



Health and Wellness Tourism: Prospects and Challenges in Nepal

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Abstract

The research paper is focused on the importance of wellness demands and the motivation, Nepal as increase for the wellness destination. The concept and the drive of the wellness in tourism are rising as wellness tourism due to the individual's desire for physical, mental, spiritual upliftment. It mainly is focused on being away from the hectic environment and being away from chaos for being healthy and beauty. The recent trend of wellness tourism in Asian countries(India, China. Thailand, Philippines) is based on wellness retreats that included holistic packages of services such as yoga, meditation, ayurvedic healing, spas, traditional experiences, forest parks, nature sceneries, characteristics food, ancient villages, hot springs, and mental healing. The trend is also seen rising and Nepal is also being a prominent destination for tourism as wellness tourism and the paper also presents the main facet of wellness tourism and possible areas for growth in the sector which will also play a main role in benefiting a region's economy contributing to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and also acts as sustainability of development. Nepal is full of abundant flora and fauna, mountains, rivers and full of natural beauty. Being a country of opportunity it has also some challenges of political, safety and security etc. Thus, it could be a driving trend of tourism. It is a critical systematic literature review of different articles published on topic relating to wellness tourism in Asian countries and different papers also relating to health. The research is conceptual and analytical in nature. It synthesizes existing theories, models, and empirical findings related to wellness tourism, health tourism, sustainable development, and destination competitiveness in Asian countries. Nepal is used as a contextual case to examine opportunities for positioning itself as a wellness tourism destination.

Key words: Wellness tourism, health, sustainable development, challenges, destination

Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a fastest growing sector through the globe in last two decades. It has played a significant role in generating employment, economy of a country and individuals, and in a country like Nepal, developing nation tourism acts a source of generating foreign exchange and even a catalyst for boarder economy. Health & Wellness can be described as a process in which individuals make choices and engage themselves in activities by promoting directing a healthy lifestyle, which in turn has a positive impact on the individual's health and wellbeing. Health and wellness tourism is at growing trend worldwide as tourist is prioritizing toward mental well-being and physically and plans their trip. Today the individuals are driven by increase in the awareness of their lifestyle, use of technology. As noted by Smith (2023) the pandemic caused anxiety with regards to catching the disease and not recovering, not to mention the economic losses suffered by businesses, the lack of social contact and the curtailment of cultural, leisure and tourism opportunities. Being a landlocked country, Nepal situated between two enormously large countries India and China with almost 35% of world's total population can be benefited from tourism. Despite of facing challenges geographical constraints, political instability, economic challenges, challenges in the infrastructures and investment in services and activities and even the natural disasters landslides, flood, earthquake and global crisis during COVID-19 . Nepal a destination of tourism as a destination for adventure and leisure, mountaineers, religious and cultural, wildlife etc today the importance and the contribution of health as wellness tourism can be coined. The role of wellness tourism in Nepals economic development contributing to GDP, employment generation, foreign exchange and regional development would be a milestone. If wellness also could be prioritized tourism sector the aim for the achievement of sustainability could be met. This paper seeks to explore both the prospects and challenges faced by wellness tourism. Nepal's tourism sector has a higher relative contribution to GDP, although absolute volumes remain modest. For example, in 2019, Nepal's 8% tourism GDP share exceeded India's 6.9%, but the total number of arrivals was far smaller (1.19 million compared to India's 17 million). This indicates that Nepal's tourism is more structurally important to its economy, but remains vulnerable due to limited diversification and dependence on a narrow range of products such as trekking and pilgrimage tourism. Policy analysis also highlights both opportunities and challenges. Government strategies, including Tourism Vision 2030, emphasize diversification into eco-tourism, cultural heritage tourism, and wellness travel. Research from other countries has been conducted in the past decade, focusing on developing guidelines to improve the potential of tourist attractions related to wellness tourism and provide a competitive edge over other countries in the future. Some studies compiled the determinants and strategies of developing medical tourism through a service integration and tourism destination competitiveness approach (Hosseini and Taghvaei, 2021). The results reveal that tourism has consistently accounted for 6–8% of Nepal's GDP, provided more than one million jobs, and emerged as a major source of foreign exchange. Strong positive correlations between tourist arrivals, receipts, and GDP growth confirm the relevance of the tourism-led growth hypothesis (TLGH) in the Nepalese context.

The objective of the study mainly aims

1. To determine Nepal's position as a premier destination of choice for health and wellness tourism in global context.
2. To identify the unique prospects and opportunities provided by the natural beauty, the Himalayan flora and fauna, the richness of cultural and spiritual heritage.
3. To determine the challenges of health and wellness tourism in Nepal.

