

WELLNESS travel trends



recommend

helping travel advisors sell travel





By Paloma Villaverde de Rico

Wellness tourism, according to a **Global Wellness Institute** study, is forecast to grow to reach \$919 billion by 2022, with an annual growth that's faster than tourism overall. The sector, in fact, is forecast to grow by 7.5 percent yearly, according to the study. Wellness enthusiasts are no longer content to put aside their healthy lifestyle when on vacation—they want to have access to a plethora of fitness activities, healthy food choices, outstanding spas, and the great outdoors when vacationing; they want to make sure that wellness plays a significant role in their vacation experience, or be the sole driver of their vacation.

For this **Wellness Travel Trends Report**—a complement to the **Wellness Travel Trends Survey** conducted on recommend.com, as well as the **Tips on Selling Wellness Travel** webinar—we reached out to experts in the wellness travel sector to gain insight into what wellness-focused travelers want and to help you better sell to this growing market.

What's All the BUZZ About

With wellness top of mind for many travelers, what exactly does it mean to go on a wellness vacation? Anne Dimon, president of the **Wellness Tourism Association (WTA)**—a global network for qualifying DMOs, hotels/resorts/retreats, tour operators, travel advisors, wellness practitioners, media, partners and others with an interest in supporting the global wellness tourism industry—says that defining a wellness vacation is of utmost importance. “The WTA definition of a wellness vacation/holiday is,” she says, “wellness travel powered by a wellness-focused intention. Wellness vacations/holidays are typically self-directed with the traveler setting his or her own timetable and schedule. They may also include a wellness retreat, which is defined by the WTA as #1, a guided, intention-driven, multi-day program with a set or semi-set schedule, and hosted by one or more facilitators. The program may include learning and lifestyle workshops such as meditation and healthy eating, as well as fitness activities such as yoga, nature walks and hiking. And #2, a smaller facility with accommodations and hospitality services and where the primary purpose is to ➤

“I let the client decide specifically what they think is a wellness vacation, and from there I know exactly where to advise and guide them to ensure their expectations are met. What I have found is that there are many different definitions of a wellness vacation, so while my definition might be general, I always make sure I listen to my client's definition first and foremost.”

– **Sofia Markovich, owner, Sofia's Travel, LLC,**
an independent agency in the Avoya Travel Network

Healthy Lifestyle on the Road

Nearly 50% of Recommend's Wellness Travel Trends Survey respondents say their wellness clients are VERY LIKELY and LIKELY to take a wellness-focused vacation in the next 6 months.





GEN X Want to know who to target when selling wellness vacations? 38% of survey respondents say that the predominant age group they are selling to is 46-55.

provide programs and experiences for the wellness traveler. The facility may have fewer wellness activities, services and facilities than a wellness resort.

"Five years ago," she continues, "the wellness-focused traveler expected the full spa experience and actively sought out 'destination spas' offering packages and programs including yoga classes, meditation sessions and perhaps a few educational lectures. They also looked for programs focusing on weight loss or weight management. Today, the wellness-focused traveler has become more knowledgeable and certainly has far more options going way beyond the traditional 'destination spa,' which today, incidentally, is a facility more often referred to as a wellness resort or a wellness retreat. The emphasis in the wellness tourism industry has been taken off the spa aspect, because, while a spa can be an important part of a wellness vacation, is it not absolutely necessary. It depends on individual preference."

In fact, says Cindy Hoddesson, director, North America, **Monaco Government Tourist Office**, "wellness today is more holistic, encompassing our emotional, physical, social, spiritual and intellectual needs. Wellness is achieving our full potential and embraces mental and physical wellbeing as well as the wellness of our environment."

Today wellness is "a movement," adds Emyln Brown, v.p. of well being for **Accor Luxury Brands**. "Today's wellness traveler is much more complex in terms of their expectations...and the complexity increases each year so

the need to fulfill those expectations becomes more pressurized in terms of what we deliver."

