

SOME LITERATURE REVIEW ABOUT WELLNESS TOURISM

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Abstract: *Wellness tourism has become a popular and developed form of tourism in some countries such as the USA, India, Korea, Japan, Singapore, China, Thailand, Indonesia, etc. Wellness tourism has become a new and rapidly growing trend in the global tourism market, thus bringing new changes in customer base, services, and products provided. This is also an open topic for researchers related to tourism, wellness tourism, and wellness tourism development. The article focuses on clarifying some literature reviews related to wellness tourism, thereby finding research gaps for future studies in this field.*

Keywords: *tourism, wellness, development, wellness tourism, literature review.*

I. Introduction

Today, most countries in the world identify tourism as one of the important economic sectors, contributing significantly and effectively to the economic, political, social, and cultural development of the country. According to Statista, in the years before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism contributed 10.3 - 10.4% of global GDP. Wellness tourism has become a new and fast-growing trend in the global tourism market. Thus, it brings new changes to the customer base, services, and product offerings. (Stara & Peterson, 2017; cited in Tran & Vu, 2024). Wellness tourism is identified as an emerging trend in the Tourism industry and mainly develops awareness among people about maintaining a healthy lifestyle (Mirando, Dabare, & Chathuranga, 2022; cited in Tran & Vu, 2024).

However, wellness tourism is a complex type of tourism. Differences in the definition of wellness tourism in different countries have created certain differences in the segmentation of wellness tourists in different countries (Meikassandra et al., 2020). Vietnam is a country with many advantages for developing wellness tourism. It has a diverse terrain system, including mountains and plains, especially with a favorable strategic location on the sea and islands. Many hot mineral springs and hot mud stretch across the country, and many areas have cool, temperate climates and rich medicinal plants. However, the potential of wellness tourism has not yet been well exploited for development (Thai Ngan, 2021). In Vietnam, there is not much access to wellness tourism. Basically, research on domestic wellness tourism is still at an exploratory level and

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has not really been implemented (Tran & Vu, 2024).

In order to further develop wellness tourism in Vietnam, a better understanding of the literature review for this issue is necessary, helping to identify some basic contents related to wellness tourism, and research gaps for coming studies.

II. Theoretical basis

2.1. Definition of wellness tourism

The word “wellness” in health tourism originated from Dr. Halbert Dunn’s research in 1959 (Dunn, 1959), which describes a state of health that includes factors not only related to physical, but also psychological, spiritual, and environmental factors.

Wellness tourism is defined by UNWTO (2021) as follows: “Wellness tourism includes fundamental elements that help an individual improve physical, mental & spiritual health through specific activities; to satisfy needs & improve the quality of life better than the current environment & society.”.

The concept of wellness tourism has evolved and changed over time, in line with the way society views wellness (Dini & Pencarelli, 2022). Compared to the original purely health-oriented starting point of wellness tourism (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001), wellness tourism today tends towards what is known as “a holistic wellness orientation” (Dillette et al., 2021; GWI, 2018).

The name «wellness tourism» is often confused with «health tourism», which can also be translated as medical tourism or health tourism. However, health tourism includes both wellness tourism and medical tourism, which are two different types of tourism, although quite closely related (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Medical tourism, which can be called medical tourism, is a type of tourism associated with the purpose of curing diseases that have been contracted, while

wellness tourism is more about the values and lifestyle of tourists (GWI, 2018). Wellness tourism is for healthy people who actively seek experiences to maintain and improve their health, as well as to prevent possible diseases (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). From this perspective, wellness tourism is sometimes viewed as a personal lifestyle of tourists who seek to achieve a balance in their health, both physical and mental, through travel without the need for medical intervention (Wang et al., 2020). This is what separates wellness tourism from other types of health-related tourism. However, overlap sometimes occurs with tourism types or destinations that can serve both medical and wellness tourism, such as spas (Damijanić, 2020). Spas and resorts are also often the subject of wellness tourism studies (e.g., Boćkus et al., 2023; Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015).

Although wellness tourism is fundamentally different from health tourism and medical tourism (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001), current evidence suggests some confusion between the two. Wang et al. (2021) found that wellness tourism is still associated with illness, despite the fact that it is a form of tourism intended for healthy people. Some studies on wellness tourism (e.g. Damijanić, 2020) still include healing elements in the context of spa research, as this is a facility that can ensure both maintenance and healing elements. This makes it difficult to develop a comprehensive approach to wellness tourism that is completely separate from medical tourism. In terms of definition, wellness tourism has no fixed shape, and previous studies have not yet shown a common structure of wellness tourism. The holistic nature of wellness tourism makes the picture quite complex. In fact, each destination has its own approach to implementing wellness (GWI, 2018). This shows the importance of environmental factors in shaping wellness tourism based on the desired state of health of tourists. Different consumers/

tourists may have different views on the desired state of health, leading to different perceptions when evaluating the suitability of a destination to participate in wellness tourism.

