

Bibliometric Analysis Of Wellness Tourism In Period From 2015 To 2025

ABSTRACT

Recent studies have shown a significant increase in the number of research works related to wellness tourism, reflecting the growing importance and popularity of this type of tourism, especially in the current post-COVID-19 context. In order to provide a detailed assessment of the research trends in wellness tourism, this study applied bibliometric analysis by collecting data on documents related to wellness tourism from the Scopus database over the past ten years, from 2015 to 2025. A total of 188 documents from Scopus related to wellness tourism were analyzed using VOSviewer software to better understand the trends and subjects of research in this field. Co-citation and co-keyword analyses were conducted to identify the foundational theories and research directions within the topic. The results indicate a development trend from theories related to wellness tourism and aspects of its development, towards factors concerning the experience and behavior of wellness tourists, as well as integration with other similar types of tourism such as health tourism and spa tourism. This shift reflects an increasing focus on improving the experience and satisfaction of wellness tourists.

Keywords: *Bibliometric analysis, Wellness tourism, Clusters, Scopus database.*

Phân tích trắc lượng thư mục về du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe trong giai đoạn 2015-2025

TÓM TẮT

Các nghiên cứu gần đây cho thấy sự gia tăng đáng kể về số lượng các công trình nghiên cứu liên quan đến du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe, phản ánh tầm quan trọng và sự phổ biến ngày càng tăng của loại hình du lịch này, đặc biệt là trong bối cảnh hậu COVID-19 hiện nay. Để cung cấp đánh giá chi tiết về các xu hướng nghiên cứu trong du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe, nghiên cứu này đã áp dụng phân tích trắc thư mục bằng cách thu thập dữ liệu về các tài liệu liên quan đến du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe từ cơ sở dữ liệu Scopus trong mười năm qua, từ năm 2015 đến năm 2025. Tổng cộng 188 tài liệu từ Scopus liên quan đến du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe đã được phân tích bằng phần mềm VOSviewer để hiểu rõ hơn về các xu hướng và đối tượng nghiên cứu trong lĩnh vực này. Phân tích đồng trích dẫn và đồng từ khóa đã được tiến hành để xác định các lý thuyết nền tảng và hướng nghiên cứu trong chủ đề này. Kết quả cho thấy xu hướng phát triển từ các lý thuyết liên quan đến du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe và các khía cạnh phát triển của nó, hướng tới các yếu tố liên quan đến trải nghiệm và hành vi của khách du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe, cũng như tích hợp với các loại hình du lịch tương tự khác như du lịch sức khỏe và du lịch spa. Sự thay đổi này phản ánh sự tập trung ngày càng tăng vào việc cải thiện trải nghiệm và sự hài lòng của khách du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe.

Từ khóa: *Phân tích trắc lượng thư mục, Du lịch chăm sóc sức khỏe, Các cụm, Cơ sở dữ liệu Scopus.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, wellness tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments in the global travel industry, driven by shifting consumer behaviors and increasing attention to physical, mental, and holistic well-being¹. According to Global Wellness Institute (GWI), global wellness tourism revenues have exceeded USD 800 billion and are projected to grow significantly through 2030¹. This rapid expansion highlights the need for a systematic understanding of the field's intellectual structure and development trends, for which bibliometric analysis provides a powerful methodological tool.

Wellness tourism is typically characterized by travelers seeking to enhance their overall health and quality of life through voluntary, preventive, and immersive experiences that combine leisure with wellness-oriented activities^{2,3}. Unlike medical tourism, which focuses on curative treatments, wellness tourism emphasizes proactive engagement in stress reduction, mental rejuvenation, and cultural healing practices⁴. The increasing prevalence of stress-related conditions, global aging demographics, and a paradigm shift from treatment to prevention have further fueled

academic interest in this domain⁵.

A growing body of literature has explored tourists' motivations, behavioral patterns, and experience design in wellness travel. Studies have highlighted that factors such as local cuisine, natural environments, therapeutic services, and tranquility significantly influence satisfaction and loyalty^{6,7}. Differences across market segments—by age, income, and domestic versus international travel—have also been examined to understand demand patterns. Recent research has emphasized the importance of local identity, cultural authenticity, and sustainability principles in shaping successful wellness destinations³. Furthermore, workforce development, service standardization, and the integration of tourism and health sectors have been recognized as key enablers for sustainable growth. With the advent of big data, citation network analysis, and AI, new approaches have been adopted to explore the evolution of wellness tourism scholarship⁸. Emerging trends such as digital wellness tourism—including remote wellness services, wearable health devices, and personalized AI-driven programs—have broadened the scope of the field⁹.

Despite growing interest, theoretical

consolidation in wellness tourism remains limited. Multiple conceptual models coexist, reflecting diverse disciplinary perspectives—from marketing and service management to behavioral sciences and public health¹⁰. This fragmentation poses challenges for theory building and coherence. Bibliometric methods offer an opportunity to systematically trace influential works, co-citation clusters, and theoretical underpinnings, thereby guiding future research toward more integrated frameworks^{8,11}.

