decline in tourists, causing a decrease in the income of the tourism industry and many tourism establishments have ceased trading. As a result, the unemployment numbers have increased, posing a significant problem for the Thai economy (Deeod, 2020; Sigala, 2020). The solution to this problem for tourism in the coastal cities of the East Coast is to urgently find an effective tourism development method.

Regarding the development of tourist attractions in secondary cities on the East Coast the first thing required to solve the problems is to study the service quality of the community or that related to the individual attractions according to the

(Chanthaburi province)                    (Trat province)
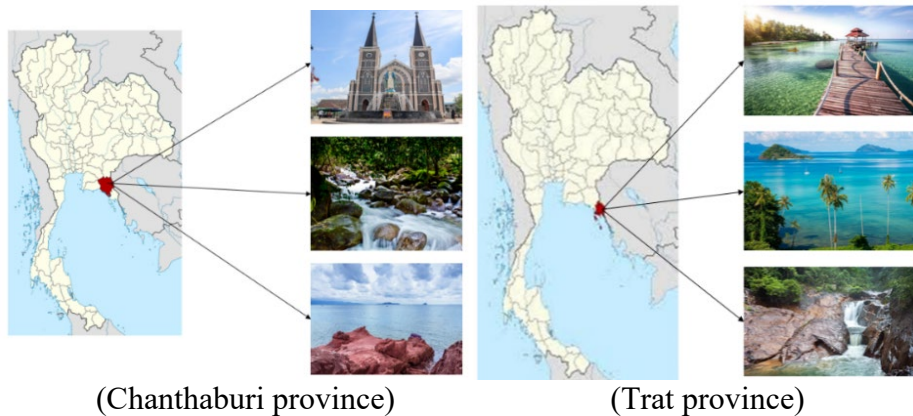
**Figure** 1 Map and Some attractions of Secondary Cities on the East Coast
(Chanthaburi Provincial office, 2019; Trat Provincial office, 2019)

theory of the 5 dimensions of service quality known as the "RATER Model". The RATER Model includes the components of Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy & Responsiveness. Quality of service is essential to the success of any business (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996; Parasuraman, 1985; Gronroos, 1990; William & Buswell, 2003). The dimension which requires further study is tourism image, which consists of the image of physical tourism, the image of cultural and historical tourism, the image of economic tourism, the image of construction tourism, and the image of vegetation and animal tourism (Burns & Novelli, 2008; Jittangwattana, 2005; Costa et al., 2016). The tourism image is an important factor, affecting tourists' decisions whether to travel in the present or in the future (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Zhang, Wu, & Buhalis, 2018). Tourism image is also very important to the sustainability of

attractions. Organizations and departments that play a role in the maintenance of tourist attractions must plan, manage, and establish policies or measures to continually create a positive image of the place for tourism in the respective tourist areas (Kozak & Decrop, 2009; Jankingthong, 2014). The final dimension covered in this research is the tourism development, which is development of the tourist destination to meet the needs of tourists relating to their visits or buying of products in that particular destination; these are known as tourism demand (Pimonsompong, 2007; Pholphirun, 2010).

There has not been any research to date, which studies the strategies for tourism development in secondary cities on the East Coast regarding the dimensions of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand under the situation of Covid-19, by e-Delphi technique. The e-Delphi technique includes the brainstorming,

considering, diagnosing, and decision making of experts, and can be carried out using online methods which are safe during the Covid-19 pandemic, at the same time providing an important opportunity to develop the tourism industry for the return of tourists once the Covid-19 situation has improved. The results of this research will provide an important guideline, consistent with the current situation in the development of secondary cities on the East Coast. When the tourist attractions of secondary cities on the East Coast follow a mixed development approach, considering the dimensions of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand, tourists are more likely to make return visits, as such dimensions influence the loyalty of tourists (Charoensuk & U-on, 2019; Tongkaw & Saethow, 2018; Tongkaw, Thakerngkiat, Ngamwongnoi, & Suksawang, 2019). These tourists are also more likely to encourage their friends and acquaintances to visit a secondary city on the eastern coast (Darnell & Johnson, 2001; Jayaraman et al., 2010). This will result in the secondary cities on the East Coast being able to generate income and jobs for people in the community, enabling a way through the crisis of the Coronavirus 2019 (Covid-19) effectively.

