



Research on the High-Quality Development Status of Health and Wellness Tourism Industry

Fan Yang*

Oxbridge College, Kunming University of Science and Technology, Kunming, 650106, China

*492289589@qq.com

Abstract. With the evolution of society, the emerging form of wellness tourism has gradually become a new focal point in the development of China's tourism industry. From the perspective of literature review, this paper elucidates the conceptual framework of wellness tourism, synthesizes the current research landscape both domestically and internationally, and explores the underlying reasons for its immense developmental potential. By consolidating existing literature, the study aims to refine the operational models of the wellness tourism industry and propose recommendations for advancing its high-quality development.

Keywords: Health and Wellness Tourism; Research Status; Development Potential; High-Quality Development

1 Introduction

Health and wellness tourism represents an innovative tourism model that leverages favorable climatic and environmental conditions to facilitate physical and mental well-being through travel experiences. This specialized form of resort tourism is fundamentally designed to enhance visitors' happiness and overall life satisfaction by integrating therapeutic elements with leisure activities. The modality combines destination-specific natural advantages with structured wellness programming to achieve its dual objectives of health promotion and quality-of-life enhancement. Prior to the emergence of health and wellness tourism as a concept, academia employed various terms such as health tourism, wellness tourism, medical tourism, healthcare tourism, and convalescence tourism to study tourists' physical and mental well-being, identifying demands including fitness, beauty, longevity, health regulation, lifestyle changes, cultural immersion in wellness practices, natural environment enjoyment, and access to medical services—primarily focusing on bodily health while neglecting mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being. However, amid rapid economic development, China faces new challenges in health preservation due to its rapidly aging population characterized by a large base, a high proportion of middle-aged and younger seniors, and increasingly high-quality elderly care needs among relatively active urban seniors. This necessitates leveraging modern information and digital technologies to construct an

© The Author(s) 2025

X. Deng et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2025 Seminar on Modern Property Management Talent Training Enabling New Productive Forces (MPMTT 2025)*, Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research 337, https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-778-6_26

intelligent health and wellness tourism product and service system, driven both by policy advocacy and societal realities, as well as demands for industrial transformation and refined management of health-related needs^[9]. The 14th Five-Year Plan explicitly articulates the strategic objective of developing the "smart healthcare and elderly care" industry, while the Healthy China 2030 Blueprint advances strategic initiatives such as "establishing internationally competitive health and medical tourism destinations" and "developing intelligent health services to enhance public accessibility and affordability."^[10] These frameworks establish a robust policy foundation for the institutionalized advancement of smart health and wellness tourism, simultaneously reinforcing systemic synergy between healthcare development and broader socioeconomic progress. This policy alignment will invariably catalyze structural optimization across healthcare ecosystems through technology integration and service innovation.

2 Methodology and Bibliometric Analysis

2.1 Methodology

This study employs a systematic literature review approach to comprehensively gather and analyze relevant publications in the field. The research was conducted using the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database, with the search performed on January 2, 2025. The search query was constructed as follows:

(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Health and Wellness Tourism " OR " Health Tourism " OR " Wellness Tourism " OR " Leisure Wellness " OR " Health Management " OR " Therapeutic Tourism " OR " Ecotourism " OR " Resort-Based Wellness Retreats " OR " Wellness Vacations ") AND ("Health and Wellness Tourism ")) AND PUBYEAR > 2015)

This search yielded a total of 1,370 relevant publications. The systematic review methodology ensures a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the existing body of literature, providing a solid foundation for identifying trends, gaps, and insights in the field of health and wellness tourism.

Table 1. Literature Screening Criteria

Dimension	Basis	Criteria Description
Timeliness	Publication Date	70% of articles published within the last 5 years; highly cited articles prioritized
Authority	Journal Indexing	Articles from CSSCI and Peking University Core Journals included
Relevance	Title, Abstract, Keywords	Articles focusing on urban elderly health and wellness tourism included

After establishing the literature screening criteria (as outlined in Table 1), the search results were subjected to a preliminary filtering process based on these standards. To ensure the authority and reliability of the included literature, duplicate articles and those published in non-core journals were first removed. Subsequently, non-research materials such as news reports and conference proceedings were ex-

cluded by examining titles, abstracts, and keywords. Further refinement involved eliminating articles that only tangentially mentioned elderly care or tourism without exploring the relationship between the two. Following this rigorous screening process, a total of 499 articles were deemed suitable for inclusion in the systematic review. This number meets the fundamental requirements for conducting a comprehensive and methodologically sound systematic literature review.

2.2 Bibliometric Analysis

From a temporal perspective, the number of publications in the field of leisure and health tourism has demonstrated a pronounced upward trend (see Figure 1). Between 2015 and 2016, only six papers were published, indicating that health tourism had not yet garnered significant attention within the tourism sector. However, from 2017 to 2019, driven by rapid economic growth and national policy support in this domain, the volume of related research began to increase substantially. By 2020, a total of 49 papers on this topic were published, reflecting a marked rise in academic interest. In 2023, following the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a resurgence in travel enthusiasm and a significant shift in tourism perspectives. This led to a peak in research activity on health and wellness tourism, with the number of related publications surging to 100. This dramatic increase not only signifies a quantitative leap but also underscores the expanding influence of health and wellness tourism within the broader tourism industry.