In emerging destinations such as Vietnam, wellness tourism holds considerable promise due to the country's rich natural resources, traditional healing knowledge, and cultural landscapes¹². However, the academic literature in this context remains underdeveloped, with limited engagement in international scholarly dialogue. A bibliometric approach can help situate Vietnamese scholarship within the global knowledge network and provide actionable insights for policy makers and tourism planners aiming to develop the sector in alignment with sustainable development goals¹³. Given these considerations, this study employs bibliometric analysis to map the intellectual structure, thematic evolution, and research frontiers of wellness tourism. The findings aim to inform scholars, practitioners, and policymakers by identifying influential publications, emerging themes, and future research directions in this rapidly evolving field.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Wellness tourism

The term wellness tourism was first mentioned in the 1960s by Dunn¹⁴. It is regarded as a comprehensive integration of physical and mental well-being, emphasizing that optimal health is not merely the absence of illness but a harmonious state of both body and mind. Expanding on the early understanding of holistic health, Goodrich and Goodrich were among the first to formally conceptualize health tourism, defining it as the purposeful development of products and services designed to promote physical fitness and aid in rehabilitation¹⁵.

In the evolving discourse, Mueller and Kaufmann distinguished wellness tourism as a distinct subset of health tourism². They defined it as “the sum of all connections and sensations performing from a trip by people whose main provocation is to save or promote their health” through participation in **healthy physical exertion**. This conceptualization marked a shift from remedial or **disease prediction trip** toward

precautionary and holistic well-being pursuits. subsequently, the Global Wellness Institute offered a broader description, describing wellness tourism as “trip associated with the pursuit of maintaining or improving individual well-being by addressing both physical and mental aspects of health¹. Extending this, Wang et al. emphasized that wellness tourism is a life-driven choice, distinct from medical tourism in that it does not inevitably involve remedial interventions but focuses on achieving holistic well-being through exploits analogous as relaxation, exercise, and mindfulness¹⁶. Recent education further elaborates on the confines and manifestations of wellness tourism. He et al. & Grénman and Räikkönen view it as a comprehensive trip that addresses physical, cerebral, and spiritual health through exertion like spa treatments, yoga and Pilates classes, contemplation, mineral springs, and detox programs^{17,18}.

From a rest and cerebral perspective, Ren interprets wellness tourism as a form of vacation that provides a restorative terrain, fostering both health and happiness¹⁹. Also, Xie et al. argued that wellness tourism involves the integration of healthcare, tourism exertion, and environmental resources to help individualities enjoy a health-concentrated life while traveling. According to Tian and Duan, the core end of wellness tourism is to attain wellness, healthcare, and recreation, whereas Lian underscores the double nature of health preservation and rest, with specific manifestations in China analogous as hot spring tourism, timber bathing, traditional Chinese medicine retreat^{20,21,22}.

Although there remains no extensively accepted academic description of wellness tourism, the literature reflects a growing agreement that it's constitutionally concerned with enhancing individual well-being through healthacquainted trip. Whether conceptualized as a life choice, a holistic trip, or a subset of health tourism, wellness tourism emphasizes prevention, balance, and particular enrichment rather than treatment or cure. These abstract contributions not only consolidate our theoretical understanding but also give a strong foundation for future empirical studies on wellness tourism in different cultural and geographic surrounds.

2.2. Wellness Tourism and Its Conceptual Connections

Over the last twenty years, wellness tourism has emerged as a clearly defined and increasingly prominent area within the international tourism

sector. Despite its growing recognition, this form of tourism is conceptually intertwined with several other health-related travel types, such as health tourism, medical tourism, spa tourism, mindfulness tourism, and well-being tourism. Although these categories may overlap in certain aspects, they diverge significantly when examined in terms of traveler motivations, the nature of experiences offered, and the intended outcomes. Therefore, a refined understanding of these conceptual distinctions is essential for accurately positioning wellness tourism within the broader spectrum of health-oriented travel.

Health tourism is widely defined as an umbrella term that includes travel for both preventive care and medical treatment purposes. Mueller and Kaufmann proposed a classification of health tourism into two distinct categories²: wellness tourism, which emphasizes the promotion and maintenance of overall well-being through preventive and lifestyle-oriented services, and medical tourism, which involves clinical procedures, including diagnosis and curative treatments. Hence, wellness tourism can be viewed as a preventive and lifestyle-based subset of health tourism, targeting improvements in physical, mental, and spiritual health, while health tourism as a whole accommodates both proactive and reactive health goals.

Understanding the specific settings and purposes of each helps clarify how wellness tourism differs from medical tourism. Medical tourism typically involves travel for the purpose of receiving medical procedures or surgeries, often in clinics or hospitals, and is commonly motivated by factors such as affordability, availability, or reduced waiting times²³. On the other hand, wellness tourism is characterized by non-clinical, health-promoting experiences, including yoga programs, holistic retreats, healthy diets, and detox therapies. As noted by Smith and Puczkó, medical tourists function primarily as patients, whereas wellness tourists act as active participants in their own self-care journey, engaging in services designed to enhance their overall quality of life¹⁰. This comparison highlights the fundamental difference: medical tourism is curative in nature, while wellness tourism focuses on prevention and self-enhancement.

Among the earliest manifestations of health-related travel is spa tourism, which remains one of the core components of wellness tourism today. Rooted in long-standing traditions across Europe and Asia, spa tourism emphasizes the use of thermal waters, hydrotherapy, massage

techniques, and rest-based treatments for physical renewal²⁵. However, while spa tourism largely centers on physical rejuvenation and stress relief, wellness tourism extends beyond to incorporate a wider range of holistic practices. These may include mental wellness programs, physical fitness, emotional balance, spiritual enrichment, and lifestyle management⁴. In this way, spa tourism serves as a building block within the broader and more integrative structure of wellness tourism.

