

Wellness Tourism in the Post-Pandemic Era: A PRISMA-Based Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly transformed global tourism patterns, leading to an increased emphasis on health, well-being, and sustainable travel practices. In this context, wellness tourism has emerged as a rapidly growing segment, attracting tourists seeking physical, mental, and emotional rejuvenation. This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of wellness tourism in the post-pandemic era through a systematic literature review using the PRISMA framework. A total of 5,577 records were initially identified from major academic databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Emerald. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 74 relevant studies were selected for detailed analysis. The findings reveal several key themes shaping wellness tourism research, including health recovery, post-pandemic travel behavior, technology adoption, sustainable tourism practices, destination preferences, economic impact, and industry challenges. The results indicate that tourists are increasingly prioritizing safety, hygiene, and holistic well-being, leading to a growing demand for nature-based, less crowded, and wellness-oriented destinations. Additionally, technological advancements such as digital platforms and contactless services have enhanced tourist experiences, while sustainability practices have become integral to tourism development. Despite its rapid growth, wellness tourism faces challenges such as high costs, limited accessibility, and lack of standardization. This study contributes to the existing literature by offering a structured synthesis of current research and identifying critical gaps, particularly in the integration of technology, sustainability, and cross-cultural perspectives. The findings provide valuable insights for researchers, policymakers, and industry practitioners to develop effective strategies for the sustainable growth of wellness tourism in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Wellness; Tourism; COVID-19; sustainable; health; PRISMA-Based Systematic Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

Traumatic events or difficult life situations can result in beneficial human growth or transformation, even though they may leave lasting scars (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2021; Jamal et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic was a severe collective trauma event that seriously questioned people's fundamental beliefs, jeopardized their sense of purpose in life, and compromised their wellness (Bhalla et al., 2021; Cheng and Liu, 2022). According to positive psychology, trauma fosters introspection, increases a person's awareness of life's frailty, and encourages positive personality traits that lead to posttraumatic growth and flourishing (Voigt et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2024). However, we still don't fully grasp how the COVID-19 tragedy affects

people's perceptions of life's purpose and how to proceed toward transformation after such trauma. To cope with trauma and achieve transformation, individuals must reflect, pursue, and reestablish purpose in their lives (Frankl, 1992; Bae & Chang, 2021; Liu et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2024). However, our understanding of the impact of COVID-19 trauma on people's sense of purpose and how to make changes in the aftermath is lacking. According to some academics (Kelly, 2012), tourism can help people who have undergone trauma reconstruct their worldview and promote positive change and development in their quest for new purpose in life. In this sense, travel experiences that promote introspection and a sense of personal significance and development are referred to as

meaningful tourism experiences (Câmara et al., 2023; Chirakranont and Sakdiyakorn, 2022). In the post-Covid-19 era, people are giving greater priority to leading a healthy lifestyle and maintaining their physical, mental, and spiritual well-being (Xia et al., 2024). This is reflected both in their day-to-day activities and in their tourism choices, with the search for well-being becoming an increasingly important motivation for tourism (AlAnsi et al., 2024). This is exemplified by the growing interest in tourism visits to healing retreats, health spas, and wellness resorts (Goyal & Taneja, 2023). Such activities deliver health and wellness benefits directly, for example by providing tourists with opportunities to unwind and relax, thereby lowering stress levels and promoting better mental health (Liu et al., 2024). What is sometimes not recognised, however, is that the activities concerned can also enhance tourists' well-being by serving as enjoyable and satisfying experiences in their own right (Backman et al., 2023). Wellness tourism in the Chinese market holds distinctive importance, spurred by an accelerated growth in domestic demand for health and wellness experiences. This trend is attributed to increasing disposable incomes and evolving lifestyle preferences among the populace. In 2022, the Chinese wellness tourism sector exhibited significant growth, achieving a market value of RMB 1,309 billion (Market Monitor, 2023). Forecasts suggest that by 2028, the global wellness tourism market will expand to RMB 8,731 billion, with China's share expected to reach RMB 163 billion (Foresight Industry Research Institute, 2023). This projection not only underscores the transformative influence of wellness tourism on the Chinese economy but also affirms its pivotal role in steering the future direction of the global wellness tourism industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Wellness tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global tourism industry, reflecting increasing consumer interest in physical health, mental well-being, emotional balance, and holistic lifestyles. Unlike conventional tourism, which primarily focuses on leisure and entertainment, wellness tourism emphasizes preventive healthcare, stress reduction, self-improvement, and quality of life through experiences such as spa therapies, yoga, meditation, healthy nutrition, and nature-based activities (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Recent reviews also show that the field has expanded rapidly, evolving from a niche market into a multidisciplinary area connecting tourism, healthcare, psychology, and sustainability. Wellness tourism is defined as an instance of tourism in which well-being acts as the main purpose for travel that is related to gaining wellness through a holistic approach, without medical treatment (Dimitrovski et al.,

