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Wellness Tourism Regions and Destinations

This chapter looks at some of the historically known wellness destinations and discusses the emerging regions and what they have to offer tourists. While some developing destinations are beginning to go beyond traditional spas, there is more opportunity to share their wellness offerings with visitors. This may be a way to encourage tourism while maintaining an authentic destination and preventing overtourism. This chapter also lists some of the well-known wellness destinations in the United States and globally.

Learning outcomes

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

1. Discuss the historic town of Bath.
 2. Define wellness destination.
 3. List several other historical wellness destinations.
 4. Identify the main wellness regions globally.
 5. Identify the top wellness destinations in the USA.
 6. Identify the top wellness destinations globally.
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Case study: Visit Bath: Spas Ancient and Modern

The historic English town of Bath is synonymous with healing waters and spas. For over 2,000 years, dating back to 43 AD when the Roman Empire controlled the land that is now England, the region has attracted travelers in search of wellness. The water contains 42 minerals and escapes the earth at approximately 45°C (113°F), although it is then cooled to a more comfortable 33.5°C (92.3°F). The original baths are available to tour but are not used anymore due to the high levels of the dangerous micro-organism *Naegleria fowleri*. Instead, the newly constructed Thermae Bath Spa and the refurbished Cross Bath use recently drilled boreholes to offer a way for visitors to experience the same waters safely. The Grand Pump Room opened in the 1790s as a gathering space serving refreshments and water from the hot springs. It now serves as a restaurant and museum featuring artifacts from the Roman period (Bath's Historic Venues, 2019; UNESCO, 2019; Cowie, 2019; Thermae Bath Spa, 2019).

The Thermae Bath Spa opened in 2006 at the cost of approximately £40 million, ending a 30-year period in which there was no bathing experience available due to the discovery of *Naegleria fowleri*. In 2011, the local tourism bodies determined that there was a need for a more cohesive promotion of the bath experience. Out of this came the Spas Ancient and Modern Package at a 2011 price of £59, which includes a ticket to visit the original Roman Baths, a three-course lunch or Champagne afternoon tea in the Pump Room, and a two-hour spa session at Thermae Bath Spa. This package is a partnership between the Heritage Services of Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bath Tourism Plus, the Thermae Bath Spa, and the Grand Pump Room catering team (Rollins, 2015).

The marketing budget allocated to this project was only £1,500. This included building a simple website, listing the new package on partner websites, creating a paper brochure, arranging familiarization (FAM) trips, developing a PR and promotional campaign aimed at regional media, and briefing the relevant tourism board partners on the project. The efforts of this reduced budget, along with continuous monitoring and incorporating of partner and guest feedback, lead to revenues of over £600,000 in the promotion's first three years alone (Rollins, 2015).

Discussion questions

1. What does the town of Bath have to offer wellness tourists?
2. What enabled the Spas Ancient and Modern Package to be so successful?
3. What lessons can wellness tourism destinations learn from this?
4. Do you know any other similar ancient spa destinations?

Wellness regions and destinations

A **tourist destination** is a place, city or a country, which offers tourism and travel products and services to tourists so they can visit it (Beirman, 2003). Many places throughout the world are known as tourist destinations, and each has its unique selling points. Wellness is one of the ongoing trends in travel and one way for a destination to set itself apart from competitors. A **wellness destination** is a country, region, city, town, or event that tourists and residents visit to improve their holistic health.

Wellness travel has become increasingly popular, not only in established tourism destinations but also in developing markets. A **developing country**, or one with a standard of living or level of industrial production well below that which is possible with financial or technical aid, often turns to tourism as a way to build their economy. Destinations with less advanced tourism infrastructure are generally more pristine and retain more of their natural unvarnished appeal. According to the 2018 Global Wellness Economy Monitor report, “wellness tourism growth is very much a tale of developing markets, with Asia-Pacific, Latin America-Caribbean, Middle East-North Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa all clocking robust gains, and accounting for 57 percent of the increase in wellness trips [from 2015 to 2017]. Over the past five years, Asia was the number-one growth sector in both wellness tourism trips and revenues, where trips grew 33% in two years, to 258 million annually” (Yeung & Johnston, 2018).

When it comes to outbound travelers, Europeans currently lead the world with the highest pre-Covid-19 number of wellness trips (291.8 million in 2017), and travelers from North America lead with the highest expenditures (\$241.7 billion in 2017). The numbers differ slightly when it comes to inbound travel; the United States ranks highest with 176.5 million trips and \$226.0 billion in expenditures, followed by Germany (66.1 million trips, \$65.7 billion in expenditures) and China (70.2 million trips, \$31.7 billion in expenditures) (all 2017 numbers) (Yeung and Johnston, 2018).

Historical wellness tourism regions and destinations

Emerging wellness tourism destinations do have their unique selling propositions, which will be discussed in the next section. However, they can learn from the regions or destinations that have been embracing wellness tourism for decades and even centuries; other destinations have been long known as places to visit for health and relaxation. In ancient Greece and Rome, public bathhouses were considered to be social and therapeutic. Bathing complexes spread through the Roman Empire, featuring not only baths but also libraries, gyms, and entertainment spaces. Questions surrounding the morality of bathing during the Middle Ages lead to the downfall of such facilities. Still, with the rise of the Enlightenment movement in 18th century Europe and the corresponding belief that mineral water had curative properties, “cure towns” began to emerge around the continent. The trend moved quickly to the United States, where resorts opened promising improved health by bathing in cold and **hot springs** (pools formed by water that is heated by the Earth’s interior, volcanic areas, or very hot rock heated by magma,) taking long walks, listening to lectures, dining on locally produced food, and enjoying spa treatments.