Deb Fogarty, luxury travel advisor at **Be Well Travel**, part of the **Oasis Travel Network**, points to wellness vacations as stress-free getaways "that allow the traveler to unplug and detoxify mentally and physically through a host of activities, including yoga, surfing, diving, hiking, or simply relaxing on the beach. These types of vacations are used to restore mental and emotional health in travelers from all walks of life so that they can return refreshed, restored and ready to take on their day-to-day activities with a new and improved outlook."

With Diana Mestre, **Velas Resorts'** spa consultant, adding that, "wellness travelers today look for authentic experiences, connections with the local community, outdoor-nature, sustainable travel experiences, self-discovery, and healing through wellness encounters.... Wellness travelers are in search of a personalized inner journey."

Wellness has become so important for travelers that even those who are not going on a wellness-focused retreat are incorporating wellness into their vacation, with "resorts, cruise lines and even tour

"Travelers expect wellness to be integrated into the experience. The traveler is more educated, but still there's an expectation to find what they are looking for in wellness to be easily accessible. This comes to dining, activities and accommodations."

– **Joyce Kiehl, Director of Communications, Greater Palm Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau**

operators adding even more wellness options," says travel advisor Paula Kaisner, **Dream Vacations** franchise owner and vacation specialist. "This includes the latest and greatest fitness equipment and classes such as Peloton classes at the resorts and cruise ship gyms along with TRX training classes. For our mental fitness, the resorts and cruise lines offer yoga, meditation, and various spa services." Chris Austin, **Seabourn's** senior v.p., global sales and marketing, says that wellness is definitely "moving into the mainstream when it comes to considerations for travelers. It's no longer limited to the spa or a gym. The contemporary definition of wellness means taking care of your mind and body."

And Joyci Staver, a certified wellness advisor and the destination specialist for wellness travel at **World of Travel**, says that it's very important to listen to the client when creating a wellness vacation. "My goal when designing a wellness vacation for our clients is to listen to what they need and what they are looking to experience. It could be a detox retreat or preventative wellness to include Ayurvedic treatments in India or Peru, a spiritual retreat visiting monasteries and temples in Tibet or maybe a more culturally based immersion vacation that includes wellness components. I enjoy customizing a wellness vacation so that it is unique, authentic and will best meet each person's interests and needs."



Goals According to survey respondents, the top two reasons for people to go on a wellness vacation are "general, overall reboot" and to be "stress-free for a few days."



4-6 Nights

Average number of nights clients are spending on a wellness vacation, according to the survey.

“Wellness is a movement, not a trend—it has always been here and is never going away. Discerning travelers are now seeking an expanded, all-encompassing wellness experience during travel.”

—**Emlyn Brown, Vice President, Well Being, Accor Luxury Brands**

care of our self, we need to be by our self.” She also adds that “individualized experiences,” such as a “hike to a specific location or a visit with a shaman, as well as healthy indulgences” are quite popular.

Kaisner, meanwhile, points to “girlfriend trips to wellness spas,” as well as healthy food options, and Dimon adds that another important trend is “more flexibility with length of stay.” Brown notes, too, that there’s been a “rise in popularity of hot springs & thermal bathing,” and travel advisor Shari Kalt of **Bee Kalt Travel**, a **Virtuoso** agency, and Fogarty both point to the trends taking place on cruises when it comes to wellness, with Fogarty saying that cruises now have “healthy spa and dining options,” and Kalt noting that “river cruise ships are now adding more active options (hiking and biking) to their excursions and onboard activities.” Kalt goes on to say that “luxury trains have added spa cars—that’s something you didn’t see a few years ago.”