Another closely associated yet distinct form is mindfulness tourism, which has gained significant attention in recent years due to its focus on mental and spiritual well-being. Travelers engaged in mindfulness tourism typically participate in silent retreats, meditation sessions, and consciousness-enhancing workshops, often inspired by Eastern philosophical traditions. While both mindfulness and wellness tourism emphasize holistic health, the former places greater emphasis on inner awareness, emotional healing, and cognitive clarity. In this regard, mindfulness tourism can be seen as a specialized niche within wellness tourism, particularly appealing to individuals seeking transformation through introspection rather than physical renewal.

A further concept that is frequently associated with wellness tourism is well-being tourism, though the two are not entirely interchangeable. As defined by Smith and Diekmann, well-being tourism encompasses a broader conceptual scope, aiming to support overall life satisfaction and human flourishing³. It includes not only wellness and medical tourism but also other experience-based forms of travel—such as cultural, spiritual, and nature tourism—provided they contribute to the traveler's subjective well-being. In this sense, wellness tourism is one of several pathways toward achieving well-being, but not the only one. The distinction lies in focus and orientation: wellness tourism emphasizes practices and experiences, whereas well-being tourism is more concerned with results and personal outcomes.

In conclusion, while wellness tourism shares commonalities with various related tourism types—including health, medical, spa, mindfulness, and well-being tourism—it maintains a distinctive identity centered on preventive care, self-improvement, and holistic well-being. Understanding these conceptual boundaries is essential for researchers, destination managers, and policymakers to design effective strategies, communicate clear value propositions, and respond to the evolving

demands of health-conscious travelers. Clarity in these definitions also enables more precise market segmentation and contributes to the

development of sustainable and meaningful tourism experiences within the health domain.

Table 1. Wellness Tourism and Its Conceptual Connections

Dimension	Wellness Tourism	Health Tourism	Well-Being Tourism
Core Purpose	To maintain or enhance holistic wellness (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual). Focus is preventive and lifestyle-oriented	To receive medical or therapeutic treatment for an existing health condition. Focus is curative, rehabilitative, or diagnostic	To improve overall life satisfaction, happiness, balance, and flourishing. Focus is personal development, emotional stability, and quality of life.
Primary Setting	Spas, wellness resorts, yoga & meditation retreats, hot springs, detox centers; nature-based settings.	Hospitals, clinics, specialized medical centers, rehabilitation facilities; sometimes combined with hotel accommodation	Nature destinations, cultural environments, mindfulness retreats, community-based tourism spaces, restorative environments. Settings are experiential rather than strictly health-oriented.
Participant Type	Individuals already healthy who seek relaxation, stress relief, lifestyle enhancement, or preventive activities	Patients or visitors with specific medical needs (e.g., surgery, fertility treatment, dental care, chronic disease therapy).	Individuals seeking psychological renewal, life satisfaction, meaning, or emotional/mental rebalancing, regardless of health status.
Expected Outcomes	Increased relaxation, reduced stress, improved physical fitness, better lifestyle habits, and enhanced vitality.	Improved medical condition, recovery, diagnosis, treatment success, or physical rehabilitation.	Enhanced happiness, emotional restoration, sense of purpose, psychological resilience, and improved subjective well-being.
Typical Activities	Spa therapies, yoga/massage, meditation, detox programs, fitness training, nutrition coaching.	Medical procedures (elective or necessary), check-ups, dental surgery, physiotherapy, rehabilitation programs	Mindfulness journeys, cultural immersion, meaningful community engagement, slow travel, wellness-nature experiences, spiritual workshops.
Tourism Value Proposition	Experience-based, preventive care supporting healthy lifestyles	Treatment-based, focused on cost, quality, and availability of medical services	Transformational experiences improving life satisfaction and emotional balance

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Bibliometric Analysis Approach

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the academic landscape surrounding wellness tourism, this study adopted the bibliometric analysis methodology outlined by Donthu et al.⁸. Specifically, their recommended approach for keyword selection was applied, setting a minimum threshold of two occurrences for keywords, as per their guidelines. This methodology ensured that only the most significant terms were analyzed. By utilizing this approach, the study facilitated a robust exploration of the intellectual structure and thematic evolution of wellness tourism research for comprehensive bibliometric evaluations.

This method allows for the systematic exploration of academic output, facilitating the

identification of collaboration patterns, knowledge structures, and thematic evolutions within the field. It is especially effective in uncovering influential research, leading authors, and dominant topics by examining interrelationships among publications, authors, institutions, and keywords.

The bibliographic data were extracted from the Scopus database, due to its broad and multidisciplinary coverage of peer-reviewed literature. A carefully defined search protocol was applied to collect relevant records. The search terms is “wellness tourism”²⁵. The search was restricted to English-language documents published up to May 2025, to ensure the inclusion of the most recent developments in the field.

Following data retrieval, the bibliographic

records were cleaned and formatted for analysis. To visualize bibliometric networks, the study made use of VOSviewer for mapping purposes. Specifically, **keyword co-occurrence** analysis to detect research hotspots and thematic clusters. These visualizations offer valuable insights into the field's structure and its evolution over time.

The analysis was performed using VOSviewer software version 1.6.13, the most recent version available at the time of the study. To ensure a comprehensive representation of the research landscape, we employed the full counting method, which captures the total occurrences of terms and co-citations across all documents. This approach allows for an accurate reflection of keyword and co-citation frequencies. The data were subsequently normalized based on association strength, a technique that adjusts for the frequency of co-occurrences between keywords, ensuring that stronger relationships are given greater weight in the visual representation. Additionally, a minimum threshold of two occurrences was applied to include keywords in the analysis. This criterion served to eliminate less relevant terms, thereby focusing on the most significant and influential keywords within the field.

