

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological framework utilized in this research to guide data collection and data analysis. To achieve this, the discussion firstly outlines the research design, and is followed by the rationale for employing qualitative methods of data collection, in particular in-depth interviewing. In doing so, the chapter covers key methodological considerations including sampling strategy, data collection, and data analysis strategy.

### **Research Design**

The key reason and motivation for this research is to study the critical success factors of economic crisis management using Phuket hotels as a case study. By drawing on literature from areas relevant to economic crisis management in tourism, this research developed three main research objectives:

1. To examine local negative factors affecting Phuket hotels.
2. To examine economic crisis as a global negative factor affecting Phuket hotels.
3. To investigate the critical success factors (CSFs) of crisis management implemented by Phuket hotels during an economic crisis.

Essentially, this research is motivated by the lack of relevant research and literature concerned specifically with crisis management during an economic crisis. As little is known about this key issue, a vital consideration for this research was to adopt qualitative research methods utilizing semi-structured in-depth interviews to obtain rich and substantively meaningful data.

It should be pointed out that qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth and interpreted account of the social world through the participation of social actors (Snape & Spencer 2003). Qualitative researchers study ‘things’ in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of and interpret phenomena through the meanings people bring to them (Denzin

& Lincoln 2005). To best achieve this, qualitative research usually emphasizes words as opposed to the quantification of data (Bryman & Bell 2003), and one of the key instruments employed in both this research and more generally, is the in-depth interview. In this research in-depth interviewing was chosen as its key method of data collection for three major reasons.

Firstly, an in-depth interview is possibly the most widely employed method in qualitative research (Bryman & Bell 2003). Secondly, the method has also been used in a wide range of crisis management researches (e.g. Elsubbaugh, Fildes & Rose 2004; Santana 1997). Thirdly, in-depth interview allows researchers to explore factors which underpin a respondent's answers, including key factors such as their reasons, feelings, opinions, and beliefs (Legard, Keegan & Ward 2003).

Using semi-structured interviewing, interviewers are able to direct interviews to a greater extent in accordance with a specific list of topics or subject areas. In this way, the timing, exact wording, and time allocated to each question area are left more to the interviewer's discretion (Aaker, Kumar & Day 2004).

### **Sampling Strategy**

Sampling strategy implemented in this research began with the process of defining the target population, identifying the sampling frame, and then choosing a sampling method as explained below.

#### **Target Population**

As the central aim of this research is to identify critical success factors of economic crisis management approaches utilized by Phuket hotels, this research chose high-level executives (e.g. directors, general managers, company advisors, and presidents) at hotels in Phuket that had already been in business prior to the year 2008 in which the global economic crisis started (C9 Hotelworks 2010a) and have a room rate of at least 133 USD (approx 4,280 Baht) per night, which is an average room rate in Phuket (Koldowski 2009), as a target population.