2024; Sthapit et al., 2023). Research has consistently shown that tourists are increasingly motivated by the desire to escape stressful lifestyles and restore psychological balance. Kelly (2012) found that wellness tourists seek authentic experiences that promote relaxation, mindfulness, and emotional renewal. Similarly, Heung and Kucukusta (2013) emphasized that wellness tourism integrates health services with hospitality, enabling destinations to create value through wellness-oriented experiences such as spas, thermal springs, fitness programs, and traditional healing practices. According to Mueller et al. (2001), wellness tourism is a specific type of health tourism when visitors want to preserve or enhance their well-being by engaging in activities including relaxation, exercise, spa services, and a balanced diet. Their research revealed that wellness tourists are driven by stress reduction, self-improvement, and lifestyle enhancement in addition to physical health. Contrary to medical tourism, which usually includes travelling for medical intervention to treat or cure illness, wellness tourism is a personal lifestyle choice, wherein tourists look to attain an integrated state of health (body and spirit) during their holidays (He et al., 2023). Besides offering pleasurable and satisfying consumer experiences that boost personal well-being, these wellness trips can lower stress by balancing body, mind, and spirit (Backman et al., 2023). Today, the demand for wellness tourism is growing amid ever increasing stress levels and offers new opportunities for businesses and destinations around the world (Dimitrovski et al., 2024). Recent studies linked to wellness tourism have been conducted in different cultural settings (Kim et al., 2024; Prayag, 2020). However, there, only a limited number of cross-cultural studies exist (Bočkus et al., 2024). A rare exception is Sangkakorn and Krajangchom's (2024) study, which examines the behaviours of wellness tourists in Northern Thailand with a view to summarising their collective preferences and expectations, thereby addressing a significant gap in research on Thai wellness tourism.

According to the Global Wellness Institute and Global Wellness Summit, wellness tourism represents one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism market (Global Wellness Institute, 2018; Global Wellness Summit, 2020). Previous research also highlights the rapid expansion of wellness tourism worldwide (Csirmaz & Peto, 2015). The Global Wellness Institute reported that the global wellness tourism market reached US\$639.4 billion in 2017, with an annual growth rate that was more than double the overall tourism growth rate of 3.2%. The sector recorded a growth rate of around 7.5–7.8% between 2017 and 2022, with projections estimating that the market could reach US\$919.4 billion (Global Wellness Institute, 2018). However, the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily

disrupted this growth trend.

Objectives of this study are:

To systematically review the existing literature on wellness tourism in the post-pandemic era

To identify key themes and research trends in wellness tourism

To analyze the impact of COVID-19 on tourist behavior and wellness preferences

To identify research gaps and suggest future research directions

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study selection process in this systematic literature review follows the stages outlined by the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Supplementary Materials), as developed by (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA 2020 ensures that the identification, selection, and inclusion of studies are carried out in a systematic, transparent, and replicable manner. To synthesize the findings from the selected articles, this study adopts a narrative synthesis approach. The synthesis involves a comprehensive reading of each article to identify antecedent variables that positively influence revisit intention. These findings are then systematically documented and summarized in tabular form to present a clear and organized overview of the relationships identified in previous research. In addition, this study also includes bibliometric outputs, namely the most relevant author and co-occurrence network, to provide a broader mapping of influential researchers and conceptual linkages in the field. Each stage of the process is described as follows:

3.1. Identification

Within the PRISMA 2020 framework, the identification stage seeks to collect all potentially relevant records from databases or other sources, representing the total number of documents retrieved prior to screening. In this study, the identification process relies exclusively on the Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Emerald databases. The database search is conducted using Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Emerald. All searches are carried out from 2016 to march, 2026, and include all articles indexed in each database up to that date. Altogether, the searches yield 5577 records. This study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine the existing research on wellness tourism and its relationship with tourist behavior, experience, and well-being. The literature search was conducted using a comprehensive academic database to identify relevant studies published between 2015 and 2026. To collect relevant publications, a structured search strategy was applied using a combination of keywords

related to wellness tourism, tourist behavior, and well-being. The following search string was used: ("Wellness Tourism" OR "Health Tourism" OR "Medical Tourism" OR "Health and Wellness Tourism") AND ("Tourist Behavior" OR "Tourist Experience" OR "Memorable Tourism Experience" OR "Tourist Satisfaction" OR "Revisit Intention") AND ("Wellbeing" OR "Quality of Life" OR "Mental Health") AND ("Tourism Management" OR "Sustainable Tourism" OR "Tourism Marketing") The search was limited to studies published within the tourism and hospitality domain, while publications belonging to unrelated subject areas such as mathematics, neuroscience, material science, and energy were excluded to ensure the relevance of the literature. Furthermore, specific document types were excluded, including conference reviews, conference papers, review articles, book chapters, and letters, as the study focused mainly on original research contributions. After applying these exclusion criteria, the dataset retained 133 journal articles, 2 books, and 1 erratum. In addition, a language filter was applied to maintain consistency and accessibility of the literature. Publications written in Chinese were removed, and only English-language publications were retained, resulting in a final dataset of 135 publications used for analysis. The selected studies were then systematically analyzed to identify key themes, research trends, and emerging topics related to wellness tourism, tourist experiences, satisfaction, and well-being outcomes. This approach ensures a comprehensive and reliable overview of the existing literature in the field.

