Challenges and **opportunities** for **sustainable tourism**: Insights from a study in Phuket with implications for tourism planning

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Abstract | Climate change includes global warming, but it also refers to a larger spectrum of changes occurring in our world. The tourism industry is exceptionally sensitive to climate change. Therefore, sustainable tourism seeks to negotiate balanced growth for the economic, sociocultural, and environmental aspects of tourism. The study aims to close a theoretical gap in the literature by critically exploring how small tourism and leisure businesses perceive the concept of sustainable tourism in Phuket, Thailand. This mixed-methods study utilized an inductive approach to generate themes through 18 stakeholder interviews with local business owners. Moreover, these obtained results were tested quantitatively through a self-administered survey with 87 responses. The study revealed that the most significant barriers are weak governance and a lack of awareness. Furthermore, small tourism enterprises associate environmental sustainability with long-term tourism development. The research concludes with theoretical implications about the stakeholder theory and practical implications for tourism planners.

Keywords | Sustainability, sustainable tourism, tourism development, Thailand

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1. Introduction

The philosophy of sustainable development is gradually being integrated into different aspects of human lifestyle and development decisions (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). Because of its environmental, social, and economic implications, this movement is also impacting the tourism industry (Tomljenovic & Faulkner, 2000; Ferreira & Carneiro, 2021). The effectiveness of implementing sustainable development is dependent in part on the support and cooperation of those working in the tourism industry (Streimikiene et al., 2021). While not all stakeholders must be equally involved in the decision-making process for sustainable development, all of their interests must be identified and understood (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). Domestic and international visitors, residents, business owners, and local government officials are the stakeholder groups that tend to focus more on involvement in the process of sustainable development (Koodsela et al., 2019). Understanding stakeholders' viewpoints is crucial for changing the interaction between stakeholders and aspects that positively affect sustainable tourism development (Chong & Balasingam, 2018; Roxas, Rivera, & Gutierrez, 2020).

The entire process might fail if the interests of stakeholders are not identified (Guo et al., 2019). Hall (2019) points out the need to rethink human–environment relations given the mistaken belief that "the exertion of more effort and greater efficiency will alone solve problems of sustainable tourism" (p. 1044). The proposed study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by reporting on the perspectives of small company owners in Phuket, Thailand. As a result, the exploratory nature of the study intends to contribute by critically analyzing how small company owners perceive sustainable tourism in general, as well as the most recent advances relevant to their business. The study is guided by the objective of answering the following two research questions: "How do small business owners perceive sustainable tourism development at large?" and "What is the perceived impact of sustainable tourism on their business?" A series of semi-structured interviews is used to gain a better understanding of their perspective and to sufficiently answer the research questions. Furthermore, the interview findings serve as a deductive framework to survey business owners about their perspectives on sustainable tourism.

2. Literature Review

Tourism is a job creator and, to some degree, has the power to boost the economic development of an entire nation (Li et al., 2020). According to the WTTC (2021), the tourism industry's contribution accounted for about 10% of the global GDP and was responsible for creating every fourth new job across the world (WTTC, 2021). While it is apparent that some progress has been made in making tourism more sustainable or responsible, the reality is that things are not changing quickly enough in most parts of the world (Guo et al., 2019). The British environmental activist and explorer Robert Swan once said that "the greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it".

In the present era, sustainable development is gradually becoming a primary objective in tourism development. The main purpose is to educate local communities about the principles of this approach (Kapera, 2018). Tourism, wealth, and long-term sustainability are all intertwined. Prosperity, on a wide scale, harms the environment. Claims that environmental protection rises in tandem with economic expansion are based on a faulty interpretation of history (Buckley, 2012; Vučetić, 2019).

The following review analyzes the historical development of sustainable tourism, the latest implications in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, and current issues and practices in Phu-

ket. Buckley's (2012) assessment of the literature on sustainable tourism traced the field's evolution over the previous two decades, highlighting major works and topics. Recognizing the challenge of identifying, quantifying, and accounting for sustainability in tourism is a recurring theme. As a result, there is no agreement on the precise criteria of sustainable hospitality and tourism (Cárdenas, Byrd, & Duffy, 2015).

