

Sustainable Wellness Tourism: Exploring Tourist Motivation, Behavior, and Responsible Travel Practices

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Abstract

Sustainable wellness tourism has emerged as an important segment of the global tourism industry, reflecting the growing demand for travel experiences that promote both personal well-being and environmental responsibility. In recent years, tourists have increasingly demonstrated interest in travel activities that enhance their physical, mental, and spiritual health while simultaneously supporting sustainable tourism practices. Wellness tourism, which includes activities such as yoga retreats, spa therapies, meditation programs, and nature-based wellness experiences, provides opportunities for travelers to reconnect with themselves and with natural environments. At the same time, the integration of sustainability principles within wellness tourism destinations has become essential in addressing environmental challenges, preserving cultural heritage, and supporting local communities. This chapter explores the relationship between tourist motivation, consumer behavior, and responsible travel practices within the context of sustainable wellness tourism. The study aims to examine how tourists' motivations for health and well-being influence their travel behavior and their adoption of sustainable tourism practices. By analyzing existing literature and qualitative insights, the chapter identifies key behavioral factors that shape tourists' preferences for sustainable wellness tourism experiences. Particular attention is given to the role of environmental awareness, destination image, and ethical consumption in influencing responsible travel behavior. The findings suggest that wellness tourists often demonstrate higher levels of environmental consciousness and social responsibility compared with conventional tourists. Their travel decisions are strongly influenced by factors such as natural environments, eco-friendly accommodation, organic food offerings, and authentic cultural experiences. These preferences encourage tourism destinations to adopt sustainable management practices that align with the expectations of wellness-oriented travelers. The chapter concludes that sustainable wellness tourism can serve as a strategic approach for promoting responsible tourism development while enhancing tourist well-being. By understanding tourist motivations and behavioral patterns, tourism stakeholders can design wellness tourism experiences that support environmental conservation, community development, and long-term destination sustainability.

Keywords:

Sustainable Wellness Tourism; Tourist Motivation; Responsible Travel; Consumer Behavior; Sustainable Tourism; Wellness Experience.

1. Introduction

Tourism has undergone significant transformation over the past few decades as travelers increasingly seek experiences that go beyond traditional leisure and entertainment (Jalali et al., 2026). Contemporary tourists are becoming more conscious of their physical well-being, mental health, and environmental impact, leading to the emergence of new forms of tourism that combine personal wellness with responsible travel practices. Among these emerging forms, sustainable wellness tourism has gained considerable attention in both academic research and industry practice. Sustainable wellness tourism refers to travel experiences that aim to improve the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of tourists

while simultaneously supporting environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and community development (Smith and Puczkó, 2014).

In recent years, the global tourism industry has witnessed rapid growth in wellness tourism as individuals increasingly prioritize healthy lifestyles and stress management (Franco et al, 2026). The growing pressures of modern life, including urbanization, technological dependence, and work-related stress, have encouraged individuals to seek travel experiences that promote relaxation, mindfulness, and holistic well-being. Activities such as yoga retreats, spa therapies, meditation programs, detox treatments, and nature-based wellness experiences have become central components of wellness tourism offerings (Voigt, Brown and Howat, 2011). These experiences enable tourists to temporarily disconnect from their routine environments and engage in activities that enhance both physical and psychological health.

At the same time, the increasing awareness of environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion has led to growing interest in sustainable tourism development. Sustainable tourism emphasizes the need to balance economic growth with environmental protection and social responsibility in order to ensure the long-term viability of tourism destinations (UNWTO, 2018). Tourism stakeholders, including governments, destination managers, and tourism businesses, are increasingly adopting sustainable practices such as eco-friendly infrastructure, waste management systems, renewable energy usage, and community-based tourism initiatives.

The intersection of wellness tourism and sustainable tourism has created a new paradigm known as sustainable wellness tourism, where tourism experiences are designed to promote personal well-being while minimizing environmental and social impacts. Wellness tourism destinations often rely on natural landscapes, clean environments, and tranquil surroundings, making environmental conservation an essential component of their long-term success. For example, wellness retreats located in forests, mountains, and coastal areas emphasize harmony with nature and encourage tourists to adopt environmentally responsible lifestyles (Kelly, 2012). These characteristics make wellness tourism particularly compatible with sustainability principles.

Understanding tourist motivation and behavior is essential for the development of sustainable wellness tourism (Jalali et al., Gupta et al., 2026). Tourist motivation refers to the psychological factors that influence individuals' decisions to travel and participate in specific tourism activities (Crompton, 1979; Zhao et al., 2025). In the context of wellness tourism, motivations often include the desire for stress relief, personal development, spiritual growth, and health improvement (Attanasi et al., 2025). These motivations influence tourists' destination choices, travel behaviors, and expectations regarding tourism services (Mitsubishi et al., 2025).

Consumer behavior in tourism involves examining how tourists search for information, evaluate travel options, make purchasing decisions, and evaluate their travel experiences (Solomon, 2018). In wellness tourism, consumer behavior is often shaped by lifestyle values, environmental awareness, and ethical considerations. Wellness tourists tend to seek experiences that align with their personal values related to health, sustainability, and mindfulness. As a result, they may prefer tourism destinations that demonstrate strong commitments to environmental conservation and responsible tourism practices.

Recent research suggests that wellness tourists often exhibit higher levels of environmental awareness and social responsibility compared with traditional tourists. These travelers are more likely to support eco-friendly accommodations, organic food production, and locally sourced products (Font and McCabe, 2017). They also tend to value authentic cultural experiences and community-based tourism initiatives that benefit local populations. Consequently, wellness tourism has the potential to promote sustainable tourism development by encouraging responsible consumption patterns among travelers.