3.2. Literature screening

Using Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach the screening of the relevant prior literature was done which served as the foundation for the research (PRISMA, 2020b). PRISMA checklist outlines procedures which need to be carried out in order to conduct a review that can be duplicated by other researchers and provide data that can be relied upon. Many researcher have modified the PRISMA approach for use in tourist research. These publications may be found in the references section of the respective articles. According to Bezner et al. (2015), doing a systematic literature review in the field of tourism and hospitality using the PRISMA methodology and checklist will help researchers obtain a better comprehension of the methodology, level of quality, and level of rigour of systematic reviews. PRISMA was selected over other existing protocols because of the acknowledgement from its succinctness (Liberati et al., 2009). A total of 465 studies were thoroughly assessed individually against the eligibility criteria at identification stage. Where abstracts didn't provide enough information, then entire evaluation of articles was done as the eligibility

criteria. Those researches that met the precise eligibility requirements have been examined. During this phase, 105 publications were eliminated because they failed to meet several of the eligibility criteria. At the critical screening stage 302 articles were screened and 254 were excluded. Following thorough the processes, 74 papers were deemed suitable and chosen for the overall analysis and interpretation. Figure 1 shows the screening process. (Figure 1)

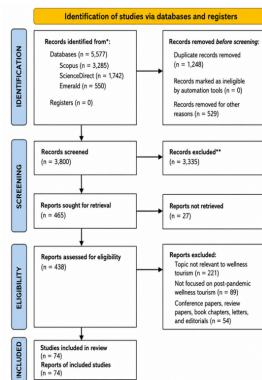


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for Systematic Review.
Source: Author's own creation/work

The figure 1.2 illustrates the distribution of research documents across different countries or territories. China contributes the highest number of documents, indicating its strong research focus and leadership in this area. The United States follows as the second-largest contributor, while India ranks third, showing significant and growing academic involvement. Countries such as Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and South Korea demonstrate moderate contributions. Meanwhile, Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Finland have relatively lower publication counts. Overall, the data reflects a concentration of research output in a few leading countries, with emerging contributions from developing nations. (Figure 2)

Documents by country or territory
Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

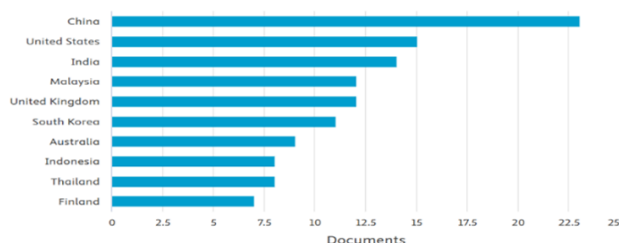


Figure 2. Document by country wise. Source: Author's own creation/work

The figure 1.3 presents the distribution of publications across different subject areas in wellness tourism research. The results indicate that Business, Management, and Accounting (41.7%) dominate the field, highlighting a strong focus on managerial practices, marketing strategies, and industry development. This is followed by Social

Sciences (25.0%), emphasizing the importance of tourist behavior, experiences, and societal impacts. Other notable contributions come from Economics (6.3%) and Environmental Science (6.0%), reflecting the growing relevance of sustainability and economic implications in wellness tourism. Computer Science (4.4%) and Agriculture (3.2%) show emerging interdisciplinary links. Meanwhile, Arts and Humanities, Decision Sciences, and Earth Sciences contribute smaller shares, indicating limited but evolving research interest. Overall, the findings demonstrate that wellness tourism is a multidisciplinary field, with a dominant managerial and social science orientation, while environmental and technological perspectives are gradually gaining importance in the post-pandemic era. (Figure 3)