In terms of thematic focus, out of the 499 articles reviewed, 256 primarily addressed health and wellness tourism. Research on the environmental aspects of health and wellness tourism followed closely, while studies on forest-based and rural health and wellness tourism each accounted for over 30 publications (see Figure 2).

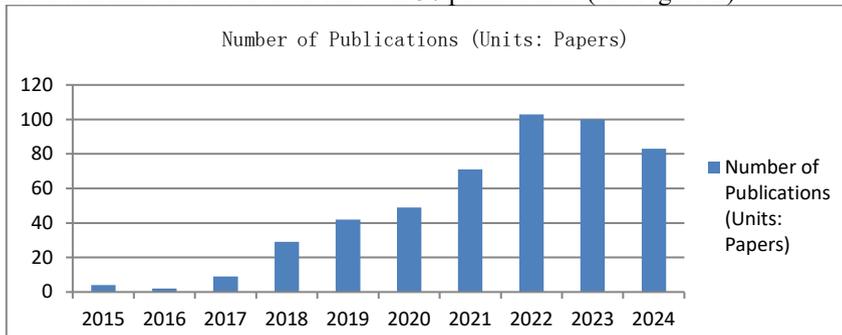


Fig. 1. Distribution of Publication Years.

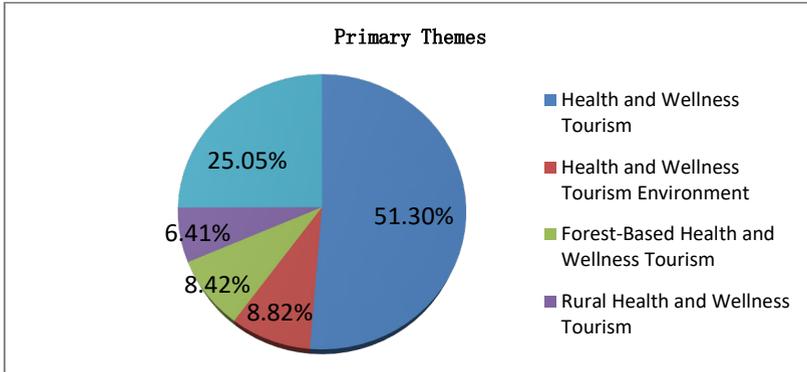


Fig. 2. Distribution of Primary Research Themes.

3 Health and Wellness Tourism: Connotative Analysis and the Driving Forces Behind Its Popularity

3.1 Connotation Analysis of Health and Wellness Tourism

The definition of health and wellness tourism remains a subject of debate within academic circles, with no universally agreed-upon framework. Terminology varies across countries, with "health tourism" and "wellness tourism" being the most commonly used terms internationally. Broadly, "health tourism" is categorized into two distinct types: "wellness tourism" and "medical tourism." This classification reflects the diverse scope of activities and objectives within the field, ranging from preventive health measures and holistic well-being to specialized medical treatments^[1].

Within the domestic context, a unified conceptual framework for health and wellness tourism has yet to be established in China. ^[2]In 2016, the National Tourism Administration of China released the National Health and Wellness Tourism Demonstration Base Standards, which defined health and wellness tourism as a comprehensive range of travel activities aimed at achieving a state of natural harmony in body, mind, and spirit through various means such as physical rejuvenation, nutritional diets, mental cultivation, emotional relaxation, and environmental care.

^[3]Building on this definition, scholars such as Liu Jingqian and colleagues have further elaborated that health and wellness tourism represents an emerging tourism model with the dual objectives of promoting physical and mental health while fostering spiritual well-being. They emphasize that the value of health and wellness tourism lies in its intrinsic connection between the tourism industry and the health industry. In summary, the essence of health and wellness tourism is best captured by its focus on a harmonious integration of "body, mind, spirit, and environment," offering a transformative and holistic travel experience.

3.2 Driving Factors Behind the Rise of Health and Wellness Tourism

The surge in popularity of health and wellness tourism can be attributed to several key factors. As disposable incomes continue to rise among the general population, there has been a marked increase in demand for health-oriented tourism services. This trend is particularly pronounced among urban elderly individuals with stable pensions, who exhibit a strong preference for specialized health and wellness tourism offerings. Furthermore, the accelerating pace of population aging has elevated the development of this sector to new heights (Du Ping, 2022) ^[4]. Zhang Wenjuan and colleagues^[5] argue that the three-year impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened global awareness of health and wellness, while the aging population has created a vast market potential for health and wellness tourism. Additionally, the rapid growth of this sector has been significantly bolstered by the synergistic interaction between an "effective market" and a "proactive government."