## 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objective was to study the opinions of experts on the tourism development of a secondary city on the East Coast through the dimensions of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand.

## 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 Literature Review for Secondary City on the East Coast

**Chanthaburi Province**

The provinces began to set up their cities for the first time around the 18th Buddhist era. The Chong people, a tribe of the Mon family (Khmer) were the first indigenous people to settle in the eastern forest in Chanthaburi, Rayong, and Trat, especially the Chanthaburi-Trat junction which has an abundance of forest and herbs. In the past, the Chong people survived by collecting forest products for sale. Overtime, the forest area declined due to deforestation and degradation for farming, eventually being captured by Thai and Chinese people. Additionally, the collection of forest products became illegal. Rangers like the Chong people were required to change their way of life, mostly becoming urban workers, with some of them becoming farmers. The community of the Chong people can nowadays still be seen around Ban Khlong Plu, and Khao Khitchakut sub-district. In the Thai year 2200, they moved to build a new town at Ban Lum on the west bank of the Chanthaburi River, then, after Ayudhya lost to Burma, King Taksin the Great brought around 500 troops to break out of Burma to the east and seize Chanthaburi for a period of 5 months for collection of food supplies

and troops. He then led an army of 5,000 Thai and Chinese people back to save Ayudhya. Such events are the pride of the Chanthaburi people, which can be seen from the many ancient sites and monuments that have been built to commemorate His Majesty, His ability, and His grace.

Chanthaburi Province is a province with a multicultural community, rich in abundant natural resources and valuable sources, such as being a digging site for various gems and minerals, with both professional farms and fisheries, in an area adjacent to the Gulf of Thailand (Chanthaburi Province, 2019). However, the development of Thailand in the past did not attach cultural importance to the community, nor the destruction of natural resources in many of its communities (Somkid, 2019). Guidelines for the development of Chanthaburi tourism should be as follows: 1) Provide a presentation of the building model of the Chong people and surrounding area to achieve development as a tourist attraction community; 2) Building of infrastructure should include making roads to the villages, and ensuring complete water and electricity supplies, providing convenient access to key infrastructure in all areas; 3) Establish a learning center; 4) Receive assistance from the government sector and other stakeholders; 5) Raise awareness of the people in the community (Preagsakit & Kasampradit, 2018). The guidelines for promoting the quality of service according to the needs of tourists for

accommodation and restaurant businesses include a concrete focus on clean and safe services with reliable complete facilities. The service must be standardized regardless of the time it is used. Operators must be ready and willing to provide prompt service in response to customer requests regarding accommodation and restaurants. Service providers must have knowledge and skills in providing polite service. Employees should possess manners and should be trained in effective communication skills including understanding customers and creating an impression of trust for customers, for example presenting the identity of Chanthaburi, and having a customer service model which responds to all groups of customers (Sangayotin et al., 2019).

**Trat Province**

Trat is assumed to be derived from the word "Krat", which is the name of a type of tree used to make brooms. This tree grows around Trat and was abundant in ancient times. Trat, or Thung Yai, appeared in the palace in the reign of King Prasat Thong as a seaside town under the foreign affairs department which was related to finance. Trat is identified as an important seaport city, enabling harbor activities for boats including transferring, buying, and selling; it also has the advantage of a fresh water supply in the area of Muang Trat Bay. Therefore, it was a vital source for the community of Chinese merchants who came to trade (Trat Provincial Office, 2019). In the past few years,

there has been much research into the development of Trat tourist attractions, for example, the tourism development on Koh Mak in Trat Province. It is evident that communities and tourist sites should receive support to assist in increasing the number of tourists, including assistance with marketing and public relations (Poltanee & Boonphetkaew, 2017). Furthermore, the tourism sector on Koh Chang, Trat Province, must accelerate the personal training development of personnel employed within this sector, in order to achieve international standards (Suwannapirom, 2017).