The role of responsible travel practices has become increasingly important in the context of sustainable wellness tourism. Responsible travel practices refer to actions taken by tourists to minimize negative environmental and social impacts while traveling. These practices may include reducing waste, conserving natural resources, respecting local cultures, supporting local businesses, and participating in

environmental conservation activities (Weaver, 2006). Tourism destinations that encourage responsible travel behavior among visitors are more likely to achieve sustainable tourism outcomes.

Another important factor influencing sustainable wellness tourism is destination image. Destination image refers to the perceptions and impressions that tourists have about a particular destination. A positive destination image can significantly influence tourists' travel decisions and expectations (Kim, Lee and Klenosky, 2003). Wellness tourism destinations often promote images of tranquility, natural beauty, and holistic well-being to attract tourists seeking health-focused travel experiences. Destinations that successfully communicate their sustainability initiatives and wellness offerings are more likely to attract environmentally conscious travelers.

In addition to destination image, digital technologies and social media platforms have significantly influenced tourist behavior in recent years. Travelers increasingly rely on online travel websites, social media platforms, and travel blogs to gather information about wellness destinations. User-generated content such as travel reviews, photographs, and personal experiences often shapes tourists' perceptions of destinations and influences their travel decisions (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Tourism businesses and destination managers are therefore using digital marketing strategies to promote sustainable wellness tourism experiences and communicate their sustainability initiatives to potential visitors.

The concept of sustainable wellness tourism also highlights the importance of community involvement and cultural preservation. Many wellness tourism destinations integrate traditional healing practices and local cultural experiences into their tourism offerings. For example, traditional wellness practices such as Ayurveda in India, traditional Chinese medicine in China, and thermal spa therapies in Europe are frequently incorporated into wellness tourism experiences. These practices not only enhance the authenticity of wellness tourism but also contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage and local knowledge systems (Smith and Puczkó, 2014).

Despite the growing popularity of sustainable wellness tourism, several challenges remain in ensuring its long-term sustainability. One of the key challenges is balancing increasing tourist demand with environmental conservation. As wellness tourism destinations become more popular, there is a risk of overdevelopment and environmental degradation. Tourism planners and policymakers must therefore implement effective management strategies to ensure that tourism growth does not compromise the environmental and cultural resources that attract tourists in the first place.

Another challenge is the lack of comprehensive understanding of how tourist motivations and behaviors influence responsible travel practices. While previous research has examined wellness tourism motivations and sustainability practices separately, there is still limited research that integrates these concepts within a unified framework. Understanding how tourist motivations influence responsible travel behavior is essential for designing effective sustainability strategies in wellness tourism destinations.

In response to these challenges, this chapter aims to explore the relationship between tourist motivation, consumer behavior, and responsible travel practices within the context of sustainable wellness tourism. The study seeks to examine how tourists' motivations for wellness travel influence their behavioral intentions and their willingness to engage in sustainable tourism practices. By analyzing qualitative insights and existing literature, the chapter aims to identify key behavioral factors that support sustainable wellness tourism development.

The objectives of this chapter are threefold. First, the chapter aims to examine the theoretical foundations of sustainable wellness tourism and its relationship with tourist motivation and consumer behavior. Second, the study seeks to explore how tourists' behavioral patterns influence the adoption of responsible travel practices in wellness tourism destinations. Third, the chapter aims to provide practical implications for tourism stakeholders, including destination managers, policymakers, and tourism businesses, regarding the development of sustainable wellness tourism strategies.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to both tourism theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the study integrates concepts from wellness tourism, consumer behavior, and sustainable tourism to provide a comprehensive understanding of sustainable wellness tourism development. From a practical perspective, the findings can help tourism stakeholders design tourism products and services that align with the expectations of wellness tourists while promoting environmental conservation and community well-being.

In conclusion, sustainable wellness tourism represents a promising approach to tourism development that combines personal well-being with environmental and social responsibility. As travelers increasingly seek meaningful and responsible travel experiences, tourism destinations must adapt their strategies to meet these changing expectations. By understanding tourist motivations, behaviors, and responsible travel practices, tourism stakeholders can develop sustainable wellness tourism models that benefit tourists, local communities, and the natural environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept and Evolution of Sustainable Wellness Tourism

Sustainable wellness tourism represents the integration of wellness tourism principles with sustainable tourism development, where tourism experiences aim to enhance individual well-being while minimizing environmental and socio-cultural impacts. Wellness tourism itself has evolved significantly over the past two decades as tourists increasingly prioritize physical health, mental balance, and holistic lifestyle experiences during travel (Smith and Puczkó, 2014). Activities such as yoga retreats, meditation programs, spa therapies, and nature-based healing experiences have become core components of wellness tourism offerings.

Wellness tourism differs from medical tourism in that it focuses primarily on preventive health, relaxation, and lifestyle improvement rather than medical treatment (Mueller and Kaufmann, 2001). Wellness tourists typically seek experiences that help them achieve physical rejuvenation, psychological relaxation, and spiritual fulfillment. As a result, wellness tourism destinations often emphasize natural environments, healthy food, mindfulness activities, and cultural healing traditions.

The concept of sustainability has become increasingly important within wellness tourism due to the reliance of wellness experiences on clean environments, biodiversity, and natural landscapes. Sustainable tourism emphasizes the need to protect natural resources, support local communities, and ensure long-term tourism viability (UNWTO, 2018). When integrated with wellness tourism, sustainability ensures that tourism development does not compromise the natural and cultural resources that support wellness experiences.

Recent studies highlight that wellness tourism can contribute to sustainable tourism development by promoting environmentally responsible behavior and encouraging tourism businesses to adopt eco-friendly practices (Kelly, 2012). For instance, many wellness resorts implement renewable energy systems, organic food sourcing, water conservation programs, and environmentally sensitive architectural designs. These initiatives support environmental sustainability while enhancing the authenticity of wellness tourism experiences.

