

WELLNESS TOURISM IN 4 AND 5 STARS ACCOMMODATION UNITS IN ROMANIA

PhD Student **Claudia CIOBANU (BITEA)**

Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, West University of Timișoara, Romania
claudy_ciobanu@yahoo.com

Abstract:

The wellness tourism is a branch of the tourism industry that is getting more and more developed. People's demand for well-being directly affects the demand for wellness products and services. The concept for wellness is more and more frequently met worldwide. Still, this concept is differently understood even by people who work in this industry. The entire concept of wellness is discussed worldwide and people try to establish a definition upon it. One of the research methods used is the theoretical one: We analyzed the concept of wellness and synthesized the important aspects of the concept. The other research method used is a quality method, case study: We analyzed the 4 and 5 stars accommodation units in Romania and established the level of development of their wellness products and services.

Key words: wellness; tourism; tourism products; tourism service; management;

JEL classification: Z32

1. INTRODUCTION

The healthy lifestyle began to have an increasingly importance for many individuals. A nice look, a good general health and a lifestyle that includes sport represent some of the individuals' wishes that lead to certain specific behaviours. This healthy behaviour typology can be frequently encountered in developed societies and reflects equilibrium and personal harmony. The need of wellbeing is becoming more and more spread and stimulates the individuals' demand for healthy products and for wellness products. These demands accompany the individuals in their everyday life: at home, at work, in their free time, on holidays and so on. A mix between health, wellness and tourism lead in a natural way to relaxation, exploration, socialisation, an increased self-esteem, or, in other words, to a general state of wellbeing. All the above, and not only, have a significant contribution to the developing of the wellness tourism.

The wellness industry has developed in the last few years all over the world. It provides both products and services for local and international tourists. These services are provided, among others, by spas, fitness organizations, wellness centres, holistic centers and so on.

The management of the demand for wellness products and services represent a real challenge for businessman, shareholders and managers. The industry of the wellness tourism must identify the characteristics of these demands. The managers must adapt permanently to the fluctuations of the clients' demand and needs that are constantly changing. They have to adapt to the market demands and have to come up with new and innovative wellness products and services according to the clients' needs. The main purpose of this article is to bring some clarifications upon the entire concept of wellness and to establish the level to which wellness products and services are offered by 4 and 5 stars accommodation units in Romania.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

At a first approach the distinction and the defining of the terms "medical tourism" and "wellness tourism" seems quite difficult. Due to this fact the organizations from the tourism industry easily mix them. At a rudimentary level one can say that medical tourism is practiced by people who suffer of a physical disease, whereas the wellness tourism is practiced by people who

are healthy, physically speaking. But, if we go beyond this simplistic explanation, we can easily observe that this distinction of the two terms is not enough and that applicability is quite large.

Besides this, even these simplistic definitions may cause debates. For example, if a healthy person travels for a preventively medical visit, what kind of tourism is involved: wellness tourism or medical tourism? Or, if a person that suffers of arthritis or another alike disease and travels in order to attend a meditation class in order to improve its health, what kind of tourism does he/she practice? Another example is that of a healthy tourist that travels for a plastic surgery, that person practices wellness tourism or medical tourism? And the examples can continue.

The members of the spa industry and of the hospitality industry are familiar with the problem of defining these two terms. Both in terms of the spa industry and the hospitality industry, as well as medicine and other alike fields, the clear distinction between the two terms is extremely useful and necessary.

In terms of scientific research, the wellness tourism is frequently linked to the medical tourism, or even to a more ambiguous concept, the health tourism. The wellness tourism is a much more newer concept than the medical tourism. Due to this fact it is quite difficult to indicate the exact sources that define the concept of wellness by itself. The scientific literature shows that the definitions cover a large range, from linking almost exclusively the wellness tourism with the spa sector to linking the wellness tourism with a variety of tourist products such as holistic healing, spirituality, sports/fitness, ecotourism and so on.

There is no global authority that can define the two terms. Until now, the businessman, the shareholders and different organizations launched some definitions for both the medical tourism and wellness tourism.