## 3.2 Tourism Demand

Tourism demand refers to the demand for tourism-related goods and services at a particular price during a specific period, to meet the satisfaction of tourists according to their purchasing power and willingness. Tourism demand can generate tourism supply; it is measured by the number of tourists (inbound tourists), time of attraction, the number of nights' accommodation (Number of trips), or tourism expenditure (Pimonsompong, 2007; Pholphirun; 2010). The study of tourism demand is one of the key areas of interest regarding the continuous studies of tourism development methods conducted over the years, as it is important information used in tourism planning to create guidelines for the development of the tourism industry, creating better careers, income, and

economy for the respective area (Song & Li, 2008; Dwyer et al., 2000)

## 3.3 Service Quality

Service quality refers to the provision of quality service to users, comprising 5 dimensions called the "RATER Model" (Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy & Responsiveness). Reliability is the ability to provide the quality services promised to users. Assurance is a guarantee of the quality standards of service, provided that the service provider has competence, courtesy, credibility, and security. Tangibles refer to the physical aspects of the product or service, its convenience, and physical aspects of the staff and materials. Empathy incorporates attempts to know and learn the needs of the customer. Responsiveness is the willingness of an organization and its staff to serve quickly and to help customers (Zeithaml et al, 1996; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Gronroos, 1990). The success of a service business is measured from the satisfaction of customers towards service quality or the RATER Model (William & Buswell, 2003), while service quality refers to what the service provider must offer and what clients expect (Kotler, 1994).

## 3.4 Tourism Image

Tourism image refers to the imagined images, perspectives, beliefs, impressions, and emotions held in relation to a tourism destination, which may be derived

from direct or indirect experiences of the destination. It is the sum of many perceptions, defined by different attitudes. Therefore, the image has both positive and negative sides. An image can be built up in the mind of a person that has never visited the place before; the person creates images based on information or pictures of things and places or incorporates knowledge of other places that are close or similar, to generate an image. The image built up in a person's thoughts, developed from listening to others' perceptions and from independently learning about the destination is called organic, while the image that a person creates from their perceptions of promotional material for the destination is identified as the induced image.

The tourism image is essential to the decision of a traveler choosing a travel destination, such that a tourist destination with a good image is more likely to be selected than one with a bad image. The elements of the tourism image include the image of physical tourism, cultural and historical images, economic image, the image of construction, and images of vegetation and animals (Burns & Novelli, 2008; Jittangwattana, 2005; Costa et al., 2016). Tourist destinations which have a good image will make tourists want to come back again (Zhang et al., 2018).