Indeed, Buckley (2012) ambiguously defined sustainable tourism as "tourism that addresses environmental, host community, visitor, or industry needs, as well as tourism that addresses future and current environmental, economic, and social impacts"(Cárdenas, Byrd, & Duffy, 2015). Nonetheless, it can be reasoned that three critical interconnected aspects drive sustainable hospitality and tourism: economic, environmental/ecological, and social sustainability, each of which includes a variety of underlying elements and dynamics (Hardy & Pearson, 2016).

Within the sector, however, dedication to sustainability is frequently underpinned by economic growth. The prospective economic benefits of tourism development are determined for this purpose. Local communities can benefit from long-term hospitality and tourist programs that give much-needed financial support (Cárdenas, Byrd, & Duffy, 2015; Hardy & Pearson, 2016). A major goal of sustainability is to strike a balance between socioeconomic interests and the planet's finite ecological systems. Despite governments' increasing commitment to alternative energy and resource efficiency, two decades after the Earth Summit, many people still regard sustainable development as a concept founded on environmental concerns (Robert, Parris, & Leiserowitz, 2005).

This establishes a fundamental divide between advocates of sustainability and others who argue that dedication to human well-being and poverty eradication requires only socio-economic measures, ignoring environmental issues (Siakwah, Musavengane, & Leonard, 2020). Proposals for a set of

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – which can be seen as a key outcome of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development – might help bridge this gap by defining complicated development issues. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are about metrics that have demonstrated their value as policy drivers in addressing crucial challenges such as rural sanitation and child mortality (Wirahayu et al., 2022).

SDGs, if properly planned and designed, will almost certainly serve a comparable role in promoting sustainability (Boluk et al., 2019). However, the importance of SDGs does not end there. One of their most important contributions will be to define the interdependence of the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, environmental, and socio-cultural. In a world where natural resource scarcity and population growth are increasing concerns, as well as demands from the developing middle class, policy decisions will be tough to make. Governments must identify "no-regret choices"that help in a variety of industries or issues (Trupp & Dolezal, 2020).

SDGs can assist decision-makers in this endeavor. They can be used to identify both restrictions and opportunities for long-term planning and investment, allowing policymakers to justify their actions even if they are more expensive than business as usual (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). A qualitative study conducted by Fuchs and Sincharoenkul (2021) revealed that some of the obstacles to more sustainable tourism development in Phuket relate to the lack of accountability and coherent leadership. Furthermore, the study found that sustainable tourism is recognized among Phuket's industry experts, but one of the major drawbacks is the high failure rate of initiatives to boost sustainable tourism (Fuchs & Sincharoenkul, 2021).

However, the authors did not reveal any particular examples of initiatives that failed in the past. A mixed-methods inquiry by Sinlapasate et al. (2020) discovered that the tourism carrying capacity regarding the exploitation of resources

(physical, environmental, social, and economic exploitation) exceeds the carrying capacity. Furthermore, it was determined that the recreation capacity of facilities poses a huge threat to tourism in Phuket (Sinlapasate et al., 2020). In a third study, Fuchs (2021) reported that tourism businesses in Phuket showed a high level of resilience, enabling them to seize opportunities by adapting their business models amid COVID-19 (Fuchs, 2021).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study was performed in Thailand during the global coronavirus pandemic. Before the global pandemic, Thailand had received almost 40 million visitors in 2019 and was considered one of the most frequently visited places in the world, with a strong dependency on international tourism (WTTC, 2021). In the same period, the tropical island of Phuket welcomed almost 10 million visitors; it is consistently ranked in the Top 20 of the Global Destination Cities Index (GDCI, 2019). The methodological framework of this study was a mixed-method approach.

