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Wellness in the Global Hospitality and Tourism Industry

By Peter Jones*

The concept of wellness is currently seen as an important driver of growth within the hospitality and tourism industry, but the ways that the large players within the industry have engaged with wellness has been largely ignored in the academic hospitality and tourism literature, and this represents a gap in that literature. This paper looks explore corporate approaches to wellness within the tourism and hospitality industry, and as such, the paper looks to help to contribute to filling the gap in the academic literature. The paper includes an introduction to the wellness concept and to its adoption by the hospitality and tourism industry, a short literature review, an outline of the frame of reference and method of enquiry, an examination of the wellness initiatives developed by some of the major players in the global hospitality industry, some wider reflections, and a brief conclusion.

Keywords: *wellness, hospitality and tourism industry, customer service experiences, sustainable development, leading hotel companies*

Introduction

The concept of wellness is currently seen as one of the important drivers of growth within the hospitality and tourism industry. Sili (2023), writing under the banner of PKF, the global hospitality consultants, for example, argued that ‘*the global rise of wellness and wellbeing offerings in hotels has taken center stage*’, and EHL (2024), one of Europe’s most prestigious hospitality schools, claimed that ‘*wellness for holistic hospitality*’ would be one of the leading trends in the travel and hospitality industry in 2024. While wellness in the tourism and hospitality industry has attracted attention in the academic tourism and hospitality literature, the ways that the leading players within the industry have engaged with wellness have been largely ignored in that literature. This paper looks explore corporate approaches to wellness within the tourism and hospitality industry, and more specifically to address two research questions. Firstly, Research Question 1 (RQ1), have wellness offers taken centre stage within the hotel industry, and, secondly, Research Question 2 (RQ2), how are the selected companies engaging with wellness. As such, the paper looks to help to contribute to filling the gap in the academic literature identified above. The paper includes an introduction to the wellness concept and to its adoption by the hospitality and tourism industry, a short literature review, an outline of the frame of reference and method of enquiry, an examination of the wellness initiatives developed by some of the major players in the global hospitality and tourism industry, a number of wider reflections, and a brief conclusion.

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The Wellness Concept and Wellness in Hospitality and Tourism

The Global Wellness Institute (2023) suggested that the origins and key principles of the wellness concept, *'as both preventative and holistic'*, can be traced back to the ancient civilisations of Greece, Rome, India and China, and further argued that *'in 19th-century Europe and the United States, a variety of intellectual, religious and medical movements developed in parallel with conventional medicine'*, and that *'with their focus on holistic and natural approaches, self-healing and preventive care, these movements have provided a firm foundation for wellness.'* In more modern times, the word wellness was first used by Halbert L. Dunn in 1959 (Kirkland 2014), and since then it has passed into common popular usage, though at times, it has been associated with pseudo-science, minority religious sects, and commercial exploitation.

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, there is little unanimity in defining wellness. Eriksson et al. (2023), for example, argued *'the concept of wellness is frequently used, but its definition remains unclear.'* That said, a range of definitions can be identified. The National Wellness Institute (2024), the longest standing not-for-profit professional wellness association in the US, for example, defines wellness as, *'an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence'*, while for the Global Wellness Institute (2024) wellness is *'the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health.'* Further, the Global Wellness Institute (2024) argued that its definition implied that wellness extended *'beyond physical health and incorporates many different dimensions that should work in harmony'*, and that although *'wellness is an individual pursuit'*, in that *'we have self-responsibility for our own choices, behaviors and lifestyles'*, it is also *'significantly influenced by the physical, social and cultural environments in which we live.'*

On the academic side, Corbin and Pangrazi (2001) defined wellness *'as a multidimensional state describing the existence of positive health in an individual as exemplified by quality of life and a sense of well-being'*, while for Eriksson et al. (2023) wellness is *'a holistic and comprehensive multidimensional concept represented on a continuum of being well that goes beyond health.'* More commercially, Pfizer (2024), the pharmaceutical multinational company, defined wellness as *'the act of practicing healthy habits on a daily basis to attain better physical and mental health outcomes.'*

In looking to unpack the concept of wellness, the Global Wellness Institute (2024) suggested that wellness is multidimensional and identified six dimensions, namely physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social and environmental, wellness. Here, the physical dimension was seen to be concerned with nourishing a healthy body through exercise, nutrition and sleep, while the environmental dimension was focused on fostering positive interrelationships between planetary health and human actions, choices and wellbeing. Davis (2024), writing under the banner of the Berkeley Well-Being Institute, argued that there were eight dimensions, namely emotional, environmental, physical, intellectual, occupational, social, financial, and spiritual, wellness.

