

## Research Article



## Wellness Travel and Happiness: An Empirical Study into the Outcome of Wellness Activities on Tourists' Subjective Wellbeing

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper it is aimed to examine what kind of leisure activity would be a significant contributor on life satisfaction among wellness travelers visiting beauty spa, lifestyle resort and spiritual retreat in India. Outcome of wellness travel on happiness and life satisfaction was determined through a structured questionnaire based survey with beauty spa, lifestyle resort and spiritual retreat visitors. The questions consist of travel behavior, Health habits, life satisfaction and socio-demographic inputs. A purposively drawn sample of 420 wellness travelers in select travel destinations were sampled to respond to the survey. Correlations were calculated, to be assured that happy people participate more in wellness activities in general. Wellness tourists' responses were tested with over-time analysis which proposed that the correlation is owing to an outcome of leisure trips on happiness. Antecedents to improved life satisfaction in the context of the wellness activities were all significant. Clearly wellness activities are instrumental for life satisfaction, but a planned dietary activity leads one to better life satisfaction as is evident in the high correlation both in zero order and partial correlations. When compared, travel behavior has very low correlation with life satisfaction whereas leisure activities show negative correlation. One reason why people resort to wellness travel though it has low correlation with life satisfaction could be that their need for time off from their routine fueled by their quest for travel and independence, their search for alternate therapies for ailments, the ever increasing need for organic concoctions as a health supplementary lure them to wellness travel destinations like India. A detailed overtime study would identify association between wellness travel and life satisfaction, Theoretical framework to assess wellbeing following a stay at a wellness facility like spa, lifestyle resort and spiritual retreat was yet unexplored by the researchers was attempted in this study.

**Keywords:** Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Wellness, Wellness tourism.

### INTRODUCTION

Wellness tourism is one of the most ancient forms of tourism if one considers the scrupulous attention paid to wellbeing by Greeks and Romans. The term "wellness" is generally used in European tourism. There is no single definition for terms "wellness" and "wellness tourism". The earliest form of wellness tourism was directly related to contemporary health and wellness and includes visits to mineral and hot springs<sup>1</sup>. Many researchers have revealed concepts and definitions relating to the importance of life style, self responsibility for health, and the utilization of a person's potential for improved quality of wellbeing. In the present study, it was tacit that tourist activities of this market segment are for "healthy" people whose main drive is happiness and wellness. Happiness and wellness involves offering people an experience that makes them feel good. In Today's world wellness activities respond to increasing the growing consumer demands for fitness improvement, education for healthy lifestyle, preventive medicine, nutrition counseling, healing, and meditation to solve their own personal problems like depression or stress. Wellness services such as activities like exercise, meditation, massages, herbal wraps and scrubs help healthy people to avoid problems so they stay in good health, both mentally and physically. Health resort, Spiritual retreat and Beauty Spas are now a key consideration for many wellness trip makers because

they put forward a holistic health services for healing the body physical, mental and spiritual exercise, relaxation and health component to the traditional holiday or break. Wellness tourists are self-aware, active seekers of improved well-being, health and happiness. Stakeholders of the wellness market must be aware that the needs of wellness tourists vary enormously at different times and stages of their lives<sup>2</sup>. Where the two operations diverge is in how customers use the facilities. In the destination spa, guests usually come specifically for a program that includes activities from each spa component. In recent years, wellness tourists show interests to receive the phenomenon of happiness. Wellness travelers want to know what can probably make them happier<sup>3</sup>. Normally, there were two ways to improve one's happiness, one was to change one's view on life and the other was to change one's way of life. For these purposes the wellness tourists set on a healthier path for life and serve on healthy spa cuisine, procure education on lifestyle improvement, practice fitness activities that built self-esteem while motivating take-home habits and future bodywork and pampering therapies that complement wellness program<sup>4</sup>.