2.2 Tourist Motivation in Wellness Tourism

Tourist motivation plays a fundamental role in shaping travel decisions and tourism participation. Motivation refers to the internal forces that drive individuals to seek specific travel experiences in order to satisfy their personal needs and desires (Crompton, 1979). In the context of wellness tourism, motivations often include stress reduction, physical health improvement, self-discovery, and lifestyle enhancement.

Research by Voigt, Brown and Howat (2011) identified several primary motivations for wellness tourism participation, including relaxation, rejuvenation, personal development, and escape from daily routines. These motivations reflect the broader societal trend toward health consciousness and work-life balance.

As individuals become more aware of the importance of maintaining their physical and mental health, they increasingly seek travel experiences that support these goals.

The push-pull motivation framework is commonly used to explain tourism motivations. Push factors represent internal motivations such as the desire to relax, improve health, or escape routine, while pull factors refer to destination attributes that attract tourists, such as natural environments, wellness facilities, and cultural healing traditions (Dann, 1981). In wellness tourism, push factors often include stress management and health improvement, whereas pull factors include spa facilities, yoga retreats, and scenic natural environments.

Furthermore, wellness tourists are often characterized by higher levels of education, income, and lifestyle awareness, which influence their travel behavior and expectations (Chen, Prebensen and Uysal, 2017). These tourists tend to value authenticity, sustainability, and personalized experiences. Consequently, tourism destinations that offer holistic wellness programs and environmentally responsible services are more likely to attract wellness-oriented travelers.

2.3 Tourist Behavior and Responsible Travel Practices

Tourist behavior refers to the processes through which travelers search for information, evaluate travel alternatives, make decisions, and evaluate their travel experiences (Solomon, 2018). Understanding tourist behavior is essential for tourism businesses and destination managers because it helps them design services and experiences that meet tourists' expectations.

In the context of sustainable wellness tourism, tourist behavior is strongly influenced by values related to environmental responsibility and ethical consumption. Many wellness tourists view travel as an opportunity to reconnect with nature and adopt more sustainable lifestyles. As a result, they often demonstrate responsible travel behaviors such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and supporting local communities.

Responsible travel practices are central to sustainable tourism development. According to Weaver (2006), responsible tourism involves minimizing the negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts of tourism while maximizing benefits for host communities. Tourists can contribute to responsible tourism by supporting eco-friendly businesses, respecting local cultures, and participating in conservation activities.

Research also suggests that tourists' environmental attitudes significantly influence their travel behavior. Han, Hsu and Sheu (2010) found that tourists who possess strong environmental values are more likely to choose environmentally friendly tourism services and accommodations. This finding highlights the importance of environmental awareness in shaping sustainable travel behavior.

Wellness tourism can play an important role in promoting responsible travel practices because wellness experiences often emphasize mindfulness, environmental awareness, and personal responsibility. For example, wellness retreats frequently encourage participants to engage in activities such as nature walks, meditation, and organic food consumption, which promote sustainable lifestyles.

2.4 Destination Image and Sustainable Wellness Tourism

Destination image is another important factor influencing tourists' travel decisions. Destination image refers to the perceptions, beliefs, and impressions that tourists hold about a particular destination (Kim, Lee and Klenosky, 2003). A positive destination image can significantly increase tourists' intentions to visit and recommend a destination.

Wellness tourism destinations often promote images of tranquility, natural beauty, and holistic well-being in order to attract wellness-oriented travelers. Destinations located in natural environments such as mountains, forests, and coastal regions are particularly attractive for wellness tourism because they provide peaceful settings for relaxation and rejuvenation.

In addition to natural environments, sustainability initiatives also contribute to a positive destination image. Tourism destinations that demonstrate strong commitments to environmental conservation and community development are more likely to attract environmentally conscious tourists (Font and McCabe,

2017). These sustainability attributes can enhance tourists' perceptions of destination authenticity and credibility.

Digital media and online travel platforms also play a crucial role in shaping destination image. Social media platforms, travel blogs, and online reviews provide valuable information about tourism destinations and influence tourists' travel decisions (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Visual content showcasing wellness activities, eco-friendly accommodations, and scenic landscapes can inspire potential tourists to visit wellness destinations.

2.5 Relationship between Wellness Tourism and Sustainable Tourism Development

The relationship between wellness tourism and sustainable tourism development has gained increasing attention in tourism research. Wellness tourism relies heavily on natural resources, environmental quality, and cultural authenticity, making sustainability essential for its long-term success.

Scholars argue that wellness tourism can contribute to sustainable tourism development by promoting environmentally responsible practices and encouraging sustainable consumption patterns among tourists (Smith and Puczkó, 2014). For example, wellness resorts often incorporate eco-friendly architecture, renewable energy systems, and organic food production to reduce their environmental impact.

Furthermore, wellness tourism can support local community development by creating employment opportunities and promoting traditional cultural practices. Many wellness tourism destinations collaborate with local communities to provide cultural experiences, traditional healing therapies, and locally produced products (Kelly, 2012). These initiatives not only enhance the authenticity of tourism experiences but also contribute to economic sustainability.

Another important aspect of sustainable wellness tourism is its potential to foster environmental awareness among tourists. By encouraging tourists to connect with nature and adopt mindful lifestyles, wellness tourism experiences can promote long-term behavioral changes that support sustainability.

2.6 Conceptual Link between Motivation, Behavior, and Responsible Travel

The literature suggests that tourist motivation, consumer behavior, and responsible travel practices are closely interconnected within the context of sustainable wellness tourism. Tourists who are motivated by health, relaxation, and personal development are more likely to seek wellness tourism experiences that align with their values.

These motivations influence tourists' travel behavior, including their destination choices, accommodation preferences, and participation in wellness activities. When tourists possess strong environmental awareness and ethical values, they are more likely to adopt responsible travel practices such as supporting sustainable tourism businesses and respecting local cultures.

