

Chapter 1

Health and Wellness: A Background to Medical Tourism

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ABSTRACT

This book identifies a range of issues and emerging trends in relation to medical tourism in the 21st Century. One basic issue is the relationship between medical tourism and the wider concept of health and wellness as a framework for living in the present, and another is determination of the extent to which concepts of health and wellness act as a background for medical tourism and the way in which it is constructed and/or practiced. There is no doubt that wellness tourism is a fundamental part of the wider range of treatments now afforded the medical tourist in addition to the medical procedures themselves, and health is of course the condition that all tourists and the members of a host community aspire to. This chapter examines health and wellness tourism as a necessary part of medical treatment for many patients, as one of the reasons why medical tourism has become popular, and its importance as a background to medical tourism.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter identifies a range of issues and emerging trends in relation to health and wellness tourism in the 21st Century. One of those issues is the relationship between medical tourism and the wider concept of health and wellness as a framework for living in the present, and another is determination of the extent to which concepts of health and wellness act as a background or framework for medical tourism and the way in which it is constructed and/or practiced. There is no doubt that wellness tourism, for example is a fundamental part of the wider range of treatments now afforded the medical tourist in addition to the medical procedure itself, and health is of course the fundamental condition that tourists and the other members of a host community aspire to. This chapter examines health and wellness tourism as a necessary part of medical treatment for many patients, and one of the reasons why medical tourism has become popular, and its importance as a background to medical tourism.

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The wellness concept is a term subject to different interpretations (Smith & Kelly, 2006; Foster & Keller, 2008; Cohen & Bodecker, 2008; Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009), but almost invariably has its origins in a natural and holistic approach to healthy living. For many people adopting the idea of wellness means making a very personal decision involving a change in lifestyle and a desire to achieve balanced wellbeing that includes physical, mental and spiritual health (Cohen & Bodecker, 2008), but for others it represents the opportunity to gain time and space for the important matter of rehabilitation after medical treatment that has recently largely become a discarded feature of modern technical medicine. In the literature quoted above (Erfurt-Cooper and Cooper, 2009), wellness is variously defined as:

1. An approach to health care that emphasizes preventing illness and prolonging life, as opposed to emphasizing the treatment of diseases;
2. The condition of good physical and mental health, especially when maintained by proper diet, exercise, and habits;
3. A healthy state of wellbeing free from disease;
4. The quality or state of being in good health especially as an actively sought goal, e.g., lifestyles that promote *wellness*.

More definitions are not hard to find, but they all contain similar variables and their purpose and meaning do not vary widely (Foster & Keller, 2008). Essentially, wellness is an *approach* to health care and lifestyle choice which is based on active prevention of illness and active promotion of a state of wellbeing (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). It is this sense of action which attracts many tourists and ultimately supports the unique form of tourism known as Health and Wellness Spa Tourism (Hall, 2003; Cohen & Bodecker, 2008). Adams (2003) refers to four main principles of wellness:

1. Wellness is multi-dimensional;
2. Wellness research and practice is oriented towards identifying causes of wellness rather than causes of illness;
3. Wellness is about balance; and
4. Wellness is relative, subjective or perceptual.

It is clear from these definitions and Figure 1 that wellness is as much a psychological as a physical state. In considering the point of view of the tourist, previous research has made much of this distinction. Health and wellness tourism is thus defined by Ross (2001) and Tabacchi (2003) as '*any kind of travel to make yourself or a member of your family healthier*'. Ross also refers to the concept of health tourism as '*as ancient as pre-history and as up-to-date as tomorrow*', reinforcing the fact that it is not known exactly when health tourism first started because of the absence of written records. An alternative wellness tourism definition is given by Myers et al (2005) as being "*a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which the body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community*".

In recent times, health and wellness tourism has undergone significant renewal and expansion, and now incorporates medical tourism (Hall, 2003, 2011; Figure 1). The growth of *Medical* tourism has been so rapid that there is as yet little scholarly work on it (Connell, 2013; Hall, 2011), but Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper (2009) proposed the following definition as a starting point for discussion:

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