Though, the term used to express health and wellness had become more complex and confusing, most of the studies show valuing wealth and material goods above the goals of intrinsic self-realization, harmfully affected happiness. International surveys of life satisfaction show



consistent mean level differences across nations, along with differences between ethnic groups within countries. It is reported that people in various societies differentially value happiness<sup>5</sup>. There is extensive literature on the definition of wellness but relatively few empirical explorations of the structure of wellness. The integrative and dynamic nature of wellness makes it difficult to control for variables, resulting in the inadequacy of the existing measures<sup>6</sup>. Several concepts have well established tools of assessment, such as 'subjective well-being', 'psychological wellbeing' and 'wellness' and 'wellbeing' which have been used interchangeably. As stated earlier, there is disagreement about this with some authors believing assessment of wellbeing relates to mental health, indicating life satisfaction, positive mental health and happiness<sup>7</sup>. Wellness, on the other hand, generally refers to the individual's functioning and is viewed as the umbrella over-arching well-being<sup>8</sup>. These are important distinctions to be considered in measuring wellness. Several other researchers have conducted large scale studies using a variety of wellness related instruments. Influence of gender and religion on levels of happiness in 60 industrialized and developing nations was examined using two sources of information: a) The World Database of Happiness and b) quality of life measuring tools including the Human Development Index, the Gastil Index of Civil Liberty, and Index of Economic Freedom, the Gini Coefficient of Income Inequality, and the Corruption Perception Index definitive data<sup>9</sup>. The present well-being assessment tools produce confusing results because of the philosophical constructs they were based upon. Therefore, separating Subjective Well-being (research of happiness and/or satisfaction with life)<sup>10</sup> from Personal Well-being (meaning and self-realization, and the degree to which a person is fully functioning)<sup>11</sup> will help alleviate this problem. It is possible to have individuals select the content or weigh the content themselves<sup>12</sup>. Current literature reveals additional terms corresponding and inter-relating to the notion of wellness, namely, well-being, quality of life, life satisfaction, and happiness and general satisfaction, the latter being a term similarly understood by many cultures and used in international studies. Longitudinal studies suggest that, "Whereas progress toward intrinsic goals enhances wellness, progress toward extrinsic goals such as money either does not enhance wellness or does so to a lesser extent"<sup>13</sup>. The relation of wealth to well-being is at best a low positive one although it is clear that material supports can enhance access to resources that are important for happiness and self-realization, there appear to be many risks to poverty but few benefits to wealth when it comes to well-being<sup>11</sup>.

There were descriptive studies on the topic, while an empirical analysis of life satisfaction and happiness through leisure activities among international tourists is found to be the primary gap. Most of the research works concentrated only on the leisure travel from the health care point of view, while the present study aimed to focus

on the combined study of effect of leisure activities on life satisfaction among the three types of wellness tourists (beauty spa visitors, life style resort visitors, and spiritual retreat visitors) wellness activities on happiness and life satisfaction among tourists.

The recent years, it was observed that wellness tourism is gradually expanding beyond its theoretical boundaries to include wellness and healthy travel. As spa related activities on happiness are already being studied, the effects of wellness travel on life satisfaction from the leisure activities are empirically tested among the three types of wellness tourists (beauty spa, lifestyle resort and spiritual retreat visitors) is yet unexplored by the researchers.

In this study, the following research objectives were formulated in order to understand the role of wellness tourism in inducing life satisfaction among the wellness tourists visiting of three different Indian wellness tourism organizations (beauty spa, spiritual retreat or lifestyle resort).

1. To explore the effect of wellness travel on life satisfaction.
2. To identify if wellness trips have a bigger impact on life satisfaction.
3. To find if wellness tourists (beauty spa, life style resort and spiritual retreat visitors) are benefited from these activities.

The rationale of this paper was to resolve the effect of wellness activities on Life satisfaction. This study clarifies which wellness activity increases Life satisfaction. Correlations were calculated, to be assured that happy people participate more in wellness activities in general.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sampling

Based on the specified objectives data were collected from respondents who visited India for wellness travel purpose. Purposive sampling procedure was adopted to identify the wellness travelers to Indian tourist destinations in major cities were solicited for consent to take part in the research. A sample of 420 wellness travelers from as many as 20 countries all over the world who visited either a beauty spa, spiritual retreat or a lifestyle resort were administered the structured questionnaire. Responses were collected particularly to study the outcome of wellness activities on happiness.