This methodological design provides a transparent and replicable means to assess the progression of wellness tourism research. It also contributes to identifying underexplored areas and suggesting promising directions for future academic inquiry and practical application. By leveraging bibliometric tools, the study delivers an evidence-based perspective that supports strategic research planning and academic knowledge development within the wellness tourism domain.

3.2. Data Collection

To explore the intellectual landscape and thematic progression of research related to wellness tourism, this study conducted a bibliometric analysis based on data extracted from the Scopus database. Recognized for its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed literature across a wide range of disciplines, Scopus served as a reliable and comprehensive source for identifying relevant academic contributions. A structured search query was developed using Boolean operators to target publications whose titles reflect core concepts in the field. The search string was applied as follows:

Scopus – TITLE (wellness tourism) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026
results: 226 matches.

This search strategy focuses on "wellness tourism" as the primary keyword to narrow down the results to studies directly related to this field. By setting the publication year range from 2015 to 2025, the search targets recent and relevant research, ensuring the inclusion of up-to-date findings and developments in wellness tourism. The specified time frame also excludes older studies that may no longer reflect current trends, making the analysis more relevant and reflective of contemporary research in the field.

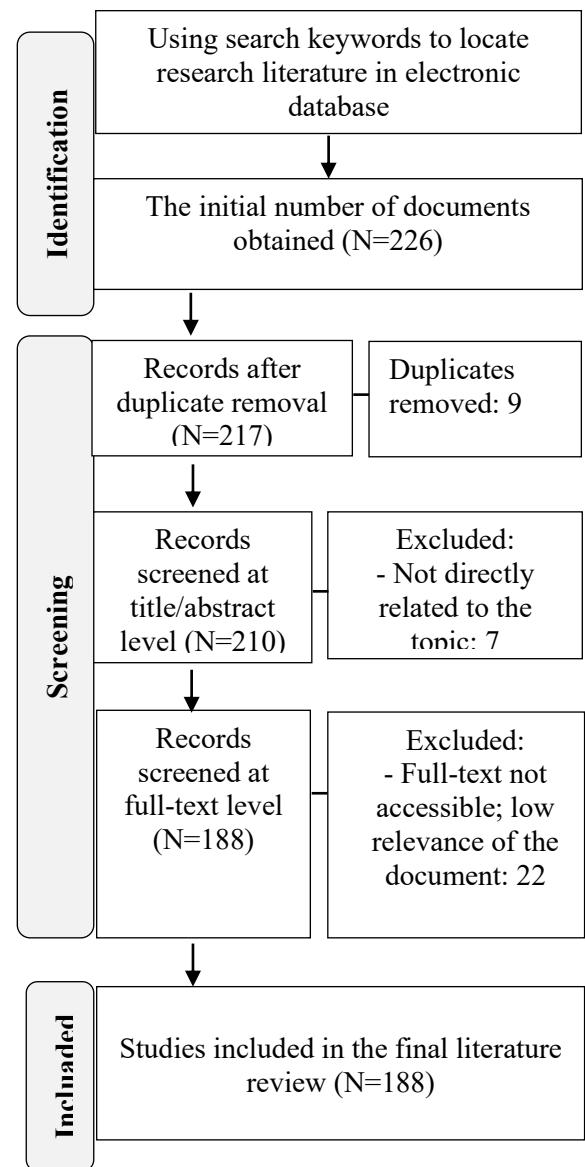


Figure 1. The PRISMA flow diagram

To ensure methodological transparency and rigor, the process of identifying and filtering relevant literature followed the widely accepted PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. The data screening process was implemented in three consecutive phases to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected literature on wellness tourism. Initially, a total of

226 documents were retrieved using search keywords from an electronic database. The first phase involved removing duplicates, which resulted in 217 unique entries. In the second phase, the records were screened at the title/abstract level, and 210 records were assessed for their relevance to wellness tourism. Studies that did not directly engage with the topic or its related aspects were excluded, totaling 7 records. Finally, peer-reviewed journal articles, along with other document types such as book chapters and conference papers, were retained for analysis. This resulted in a final dataset of 188 documents, which were used for bibliometric mapping and network visualization.

3.3. VOSviewer Analysis

To gain insights into the academic discussion on wellness tourism, this research applies a structured bibliometric analysis. The analysis focuses on uncovering the conceptual structure and developmental trajectory of the field by examining patterns within the academic literature. The co-citation technique was utilized to trace connections among highly referenced publications, thereby identifying foundational works and influential contributions that have shaped the field over time. Meanwhile, co-word analysis enabled the examination of keyword frequency and their interrelationships, offering insights into prevailing research topics and thematic shifts. By analyzing how keywords co-occur across publications, the study identifies dominant clusters of knowledge and emerging lines of inquiry in wellness tourism research. This method also facilitates the visualization of the intellectual landscape of the field through the generation of scientific maps, highlighting thematic concentrations and their evolution. Altogether, the bibliometric approach not only supports the exploration of research trends and scholarly impact but also reveals the structural and theoretical development of wellness tourism as an academic domain.

3.4. Research questions

The study aims to find answers to some questions regarding the scientific concern for the field of wellness, especially for the last years, and from the point of view of the magazines that were the most significant, where articles in the field appeared, respectively in which academic fields research is carried out in the field of wellness. During the research period, we are looking for who are the researchers in the field of wellness and if there is a cooperation between them. Wellness tourism is related to other fields, that's

why the study looks for the most popular research fields in relation to wellness tourism. Also, an answer is sought to what extent management is present in research in the field of wellness tourism.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the primary scientific questions addressed in wellness tourism research, especially in recent years?