In the first phase, a series of exploratory interviews with local business owners regarding the perceived impact and importance of sustainable tourism was used to inductively establish a relevant framework. In the second phase, the established framework was tested quantitatively through a self-administered survey. The fundamental goal of this approach was to narrow the gap that previous studies left in the past and place more emphasis on the perspective of small local businesses as opposed to other stakeholders in the tourism industry.

The additional perspective is essential in understanding the implications of sustainable tourism in a mass tourism destination and gaining a holistic perspective from stakeholders other than agencies and residents (Byrd, 2007). An advantage of this approach is that it enables tourism developers and policymakers to determine the feasibility of future forms of destination development benchmarking their understanding of the businesses' resistance rationale (Chong, 2020). Although the study is not an exact replication of previous research – due largely to its exploratory nature – it follows an adapted methodological approach based on good practice by Dodds (2010) and Prideaux et al. (2018).

3.2. Phase One: Semi-structured Interviews

The first step is to identify the key stakeholder groups and gather additional information to assess eligibility based on the type of business, location of the business, and involvement with international tourism. The primary aim was a diversified spread concerning the type and geographical location of the business. In the next step, business owners were recruited based on the purposive sampling method. The invitation to participate in the study was distributed in person by the lead investigator. Finally, data were gathered through a total of 18 interviews (based on 45 invitations), yielding a 40% positive response rate.

The lead investigator is confident in having reached data saturation based on the definition set forth by Fusch and Ness (2015), i.e., "the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and … further coding is no longer feasible" (p. 1410). The interviews took place between March and April 2022 and ranged from 19 to 43 minutes in duration. The interviews were guided by an 8-question lead focusing on identifying the business owners' perspectives on the perceived impact and importance of sustainable tourism in Phuket, Thailand. The interviews were audio-recorded with prior written informed consent and later transcribed verbatim. Confidentiality was considered

and granted at all times.

Once all data were collected and transcribed, a preliminary interpretation of the responses was carried out in a group to avoid interpretive bias (Neuendorf, 2018). The thematic analysis was carried out manually and not via computer software. Thus, the researcher had direct control over the thematic coding of the findings. The thematic analysis was developed based on the data gathered from the interviews to create groups and patterns. Next, the audio-recording was transcribed verbatim and coded manually according to the framework of this study (Table 1 in the Appendix).

The codes formed the basis for bundling and grouping the data by clusters and analyzing the information thematically (Terry et al., 2017). This process was repeated until the lead investigator and research assistants agreed on the results. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the identified categories and patterns for each category. The findings are presented in the subsequent sections of this report. Before the thematic analysis, the transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using open-source software to create a word cloud visualization (Figure 1).

3.3. Phase Two: Self-administered Surveys

The second step involved quantifying the empirical findings from the previous phase. To attain the possibility of generalizing results from a subset of a larger population, it is important to quantify the data obtained from qualitative research (Rendle-Short, 2019). To achieve this, a survey was developed based on the themes that emerged from the previous analysis. Three broad themes were derived from the transcribed interviews. First was the recognition of environmental issues as the primary pillar of sustainable tourism. Second was the presence of insufficient support and incentives from the government. Third was a lack of universal education relating to the understanding and

interpretation of sustainable tourism.

The survey contained 16 questions and was adapted based on the three themes. The first section sought to collect data on the participants' sociodemographic profiles. The second section contained a set of 10 questions to which the participants were able to express their answers on a 5-point Likert-type scale with pre-coded responses. The pre-coded responses were Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5). The collected data were examined using JASP (software for statistical analysis) to obtain an average value (Mean), median, mode, standard deviation (SD), minimum value (Min), and maximum value (Max).

The data were collected from small and medium-sized business owners located in Phuket. The sampling was carried out in November 2022 at Patong Beach and in Phuket Town. Both locations are known primarily for attracting many domestic and international tourists during the high season. With the help of a research assistant, self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 150 businesses. The questionnaires were collected from the businesses on the same day, usually 3-4 hours after they were distributed. In total, 93 responses were collected. Of these, 6 were discarded due to their being inconclusive/incomplete. The final sample included 87 responses, yielding a 58% positive response rate.