This paper tries to identify the effect of wellness travel on life satisfaction. Wellness activities seek an answer to the following questions: What is the effect of wellness activities on life satisfaction? And end with, does wellness tourists benefit from these activities? The intention of this study clarifies which leisure activities increase life satisfaction. Same time correlations were calculated among the several independent variables in order to find the correlation among those wellness activities



responsible for the life satisfaction, while all effects were controlled by demographic variables of the respondents from different countries of origin.

**Questionnaire construction**

These questions were framed into four parts, first part consist of travel behavior, the second part consists of Health habits with 52 items which were grouped in to 7 variables, and the third part consists of questions on life satisfaction and finally the fourth part consists of socio demographic questions. The questionnaire contains ten main topics including ‘Travel behavior’, ‘Health habits’, ‘Personality’, ‘Education’, ‘qualification’, and ‘occupation’. The topic of ‘Travel behavior’, ‘Health habits’ and ‘Participation and integration’ includes measures of subjective well-being. The responses were recorded in a 5 point likert scale ranging from 1- not at all important to 5- very important for assessing expected benefits, 1- never to 5- frequently for health habits, 1- Strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree for personal beliefs.

**Measurement of variables**

**Dependent variable**

The dependent variable of the present study is Life satisfaction, which is defined as ‘the overall appreciation of one’s life as a whole’ and is also labeled as ‘happiness’<sup>15</sup>. The focus of this paper was on present satisfaction with life. Life satisfaction was measured using a self-report on themselves measured using four questions on happiness as given in the appendix. The responses were

marked on a 5 point likert scale. It is logical to conclude that life satisfaction is a consequence of healthy habits and wellness travel as is evident from most research. Hence the role of the independent variables on life satisfaction among the wellness tourists to India needs a look into what influences them to prefer India as a destination for travel.

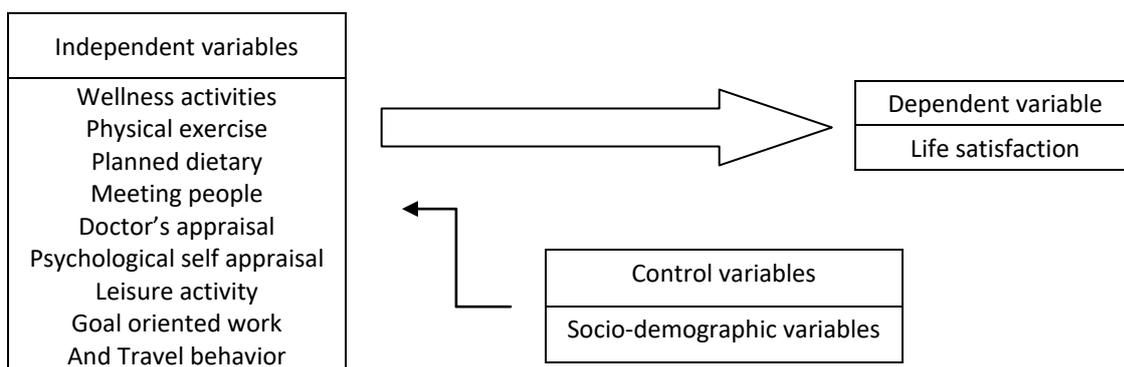
**Independent variables**

Wellness habits of the tourists were grouped into seven items namely, physical exercise, planned diet control, meeting people, doctors’ appraisal, psychological self appraisal, leisure activities and goal oriented work. These seven habits were assessed by 52 statements measured across a 5 point likert scale as given in appendix. Along with these, their travel behavior with special reference to wellness travel to India is assessed using a single question on how often do they typically visit a SPA/Health Resort/Spiritual retreat in India measured using a 5 point scale ranging from never to very often.

