

WELLNESS ON SALE: WHAT AND WHY IN A TOURIST CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper depicts a new investigative theme; wellness tourism. Owing to the paucity of definition, this study first attempts to outline the concept of wellness tourism. Then the research focuses on exploring why and how customers consume these types of products, and as such the consumption (or prosumption) of wellness products are delineated. The study employs qualitative techniques to explore these topics. The qualitative method is to assist the researchers to find specific attributes appealing the travelers before and during the SPA experience. Results from the study will be presented. The research is concluded by relevant market implications and suggestions for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Work and leisure are regarded as the two major parts of life. In a modern society, work is often accompanied with stress, and sometime apprehension. Leisure has become an integral component rejuvenating the body and soul to further one's life enjoyment. As such tourism has been an agent for people to improve their quality of life through various forms of touring experiences at various vacation destinations.

Due to the recent issues of obesity detrimental to the health of the mass, goods and services booting personal health turn out to be an alluring invention. In tourism business, merchandises catering to individuals' health have been fast developed in the decade. For example, health-care tourism has emerged in tourist market place as lucrative one in the years to come. It is defined as the attempt on the part of a tourist facility (e.g., hotel) or destination (e.g. Baden, Switzerland) to attract tourists by deliberately promoting its health-care services and facilities, in addition to its regular tourists' amenities (Goodrich and Goodrich 1987). With a similar notion, health tourism also surface as a trendy jargon that is defined as people traveling from their place of residence for health reasons (Ross 2006).

The new lines of services in the wellness market are rather comprehensive that could include preventive measures of health and the treatment of illness. The former symbolizes a novelty of experience while the latter merely fabricates the idea from health tourism. Thus, the ambiguity between health tourism and wellness tourism might be disentangled. The common wellness themes are spa, massage, body pampering, healthy gourmet meals, fitness class, and in minority alternative clinical treatment (such as aquatic therapy and acupuncture).

Due to the paucity of research on traveling consumers participating wellness activities, this research aims to supply the current shortcomings by exploring the underlying motivations influencing the consumers' desire to visit a facility, place, or location which render services aiming to enhance the state of wellbeing in physical, psychological and spiritual fashions.

The study regards that wellness tourists are teeming to consummate their personal quality of life by enjoying the services and products rendered by the attractions full of the ambience of wellness. To effectively delineate the above niche, a definition of wellness tourism is provided as follows. Wellness tourism prescribes *a phenomenon due to the needs of enhancing personal wellbeing for those traveling to destinations where render services and experiences to rejuvenate the body, mind and spirit of the travelers.*

Research objectives of the study are proposed as follows: (1) Explore the contents of Wellness tourism (e.g. body, mind and spirit), (2) Survey the variety of wellness products and services that is in the marketplace, and Survey the wellness tourism (motivation, behavior and loyalty). The study employs qualitative methods of research to examine the product/service line and the tourist motivation in the wellness settings. To reveal the variety of product and services in the market place, in-depth interviews were accomplished with tourism scholars, travel agents and managers of hotels promoting the theme of wellness living and travel in various health related resorts and businesses in Europe and Australia/New Zealand. A total of twenty depth interviews; 3 tourism scholars, 5 travel agents and 12 managers were performed. Since few (i.e., Chen and Prebensen, in press) empirical studies have investigated the motives to visiting wellness centers, resorts, and destinations, the interviews intents to construct attributes that could be used as measurements of wellness tourist motivations in later works. While the present study is being performed in Europe and Oceania, the results from the Chen and Prebensen study on wellness tourists' motivation in Asia, "health consciousness, physical therapy, social activity, recreation, enhancement of quality of life, effortless activity, affordable activity, pursuing multi-activities, relaxation, business engagement, word of mouth, curiosity, mental therapy, attractiveness, experiencing the nature, and meditation", were used as foundation for further exploration in other geographical areas and within an extended variety of wellness product/services offered.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In general, wellness resorts tend to be upscale lodging facilities and their customers apparently constitute a niche sector and may not be considered as mass tourists in terms of activities involved. However a variety of wellness products and services are outlined and analyzed in terms of customers' motivation to visit. The wellness product/offers vary from low-involvement/threshold services (i.e. sauna, relaxing area) to high-involvement/threshold services (i.e., week-end body and soul offerings, where the tourist can get various types of massage/tratements, healthy diet, mind-related courses etc.) do exist. The customers also vary in terms of motivation when it comes to visit and participation in the various types of wellness products and services. It can be temporary concluded that the higher involvement/ threshold type of wellness offerings seem to a larger extent to be tied to a deeper need for change or transformation, indicating that theories of experience (Csikszentmishalyi 1990) is needed to fully understand this type of needs and products. In addition the results reveal that people addresses

body, mind, and life quality as reasons for visiting most of the wellness offerings. The study asks for more knowledge on the topic, and in particular sees the importance of fully comprehend the interpersonal interaction between wellness guests and wellness hosts, since research has frequently demonstrated that such an interaction is among the most significant determinants of consumer satisfaction with services (Bitner et al 1994).

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