Documents by subject area

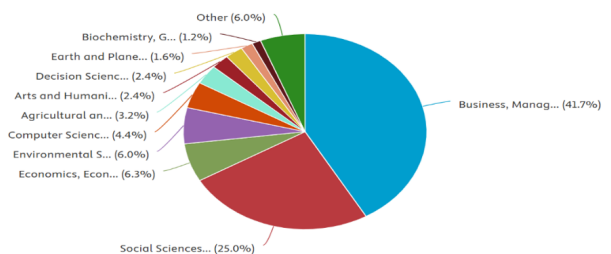


Figure 3. Document author cited. Source: Author's own creation/work

Figure 4 illustrates the author co-citation network, revealing the intellectual foundations and scholarly relationships within wellness tourism research. The network identifies several prominent authors whose works are frequently cited together, indicating their substantial contribution to the development of the field. Distinct clusters emerge around themes such as tourist well-being, health tourism, sustainable tourism, destination experiences, and post-pandemic travel behavior. Larger nodes represent authors with greater citation influence, while stronger connecting lines indicate closer conceptual associations between scholars. The findings demonstrate the interdisciplinary nature of wellness tourism research and highlight the key theoretical perspectives that continue to shape contemporary studies in the post-pandemic era. (Figure 4)

Documents by affiliation
Compare the document counts for up to 15 affiliations.

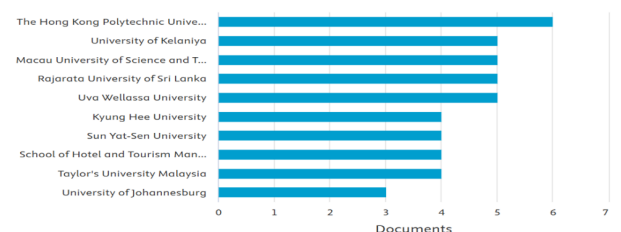


Figure 4. Author Co-citation Network. Source: Author's own creation/work

creation/work

Figure 5 illustrate the keyword co-occurrence network, illustrating the major research themes and conceptual relationships within wellness tourism literature. The analysis reveals that wellness tourism, health tourism, well-being, tourist satisfaction, mental health, and sustainable tourism are among the most frequently occurring keywords. The strong connections between these terms indicate that researchers increasingly associate wellness tourism with holistic health outcomes, sustainable travel practices, and enhanced tourist experiences. The emergence of keywords such as COVID-19, post-pandemic travel, and digital technology reflects recent scholarly interest in understanding changing tourist preferences and industry adaptation strategies. Overall, the network highlights the multidisciplinary nature and evolving research directions of wellness tourism. (Figure 5)

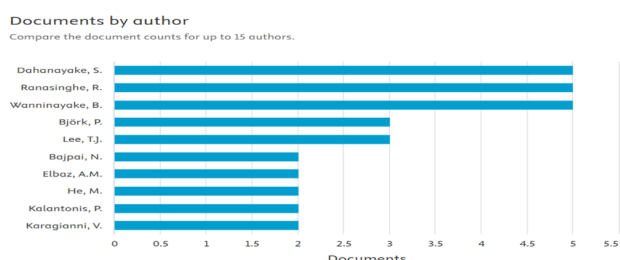


Figure 5. Keyword Co-occurrence. Source: Author's own creation/work

Figure 6 illustrate illustrates the citation analysis of publications included in the review, highlighting the most influential studies and intellectual foundations of wellness tourism research. The results indicate that a relatively small number of highly cited articles have significantly shaped the development of the field. Foundational studies focusing on wellness tourism concepts, tourist well-being, health motivation, and destination experiences received the highest citation counts, demonstrating their scholarly impact. More recent publications related to COVID-19, health recovery, and sustainable tourism have also gained considerable attention, reflecting emerging research priorities. The citation pattern suggests a growing academic interest in wellness tourism and the increasing importance of interdisciplinary contributions to the field. (Figure 6)

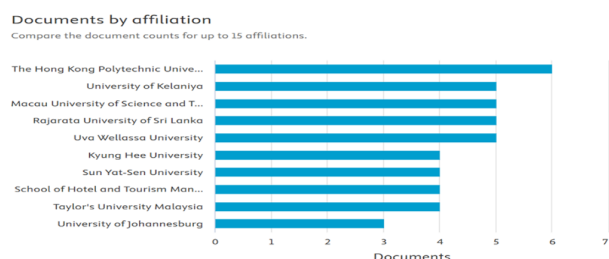


Figure 6. Citation Analysis of publications. Source: Author's own creation/work

Figure 7 presents the most influential authors contributing to wellness tourism research based on publication output and citation impact. The figure demonstrates that a group of leading scholars has played a crucial role in advancing theoretical and empirical understanding of wellness tourism, health behavior, and tourist well-being. These authors have extensively examined topics such as wellness motivations, destination experiences, sustainability, and health-related travel outcomes. The concentration of citations among a few prominent researchers indicates their substantial influence on shaping the research agenda in this domain. Furthermore, the figure highlights the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of wellness tourism research across tourism, psychology, healthcare, and sustainability studies. (Figure 7)



Figure 7. Document author cited contributing to wellness tourism. Source: Author's own creation/work