The wellness concept has also been taken up by the hospitality and tourism industry. Focusing first on hospitality, Zen Tech Asia (2023) claimed that *'wellness has become the new currency in the industry'*, while Potter (2023), writing under the Expedia banner, claimed that *'wellness tourism is the fastest growing sector of the wellness industry.'* There are a number of definitions of wellness tourism. e-travel.com (2024), for example, defines wellness tourism as *'travel that allows a person to maintain or enhance their personal well-being'*, and suggested that there are two types of travellers who choose wellness tourism, namely, those whose sole aim for travelling is wellness, and choose their destination based on the wellness offerings that destinations provide, and those who look to maintain their wellness during any type of travel. Liao et al. (2023) argued that *'wellness tourism is well defined'*, in that *'wellness is a state of health featuring the harmony of body, mind, and spirit, with self-responsibility, physical fitness or beauty care, healthy nutrition or diet, relaxation or meditation, mental activity, and environmental sensitivity.'*

Literature Review

In undertaking a bibliometric analysis of wellness tourism, Suban (2023) observed that *'the field's study themes are extremely specialized'*, but a number of broad inter-linked themes, around environments, experiences, and benefits, relevant to the current study, can be identified within the literature. Here, the aim is to provide something of the flavour of that work, rather than a comprehensive review.

Dillette et al. (2021), for example, examined international wellness tourism experiences as described by user-generated content published on TripAdvisor.com, using netography analysis in conjunction with framework analysis. The thematic qualitative coding identified four dimensions of the wellness tourism experience, namely body, mind, spirit and environment, and claimed that there was a consensus within the data that these four dimensions served as a mechanism for wellness. Further, recommendations for planning and management were discussed for each dimension. In focusing on the body, for example, the authors recommended that specific attention should be paid to the type of food that will be offered, including pictures and videos presenting the dining experience and its connection to the local community. Here, the argument is that this type of branding *'will help potential wellness guests to understand the holistic benefits of culinary experiences at wellness resorts as opposed to other types of facilities'* (Dillette et al. 2021).

Yi et al. (2018) aimed to identify the relationships between customer experience, both leisure and non-leisure satisfaction, and the quality of life in wellness tourism. More specifically, customer experience was evaluated with four dimensions of the experience economy, namely entertainment, educational, aesthetic, and escapist. In exploring education, the research emphasised the strategic importance of incorporating cultural education into the wellness tourism experience. In the Portuguese Madeira islands, for example, a wellness tourism

education series was initiated to educate attendees about the benefits of the destination for the wellness tourism sector, and to demonstrate their importance to the Madeira economy. The authors also claimed that their findings provided practitioners with practical knowledge for promoting traveller quality of life through wellness tourism, and designing effective marketing strategies

Blackman et al. (2023) looked to draw on environmental psychology and consumer well-being perspectives to examine the restorative potentials of wellness tourism settings. Their results showed that a restorative environment is an important aspect of the wellness experience, contributing to positive emotions and life satisfaction, as well as determining an individual's loyalty and intention to revisit. By way of conclusion, the authors argued that by implementing the restorative benefits philosophy for potential marketing tools, wellness resorts may encourage more individuals to engage in meaningful experiences, that not only enhance tourists' well-being, but also enhance a resort's economic growth.

Farkik et al. (2021) noted that the therapeutic benefits of forest bathing have entered a more mainstream consciousness, and suggested that it has become one of the leading global wellness trends, and looked to explore the potential of the wellness trend of forest bathing for '*deeply immersive tourist experiences*.' More specifically, the authors employed a sensory ethnographic approach to interrogate the tourism experience of forest bathing in Serbia. Their results revealed that the experience of forest bathing offered the mindful immersion in slowness, stillness and silence, which the inhabitants of the industrialised and digitalised world, lack in their everyday lives.

