



Health consciousness through wellness tourism: a new dimension to new age travelers'

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Abstract

Health is multidimensional concept. There are various factors which interplay with, and which affect health at different levels, be it on the human body and soul, be it in bacteria on the micro level, or socio-economic status at the macro level. With burgeoning stress levels, chronic diseases globally paves the way for a growing consumer awareness that has a dramatic impact on individuals desirous of a healthy and wholesome lifestyle. Health-conscious individuals become more involved in seeking healthier behavioral dimensions in order to improve their general health, but these are mostly in striving for material possessions and higher status. In the process, social inevitably comes to the fore and realities hit home harshly. People are invariably always seeking new ways of relaxation and ways in which to rejuvenate themselves physically and emotionally. Wellness tourism is a comparatively a new trend that is booming. This is not surprising given that the WHO has been assertive in promoting a cohesive notion of wellbeing. In addition, people are more cognizant of the fact that they need to care for themselves more. Equating health with wellness and ignoring mental, psychological and social aspects, is a narrow view of individual well-being. The article explores the potential relationship of health consciousness and wellness as a whole. The objective is to aid people to figure out the bigger idea behind driving for a healthy sense of being and feeling vibrantly alive. The research suggests a new way towards universal and perennial concerns for wellness of individuals and groups of people and indeed for the well-being of the whole of mankind, through the growing trend of wellness tourism.

Keywords: health, health consciousness, wellness, psychological well-being, wellness tourism.

Introduction

The world is indeed an amazing place in many respects, especially in the era of globalization and digitalization where everything and everyone is interconnected and where the Fourth Industrial Revolution is in full swing. People are more indulgent in the benefits of modern life and are involved in somewhat inactive modes of digital entertainment, lethargic work environments and everyday mundane life in which fast food meals are the norm. The rates of increase in obesity and chronic disease are also on an upward spiral, resulting from ill health caused by poorly considered human behaviors. The snowballing rise in stress and chronic diseases globally, has paved the way for a need for enhanced consumer awareness in what is happening, so as to mitigate the health decline and thus dramatically influence people towards a healthier, balanced and wholesome lifestyle. In order to improve their quality of life and promote their health, people tend to travel to far-away places to relieve themselves from the pressures of their taxing day-to-day activities. Health tourism has thus gradually become



a common form of vacationing for them as it covers a wide spectrum of leisure, fun and relaxation options that incorporates wellness and healthcare.

Any form of tourism directly or indirectly associated with maintaining or enhancing an individual's well-being comes under the framework of Wellness Travel. Wellness tourism is now a \$439 billion industry within the worldwide tourism industry which makes a staggering \$3.2 trillion per annum. It represents 14 percent of total global tourism spending (www.huffingtonpost.in).

We should note that by speaking of wellness tourism we are referring to travel for the purpose of stimulating health and well-being through physical, psychological, or spiritual undertakings. Wellness tourism is a fast growing travel niche and is expected to hit \$680 billion by 2018, according to the Global Wellness Summit. It is thus increasing 50 percent quicker than the general tourism industry. Travelers take an amazing 586 million wellness trips every year and this sector is second only to cultural tourism. Wellness travelers tend to spend 130 percent more than the regular traveler. The 2016 Virtuoso Luxe Report has identified the most sought-after wellness aspects to be massages and other physical treatments, healthy cuisine, fitness classes, natural beauty, and a range of sports activities (Virtuoso Life, 2017). The destinations which are associated with Ayurveda, Naturopathy, alternative medicines, spa, Yoga, energy therapy, and other health aspects, along with a spiritual philosophy, are in great demand. Wellness as such, is considered to incorporate a mind-body-soul harmony. It is associated with beauty and balance of both the internal and external facets of life. The Wellness concept is a complex phenomenon, and it is a specific state of human well-being, which is associated with consciousness, healthy behaviors, healthy attitudes, physical fitness and of course deeper spiritual activity (Dunn, 1961).

Methodology

A literature review methodology was used to survey books, scholarly articles, and other sources considered to be relevant as they relate to the area of research, and by so doing, the researchers have provided a description, and summary, and critical evaluation of the works in relation to the research issue being investigated, namely health consciousness through wellness tourism.

