Health Tourism Trends: Back to the Future

Melanie Smith, Lecturer & Researcher in Tourism Management
Corvinus University, Institute for Environmental Studies, Fővám tér 8,
1093 Budapest, Hungary
Email: melanie.smith@uni-corvinus.hu

“Wellness is a journey not a destination”
Structure of my Talk: Health and Wellness Tourism Development

- A global overview of past and present developments in health and wellness tourism
- Factors influencing health and wellness tourism demand
- Typologies of health and wellness tourism
- Typical markets for different health and wellness products
- Summary of new products and future trends
Health

‘Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’

(WHO, 1948)

‘The extent to which an individual or a group is able to realize aspirations and satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Health is a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living; it is a positive concept, emphasizing social and personal resources as well as physical capabilities’

(WHO, 1984)
Wellness

‘A special state of health comprising an overall sense of well-being which sees ‘Man’ as consisting of body, spirit and mind and being dependent on his environment’ (Dunn, 1959)

“A way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which the body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community”  

(Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000)

- German concepts of ‘kur’, ‘medical wellness’ and ‘selfness’
- British not very familiar with the term ‘wellness’
- ‘Wellness’ often synonymous with ‘medical’ in CEE
- No word for wellness in some languages (e.g. Hebrew = ‘health’; Finnish = ‘wellbeing’; Slovenian = ‘well-feeling’)
- Icelandic??
Health & Wellness in Europe: Historical

- Large numbers of thermal & mineral springs & sea coasts
- European health and wellness model based around the four elements: water, fire, earth and air
- Romans built very sophisticated baths all over Europe
- Many of Europe’s historic spa towns built around healing springs between 14th & 16th Centuries
- 18th Century development of sea water facilities
- Numerous mountain climatic resorts by 19th Century
- 20th Century: spa resorts in stagnation
Health & Wellness in Europe: Contemporary

- 1,200 spas and health resorts (ESPA, 2007)
- Many spas declined (e.g. UK) **BUT**
- Saturation of industry in some countries (e.g. Germany, Austria)
- Thalassotherapy still popular and growing (e.g. in France, Greece)
- Prolific growth of wellness hotels
- Popularity of holistic tourism (e.g. in the UK, Netherlands, Germany)
- Regeneration of medical spas in CEE
- Caves and salt mines (e.g. Poland)

- Nordic Wellbeing focus: design, food, gardens & herbs, outdoor life, relaxation
- Lake wellness in Finland
- Sauna culture
- Hydrotherapy in Iceland
- Cryotherapy (extreme cold)
Health & Wellness in the Middle East & North Africa: Historical

- Arabian medicine influenced by Greeks and Romans:
  - Based on 4 humours
  - Based on seasons
  - Tibb – based on lifestyle
- Egyptians & Babylonians used bathing to heal the spirit & treat the body
- Visits to Dead Sea (300BC)
- Arabian Hammams played major role in Ottoman culture (600AD)
- Common practice of Jewish ritual bathing
Health & Wellness in the Middle East & North Africa: Contemporary

- Thalassotherapy in hotels in UAE, Tunisia, Marocco, Egypt
- Dead Sea (Israel, Jordan)
- Medical tourism (e.g. Dubai, Iran, Jordan)
- Desert yoga
- Spiritual festivals (e.g. in Israel)
Health & Wellness in Asia-Pacific: Historic

- Holistic approach (what does this mean?)
- Rooted in tradition & spirituality
- Indian Ayurveda pre-dates most other systems of wellness
- Links with religion & pilgrimage
- Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)
- Feng Shui, Tai Chi, Qi Gong
- Thai massage
- Japanese onsen
- Aboriginal peoples & hot springs in Australia, New Zealand,
Health & Wellness in Asia-Pacific: Contemporary

- Luxury spa hotels (e.g. Bali, Maldives, Thailand, Vietnam)
- Continuing popularity of Japanese onsen
- Globalisation of Ayurveda, Thai massage & Chinese medicine
- Medical tourism (e.g. China, Singapore, India)
- Yoga, meditation & ashram tourism in India
- Spiritual festivals (e.g. Malaysia, India)
Health & Wellness in Africa: Historical

- Tribal & herbal medicines (witch doctors & medicine men)
- Bushmen – drumming & trance dance
- Masai massage
- Hot springs & cruises in South Africa
- C19th/20th hill stations & spas in the colonies:
  - Escape from the heat
  - Treatment for tropical diseases
Health & Wellness in Africa: Contemporary

- Luxury spas (e.g. Seychelles, Mauritius)
- Traditional spas (e.g. South Africa)
- Former colonial hill station retreats (e.g. Kenya, Uganda)
- African Bush spa
- Vinotherapy (e.g. South Africa)
- Medical tourism (e.g. South Africa, Kenya)
Health & Wellness in the Americas: Historical

- Ancient civilisations (e.g. Mayans, Aztecs, Incas)
- Native American Indian traditions
- 1806 coming together of indigenous traditions & modern spa culture in US’s first European-style spa in Saratoga
- Development of day spas in early C20th
- South American focus on hot springs & volcanic thermal waterfalls & ‘baños’
- Hawaiian Lomi-Lomi massage (now world famous)
Health & Wellness in the Americas: Contemporary

- Focus on pampering day spas in North America
- Canadian developments in occupational wellness
- Therapeutic recreation common in USA & Canada
- Caribbean focus on spa & wellness hotels
- Cosmetic surgery common in Central/South America
- Adventure spas growing in South America
- Ecospas in Central America
Health and Wellness in Australasia & the South Pacific: Historical