## 3.5 The Tourism Development in the Current Situation

At present, tourism in Thailand is heavily affected by the Covid-19 situation, including tourism in secondary cities on the East Coast, which have also been greatly affected (Chaiyo & Mahaprom, 2020). Throughout this situation, a tourism development plan considering the dimensions of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand has not yet been established. Such dimensions are very important for tourism as they influence the loyalty of tourists (Charoensuk & U-On, 2019; Tongkaw & Saethow, 2018; Tongkaw, Thakerngkiat, Ngamwongnoi, & Suksawang, 2019). The Covid-19 situation is an important opportunity to develop tourism to support tourists after the Covid-19 situation has improved. When the tourist attractions of secondary cities on the East Coast follow a mixed development approach using the dimensions of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand, tourists are more likely to make return visits. These tourists are also more likely to encourage their friends and acquaintances to visit a secondary city on the eastern coast. (Darnell & Johnson, 2001; Jayaraman et al., 2010). As a result, secondary cities on the East Coast will be able to generate income and jobs for people in the community, effectively enabling a way through the crisis of the Coronavirus 2019 (Covid-19). However, the research process for creating a development guideline should be carried out using processes which are safe under the coronavirus 2019 situation.
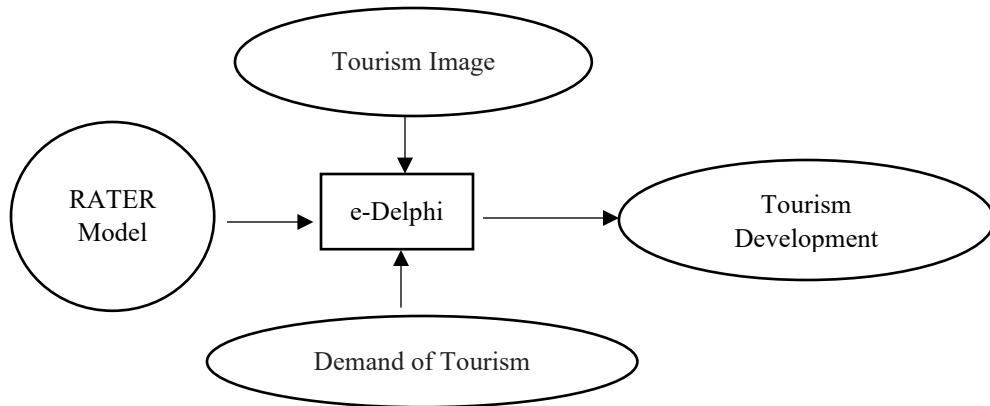
**Figure 2.** Conceptual Framework

## 4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This research used the e-Delphi technique which is considered to be a future-oriented research process (Brady, 2015), covering the dimensions of tourism image, service quality, and tourism demand. The purpose of this research was to create a guideline for tourism development for a secondary city on the East Coast, providing the destination with the tools to encourage tourists to take return trips, and to recommend the destination and its attractions to friends and family, thus leading to sustainable tourism.

## 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This future-oriented research study (Brady, 2015) used an electronic Delphi process to examine the tourism development of two secondary cities on the East Coast. The ultimate aim was to increase the number of tourists travelling to the area on a regular basis, generating sustainable income and careers in the community. Using a development approach, the dimensions of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand, were considered and then assessed through the consensus method. The electronic Delphi method was utilized, using 7-level approximation with closed-ended questions delivered via email. The technique involved a group of experts on the subject, brainstorming to consider, diagnose, and make decisions on a particular topic via Microsoft Teams (MS TEAMS). This method was also used to seek knowledge and predict future outcomes using systematic and reliable research processes.

The process of screening user group reviews consisted of online participants making submissions to the experts. Data from the measurements was then agreed (The Consensus Measure) by a group of experts who agreed or conceded, using a majority vote. The procedure for implementation of the e-Delphi

technique consisted of 4-Steps (Brady, 2015; Fowles, 1978; Cole et al., 2013):

Step 1 - Determination of problems regarding the development approaches currently used to improve tourist loyalty to the secondary city on the East Coast, in terms of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand.

Step 2 - Determination of expert groups, consisting of experts in economics, tourism, marketing, the hospitality industry, and business strategy.

Step 3 - Gathering opinions from the experts via the 1st round of open-ended, online inquiry regarding the development of tourism in the secondary city in relation to issues of tourism service quality and tourism demand. The question used in this stage was: "Should Tourism guidelines be developed in the dimensions of service quality, tourism image, and the demand for tourism of a secondary city on the East Coast?". The content was consequently analyzed to draw conclusions and a closed-ended questionnaire was formulated and submitted for the second round of questioning, followed by consensus analysis. Data collection was carried out during March and April 2020.