Consequently, tourism destinations that successfully integrate wellness experiences with sustainability initiatives can attract tourists who value responsible travel. By aligning tourism services with tourists' motivations and behavioral preferences, tourism stakeholders can promote sustainable tourism development while enhancing tourist satisfaction.

3. Research Gaps

Although the existing literature provides significant insights into wellness tourism, tourist motivation, and sustainable tourism development, several gaps remain that require further scholarly investigation. While previous studies have examined these concepts independently, there is still limited research exploring their integrated relationship within the framework of sustainable wellness tourism. Identifying these gaps is essential for advancing theoretical understanding and improving tourism management practices. The following sections outline the major research gaps identified from the literature review.

3.1 Limited Integration of Wellness Tourism and Sustainability Perspectives

Many studies have explored wellness tourism from the perspectives of health benefits, tourism marketing, and destination development (Smith and Puczkó, 2014). At the same time, sustainable tourism research has focused primarily on environmental conservation, community participation, and responsible

tourism management (Sharpley, 2000). However, relatively few studies have examined how wellness tourism and sustainability principles interact within a unified framework.

The existing literature often treats wellness tourism and sustainable tourism as separate domains rather than examining their combined potential for promoting responsible travel practices. As wellness tourism relies heavily on natural environments and cultural authenticity, integrating sustainability principles into wellness tourism development is essential. Therefore, there is a need for research that explores how wellness tourism can serve as a pathway for achieving sustainable tourism development.

3.2 Insufficient Understanding of Tourist Motivation in Sustainable Wellness Tourism

Tourist motivation has been widely studied in tourism research, particularly in relation to destination choice and travel behavior (Crompton, 1979). However, limited research has specifically examined the motivations of tourists who seek sustainable wellness tourism experiences.

Most studies on wellness tourism motivations focus on factors such as relaxation, stress reduction, and physical health improvement (Voigt, Brown and Howat, 2011). While these motivations are important, they do not fully capture the influence of environmental awareness, ethical values, and sustainability concerns on tourist decision-making. As sustainable tourism becomes increasingly important, understanding how sustainability-oriented motivations influence wellness tourism participation remains an important research gap.

3.3 Limited Research on Responsible Travel Behavior among Wellness Tourists

Responsible travel behavior is a key component of sustainable tourism development. Responsible tourism involves minimizing negative environmental and social impacts while maximizing benefits for local communities (Weaver, 2006). Although responsible travel behavior has been widely discussed in sustainable tourism literature, relatively few studies have examined how wellness tourists engage in responsible travel practices.

Wellness tourism experiences often emphasize mindfulness, environmental awareness, and personal well-being. These values may encourage tourists to adopt more responsible travel behaviors such as supporting eco-friendly businesses, reducing waste, and respecting local cultures. However, empirical research exploring the relationship between wellness tourism experiences and responsible travel behavior remains limited.

3.4 Lack of Qualitative Research on Sustainable Wellness Tourism Behavior

Another important research gap relates to the methodological approaches used in wellness tourism studies. Much of the existing research relies heavily on quantitative survey-based methods to examine tourist motivations, satisfaction, and destination loyalty.

While quantitative methods provide valuable statistical insights, they often fail to capture the deeper psychological and experiential dimensions of tourism behavior. Qualitative research methods such as interviews and thematic analysis can provide richer insights into how tourists perceive wellness tourism experiences and sustainability practices. Therefore, there is a need for more qualitative studies that explore tourists' personal experiences, perceptions, and behavioral motivations in sustainable wellness tourism contexts.

3.5 Limited Focus on the Role of Destination Management in Sustainable Wellness Tourism

The role of destination management in promoting sustainable wellness tourism has not been extensively explored in existing literature. Tourism destinations often promote wellness experiences such as spa resorts, yoga retreats, and holistic healing programs. However, the integration of sustainability practices within these tourism offerings is not always clearly addressed.

Many wellness tourism destinations prioritize luxury experiences and service quality without fully considering environmental sustainability and community engagement. As a result, there is a need for research that examines how destination managers and tourism stakeholders can effectively integrate wellness tourism development with sustainable tourism management strategies.

3.6 Lack of Research in Emerging Wellness Tourism Markets

Most wellness tourism research has focused on established tourism destinations in Europe, North America, and parts of Asia. Comparatively fewer studies have examined sustainable wellness tourism development in emerging tourism markets, where wellness tourism may offer significant opportunities for sustainable economic growth.

Emerging destinations often possess rich natural resources, traditional healing practices, and cultural heritage that can support wellness tourism development. However, limited research has explored how these destinations can develop sustainable wellness tourism strategies while preserving their environmental and cultural assets.

Summary of Research Gap

The literature review reveals that although wellness tourism, tourist motivation, and sustainable tourism have been widely studied individually, their interrelationships remain insufficiently explored. In particular, there is a need for research that:

- Examines the motivations and behaviors of tourists in sustainable wellness tourism contexts.
- Explores the relationship between wellness tourism experiences and responsible travel practices.
- Utilizes qualitative research methods to capture deeper insights into tourist perceptions and experiences.
- Investigates the role of destination management and policy development in promoting sustainable wellness tourism.

Addressing these research gaps will contribute to a deeper understanding of how sustainable wellness tourism can support responsible travel practices and long-term tourism sustainability.

4. Hypothesis

Based on the literature review and identified research gaps, the following hypotheses are developed to examine the relationship between tourist motivation, behavior, and responsible travel practices within the framework of sustainable wellness tourism.