Figure 8 illustrates the distribution of publications across the most productive academic journals and sources in wellness tourism research. The results indicate that tourism and hospitality journals dominate the publication landscape, reflecting the strong relevance of wellness tourism within these disciplines. Several journals focusing on sustainable tourism, destination management, public health, and consumer behavior also contribute significantly to the field. The diversity of publication sources demonstrates the multidisciplinary character of wellness tourism research and its growing integration with health, environmental, and social science perspectives. The figure further suggests that researchers increasingly recognize wellness tourism as an important area of academic inquiry and industry development. (figure 1.8)

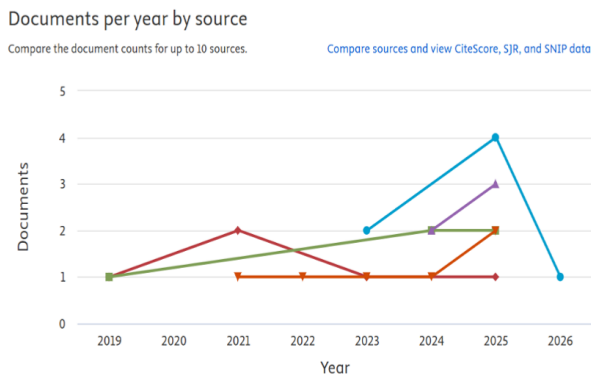


Figure 8. Document author cited. Source: Author's own creation/work

Figure 9 illustrates that presents the annual publication trend in wellness tourism research over the study period. The findings indicate a gradual increase in scholarly output, followed by a significant rise after the COVID-19 pandemic. This growth reflects the increasing global interest in health-conscious travel, mental well-being, and sustainable tourism practices. The surge in publications during the post-pandemic period suggests that researchers are actively exploring the changing motivations, behaviors, and expectations of tourists. Furthermore, the expanding volume of research demonstrates the growing recognition of wellness tourism as a critical component of tourism recovery and future destination development strategies. Overall, the trend highlights the field's rapid evolution and academic importance. (Figure 9)

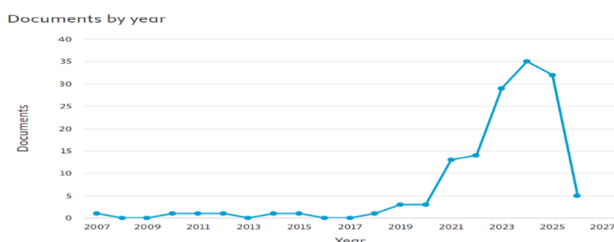


Figure 9. Document author cited as per period. Source: Author's own creation/work

4. FINDING

The country-wise analysis reveals a global distribution of research contributions, with a noticeable concentration in a few leading nations. China emerges as the most dominant contributor with 23 publications (9.96%), indicating its strong research focus and growing interest in the subject area. This is followed by the United States (6.49%) and India (6.06%), highlighting their significant involvement and consistent research output. European countries such as the United Kingdom (5.19%), Italy (3.03%), Spain (2.16%), Portugal (2.16%), Germany (1.30%), and France (1.30%) also demonstrate active participation, reflecting the region's steady contribution to academic research. Similarly, several Asian countries, including Malaysia (5.19%), South Korea (4.76%), Thailand (3.46%), Indonesia (3.46%), and Japan (2.16%), show strong engagement, suggesting that Asia is a key hub for research development in this domain. Other countries such as Australia (3.90%), Finland (3.03%), Macao (2.60%), and Hong Kong (2.60%) contribute moderately, while nations like Sri Lanka, South Africa, Denmark, Viet Nam, Turkey, Taiwan, and Greece show relatively lower but noteworthy contributions. Overall, the findings indicate that research in this field is widely dispersed across both developed and developing countries, with a stronger concentration in Asia and Western nations. This reflects the growing global interest and collaborative potential in the research area.

Table 1. Country-wise analysis

Country	Documents	Percentage of total (%)
China	23	9.96%
United States	15	6.49%
India	14	6.06%
United Kingdom	12	5.19%
Malaysia	12	5.19%
South Korea	11	4.76%
Australia	9	3.90%
Thailand	8	3.46%
Indonesia	8	3.46%
Italy	7	3.03%
Finland	7	3.03%

Macao	6	2.60%
Hong Kong	6	2.60%
Sri Lanka	5	2.16%
Spain	5	2.16%
South Africa	5	2.16%
Portugal	5	2.16%
Japan	5	2.16%
Denmark	5	2.16%
Viet Nam	4	1.73%
Turkey	4	1.73%
Taiwan	4	1.73%
Greece	3	1.30%
Germany	3	1.30%
France	3	1.30%