The Medical Tourism Association is one of the most well-known international organizations that represent medical tourism. From their perspective, “medical tourism is where people who live in one country travel to another country to receive medical, dental and surgical care while at the same time receiving equal to or greater care than they would have in their own country, and are traveling for medical care because of affordability, better access to care or a higher level of quality of care. Domestic Medical Tourism is where people who live in one country travel to another city, region or state to receive medical, dental and surgical care while at the same time receiving equal to or greater care than they would have in their own home city, and are traveling for medical care because of affordability, better access to care or a higher level of quality of care”.

Unlike the medical tourism, for the wellness tourism there is no such an organization like the Medical Tourism Association. Due to this fact there are no definitions available at an international level. At a primary translation, the word “wellness” refers to the general state of wellbeing, seen as a whole. Nevertheless, in order to understand and to define the wellness tourism, we must understand and define the concept of wellness. “Wellness” is a relatively new concept that has been used more frequently during the last two decades. It is assumed that the term has been introduced in the modern era by Dr. Halbert Dunn, between the years 1950-1960. As mentioned above, there are no key definition for this term. Below, there is presented a synthesis (table no.1) regarding the approaches and definitions of the wellness concept over the years.

Table no. 1. Synthesis of the approaches of the wellness concept

No.	Sources	Approaches
1	World Health Organization	“Health is a state that refers to the mental, physical and social well-being, and not only to the absence of any type of disease.” (definition adopted in 1948)
2	National Wellness Institute (founded in 1977)	“Wellness refers to the active process that helps people become aware of, and make choices toward a more successful existence.”
3	Mueller H., Kaufmann E.L., (2001)	“Wellness tourism sums up the relationships and phenomena that result from a trip taken by people whose main motive is to preserve or promote their health. They stay in a specialized hotel which provides the appropriate professional knowhow and individual care. They require a comprehensive service package comprising physical fitness/beauty care, healthy nutrition/diet, relaxation/meditation and mental activity/education.”
4	Smith M., Kelly C. (2006)	“In order for an experience to be qualified as a contemporary wellness tourism experience some deliberate contribution has to be made to psychological, spiritual or emotional well-being in addition to physical. This takes wellness tourism from the realm of being merely a passive form of tourism with a focus on escapism to one where tourists are purposefully driven by the desire to actively seek enhanced wellness.”
5	Jagyasi P. (2006)	“The wellness tourism refers to the process of a traveler that seeks a journey specifically in order to improve or promote their health and wellbeing. The tourist will stay in a certain place where he will be offered different health-promoting physical activities, relaxation methods and nutritious food in a comprehensive package.”
6	Smith M., Puczko L. (2009)	“The tourism industry needs a segmentation of the wellness market, a differentiation of products into several sub-segments of the wellness tourism: spa tourism, thalasso tourism, holistic tourism, yoga and meditation tourism, spiritual tourism.”
7	Travel to Wellness Magazine	“Wellness is about traveling in order to achieve, promote or maintain maximum health and a sense of well-being. A wellness journey may include spa treatments, healthy eating, outdoor activities (hiking, cycling, mindful walking, yoga, paddling and cross-country skiing or snowshoeing), inspirational outings and adventures that clear or expend the mind, and educational programs that teach us how to incorporate healthy habits into our everyday lives.”
8	Global Spa Summit (2011)	“Wellness tourism involves people who travel to a different place to proactively pursue activities that maintain or enhance their personal health and wellbeing, and who are seeking unique, authentic or location-based experiences/therapies not available at home. A wellness tourist generally seeks integrated wellness and prevention approaches to improve their health/quality of life.”

Source: Personal approach, 2016

From the table above can be observed how the perspective on the concept of wellness and on the wellness tourism suffered different changes in time. The definition of health adopted by WHO in 1948 refers to the main principles of wellness and exceeds the physical state of health (the absence of disease) and focuses on the general state of wellbeing. According to them, the general state of wellbeing includes both mental and social dimensions. Starting here, the up to date wellness organizations adopted a specific management for this particular type of industry, a management based on new, innovative and personalized products and services for specific clients opened to innovation.

