

As interest and investment in health-focused holidays continues to develop across the globe, we explore the evolving face of well-being travel and its business potential

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In 2024, the global wellness industry is worth some seriously big bucks. Its value has been steadily rising over the past five years. In 2019, it was valued at US\$4.9 trillion – and although the widespread economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic saw this drop to \$4.5 trillion, by 2022 it was back and stronger than ever before, at US\$5.6 trillion. This figure is expected to grow at a rate of around 12 per cent per year, reaching an estimated US\$8.47 trillion by 2027.

According to a report published alongside the 2023 Global Wellness Economy Monitor from the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), the largest wellness markets across the world include the USA, China, Germany, Japan, and the UK. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA), too, have done well in this arena – the region already ranked first in terms of spa revenue growth as far back as seven

to nine years ago, with a 30 per cent year-on-year expansion, and with the wellness real estate and workplace wellness markets also experiencing healthy growth. According to the GWI's Global Wellness Economy: Country Rankings, the MENA region was also a leader among those that have "shown the strongest resilience, recovery, and growth in their wellness economies since before the start of the pandemic", with its recent growth reported at 119 per cent. The projected annual growth rate for the MENA region's wellness market is currently higher than the world average – at 14.7 per cent, estimated at more than US\$108 billion.

This year, McKinsey's annual Future of Wellness survey examined the trends shaping the consumer wellness landscape, with a view towards discovering the areas that are "especially ripe for innovation and investment activity". Among its findings, Gen Z and millennials were

found to be more keen to purchase wellness-related products and services than older generations. While this speaks to a relatively large age range – roughly 12 to 27 years old, and 28 to 42 years old, respectively – when you consider that millennials are now entering their prime spending years, and Gen Z's spending power continues to grow (it's even touted as being the highest spending power among generational groups), it's a trend too important to ignore.

Perhaps even more powerful is the fact that in the current day, an increasing number of consumers are aware of, and interested in, the fact that true wellness encompasses more than just hitting the gym and eating more salads. Rather, it is, at its best, a 360-degree approach to one's well-being – wherein an optimal state of existence can be achieved by exploring the most holistic, feel-good-inducing, and sustainable approach towards our physical, mental, and emotional health.



As a result, wellness offerings have seeped into every market you could possibly imagine, through elements of fitness, nutrition, weight management, sleep, breathwork, and other forms of rest and recovery. You'll see aspects of it in corporate life (such as through various "wellness at work" schemes), real estate, hospitality, travel and tourism, appearance-related services, and plenty more. Simply put, whether you're looking at a lifestyle brand, or a trade name that's trying to centre its branding around the lifestyle affiliated with those who purchase its offerings, it's almost impossible to escape.

And this isn't necessarily a bad thing. Key factors that consumers are looking for in these products and services include their efficacy and scientific credibility, with technology-assisted devices (including wearables, biohacking tools, and other wellness-focused gadgets), premium offerings that promote healthy ageing and greater longevity, in-person fitness and related well-being activities, and sleep being among the most highly sought-after trends – all of which are being cleverly incorporated into various parts of the travel industry.

Want meditation content on flights? Airlines including Emirates, British Airways, JetBlue, United Airlines, Qatar Airways, Virgin Atlantic, and Delta Air Lines all offer some form of it to promote a more relaxing and mindful in-flight experience. Seeking wellness-focused hotel rooms themed around everything from fitness to sleep? They exist everywhere from New York and Los Angeles to London, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, and across Europe. In fact, many properties have expanded their existing services by offering dedicated wellness retreats, and a range of properties have opened up that have literally been designed and conceptualised with wellness in mind.

One such property is Clinic Les Alpes. Known as the world's best luxury rehab centre and mental health clinic, places like this are redefining the concept of what it means to travel for wellness. Now, heading somewhere for rehab or to deal with our mental health doesn't need to be perceived as shameful as it might once have been in the past. When it's in a stunning, bespoke (and medically-licensed) five-star facility in the French Alps, it can actually be seen as more of a badge of honour for some,



where booking in a visit signifies the courage and commitment to put one's self-care first, and "be our best self".