- Indigenous peoples in the Asia-Pacific region (including Australian Aborigines and New Zealand Maori) have always used traditional herbal remedies, massages, & deep spiritual beliefs in holistic ways to preserve good health & enhance well-being.
- New Zealand has numerous hot springs in its vicinity because of its volcanic landscape
- Maori built villages around springs & later (1830s) helped British to develop tourism
Health and Wellness in Australasia & the South Pacific: Contemporary

- Australia has over 500 day spas, destination spas & resort spas (Intelligent Spas, 2006)
- Development of ecolodge spas with indigenous Aborigines
- Holistic retreats near Byron Bay
- Spas based on natural hot springs in New Zealand
- Combination of geothermal, cultural & health experiences
- Development of spa & wellness hotels in South Pacific (e.g. for weddings & honeymoons)
Push and Pull Factors in Health and Wellness Tourism

**PUSH**
- Escape from everyday life, work & stress
- Breakdown of community & social support networks
- Loss of traditional religion
- Need to develop or improve self
- The desire to downsize, simplify or slow down life
- Influence of media & celebrities

**PULL**
- Travel to beautiful, peaceful landscapes to rest
- Search for like-minded people
- Spiritual quest
- Workshops or treatments with specific aims
- Rest, recuperation, stress relief
- Active programmes of weight loss, detox, cosmetic surgery, etc.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Factors</th>
<th>Internal Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fashion and Tradition</td>
<td>Obsession with Self and Celebrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness and Sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Search for Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapy and Healing</td>
<td>Desire for Downsize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Towards New Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>Time-poor, Cash-Rich Élites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Policy</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Domains of Wellness

- Increasing recognition of multiple domains of wellness
- Development of numerous sub-sectors in the industry
- Customised, individualised programmes becoming more desirable for consumers
- Need for multi-disciplinary understanding in academic circles
- Need for communication & collaboration in the health & wellness industry
Typologies of Tourism

- Health tourism
- Medical tourism
  - Therapeutic
  - Surgical
- Medical wellness tourism
- Spa tourism
  - Medical/thermal
  - Leisure/thermal
  - Day spa
- Wellness tourism
- Holistic tourism
- Selfness tourism
- Occupational wellness tourism
- Leisure and sports tourism
- Spiritual tourism
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Mind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical (therapeutic) tourism</td>
<td>Leisure spa tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalasso Tourism</td>
<td>Medical (surgical) tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic Tourism</td>
<td>Yoga and Meditation tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Wellness Tourism</td>
<td>Spiritual Tourism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of Health Tourism

Wellness

Holistic
Leisure and Recreation
Medical Wellness

Medical
Medical (Therapeutic)
Medical (Surgical)
Types of Health Tourism Facilities

- Retreat
- Ashram
- Festivals
- Spas
- Hotels & Resorts
- Cruises
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Health Tourism Product/ Location</th>
<th>Typical Activities</th>
<th>Wellness Domain(s)</th>
<th>Typical Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional spas and spa towns (e.g. Central &amp; Eastern Europe)</td>
<td>Sitting in mineral waters, massage, sauna, steam room</td>
<td>Physical, medical, curative</td>
<td>Older people with specific diseases or complaints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotels and day spas (e.g. UK, US, Caribbean, South East Asia)</td>
<td>Beauty treatments, relaxing massage, aromatherapy, jacuzzi</td>
<td>Cosmetic, pampering, relaxing</td>
<td>High income visitors, business tourists, more often women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose built recreational spas (e.g. Austria, Germany)</td>
<td>Swimming pools, thermal waters, themed saunas and steam rooms, jacuzzis, fitness activities</td>
<td>Physical, relaxation, fun</td>
<td>Skiers, hikers, couples, sometimes families with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seaside resorts &amp; thalassotherapy centres (e.g. France, Israel)</td>
<td>Hydrotherapy, salt inhalations, salt scrubs, seaweed wraps, tanning</td>
<td>Physical, curative, cosmetic</td>
<td>High income hotel guests, older visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Health Tourism Product/Location</td>
<td>Typical Activities</td>
<td>Wellness Domain(s)</td>
<td>Typical Visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holistic retreat centres (e.g. Greece, Spain)</td>
<td>Yoga, massage, creative, spiritual &amp; psychological workshops</td>
<td>Physical, mental, psychological, social, creative, spiritual</td>
<td>Mainly 'baby-boomers' aged 35 – 55, more likely to be women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga &amp; meditation centres (e.g. India, US, Canada, Europe)</td>
<td>Yoga, meditation, chanting, fasting</td>
<td>Physical, mental, spiritual</td>
<td>'Baby boomers', backpackers, 'hippies', professional women aged 40+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilgrimage centres (e.g. Spain, France)</td>
<td>Visiting spiritual landscapes, religious buildings, walking pilgrimage routes</td>
<td>Physical, spiritual</td>
<td>All ages but increasingly under 30, not necessarily religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical centres (e.g. Hungary, South Africa, India)</td>
<td>Operations, cosmetic surgery, dentistry, special treatments</td>
<td>Physical, cosmetic</td>
<td>Western Europeans and Americans for whom treatment is cheaper abroad, mainly 30+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary of New Trends

- Shift back to indigenous & natural products & treatments
- Need for greening or spas & eco-friendliness
- More holistic tourism
- Growth of global wellness hotels
- More wellness areas at music festivals
- Increase in gastro-travel
- More fusion treatments (e.g. Aquaveda, Yogalates)
- Flexible delivery of treatments (e.g. own home, workplace, online, even in bars!)
- Wellpitals
- SpaLiving environments
- Eco-fit resorts
- Dreamscapes
- MySpa
- Hol-Life retreats
- Wellworking
- Budget spas

(Smith & Puczkó 2008)