Paterson and Balderas-Cejudo (2022) focused on the growing importance of wellness tourism to the baby boomer generation, who were born between 1946 and 1964, because these types of services are seen to be beneficial from a medical, wellness and social perspective. Here, many older travellers were seen to be seeking out alternative forms of treatment at spa resorts, as a means of enabling them to fulfil their desire for youthfulness and as a means of providing physical and spiritual balance for their bodies, while for others the choice of spas were seen to depend on the types of treatments and natural remedies available to help treat specific chronic illnesses. Emotional and psychological wellbeing were found to be vital for baby boomers, in that wellness tourism provides opportunities for increased social interaction and companionship that can have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Kan et al. (2023) investigated how wellness tourism enhances life satisfaction for the elderly visitors to hot spring areas in Taiwan. Their findings suggested that the elderly look forward to taking vacations with people in the same age range to enjoy the local values of wellness tourism at destinations if the destination operators provide suitable and special tourism products to attract this market segment. At the same time, the authors suggested that the travel agencies should use advertising icons to emphasise the fun of wellness tourism, and stress the message that a happy travel experience contributes to both the dignity and quality of life of the elderly, and that hotel operators should provide more fun facilities for the elderly.

Kim and Yang (2021) explored healing seekers' eudaimonic (meaning and purpose) wellness experiences at the Le Monastere des Augustines Wellness Hotel in Quebec, Canada, and sought to determine how such experiences were conceptualised in a restorative environment. The authors employed participant observation, secondary data, and in-depth interviews, to identify four key elements of the wellness hotel experience, namely the museum and its inspiring reflections; the historical facilities and the power of quietness; the wellness lifestyle and its lasting impacts; and religious encounters, caring staff, and feeling of being cared for.

Chenet al. (2022) looked to construct a scale to measure the spa hotel experiencescape in wellness tourism, to clarify how wellness tourism experiencescapes influence intentions to revisit, and to investigate the mediation roles of authenticity, memorability and organizational identification. The authors identified three factors of spa hotel experiencescapes, namely health promotion treats, mental learning, unique travel experience, and found that existential authenticity and organisational identification exerted full positive mediation in the relationship between wellness tourism experiencescape and intention to revisit. The authors also argued their work provided guidance on experience design for spa hotels.

Chi et al. (2024) used a mixed methods research approach to explore the factors that drive, and inhibit, customers in the US, to stay at a wellness hotel. Their results revealed that six motivators, namely knowledge seeking, wellness seeking, prestige seeking, social influence, escapism seeking, and relatedness seeking, and two inhibitors, namely value for money, and incongruence, that influence guests' stays in wellness hotels. Four wellness hotel customer segments were identified and discussed, viz. socially aspirational, holistic, budget minded, and discretionary, wellness seekers. The authors argued that segmentation would enable hotel operators to design tailor-made wellness experiences in order to capture a larger market share. In looking to target holistic wellness seekers, for example, the authors recommended that hotel operators should look to provide a *'full service package encompassing environmental, physical and mind wellness amenities'*, and that while all aspects of wellness activities were seen to be important, it was worth *'highlighting mind wellness activities'*, because *'mindfulness-based activities such as meditation and yoga can be particularly appealing due to the strong need for escapism.'*

Han et al. (2020) aimed to delineate travellers' behavioural intention formation for revisiting, and recommending, Thailand, for wellness spa tourism, and to examine cross cultural differences between Chinese and US travellers. The authors' concentrated on developing a framework linking wellness, spa quality, price perception, brand affiliations, and behavioural intentions. Further, the study also deepened the behavioural intention process by adding the moderating influence of culture. More practically, the authors claimed that their findings would help destination marketers to improve the competitiveness of its destinations using wellness spa tourism as a tool.

