



# MEDICAL & WELLNESS TOURISM: CONCEPTS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

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**ABSTRACT:** Nowadays tourism is not only a leisure but a pleasant part of life. A better travel experience contributes positively to a person's health, work-life, and family relations (Petrick, 2013). Nowadays, individuals are more concerned about their health after the COVID pandemic, and common lifestyle diseases increasing day by day. Traditionally, two types of tourism are considered related to the goals of treatment and recovery: medical tourism and wellness tourism (Savel'eva, Kolesnikov, & Shmeleva, 2020). India is always known for medical tourism, especially with low costs and the best treatment. Moreover, vast knowledge and popularity for its rare combination of Ayurveda, Siddha, allopathy, and naturopathy make India the foremost destination for tourists. Recently, the term wellness tourism attained popularity worldwide for engaging in activities that develop optimal health. Medical and wellness tourism have certain similarities, yet differ in nature and serve different purposes. The terms medical tourism, health tourism, and wellness tourism are used interchangeably but in the current scenario, they differ in various aspects. This study tries to understand the conceptual differences between medical and wellness tourism with the help of existing literature and its significance in the post-pandemic economy.

**Keywords:** Medical tourism, Wellness tourism, Literature review, Post pandemic economy

## INTRODUCTION

Health, wellness, and medical tourism are recognized as one of the most developed and thriving sectors in the tourism industry (Wang, Feng, & Wu, 2020). Medical, health, and wellness tourism are terms that are often used interchangeably and are included under the term "health tourism" (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Health tourism consists of 'medical tourism' which provides medical treatment and 'wellness tourism', which is intended for relaxation, recuperation and holistic health. (Kempainen, Koskinen, Bergroth, Marttila, & Kempainen, 2021; Smith & Puczko, 2014; Willson, McIntosh, Morgan, & Sanders, 2018). In this post-pandemic scenario medical and wellness tourism have a prominent role in accelerating economic growth and in attracting travelers who are seeking expertise in medical treatments and rejuvenation activities. The real essence and scope of the terms medical and wellness tourism were not yet completely revealed or identified due to their similarities. Even the most common or popular destinations like Kerala still have not yet started to use the term "wellness" or distinguish their products from the umbrella term health tourism. Health has become much more of a priority in recent years. Beyond traditional diseases, COVID-19 and its aftereffects, depression, and other diseases of civilization are increasing day by day. It is in this context that the miracle of wellness and medical tourism has been showing its strength. Recent studies point to the fact that medical and wellness tourism are key components of individual human existence (Wright & Zascerinska, 2022). This work considers the prospects and multidimensions of the tourism sectors with the available literature in this area. Using the published works retrieved from popular databases, primarily

we will try to explore how the concepts of Medical and Wellness tourism get distinguished. Secondly, to identify the components and treatments that mainly come under the stated terms. Thirdly, to study the role of medical and wellness tourism in the post-pandemic economy.

## MEDICAL TOURISM

Medical tourism is delimited to 'organized travel outside one's natural health care jurisdiction for the enhancement or restoration of the individual's health through medical intervention (Carrera & Bridges, 2006; Pandilla & Del-Aguila-Obra, 2016). Medical tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors which thrives on foreign exchange earnings, stabilize the balance of payments, and creates employment opportunities (Liu & Zhang, 2016; Wang, Feng, & Wu, 2020). As part of medical tourism, people travel mainly for cosmetic surgeries, dental, heart, knee transplantations, and Plastic surgeries and such major and expertise needed treatments (Kemppainen, Koskinen, Bergroth, Marttila, & Kemppainen, 2021).

Major Destinations have their expert areas, for Thailand, cosmetics & bariatric surgeries like breast augmentation, laser tattoo removal, liposuction, Botox, hair transplant and cool sculpting are the major areas, India is well known for knee replacement, hip replacement & gastric bypass. Costa Rica for dental procedures. Malaysia is popular for Dental and cosmetic treatments. Heart diseases, orthopedics, infertility, health checkups, dental & cancer are the major treatments in Indonesia. (Grand View Research, 2022)

Nowadays, medical tourism is marketed as a package of medical services and tourism products (Connell, 2006; Yu, 2012). People prefer medical services along with touring. Medical tourists prioritize safety, high-quality medical treatment, care, people-oriented service, waiting time, and accurate health assessment, and always they assess the expected outcome by analyzing doctors' reputations and expertise, whether they are treated by certified doctors and staff and advanced medical treatments (Wang, Feng, & Wu, 2020). We can easily elaborate on medical tourism as an overseas travel for medical treatment due to the lack of appropriate medical services in the origin country as a push factor and cheaper expertise service as a pull factor (Pandilla & Del-Aguila-Obra, 2016). The medical tourism sector is much more complex, requires professionals and experts in the medical field, there involves reactive treatments to a cause of illness.