Step 4 - Summarizing the results. The results were analyzed to calculate the medians (MED), modes (MOD), and the absolute value of the difference between the median and mode values, and also included the Inter Quartile Range (IQR). Opinions were accepted if the median value was

3.5 or higher, the absolute value of the difference between the median and the mode was not greater than 1.00, and the interquartile range was not greater than 1.50 (Jareanput & Chirinung, 2015, Pankham, S. & Chadcham, S, 2017). After all research results were obtained, they were interpreted, leading to the creation of guidelines for tourism development in the suburbs of a secondary city on the East Coast.

## 6. RESULTS

The results of the e-Delphi technique were used to generate 43 tourism development guidelines which were obtained from the statistics consensus analysis. Of these 43, 23 approaches passed the expert consensus accounting for 60 percent of the total guidelines. The guidelines were considered as passing the expert consensus if the median value was 3.5 or higher, the absolute value of the difference between the median and the mode was not greater than 1.00, and the interquartile range was not greater than 1.50.

The results of the research via consensus regarding the dimension of service quality reveal that, for example, there should be buses to service the tourist area and that these buses should be easy to access; staff in tourist attractions should perform their work accurately according to the needs of tourists; and staff must provide services as soon as tourists seek help. The results of the consensus research regarding the dimension of tourism image showed that for

example, tourism attractions should be well maintained at all times, including beautiful scenery; members of the community must present the culture of the tourist attraction, showing its unique beauty to attract tourists; and the community should be supported by creating occupations and income from tourism. The results of the consensus research regarding the dimension of tourism demand reveal that there should be publicity and marketing of tourist attractions that tourists would regularly want to visit. Reasons for some guidelines not passing the consensus included the idea that the practice may be difficult, some experts disagreed, or the guidelines were already being implemented by the government. Details of the guidelines for tourism development in secondary cities of the Eastern Seaboard are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** The results of consensus evaluation with the e-Delphi Technique

| Dimension of Service Quality | Analysis results | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MED | MOD | \|MED − MOD\| | $Q_3$ | $Q_1$ | IQR | Consensus |
| **1. Tangibles** | | | | | | | |
| 1.1 Tourist attractions should have clear sources of information such as road signs, and information boards at the tourist attractions. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 4 | 3 | Not passed |
| 1.2 Tourist attractions should have a clear public relations service. | 6 | 7 | 1 | 7 | 4 | 3 | Not passed |
| 1.3 Tourist attractions should have accommodation available around the tourist spots which are easy to access. | 5 | 4 | 1 | 6.5 | 4 | 2.5 | Not passed |
| 1.4 There should be buses serving the sights which are easily accessible. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 7 | 5.5 | 1.5 | Passed |
| **2. Reliability** | | | | | | | |
| 2.1 Tourist attraction staff should perform their jobs accurately according to the needs of tourists. | 6 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 5.5 | 1.5 | Passed |
| 2.2 Employees in tourist attractions should perform the work that regularly meets the needs of tourists. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 7 | 5.5 | 1.5 | Passed |
| 2.3 The tourism sites should be developed to be safe in all respects, for example, there is an alcohol service point to prevent Covid-19 infection, a | 6 | 6 | 0 | 7 | 5.5 | 1.5 | Passed |

**Table 1** The results of consensus evaluation with the e-Delphi Technique (Continued)

| Dimension of Service Quality | Analysis results | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MED | MOD | \|MED − MOD\| | Q₃ | Q₁ | IQR | Consen-sus |
| temperature screening unit for tourists, various warning signs, implementation of Covid-19 vaccinations for both tourists and staff. | | | | | | | |
| 2.4 Products and services in the attractions should be of a reliable standard. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| **3. Responsiveness** | | | | | | | |
| 3.1 The staff at the attractions should be ready and willing to provide service. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| 3.2 Residents of the communities around the tourist destination must be willing to provide information when a tourist asks for assistance. | 6 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 2 | Not passed |
| 3.3 Employees must provide services as soon as the traveler asks for assistance. | 6 | 5 | 1 | 6.5 | 5.5 | 1 | Passed |
| 3.4 Employees and community residents should provide services with a good service mind. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 6.5 | 5.5 | 1 | Passed |
| **4. Assurance** | | | | | | | |
| 4.1 Staff at the attractions must always provide good and accurate services to instill consumer confidence in the service. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 5.5 | 1.5 | Passed |
| 4.2 There should be someone who has a thorough knowledge of the attractions as well that will be told in the stories of the attractions. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| 4.3 Products and services around the attractions must be up to standard until tourists are confident in using the service. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 4.5 | 2.5 | Not passed |