Frame of Reference and Method of Enquiry

In an attempt to investigate how the major corporate players in the tourism and hospitality industry had looked to address wellness, the author selected a simple method of enquiry, which he believed fit for purpose. The top ten global hotel companies, namely Wyndham Hotels and Resorts, Marriott International, Choice Hotels International, Hilton, IHG Hotels and Resorts, BWH Hotel Group, Ambridge Hospitality, G6 Hospitality, Hyatt Hotels Corporation, and Sonesta International Hotels Corporation, as measured by the number of properties (Statista 2024), were selected for study. Many of these hotel companies, operate a number of brands. The Hyatt Hotels Corporation, for example, operate 25 brands including, Caption, Dreams, Grand Hyatt, and Miraval, while IHG Hotels and Resorts has a portfolio of 18 brands including, Six Senses, Regent, Kimpton, Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn Express, and Candlewood Suites. These leading hotel companies, were seen to be major players in the global hospitality and tourism industry, and as such to potentially provide some valuable insights into how wellness was being addressed within the industry.

Wyndham Hotels and Resorts is a US based hospitality company and is the largest hotel franchisor in the world with over 9,000 locations, across over 90 countries. Marriott International is a US multinational company that operates, franchises and licenses hotels and timeshare properties, in over 140 countries. Choice Hotels International is a US multinational hospitality company and franchises over 7,000 hotels in over 40 countries. Hilton is a US hospitality company with over 7,500 properties in 120 countries. IHG is a UK multinational hospitality company and has over 5,500 hotels in almost 100 countries. BWH Hotel Group is an US multinational hospitality company, and it licenses some 4,500 hotels in over 100 countries. Ambridge Hospitality is a US management company with over 1, 500 hotels and resorts in 23 countries. G6 Hospitality franchises over 1, 400 economy hotel and motels in the US and Canada. Hyatt Hotels Corporation is a US multinational hospitality company and it has over 1,350 hotels and properties in 69 countries. Sonesta International Hotels Corporation is a US hotel company and its portfolio includes 1,200 hotels across 8 countries.

Having selected these ten leading hotel companies as a focus for the study, the author then conducted two simple Internet searches in June 2024, on the Google search engine. The first search used the name of each of the selected ten hotel companies, and was designed to address RQ1 and to discover if wellness featured on the companies' signature corporate websites. The second search was conducted around the term wellness and the names of each of the selected hotel companies. The material generated by both of these searches provided the empirical material for this paper. At times, the author explicitly quotes from the material posted on the companies' corporate websites. Here the aim is to add authenticity to the findings by exploring how the hotel companies publicly expressed, and looked to evidence, their approach to wellness in their own words.

Findings

In addressing RQ1, the Internet search of the selected hotel companies' signature websites revealed that only one of the selected ten hotel companies Hyatt Hotels Corporation, featured wellness. Under the banner *'Relax and Conquer'*, Hyatt Hotels Corporation (2024a), mentioned its *'Wellness Retreats Stories'*, which are *'a curated collection of 30+ hotels and resorts where worry and want dare not enter.'* A hyperlink promotes the company's *'Wellness Retreats'*, with the message *'you are free to indulge in activities designed to calm the mind, fuel the body, and center your life so you can be relaxed, recharged, and ready for whatever awaits your victorious return'* (Hyatt Hotels Corporation 2024b). This finding from RQ1 might be seen to call into question Sili's (2023) assertion that wellness has taken centre stage within hotels.

Turning to RQ2, the Internet search revealed that seven of the selected ten hotel companies engaged with wellness in a variety of ways. However, rather than looking to describe each of the companies' approach to wellness in detail, this paper identifies, and illustrates, four themes, namely corporate commitment to wellness, the availability of dedicated wellness facilities within the hotels and resorts, the ways companies promote their employee's wellness, and an increasing focus on wellness within guest's rooms. Firstly, some of the selected hotel companies highlighted their corporate commitment to wellness. Amanda Al-Masri, Hilton's Vice President of Wellness, for example, emphasised the company's *'clear strategic commitment to bringing wellness to the heart of the stay experience'* (Hilton 2023). In a similar vein, Wyndham Hotels and Resorts (2021) emphasised that the company was *'committed to the health and wellness of our guests and team members.'*