## WELLNESS TOURISM

The term 'wellness' was developed by the American doctor Halbert Dunn in 1959, when he wrote for the first time about a special state of health comprising an overall sense of well-being that sees man as consisting of body, spirit, and mind and being dependent on his environment (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Wellness tourism is defined as a way of traveling where tourists seek to enhance their emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual well-being (Smith & Puczko, 2014; Bockus, Vento, Tammi, Komppula, & Kolesnikova, 2023). The concept of wellness is the co-product of the awareness of sound health, well-being, and happiness (Koncul, 2012). The route of wellness is so hard to locate and none of the studies holds a confirmatory history and has not been well defined. Starting from natural hot, mineral springs (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009), acupuncture, herbal medicine, qi gong and tai chi (Global Wellness Institute, 2022), spas (Health and Wellness Tourism: A focus on the Global Spa Industry), thermal springs (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009) to focus on diet, lifestyle and environmental factors as a means for preventing illness (Global Wellness Institute, 2022) and by 21<sup>st</sup>-century wellness focus on health promotion, education and encouraging a more holistic approach to nutrition and achieving mental and spiritual balance (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009) (Wright & Zascersinska, 2022). Wellness tourism gets its popularity in the way it provides services and products that reduce medicinal consumption in a curative and preventive way and also enhance well-being in a holistic perceptible regarding an increase in life expectancy (Quintela, Costa, & Corriea, 2016). Wellness tourism is multidimensional and owing to its holistic approach, it is related to many activities such as new age tourism, volunteer tourism, yoga tourism, and so on. Mostly, wellness tourism includes luxurious products and services and is mainly related to people's lifestyles (Quintela, Costa, & Corriea, 2016; Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Wellness tourists are categorized into three beauty spa visitors, lifestyle resort visitors, and spiritual retreat visitors (Voight, Brown, & Howat, 2011).

An individual who has average health can improve or achieve optimal health through disease prevention and health promotion activities by gaining knowledge about his health (Corbin, Welk, Lindsey, & Corbin, 2003) and this contributes to wellness tourism. Wellness tourism is not only a touristic journey of physical movement but also a journey toward greater self-awareness and contentment (Smith & Kelly, 2006). Wellness tourism mainly involves activities for revitalizing the body, mind, and spirit it includes spas, beauty and anti-aging, sport and fitness, and spiritual tourism. It focuses on general health improvement and well-being activities. The availability of natural resources or infrastructure are those factors influencing an individual to travel and wellness treatments do not involve any medicine (Pandilla & Del-Aguila-Obra, 2016). The main motive behind every wellness travel is seeking rest, stress relief, relaxation, self-development, socialization, and health (Bockus, Vento, Tammi, Komppula, & Kolesnikova, 2023; Health and Wellness Tourism: A focus on the Global Spa Industry). In this modern era, technologies take a severe toll on the time, energy, and health of human beings, which leads them to a quest for a counterbalancing phenomenon that would serve to restore their emotional well-being, social relations, physical health, intellectual strength, and spirituality (these are the dimensions of wellness). Wellness tourism does fulfill that need and the revolution of wellness started there. The search for quality of life is the ambiguous human drive that motivates much tourism activity. Although, quality of life is complex, multidimensional, and a subjective concept it varies among each at each stage of life in a way that they stay well (Quintela, Costa, & Corriea, 2016; Smith & Kelly, 2006). Wellness tourism is something more than staying away from mere illness and health as the absence or prevention of illness. Instead, it focuses on more conventional, familiar, and comfortable notions of physical or mental health (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006).

## MEDICAL AND WELLNESS TOURISM IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ECONOMY

Tourism is globalized and has a significant economic, environmental and social role (Wang, Feng, & Wu, 2020; Wright & Zascerinska, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic affects the tourism industry and results in a huge economic loss (Fletcher, Mas, Blazquez-salon, & Blanco-Romero, 2020) (Szromek, 2021). Not only the covid -19 but also floods and other disasters affect the economy very badly but it was noted that the impact made by COVID-19 was more severe and long lasting than other pandemics. Industries like tourism especially health tourism still have the risk of covid pandemic (Szromek, 2021; Chein & Law, 2003). The pandemic period not only affects tourism but its related sectors like aviation, accommodation; meetings, incentives, conferencing & exhibitions (MICE) and sporting events; restaurants; and cruises (Gossling, Scott, & Hall, 2021). Among the negative impacts made by the pandemic, it also opens a wide range of opportunities to the medical and wellness tourism sector. The environment should have an irreplaceable role in medical and wellness tourism. Developing strategies to preserve natural wealth and overcome natural disasters positively influences the tourism industry (Plzakova & Stupkova, 2019; Yeon-Jin, Hwa-Kyung, & Timothy, 2015). Preservation of natural resources and environment protection by tourism providers to attract tourists in another way positively contribute to the society and economy. it reduces environmental hazards and uncertainties. Tourism providers, Govt, businesses, and all those who benefit from the tourism sector equally have to make the environment tourist-friendly in all manners.