**Table 1** The results of consensus evaluation with the e-Delphi Technique (Continued)

| Dimension of Service Quality | MED | MOD | \|MED − MOD\| | Q₃ | Q₁ | IQR | Consensus |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **5. Empathy** | | | | | | | |
| 5.1 Employees and people of the community should provide services in a friendly manner. | 6 | 7 | 1 | 7 | 4.5 | 2.5 | Not passed |
| 5.2 Employees should provide service with sincerity and compassion. | 6 | 4 | 2 | 6.5 | 4 | 2.5 | Not passed |
| 5.3 Employees must know and understand the needs of the users. | 6 | 7 | 1 | 7 | 4.5 | 2.5 | Not passed |
| 5.4 Employees and community people must pay attention, listen to problems, and help solve problems for tourists. | 6 | 4 | 2 | 6.5 | 4 | 2.5 | Not passed |

**Tourism Image**

| Dimension of Tourism Image | MED | MOD | \|MED − MOD\| | Q₃ | Q₁ | IQR | Consensus |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Physical tourism image** | | | | | | | |
| 1.1 Should maintain the tourist attraction with beautiful scenery. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| 1.2 Should maintain tourist sites with abundant nature at all times. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6.5 | 0.5 | Passed |
| 1.3 Always maintain fresh air at the attractions. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| 1.4 There should be more publicity for tourist attractions near waterfalls, sea, and mountains. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| **2. Image of cultural and historical tourism** | | | | | | | |
| 2.1 The community in the tourist area must show a unique and interesting culture. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| 2.2 The community in the tourist area must preserve the traditional way of life. | 7 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |

**Table 1** The results of consensus evaluation with the e-Delphi Technique (Continued)

| Dimension of Tourism Image | Analysis results | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MED | MOD | \|MED − MOD\| | Q₃ | Q₁ | IQR | Consensus |
| 2.3 Tourist attractions must present history and culture. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| 2.4 People of the community must present the culture in the tourist attraction, allowing tourists to see the beauty, thus attracting tourists. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| **3. Economic tourism image** | | | | | | | |
| 3.1 Should support the community, providing occupations, and income from tourism. | 6 | 5 | 1 | 6.5 | 5 | 1.5 | Passed |
| 3.2 Tourist attractions should be developed to have a variety of trade sources that meet the required standards. | 6 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 2 | Not passed |
| 3.3 Tourist areas should have ATMs or reliable financial institutions. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 6.5 | 4.5 | 2 | Not passed |
| 3.4 Tourist attractions should have property security. | 6 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 2 | Not passed |
| **4. Construction tourism image** | | | | | | | |
| 4.1 Tourist attractions should have buildings that are unique and attractive. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 7 | 5.5 | 1.5 | Passed |
| 4.2 There should be a building that is a check-in point for tourists. | 5 | 4 | 1 | 7 | 5.4 | 1.6 | Not passed |
| 4.3 Tourist attractions should offer access to structures that are rare and unique (if any). | 5 | 5 | 0 | 7 | 4.5 | 2.5 | Not passed |
| 4.4 Tourist attractions should have beautiful historical, religious, or cultural buildings. | 5 | 5 | 0 | 5.5 | 4 | 1.5 | Passed |
| **5. Vegetation and animal tourism images** | | | | | | | |
| 5.1 Tourist attractions should offer rich and unique nature. | 5 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 5 | 1 | Passed |
| 5.2 Tourist attractions should offer outstanding nature, flora, and fauna. | 5 | 5 | 0 | 6.5 | 5 | 1.5 | Passed |