2.2. Concept of wellness tourism development

Wellness tourism development can be understood as the process of enhancing and expanding wellness tourism services to meet the needs of tourists and improve their wellness. This includes: Improving the quality and diversification of wellness services, increasing investment in medical infrastructure and tourism services, training and capacity building for experts in the wellness field, building effective promotion and marketing programs to attract tourists. The ultimate goal is to create a sustainable wellness tourism industry that benefits both tourists and local communities (Tran & Vu, 2024).

III. Research methods

This paper employs a desk study methodology. It includes already published materials in reports, articles, or similar documents. Accordingly, relevant data about wellness tourism is collected from scientific researches, scientific articles, proceedings, reports, etc. from reliable information sources such as the Vietnam National Tourism Administration, the Institute of Tourism Development Research, the National Library, Hanoi Open University library, etc. These data are then screened, classified, sorted, and structured to serve the paper.

IV. Research results and discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Literature review of wellness tourism in Vietnam

In 2018, the Institute for Tourism Development & Research held a workshop on developing wellness tourism

in Vietnam, as a premise to attract the attention of academics on wellness tourism. However, the presentations in the workshop only stopped at re-presenting the definitions of wellness tourism, reporting on market trends, and studying the current status of wellness tourism destinations in the world. For example, Tran (2018) presented the experience of developing wellness tourism in China and some Northeast Asian countries. Vu (2018) proposed a model of developing hot mineral springs associated with wellness tourism for tourist destinations in Vietnam. Although the reports in the 2018 conference were all very interesting and provided perspectives on wellness tourism, the conference's goal was only to gain a deeper understanding of wellness tourism, which is still quite new to the world market. Therefore, we still do not have an idea of how Vietnamese tourists interact with or perceive wellness tourism, as well as how Vietnamese consumers perceive the concept of "wellness", which is a very important factor that can determine the success or failure of a tourism program, as Bočkus et al. (2023) pointed out with Russian and Finnish tourists. Ngo (2022) compared the views on wellness tourism of foreign and Vietnamese tourists and also pointed out the differences between groups of tourists; however, the author's results did not go into detail about the reasons. Another rare study on wellness tourism in 2022 by Nguyen and colleagues (Nguyen et al., 2022) conducted on Vietnamese tourists in Ba Vi National Park showed that Vietnamese tourists have a great demand for wellness tourism. The authors pointed out that factors such as income, location, and natural scenery at the destination are factors affecting tourists' demand for sightseeing with the purpose of "wellness" - these are important factors for stakeholders to refer to in developing wellness tourism. The above results are very interesting and serve as a premise for determining Vietnamese people's views

on “wellness”, which is still a big gap in the theoretical system of wellness tourism.

4.1.2. Literature review of wellness tourism in the world

4.1.2.1. Motivation to participate in wellness tourism

The assumption made when tourists decide to engage in wellness tourism is that the chosen destination is identified as being suitable for the purpose of maintaining and improving health, as defined by wellness tourism. This is supported by the results of previous studies on tourists’ motivations for engaging in wellness tourism (e.g., Tuzunkan, 2018).

In general, for the theory of motivation for participating in wellness tourism, Chen et al. (2008) divided the motivations of tourists participating in wellness tourism into four main groups: relaxation to reduce stress, participation in various activities, entertainment, and enjoying nature. Other studies on motivation for participating in wellness tourism also share the view of a mixture of motivations that make consumers participate in wellness tourism, although the implementation is slightly different. For example, Bockus et al. (2023) presented the factors that motivate wellness tourism behavior, including relaxation, social status, physical beauty, personal development, nature, and social interaction. Although different studies have different approaches to the motivations for participating in wellness tourism, the authors share the view that there is a mixture of many motivations, and the groups are quite similar in characteristics. For example, the group of relaxation and nature enjoyment motivations in the study of Bockus et al. (2023) is almost equivalent to the group of relaxation and stress reduction motivations and the group of nature in Chen et al. (2008).

Motivations for wellness tourism influence tourists’ interactions with wellness activities, strengthening loyalty (Kim et al.,

2017). However, this is not without risks. While interactions with wellness tourism activities lead to destination selection decisions, visiting a destination too many times can reduce tourists’ inspiration (Liu et al., 2022). In other words, motivations for wellness tourism do not always lead to positive outcomes for tourists. Tourist experiences in wellness tourism depend largely on tourists’ beliefs about the benefits they can receive from related activities (Wendri et al., 2019). Demographic information, such as age or education level of tourists, can predict these beliefs relatively well (Koskinen & Wilska, 2019). In any case, previous studies agree that the demand for wellness tourism is driven by many different influencing factors at the same time, and these motivations are not fixed across cases. On the side of wellness service providers, they will naturally try to satisfy most of the tourists’ motivations (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). In addition, looking at the heterogeneous structure of motivations for participating in wellness tourism contributes to explaining why each destination has its own characteristics when offering wellness tourism (GWI, 2018).