4. Results and Discussion

The study aimed to examine perspectives from local entrepreneurs and small businesses about the perceived impact and importance of sustainable tourism in Phuket, Thailand. A self-administered survey with an expanded sample was used to further investigate and gain more insights. The socio-demographic profile including key characteristics (e.g., age, nationality, and type of business)

of the 18 interview participants (in Table 2) and 87 survey respondents (in Table 3) can be found in the Appendix.

4.1. RQ1: "How do small business owners perceive sustainable tourism development at large?"

Word cloud visualizations are an easy alternative for quantifying qualitative data (Yang et al., 2020) and gaining a first perspective on that data. Essentially, word cloud generators work by breaking down the text into component words and counting how frequently they appear in the body of the text (Yang et al., 2020). This method is often used for sentiment analysis of reviews, but has gained popularity as an analysis method for interview transcripts (Yakar, 2017). Before conceptualization of the desired output (Figure 1), the data were modified to remove stop words, which in this case included words such as "that," "this," "and," "because," "which," and "the." The size of the words in the cloud is correlated with the frequency of their occurrences in the transcription of the interviews. The most common word was "plastic," with 34 occurrences, followed by "people" (27) and "try" (27). The findings offered a first lead in the thematic analysis and were later used to triangulate the coded findings.

Figure 1 | Word cloud visualization based on the transcribed interview protocols

A formal explanation was not given to the interviewees of how sustainable tourism is defined in the literature as their perceived definition was considered one of the contributions to the study. The majority of the participants were able to place sustainable tourism into context and conceptualize its implication for tourism development in Phuket. However, most of the participants also related to environmental issues and environmental sustainability when asked about sustainable tourism. Except for two participants, the majority of business owners did not identify economic or socio-cultural development as part of sustainable tourism. Exemplary of that point of view is a statement made by two interviewees, i.e., "it is now a good time [during COVID-19] to let ... nature and [the] environment recover from all the impacts that tourism has brought to us" (P-3). Furthermore, "we have exploited the environment for a long time. A lot of forests have vanished, and the pollution in the ocean and on the beaches increased tremendously" (P-11).

Table 4 summarizes the first part of the survey. The results affirm that small business owners

and entrepreneurs in Phuket recognize the importance of environmental sustainability as cemented by a mean rating of 4.08 on the statement "In my opinion, it is important to protect the environment." The second-highest rated statement was "In my opinion, it is important to conserve natural resources," with 3.97. Meanwhile, "I intend to seek out more opportunities to be more environmentally active in the future" (3.61) ranked last among the five statements. Generally, it can be said that the surveyed businesses have high agreement about the importance of (environmental) sustainability.

Table 4 | Summarized responses based on the 87 surveys among SMEs in Phuket (Part 1)

No.	Questionnaire	Rank	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Q1	In my opinion, it is important to protect the environment	1	4.08	0.75	2	5
Q2	I actively practice environmental sustainability at my business (e.g., energy conservation, recycling)	4	3.65	0.82	1	5
Q3	I am concerned about the long-term future of the environment in Phuket	3	3.88	0.91	1	5
Q4	In my opinion, it is important to conserve natural resources	2	3.97	0.95	3	5
Q5	I intend to seek out more opportunities to be more environmentally active in the future	5	3.61	1.02	2	5
* The pre-coded responses ranged from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), to Strongly Agree (5)						

Similarly, the content analysis, conducted through means of a word cloud visualization, shows that the most frequently occurring terms are related to the environmental pillar that represents part of sustainable tourism. As seen in the word cloud (Figure 1), the words "environment," "garbage," "government," "trash," and "waste" are all connected to the ecological part of sustainable tourism, while the economic and socio-cultural pillars were skipped entirely. Zhuang, Yao, and Li (2019) found that particularly in developing countries – including Thailand – much of the discussion related to sustainability centers on the environmental impact. Nevertheless, socio-cultural impacts such as the destruction of heritage, increased crime, or changes in moral behavior are contemporary issues in Thailand (Agarwal & Kariyapol, 2018). Moreover, the business owners' perspective falls in line with the perspective of Phuket residents who noted an increased level of pollution, deterioration of nature, and improper waste management (Tuntipisitkul et al., 2021).

