

Wellness Travel Trends in a New Travel Landscape




NAPLES • MARCO ISLAND
EVERGLADES
FLORIDA'S PARADISE COAST


Wellness Tourism
Association.



Wellness travel—in light of COVID-19, why humans travel for wellness has changed in the past few months. Yes, wellness retreats, yoga classes, fitness regimens, spa days, inner self-discovery... those are all still part of a wellness vacation, but today's traveler is also looking for the health and safety protocols that destinations, hotels, cruise lines and other suppliers have put in place, and they are seeking places that allow them to social distance safely (think off the beaten path).

In a COVID-19 world, wellness travel has been turned on its head—as Anne Dimon, president of the **Wellness Tourism Association (WTA)**, notes, “much in part to the global pandemic, health and wellness has never been more at the forefront of our everyday lives. Each and every one of us is placing a greater importance on our own personal health and safety. For many, the concept of personal health thru proactive self-care has become, and will continue to be, a new core value in our lives. And, many will want to carry this new priority along with them as the industry begins its slow and steady journey to recovery.”

In this report, we'll touch on how COVID-19 has changed the wellness travel segment, but we'll also talk about wellness travel trends in general—from the demographics you should be focusing on to the most popular forms of wellness vacations. For this **Wellness Travel Trends in a New Travel Landscape Report**—a complement to the Wellness Travel Trends 2020 Survey conducted on [recommend.com](#), as well as [How to Navigate Wellness Travel Webinar](#)—we reached out to experts—wellness practitioners, destinations, tour operators and river cruise lines—in the wellness travel segment to gain insight into what wellness travelers want and to help you better sell to this market.

A SHIFT IN THIS NEW LANDSCAPE



Pete Sanders, who works with the **Sedona Metaphysical Spiritual Association** and founder of **Free Soul Mind/Body Education**, says that today, “people are looking for spacious & nature-intensive locations to visit vs. a great indoor spa. They want open spaces, rooms with views and easy entrance and exits so they can relax and renew without having to move/interact with others, and they want outdoor/nature activities—always a factor for Sedona, but even more now.” Amanda Dunning, brand partnership manager for **G Adventures**, adds that, “The desire (and need!) for this type of mindful experience, given the world we’re living in this year, has grown exponentially, and we’ve found that it is exactly these kinds of experiences that people are dreaming of right now. If anything, the shift is more about directly addressing a very specific need that connects all of us

right now, which is how to recharge and nourish the body and mind.

“Many travelers who thought they might be planning a family trip or active trip this summer or fall are now fantasizing about a wellness vacation. Since we’ve been spending so much time cooped up in our homes, the opportunity to shut off from all of the noise, distractions and screens is a much-needed retreat. It’s still growing quite a bit, even during COVID-19, 21 percent year-over-year.”

Dunning says that travelers are moving away from perceiving wellness travel as only a yoga retreat, noting that although it’s definitely a part of it, today, wellness travel also means unwinding in beautiful locations.

Jackie Roby, a wellness practitioner and chief excellence officer for **Inspired Journey Consulting**, points out that in today’s

new travel landscape, “there’s more talk about touch-free services like sound healing and energy work. People want to be in nature with wide, open spaces. Lastly, small hotels are in style because of less people. There are all shifts from the pandemic. Things like detox retreats will continue to be popular as people will want to reset after being inside and feeling out of control.”

It seems that all of the experts we spoke with point to the great outdoors as the main

“Wellness travel is front and center in today’s new landscape. The biggest shift has been in awareness and desire. With being forced inside, humanity has also been forced to be with their own thoughts. We have had the time to slow down and perhaps recognize more of what our bodies, minds, and souls need. With the desire to travel that is bottling up, there is a natural craving for wellness to enhance our lives.”

Jackie Roby, Chief Excellence Officer, Inspired Journey Consulting

A Surge in Wellness Vacations?

Almost 60% of respondents believe that it’s **LIKELY** or **VERY LIKELY** that wellness vacations will surge due to COVID-19





focus for today's wellness traveler—for obvious reasons as it's a reliable way to practice social distancing, but it also allows travelers an escape from the "lockdowns" that have become part of the New Normal due to COVID-19. "Travelers," says Pam Hoffee, managing director for **Avalon Waterways**, "have always enjoyed the great outdoors and getting in touch with wilderness. Since COVID, that sense of enjoyment is, no doubt, heightened. Thankfully, river cruises sail through quaint, countryside villages, under forested canopies and along vineyard-clad hillsides with countless opportunities to hike, walk or bike."

She notes that one of the biggest shifts in wellness travel, taking COVID-19 out of the equation, is that where once wellness vacations were defined by spa resorts or extremely active getaways, "today, wellness is a lifestyle. It's part of people's everyday lives and they want it to be a part of their vacations too—balanced with immersive, authentic exploration, healthy foods and fun."