Recent research on wellness tourism motivations by Bockys et al. (2023) shows that different countries are more inclined towards different sets of motivations, or have their own priorities for motivations. For example, Russian and Lithuanian tourists prefer physical activities when choosing wellness tourism, while Finnish tourists prioritize external factors for wellness trips. The authors suggest that this difference comes from different views on “wellness” in each country; for example, Russians believe that wellness must be beautiful and healthy, while Finns do not care much about taking care of their appearance. According to Kukkonen and Sarpila (2021), Finnish views on beauty are generally modest and pragmatic.

Thus, service providers need to understand how their target customers perceive wellness before offering or

developing related products. Looking at the example of Bockus et al. (2023), it is clear that a wellness tourism service that is suitable for Russian tourists would not be well received by Finnish tourists, simply because customers would not recognize the service as being for wellness purposes.

4.1.2.2. The relationship of wellness tourism with tourists and local communities

Since wellness tourism remains a niche market, the number of studies focusing solely on wellness tourism is still limited, especially studies on the relationship between wellness tourism and tourists and local communities (Uysal et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2021). Uysal et al. (2016) compared the perspectives of quality of life from both tourists and local residents to clarify how tourism affects the health of local communities. Wang et al. (2021) found that local residents isolate themselves from wellness tourism activities as a way to protect themselves from diseases that may be transmitted from tourists.

4.1.2.3. The needs of wellness tourists

The needs of wellness tourists have received considerable contributions from various authors. Studies in this area focus on describing how tourists seek and demand comprehensive wellness services, which include many different types of services and experiences. Typical representatives are the motivational factors for participating in wellness tourism.

For example, Konu et al. (2010) showed that wellness tourists are attracted by a mixture of activities that include many different types, such as sports, spirituality, and culture. Among the proposed types, activities related to relaxation and stress relief ranked first, followed by the factors that motivate consumers to participate in wellness tourism activities.

4.1.2.4. Factors affecting the development of health tourism

Sheldon and Bushell (2009) proposed the first theoretical model of wellness

tourism to link related factors such as type of experience, tourist motivation, factors influencing choice, and components that form a wellness tourism destination. These factors are synthesized into three main groups, reflecting the “holistic” character of wellness tourism, which is a combination of factors related to tourism experience, such as infrastructure, tourist experience, and natural resources.

In 2019, the Wellness Travel Association (WTA) mentioned nine essential elements of a wellness tourism destination but did not give the level of influence of these elements on the development of wellness tourism; These nine elements include: safe environment, clean infrastructure, quality of life of local people participating in tourism, natural resources, sustainable policies, health care service guides, restaurants serving healthy food, health care related equipment and tours, and a quiet physical environment. Ullah et al. (2021), in a study related to factors affecting health and wellness tourism, mentioned four contents: market demand, service supply, infrastructure, and external environment.

4.2. Discussion

The overview of the above research shows that wellness tourism is a fairly new type of tourism. Foreign studies have mentioned many aspects of this type of tourism; however, research on factors affecting the development of wellness tourism is lacking. Currently, there are quite a few studies, only pointing out some influential factors but not clarifying the correlation between the factors on the development of wellness tourism.

Applying these research results in Vietnam is not really suitable due to the different characteristics of culture, economy, and society in each country, while in the country, there is almost no complete research on the factors affecting the development of health tourism in Vietnam. Besides, there is a lack of studies

on how Vietnamese tourists interact with or perceive wellness tourism, as well as how Vietnamese consumers perceive the concept of “wellness”, which is a very important factor that can determine the success or failure of a tourism program. Those are potential areas for future studies and research related to wellness tourism development in Vietnam.

V. Conclusion

The wellness tourist market is forecast to grow rapidly and strongly in the near future after the global tourism industry recovers after the pandemic. The supply and demand of this market have many different characteristics compared to regular tourism, so meeting the needs of wellness tourists also poses many challenges for destinations (Tran & Vu, 2024). This paper aims to provide a further look into the literature review of this kind of tourism, opening new research gaps for researchers to develop wellness tourism further in the future.

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MỘT SỐ TỔNG QUAN VỀ DU LỊCH CHĂM SÓC SỨC KHỎE

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Tóm tắt: Du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe đã trở thành loại hình du lịch phổ biến và phát triển ở một số quốc gia như: Mỹ, Ấn Độ, Hàn Quốc, Nhật Bản, Singapore, Trung Quốc, Thái Lan, Indonesia... Du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe trở thành một xu hướng mới và đang phát triển nhanh trên thị trường du lịch toàn cầu, do đó nó mang đến những thay đổi mới về cơ sở khách hàng, dịch vụ và sản phẩm cung cấp. Đây cũng là chủ đề gợi mở cho các nhà nghiên cứu liên quan đến du lịch, du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe và phát triển du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe. Bài báo tập trung làm rõ một số tổng quan về các nghiên cứu liên quan đến du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe, từ đó tìm ra các khoảng trống nghiên cứu cho các nghiên cứu trong tương lai.

Từ khóa: du lịch, sức khỏe, phát triển, du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe, tổng quan.

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