Source: Author's own creation/work

Figure/Table 2 presents the distribution of the top 20 countries contributing to the research domain. The results indicate that China holds the leading position with the highest number of publications, significantly outperforming other countries. This highlights China's strong research focus and increasing academic investment in this field. The United States and India follow as the second and third major contributors, reflecting their active engagement and consistent scholarly output. A cluster of countries including the United Kingdom and Malaysia demonstrates moderate yet substantial contributions, indicating their growing interest in the research area. Similarly, South Korea and Australia show noteworthy participation, further strengthening the global research landscape. Countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Italy, and Finland contribute at a mid-level, suggesting emerging research activity. Meanwhile, regions like Macao, Hong Kong, and Denmark reflect moderate involvement, whereas Sri Lanka, Spain, South Africa, Portugal, and Japan contribute smaller but meaningful shares. At the lower end, countries like Viet Nam exhibit comparatively limited contributions, indicating potential scope for future research development. (Figure 10)

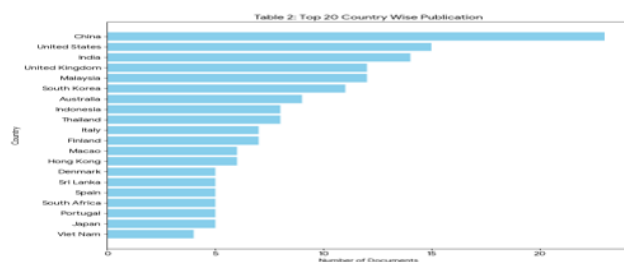


Figure 10. country wise Publication. Source: Author's own creation/work

4.1. Reason for selecting wellness in the post pandemic era

Wellness tourism often attracts healthy individuals looking to maintain and improve their overall wellness. Medical and health tourism, often known as wellness tourism, has been extensively researched and analyzed. Asian scholars have primarily researched wellness hotel centres (Chi, 2020), spiritual and physical healing through yoga (Dillette, 2019), health and wellness (Gretzel et al., 2015), and the cultural perspective of health and wellness tourism.

4.1.1. Health Recovery

This study provides valuable insights into the growing demand for holistic and alternative health approaches among tourists. They seek venues that provide a variety of health activities, including yoga, meditation, health spa and traditional therapeutic therapies like Ayurveda, naturopathy from India, and Traditional Medicine (Heung & Kucukusta, (2013). Tourism stakeholders should collaborate with local communities and healthcare providers to offer culturally appropriate and authentic wellness experiences. According to some academics, tourism can enable people who have suffered trauma during COVID-19 find a fresh purpose in life, rebuilding their healthy living through worldview exploration and promoting positive change and growth (Zenker & Kock, 2020; Sengupta, 2022).

4.1.2. Nature Connection

According to Heung and Kucukusta (2013), countries' wellness tourism offerings tend to focus on nature, including clean water, fresh air, Ayurveda, forest bathing, nature-based therapies, forest parks, healing food, ancient villages, hot springs, rural scenery, and spa treatments in

pristine natural settings. This aligns with traditional wellness culture and the belief that nature provides optimal health benefit to the tourists.

4.1.3. Mental Wellbeing

This study demonstrated that wellness tourism found that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption and vulnerability in the business, leading to increased interest in spiritual travel. Kahneman and Krueger et al. (2006). discovered that Indian urban millennials are turning to spiritual travel to help cope with mental health difficulties, corporate demands, and curiosity. The tourists' choices for their spiritual travels were influenced by their mental health Sivanandamoorthy (2021).

4.1.4. Stress Relief

According to this systematic review stress and anxiety increased during home quarantine due to the pandemic's outbreak and disclosure of many unfavourable information. A lot of people had to postpone their trip arrangements. People's psychological yearning to flee the real world and be free from captivity is further heightened by the innate motivation to travel (Chen & Petrick, 2013). Additionally, it was discovered that the pandemic-related trauma motivated travellers to consider the significance of tourism activities and recognize their contribution to well-being. By promoting pleasant emotional states, enjoyable travel experiences significantly support and increase life meaning (Andreu et al., 2021). A single trip experience has a direct impact on a tourist's overall wellbeing and have a beneficial effect by influencing the wellbeing experienced during the tourism activity.

4.1.5. Self-Care

According to a systematic analysis, meaningful tourism involves positive emotions such as joy, peace of mind, relaxation, and pleasure, which are considered a core aspect of life's meaning. Many tourists emphasized that "the most important function of travel is to make oneself happy" and that "happiness itself is meaningful." According to King and Hicks (2021), people find meaning in situations that produce good feelings. As a result, post-crisis travel served as a potent compensatory mechanism that gave travellers their sense of agency and control back, allowing them to escape the limitations of daily life and rediscover their sense of purpose. This review also showed that travel offers a crucial setting for learning, developing skills, expanding one's horizons, and discovering one's own potential, all of which lay the groundwork for self-actualization.