**Control variables**

In order to ensure that correlations between wellness activities and life satisfaction were not driven by a common third variable, socio-demographic variables were used as control variables. Age, sex, marital status, education, occupation and income are some of the socio demographic variables used in this study. The relationship between the variables was illustrated in Figure1.

**Figure 1: Research model**



**Correlation analysis**

Analysis was started with a same-time analysis to see whether life satisfaction and wellness activities are related. The same-time analysis was done using Pearson correlations. First simple zero-order correlations were computed for assessing to what extent life satisfaction goes together with wellness activities. To check whether these same-time correlations were by chance, it’s also computed partial correlations.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Correlations for each of the variables were presented in the table 1. The table illustrates the zero order correlation of the eight independent variables with the dependent variable life satisfaction.

**Same-Time Zero order correlations**

Six wellness activities out of 8 have significant correlations with life satisfaction. The wellness activities with significant correlations are physical exercise, planned diet, meeting people, doctors’ appraisal,

psychological self appraisal and goal oriented works.

Two wellness activities have no significant correlations.

**Table 1:** Zero order correlation of independent variables with dependent variable

Correlations (Controlled by)	Same time Correlations							
	Travel behavior	Physical exercise	Planned diet	Meeting people	Doctors' appraisal	Psychological self-appraisal	Leisure activities	Goal oriented works
Zero Order	0.023	0.101*	0.207*	0.122*	0.124*	0.122*	-0.009	0.097*
Partial( Gender)	0.024	0.104*	0.208**	0.123*	0.120*	0.120*	-0.006	0.104*
Partial (Age)	0.020	0.099*	0.206**	0.118*	0.123*	0.120*	-0.014	0.097*
Partial (Education)	0.022	0.102*	0.208**	0.123*	0.125*	0.123*	-0.009	0.098*
Partial ( Marital status)	0.023	0.103*	0.208**	0.123*	0.126*	0.123*	-0.009	0.098*
Partial (Employment)	0.020	0.103*	0.206**	0.129**	0.130**	0.123*	-0.009	0.101*

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level; \* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level

They are travel behaviour and leisure activities. The wellness activity with the largest correlation is planned dietary as is evident from the above table. Planned dietary is the most important wellness activity with mean score of 0.207( $p < 0.05$ ) when compared with other significant wellness activities like physical exercise (0.101,  $p < 0.05$ ), meeting people (0.122,  $p < 0.05$ ), doctors' appraisal (0.124,  $p < 0.05$ ), psychological self appraisal (0.122,  $p < 0.05$ ), and goal oriented works (0.097,  $p < 0.05$ ). The other not significant wellness activities are travel behaviour (0.023) and Leisure activities (-0.009). It was surprising that wellness travel behavior and leisure activities were not instrumental in inducing life satisfaction as is evident from the insignificant correlational mean score.

#### Same-Time Partial Correlations

The partial correlation scores of the planned dietary habit controlled by gender, age, education, marital status, and employment are 0.208( $p < .01$ ), 0.206( $p < .01$ ), 0.208( $p < .01$ ), 0.208( $p < .01$ ), and 0.206( $p < .01$ ) respectively. The wellness activities that have significant mean zero correlations are physical exercise, planned dietary, meeting people, doctors' appraisal, psychological self-appraisal and goal oriented works. Their mean partial correlations scores are physical exercise 0.1049 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.099 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.102 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.103 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and 0.103 ( $p < 0.05$ ), meeting people 0.123 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.118 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.123 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.123 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 0.129 ( $p < 0.01$ ), doctors' appraisal 0.120 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.123 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.125( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.126 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 0.130 ( $p < 0.01$ ), psychological self-appraisal 0.120 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.120 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.123 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.123 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 0.123 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and goal oriented works 0.104 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.097 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.098 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 0.098 ( $p < 0.05$ ) and 0.101( $p < 0.05$ ) when controlled by gender, age, education, marital status and employment respectively. In partial correlation too travel behavior and leisure activities were insignificant as is evident from the mean score of travel behavior 0.024, 0.020, 0.022, 0.023 and 0.020 and -0.006, -0.014, -0.009, -0.009 and -0.009 while controlled by gender, age,

education, marital status and employment.