"Health is not merely the absence of disease, but a complex interplay of various factors that can deeply impact our quality of life. To be 'well' and to be 'free of illness' are not strictly the same thing, which thereby necessitates an ongoing awareness and maintenance of well-being in every individual. This is not only beneficial for the individual in terms of maintaining emotional resilience, managing performance or productivity, and preventing many lifestyle diseases. Active care of the self ripples out to have wider impacts on our communities. We have the power to contribute to reduction of stigma, community health, →

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Clinic Les Alpes is a luxury rehabilitation and wellness centre in the French Alps; A swimming pool at Clinic Les Alpes; A calming room at Clinic Les Alpes

OPPOSITE PAGE: A young woman relaxes in an outdoor infinity swimming pool

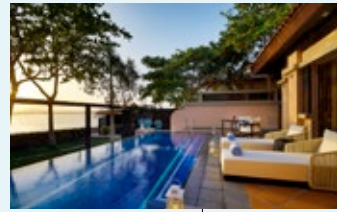
Destination: Wellness



NEED A SELF-CARE SOJOURN? HERE ARE SOME OPTIONS IN THE REGION

Anantara The Palm

The overwater villas will already give you a deep sense of tranquility, but that's not all: the Anantara Spa at this Dubai property also has a jaw-dropping list of treatments, from a holistic cocoon room and Ayurveda room to both Turkish and Moroccan hammam facilities, a crystal and gemstone steam room, magnesium and marine wellness treatments, and relaxing CBD-infused body rituals.



can enjoy a full range of luxury spa treatments, in indoor or outdoor cabins. If you prefer to take your workouts beyond their cutting-edge gym, you can snorkel around the reef and the Ayqah

Pinnacles, dive the Umlujj wreck, or try a large range of eco-safe watersports, from sailing and kayaking to eboarding, wingfoiling, and more.

Our Habitas AIUla

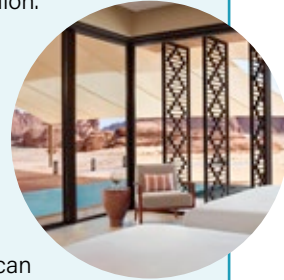
From sunrise yoga sessions to physiotherapy from the in-house expert, or the chance to go horse-riding, hiking, or biking around the nearby valley, this entire resort is an



and movement room, pilates studio, yoga studio, cycling studio, squash court, TRX area, and waterfront yoga and meditation pavilion.

Banyan Tree AIUla

Banyan Tree resorts are known for their dedication to wellness, and this property in AIUla's Ashar Valley is no different. Here, you can refresh yourself in its unique Rock Pool in the mountains, after a serene treatment (or a few) in their award-winning spa. To truly immerse yourself in the destination, you can opt for one of their "in-valley" treatments, such as an outdoor massage.



Zulal Wellness Resort by Chiva-Som

This luxury full-immersion wellness resort in Qatar is Chiva-Som's first in the Middle East. It blends traditional Arabic and Islamic medicine with a modern holistic health and well-being philosophy. It's split into one adults-only and one family-friendly section, where the former is all about tranquil serenity, and the latter invites families to connect while embarking on a wellness journey together.

Zoya Health and Wellbeing Resort

This stunning resort in Ajman offers a range of mindfulness activities, along with fitness options such as personal training and aqua gym, energy-boosters such as oxygen therapy, and outdoor pursuits such as green bike trails, or the chance to kayak through its lush and majestic mangroves.



Sofitel Dubai Downtown

This elegant French hotel has an award-winning spa, with eight treatment rooms (including a couple's room), a sauna and steam room, and stunning hammam – the ideal spot for an indulgent spation.

Marriott Resort Palm Jumeirah Dubai

If you're looking for a sea-view stay where you can get fit on-the-go, look no further: this property's expansive fitness centre offers personal training, group classes, and access to their FitnessOnDemand app. Outdoors, its 7,000 sqm of private beachfront is the perfect place for a saltwater swim or an abundance of watersports, while those needing to unwind can enjoy a comprehensive "Spa-Cation" package from its Saray Spa.

The St. Regis Riyadh

Located in the diplomatic quarter of Saudi Arabia's capital, this property has the largest spa in Riyadh. Soothe your weary body in their thermal facilities, including a lush traditional sauna and herbal steam room, or indulge in an Ayurvedic treatment followed by a therapy bath or foot bath. If you're after exercise, fitness counselling services are available, as are beauty treatments, from lip treatments to mani-pedis and more.

The St. Regis Red Sea Resort

This exquisite resort is located on a pristine private island in the Ummahat archipelago – and it is also home to the largest spa in Saudi Arabia. The resort can be accessed by seaplane or speedboat, and once there, you

ode to well-being. Want more? They also offer breathwork, acupuncture, and ice bathing. One of their must-try experiences is a sound healing session, where meditative acoustic vibrations uplift your energy with deep healing.