H1: *Tourists whose travel motivations are strongly oriented toward health improvement, psychological well-being, and lifestyle enhancement are more likely to participate in sustainable wellness tourism experiences than tourists whose travel motivations are primarily leisure-oriented.*

H2: *Wellness tourism destinations that integrate environmental sustainability practices, such as eco-friendly infrastructure, organic food systems, and natural resource conservation, are more likely to attract environmentally conscious tourists than destinations that emphasize wellness services without sustainability integration.*

H3: *The greater the level of environmental awareness and ethical consumption values among tourists, the more likely they are to adopt responsible travel practices such as supporting eco-friendly accommodations, reducing environmental impact, and engaging in community-based tourism activities.*

H4: *Wellness tourism experiences that combine physical wellness activities with environmental and cultural authenticity are more likely to generate higher levels of tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty than wellness experiences focused solely on relaxation services.*

H5: *Tourism destinations that effectively align tourist wellness motivations with sustainable tourism practices are more likely to promote responsible travel behavior and long-term sustainable tourism development than destinations that treat wellness tourism and sustainability as separate strategic initiatives.*

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the relationship between tourist motivation, consumer behavior, and responsible travel practices in sustainable wellness tourism. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining complex social and behavioral phenomena because it allows researchers to gain deeper insights into individuals' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes (Creswell, 2018). In the context of sustainable wellness tourism, qualitative methods enable the exploration of

tourists' motivations for wellness travel, their understanding of sustainability practices, and the ways in which these factors influence responsible travel behavior.

The research follows an exploratory approach, which is appropriate when investigating emerging or underexplored topics. Sustainable wellness tourism represents a relatively new area of tourism research, particularly in relation to the behavioral patterns of tourists who seek wellness experiences while also demonstrating concern for environmental sustainability. Therefore, an exploratory qualitative approach provides flexibility in examining these complex interactions.

5.2 Research Approach

The study uses an interpretive research approach, which focuses on understanding how individuals interpret and give meaning to their experiences. In tourism studies, the interpretive approach is widely used to examine how tourists perceive destinations, experiences, and travel practices.

Through this approach, the study seeks to understand how tourists perceive wellness tourism experiences and how these experiences influence their attitudes toward sustainability and responsible travel practices. The interpretive approach allows the researcher to capture the subjective meanings and motivations that influence tourists' behavior in wellness tourism contexts.

5.3 Study Context

The research focuses on tourism destinations that offer wellness tourism experiences integrated with sustainability initiatives. These destinations typically include wellness resorts, yoga retreats, spa centers, meditation retreats, and nature-based wellness facilities located in environmentally rich areas such as mountains, forests, and coastal regions.

Wellness tourism destinations often emphasize natural environments, holistic health programs, and sustainable resource management. These characteristics make them ideal settings for examining the relationship between wellness tourism experiences and responsible travel practices.

5.4 Sampling Technique

The study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic.

Participants selected for this study include tourists who have previously participated in wellness tourism experiences, such as spa retreats, yoga tourism, meditation retreats, or nature-based wellness programs. These individuals are considered appropriate participants because their experiences provide valuable insights into the motivations and behavioral patterns associated with sustainable wellness tourism.

A sample size of approximately 20–25 participants is considered sufficient to achieve data saturation, which occurs when additional interviews no longer generate new information or themes.

5.5 Data Collection Methods

The research uses multiple qualitative data collection methods to obtain comprehensive insights into tourist behavior in sustainable wellness tourism.

5.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data collection method. This method allows participants to share their experiences, opinions, and perceptions while enabling the researcher to guide the conversation around key research themes.

Interview questions focus on the following topics:

- Motivations for participating in wellness tourism
- Perceptions of sustainability practices in tourism destinations
- Attitudes toward responsible travel behavior
- Factors influencing destination choice
- Personal experiences with wellness tourism activities

Each interview lasts approximately 30–45 minutes and is conducted either face-to-face or through online communication platforms. Interviews are recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis.

5.5.2 Secondary Data Analysis

In addition to primary interview data, the study also examines secondary data sources to support the analysis. These sources include:

- Academic journal articles
- Tourism industry reports
- Sustainability reports of wellness resorts
- Tourism marketing materials

Secondary data helps provide contextual understanding of sustainable wellness tourism trends and supports the interpretation of qualitative findings.

5.6 Data Analysis Method

The collected qualitative data are analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a widely used method for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows researchers to organize and interpret large amounts of textual data by identifying recurring themes and concepts.

The data analysis process consists of several stages:

5.6.1 Data Familiarization

The researcher carefully reviews interview transcripts and secondary data to gain an overall understanding of the collected information.

5.6.2 Coding

Key statements, phrases, and ideas within the data are identified and assigned codes that represent meaningful concepts related to wellness tourism behavior and sustainability.

5.6.3 Theme Development

Codes that share similar meanings are grouped together to form broader themes, such as tourist motivation, sustainability awareness, responsible travel practices, and destination perception.

5.6.4 Interpretation

The identified themes are analyzed and interpreted in relation to the research objectives and hypotheses. This step involves linking the findings with existing tourism literature to develop meaningful conclusions.

5.7 Reliability and Validity

Ensuring the credibility and reliability of qualitative research findings is essential. Several strategies are employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Triangulation is used by combining multiple sources of data, including interviews and secondary literature, to validate the findings. This approach helps ensure that the results are supported by different forms of evidence.

Additionally, member checking is conducted by sharing selected interpretations with participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of their responses.

5.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are carefully addressed throughout the research process. All participants are informed about the purpose of the study before participating in the interviews. Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

Confidentiality is maintained by ensuring that participants' identities remain anonymous in the research report. The collected data are used solely for academic purposes and are stored securely to protect participants' privacy.

Summary

This study employs a qualitative exploratory research design to investigate the relationship between tourist motivation, consumer behavior, and responsible travel practices in sustainable wellness tourism. By using purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis, the research aims to generate in-depth insights into the motivations and behavioral patterns of wellness tourists and their implications for sustainable tourism development.

6. Analysis and Interpretations

The qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and secondary literature analysis were examined using thematic analysis in order to identify patterns related to tourist motivation, travel behavior, and responsible travel practices in sustainable wellness tourism. The analysis revealed several significant themes that provide insights into how tourists perceive wellness tourism experiences and how these perceptions influence their attitudes toward sustainability and responsible travel behavior. The interpretations presented in this section link the empirical findings with the research hypotheses and existing literature.