Many of the interview participants said that there is a lack of education and awareness toward sustainable tourism. A business owner indicated that "the concept is quite abstract and sounds very scientific. It should be easier to understand for every business" (P-6). Moreover, another business owner stated that there is a general level of awareness, but not on all levels of the business (or business community), i.e., "How can we blame the labor and hospitality workers if no one educated them about proper practices?" (P-9). For the case of Phuket, the emphasis is placed on economic development at the expense of the remaining two pillars (i.e., socio-cultural and environmental). A lack of partially uneducated stakeholders paired with an increasing influx of tourists can potentially worsen the situation and increase the gap. Tourism is often seen as important only because of the economic benefits it can provide to the involved stakeholders (Hall, 2019). However, an increase in education and knowledge is important to address these issues and improve socio-cultural sustainabi-

lity.

Sustainable tourism is a contemporaneous topic of discussion in higher education for tourism and hospitality curricula (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). However, the study found that there is a more practical danger when one assumes that all stakeholders are well aware of the theoretical concept and practical implications of sustainable tourism. The participants stated that sustainable tourism is "lacking a common understanding on all levels across stakeholders" (P-6, P-9, and P-11). In particular, jobholders who do not directly face the customer appeared to have less understanding of sustainable tourism compared to those who directly face the customer. Furthermore, it was mentioned that governance was insufficient, though none of the participants described a lack of education as a potential reason. Moreover, unsustainable behavior was observed among tourists. Piner and Paradis (2004) stated that cultural bias means interpreting and judging phenomena by standards inherent to one's own culture. Several interviewees (more than half) said that "cultural bias" could be a reason for different interpretations of sustainable tourism.

4.2. RQ2: "What is the perceived impact of sustainable tourism on their business?"

Another noteworthy finding was a relative agreement among most entrepreneurs that the increased use of plastic packaging leads to negative impacts on the environment. Some pledged to switch their packaging to a more sustainable material (for example, bamboo straws or recycled materials). Others noted their general readiness to use more sustainable material, but they feared that rising costs would put them at a disadvantage. This paradox has been cited previously in the literature stating that the betterment of environmental sustainability comes at the cost of decreasing the sustainability of the economic factor (Higgins-

Desbiolles et al., 2019). Higgins-Desbiolle (2020) suggested that the government will provide stimulus packages for business owners to balance out any economic disadvantages and further incentivize local businesses. Correspondingly, a case study conducted by Radović et al. (2020) confirmed that "financial resources are a significant limitation of the sustainable development of tourism" (p. 12).

Several subthemes emerged from the mapping of codes in the analysis process. Specifically, "regulation and control," "government initiative," "government assistance," and "incentives" were the most reoccurring themes. Bramwell (2011) noted that "destinations wanting to promote sustainable tourism are more likely to be successful when there is effective governance" (p. 461). Also, Bramwell (2011) said that one of the major hurdles to achieving effective governance in supporting sustainable tourism development is multi-stakeholder agreement – that is, getting consent from the public sector and private sector as well as NGOs and the media. Similarly, the respondents reported that insufficient governance has been a concern and hurdle. "There is no financial incentive from the government to adopt better practices" (P-12) and "I think it needs to start from within the government" (P-14) are representative statements indicating that small local businesses are ready to contribute to sustainable tourism development.