TRENDS TO WATCH

The last few years have seen a dramatic change in the way the travel industry defines wellness travel, so what should you be keeping an eye on in terms of trends? Jack Wert, executive director of the **Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention & Visitors Bureau**, says that the top three trends in the wellness travel sector are “‘tell technology to take a hike’—to totally unplug and detox from technology while on a trip and literally go off the grid for a weekend, a week or even more; ‘party of one please’—women and men of all ages go to far ends of the earth to get away solo and rest, recharge and rejuvenate...by themselves...and don’t apologize for it; and ‘no reservations are needed for the outdoors’—wellness travelers are less focused on reservation-based spas and massages (they can do that at home), though are now way more keen on the benefits of ‘active travel’ such as walks on the beach, paddleboarding, snorkeling, hikes, kayaking, walking on sightseeing tours, eating healthy from local farms or local fishermen.”

Mestre says that outdoor activity plays a powerful role in today’s wellness vacation, pointing out that “disconnecting to reconnect with the

power of nature and self-healing, earthing, outdoor activities and exercise are an essential part of any wellness program.” For Staver one of the key ingredients for creating a successful wellness program are “cultural immersion experiences that incorporate wellness options such as learning about traditional herbal medicine in Bali, visiting an organic farm in Turkey or maybe taking part in a traditional ceremony in Peru performed by a shaman giving thanks to Mother Earth.”

And the “party of one please” that Wert mentions is something many of the experts pointed to as a growing trend, with Dimon saying that “based on a recent WTA survey over 45 percent of respondents would prefer to travel solo...when on a wellness vacation.” **Red Mountain Resort’s** general manager Tracey Welsh also points to the solo travel trend, because, as she says, “sometimes to take



THE ROLE OF THE TRAVEL ADVISOR

So what do you bring to the table? Dimon says that the travel advisor “can bring first-hand experience to the client, plus make the client aware of options that he or she might not previously have known about.” Markovich adds that of utmost importance is to listen to the client “carefully, so I do not miss what they are looking for in a wellness vacation. What sets a travel advisor apart is knowing those special places that exceed their expectations,” adding that “the benefits of engaging in an active vacation only serves to enhance a client’s overall enjoyment and I take every opportunity to inspire people to take care of themselves while away from home as an integral part of their travel routine.”

“Having a travel advisor is imperative for travelers interested in a relaxing wellness getaway,” points out Fogarty, “because an advisor takes care of all the details, giving travelers a smooth and enjoyable experience. An advisor can find out all the details on the type of cuisine and activities available on a property or cruise line and select the best options for travelers based on their needs.”

Kalt notes that “there are a lot of options out there for wellness travel and an experienced travel advisor can help the client determine the best fit for them. Some resorts would be better for a solo traveler, some are geared more toward spirituality and mindfulness while others are better for a guest who wants to be very active.”

Accommodation Options

When booking your clients on a wellness vacation, look for the top-of-the-line luxury accommodations with spa facilities as 32% of Recommend’s Wellness Travel Trends Survey respondents say that’s what their clients prefer....followed closely by a fitness-oriented resort. ▼



“While anyone from any demographic can certainly take a self-guided vacation with wellness as the focus, WTA research, along with other industry research, tells us that the primary client for a wellness vacation is female 35 plus. One would assume that these are also women with a higher education with the knowledge of the importance of being conscientiously proactive with one’s own health.”

– Anne Dimon, President,
Wellness Tourism Association

Girls Rule! Almost all of the survey respondents —93%—point to women as the gender booking the most wellness vacations among their clients. *AND* girls’ getaways are going to hold steady as one of the most popular types of wellness retreat bookings among our survey takers.



Want to gain insight into the Wellness Tourism sector? Visit the Wellness Tourism Organization site:
wellnesstourismassociation.org.

⇒ Point Your Clients to Wellness

So what do some of the hotels and destinations that are focused on wellness have on offer for your clients? Lots of outdoor activities, a variety of healthy dining options, an array of wellness programs to fit your diverse clients' needs, and plenty of mind, body and spiritual touch points.