6.1 Motivations Driving Participation in Sustainable Wellness Tourism

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the analysis is the strong influence of health and well-being motivations on tourists' decisions to participate in wellness tourism experiences. Many participants indicated that their primary motivation for choosing wellness tourism destinations was the desire to improve their physical health, reduce stress, and achieve emotional balance. Modern lifestyles characterized by work pressure, sedentary habits, and digital dependency have increased the need for relaxation and mental rejuvenation.

Participants frequently described wellness tourism as an opportunity to temporarily disconnect from routine life and engage in activities that support holistic well-being. Activities such as yoga retreats, meditation sessions, spa therapies, detox programs, and nature walks were commonly mentioned as essential elements of their wellness tourism experiences. These findings suggest that wellness tourism provides tourists with a structured environment for self-care and personal development.

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that wellness tourists often perceive travel as a form of preventive health management. Instead of viewing wellness tourism solely as a recreational activity, participants emphasized its role in maintaining long-term physical and mental health. This perspective reflects the growing global trend toward health-conscious lifestyles and preventive healthcare practices. As a result, tourism destinations that offer comprehensive wellness programs are more likely to attract tourists seeking meaningful and health-oriented travel experiences.

6.2 Environmental Awareness and Sustainable Travel Behavior

Another key theme identified in the analysis relates to environmental awareness and sustainability consciousness among wellness tourists. Participants expressed strong concern about environmental issues such as pollution, climate change, and environmental degradation. These concerns influenced their preferences for tourism destinations that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability.

Many respondents indicated that they actively seek tourism destinations located in natural and environmentally preserved environments, such as forests, mountains, and coastal regions. The presence of clean air, natural landscapes, and tranquil surroundings was considered essential for achieving a successful wellness experience. These environmental attributes were perceived as important contributors to both physical and psychological well-being.

Participants also demonstrated a strong preference for tourism businesses that implement environmentally responsible practices. Examples mentioned by participants include the use of renewable energy, eco-friendly construction materials, organic food production, and waste reduction initiatives. Many respondents stated that they were willing to pay higher prices for tourism services that support environmental sustainability.

These findings suggest that wellness tourists often exhibit pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors, which can encourage tourism providers to adopt more sustainable business practices. As consumer demand for environmentally responsible tourism services increases, tourism destinations may become more motivated to integrate sustainability principles into their operations.

6.3 Influence of Destination Image on Tourist Decision-Making

The analysis also highlights the importance of destination image in influencing tourists' decisions to participate in wellness tourism experiences. Participants frequently described their expectations of wellness tourism destinations using terms such as peaceful, natural, healthy, and environmentally friendly. These perceptions strongly influenced their destination preferences.

Wellness tourism destinations that promote images of natural beauty, tranquility, and holistic health were perceived as more attractive and credible. Participants indicated that destinations known for their wellness facilities, such as yoga retreats, spa resorts, and meditation centers, were more likely to be considered when planning wellness travel.

The role of digital media was also evident in shaping tourists' perceptions of wellness tourism destinations. Many participants reported that they discovered wellness travel opportunities through social media platforms, travel blogs, and online travel communities. Visual content showcasing scenic landscapes, wellness activities, and eco-friendly accommodations played a significant role in inspiring tourists to visit particular destinations.

The findings indicate that a positive destination image not only influences initial visitation decisions but also contributes to tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. Participants who had positive experiences at wellness destinations often expressed their intention to revisit the destination and recommend it to others through word-of-mouth and online reviews.

6.4 Role of Wellness Experiences in Tourist Satisfaction

Another significant theme emerging from the analysis is the role of wellness tourism experiences in shaping tourist satisfaction and emotional well-being. Participants emphasized that the quality of wellness services and the overall atmosphere of the destination significantly influenced their travel satisfaction.

Several factors were identified as important contributors to positive wellness tourism experiences. These include the professionalism of wellness practitioners, the authenticity of wellness programs, the availability of healthy food options, and the presence of natural surroundings. Participants also highlighted the importance of personalized wellness programs tailored to individual health needs.

Wellness tourism experiences that combine multiple elements of well-being—such as physical fitness, mental relaxation, and spiritual reflection—were perceived as particularly meaningful. For example, retreats that integrate yoga sessions, meditation workshops, nature therapy, and healthy cuisine were often described as transformative experiences.

Participants also reported that spending time in natural environments had significant psychological benefits. Activities such as forest walks, beach meditation, and outdoor yoga sessions were perceived as highly effective in promoting relaxation and emotional balance. These findings suggest that the integration of natural environments into wellness tourism experiences plays a crucial role in enhancing tourist satisfaction.

6.5 Responsible Travel Practices among Wellness Tourists

The analysis also revealed that many wellness tourists demonstrate a strong commitment to responsible travel practices. Participants frequently described actions such as reducing plastic use, supporting local businesses, respecting local cultures, and minimizing environmental impact during their travels.

Responsible travel behavior was often linked to the values associated with wellness tourism, particularly mindfulness and environmental awareness. Many participants indicated that wellness tourism experiences encouraged them to reflect on their lifestyle choices and adopt more sustainable habits.

For example, some respondents reported that participating in wellness retreats inspired them to adopt healthier eating habits, reduce consumption of processed foods, and support organic farming practices. Others mentioned that wellness tourism experiences increased their awareness of environmental conservation and encouraged them to reduce waste and conserve natural resources.

These findings suggest that wellness tourism can play an important role in promoting sustainable consumption patterns and responsible travel behavior among tourists. By encouraging mindfulness and environmental awareness, wellness tourism experiences can influence tourists' attitudes and behaviors both during and after their travel experiences.

6.6 Interpretation in Relation to Research Hypotheses

The findings of the analysis provide support for the proposed research hypotheses. The strong influence of health and well-being motivations on tourist participation in wellness tourism confirms the first hypothesis regarding the role of motivation in sustainable wellness tourism behavior.

