

Insights into wellness tourists: segmentation by benefits

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Abstract

Despite the rapid increase in this niche market, little is known about the benefits wellness tourists seek from their experience. This exploratory qualitative study, which is part of a larger research project, has the following three objectives: (1) to ascertain what the benefits are that wellness tourists expect from their wellness tourism experience; (2) to examine if there are differences among wellness tourists based on the benefits they seek; and (3) to analyse to what extent the benefits differ from these commonly quoted in the tourism literature. Based on data from 27 semi-structured in-depth interviews, participants were segmented into three broad types of wellness tourists. Through thematic and frequency analyses, the interviews revealed 22 benefits showing distinct differences between the three groups of wellness tourists. Moreover, several of those benefits seem to be unique in the wellness tourism context when compared to other benefit and motivation tourism studies.

Keywords: wellness tourism, benefits, spas, retreats

INTRODUCTION

Many factors such as the increasingly fast pace of living, high stress-levels, a search for meaning in life, escalating health costs and demographic changes in Western populations have fuelled people's desire to live healthier lives and to increase their well-being. Health-conscious consumers take a more proactive role in pursuing their wellness and make informed choices about services and products that are available to them. People's concern for their health and well-being has led to a rapidly growing 'wellness industry' which also encompasses the recent phenomenon of *wellness tourism*.

Despite wellness tourism being touted as one of the most promising niche markets within the tourism field, it still remains a little-researched area and empirical studies are sparse. From a marketing perspective it is essential to understand the behaviour, needs and preferences of wellness tourists so that wellness tourism services and products can be designed to cater for customer's expectations. Currently, there seems to be little understanding of who wellness tourists are; whether they can be segmented into distinct types of wellness tourists; and what benefits they expect to obtain from their wellness tourism experience. This paper presents the results of a qualitative study that attempted to explore those questions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is Wellness Tourism and Who are Wellness Tourists?

The definitions of wellness tourism vary extensively. As with general tourism definitions, some wellness tourism definitions place more importance on the *supply* side, whereas others highlight the *demand* side. Definitions referring to the supply side emphasise that tourism infrastructure is necessary in order to experience wellness tourism (specifically facilities that include health services and overnight guest accommodation). Pollock and Williams (2000:165), for example, define health tourism as "activities ... that use tourism products and services that are designed to promote and enable customers to improve and maintain their health and well-being".

Other definitions focus on the demand side, thereby implying that wellness tourism can be pursued without specifically designed tourism facilities and services. For instance, tourism activities such as hiking are also discussed as a wellness tourism activity (Brämer, 2003; Freidl, 2004).

Another characteristic which distinguishes wellness and health tourism definitions is the emphasis on medical treatment and cure of 'tourist-patients' on one hand or the retention or improvement of one's health and well-being on the other. Research by Müller and Lanz Kaufmann (2001) has shown that a clear demarcation should be made between 'cure' and 'wellness' concepts because tourists from these two groups have distinct needs. Consequently, those tourists who primarily travel in order to cure or treat a certain illness or medical condition should be regarded as *medical tourists* and only those who go on vacation in order to maintain or improve their health and well-being should be referred to as *wellness tourists*. Admittedly, the distinction between medical and wellness tourism is not always clear-cut. For instance, the same tourism operator can host both cure and wellness guests which is often the case in traditional European health sanatoria. Nonetheless it can be argued that wellness and medical tourism are distinct sub-sectors of *health tourism*, a view which has been supported by Nahrstedt (2004) and Müller and Lanz Kaufmann (2001).

A narrower definition of wellness tourism is employed in this paper that excludes those potential wellness tourism activities that can be engaged in without relying on a specifically designed wellness tourism infrastructure. Therefore, wellness tourism is defined as the sum of all the relationships and phenomena resulting from a journey by people whose primary motive is to maintain or promote their health and well-being and who stay at least one night at a facility that is specifically designed to enable and enhance people's physical, psychological, spiritual and/or social well-being (adapted from Müller and Lanz Kaufmann, 2001).