### Sampling Frame

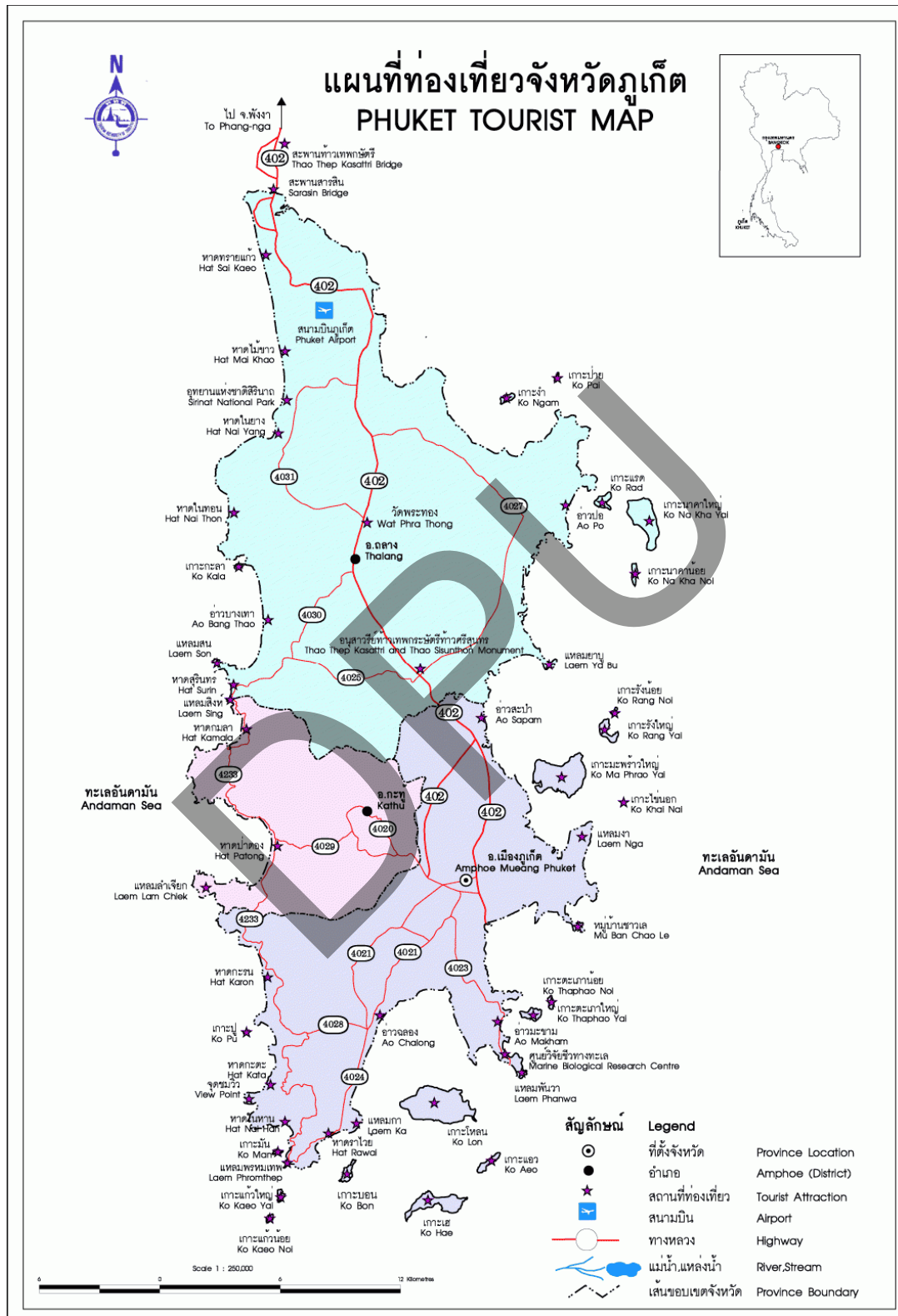
The researcher has contacted the local tourism authority with an attempt to obtain a database of Phuket hotels with up-to-date room rates. Unfortunately, the existing database does not provide such information. Therefore, a sampling frame has been obtained mainly from an internet search (Google) of hotels in Phuket with a room rate of at least 133 USD.

### Sampling Method

By using multi-stage sampling, this research initially employed purposive sampling to identify hotels located in Phuket's main tourist areas (see the figure below). Convenience sampling has been used to choose one high-level executive (e.g. a director or general manager) from each hotel in selected tourist areas that would be able to provide insightful information in regard to this research topic. Convenience sampling constitutes a non-probability technique which attempts to obtain a sample of convenient elements; overall, it is both less expensive and less time consuming when compared with other sampling techniques (Aaker, Kumar & Day 2004, p. 388; Malhotra 2004), and thus is particularly suitable to this research given its resource limitations.

In addition to convenience sampling, the other non-probability technique employed in this research is snowball sampling. Using this technique, respondents are selected based on direct referral, or alternatively information provided by initial respondents, thus constituting ultimately a snowball effect to obtaining interviewees (Malhotra 2004). While in this research convenience sampling is expected to dominate the sampling process, snowball sampling is also envisaged to act as a supplementary device when it becomes difficult to approach certain respondents.