Secondly, many of the selected companies' hotels offered a range of dedicated wellness facilities. Under the banner *'Wrapped in Wellness'*, the IHG Hotels and Resorts (2022), for example, presented details of a number of the company's *'most tranquil'* spas across Mexico, US, Canada, Cayman Islands, UK, Spain, France, Thailand, Vietnam, China and Fiji. The company's Kimpton Seafire Spa and Resort in the Cayman Islands, for example, offers *'an indoor and outdoor garden retreat with a Jazzuci and waterfall, a relaxation lounge, a hammam, a hair salon, five treatment rooms, two couples' suites, four nail stations and steam rooms'* (IHG Hotels and Resorts 2022). Here, the most popular treatment is the *'Purification Hammam Journey'*, which *'uses a traditional Kesemitt to cleanse the body, volcanic ash soap to exfoliate, and marine-silt mud to mineralize the skin, and then ends with a scalp and full body massage'* (IHG Hotels and Resorts 2022). The company's Six Senses Spa in Ibiza offers *'an array of spa treatments that go above and beyond the norm'*, and includes *'a longevity lounge, a caldarium hot bath, a steam room, an infra-red sauna, a hammam, and a holistic anti-aging program with nutrition guidance and modern healing methods'* (IHG Hotels and Resorts 2022). The hotel also houses an organic garden where the ingredients for the spa botanicals are homegrown.

Under the banner *'Wellness Retreats'*, BWH Hotel Group (2024), listed a number of its hotels in Germany. The Best Western Kurhotel an der

Obermaintherme, in Bad Staffelstein, for example, includes a 36,000 square metre wellness centre, 26 indoor and outdoor pools, 18 themed saunas and steam baths, and 16 relaxation areas, and offers what the company claims to be *'Bavaria's warmest and strongest thermal brine salt'* (BWH Hotel Group 2024). In a similar vein, the company claims that the wellness and spa areas, which includes garden saunas, an outdoor swimming pool, and sunbathing garden in its Premier Park Hotel & Spa at Bad Lippspringe, *'will help you forget your daily routine'* (BWH Hotel Group 2024).

Hyatt's Miraval brand of Resorts claimed to offer *'A Complete Wellness Experience'* (Hyatt 2024c). This is seen to embrace a range of offers from *'day spa experiences to extended stay retreats'*, with *'dedicated teams of experienced planners at Miraval resorts to help guests craft a one-of-a-kind wellness journey.'* More specifically, Hyatt (2024c) argues that its *'Journeys with Intention put you at the center of your wellness experience.'* Such journeys are seen to include a variety of potential experiences, namely mental wellbeing, relaxation, self-connection, reconnection with family and friends, culinary and nutrition, spa experience, outdoor adventure, fitness focus, and leadership fulfilment. The company claim that *'our luxurious wellness destinations are designed to help you create a life in balance through mindfulness'*, that our activities *'empower guests to consciously explore the connection between body, mind and spirit'*, that *'with pioneering programmes, exclusive spa treatments, nourishing cuisine and world-class wellness specialists, Miraval Resorts wants you to live your best life – whatever that means to you'*, and that *'we meet guests where they are, encouraging them to embrace the moment they're in, and to make wellness a way of life, day in and day out'* (Hyatt 2024c).

At Miraval Arizona, for example, the *'approach to wellness is immersive and experiential'*, and there is an *'extensive menu of daily workshops, classes, lectures and activities'*, and guests can choose from *'hundreds of life-enriching options – from equine and outdoor adventure experiences to yoga, meditation and breathwork'* (Hyatt 2023a). At Miraval Austin, the Spa Services offer guests Aqua Zen, Naga, Pranazama-Dima, and Sukha. In Aqua Zen the guest floats in warm water and her/his body is cradled by a therapist, and Hyatt (2023b) claims that *'body and spirit relax into this safe space. In Naga 'hanging silks support the therapist in delivering deep compression in this massage that includes Thai techniques and assisted floor mat massages'*, which Hyatt claims *'encourage healthy bold circulation, and relieve tension while improving flexibility and postural alignment'* (Hyatt 2023b).