Even with a limited wellness definition as this it is unlikely that wellness tourists are a homogenous group with the same needs, expectations and behaviour. Consequently it is important to identify differences among wellness tourists in order to form distinctive homogenous groups. Several sub-groups of wellness tourists have been suggested in the literature. Foremost, wellness tourism has "long been dominated by

the sub-sector of *spa tourism*" (Letho et al., 2006, emphasis added). Other groups such as new age tourists (Pernecky & Johnston, 2006), spiritual pilgrims (Devereux & Carnegie, 2006) and yoga tourists (Letho et al., 2006) have also been described as wellness tourists. Articles referring to more than one group of wellness tourists are rare. Smith and Kelly (2006a) suggest a typology of wellness tourists comprising of spiritual tourists, religious tourists, yoga tourists and spa tourists. However, their typology was not based on empirical data and they conceded that wellness tourist segmentation research based on demographic, behaviouristic or psychographic factors is needed.

One variable that can be used to distinguish between groups of tourists are *benefits* because consumers are sought to desire different benefits from products and services. The following section provides more detail about the use of benefits in the tourism literature.

The Concept of 'Benefits' in the Tourism Literature

A benefit can be referred to "a *change* that is viewed to be advantageous – an improvement in condition, or a gain to an individual, a group, to society, or to another entity" (Driver, Brown & Peterson, 1991:3). In a tourism context this means that an improvement in a condition or at least the maintenance of a desired condition must have occurred because one has had a tourism experience (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997:276).

The concept of benefits has been predominantly linked to market segmentation. Whereas segmentation based on benefits has been applied in a variety of industries, Frochot and Morrison (2000:23) argued that it has been "undoubtedly" the tourism and leisure context where benefit segmentation has received the greatest attention. A substantial amount of research has demonstrated the usefulness of benefits as a means for segmenting tourism markets (e.g. Gitelson & Kerstetter, 1990; Loker & Perdue, 1992; Molera & Albaladejo, 2007; Palacio & McCool, 1997; Shoemaker, 1994; Weaver, Kaufman & Yoon, 2002).

Several advantages are associated with focusing on benefits in the tourism context. Knowledge of benefits sought by tourists helps marketers and managers to understand different market segments and their profiles, to design effective promotional material as well as to develop and provide products and services which are attractive to the tourists (Frochot & Morrison, 2000; Molera & Albaladejo, 2007). As such, a focus on benefits also helps to clarify the question *why* people travel. Therefore, researchers have recognised the close relation of 'travel motives' or 'leisure needs' and the concept of benefits (Frochot & Morrison, 2000; Mannell, 1999; More & Averill, 2003).

There are, however, limitations to the use of benefit typologies in the tourism literature. Frochot and Morrison (2000) point out that most of the existing benefit classifications are specific to a certain destination or activity and as such results of one study cannot be directly applied in other research. Therefore, it is questionable when authors, with the aim to find out the benefits sought by a certain tourist population, do not directly question members of this group but rely on predetermined benefits selected from other studies. All the above listed benefit segmentation studies are quantitative in nature and it is not always clear how the authors arrived at the benefit items included in their surveys. For instance, Palacio and McCool (1997) segmented eco-tourists travelling to Belize according to benefits the tourists sought. Instead of asking tourists about their benefits, the authors pre-selected items from the literature and thereby risked omitting important benefits relevant for eco-tourists in that specific context. Consequently it is suggested that tourist groups such as wellness tourists which have not previously been researched, qualitative methods are first needed to establish benefits sought by the tourists.

Although there are a number of benefits that apply only to specific tourism activities, there are other benefits consistently recurring in dissimilar tourism contexts. For instance, nearly all of the benefit segmentation studies referred to in this section included: socialising benefits (i.e. being with friends and family), the benefit of relaxation, and the benefit of escape. Moreover, there seems to be a congruence between those benefits and motives commonly cited in tourism motivation theories. Travel motives such as escape and relaxation as well as relationships to family and friends have been referred to consistently in the tourism motivation research

(Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1983; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Ryan & Glendon, 1998). Indeed, it was argued recently that there are some core tourist motives which build the “backbone” or central foundation of tourist motivation “regardless of one’s travel experience” (Pearce & Lee, 2005:236). According to those authors these are the motives or benefits of “novelty”, “escape/relax”, and “relationship” as well as “self-development”. It would be interesting to see how far the benefits emerging in this study are congruent or unique in comparison to the benefits commonly quoted in the literature.