Similarly, the findings demonstrate that environmental awareness significantly influences tourists' preferences for sustainable tourism services, supporting the second and third hypotheses related to sustainability practices and responsible travel behavior.

The importance of destination image in shaping tourists' travel decisions also supports the hypothesis that positive destination perceptions can influence tourist behavior and destination loyalty. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that wellness tourism experiences that integrate sustainability principles contribute to higher levels of tourist satisfaction and responsible travel behavior.

Overall, the findings highlight the interconnected relationship between tourist motivation, wellness tourism experiences, and sustainable tourism practices. Understanding these relationships can help tourism stakeholders design tourism products and services that promote both tourist well-being and environmental sustainability.

7. Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore sustainable wellness tourism by examining the relationship between tourist motivation, behavior, and responsible travel practices. The qualitative analysis provided valuable insights into how wellness tourism experiences influence tourists' travel decisions, sustainability awareness, and overall satisfaction. The findings reveal that wellness tourism has the potential to promote responsible travel behavior while contributing to sustainable tourism development. The following key findings summarize the most important insights derived from the study.

7.1 Health and Well-being Motivations as the Primary Driver of Wellness Tourism

One of the most significant findings of this study is that health and well-being motivations serve as the primary driver of sustainable wellness tourism participation. The majority of participants indicated that their decision to engage in wellness tourism activities was strongly influenced by the desire to improve their physical health, reduce stress, and achieve psychological balance.

Modern lifestyles characterized by work pressure, sedentary routines, and digital dependence have increased individuals' need for relaxation and self-care. As a result, wellness tourism has emerged as an attractive option for individuals seeking opportunities to restore their physical and emotional well-being. Participants emphasized that wellness tourism experiences such as yoga retreats, meditation programs, spa therapies, and detox programs help them disconnect from routine life and focus on personal wellness.

Another important aspect identified in the findings is that wellness tourism is often perceived as a form of preventive health management. Rather than seeking treatment after experiencing health problems, many tourists prefer to adopt proactive lifestyle practices that maintain their well-being. Wellness tourism therefore provides an environment where tourists can learn and practice healthy behaviors that can be integrated into their daily lives after the travel experience.

These findings suggest that wellness tourism destinations that emphasize holistic health programs, relaxation opportunities, and personalized wellness services are more likely to attract tourists seeking meaningful and health-focused travel experiences.

7.2 Environmental Awareness Influences Sustainable Travel Decisions

The second key finding of the study is that environmental awareness plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' travel decisions within sustainable wellness tourism contexts. Participants demonstrated strong concern for environmental protection and sustainability, which influenced their preferences for tourism destinations that adopt eco-friendly practices.

Many participants expressed a preference for destinations located in natural environments such as forests, mountains, and coastal areas. These environments were perceived as ideal settings for wellness activities because they provide tranquility, clean air, and opportunities for connection with nature. The presence of natural landscapes was considered an essential element in enhancing both physical and psychological well-being.

In addition, participants showed strong interest in supporting tourism businesses that demonstrate environmental responsibility. Examples mentioned by participants include eco-friendly accommodation, organic food production, renewable energy use, and waste reduction initiatives. Some participants indicated that they were willing to pay higher prices for tourism services that align with sustainability principles.

These findings indicate that environmental awareness among tourists can encourage tourism businesses to adopt sustainable practices. As demand for sustainable wellness tourism increases, tourism destinations may become more motivated to implement environmental management strategies.

7.3 Destination Image Significantly Influences Wellness Tourism Choices

Another important finding is the role of destination image in influencing tourists' decision-making processes. Participants indicated that their perception of a destination as peaceful, natural, healthy, and environmentally responsible strongly influenced their travel choices.

Destinations that successfully promote images of tranquility, scenic beauty, and wellness facilities are more likely to attract tourists interested in wellness tourism experiences. Wellness tourism destinations often highlight natural landscapes, holistic health programs, and sustainable tourism initiatives in their marketing strategies.

Digital platforms and social media were also identified as important sources of information influencing tourists' perceptions of wellness tourism destinations. Many participants reported discovering wellness retreats and eco-friendly resorts through online travel websites, social media platforms, and travel blogs. Visual content showcasing nature-based wellness experiences and sustainable tourism practices often inspired tourists to visit specific destinations.

A positive destination image also contributes to tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Participants who had positive wellness experiences reported a strong intention to revisit the destination and recommend it to others through word-of-mouth communication and online reviews.

7.4 Wellness Experiences Enhance Tourist Satisfaction and Personal Transformation

The findings of this study indicate that high-quality wellness tourism experiences significantly enhance tourist satisfaction and emotional well-being. Participants described wellness tourism experiences as transformative journeys that promote relaxation, self-reflection, and personal growth.

Several factors were identified as important contributors to positive wellness tourism experiences. These include the quality of wellness services, the expertise of wellness practitioners, the authenticity of wellness programs, and the natural environment surrounding the destination. Participants emphasized that wellness tourism experiences that integrate multiple elements of well-being—such as physical activity, mindfulness practices, and healthy nutrition—are particularly meaningful.

Many respondents reported that wellness tourism experiences helped them develop new lifestyle habits related to health and well-being. For example, participants mentioned adopting regular meditation practices, healthier eating habits, and improved work-life balance after returning from wellness retreats. These findings highlight the transformative potential of wellness tourism. By offering experiences that support physical, mental, and emotional well-being, wellness tourism destinations can create meaningful travel experiences that extend beyond traditional leisure tourism.

7.5 Responsible Travel Practices among Wellness Tourists

The final key finding of this study is that wellness tourists often demonstrate responsible travel behavior aligned with sustainability principles. Participants reported engaging in various responsible travel practices during their wellness tourism experiences.