Balance that, says Dario Flota, director of **Quintana Roo Tourism Board**, with safety and stringent sanitary measures, which is especially true when it comes to wellness travel. "This segment," he says, "desires holistic experiences and total peace of mind. We are seeing an informed traveler who is doing more in-depth research and is booking services and experiences before arriving at the destination; and travelers now are looking to decompress from the stress and isolation experienced during the last months and want to relax and enjoy nature, whilst feeling taken care of with the highest standards of health and safety."

Essential Must-Haves in New Travel Landscape

1. A range of fitness activities
2. Spa treatments
3. Remote location
4. Yoga & similar activities/easy access to nature
5. Healthy food options
6. Peace & quiet



Early 2021

That's when **66%** of respondents say their wellness clients will be ready to travel again, with **23%** pointing to fall or the holidays





TRAVELER'S EXPECTATIONS

DAVID MARCUM UNsplash

It's wellness travel on steroids in this new world—seeking even out more off-the-beaten-path experiences, activities that make you physically healthy in order to be able to attempt to combat COVID-19, and a sense of mental wellbeing so that one can overcome the anxiety that might've set in as we face this pandemic.

In fact, says Quintana Roo's Flota, "Travelers are looking for completely immersive wellness, whereby the wellness aspect of a property or tour is not just relegated to a spa, rather wellness is considered in every aspect of the experience. From the lobby to dining to in-room amenities, travelers are seeking brands that

imagine wellness as a full concept."

Adds Sedona's Sanders, travelers want to be able to "easily social distance, and safely travel around once they get to their destination."

Inspired Journey Consulting's Roby does point out, however, that overall wellness means something different to everyone. "Some may focus on fitness while others look for something more spiritual. What I think will be interesting is determining the expectations for the variety of travelers likely to travel for the first time. Wellness tourism businesses can pivot messaging to assist with attracting a new audience."

"Travelers want a safe destination to come to and they want to be assured that the various businesses in our community are taking the necessary precautions to deliver that safe experience."

Jack Wert, Executive Director, Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention & Visitors Bureau

Demographics

Survey respondents point to people between **ages 46 to 55** most gravitating toward wellness vacations, with those aged 35 to 45, as well as 55 to 63 following closely behind. In other words—that's a huge chunk of your clients ready to go on a wellness vacation





TRAVEL ADVISORS— SELLING THIS NICHE

“Listen to your clients and ask the right questions” is one of the many tips WTA’s Dimon offers travel advisors. She goes on to note that “clients might not even realize that they are looking for wellness. But if you listen carefully to what they are telling you, their words might give you a few clues. Comments that include phrases such as ‘stressed out,’ ‘needing time for self,’ ‘looking for ways to reboot’ might signal that they are prime candidates for a wellness-focused trip.”

In fact, says G Adventures’ Dunning, “This market is growing, and there is a lot of appetite for support in arranging the overall experience. Wellness can be the focus of a trip, or just a smaller component, so an advisor can

make sure that travelers are getting the right mix for their specific wants/needs.” Inspired Journey Consulting’s Roby adds that travel advisors need to understand that the “wellness traveler spends 130 times more than the average leisure tourist. For an industry that works on commission, wellness travel is a win.” And with COVID-19, what’s already been a lucrative market will see even more of an “increase in both offer and demand,” Quintana Roo’s Flota notes, because, as Sedona Metaphysical Spiritual Association’s Sanders says, “the pandemic has created tremendous (sustained) anxiety that people desperately want to feel relief from, to renew their sense of calm, ease vs. disease.”

“Be familiar with the latest trends and new developments in the industry. Pre-pandemic, a few of the top travel trends, according to WTA members, were “solo travel,” “longer stays” (up to several weeks in some cases), “mental health-focused retreats” and “demand for specific solution” (include weight loss and stress management). While we do not know exactly what trends and developments will establish themselves as the industry begins to recover, many are predicting a gravitation toward less-congested regions of the world with easy access to nature.”

**Anne Dimon, President,
Wellness Tourism Association**

To read Anne Dimon’s “7 Tools for Selling Wellness Vacations,” [click here.](#)

POINT YOUR CLIENTS TO GREAT WELLNESS EXPERIENCES



So, what do some destinations, tour operators and cruise lines offer when it comes to wellness?

For those set to explore the world once they feel comfortable to do so, G Adventures, Dunning notes, “has a line of Wellness tours all over the world—from quintessential wellness destinations like India to more unique and adventurous ones like Peru and Iceland. What’s special about them is they are truly designed to foster wellness, through three main pillars—mindfulness, movement and nourishment. And each trip is true to the location, incorporating local traditions, cuisine and lots of interaction with local communities. Each tour starts with an intention-setting ceremony, opportunities for yoga, and delicious,

healthy food—all with an upgraded service level.”