4 Analysis of the Current State of Health and Wellness Tourism Research

Research on health and wellness tourism in international contexts began earlier and is characterized by greater diversity and maturity. The focus of these studies has predominantly been on demand-side behavior, exploring tourists' motivations, experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and satisfaction levels. In contrast, domestic research in China started later and lags significantly behind practical developments. Much of the existing work emphasizes the development and construction of health and wellness tourism destinations, while research on the needs, behavioral characteristics, experiences, and perceptions of market participants remains underdeveloped (Zhu Dongfang et al., 2023) ^[1].

Contrary to the above perspective, ^[6]Zhou Gongmei and colleagues (2021) argue that both domestic and international academic research on health and wellness tourism is still in its nascent stages. They contend that the depth of exploration in this field is insufficient, with the majority of studies relying on qualitative descriptions rather than quantitative analyses. As a result, a systematic knowledge framework and theoretical system have yet to be established.

^[7] ^[8]Chen Xuejun et al. (2022) highlight that, while current research on health and wellness tourism has established a relatively broad scope of inquiry, a systematic analytical framework integrating shared economy theory with the health and wellness tourism industry remains absent. Based on a systematic review of 28 relevant domestic and international studies, The author conducts the following comparative analysis of current domestic and international research on wellness tourism, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Domestic and International Research on Smart Health and Wellness Tourism

Dimension	Characteristics of International Research	Current State of Domestic Research
Research Focus	Demand-side behavioral research (motivations, experiences, satisfaction)	Supply-side development research (resource evaluation, product design)
Methodology	Mixed-methods approaches	Predominantly qualitative descriptions
Theoretical Innovation	Interdisciplinary integration (e.g., health geography and tourism studies)	Extension of traditional tourism research paradigms (e.g., forest tourism, hot spring tourism)

5 Conclusion and Future Prospects

Based on the existing research, it is evident that the academic community, both domestic and international, does not have a unified view on health and wellness tourism. There are significant differences in research perspectives and content, and the research methods require further enrichment and refinement. The theoretical framework for health and wellness tourism is still under development, indicating that the field is in an exploratory and developmental stage.

As a new economic growth point in the current era, the health and wellness tourism industry not only meets the dual needs of the nation for health and tourism but also provides a viable path for the upgrading and transformation of China's tourism industry. Therefore, constructing a scientific and reasonable organizational structure for health and wellness tourism is of great significance for promoting high-quality development in the industry. Future research should delve into the organizational structure that fosters high-quality development in health and wellness tourism, further explore the behavior patterns on both the supply and demand sides of the industry, segment the health and wellness market, strengthen specialized research in health and wellness tourism, and establish a data sharing platform and technical standard system. By employing standardized methods, the industry can achieve high-quality and sustainable development.

Acknowledgments

This work was funded by the Scientific Research Fund of the Education Department of Yunnan Province—"Research on the High-Quality Development of Wellness Tourism for Urban Elderly Populations" (Project number: 2024J1187).

References

1. ZHU Dong fang, ZHONG Lin sheng, YU Hu. Comparison and prospect of wellness tourism at home and abroad. *World Regional Studies*, 2023, 32 (11): 167-180.
2. Ren Xuanyu. Wellness Tourism: Connotation Analysis and Development Pathways[J]. *Tourism Tribune*, 2016, (11): 1-3.
3. Liu Jingqian, Shi Pengfei, Li Xingming. Research on the Coupling Development Model of Wellness Tourism Industry: Based on the Perspective of Aesthetic Experience[J]. *Enterprise Economy*, 2023, (5): 94-103.
4. Du Ping. Development Status and Countermeasures of Wellness Tourism from the Perspective of Holistic Tourism[J]. *Social Scientist*, 2022, (10): 47-53.
5. Zhang Wenjuan, Ming Qingzhong. The Evolution and Supply-Demand Matching of China's Wellness Tourism Policies: Based on Policy Text Analysis from 2011 to 2022[J]. *Social Scientist*, 2024, (5): 87-95.
6. Zhou Gongmei, Song Rui, Liu Qianqian. A Review and Outlook of Wellness Tourism Research at Home and Abroad[J]. *Culture and Tourism*, 2021, (1): 119-128.
7. Chen Xuejun, Li Li. Research on Innovation Development Strategies of Wellness Tourism Industry under the Sharing Economy[J]. *Development Research*, 2022, (4): 73-81.
8. Li Li, Chen Xuejun. The Development Process, Evolution Patterns, and Experiential Insights of China's Wellness Tourism Industry[J]. *Social Scientist*, 2020, (5): 74-79.
9. Wang Wei jie. The Theoretical Logic and Practical Exploration of High-Quality Development in the Smart Health and Wellness Tourism Industry: A Case Study of Guizhou Province [J]. *Theory Monthly*, 2022, 12(1), pp. 83–93.
10. Xinhua News Agency. The "Healthy China 2030" Outline of the Plan Issued Jointly by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council [EB/OL]. (2016-10-25)
http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-10/25/content_5124174.htm(http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-10/25/content_5124174.htm).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