The medical tourism industry has been growing rapidly in recent years, and governments are recognizing its potential as they seek new sectors for sustainable growth. The growth of medical and wellness tourism in such a manner will lead to a market in which tourists seek medical practices of longevity (Wright & Zascerinska, 2022; Kim & Hyun, 2022). In all forms of tourism, the flow of people is predominantly from more developed to less developed countries (Smith & Kelly, 2006). In wellness tourism, tourists' requirements are destination-specific and driven by multiple motivations. Offering unique and authentic services could help to increase competition and attract international customers (Bockus, Vento, Tammi, Kompplu, & Kolesnikova, 2023). Targeting customers based on nationality and other demographic factors and customizing the services are the best way to satisfy and attract wellness travelers. More new segments like mountain wellness tourism were emerging and its scope for a harmonious and balanced relationship with nature will be a stepping stone for future wellness (Pan, Yang, Han, Lu, & Liu, 2019).

Post post-pandemic economy will develop faster than in earlier years with the growth in the tourism industry especially, the medical & wellness tourism sector. It is expected to have a growth rate (CAGR) of 32.51% from 2022 to 2030. A sudden shift in the tourism market is not possible due to the massive impact created by the first half of the pandemic especially the imposition of travel restrictions. The tourism market is expected to return to the pre-pandemic level by 2024 only. The opening of borders & vaccination drives may positively impact the market. The developed countries' medical tourism sector has been overloaded with patients. The backlog of treatments and excessive wait times will likely fuel the tourism market in the coming years. The market will have a rising demand for gender reassignment surgeries, reproductive therapy, dental reconstruction, and aesthetic surgery. Improvements in healthcare infrastructure and the availability of high-quality health services at affordable prices will drive global market growth. Moreover, to save time and avoid the risk associated with delaying treatments, people rely on medical tourism and travel overseas. Strong government support can be anticipated in the future to promote the tourism market and to flourish in economic growth, especially in developing countries. Prominence will be given to the Medical and wellness tourism sector (Medical Tourism Market Size & Share Report, 2030).

For the sustainable development of a country and a society, a healthy population and a properly functioning healthcare system are inevitable (Popa, et al., 2022). The future of the health industry will be focused on wellness and being customer-centric. There will be a fundamental shift from healthcare to health with the help of science, data & technology. Future will be able to identify the diseases earlier, intervene proactively, and better understand their progression and thereby sustain people's well-being. Data and platforms are the backbones of tomorrow's health ecosystem. Virtual as well as physical well-being & care delivery will fuel the future. The connectors, financiers & regulators help make the industry's engine run (Deloitte, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

Medical and wellness tourism flow on a similar path due to its health-consciousness motive. Medical tourism insists on the treatment of the disease rather than its prevention whereas wellness tourism focuses on health promotion and achieving optimal health. Market drivers for medical tourism are always the cheapest cost, expert knowledge, minimal waiting time, and care. Generally, individuals play only a passive role in choosing the treatments for their health condition. In wellness tourism, individuals have to be more proactive and play a prominent role in understanding, choosing, and deciding their health continuum. Moreover, the recipients of medical tourism are patients in common but in wellness tourism, they are mere travellers and there is no involvement of any medicine. Targeting and grouping the tourists' based on various demographical, cultural, and geographical manners are the best way to utilize the post-pandemic opportunities and the potential of the destinations should be productively used. Medical and wellness tourism creates more gains for developing countries than developed countries. This sector has benefited from globalization in the sense that people can choose the best from different alternatives available in the world market. Post pandemic economy relies mainly on the tourism industry for its prospects. People are confronted with diseases, and their aspiration to move from illness to wellness is the main driver of the health tourism market. Medical Tourism and Wellness tourism have their own identity and specifications, It is necessary to draw a clear distinction between the two terms with regard to their meaning, nature, and scope. Synonymously using the terms will be a stumbling block for their maturation.

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