References to benefits specifically sought by *wellness tourists* are rarely found in the literature. The International Spa Association (ISPA) (2004) suggested three major benefits of spa visitors, namely (1) escape (i.e. from pressures of everyday life), (2) indulgence (i.e. pleasurable fun, appealing to the senses) and (3) self-improvement (i.e. on some aspects of their body, their emotional state or their long-term spiritual dispositions). An American-based study by Naylor and Kleiser (2002) reported benefits such as self-discovery, improving fitness, losing weight, making lifestyle changes and feeling pampered and cared for. A study investigating the motives of yoga tourists found the four motivational dimensions of (1) seeking spirituality, (2) enhancing mental well-being (e.g. let go of stress and relax), (3) enhancing physical condition and (4) controlling negative emotions (Letho et al., 2006). Finally, several non-empirical sources describing wellness tourists, spiritual tourists or new age tourists emphasise the quest and search for meaning in life and spirituality as well as a search for the true self (Dallen & Conover, 2006; Digance, 2006; Smith, 2003; Smith & Kelly, 2006b).

METHODS

Adequate lists and consequently sample frames for wellness tourists are not readily available; therefore *snowball sampling* was considered to be the most effective technique to obtain the purposive sample. The start of the referral chain in this case was one of the directors of the Australasian Spa Association (ASpA) who contacted several potential study participants with a letter explaining this research as well as personal contacts. Those people who then participated in the study were asked if

they knew other individuals who had a wellness tourism experience and might be willing to be interviewed. The recruitment of participants ended at 27 interviews when similarities in responses became apparent and therefore data saturation was reached.

The data collection primarily occurred through individual semi-structured interviews using an interview guide questioning participants about their experience as wellness tourists and the benefits they obtain from their experience. This data collection method was chosen because it permits a flexible and personal free-flowing conversation that puts participants at ease but still provides a predetermined focus (Patton, 2002). Some demographic information of each interviewee was also collected on a separate form. Depending on geographical distance and convenience for the participants the interviews took place in a range of locations: the workplace of the participants or the researcher, the home of participants or a quiet coffee shop. Nine of the 27 interviews were conducted over the telephone. Data was collected in summer 2007/2008 and the interviews lasted between twenty minutes and one and a half hours.

All digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to *thematic analysis* (Boyatzis, 1998) or what others call *qualitative content analysis* (Cavanagh, 1997; Mayring, 2000). An essentially realist framework, which underpins this study, endorses the assumption that there is a largely unidirectional relationship “between meaning and experience and language” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:85). Therefore, it was concentrated only on what was actually articulated by the research participants (the ‘*manifest level*’) (Boyatzis, 1998). A codebook which underwent several stages of refinement as well as diachronic reliability (Boyatzis, 1998:148), peer debriefing and inter-coder reliability testings was developed. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis software NVivo 7 was used to facilitate data analysis and code recognition by visually organising the data through matrices and frequency of occurrences of codes within and across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three groups of wellness tourists emerged based on different benefits they sought from their wellness tourism experiences. These groups were named *beauty spa visitors*, *lifestyle resort visitors* and *spiritual retreat visitors*. It should be noted that benefits were not the only variable based on which differences between those three groups emerged. The groups also differed in terms of travel behaviour, in the kinds of activities that they engage in, their expectations of the standard and luxury of accommodation and facilities, and their interaction with other guests and staff members. These details are however beyond the scope of this paper.

Twenty-two benefits in total were revealed by the interview participants. Table 1 shows how often each benefit was discussed by each of the three groups of wellness tourist. Four interview participants engaged in two of the tourism activities of beauty spa, lifestyle resort or spiritual retreat visitation. Those participants were asked for expected benefits for each of those activities. This raised the sample of beauty spa visitors to 15 members and the spiritual retreat sample to 10 interview participants, for an overall total of 31 interviewees.

Table 1
Frequency of Benefits Among Three Types of Wellness Tourists

	Beauty Spa Visitors (out of 15)	Lifestyle Resort Visitors (out of 6)	Spiritual Retreat Visitors (out of 10)	TOTAL (out of 31)
1. Becoming Renewed & Refreshed	3	1	2	6
2. Body Maintenance & Appearance	7	0	0	7
3. Contemplation & Mindful Thinking	2	5	4	11
4. Detox	2	3	2	7
5. Escape from Way of Life	3	3	7	13
6. Experiencing New Things	3	1	2	6
7. Exercise & Fitness	0	5	1	6
8. Focus on Self	7	5	6	18
9. Getting Healthier	0	4	0	4
10. Healing & Recovering	4	5	3	12
11. Increased Well-Being	3	2	2	7
12. Meeting New People	0	4	1	5
13. Pampering & Indulgence	7	2	0	9
14. Peace & Tranquility	1	1	5	7
15. Reinforcing Relationships & Bonding	5	0	1	6