Starting from the numerous definitions of the concept of wellness, Global Spa Summit (2010) found some common features of this concept:

- Wellness is multi-dimensional;
- Wellness is holistic;

- Wellness constantly changes over time;
- Wellness is both individual and influenced by the environment;
- Wellness is a self-responsability; (Global Spa Summit, SRI International, 2010, p.18)

4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

In Romania the wellness tourism is only starting to develop. In order to establish the Romanian wellness tourism's level of development, the scientific research has been done as follows:

The research method used is a quality method – a short descriptive case study. The research segment consists of 4 and 5 stars accommodations from Romania. The data were collected from the database of the National Agency for Tourism (ANT) in June 2016. After collecting the data, each accommodation unit was checked in order to find out whether it offered wellness products and services or not. The accommodation units were checked in October-November 2016. For the ones that offered wellness products and services, the following classification has been done:

- Developed level
- Medium level
- Slightly developed level

The testing of each accommodation unit has been done by checking their web site or by phone.

Finally, the information was synthesized and graphics and tables were made. The graphics and tables are descriptive, since this is a descriptive case study. They show the number/percent of the accommodation units that provide wellness services and at what level of development they provide them. The graphics and tables show the level of development of the wellness tourism in Romania among the 4 and 5 stars accommodation units.

The total number of 4 stars accommodation units from Romania is 715 (table no. 2). 456 do not offer wellness services, 98 offer some wellness services at a lower level, 42 offer such services at a medium level and 119 offer wellness products and services at a developed level.

Table no. 2. Level of Wellness in 4* Accommodation Units

Wellness 4 * Accommodation Units		
Wellness	Accomodation unit	%
Developed	119	16.64%
Medium	42	5.87%
Slightly developed	98	13.71%
No	456	63.78%
Total	715	100.00%

Source: Personal approach, 2016

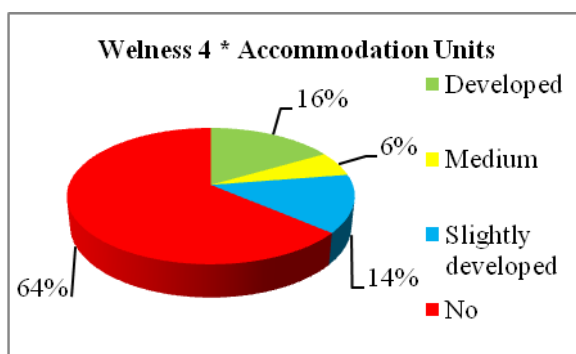


Figure no. 1 – Level of Wellness in 4* Accommodation Units

Source: Personal approach, 2016

Above (figure no.1) there is presented the percentage distribution of the 4 stars accommodation units in Romania. 64% of them do not offer wellness services, 14% offer some wellness services at a lower level, 6% offer such services at a medium level and 16% offer wellness products and services at a developed level.

The total number of 5 stars accommodation units in Romania is 127 (table no.3). 24 do not offer wellness services, 6 offer some wellness services at a lower level, 23 offer such services at a medium level and 74 offer wellness products and services at a developed level.

Table no.3. Level of Wellness in 5* Accommodation Units

Wellness 5 * Accomodation Units		
Wellness	Accommodation unit	%
Developed	74	58.27%
Medium	23	18.11%
Slightly developed	6	4.72%
No	24	18.90%
Total	127	100.00%

Source: Personal approach, 2016

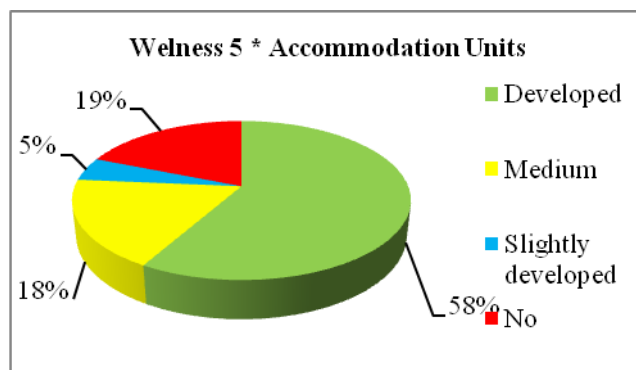


Figure no. 2 – Level of Wellness in 5* Accommodation Units

Source: Personal approach, 2016

Above, (figure no. 2) it is presented the percentage distribution of 5* accommodation units in Romania. 19% do not offer wellness services, 5% offer some wellness services at a lower level, 18% offer such services at a medium level and 58% offer wellness products and services at a developed level.

