

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **3.1 Intended Population**

For the purpose of this research will be defined as: “*Hotel resorts in Phuket charging a starting room price of 6,000 THB/150 USD or more*”. 26 resort hotels have been identified to come under this category, which constitutes the population of the research (Asia Web Direct, 2005).

Tourists will be defined as “*visitors spending at least one night at hotel accommodation in Phuket*”, which population counts 4,234,982 (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2005).

#### **3.2 Sample Size and Sampling Method**

As the population consists of relatively complex entities, hotel resorts, and given time constraints, a case study of the Evason Phuket Resort was chosen. The choice of this hotel resort allows a view into several hotel resorts in other destinations such as the Maldives, Vietnam and other areas of Thailand through their corporation Six Senses Resorts & Spas. Though these are not in Phuket it is believed that experiences drawn at other resorts have transferable value.

To complement the case study interviews was also carried out at two other hotel resorts, the Mangosteen Resort and Spa and Holiday Inn Phuket. These two hotel resorts complemented the Evason Phuket Resort, which is part of a small international hotel chain, by the former being an independent boutique hotel resort and the latter part of a big multinational hotel chain. For this reason comparison between small boutique and large multinational hotel chains could be made. A total of three hotel resorts and one hotel resort management company were explored in-depth, which constituted the sample size.

The rest of the population was approached either by personal communication or e-mail without giving any answer, thus these were looked upon briefly through research of secondary data to see if they are taking any measures regarding environmentally friendly

development.

As it would be difficult to estimate exact number of visitors to the population it was chosen to look at the tourists as a whole visiting Phuket. Furthermore, it would allow comparison between guests' preferences and choices at various hotel resort levels.

With a population of 4,234,982 tourists the sample size was selected by simple random sampling. The large population made it necessary to decide on a confidence level 95% and confidence interval of +/-5%. Sample size for such a large sample has been calculated by various researchers to be 384 (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970) to 400 (Yamane, 1967). The target was set to be 400 questionnaires.

A majority of the questionnaires was distributed at Phuket International Airport's departure hall with some at Holiday Inn Phuket and Evason Phuket Resort as these to resorts kindly allowed it. A total of 408 valid questionnaires was collected, a large enough sample to analyse the opinions of hotel guests. Only guests staying in the Phuket region was evaluated.

### **3.3 Research Design**

As identified there is a growing concern and demand for environmental issues within the tourism industry. Given the importance of hospitality industry especially within accommodation sector, and its often big negative environmental impact, it is likely that environmentally friendly development will become more and more important. For this reason, it has been identified that primary research is necessary to investigate this theme further. This research project specifically looked at one luxury resort, Evason Phuket Resort, Thailand, in-debt, but also looked at other properties managed and developed by Six Senses Resorts & Spas as well as other luxury resorts in Phuket such as the Mangosteen Resort and Spa and Holiday Inn Phuket.

The rationale behind choosing luxury is that they by nature of pampering guests with luxury use substantial amount of energy, water and resources as well as producing much waste, which may have severely negatively affect on the environment. Furthermore, only environmental sustainability will be investigated, as it is believed to be the most crucial factor in differentiation, especially in terms of understanding amongst hoteliers and guests. It is recognized that both economical- and social sustainability are important issues, but these often are a result of

environmental action taken.

A case study approach was chosen because in-depth data is believed to be most useful in this exploratory research study. Phuket is an international destination with a wide variety of hotel resorts, and this particular hotel resort has been chosen because it already has put in the mission statement that they should operate in a sustainable environment. Furthermore, it is part of a chain, Six Senses Resorts & Spas, which can give insight in challenges met in different parts of the world.

### **3.4 Instrumentation**

The main form of primary research was in-depth interview with key figures, managing director, general manager, resident manager and director of property and maintenance, in the Evason Phuket Resort, Six Senses Resorts & Spas, the Mangosteen Resort and Spa and Holiday Inn Phuket as well as questionnaires aimed at tourists in Phuket to both understand considerations necessary for sustainable development from a developer's point of view as well as demand and awareness amongst customers.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

#### **3.5.1 Secondary Research**

Several research papers on competitive advantage and on environmentally friendly development have been identified, however, to the knowledge of the author there has not been identified any academic studies or research on how hotel resorts can gain competitive advantage through environmentally friendly development. Therefore, secondary research concentrates on environmentally friendly development in general, competitive advantage in hospitality industry and tourism statistics related to region of study, which will make it possible to put research findings into context.