In Florida's Naples, Marco Island, Everglades area, where "wellness travelers are a much bigger segment of our visitors than five years ago," says Wert, has "worked to establish increased awareness of wellness options in the destination. Activities are now offered destination-wide during *January Wellness Day*, *World Wellness Day* in June and *Global Wellness Weekend* coming in September. Most of our visitors are attracted to our destination because of our beautiful, white-sand beaches, but they don't just park themselves in the sand. They seek more active ways to enjoy the beachy environment. Popular options include paddleboard and kayak rentals and guided tours, and small boat tours to our many nearby deserted beach islands and sand bars to hunt for shells." For Greater Palm Springs the outdoors also plays a significant role, with Kiehl saying that, "the destination lends

itself to the wellness traveler. With the convergence of the elements (300 days of sunshine, protective mountains, aquifer and mineral spas, the windiest spot in the continental USA) in Greater Palm Springs, being well often means getting outside. We have worked to highlight our natural surroundings and worked to draw new events such as Wanderlust's Wellspring event and Ironman Indian Wells La Quinta."

Wellness in Monaco, says Hoddeson is part of the fabric of the destination. "It is not a trend with the Principality of Monaco but part of our DNA. People were coming at the turn of the last century to benefit from the restorative powers of the Mediterranean. What the Principality of Monaco is doing is making efforts to better communicate our offerings, including creating a better environment (reducing carbon imprint). Some of this we do by creating new events like an e-Prix (electric car race), allowing visitors to explore by electric bikes, and suggesting that visitors explore the Via Alpina (like America's Appalachian Trail)."

Accor Luxury Brands' portfolio



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lends itself to wellness vacations, as Brown notes, with "a number of destination wellbeing locations—**Fairmont Grand Del Mar** [in San Diego, CA], **Fairmont Kea Lani** [in Wailea, HI], **Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa**, **MGallery Dubai** and more. All of these properties incorporate short-term wellbeing programs into the guest experience, allowing travelers flexibility to experience wellness in a variety of ways throughout their holiday."

In Utah's Red Mountain Resort, there are wellness retreats and Personal Discovery experiences, as well as "meditation labyrinth, daily guided hiking and walks in our neighboring red rock canyon," says Welsh. Velas Resorts, too, has labyrinths, as well as meditation pods at its **Casa Velas** property. They also offer wellness workshops inspired by local Mexican culture, a Wellness Wednesday program and shamanic healing spa treatments.

MUST-HAVES? Survey says that your clients are seeking this while on a wellness vacation...



- Spa treatments 33%
- Range of fitness activities ... 27%
- Yoga & similar activities .. 17%
- Healthy food options 13%

Many of the experts we spoke with for this report are members of the Wellness Tourism Organization, which partnered with Recommend to create the Wellness Travel Trends Survey, and the Tips on Selling Wellness Travel Webinar.



When you're named the "Happiest, Healthiest City in the U.S." four years in a row by the Gallup-Sharecare State of American Well-Being, it's clear that you've made wellness a priority. As a Blue Zones Project Community, Florida's Paradise Coast is committed to improving the wellbeing of both residents and visitors alike. That's why Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades is the perfect destination for travelers who want to incorporate wellness, eco-friendly activities and healthy options into their vacation plans.

The Naples, Marco Island and Everglades area features many opportunities for visitors to embrace our wellness lifestyle. Many of our stunning resorts and hotels are dedicated to using green and eco-friendly practices. Guests who dine in our world-class restaurants will find a variety of healthy menu choices, many of which feature fresh, sustainable seafood, farm-to-table produce and local ingredients. There are ample adventures and eco-tours for active-minded families and travelers to enjoy, such as hiking the world-famous Everglades or kayaking the Ten Thousand Islands. If our guests prefer to focus on relaxation, they can unwind in a luxurious spa, find their center with yoga on the beach, or simply soak up some healthy vitamin D in the warm Florida sunshine.

On Florida's Paradise Coast, we believe that wellness isn't just the latest trend—it's a way of life. Explore the natural beauty and discover the Wellness Paradise of Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades. Learn more at [ParadiseCoast.com/wellness](https://www.paradisecoast.com/wellness).

URLs and Social Media:

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