Methodology

This study mainly adopts a descriptive, qualitative and exploratory research design which is primarily based on the systematic literature review; it includes the review of the article written previously. The research mainly aims on analyzing existing knowledge on wellness tourism with a specific focus made on Nepal, due to its prospects, challenges, and economic implications. It focuses on qualitative approach which is suitable as the study seeks to understand concepts, trends, policies, and experiences on the subject rather than to test it quantitatively using primary data.

Nature of the Study

The research is conceptual and analytical in nature. It synthesizes existing theories, models, and empirical findings related to wellness tourism, health tourism, sustainable development, and destination competitiveness in Asian countries. Nepal is used as a contextual case to examine opportunities for positioning itself as a wellness tourism destination.

Research results and Discussion

We are known Nepalese Health Tourism which was a traditional health care dated some 125 years ago. They practiced primary health care approach, offered by both government and private ownership that included Ayurveda, yoga, meditation, SPA, faith healing, naturopathy, homeopathic. Health tourism in Nepal is mostly based on natural healing factors that combine different kinds of medical treatment, preventive and health & wellness programs adapted to the needs of specific tourist to cater.

Prospects

The growth and development of wellness tourism has not been recognized widely as a very potential business that has growth and a country like Nepal which is a gift of nature, culture and traditions has enormous potential for development of wellness tourism. Among the 10 highest peak of the world eight peaks above 8000 meters higher sea level are in Nepal, it is rich in its cultural diversity, the use of the traditional healing with the herbs and spices used to healing, meditation has made it a perfect blend of land for relaxation and healing. Among the prospects some of them can be as described as the richness of the Himalayas, the then created landscape, sacred sites and the biodiversity itself has created a ideal destination of the wellness experiences promoting the tourism. Along this place has also practiced the art of meditation, art and the ayurveda practice from the ancient times also has proved a destination offering authentic experiences for the global wellness seekers.

Prospects and challenges are as described

Today, health and wellness initiatives are being done as events with the participation of the provincial stakeholders and the local government and NTB. Different marts are being organized for the support. Zhang et al. (2021) investigated health tourism destinations as therapeutic landscapes, focusing on the health perceptions of senior seasonal migrants. The research provided insights into the role of health tourism in promoting well-being among senior populations. Today the eastern part of Nepal Jhapa, Birtamod a neighboring state to India are targeting health and wellness tourist to cater them with the services. Place like Pokhara, Lumbini itself are rich in nature and achieving the need of wellness tourists. It can also be seen Nepal Tourism Board is supporting the initiatives. (Nepal Tourism Board. 2025, February 27). Nepal can leverage affordable healthcare services blended with wellness practices (e.g., yoga retreats post-trekking, spa and meditation packages) for international visitors. (Shrestha, S., & Bhandari, P. 2023). After the global pandemic the motivation and pattern of travel by the travelers are changing thought the globe. There's increasing international demand for holistic travel experiences, especially post-pandemic, with wellness travelers often spending more and staying longer than typical tourists. (Global Wellness Institute. 2024). The Global Wellness Institute (GWI) defines wellness as: the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health. With its rapid post-pandemic recovery and a growth rate that has been faster than economic growth, the global wellness economy has also been growing in its share of the overall economy. In 2023, the wellness economy represented 6.03% of global GDP, as compared to only 5.75% in 2019.