Under the banner *'Rest, Rejuvenate and Recharge'* Marriott International (2024) claim to have *'spas and wellness spots just for you'*, including Natra Bintan in Indonesia, Le Meridien Suvarnabhumi in Thailand, and the Waldhaus Flims Wellness Resort in Switzerland. In the Waldhaus Flims Resort, for example, Marriott International claims that potential guests are able to *'breathe the rejuvenating air of Switzerland and revive your spirit'*, and guests are encouraged to enjoy *'energizing activities at our 24-hour gym or relax at Waldhaus Spa, our facility encircled by calming parkland and mountains'*, and to *'be pleasantly*

surprised by our lap pool, steam room, therapy bath and spa services, such as body wraps, facials and in-suite massages' (Marriott International 2024).

As part of its bed and breakfast package the London Hilton Croydon (Hilton 2024) offer *'includes 90 minutes of exclusive access to the Hilton Private Wellness Area'*, though pre-booking is required. The company claims that this facility enables guests to *'escape your everyday worries with an exclusive mind and body ritual personalised for your wellness needs'*, and that guests can *'follow one of our guided wellness rituals or design your own wellness journey'*, and that the experiences on offer include relaxation beds, Finnish Sauna and Steam Bath, the Digital Wellness couch and an herbal infusions station. Further the company claim *'whether you're looking for a better night's sleep, increased concentration and focus, improvements to your skin, detoxification and immune system benefits, or you're looking to enhance your athletic abilities, or to recover faster so you can train harder, you'll find the perfect ritual just for you'* (Hilton 2024).

Thirdly, some of the selected hotel companies emphasise how they look to promote their employees' wellness. G6 Hospitality (n.d.), for example, explicitly recognised the importance of supporting its team members' *'health and wellness'*, including *'medical, dental and vision plans, virtual doctor visits, wellness programs, flexible spending accounts, life and disability insurance, and a team member assistance program'*, and Hilton (2023) reported launching an initiative designed to *'destigmatize mental wellness in the workplace.'* BWH Group (2023) offers its employees a *'Wellness Program'*, that included both preventative screening for cancer and flu immunization injections. Wyndham Hotels and Resorts (2023) reported its commitment *'to offering programs that focus on the total well-being of all our team members. We also understand that nutrition, exercise, lifestyle management, physical, mental, and emotional wellness, financial health and the quality of the environment in which we work and live are also critical priorities for each of our team members. We believe that health and wellness promote both professional and personal productivity, achievement, and fulfillment, ultimately making us stronger across the organization. To encourage all our team members to lead healthier lifestyles while balancing family, work and other responsibilities, we offer several resources under our Be Well program, including free clinic services, an onsite fitness facility and a Wyndham Relief Fund to help employees who are facing financial hardship.'*

Fourthly, some of the hotel companies are giving an increasing focus to wellness within guest's rooms. At selected Wyndham hotels, for example, the company claim that *'Wellness Rooms utilize scientific research along with engineering and technological advancements to help create a healthier guest room experience'*, and that *'these rooms feature air purification, dawn simulation, a signature memory foam mattress, and more to ensure you have a rejuvenating night's sleep'* (Wyndham Hotels and Resorts 2024). Marriott's Residence hotel at Phoenix Airport, US, offers a number of *'Wellness Hotel Rooms'*, in which *'medical grade, in-room filtration systems remove particles from the air, while surfaces are treated to minimize bacteria growth'* (Marriot International n.d.).

Reflections

The findings offered some valuable insights into how the world's leading hotel companies had embraced wellness, outlined some of the wellness activities and facilities within hotels, and drew attention to some of the benefits claimed for these activities and facilities. More generally, four wider issues, namely the challenges that wellness poses for tourism and hospitality companies, the commodification of wellness, concerns about the role of wellness in tourism and hospitality company employee development programmes, and the links between wellness and the hospitality and tourism industry and sustainable development, merit attention.

Firstly, a variety of challenges can be identified. Tourism and hospitality companies face investment challenges, for example, in looking to secure the capital to develop wellness facilities. Here, Kipping (2024) argued that *'the shift towards wellness tourism heralds a renaissance in investment patterns, compelling hoteliers to adopt a more discerning approach towards capital allocation'*, and that *'this necessitates a strategic foresight to discern the long-term viability and profitability of wellness initiatives, ensuring that they are not ephemeral trends.'* There are challenges in securing the services of employees who can manage wellness facilities and programmes, particularly at a time many rivals in the tourism and hospitality industry are also looking to develop and/or expand their wellness offers, and challenges, in promoting a wellness ethos and wellness facilities to new customers, and in promoting such facilities to existing customers.