16. Relaxation	14	1	1	16
17. Self-Esteem	2	0	0	2
18. Self-Realisation & Self-Awareness	0	3	6	9
19. Sleep Management	0	3	0	3
20. Spiritual Progress	0	1	5	6
21. Stress Release	6	2	2	10
22. Weight Management & Diet	0	6	3	9

Before each of the listed benefits in Table 1 is explained in greater detail, the benefits that were emphasised by each group of wellness tourists were:

- *Beauty Spa Visitors* either exclusively or predominantly discussed the benefits of 'Body Maintenance & Appearance', 'Pampering & Indulgence', 'Reinforcing Relationships', 'Self-Esteem', 'Relaxation' and 'Stress Release'.
- *Lifestyle Resort Visitors* either exclusively or predominantly focused on the benefits of 'Contemplation & Mindful Thinking', 'Getting Healthier', 'Healing & Recovering' as well as the benefits related to specific health behaviours such as 'Detox', 'Exercise & Fitness', 'Sleep Management' and 'Weight Management & Diet'.
- *Spiritual Retreat Visitors* predominantly emphasised the benefits of 'Escape from Way of Life', 'Peace & Tranquility', 'Self-Realisation & Self-Awareness' and 'Spiritual Progress'.

Before discussing the differences between the three groups in detail it should be noted that one benefit, namely '*Focus on Self*', was seen as important across all the groups and by more than half of the total sample. This is in line with other authors who suggested that the self is the main focus of wellness or spiritual tourism experiences (Dallen & Conover, 2006; Digance, 2006; Smith, 2003; Smith & Kelly, 2006b). Several interview participants conceded to be "selfish" and that their experience is a very "self-focused ... personal time". As 'Jade' (Lifestyle Resort Visitor) noted:

"I was very selfish, it was all about me, a time just for me ... it was a very selfish act, I know that but that's what I wanted and what I needed in my life at that time. Just uhm, just to take time out and honour myself".

Focusing on oneself without being responsible for anyone else or anything was seen as central to the wellness tourism experience. Moreover, lifestyle resort and spiritual retreat visitors also prefer to have their experience by themselves without being accompanied by someone who knows them. Thus, wellness tourists are looking for a transformation of the self, albeit in quite different ways as the following discussion will show.

Beauty spa visitors focus to change or improve their physical appearance (*'Body Maintenance & Appearance'*) and the focus on self is related to self-indulgence and time for a treat (*'Pampering & Indulgence'*). The importance of the motivational factor of indulgence and feeling pampered and cared for as well as the physical improvement of one's body was also pointed out by two other studies researching spa visitors (International Spa Association, 2004; Naylor & Kleiser, 2002). Beauty spa visitors feel that they deserve to be pampered and spoilt and they relish the extravagance and luxury that they are surrounded with in a spa. 'Daphne' said:

"I think, you know, everybody just prefers to be nurtured and to be treated like a queen and to be looked after. Every woman wants that".

Beauty spa visitors think that their wellness tourism experience helps to "preserve" or "maintain" their body and appearance or, in 'Joan's' words, to make the "body a better temple". Looking and feeling better also leads to the benefit of *'Self-Esteem'*, a benefit that was only discussed by beauty spa visitors. 'Daniel' explained this benefit as follows:

"And one other thing out of this is a better understanding of how some of those treatments could give your self-esteem a bit of a lift and it builds you up somehow because you came out feeling different".

The most mentioned benefit in the sample of beauty spa visitors was however the benefit of *'Relaxation'*. This benefit was discussed by almost all beauty spa visitors and in contrast by only one lifestyle resort and one spiritual retreat visitor. As 'Kate' explained, visiting spas brings about physical and mental relaxation:

“I mean uhm physically you are relaxed and also mentally you can sort of unwind and relax your mind because you can’t really do anything when you are there”.

Closely related to the benefit of relaxation is the benefit of ‘*Stress Release*’ which was also prevalent in benefit discussions for beauty spa visitors. Beauty spa visitors think that spa visitation is de-stressing because it “forces your mind to slow down”, it “gives you a chance to stop” and “you just don’t worry about anything”.