- Which journals have been the most significant in publishing articles on wellness tourism, and in which academic fields is wellness tourism research most prominent?

- Who are the main researchers in the wellness tourism field?

- Which research areas are most frequently associated with wellness tourism?

- What is the level of focus on management in wellness tourism research?

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To provide a more specific assessment of research trends in wellness, this study collected relevant publications related to wellness tourism from the Scopus database. A total of 188 documents related to wellness tourism were identified and selected for analysis after a thorough screening process. The results presented in this section are based on Scopus data. A detailed bibliometric analysis is conducted to explore the evolution of research trends and key themes related to wellness tourism over time.

Document type analysis

The distribution of document types related to wellness tourism in the Scopus dataset is presented in Table 2. The analysis is based on keywords associated with wellness tourism. The results reveal an uneven distribution among document types. According to the chart, the most common document type in the Scopus database is Articles, accounting for 67.55% (127 documents), followed by Books and Book Series (15.42%, 29 documents), and Conference Papers (17.02%, 32 documents).

Table 2. Type of document

Type of document	Number	Percent (%)
Article	127	67,55
Book/Book series	29	15,42
Proceeding paper	32	17,02
All	188	100

Analysis by Subject Area

The distribution of collected documents across subject areas within the Scopus database is presented in Table 3. Specifically, Table 3 shows the top 10 research fields with the highest number of published publications. It is important to note that in the Scopus database, a single document can be classified under multiple subject areas depending on its scientific discipline and the journal in which it is published.

According to the results in Table 3, the field of Business, Management and Accounting accounts for the largest share of publications. Specifically, within the Scopus dataset, Business, Management and Accounting comprises 102 documents, representing over 54% of the total publications. This is followed by the field of Social Sciences, which includes 86 documents, accounting for 45.74% of the total.

Table 3. Top 10 Subject Areas of the Publications

Area	Number	Percent (%)
Business, Management and Accounting	102	54.26
Social Sciences	86	45.74
Environmental Science	38	20.21
Computer Science	34	18.09
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	33	17.55
Energy	20	10.64
Engineering	17	9.04
Earth and Planetary Sciences	14	7.45
Medicine	12	6.38
Arts and Humanities	11	5.85

Publication Trend Over Time

Figure 2 illustrates the temporal distribution of the number of published articles. From this figure, it is evident that there has been a significant increase in the volume of publications related to wellness tourism. Between 2015 and 2020, the number of studies remained relatively stable with little fluctuation. However, since 2020, there has been a remarkable surge in research output on wellness tourism. This growth likely reflects the rising interest of scholars in this field, in line with global economic and social changes—most notably the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

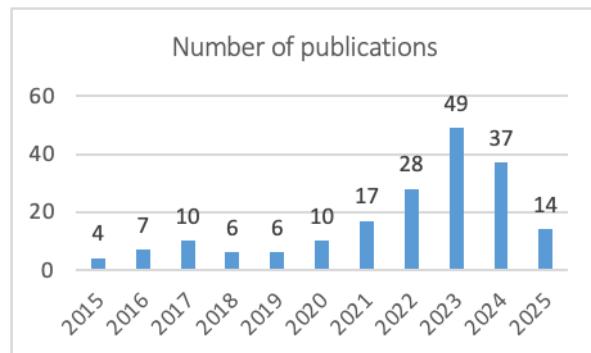


Figure 2. Annual publications

Despite this increase, when compared to other popular tourism topics such as cultural tourism and community-based tourism, wellness tourism research remains relatively limited. Nevertheless, the growing number of studies indicates that wellness tourism is an emerging area of interest within the tourism discipline. This is further underscored by the fact that in just the first four months of 2025, 14 new studies on wellness tourism have already been published.

Geography analysis

The geographic distribution of research on wellness tourism is highly diverse. According to the statistical results, a total of 54 countries and territories have contributed to research in the field of community and wellness-oriented entrepreneurship. Among them, 10 countries have published at least 10 articles related to this topic, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Top 20 Countries with the Highest Number of Publications

Nation	Number	Percent (%)
People R China	30	15.96
Thailand	25	13.30
Portugal	25	13.30
India	22	11.70
United States	16	8.51
South Korea	12	6.38
Taiwan	8	4.26
Malaysia	8	4.26
Indonesia	8	4.26
United Kingdom	7	3.72

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that China has the highest number of publications, with 30 documents, accounting for 15.96% of the total. This is followed by Thailand and Portugal (25 publications each), and India (22 publications). The high publication output from these countries is unsurprising, given their relatively developed economies and active research in the field of tourism. Notably, these countries have demonstrated increasing interest in wellness-related topics during and after the

COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the study reveals a clear geographical concentration of wellness tourism research in Asia and parts of Europe. Countries such as China, Thailand, Portugal, and India lead in publication volume, forming identifiable regional research hubs where both academic interest and commercial development are strong. Asia, in particular, appears to function as a dual center for practice and scholarship, likely driven by the prominence of spas, hot springs, and wellness resorts, as well as supportive policy agendas. Portugal's notable position reflects a European interest in thermal destinations and gastronomy-based wellness. These patterns highlight the growing importance of cross-regional comparisons and raise questions about the transferability of wellness models across different cultural and policy contexts.

Journal Analysis

As shown in Table 5, the International Journal of Spa and Wellness ranks first in terms of the number of publications on wellness tourism within the Scopus database. The journal Sustainability (Switzerland) follows closely, with 11 articles on the topic. Most of the leading journals in terms of publication volume are situated within the fields of business management, economics, and tourism studies.