Secondly, the commodification of the concept of wellness, and its relationship with the continuing growth of tourism, can be thorny issues. Here one of the arguments is that under capitalism, wellness becomes a commodity that can be sold, and bought, and as such it may become detached from its original roots, and its success may be seen to rely on both the exploitation of local labour, and of local cultures and environments. More specifically, Bowers and Cheer (2017), for example, examined the growth of two elements of wellness tourism, namely yoga tourism and spiritual tourism. The authors argued that the *'overt commodification of yoga in the contemporary context'* is *'far removed from ideals of practice centred on spirituality, compassion and peace'*, that yoga has become *'commodified as a vehicle for international tourism'*, and that *'a corollary to the growth of yoga related travel is wellness tourism centred on the consumption of meditation and spa retreats.'* In a similar vein, Medina-Munoz and Medina-Munoz (2012) looked to analyse the commodification of wellness services in Gran Canaria, and their work revealed that the commodification of wellness had been taking place in the form of hotel spas, as well as in a variety of small day-spas, relaxation centres, beauty centres and gyms. The authors suggested that an *'excessive presence of leisure and tourism'* could affect the wellness experience.

Thirdly, there are issues in and around wellness in hospitality and tourism companies' employee development programmes, and here there are contrasting positions. On the one hand, Hull and Pasquale (2017), for example, observed that in the US, employee wellness programmes were increasingly linked to employee provided health insurance. Such programmes were seen *'to nudge employees,*

sometimes quite forcefully, into healthy behaviours such as smoking cessation and exercise routines.' However, the authors documented the failure of these programmes to deliver a positive return on investment and claimed that they provided an opportunity for employers to exercise increasing control over their employees. On the other hand, Varga et al. (2021) looked to examine the impacts of employee wellness programmes on employee and organisational outcomes in the hospitality industry. Their results suggested *'that organizations that offer wellness programs to their employees are likely to see lower employee turnover than organizations that do not offer wellness programs'*, and that wellness programmes *'can be effective at helping hospitality employees deal with stress, even the multi-faceted stress that comes from the challenges specific to the industry'* (Varga et al. 2021).

The final wider issue focuses upon the relationship between wellness activities in the hospitality and tourism industry and sustainable development. Cook (2013), for example, claimed that from a Buddhist perspective, wellness could be defined *'almost interchangeably'* with sustainable development. In some ways such a close relationship, and interchangeability of meaning, might be seen to be understandable in that both concepts are rooted in a holistic view of their worlds. Thus, while wellness looks to address the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual components of health, so sustainable development looks to balance the environmental, social and economic components of development. However, apart from wellness tourism activities themselves, wellness tourism venues may give rise to a range of unsustainable pressures, for example, in the aircraft and motor vehicle emissions generated by guests' travel to these venues, and in the damage the development of new wellness venues may cause to natural environments, and to indigenous cultures and peoples.

Conclusions

The findings of this exploratory study suggest that wellness has not taken centre stage for the world's leading hotel companies, but that many of these companies have looked to embrace wellness in their offers in a variety of ways. More generally, the author also drew attention to a number of wider issues, including the challenges that wellness poses for tourism and hospitality companies, the commodification of wellness, the role of wellness in tourism and hospitality company employee development programmes, and the links between the growth of wellness facilities and attractions in the hospitality and tourism industry and sustainable development. The paper clearly has a number of limitations, not least in that its empirical is drawn exclusively from Internet sources. Nevertheless, the author believes that the paper not only offers a valuable exploratory picture of how the leading hotel companies have embraced wellness, and as such it helps to contribute to filling a gap in the academic hospitality and tourism literature, but that it may also provide a platform for future research. Future research agendas might, for example, include detailed empirical investigations into the strategic decision making around the introduction of

wellness activities and facilities by tourism and hospitality companies, into the barriers to the introduction of such activities and facilities, into guests' experiences of wellness activities and facilities within tourism and hospitality offers, and into how these experiences influenced future patronage.

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