Literature review

Wellness tourism has a special core focus on good health. Well-being is not a new phenomenon and various researchers have devoted their time and energy in expanding its dais and its relation with other determining factors. Consciousness is a fundamental aspect of being and it develops along with subjectivity and the values which an individual espouses as learned from his religion, education, family and so forth. Furnham and Forey (1994) defined health consciousness as an individual's ecological and self-awareness of healthy lifestyles. Dutta-Bergman (2004a) has suggested that health conscious persons are more responsible for their health. He equated a "responsible" person to a "health conscious" person. He points out that health conscious persons' are more engaged in seeking out preventive and health-maintaining attitudes and behaviors in their lives and feel more responsible in respect to their health throughout their lives.

Gould (1998) in his seminal article considered health consciousness including health self-consciousness, health involvement and alertness in self-monitoring of one's health as a psychological or inner status of an individual. Gould (1998; 1990) argues that health consciousness is a psychographic variable and not incorporated with visible other behaviors. The measures of one's health attitude and behavior regarding care and prevention of illness



are dependent and predicted by a health consciousness. Whereas, Iversen and Kraft (2006) in their Health Consciousness Scale, have established a positive correlation with preventive health behaviors and noted that health consciousness is incongruous with health anxiety or the constant fear of being ill.

Dutta-Bergman (2004b; 2006) tried to differentiate psychological characteristics of health consciousness from three other pointers of health orientation. The indicators of health orientation were (a) healthy activities, (b) health beliefs, and (c) health information orientation. Furnham and Forey (1994), conclude that seeking health information is one of the essential elements of a health consciousness. Rodgers et al. (2007) refer to a “health conscious cluster” relating to an individual’s awareness of health information. Slater and Flora (1989) after analyzing two major clusters of health (health-oriented vs. non-health oriented) and several lifestyle patterns, concluded that the factors that dominate are health knowledge, health attitude and cognition, and health behaviors in general.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as “*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*” (WHO, 2006). Kahneman and Krueger (2006) have made an interesting analysis of a definition that asserted that health specifically includes psychological and social aspects, rather than only physical health. Ryan (2002b) suggests that opportunity exists for the re-creation of the definition to be used including the positive aspects of the human psyche, since recreation for example, is specific time spent for psychological health enhancement. Tourists who look for a healthy balance between body, mind and soul, with the primary objective of individual well-being are known as “wellness tourists.” Kaspar (1996) highlights that Wellness tourism is a phenomenon that intends to maintain, promote and recover and rejuvenate the body, mind, and socio-psychological well-being of individuals. Brooker and Joppe (2014) consider that health is in part a matter of personal responsibility as it is concerned with an individual’s attitude and behaviour towards his or her own body, mind and spirit. Bushell and Sheldon’s (2009) study complements this idea and consider that the subjective well-being of individuals depend upon a connection with their inner and outer body, harmony with nature, culture and aesthetic aspects. Experiences such as an appreciation of nature are interconnected with personal experiences and human satisfaction. Thus, by pursuing beauty therapy or energy-balancing classes, art and music, an individual has a more direct relationship with health, as these activities and interests diminish the negative effects of externally imposed health risks. Smith and Puczkó (2008) hold the view that a “*typical spa visitor may not want a psychological or spiritual experience*”. They declare that it is unlikely that a wellness tourist wants to attain mind-body-spirit wellness with merely a single activity. Ragheb (1993) categorically states that the quality and meaning of the experience of an individual, contributes to perceived wellness rather with participation alone. The technical and functional quality of wellness tourism seems to depend upon an array of facilities associated with health related treatments including physical, mental and spiritual activities, social, and cultural and all in a natural or aesthetically pleasing setting.

Types of Wellness destinations

Wellness travelers chase after a wide range of services, which often include physical fitness and sports, working towards a healthy diet and weight management, beauty treatments, relaxation and stress relief, meditation and yoga,. The most popular forms of meditation include Buddhist meditation or Transcendental meditation. These are increasingly sought after by frazzled Westerners seeking to achieve peace and calm in their hectic lives. Often, Wellness travelers also seek procedures or treatments using conventional, alternative, complementary, herbal, or homeopathic medicines.

Hotels and hospitality



Many hotel guests seek to maintain a healthy lifestyle while traveling and some hotels have developed and endorsed programs to attract wellness tourists. They thus develop programs including healthy menu options, detoxing in conjunction with hospitals, relaxation programs, spa services, and a range of fitness facilities and classes (Pilzer, 2008).