The distribution of subject areas demonstrates that wellness tourism research is increasingly interdisciplinary. While Business, Management, and Social Sciences account for the largest share of studies, the presence of Environmental Science and Computer Science indicates expanding interest in sustainability, environmental well-being, and the integration of

digital technologies. Core journals such as the International Journal of Spa and Wellness and Sustainability illustrate this broadening scope. Taken together, these patterns suggest a maturing research landscape that links tourism with ecological responsibility, health sciences, and technological innovation.

Table 5. Leading Journals Publishing Research on Wellness Tourism

Journal	Number	Citescore 2024
International Journal Of Spa And Wellness	14	3.8
Sustainability Switzerland	11	7.7
Smart Innovation Systems And Technologies	7	1.2
Geojournal Of Tourism And Geosites	6	3.7
Proceedings Of The International Conference On Tourism Research	5	0.9
Journal Of Travel And Tourism Marketing	5	13.8

Keyword Analysis and Keyword Citation

The initial stage of this analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software (version 1.6.13). This software enables the creation of keyword maps, author networks, citation relationships, and the identification of correlations or suggested linkages among them.

Using VOSviewer, the author set a minimum threshold for keyword occurrences at 2. Based on this criterion, a total of 92 keywords from the Scopus database were selected for analysis. The keywords with a frequency greater than 5 are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Keywords with Frequency Greater than 5 (Occurrences in Scopus)

Ranking	Keywords	Cluster	Occurrences	Total link strength	Link	APY
1	Wellness tourism	1	90	141	75	2021
2	Wellness	2	20	40	25	2020
3	Health and wellness tourism	3	14	13	10	2022
4	Tourism	2	10	17	12	2021
5	Health Tourism	3	9	23	13	2022
6	Motivation	1	8	15	10	2021
7	Spa	2	7	19	13	2021
8	Satisfaction	2	6	14	11	2021
9	Bibliometric analysis	1	6	8	5	2022
10	Health	2	5	14	10	2020
11	Medical tourism	3	5	13	9	2021
12	Well-being	2	5	12	10	2021
13	Tourist satisfaction	1	5	9	8	2023

Note: APY: Average Publication Year

A more in-depth analysis is provided in Figure 3, which graphically presents the keyword

clusters generated by the VOSviewer software based on the Scopus database. The results show

that the keywords are grouped into a total of three distinct clusters.

- Cluster 1 (Red) focuses on the development of wellness tourism. This cluster includes keywords related to the growth and defining features of wellness tourism, such as “wellness resorts”, “wellness tourism”, “wellness tourists”, “motivation factors,” and “tourist behavior”. Notably, this cluster also contains several methodological terms related to research on wellness tourism, including “bibliometric analysis”, “literature review”, and “machine learning”, indicating a focus on research approaches within the field. So, many studies still map markets, define concepts, and propose product typologies of wellness tourism. The presence of methodological keywords (bibliometric analysis, machine learning) signals a methodological maturation. Furthermore, movement from purely qualitative case studies and conceptual pieces toward systematic, reproducible mapping (co-citation, co-word analysis) and increasingly exploratory data-driven methods (text-mining / ML mentioned). This enables meta-level synthesis and reveals structural patterns across disciplines in wellness tourism.

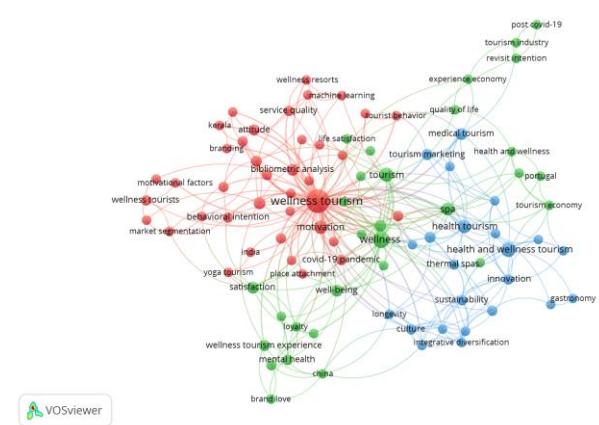


Figure 3. Keyword Clustering Visualization

- Cluster 2 (Green) centers on the tourist experience in wellness tourism. This cluster features keywords such as “life satisfaction,” “quality of life,” “satisfaction,” “loyalty,” and “wellness tourism experience,” highlighting a shift in research interest toward visitor perceptions, well-being, and behavioral outcomes. It represents a substantive shift from supply-side/product research to demand-side, experience-centred studies. Keywords show rising interest in subjective outcomes (well-being, life satisfaction, loyalty), consistent with post-COVID emphasis on psychological recovery and restorative travel. Furthermore, more

measurement/scale development (e.g., wellness experience scales cited in your refs), experimental or longitudinal designs may grow as researchers probe causal links between wellness offers and well-being outcomes.

- Cluster 3 (Blue) deals with specific types of wellness-related tourism. This cluster includes terms such as “health tourism,” “health and wellness tourism,” “gastronomy,” “medical tourism,” and “medical and wellness tourism,” reflecting the variety of tourism models that integrate health, wellness, and culinary experiences. It highlights conceptual convergence and cross-fertilization across wellness tourism subfields. Research is treating spa, medical, gastronomic, and health tourism as integrated or hybrid product bundles rather than discrete markets.

The analysis of keyword influence reveals that the terms “wellness tourism,” “wellness,” “health and wellness tourism”, “spa,” and “health tourism” are among the most impactful, indicating high levels of scholarly interest and attention in the field.