The second section of the survey covers questions six through 10 as summarized in Table 5. The results of the survey confirm that businesses are willing to increase their activities to support environmental sustainability if subsidized by the government. The corresponding statement "I plan to increase environmentally sustainable activities if subsidized by the government" ranked the highest, with a mean rating of 4.12. Furthermore, it had the highest level of agreement among all 10 survey statements (covering Tables 4-5). Contrary to that, the statement "I feel supported by the local government to implement ideas that support sustainable tourism" received the lowest approval

rating, with a mean rating of 2.72. This indicates that local businesses do not feel adequately supported by the local government in their sustainability efforts.

Table 5 | Summarized responses based on the 87 surveys among SMEs in Phuket (Part 2)

No.	Questionnaire	Rank	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Q6	I have learned about sustainability in high school or university	3	3.48	1.09	1	5
Q7	I am well-informed about current issues that impact the sustainability of tourism	4	3.18	0.96	1	5
Q8	I talk about the need to preserve the environment at work with my staff	2	3.86	1.02	2	5
Q9	I feel supported by the local government to implement ideas that support sustainable tourism	5	2.72	1.32	1	5
Q10	I plan to increase environmentally sustainable activities if subsidized by the government	1	4.12	0.78	3	5
* The pre-coded responses ranged from Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), to Strongly Agree (5)						

However, they are waiting for the public sector (i.e., at the municipality or local government level) to initiate and lead the way. Statements like "There is so much that can be done, but we need a common direction and better regulations and control" (P-3) indicate the readiness of business owners, while also confirming Bramwell's (2011) claim. Nevertheless, "varying objectives at different levels within the government" could be one contributor to preventing more effective governance, according to Dinica (2009). The author also suggested the urgent need for "multi-stakeholder debates to search for common ground in their sustainability visions" (Dinica, 2009, p. 601). As for sustainable development in Phuket, an initiative from the business community through town hall meetings could address the issue at hand as well as serve as an incubator to initiate much-needed multi-stakeholder debates to identify common ground (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020).

Finally, the reader should note and consider a few limitations in the context of this study. First, to determine the business owners' perceptions of sustainable tourism, this study utilized a qualitative approach. Although qualitative data provide rich and meaningful perspectives on a complex problem, they do not allow for the generalization of

the findings. Quantitative data could help advance the implications of this study. Second, the study is limited in scope to Phuket and is not representative of, or generalizable to, other parts of Thailand. More empirical evidence should be gathered in different parts of Thailand, which will help in constructing a conceptual framework that has the potential to generalize the findings to a wider context. Lastly, the interviews were conducted in English without the assistance of an interpreter. Hence, a prerequisite for participating in the interviews was the ability to communicate comfortably in English, which might have prevented the participation of business owners who were not bilingual.

5. Conclusion

In practical terms, the findings demonstrate how the business owners' perception of sustainable tourism can provide insight into contemporary tourism and hospitality issues. The study revealed that small business owners in the tourism and hospitality industry in Phuket recognize the importance of sustainable tourism. However, several obstacles have been identified that relate mostly to insufficient governance and support from the go-

vernment (local agencies) as well as a lack of universal education to increase awareness among all stakeholders. These shortcomings are an important consideration for regional and local policymakers when it comes to planning and implementing future tourism directives. Furthermore, the study discovered that the majority of small business owners in Phuket consider environmental sustainability to be a synonym for sustainable tourism. Generally, local business owners are willing to back initiatives that support sustainability at large. Nevertheless, they are not willing to be at an economic disadvantage and compromise the prosperity of their business for it. Hence, setting economic incentives for small and medium-sized businesses is an important consideration for policymakers.

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Conflict of Interest
The author would like to declare no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

Informed Consent
All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrolment and participation in the study.