Figure 5: Phuket tourist map



Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand (2010)

## **Data Collection**

To provide an overview of data collection in the context of this inquiry, this section discusses the pilot interviews utilized in this research; the major in-depth interviews which form the core of the data collected; and the relevant ethical considerations raised by the study. Details of each part are discussed as follows.

### Pilot In-Depth Interviews

As suggested by Vant, Leven and Jonsson (2002), a pilot interview can be conducted to test the interview guidelines, as well as help the researcher become acquainted with an interview situation.

With these aims in mind, five pilot interviews for this research were conducted with hotel executives, prior to the main interviews. Each hotel executive in the pilot interviews, however, is at a different level within an organization. Observations from the pilot interviews revealed that respondents in a higher position tend to have a better understanding and knowledge of crisis management than respondents in a lower position. This has strengthened the researcher's decision to interview only high-level hotel executives.

### Main In-Depth Interviews

This qualitative research employed semi-structured interviewing which enables the researcher to employ an interview guide outlining a specific list of topics needed to be covered during an interview (Aaker, Kumar & Day 2004). Using Internet search, the researcher has found a number of hotels that can be chosen as target populations. From the list of search results, 60 hotels that have sufficient hotel information provided on their websites have been chosen.

To start with, the researcher sent an email to those 60 selected hotels asking for cooperation with the in-depth interviews. In return, the researcher received a total of 25 responses out of 60 (a 41.6% response rate) from organizations willing to participate in an interview.

**Table 2: Profile of respondent titles**

<b>Respondent Profiles</b>	<b>No.</b>
General Managers	19
Board of Directors	3
Directors	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

Source: Developed for this research

The major in-depth interviews in Phuket, Thailand were all undertaken in October 2010. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes, and it remained very difficult to extend interviews beyond 45 or 50 minutes given most interviewees were senior management with busy schedules. When the data became saturated, the researcher carefully decided whether the quantity of data was sufficient to achieve the research aims, and further interviews were therefore not needed.

#### Ethical Consideration

Crisis management has been considered a sensitive issue in a number of studies (Elsubbaugh, Fildes & Rose 2004; Santana 1997). In particular, while some organizations have managed crises successfully, through well developed crisis management plans, others remain comparatively unprepared and vulnerable. Moreover, an interview on an issue as sensitive as the organization's management of a crisis could be linked to management failings caused by poor or unsafe practices (Elsubbaugh, Fildes & Rose 2004). To ensure the confidentiality of respondents, all respondents were clearly informed prior to the interviews that any quotes that are used in this research will be anonymously attributed, and any descriptors that could result in their identification will be removed.

#### **Data Analysis**

This research has implemented the following data analysis steps. Firstly, the data analysis of this research began by typing interviews into a transcription format. Secondly, the researcher has categorized data based on themes, concepts, or other common features, from

which new concepts can then be developed, conceptual definitions formulated, and relationships between concepts drawn and examined. Such a process is commonly known as ‘content analysis’ (Ruhanen 2006), which can be defined as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use (Krippendorff 2004). In this sense, content analysis is a technique for data collection, description, and interpretation (Norris & Jacobson 1998), with the goal of depicting the ‘big’ picture in terms of a given subject, and displaying conceptual depth through the thoughtful arrangement of a wealth of detailed observations (White & Marsh 2006).

Thirdly, this research has conducted a data confirmation process with a panel of tourism experts who were chosen using convenience sampling. Through online surveys, they were requested to rate their opinions on each major finding that has been identified in the in-depth interviews. More detailed will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **Summary**

This chapter has given an account of the methodological framework utilized in this study, and discussed its key methodological considerations. Firstly, this chapter has outlined the research design, and then discussed sampling strategy, the methods of data collection, and data analysis respectively. In the next chapter, key findings from the main in-depth interviews will be presented.