Additionally, the VOSviewer software enables the analysis of keyword development over time. The evolution of keywords is illustrated in Figure 5, while Table 6 presents the average publication year of keywords that appear more than five times.

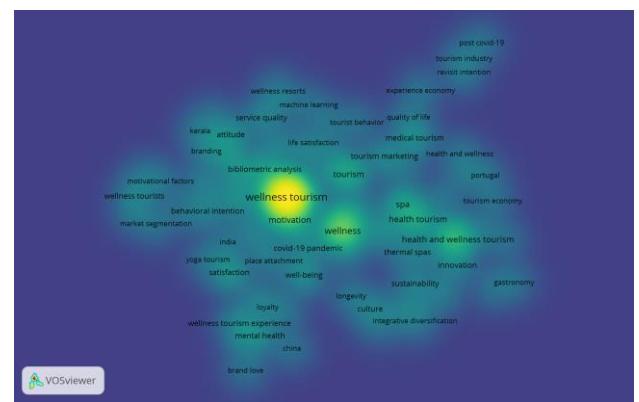


Figure 4. Influence of Keywords

The results indicate that before 2022, researchers primarily focused on aspects related to the development of wellness tourism and its various forms, with common keywords including “market,” “medical tourism,” “well-being,” “wellness tourism,” etc. In the following period, research attention shifted toward tourist-centric studies aimed at enhancing wellness tourism, using keywords such as “service quality,” “experiences,” and “behaviors.”

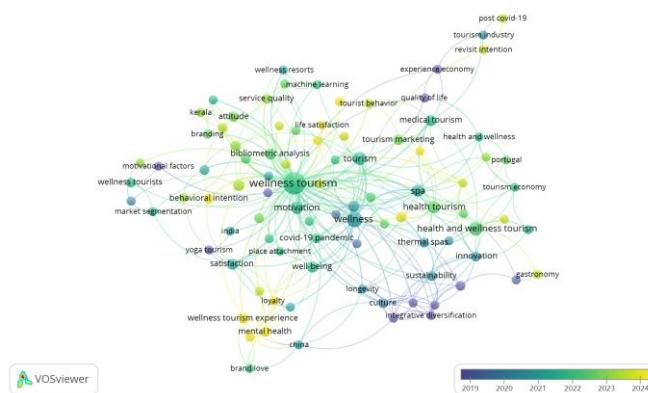


Figure 5. Evolution of Keywords Over the Years

A more detailed analysis was conducted to examine the interconnections among keywords. These connections reflect the number of times a keyword is linked to others. The author analyzed the keywords with the highest number of links. Based on the statistical results in Table 7, a total of six keywords were selected for in-depth analysis: "wellness tourism," "wellness," "health tourism," "spa," "tourism," and "satisfaction." The results show that "wellness tourism" has the strongest connection with "health tourism." Additionally, there are notable interdependencies between "wellness tourism" and "motivation," "tourism" and "wellness," and "spa" and "wellness," among others.

Table 7. Top 6 Keywords Based on Link Strength Between Keywords

Ranking	Keyword	Link	Co-occurrence keyword	Link strength
1	Wellness tourism	75	Health Tourism	7
			Motivation	5
2	Wellness	25	Tourism	5
			Wellness tourism	3
			Spa	3
			Wellness tourism	7
3	Health Tourism	13	Covid-19	3
			Wellness tourism	3
			Wellness	3
4	Spa	13	Wellness	5
5	Tourism	12	Wellness tourism	3
6	Satisfaction	11		

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study enhances understanding of the current research landscape in the field of wellness tourism, highlighting the growth in the number of publications over the past decade (from 2015 to the present) and the geographical distribution of related studies. Additionally, the results highlight key trends and important keywords in this field, helping to shape future research directions.

The analysis of Scopus data on wellness tourism reveals an uneven distribution across different types of publications, with journal articles making up the majority, followed by conference proceedings and books/book chapters. The field of Business, Management and Accounting leads in terms of publication volume, followed by Social Sciences. Notably, there has been a significant surge in wellness tourism articles from 2020 to 2023, reflecting growing academic interest, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Geographically, China, Thailand, and Portugal are the top contributors in terms of publication volume, reflecting the level of economic and research development in these countries. The International Journal of Spa and Wellness publishes the highest number of wellness tourism-related articles, demonstrating its relevance to the topic.

This study utilized VOSviewer software to analyze and generate keyword clusters related to wellness tourism. The analysis identified three main clusters: development of wellness tourism, characteristics of wellness tourism, types of wellness tourism, and approaches to the development and management of wellness tourism. Each keyword cluster represents different aspects of the field—from exploring tourist motivations and marketing strategies to specific types of tourism such as medical tourism, wellness tourism, and spa tourism.

The study also illustrates the temporal development of keywords in this field. Before 2022, researchers primarily focused on development aspects and types of wellness tourism. Later, the research trend shifted towards tourist-related factors and their experiences, such as service quality and tourist behavior. This shift reflects a change in research focus from building and promoting wellness tourism products to enhancing the overall tourist experience and satisfaction. Furthermore, the analysis of keyword connections reveals a strong interrelation between core concepts in this field. Keywords like "wellness tourism," "health," and "spa" are closely interconnected, indicating that wellness tourism research often addresses these

elements together. This linkage emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between wellness and tourism in developing wellness tourism products and services that meet increasing traveler demands.

The study shows that the research trend in the wellness tourism field has shifted from a focus on development and types of tourism to the investigation of factors related to tourists' experiences and behaviors. Keywords such as "wellness tourism," "health," and "medical tourism" highlight the close relationship between wellness and tourism, supporting the development of products and services that cater to the growing needs of wellness-focused travelers.