Allowing the local culture to spill into a wellness vacation is nourishment for the soul, and especially important in today’s world. Quintana Roo’s Flota points out that “owing to our Mayan history, wellness is at the very core of Mexican Caribbean culture through the traditions that remain strong in the destinations today. Whether in a luxury hotel spa or the middle of the jungle, visitors can experience authentic Mayan wellness rituals throughout the region.

“A major wellness site is Maya Ka’an, a protected area of Mayan communities just two hours from Cancun. Travelers here enjoy ancient wellness activities such as medicinal

arts, temazcal (Mayan sweat lodge), healing ceremonies, traditional medicine using herbal plants, nature paths and more.

“We’re seeing the rise of dedicated properties like **Palmaia The House of AIA Riviera Maya**, a sustainable wellness resort based on sacred practices. The resort offers locally sourced plant-based cuisine, an in-house shaman, extensive spa treatments including ayurvedic methods, a steam room, and other unique amenities. Another dedicated wellness property is **SHA Wellness Clinic**, set to debut in Playa Mujeres in 2021. The clinic’s SHA method blends natural therapies and therapeutic nutrition with a focus on preventative medicine, genetics and anti-aging. The decor and setting of the clinic will also incorporate local, organic materials and a natural structure.”

Sedona, meanwhile, in our own backyard, offers “a vast area of outdoor options—hikes; vortex meditation sites; mountain biking; wellness enhancing scenery—green year-round with vast blue-sky ➤

Most Popular Wellness-focused Retreats

The 2 most popular according to our survey respondents: Small groups such as a **girls’ getaways** & **Visiting Masters**—teachers, therapists, healers in different areas of wellbeing who lead workshops



vistas,” notes Sedona Metaphysical Spiritual Association’s Sanders.

For those who seek out the water-based vistas, Avalon Waterways, says Hoffee, is an ideal option. The river cruise line features an *Adventure Host* on each of its ships to lead fitness classes on board. The *Adventure Host* is also available to guide and assist guests with active experiences ashore like hikes, jogging trails, and scenic bike rides.

“We have also added *Active* excursions,” notes Hoffee, “to all of our sailings, giving travelers the opportunity to hike, bike or even kayak their way through a plethora of European destinations. Taking that concept of ‘active’ a giant step further, we also offer travelers *Active & Discovery* itineraries on the rivers

of Europe, inviting them to choose from *Classic*, *Active* or *Discovery* excursions every day, ensuring the pace of the vacation fits each and every traveler’s needs and interests. In Budapest, for instance, travelers can take a cave hike under the city. In Visegrad, they can hike to the top of Dracula’s castle. On one of our *Active & Discovery* cruises, travelers can even kayak through the Wachau Valley or bike the Netherlands’ countryside, outside Amsterdam.”

And whatever the option your clients want, post-COVID, wellness, as these experts have said, will not only remain high on the desire list, but will become even more popular, because, as Roby says, “Wellness travel is front and center in today’s new landscape. The biggest shift has been

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Overall, say survey respondents, clients booking a wellness vacation do so:

- To get a few stress-free days
 - For a general, overall reboot
 - Yoga & meditation
-

in awareness and desire. With being forced inside, humanity has also been forced to be with their own thoughts. We have had the time to slow down and perhaps recognize more of what our bodies, minds, and souls need. With the desire to travel that is bottling up, there is a natural craving for wellness to enhance our lives.”

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Most Popular Accommodation Types?

Near the **ocean** & one with easy access to many **outdoor activities**





Visitors to Florida's Paradise Coast enjoy plentiful opportunities for wellness throughout Naples, Marco Island and the Everglades. From restorative yoga sessions on the beach to on-site spas at several area hotels and resorts, it's never been easier for travelers to incorporate wellness, eco-friendly activities and healthy options into their vacation plans.

This is thanks in part to the Blue Zones Project, a community-wide wellbeing initiative that makes it easier to make healthy choices. (And happy and healthy is what we're all about, having topped the Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index for four years in a row.) When visitors arrive in Paradise, they see the Blue Zones effect all around. It's in better-for-you menu options at restaurants, which feature fresh, sustainable seafood, farm-to-table produce and local ingredients. It's in the 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. And it's in the innovative cooking classes hosted by some of the area's top chefs, which allow visitors to take their own place in the kitchen. It all makes the Paradise Coast a healthier, happier place to relax, refresh and explore!

On Florida's Paradise Coast, we believe that wellness isn't just the latest trend; it's a way of life. Discover health- and fitness-oriented events, eco-friendly hotels and more at paradisecoast.com/wellness.

URLs and Social Media:

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