Examples of responsible travel practices include reducing plastic consumption, conserving natural resources, respecting local cultures, and supporting local businesses. Participants also indicated that wellness tourism experiences increased their awareness of environmental sustainability and encouraged them to adopt more responsible lifestyle choices.

Many wellness tourism destinations actively promote sustainability initiatives such as community-based tourism programs, environmental conservation projects, and local cultural experiences. These initiatives encourage tourists to interact with local communities and contribute to sustainable tourism development.

The findings suggest that wellness tourism can serve as a platform for promoting responsible travel behavior among tourists. By encouraging mindfulness, environmental awareness, and ethical consumption, wellness tourism experiences can support sustainable tourism development while enhancing tourist well-being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that sustainable wellness tourism represents a promising pathway for integrating personal well-being with responsible travel practices and sustainable tourism development. The findings highlight that tourist motivations related to health improvement, stress reduction, and personal development play a crucial role in driving participation in wellness tourism activities.

Environmental awareness also plays a significant role in shaping tourists' preferences for sustainable tourism services. Wellness tourists often demonstrate strong support for eco-friendly tourism practices, including sustainable accommodations, organic food systems, and environmentally responsible tourism infrastructure.

The study further reveals that destination image and the quality of wellness experiences significantly influence tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Destinations that successfully integrate wellness tourism services with sustainability initiatives are more likely to attract environmentally conscious travelers and achieve long-term tourism sustainability.

Moreover, wellness tourism experiences have the potential to promote responsible travel behavior by encouraging tourists to adopt sustainable lifestyle practices. Through mindfulness activities, nature-based experiences, and community engagement, wellness tourism can foster greater awareness of environmental and social responsibility among travelers.

Overall, sustainable wellness tourism offers significant opportunities for tourism destinations to promote holistic well-being, environmental conservation, and community development. By understanding tourist motivations and behavioral patterns, tourism stakeholders can design tourism strategies that align with sustainability principles while meeting the evolving expectations of wellness travelers.

The integration of wellness tourism and sustainable tourism practices therefore represents an important direction for the future of tourism development, ensuring that tourism activities contribute positively to both human well-being and environmental sustainability.

8. Limitations and Recommendations

While this study provides valuable insights into sustainable wellness tourism, tourist motivation, and responsible travel practices, several limitations must be acknowledged. Recognizing these limitations helps identify areas for improvement and provides direction for future research and policy development. The following sections outline the major limitations of the study and propose recommendations for enhancing sustainable wellness tourism practices.

8.1 Limitations of the Study

8.1.1 Limited Sample Size

One of the primary limitations of this research is the relatively small sample size used in the qualitative study. The research relied on interviews with a limited number of wellness tourists, which may not fully represent the perspectives of the broader population of wellness travelers. A larger and more diverse sample could provide deeper insights into the variations in tourist motivations and responsible travel behaviors.

8.1.2 Lack of Geographic Specificity

The study does not focus on a particular geographic destination or region, which may limit the applicability of the findings to specific tourism markets. Sustainable wellness tourism practices may vary significantly across different countries and cultural contexts. Future studies could examine sustainable wellness tourism within specific destinations to better understand regional differences in tourist behavior and sustainability practices.

8.1.3 Dependence on Qualitative Research Methods

This study primarily used qualitative research methods, which focus on exploring perceptions, attitudes, and experiences rather than measuring statistical relationships between variables. While qualitative methods provide rich and detailed insights, the findings may not be generalized to a larger population without further quantitative validation.

8.1.4 Limited Stakeholder Perspectives

The research mainly focuses on the perspectives of tourists participating in wellness tourism experiences. However, sustainable wellness tourism development also involves other stakeholders such as tourism businesses, destination managers, policymakers, and local communities. Including these stakeholders could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with sustainable wellness tourism.

8.1.5 Rapidly Changing Tourism Trends

The tourism industry is constantly evolving due to factors such as technological advancements, changing consumer preferences, and global environmental challenges. As a result, some of the findings of this study may require further updates in the future to reflect new trends in sustainable wellness tourism and responsible travel practices.

8.2 Recommendations

8.2.1 Integration of Sustainability into Wellness Tourism Planning

Tourism policymakers and destination managers should integrate sustainability principles into wellness tourism planning and development strategies. This includes promoting eco-friendly infrastructure, protecting natural environments, and encouraging responsible tourism practices among visitors.

8.2.2 Promotion of Environmentally Responsible Tourism Businesses

Wellness tourism providers should adopt sustainable business practices such as renewable energy usage, water conservation, waste management, and organic food sourcing. Implementing environmentally responsible practices can enhance the credibility and attractiveness of wellness tourism destinations.

8.2.3 Encouraging Community Participation

Sustainable wellness tourism development should involve local communities in tourism activities. Encouraging community participation can help preserve local culture, create employment opportunities, and ensure that tourism development benefits local residents.

8.2.4 Utilization of Digital Platforms for Sustainable Tourism Promotion

Tourism organizations should utilize digital marketing and social media platforms to promote sustainable wellness tourism destinations. Sharing information about eco-friendly initiatives, wellness programs, and nature-based experiences can attract tourists who value responsible travel practices.

8.2.5 Future Research on Sustainable Wellness Tourism

Future research should explore sustainable wellness tourism using mixed research methods, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Studies could also examine emerging topics such as digital wellness tourism, post-pandemic wellness travel trends, and the role of technology in promoting sustainable tourism experiences.

Summary

This chapter examined sustainable wellness tourism by exploring tourist motivation, behavior, and responsible travel practices. Although the study provides valuable insights into the behavioral patterns of wellness tourists and their influence on sustainable tourism development, several limitations highlight the need for further research.

By addressing these limitations and implementing the recommended strategies, tourism stakeholders can strengthen the integration of wellness tourism and sustainability principles, ensuring that tourism development benefits tourists, local communities, and the natural environment in the long term.

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