

1

Introduction to Wellness Management in Hospitality and Tourism

This chapter introduces the overall concept of wellness management in hospitality and tourism as a foundation for the rest of this book. First, it discusses the concept of health and wellness. Next, it looks at what wellness tourism is and how it differs from medical tourism. Primary and secondary wellness tourism are defined, and the impact of wellness travel on the global economy is introduced.

Learning outcomes

By the end of reading this chapter, students should be able to do the following:

1. Define health and wellness.
 2. Define wellness tourism and medical tourism.
 3. Discuss the differences between wellness tourism and medical tourism.
 4. Discuss the impact of wellness travel on the global economy.
 5. Define primary and secondary wellness travelers.
 6. Identify core motivations for wellness tourism.
 7. Identify the main beneficiaries/stakeholders of wellness activities in the hospitality and tourism industry.
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Case study: Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, Aruba

“Wellness” has become a buzzword in the hospitality and tourism industry and for many good reasons. However, some organizations and destinations have been focusing on wellness principles for decades before the movement became mainstream. One example is Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort on the Caribbean island of Aruba.

While the numerous large branded hotel chains on the island have been moving beyond the fitness center and spa, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort has been taking steps to maximize its wellness efforts from its opening in 1987. Their concept of wellness starts with environmental sustainability. The resort hotel is the first carbon-neutral property in the Caribbean. Much of their produce is locally grown, they have eliminated almost all single-use plastic on the property, and they generate electricity through solar panels and their fitness facility equipment. Starting with a strong foundation of environmental wellness, the hotel is better able to offer personal wellness services and guarantees to its guests.

Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort offers wellness amenities like a tranquil adults-only environment, a Daily Healthy Hour with reduced price smoothies and mocktails, free daily wellness activities on the property, exercise classes and nutritional counseling, non-smoking rooms with additional air purification, an on-site restaurant with healthy ingredients and portions, and of course, spa treatments focused on balancing mind, body, and spirit.

Another important concept in wellness travel is connecting with new people, other travelers, and locals alike, to expand one’s mental well-being and interact with the local community. Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort not only employs local Aruban people, they also open their classes and restaurants to the community and are happy to connect guests to events run by other local organizations, such as stand up paddleboard yoga. Many tourism entities are incorporating a range of wellness programs and activities into their business, from sustainability to physical health; Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort in Aruba is one example of a hotel that has focused on this from its inception.

Discussion questions

1. What types of wellness programs and activities can hotels offer to their guests?
2. How can tourism entities go beyond spa treatments to offer a more holistic wellness experience?
3. How can hotels and other service providers incorporate local people and traditions into the guest experience in a way that enhances wellness?
4. Do you know any hospitality and tourism organization offering unique wellness experiences? If yes, please provide a short description of these experiences.

Wellness management in hospitality and tourism.

According to Stara and Peterson (2017), there are five main themes surrounding research on wellness: (1) wellness as a state of being, (2) wellness as a process of personal growth, (3) wellness as an approach to professional care, (4) wellness as a matter of community, and (5) wellness as a global topic. This textbook broaches all five of these topics in one way or another as it explores wellness in regards to hospitality and tourism.

Health, wellness, and well-being

The concepts of health, wellness, and well-being are certainly not new. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines **health** as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being,” taking care to further note that it is not only the absence of disease or illness (WHO, 2019). The Global Wellness Institute (GWI) more specifically defines **wellness** as “the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health” (GWI, 2019a and Yeung and Johnston 2018, p. iii). **Well-being**, on the other hand, tends to be more subjective in nature, focusing on happiness rather than health or wellness. Dillette et al. (2020, p. 795) sum up all three concepts by stating that “wellness can be thought of in congruence with prevention and health, while well-being with happiness.” Throughout history, people of the world have participated in a shared search for health, wellness, and well-being (Tables 1.1 and 1.2.).

Table 1.1: History of wellness (summarized from GWI, 2019a; Pierre-Louis, 2019)

Ancient wellness	
3,000 – 1,500 BC	The practice of Ayurveda is developed as a holistic system that promotes harmony between body, mind, and spirit. This balance is unique for each person’s own nutritional, exercise, social, and hygiene needs, and yoga and meditation are incorporated. Originally an oral tradition, Ayurveda was later recorded in the four sacred Hindu texts of the Vedas.
3,000 – 2,000 BC	Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) emerges as a holistic perspective to achieving health and well-being by fostering harmony. Influenced by Taoism and Buddhism, TCM incorporates healing methods like acupuncture, herbal medicine, qigong (which focuses on regulated breathing exercises, [Merriam Webster, 2020a]), and tai chi.
500 BC	In ancient Greece, Hippocrates argued that disease is due to poor diet, lifestyle, and environmental factors, and focused on preventing sickness instead of only treating disease.
50 BC	The ancient Romans adapted Greek beliefs that disease prevention is essential, and created a public health infrastructure with aqueducts, sewers, and public baths to prevent the spread of germs.
Wellness defined and homeopathy developed	
1650s	The Oxford English Dictionary traces the word “wellness” back to 1654, from the diary of Sir Archibald Johnston: “I ... blessed God ... for my daughter’s wealnesse.” A 1655 letter from Dorothy Osborne to her husband, Sir William Temple, is the first citation with the modern spelling of ‘wellness.’
1790s	In Germany, physician Christian Hahneman develops a system that uses natural substances to encourage the body to heal itself, known as homeopathy .