So, it can be noticed that although in Romania the wellness tourism is only at its start, 36% of the 4 stars accommodation units and 81% of the 5 stars accommodation units provide wellness services at different development levels.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After studying the international literature related to the wellness tourism and elaborating this descriptive case study, the following results emerged:

As mentioned above, starting from the literature review, there has been done a subjective classification of the 4 and 5 stars accommodation units that offer wellness services, as follows:

Developed level – the accommodation units that offer complex and diversified wellness products and services adapted the clients' needs (complex and personalized products and services like holistic treatments, different types of massages, sauna, fitness, relaxation methods, meditation, courses etc);

Medium level – accommodation units that offer some wellness products and services (offer at

least 3-4 wellness services);

Slightly developed level – accommodation units that offer only a few wellness products and services (at least 2 such services);

The total number of 4 and 5 stars accommodation units in Romania is 842 (table no. 4). 480 do not offer wellness products and services, 104 offer some wellness services at a lower standard, 65 offer medium lever services and 193 offer wellness products and services at a developed level.

Table no. 4. Level of Wellness in Romania

Level of wellness in Romania		
Wellness	Accommodation unit	%
Developed	193	22.92%
Medium	65	7.72%
Slightly developed	104	12.35%
No	480	57.01%
Total	842	100.00%

Source: Personal Approach, 2016

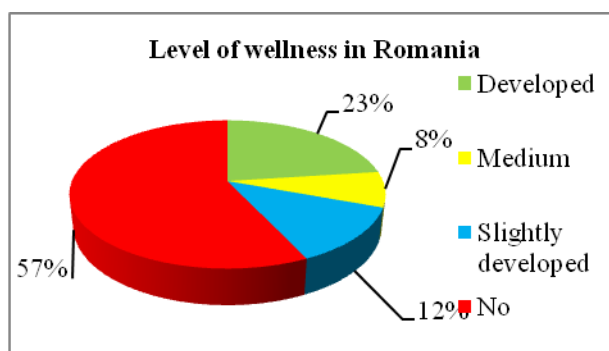


Figure no. 3 – Level of Wellness in Romania

Source: Personal approach, 2016

Above (figure no.3), there is presented the percentage distribution of the 4 and 5 stars accommodation units in Romania. 57% do not offer wellness services, 12% offer some wellness services at a lower level, 8% offer such services at a medium level and 23% offer wellness products and services at a developed level.

Overall, it can be observed that in 4 and 5 stars accommodation units in Romania, 33% offer wellness services. This means that top managers start paying more and more attention to this field of tourism, the wellness tourism.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In Romania the wellness tourism is only at the beginning. It can be observed from the graphics and tables above that, at a national level, the wellness tourism is just starting to develop. More than half of the 4 and 5 stars accommodation units do not offer wellness products and services. Still, almost a quarter of them offer such products and services at a developed level.

This fact shows that the managers of these accommodation units have a more clear vision upon the concept of wellness and want to develop this concept in the accommodation units they are running. It can be also observed that the accommodation units with a higher number of stars offer more developed wellness products and services, at a higher level.

The main difference between the accommodation units that offer common wellness services and the ones that offer complex ones, does not depend only on the offered facilities, but rather on the entire concept of wellness, implicitly on the management of the entire accommodation unit. An

accommodation unit that has a more clear vision upon wellness and that has identified the profile of its customers has big chances of making the business a real success.

The organizations from the tourism industry must permanently anticipate and analyze the market trends. Starting from these analyzes they must always come up with new products adapted to the market demands. One of the main roles of the managers is to decide when, how and what kind of innovation to implement.

For future research, it would be interesting to see how many of the total number of accommodation units in Romania (not only 4 and 5 stars), offer wellness services and the level of development they provide them. It would be also interesting to see what is the level of development of the wellness tourism in different Regions of Romania, and not only overall.

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