**Table 1** The results of consensus evaluation with the e-Delphi Technique (Continued)

| Dimension of Tourism Image | Analysis results | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MED | MOD | \|MED − MOD\| | $Q_3$ | $Q_1$ | IQR | Consensus |
| 5.3 Tourist attractions should offer beautiful nature to attract tourists. | 5 | 5 | 0 | 6.5 | 5 | 1.5 | Passed |
| 5.4 The community in the tourist destination should always maintain the outstanding beauty of nature. | 5 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 5 | 1 | Passed |

## Demand of Tourism

| Dimension of demand | Analysis results | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MED | MOD | \|MED − MOD\| | $Q_3$ | $Q_1$ | IQR | Consensus |
| **1. Demand** | | | | | | | |
| 1.1 Tourist attractions should have publicity about places that tourists will want to visit. | 6 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 6 | 1 | Passed |
| 1.2 Tourist attractions should have an appropriate place to offer any relevant products and services. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 6.5 | 4 | 2.5 | Not passed |
| 1.3 Should preserve the beautiful nature of the tourist attraction to meet the tourists' needs. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 6.5 | 4 | 2.5 | Not passed |
| 1.4 Tourist attractions should have everything required to fulfil the tourists' needs. | 6 | 6 | 0 | 6.5 | 3.5 | 3 | Not passed |

**Table 2** Tourism Development Action Plan

| Development dimensions | Action plan |
|---|---|
| Dimension of demand | 1. Create a project regarding potential places for visiting. |
| Tourism Image | 1. Projects must be developed to maintain tourist attractions with beautiful scenery.<br>2. Projects must be developed to preserve the abundant nature of the tourist attractions.<br>3. Projects must be developed to continuously maintain outdoor tourist attractions.<br>4. There must be clearer publicity for tourist attractions near waterfalls, the sea, and mountains. |

**Table 2** Tourism Development Action Plan (Continued)

| Development dimensions | Action plan |
|---|---|
| | 6. The community in the tourist area must have a project to preserve the original way of life. |
| | 7. Tourist attractions must have a project that clearly presents the history and culture. |
| | 8. Community members must assist in presenting the culture and beauty of the tourist attraction in order to attract tourists. |
| | 9. There must be a project to support the community by generating occupations and income from tourism. |
| | 10. The construction of unique and attractive tourist attractions must be encouraged. |
| | 11. Tourist sites must be encouraged to build beautiful historical, religious, or cultural structures. |
| | 12. Tourism sites must be able to present rich and unique nature. |
| | 13. Tourism sites should be encouraged to present outstanding and recognizable nature, flora, and fauna. |
| | 14. Tourist attractions must be encouraged to clearly present beautiful nature in order to attract tourists. |
| | 15. Communities in tourist attractions must develop projects to maintain the beautiful and outstanding nature in the community. |
| **Service Quality** | 1. The relevant organization must provide buses to service the tourist area which are easy to access |
| | 2. The tourist attractions must have an employee training development program, so that employees can carry out their job efficiently according to the needs of tourists. |
| | 3. Tourist attractions must have a project to continuously develop employees in order to consistently meet the needs of tourists. |
| | 4. Relevant organizations must develop all aspects of the tourist attractions to be safe, such as having an alcohol service station to prevent Covid-19, a temperature screening point for tourists, and various warning signs. |
| | 5. Tourist attractions must have a project to develop reliable products and services of a high standard. |
| | 6. Tourist attractions must have a project to develop the skills of staff regarding customer service procedures. |
| | 7. There must be a service staff development program to ensure that travelers are given information as requested. |
| | 8. The organization concerned must support employees and the community, preferably being service minded. |
| | 9. There must be a project to develop staff at the tourist attractions to provide accurate services to instill confidence in the tourists. |
| | 10. There must be a project to develop knowledge and understanding of the attractions for the people concerned, to ensure that they are able to relay the history of the attraction. |