#### **3.5.2 Primary Research**

Since this research study seeks to explore a complex issue, which minimum previous research has been conducted. For this reason, it is believed that a small sample with in-debt data will be most useful. A case study approach will be chosen as an appropriate method for the collection of primary data as to be successful it is necessary to get exhaustive in-debt understanding (Yin, 2002).

The main form of primary research was in-debt interview with key figures in the Evason Phuket Resort, general manager and resident manager, as well as in the resort's management company Six Senses Resorts & Spas, group director of property and maintenance. In-debt interview with managing director of the Mangosteen Resort and Spa and general manager of Holiday Inn Phuket was also conducted. This method is chosen because interviews are, "*ideal if a topic is to be explored as the preliminary stage in planning a large study.*" (Veal, 1997) By doing this it will be possible to look at several different hotel resort developments of different characteristics.

Semi structured interviews will be developed to allow the interviewees to express their opinion and observations freely as well as keeping them in line of the research topic. The reason for choosing this method is to try and allow as many issues as possible come to the surface, but the main area of interest is economic-, social- and environmental sustainability.

A second tool of primary research will be questionnaires, which is "*arguably the most common method used in leisure and tourism research*" (Veal, 1997). Questionnaires give a general view on people's opinions and give an opportunity to establish whether or not sustainable development of resorts can give competitive advantage through distributing it amongst tourists, i.e. guests/customers of hotel resorts. Furthermore, questionnaires are less costly than interview when investigating a large number of participants and are easier to quantify and analyse (Cooper and Schindler, 2003).

The questionnaire will be designed to cover areas relevant to this research, such as concern about sustainability, reasons for choosing certain resorts, environmental and social awareness and willingness to pay for environmental awarded resorts. Primarily, the questionnaires will be distributed amongst guests at Evason Phuket Resort but it is also intended to distribute to other tourists in Phuket to establish whether or not there are differences. Questionnaires will be constructed in English, as it is believed to be the most widely used

language.

To further evaluate whether differentiation is possible to be achieved investigations of the other luxury hotel resorts in Phuket will be intended established in order to evaluate to what extent environmentally friendly development practices is undertaken.

### 3.6.3 Constraints

The main constraint with this research was time. For this reason, a case study approach of Evason Phuket Resort has been chosen, which limits the number of hotel resorts investigated. To not only rely on one hotel resort interviews at two other hotel resorts, the Mangosteen Resort and Spa and Holiday Inn Phuket, was conducted. Despite the limited number of hotel resorts it allows, however, a deeper investigation into a hotel resort, which is genuinely trying to operate in a sustainable manner. It also allows to investigate the corporate's, Six Senses Resorts & Spas, experiences in their developments in other destinations such as the Maldives, Vietnam, Hua Hin (Thailand) and Koh Samui (Thailand). For this reason, in-debt interviewing has been chosen as the main form of research tool to get a more qualitative research.

However, interviewing has its limitations, as a major constraint is whether or not people are telling the whole truth or altering their answers. As Clarke and Critcher (1985, p. 27) argue:

*“There is always a gap between what people say and what they actually do and no study of work or leisure can afford to take what people say at face value, especially when the answers are contained in the questions.”*

This is particularly important, as the topic caters for sustainable issues, a topic in which there are no formal standards and with terms that can be interpreted differently, and which involve parties generally believing that they are acting correctly.

Furthermore, cultural and language barriers are believed to be a constraint. By this is meant that involved parties come from different nationalities and cultures, which may interpret the term sustainability differently leaving slightly conflicting answers. Also, by choosing English at the main language does restrict the expression of opinion amongst those who does not have it as their mother tongue. However, by researching amongst people from different cultural

backgrounds reduces cultural bias.

### **3.7 Summary of Chapter 3**

The population of this research is 26 luxury hotel resort and 4,234,982 tourists. The rationale behind choosing luxury is that they by nature of pampering guests with luxury use substantial amount of energy, water and resources as well as producing much waste, which may have severely negatively affect on the environment.

As the research is exploratory a case study of Evason Phuket Resort was chosen with in-debt interviews as instrumentation. Two managers was interview plus on from the management company Six Senses Spas and Resorts covering eight existing hotels and twelve under development. To complement this, top management of the Mangosteen Resort and Spa and Holiday Inn Phuket was interviewed. The rest of the population was research based on secondary information.

408 valid questionnaires were collected from tourists mainly from Phuket International airport giving a large enough sample to analyse opinions of hotel guests.