Hospitals and medical centers: These are a substantial providers of destination wellness agendas. They tend to emphasize lifestyle improvement, prevention, or health screening. Hospitals and hotels are often involved in partnerships in driving such endeavours (Dimon, 2013).

Wellness resorts: These offer short-term, residential programs to address specific health anxieties, decrease stress, or drive the maintenance of lifestyle improvement (Fitzsimmons, 2012).

Health consciousness and wellness interrelationship

Health always plays a dominant role in both individual (human) and national development (Berry, Dalal & Pande, 1994). It is thus a multidimensional concept affected by various factors at different levels. The determinants of health are biological, ecosystem, social and behavioral. In behavioral determinants, the individual is liable for the upkeep of health through the choice of a healthy lifestyle (Marmot & Wilkinson, 1999). The individual's behavior and several social policies determine the conceptualization of health. Both hold each other accountable, and healthy behavior of an individual is the reflection of a prevailing social system and is a critical outcome of the manner in which society conceives health. Fosarelli (2002:207) has pronounced how 'In addition to taking better care of their bodies, many people are searching for new ways to make themselves healthier by paying more attention to their emotional and spiritual lives',

The naturalist view on health defines health as freedom from disease and outlines it from the traditional point of view of biomedical aspects (Boorse, 1977). Whereas, the normative view of health, states it as being an individual's ability to achieve desired health ends in given normal circumstances. The naturalist views health as the capability of the individual to perform all the physiological functions with least possible efficiency. They view it as two extremes of the continuum of health at one end, and disease at the other, and individuals fall in between these two opposite poles. Whereas, the normative approach views health as an individual's possibility to be become healthier and this is irrespective of their physical and psychological abilities.

The meaning and goals of health have changed drastically over the last few decades. Previously, the definition of health places a greater emphasis on the presence and absence of disease. Later on there was a distinct move to a more broad and inclusive definition with promotion and prevention at center stage (instead of just curing of disease). This turned out to be an internationally acclaimed goal as inscribed in the Alma Ata Declaration "*Health for All by the Year 2000*" (World Health Organization, 1978) and in the Ottawa Charter (World Health Organization, 1988). In these declarations, there is a notable change in the goal from "curing disease" to the "prevention of disease". The fundamental shift towards health consciousness i.e., to the "promotion of health" by taking factors like healthy diet and physical exercise into consideration, and the avoidance of unhealthy food items, become important. The shift in approach also came into focus, from an exclusively individualized and traditional bio-medical oriented strategy to social and behavioral factors and its potential role in health (Berry et.al., 2006).

With the change in approach, the definition of health extended to "*state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*" The

fundamental concept of health saw new light in it being viewed as ‘a *highly subjective experience*’ (Babao & Moscoso, 2008) towards more intrinsic individual wellbeing and overall wellness. Now individual health is seen as a consequence different biological, psychological and socio-cultural factors whose enhancement is the responsibility of everyone and not merely the professional responsibility of health practitioners. These changed views of health now focus on positive aspects as quality of life (Fernandez-Ballesteros, 1998), human health (Ryff & Singer, 1998), and psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1998).

Psychological wellbeing is a multidimensional construct (Ryff, 1998), and is an ability to live a meaning-full, and vital life (Ryff, 1998). The individual’s life should be full of vitality and meaning with the highest functioning and development of an individual’s true potential (Insel & Roth, 2006). A daily health experience is mainly planned and controlled by the individual’s choices of lifestyle (Babao & Moscoso, 2008). An individual’s awareness of a healthy lifestyle and the control of one’s own senses leading them to a more health conscious existence is essential (Schumacher, Zehrer & Schobersberger, 2011).

Health-related behavior and attitude factors structuring psychological wellbeing (Babao & Moscoso, 2008) are also important. Health-related behavior is like any personal attribute that either raises or restores physical, psychological and social wellbeing (Ryff, 1998). It is individual lifestyle choices for life to enhance or jeopardize the optimal function of one’s true potential. The person’s highest potential is mainly determined by the decisions and choices he or she makes in daily life (Babao & Moscoso, 2008). These health behaviors, have inferences on one’s psychological wellbeing and influence an individual’s health consciousness, both positively and negatively (Insel & Roth, 2006). An individual’s awareness of health cultivating endeavors and greater understanding directly depends on the extent to which an individual takes care of themselves (Insel & Roth, 2006). The variations in health values have a significant relationship with health practices and psychological health status. There is a positive correlation between health-related behaviors and health-related consciousness on psychological wellbeing (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Health conscious people are more sensible to eat well and sleep long enough, get enough physical exercise, and also necessary preventive health care that in turn shapes their psychological wellness.