## 7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this research was to study the opinions of experts regarding tourism development in secondary cities on the East Coast, focusing on the dimensions of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand using the e-Delphi technique among five experts (specialists in economics, tourism, marketing, hospitality industry, and business strategy). The results of the research revealed 23 guidelines for tourism development among the secondary cities of the Eastern Seaboard region, which passed the consensus of the experts. These 23 guidelines account for 60 percent of the total guidelines generated during the e-Delphi approach. The results of the research show that when developing the eastern coastline, various programs must be developed. There should be a public relations project regarding locations that tourists will want to visit, as well as projects to preserve the original way of life for the community in the tourist area. The community residents should help to present the culture of the tourist destination to reveal its full beauty and attract tourists, while the organizations concerned must provide local transport to the tourist attractions which should be convenient to access. Relevant organizations must develop the tourist attractions to be safe in all aspects, such as having an alcohol service station to prevent Covid-19, temperature screening points for tourists, various warning signs, and implementation of Covid-19 vaccinations for both tourists and staff.

The results of this research are outstanding in providing convenience to tourists in terms of travel, information awareness, and maintaining the traditional lifestyles, while also meeting the needs of tourists and creating confidence in the destination within the current situation of Covid-19. The development approaches derived from this research form an overview for the development of secondary cities on the East Coast utilizing the e-Delphi technique. At present there is no research integrating the theories of service quality, tourism image, and tourism demand within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Most prior research was quantitative or qualitative and may include some methods which are not appropriate in the Covid-19 situation, including a lack of development guidelines in the research results. Past research has provided guidelines for tourism development, such as organizing activities to promote tourism in the community and creating new experiences for tourists in Chanthaburi; personnel development to improve efficiency; and allowing the community to help preserve the environment and culture of the community of Trat province. According to the results of such research, there are still no development guidelines which relate to the Covid-19 situation (Tantikulvara & Sotwithee, 2018;

Tongla & Samarak, 2019; Thalang, 2020).

The results of the present research are consistent with Poltanee and Boonphetkaew (2017) who studied the opinions of tourists regarding the potential of tourist attractions in the Koh Mak area, Trat Province. It was found that public relations must be developed to increase the number of tourists, and this was consistent with Sricharoenpramong (2018), who made suggestions for the development of tourist attractions in the Kung Krabaen Non-Hunting Area, Chanthaburi Province, finding that the service should be developed in the dimensions of responsiveness to tourists, safe and clean tourist areas, and creating potential tourist attractions. It is also in line with Suwannapirom's (2017) research which found that human resource development should be accelerated according to job position and the persons involved in the development of Koh Chang tourism, in order to increase the satisfaction of Thai and foreign tourists. If related organizations or agencies have developed tourism in the subordinate cities of the Eastern Seaboard, they will be able to restore tourism and in turn effectively generate professional income for people in the community. Despite concerns about the novel coronavirus outbreak (Covid-2019), tourism development can be effective when communities, local government, and private tourism destinations have unity in development. These will be a vital force in driving the Thai

economy. Let Thailand move towards "stability, prosperity, and sustainability" through tourism, so that it can be fully transformed into Thailand 4.0.

## 8. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research was conducted by an expert group via online meetings and is therefore lacking additional empirical data for both Thai and foreign tourists. Future research developments should include studying empirical data from actual travelers, interpreting the results of expert group meetings to obtain in-depth, credible findings. In addition, whilst researching secondary cities on the East Coast, other issues should be studied, such as the crisis management of Covid-19, luxury tourism with community participation, and cross-cultural tourism as applied to secondary cities in border areas.

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