The thematic analysis identified seven major themes in the existing literature on wellness tourism in the post-pandemic era. The most dominant theme is health and wellness benefits, where studies highlight improvements in physical and mental well-being. Another important theme is post-pandemic travel behavior, which shows increased concern for safety and hygiene. Furthermore, technology adoption and sustainable tourism practices are emerging as key trends influencing tourist preferences. The analysis also reveals growing interest in nature-based and rural destinations, along with significant economic contributions of wellness tourism. However, challenges such as high costs and limited accessibility remain critical issues.

Table 2. Thematic analysis table

Theme	Sub-Themes	Key Findings (Simple Explanation)	Supporting Studies (Example Citations)
1. Health Recovery	Physical Health, Mental Well-being, Stress Reduction	Most studies show that wellness tourism helps improve physical fitness, reduces stress, and supports mental health after COVID-19. People prefer destinations that offer relaxation and healing experiences.	Hall (2019); Sthapit et al. (2023)
2. Post-Pandemic Travel Behavior	Safety Concerns, Hygiene, Risk Perception	Tourists are more concerned about safety, hygiene, and social distancing. Demand for less crowded and nature-based destinations has increased.	Chen et al. (2021)
3. Technology Adoption in Tourism	Digital Platforms, AI, Contactless Services	Technology such as mobile apps, AI chatbots, and contactless services has become important for improving tourist experience and safety.	Park (2022); Singh (2023)
4. Sustainable Tourism Practices (Natural connection)	Eco-friendly Travel, Green Practices, Responsible Tourism	Studies highlight the growing importance of sustainability. Tourists prefer eco-friendly accommodations and environmentally responsible tourism services.	Hall (2020)
5. Destination Preferences	Rural Tourism, Nature-based Tourism, Wellness Resorts	Tourists prefer rural, natural, and less crowded destinations. Wellness resorts and retreats are gaining popularity.	Li (2021)

6. Economic Impact	Revenue Generation, Employment, Local Development	Wellness tourism contributes to economic growth by creating jobs and supporting local communities, especially after the pandemic recovery phase.	Sharma (2021); World Tourism Organization (2022)
7. Challenges in Wellness Tourism	High Cost, Accessibility Issues, Lack of Awareness	Some studies identify challenges such as high cost of wellness services, limited access in rural areas, and lack of awareness among tourists.	Romão et al. (2022); Tripathi & Ben Said (2023)

Source: Author’s own creation/work

4.2. Discussion

The present study provides a systematic synthesis of existing literature on wellness tourism in the post-pandemic era using the PRISMA framework. The findings reveal that wellness tourism has undergone a significant transformation following the COVID-19 pandemic, with increased emphasis on health, safety, and overall well-being. One of the most prominent findings of this review is the growing importance of health recovery and mental well-being as primary motivations for travel. This aligns with previous studies, which suggest that tourism experiences can contribute to psychological restoration and stress reduction (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Liu et al., 2024). The pandemic has heightened individuals’ awareness of personal health, leading to a shift from traditional leisure tourism toward wellness-oriented travel experiences. This transformation reflects a broader change in consumer behavior, where tourism is increasingly perceived as a means of achieving holistic well-being rather than mere recreation. The study also highlights significant changes in post-pandemic travel behavior, particularly in terms of risk perception and safety concerns. Tourists now prioritize hygiene, social distancing, and less crowded destinations, which is consistent with earlier research indicating increased risk aversion and cautious travel decision-making (Neuburger & Egger, 2021). This shift has led to a growing demand for rural, nature-based, and wellness destinations, reflecting a move away from mass tourism toward more personalized and meaningful travel experiences. Another key finding is the increasing role of technology adoption in tourism, particularly in enhancing safety and convenience. The integration of digital platforms, contactless services, and artificial intelligence has improved tourist experiences while minimizing physical interaction. This supports prior research emphasizing the role of technology in transforming tourism services and building customer trust (Tussyadiah, 2020). The findings suggest that technology is no longer optional but has become a critical component of modern tourism management. In addition, the study identifies sustainable tourism practices as a major emerging theme. Tourists are increasingly inclined toward eco-friendly and responsible travel options, which aligns with global sustainability goals. Previous research also highlights the

growing importance of sustainability in tourism development and its role in shaping tourist preferences (Gössling et al., 2020; Gössling et al., 2021). Wellness tourism, in particular, demonstrates strong alignment with sustainability due to its focus on nature-based experiences and environmental conservation. The findings further indicate a shift in destination preferences, with tourists favoring rural, less crowded, and nature-rich locations. This trend reflects the desire for privacy, safety, and meaningful experiences, which has been widely discussed in recent tourism literature. Moreover, the study highlights the significant economic contribution of wellness tourism, particularly in supporting local communities and promoting regional development. Despite these positive trends, the review also identifies several challenges that may hinder the growth of wellness tourism. High costs, limited accessibility, lack of awareness, and absence of standardized regulations remain key issues. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that emphasize the need for better infrastructure, policy support, and professional training in the wellness tourism sector. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that wellness tourism is evolving as a multidimensional and dynamic field, influenced by health consciousness, technological advancements, and sustainability concerns. The study not only confirms existing findings but also extends the literature by providing a comprehensive and integrated perspective on post-pandemic tourism trends. It highlights the need for a more holistic approach that combines health, technology, and sustainability to ensure the long-term growth and resilience of the tourism industry.