In this context relaxation and stress release is relatively passive and akin to physical laziness (Ryan, 2002:39). Beauty spa visitors want to leave behind their everyday life worries and problems. In contrast, ***lifestyle resort visitors*** seek out physical activity and they also want to confront and contemplate their lives and their problems rather than escaping from them. In this sense, lifestyle resort visitors are truly interested in finding themselves. The benefit of ‘*Contemplation & Mindful Thinking*’ was referred to by nearly all lifestyle resort visitors and also by almost half of the spiritual retreat visitors. Many activities and courses in lifestyle resorts and spiritual retreats also provoke guests to think deeply about their lives. It helps them to “think clearer”, “the opportunity to think and reflect” and “focus on what is really important”.

There are also particular health behaviours participants across all samples want to address by visiting beauty spas, lifestyle resorts and spiritual retreats. Benefits that address health behaviours were also emphasised in the study by Naylor and Kleiser (2002). In the United States, lifestyle resorts are often termed ‘spas’ and their major focus is on lifestyle change (McNeil & Ragins, 2004:32). Health behaviour areas in this study are related to the benefits of ‘Sleep Management’, ‘Exercise & Fitness’, ‘Weight Management & Diet’ and ‘Detox’. The benefits of ‘*Exercise & Fitness*’ and ‘*Weight Management & Diet*’ were never mentioned by any beauty spa visitors but nearly all lifestyle resort visitors as well as by some spiritual retreat visitors. Lifestyle resorts as well as spiritual retreats generally offer a very healthy, fresh and often vegetarian or even vegan, organic diet which helps people to lose weight whereas some beauty spas offer gourmet food which is not always healthy. ‘Exercise & Fitness’ was also discussed mainly by lifestyle resort visitors. Visits to lifestyle resorts “makes one feel physically fitter” and like an “active person”. It challenges people into

new forms of exercises. Although rarely mentioned by spiritual retreat visitors, some activities that are undertaken in retreats such as yoga help people gain fitness and suppleness and are therefore seen as beneficial in addition to the spiritual gain that is sought from those activities. *'Sleep Management'* is a benefit that was referred to exclusively by lifestyle retreat visitors. Several interview participants had sleeping problems before they visited lifestyle resorts where they improved their sleeping patterns. Finally, the benefit of *'Detox'* was mentioned by interview participants across all samples, but mostly by lifestyle resort visitors. In many lifestyle resorts as well as in spiritual retreats people have to detox as coffee, tea, alcohol, sugar, tobacco or other substances are not allowed to be consumed. It might also be that some beauty spa visitors decide for themselves to eat healthily during their beauty spa holiday, even though the cuisine is generally not as strict in beauty spa resorts. About the benefit of detoxing 'Jil' (Lifestyle Resort Visitor) said:

"You have to totally detox yourself ... But you come back, the best of all from one of these places because you have cleansed yourself and you stopped using all sorts of toxins and poisons and things".

Finally, the benefit of *'Getting Healthier'* was discussed exclusively by lifestyle resort visitors. This makes sense as lifestyle resorts focus on making people healthier in different aspects of their life. For instance, 'Katia' (Lifestyle Resort Visitor) commented that:

"... it's really good to be at a particular time in your life where you are evaluating uhm different personal issues ... and your health and where you are at. This is what I really wanted to do uhm in order to be healthy as a human being, physically and mentally".

Related to *'Getting Healthier'* is the benefit of *'Healing & Recovering'* which was mentioned across all wellness tourist groups. It also seems to be an important benefit because it was stated by approximately a third of the total sample (11 out of 31 participants). However, interviewees referred to different issues one can heal and recover from. In this research, it seems that beauty spa visitors mainly emphasised relatively minor pains and aches, (e.g. back pain) their wellness tourism experience

helps to overcome. In contrast, lifestyle resort and spiritual retreat visitors discussed major negative life events they needed to recover from. As major negative life events people talked about the death of a loved one, serious illnesses (e.g. cancer), marriage break-downs, major stressors at the job (e.g. bullying) or job-related burn-out syndrome and general deterioration of health to the point of a total collapse.