#### What is the antecedent of Life satisfaction?

Clearly wellness activities are instrumental for life satisfaction, but a planned dietary activity leads one to better life satisfaction as is evident in the high correlation both in zero order and partial correlations scores above. When compared, travel behaviour has very low correlation with life satisfaction whereas leisure activities show negative correlation. One reason why people resort to wellness travel though it has low correlation with life satisfaction could be that their need for time off from their routine fueled by their quest for travel and independence, their search for alternate therapies for ailments, the ever increasing need for organic concoctions as a health supplementary lure them to wellness travel destinations like India.

#### Does wellness tourism predict life satisfaction over years?

As over-time correlations were not measured among the tourists, it is not possible to predict if wellness tourism activity predicted life satisfaction over the years. As the influence of wellness travel among the tourists on life satisfaction is minimal when compared with other wellness activities, it is not significantly sufficient to statistically conclude its role on life satisfaction even though the tourists made a number of visits to wellness tourism centers in India. Lack of support by government in promotion of wellness tourism is a reason why life satisfaction could not be influenced by the travel activities done towards wellness.

#### Do wellness trips boost life satisfaction (happiness)?

Vacationing was reasoned to have both direct and indirect effects on one's happiness. Follow-up studies that assessed pre-trip and post-trip levels of happiness mostly find that leisure travel positively affects happiness<sup>3</sup>. This may be because, a vacationer visits along with family, but wellness trips need not be along with a companion, so whether it boosts one's life satisfaction? Attributes of Health programs factor are

considered as a major determinant affecting customers' perception, resulting in their overall satisfaction with health and wellness resorts<sup>14</sup>. For many travelers, spas become the primary consideration due to celebrity chefs, expanded menus, innovative branded diet programs, and special diets. As far this study, though wellness travel was not directly associated with life satisfaction as is evident from the same time zero order & partial correlation scores, other wellness activities have shown significant correlation with life satisfaction. A study on overtime correlational analysis would have identified a significant association between wellness travel and life satisfaction. Life style resorts, as well as spiritual retreats, generally offer healthy, fresh and often vegetarian or even vegan, organic menus which help people lose weight, whereas beauty spa often offer gourmet food which is not necessarily healthy. Indian food especially vegetarian dishes have more health promoting ingredients being offered in lifestyle resorts promote health besides a happy living to wellness seekers from outside India. Travelers cherish not only their stay at these resorts but toast the meal they dine here fulfilling their need for taste and choice. Spiritual retreats de-stress the mind and body through meditation, yoga and simple exercises at affordable cost lure many visitors to these resorts which are centre for new friendship. Meeting like-minded people, and contact with other guests were mostly referred to by lifestyle resort visitors as the benefits they enjoyed and preferred to go to lifestyle resorts. New friendship and association with newer cultures help one to explore a different lifestyle besides rejuvenates one for a fresh lease of life post trauma situations.

Beauty spa visitors referred to sharing their experience with someone to whom they felt close as a benefit of reinforcing relationships & bonding<sup>15</sup>. Beauty spa centers promote confidence and support beauty seekers in sporting a new look. Many tourists prefer natural cure and therapies for scars and wounds inflicted on them instead of costlier cosmetic therapies which are specialized in Indian Beauty Spa. Wellness tourists may experience indirect effects such as mental and physical relaxation, learn new skills say a new language, fond of a new culture, or meeting new people and experiencing their culture may enhance one's world view<sup>16</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The theoretical framework connecting wellness, healthy lifestyles and complementary and alternative medicine has been proven in a structural equation model<sup>17</sup>. In this present study, the association between wellness and

health lifestyles with life satisfaction is established well, even though wellness travel did not show significant association with life satisfaction; a detailed overtime study would identify such an association.

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