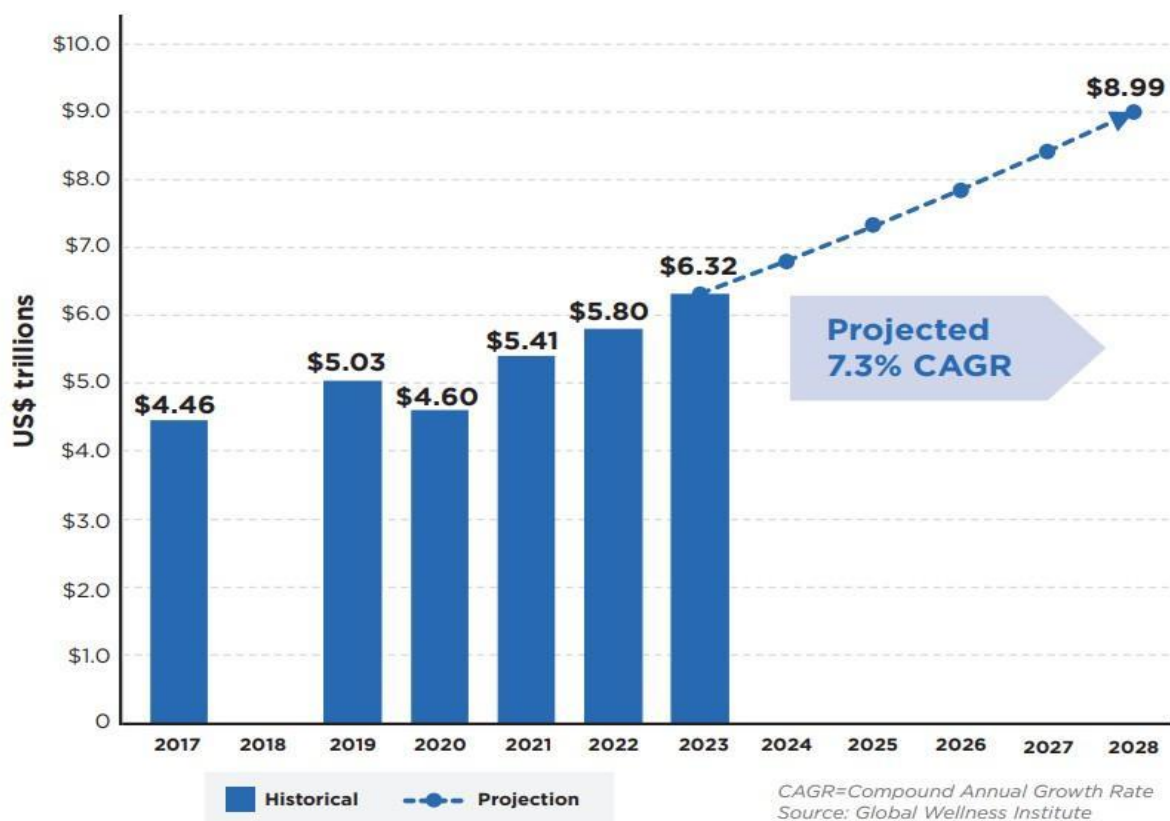


Fig.1: Global wellness Economy market size and growth projection, 2017-2028

In the above figure we can make a conclusion that the annual revenue obtained in the previous year is in a increasing ratio. According to global wellness economy it will grow at a robust rate of 7.3% annually from 2023-2028, a growth rate substantially higher than the projected global GDP growth (4.8% according to current IMF forecasts). As of the sectors of tourism recovery from the pandemic, the wellness economy was expected to reach nearly \$6.8 trillion in 2024, and march toward nearly \$9.0 trillion in 2028.

Nepal is actively and aggressively focused on developing wellness tourism through its new Tourism Policy 2082, Focusing on yoga, meditation, natural healing, and integrating wellness into existing circuits, supported by capacity-building workshops (like NATTA's for stakeholders) and workforce training (NATHM). . Through its key policy framework and initiatives in Tourism policy-2082, Government of Nepal, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2025). National Tourism Council through integrating wellness into tourism circuits and developing infrastructure for wellness travels and even prioritizing sector specific agendas (Tourism Mail, 2025, July 30) It is also using Non Resident Nepali (NRN) investment and uses them as diplomats and promotion (Taksar News. 2025).

Challenges

A major challenge is the high turnover rate within the tourism and hospitality sector. Many skilled professionals seek opportunities abroad due to better pay and career advancement prospects, leaving domestic businesses struggling to retain talent. This "brain drain" undermines the growth potential of the wellness tourism industry, as businesses face difficulty maintaining consistent service quality and building long-term client relationships. Moreover, there is often a gap between workforce skills and the evolving demands of wellness tourists. For example, tourists increasingly seek personalized and culturally immersive wellness experiences, requiring staff with a deep understanding of local traditions, advanced communication skills, and proficiency in multiple languages, (Bardukova, L. 2024).

The absence of targeted training programs to develop such skills further limits the industry's ability to adapt to changing market trends. Tackling these workforce development challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including government and private sector initiatives to create specialized education and certification programs. Partnerships with international health & wellness institutions and trainers could help elevate the skill level of local professionals. Competitive wages and career growth opportunities will also be essential in retaining talent and establishing Nepal as a leading destination for health & wellness tourism.

Conclusion

In the latest trend of tourism Health and Wellness has been a recent surge in the interest level amongst youth all over the world. Now it is very crucial to tap the growing interest in increase of health and wellness tourism. In recent years we have seen people are stressed, and pressurized in work therefore health, wellness, and medical tourism have grown quickly to cater those tourist. Thus visits to spa and wellness hotels & resorts, Ayurveda, Yoga and meditation, hospitals and clinics for surgery and medical procedures, as well as spiritual or holistic retreats is required.

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