Another benefit which seemed to be important across all samples (13 out of 31 participants mentioned it), but particularly by **spiritual retreat visitors**, is the benefit '*Escape from Way of Life*'. Smith (2003) equates escapism with avoidance of the self and claims that wellness tourists do *not* focus on escaping their lives because they want to enhance their selves. Spiritual retreat visitors clearly focus on the self which includes looking for the "inner spirituality" (Digance, 2006:38). However, they also emphasise escapism and usually speak quite negatively of people's current lifestyles as too fast, superficial and too consumption-oriented. It seems that they have to leave and escape this lifestyle in order to be able to truly focus on the self. The way of life in spiritual retreats is very simple, austere and measured and it might be that this environment provides a strong contrast to a person's normal lifestyle. Spiritual retreat visitors in particular emphasised the benefit of '*Self-Realisation & Self-Awareness*' or in 'Laura's' words "learning more about the inner self". 'Josie' further elaborated:

"... and really a retreat is all about the self, finding the self, finding what's inside and what is your best attribute to the world, to everything, to yourself. So it's all about, you know, getting to know who you are as a human being. ... So obviously, it is my time to re-united with that energy and go back into myself again and look at me".

'*Spiritual Progress*' is a benefit that some participants related to the benefit of 'Self-Realisation & Self-Awareness' because spirituality is closely connected to the self. Some interview participants spoke about a "higher self" or the self connected to God or "a force" or "energy". '*Peace & Tranquility*' is another benefit that was mainly considered by spiritual retreat visitors. Participants across the samples emphasised that their experiences makes them "feel peaceful" and calm or at peace within themselves.

There were also two benefits related to the social dimension of the wellness tourism experience, but those were not discussed frequently. The benefit of *'Meeting New People'* was mostly referred to by lifestyle resort visitors. Even though they prefer to go to lifestyle resorts by themselves they still enjoy the contact with other guests and to meet like-minded people. In contrast, a few beauty spa visitors like to share their experience with someone they are close to (benefit of *'Reinforcing Relationships & Bonding'*). Infrequently mentioned across all wellness tourist groups were benefits of *'Becoming Renewed and Refreshed'* and *'Increased Well-Being'*. As such, wellness tourists might feel "renewed" or, "refreshed", "rejuvenated" or "energised" and get an "enhanced feeling of well-being" through their tourism experiences. Finally, there is the benefit of *'Experiencing New Things'*, which was only referred to six times across all sample groups.

To summarise, this study revealed that wellness tourists can be divided into three different groups on the basis of benefits. Moreover, several benefits that were discussed by interview participants across all three groups rarely emerge in other tourism contexts which means that there are distinct benefits that distinguish wellness tourists from other types of tourists. The benefit of *'Focus on Self'* did not appear in benefit segmentation studies reviewed for this paper or in the general tourism motivation literature. Moreover, if benefits or motives regarding self-development were discussed in other studies, they were usually related to learning or the development of particular skills and abilities rather than to evaluating, transforming and finding the self or the spiritual self (e.g. Pearce & Lee, 2005; Ryan, 2002; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Also, benefits such as *'Getting Healthier'*, *'Healing & Recovering'*, *'Increased Well-being'* were rarely discussed in other contexts and if benefits of health improvement are included they only referred to physical health (e.g. Palacio & McCool, 1997; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007). Additionally, the benefits related to *'novelty'* (i.e. *'Experiencing New Things'*) and *'relationships'* (i.e. *'Meeting Other People'* and *'Reinforcing Relationships & Bonding'*) that are central to tourist motivation research (Pearce & Lee, 2005) did emerge in this context, but were only infrequently mentioned in this study. Finally, the benefits of *'Relaxation'* and *'Escape from Way of Life'* frequently emerged in this study as in

others, however, some wellness tourists emphasise those benefits a lot more than others.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This research provides insights and cues for the development and promotion of wellness tourism products and services. The present data suggests that there appear to be three different groups of wellness tourists seeking different benefits. As more and more destinations and facilities promote themselves as wellness tourism destinations, it should be acknowledged that wellness tourists are not a homogenous group with the same needs.

Due to the small sample size it is not advisable to generalise the present results, thus they should be interpreted with caution. Specifically quantitative tests including robust benefit measurement scales and more inclusive samples need to be employed in the future. Quantitative research is also needed to create profiles of wellness tourists where benefits are matched with other characteristics such as demographics and travel behaviour. It might also be that wellness tourists seek different benefits in other cultural contexts. Consequently, cross-cultural research is needed. In addition, a broader definition of wellness tourism that includes activities that can be undertaken without the provision of specifically designed infrastructure could be integrated into future studies.

Nevertheless, this research has shown that qualitative research can be useful to differentiate between tourists based on the benefits they seek. It has also been demonstrated that there seem to be benefits unique to the wellness tourism context. As wellness tourism research is still in its infancy, this research provides a stepping stone for further research in this area.

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