Six Senses Kaplankaya

This luxury resort near Bodrum, Türkiye, is created for a fully-immersive wellness experience. The flagship spa boasts expert-led picks you won't find anywhere else, including an Alchemy bar, unique hydrothermal areas, a Watsu pool, stunning hammams, a meditation cave, beauty salon, biohacking, wellness screenings, a "sleep upgrade" and more, all available with personalised programmes led by reputed experts and in-house plus visiting practitioners. Its state-of-the-art fitness and sports facilities include a cardio studio, weight

and positive social relationships," says Brittany Hunt, Clinic les Alpes' Head of Quality, Innovation, and Research Department.

"In my opinion, today, in our fast-lane, post-postmodern, cybercultural world, we are forgetting our health in general; health that is defined by the World Health Organization as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. The vertiginous advance of technology has induced in humanity a mind-body disarticulation for the average person because of the disappearance of the need to make a physical effort to survive – or at least have the basic elements in Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid. The resulting sedentarism and paradoxical social isolation and anxiety stemming from social media is what has separated us from each other as well as from ourselves. Being aware of this impact, – for example, by simply lowering your screen time and going to the gym, from as early an age as possible – can better the quality of one's life, especially when the passage of time makes recuperation capacities and resilience less performant," explains Dr. Randolph Willis, Clinic Les Alpes' Medical Director and Psychiatrist.

Hunt believes that the global cultural shift towards more experiential travel – another trend that has been linked to the tastes of millennials and Gen Z's spending preferences – has been one significant factor. "As individuals have been generally struggling to fight back against over-consumerism, there has been a shift in expectations for tourism to represent meaningful experiences, as opposed to traditional sight-seeing or souvenir accumulation. This has prompted the tourism industry to diversify offerings to include wellness elements as a core part of the travel experience, creating travel experiences that have long term positive impacts on an individual that go further than photos can capture," she says.

This trend, combined with the ever-growing inclination for personalisation and more bespoke experiences – not to mention the growing desire for more nature-aligned and environmentally-



friendly experiences – can lead to some very lucrative opportunities for companies in the hospitality and travel industries that are willing to cater to these needs. However, it is important that such offerings are carried out with authenticity and genuine care. This is not simply because consumers are looking for those well-researched and science-backed options that will send them home with real and tangible results, but also because it is more ethically-sound – an extremely important factor when working with people's health, in any capacity.

"It is not simply enough to reduce symptoms in a person's life, or even to reduce their suffering, but [rather, we must] give them the skills, knowledge, and confidence to make health-promoting choices in all domains of their life," Hunt says, explaining that her approach champions empowering people in their mental, physical, social, and spiritual health. She is not only focusing on a 'cure', but a way to help guests maximise their mental health and overall quality of life. Dr. Willis agrees, adding that the goal should be "helping people find direction in life to a healthier and more spiritually deep internal and interpersonal way of existing."

Whether it is mental, physical, emotional, or spiritual health that is being explored, as the wellness tourism industry is poised to boom dramatically in the coming years – and it appears to be here to stay – it is imperative that the hospitality and wider travel industry shoulders the responsibility with as much integrity as possible. By consulting with or employing qualified experts, teaming up with genuine specialists in various fields, and keeping the customer's long-term as well as short-term gains in mind, creating offerings for every level of wellness tourism – from the curious novice to the die-hard well-being enthusiast – could not only attract consumers that are willing to spend top dollar on travelling with the goal of going home feeling better, it could keep them frequently coming back for more. To do so, however, it is important to keep on top of the science, with programmes that are ready to adapt with the latest research findings, focusing on those with trusted and tested results, and with an authentic win-win attitude in mind for the provider and guest alike.

After all, as Dr. Willis puts it, "We're only here to learn, to better ourselves mentally and physically and to share this experience with everyone else."

ABOVE: Clinic Les Alpes offers private treatment in a historic alpine chateau located above Montreux, in the Swiss Alps



MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS: EXPLAINED

In 1943, American psychologist Abraham Maslow came up with a theory that humans must fulfil a list of innate needs organised in hierarchical priority, in order to experience true well-being. From the bottom up, these include the physiological as a base (food, air, water, etc), safety, love and belonging, esteem, and one's self-actualisation.