5. CONCLUSION

Through a systematic review employing the PRISMA framework, this study offers a thorough understanding of wellness tourism in the post-pandemic age. The results show that, as a result of growing awareness of physical, mental, and emotional well-being in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, wellness tourism has become a large and quickly expanding sector of the worldwide tourism business. Health recovery, post-pandemic travel behaviour, technological adoption, sustainable tourism practices, destination preferences, economic effect, and wellness tourism difficulties are some of the major themes identified in the review. Benefits to health and well-being and safety concerns are now the most important variables influencing

traveller decisions. Tourists are increasingly drawn to nature-based, less congested, and wellness-focused places that provide holistic experiences while encouraging self-care and stress alleviation. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that technological improvements and sustainable practices are critical in improving tourist experiences and maintaining long-term economic prosperity. At the same time, wellness tourism has a substantial economic impact by creating jobs and supporting local communities. However, issues such as high costs, limited accessibility, and a lack of standardization continue to impede its full potential. Overall, this study adds to the current body of knowledge by providing an organized and integrated overview of wellness tourism research. It helps researchers, policymakers, and industry practitioners analyze new trends and build long-term growth strategies. The findings also highlight the need for future study that focuses on empirical validation, cross-cultural analysis, and the use of technology and sustainability into wellness tourism.

5.1. Implication

This paper offers a thorough synthesis of research done in the post-pandemic era, which greatly advances the theoretical development of wellness tourism literature. By showing how health consciousness, psychological recovery, and holistic well-being have emerged as key factors affecting travel behaviour following COVID-19, the review expands upon current ideas of tourism and well-being. The results combine several aspects of wellness tourism, such as location choices, technology adoption, sustainability, mental health, and physical health, into a cohesive conceptual framework. Additionally, by highlighting ideas like self-care, stress reduction, life purpose, and post-traumatic growth, the study demonstrates the expanding connection between wellness tourism and positive psychology. Emerging research themes and knowledge gaps are also identified in the review, especially with regard to cross-cultural disparities, technological advancements, and sustainable wellness practices. This research fosters the creation of more solid conceptual frameworks in wellness tourism research and offers a useful theoretical basis for next empirical studies by combining disparate findings from many studies. The study's conclusions have significant implications for destination managers, tourism professionals, legislators, and providers of wellness services. Tourism companies should provide integrated wellness packages that emphasize physical, mental, and emotional well-being through practices like yoga, meditation, spa treatments, outdoor activities, and stress-reduction programs in light of the increased demand for wellbeing-focused travel. In order to satisfy changing visitor demands in the post-

pandemic setting, destination management should place a high priority on safety, cleanliness, and sustainable tourism practices. In order to increase service quality and boost visitor confidence, the study also emphasizes the significance of implementing digital technologies, such as mobile applications, artificial intelligence, and contactless services. To increase destination competitiveness, policymakers should use these findings to create supporting regulations, set quality standards, and fund infrastructure related to wellness tourism. Wellness tourism can also help local communities by creating jobs and boosting the local economy, which makes it a useful tactic for encouraging inclusive and sustainable tourism growth in the post-pandemic age.

5.2. Limitations

This review may have overlooked pertinent material from other sources because it is restricted to English-language studies that have been published in the Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Emerald databases. Relationships between variables cannot be quantitatively examined because the study only uses secondary data and a narrative synthesis approach. As a result, the results should be evaluated in light of the chosen literature.

5.3. Future Research Directions

The results of this review should be confirmed by empirical and cross-cultural research in future studies. Researchers may investigate how wellness tourism experiences are shaped by new technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) and digital wellness platforms. The literature would be further enhanced by longitudinal studies that look at the long-term impacts of wellness tourism on visitor happiness, well-being, and destination sustainability.

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7. ETHICAL STATEMENT

Data were obtained from secondary source. The research has been carried out in accordance with the COPE guidelines

8. AUTHORS CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr. Monika Yadav: Introduction; Literature Review, Writing – Original Draft.

Dr. Amit Gusain: Conceptualization, Research Design, Methodology, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Interpretation of Results.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

regarding the publication of this paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data generated or analyzed during this study are Scopus data base (and its supplementary information files).

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