According to Berry, Dalal, and Pande (1994), health can differ according to one’s beliefs, attitudes, values, customs and cultural practices. Every habit, practice and activities or personal attributes, have the potential to either enhance or damage the overall functioning of an individual. These are referred to as health-related behaviors (Ryff, 1998). They include physical and psychological wellbeing or any preventive health behavior or health risk behavior. Any visible behavior or personal attribute that contributes to enhancement, maintenance, reinstatement of physical, mental, and social well-being comes under the purview of health-related behavior.

Health consciousness refers to an individual’s concern, and interest in information about physical, emotional, and social health and self- realization of their true potential. Health conscious people maintain certain life-enhancement attitudes and behaviours, namely:

- self-determined and independent.
- manage everyday life circumstances.
- create a surrounding environment according to needs and values.
- positive attitude towards the self.
- accept everything constituting the self.
- admit one’s good and bad qualities.
- sense of direction in life.
- seeing meaning in one’s life.
- feelings of continued development.
- openness to new experiences.
- interpersonal wellbeing-having close.

- satisfying ties with others.

A health conscious individual is more active in the search for health information and acts swiftly on gathered information that result in better health. They engage themselves in more than one healthy behavior at a given point of time to improve their health (Moorman & Matulich, 1993). This notion is well-supported by the definition of Becker and Maiman, et al., (1975) who define health consciousness as “*the degree of eagerness to undertake health actions*”.

According to Jayanti and Burns’s (1998) health consciousness is “*the degree to which health concerns are integrated into a person’s daily activities*”.

Gould (1990) asserts it is a positive relationship between consciousness and health. An individual’s intrinsic motivation for better health is an indicator of a good health consciousness as it echoes his or her consistent involvement in health enhancement. An individual’s health attitudes and behaviors is directly influenced by his or her health consciousness (Gould, 1990).

Forthofer and Bryant (2000) explained the importance of identifying people with high health consciousness.

1. Individuals with different levels of health consciousness, addressed differently as it enhances the efficiency of one’s health involvement.
2. Peoples who are highly health consciousness are prepared to carry out health preventive behaviors to attain the desirable health outcomes.
3. By observing health conscious people, the non- health conscious individuals get motivated to improve their attitudes towards health.

With the rising health-conscious consumers, the wellness industry begins a new long day as envisaged from Kondratieff’s Theory of Long Waves with acceptance from Nefiodow (2006). Wellness is not about curing any particular disease, it is a means of changing lifestyle and “finding yourself” in a ‘stress age’. The increasing stress levels in this fast-paced existence and growing awareness of personal health, has deepened the demand for health related vacation and breaks (Douglas, 2001). The attitude of people towards wellbeing and wellness is changing, as maintaining an individual’s vitality is now considered to be a self-responsibility (Nahrstedt, 2002). In this era, Wellbeing and wellness is seen as a holistic philosophy (Schobersberger, 2004). This paradigm shift has led individuals to understand wellness far better. Ardell (1986) considers wellness as a ongoing process of health that awakens ideas of harmony of mind, body and soul. It is an individuals self-responsibility to take care of their physical fitness, intake of healthy nutrition, relaxation, meditation, and environmental upkeep. Wellness is a lifelong process to improve the quality of life thus maintaining the balance of mind, body, and spirit and positively developing physical, emotional, social, psychological and spiritual wellbeing. The main objective of wellness vacations is to feel physically relaxed and mentally rejuvenated with resultant greater potential strength and power. Wellness vacations are mainly taken by health conscious people.

Conclusion

Health consciousness can be viewed as a psychological state anticipating consequences of related variables (e.g., health attitudes and behaviors). Health consciousness should be viewed as a personal attribute, in predicting diverse health behaviors as it is interconnected with the wide web of our health and also to a network which results in ripple effect in a positive direction of psychological well-being . This individualized process will take time but in the end, will provide individuals with the ability to nurture habits that have lasting positive effects on



their wellness. The evolution of health consciousness amongst people will bring health and wellness to all, if it is vigorously and consistently prosecuted. We note that health tourism sector is diverse and consists of a number of sub-sectors. This is important to understand for the management and marketing of wellness facilities, which is an altogether equally important area for future study.

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