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Appendix

Table 1 | Excerpt of the summarized coding based on the empirical data analysis

Theme	Code	Alias	Exemplary quote from the interview
The Environmental Pillar	Higher costs	P-1	"Yeah, I hate that it is a lot more expensive. That's why a lot of people are not using it"
	Environmental-friendly	P-7	"All of my plastic cups are biodegradable"
	Waste management	P-8	"We do have trash separation, like plastic and glass bottle, but there are so many other types, too"
		P-4	"I see it every day how they throw batteries, plastic trash, and leftover foods into the same bin"
	Plastic pollution	P-6	"Styrofoam packaging was banned a few years ago, but everywhere you look, plastic packaging"
Insufficient Governance	More regulations and control	P-15	"Why should I do something that others would not do and, in the end, it puts me out of business"
		P-3	"There is so much that can be done, but we need a common direction and better regulations and control"
	Assistance from government	P-10	"When you really want to see change, you need some help from [the] government"
	Government initiative	P-14	"I think it needs to start from within the government"
	Lack of incentives	P-12	"There is no financial incentive from the government to adopt better practices. At least I am not aware of any"
		P-16	"We would do more if the costs for alternative products would not be substantially higher"
Lack of Education	Instruction card for guests	P-11	"Normally, we have an instruction card for guests […] to preserve energy […] only on request, we will clean your room"
	More education	P-10	"We need to educate people to do the right thing"
		P-9	"How can we blame the labor and hospitality workers if no one educated them about proper practices?"
			"Maybe it is part of today's university studies […] but who is helping me to educate my staff and provide them with better knowledge?"
	Unclear definition	P-6	"Yes, of course, I am hearing about it regularly. But the concept is quite abstract and sounds very scientific. It should be easier to understand for every business"
	Language barriers	P-2	"There are some posters and banners, but it is all in Thai. We are an international island and should offer different languages"

Table 2 | Sociodemographic characteristics of the interview participants (n=18)

Alias	Description of the respondent
P-1	Female – 38 years old – Thai - Owner of café/restaurant – Operating the business for more than 8 years
P-2	Male – 53 years old – Thai – Owner of clothing/apparel store – Operating the business for more than 25 years
P-3	Female – 33 years old – Thai – Owner of a pharmacy in a tourist area – Operating the business for about 3 years
P-4	Male – 51 years old – Foreign – Owner of bed and breakfast – Operating the business for more than 10 years
P-5	Male – 35 years old – Thai – Owner of a medical clinic serving tourists – Operating the business for 5 years
P-6	Female – 24 years old – Thai – Co-owner and manager of a restaurant – Operating the business for 2 years
P-7	Male – 28 years old – Thai – Owner of coffee shop in a tourist area – Operating the business for less than 3 years
P-8	Female – 34 years old – Thai – Owner of coffee shop in a tourist area – Operating the business for about 4-5 years
P-9	Male – 44 years old – Foreign – Owner of a boutique hotel – Operating the business for more than 7 years
P-10	Male – 41 years old – Foreign – Owner of a bar – Operating the business for 3 years
P-11	Female – 47 years old – Thai – Co-owner and manager of a hotel – Operating the business for more than 10 years
P-12	Male – 28 years old – Thai – Owner of a coffee shop – Operating the business for 4 years
P-13	Female – 35 years old – Thai – Travel and tour agency - Operating the business for 5 years
P-14	Male – 42 years old – Foreign – Owner of an apartment building – Operating the business for about 6-7 years
P-15	Female – 32 years old – Thai – Owner of retail and souvenir shop – Operating the business for 5 years
P-16	Male – 51 years old – Foreign – Owner of restaurant and bar – Operating the business for 7 years
P-17	Male – 54 years old – Foreign – Owner of destination management company – Operating the business for more than 15 years
P-18	Female – 52 years old – Thai – Travel and tour agency – Operating the business for more than 10 years

Table 3 | Sociodemographic characteristics of the survey participants (n=87)

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	53	61%
	Female	34	39%
Nationality	Thai	64	74%
	Foreign	23	26%
Years of Operation	3 years or less	16	19%
	3 – 6 years	34	39%
	7 – 10 years	28	32%
	10 years or more	9	10%
Type of Business	Food and beverage	35	40%
	Accommodation and lodging	12	14%
	Tour operator and travel agent	8	9%
	Other tourism-related business *	32	37%
* inclusive of retail shops, massage and wellness, medical clinics or souvenir sales			