A review of international literature reveals that research on wellness tourism primarily focuses on tourist experiences, factors influencing satisfaction, and travel motivations. The wellness tourism experience is evaluated through factors such as health recovery, stress reduction, and self-discovery²⁶, while perceived quality, restorative environments, and relaxation spaces play crucial roles in tourist satisfaction^{27,28}. Travel motivations, including the desire for relaxation and comfort, also significantly influence the decision to engage in wellness travel. Studies further indicate that market segmentation and personal factors such as age, gender, income, and education level impact the decision to participate in this form of tourism^{29,30}. Moreover, in recent years, global research trends in wellness tourism have concentrated on analyzing factors affecting tourist behavior, satisfaction, and revisit intentions.

Although current research has indicated a significant increase in studies on wellness tourism, especially in the post-COVID-19 context, there are still some gaps that require further investigation. First, despite the increase in research in this field, there is still a lack of a solid theoretical foundation. The existing theoretical models are fragmented and reflect different perspectives, ranging from marketing, behavior, to public health, making it difficult to build a unified theory. Therefore, future studies should focus on developing an integrated theoretical framework that connects the various factors and creates a solid foundation for further research. Second, while there have been studies on the tourist experience and the factors affecting satisfaction, there is still a lack of in-depth research on the psychological and emotional factors in wellness tourism experiences, such as

emotional recovery, service quality, and relaxation spaces—important elements in enhancing tourist satisfaction that have not been fully explored. Third, geographically, while countries like China, Thailand, and Portugal have made significant contributions to wellness tourism research, Vietnam—a growing country with rich natural resources and traditional healing knowledge—has not yet fully engaged in the international academic community. This presents an opportunity for research on wellness tourism in Vietnam, to provide directions aligned with local practices. Finally, with the rapid global development of wellness tourism, particularly new trends such as digital wellness tourism and AI integration, current research primarily focuses on traditional factors, without fully exploring the potential of technology to personalize and enhance wellness tourism experiences. Therefore, further research is needed on the application of technology in wellness tourism to meet the needs of modern travelers. In conclusion, while current research has clarified many aspects of wellness tourism, there are still significant gaps that need to be explored further in order to develop theory, methods, and practical applications in this field.

Implications for policy and industry strategies

- For Policymakers:

The findings highlight the need for policymakers to shift from traditional performance indicators toward experience-oriented metrics. Because recent studies increasingly focus on satisfaction, life satisfaction, and loyalty, governments should complement visitor numbers with well-being measures such as restorative indexes or pre- and post-experience self-assessments, especially at leading wellness destinations. In addition, the conceptual convergence across medical, spa, and gastronomic tourism suggests the importance of cross-sectoral policy frameworks. Inter-ministerial collaboration—linking health, tourism, and environmental agencies—can help establish safety standards and certification systems for integrated wellness packages.

The bibliometric results also reveal regional imbalances, with strong research concentrations in China, Thailand, and Portugal but limited evidence from emerging markets such as Vietnam. Policymakers should therefore support evidence-based product diversification through pilot projects and applied research on traditional medicine, hot springs, or community-based wellness models. Finally, the rise of

keywords linked to digital technologies indicates the need for regulatory readiness. Governments should provide clear guidelines on data protection, quality standards for digital wellness services, and digital-skills support for small and medium-sized enterprises.

- For Destination Managers and Industry Operators:

For industry actors, the research trends emphasize designing experiences that produce measurable transformation rather than simple relaxation. As consumer expectations increasingly center on meaningful outcomes, businesses should integrate validated pre-/post-assessment tools and offer holistic programs combining nutrition, nature-based activities, and mindfulness. The growing overlap between wellness, medical, and gastronomy tourism also presents opportunities for hybrid product development. Partnerships with clinical providers and local food producers can enable comprehensive recovery-and-leisure packages.

Data-driven personalization is another strategic priority, reflecting the broader methodological shift toward machine-learning approaches within the literature. Destinations can pilot anonymized preference modeling to tailor wellness pathways such as stress reduction, sleep improvement, or fitness enhancement. Finally, sustainability should be positioned as a competitive advantage. Because environmental quality is central to restorative experiences, operators should adopt low-impact practices, seek relevant certifications, and communicate ecological stewardship as an integral part of their wellness value proposition.

Overall, the bibliometric mapping (2015–2025) reveals a disciplinary shift from supply-side, product-oriented research toward a demand-centred focus on tourist experiences and measurable well-being outcomes, accompanied by growing methodological sophistication—especially the adoption of bibliometric and machine-learning tools to synthesize an increasingly interdisciplinary literature. Geographically, scholarship concentrates in Asia and selected European contexts, underscoring opportunities for comparative and context-sensitive research in underrepresented destinations such as Vietnam. These trends indicate urgent opportunities for policy and industry to pivot from destination promotion alone to evidence-based program design, cross-sector integration with health services, and responsible adoption of digital personalization—

measures that will better align products with the well-being outcomes current research suggests visitors increasingly seek.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the data used were limited to the Scopus database, which may not provide a comprehensive evaluation. Second, relevant documents may have been excluded if keywords such as "wellbeing," "health," or "medical" were not present in the title, abstract, or keyword list. Therefore, future studies should expand the database coverage and adopt more comprehensive search strategies to include documents that may not explicitly use the core keywords in titles, abstracts, or keyword fields. This would help provide a more complete and accurate overview of the wellness tourism research field. Furthermore, future research can use cross-database analyses and thematic content expansion on this topic.

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