

# Wellness Tourism in China: Resources, Development and Marketing

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## ABSTRACT

China's natural and cultural resources are the foremost offerings of the country's wellness tourism sector. Although wellness tourism in China is in its infancy, it can offer new opportunities in, and strengthen the overall competitiveness of, China's tourism industry. To achieve this, the assessment and development of wellness tourism resources in China are required. This study examines the potential for wellness tourism development in terms of resources and promotion from the point of view of wellness tourism experts. It surveys professionals working in tourism, health and education in China. The results reveal that environmental assets, including fresh air, clean water and natural features, are considered the most important attributes for the development of wellness tourism in China and that the promotion of wellness tourism can best be achieved through advertising in mass media, governmental support and organizing new regional events. The study implications and future research directions are discussed. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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## INTRODUCTION

Health tourism is a broad concept that incorporates both medical and wellness tourism (Mueller and Kaufmann, 2001). Wellness tourism has become a travel trend in recent years. The reasons behind this trend are mainly due to the more health conscious of middle and upper class and the necessity in coping with work stress. More and more people are considering long distance travel for the purposes of relaxation and improvement of their health. In 2005, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand attracted more than 2.5 million medical travelers (UNESCAP, 2008), and Singapore, India, Thailand, Brunei, Hong Kong, Israel, Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, the Philippines and the United Arab Emirates are emerging as major healthcare destinations.

Wellness is a multidimensional concept founded on balance and spirituality that combines physical and mental health with social and environmental elements (Myers, *et al.*, 2005; Steiner and Reisinger, 2006). The rapidly growing wellness sector focuses on the prevention of illness and maintenance of health and caters to healthy people of all age groups. Over the last 200 years, health research has mainly taken the pathogenic (cause of disease) approach, concentrating on metabolic disorders (Obradović, 2007). The end of the 20th century saw wellness become a mega trend, which involves the preservation of health in the face of the threats of stress, hunger and emerging diseases. Poor diet, low levels of activity and increased stress characterize the modern way of life. Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, and the total number of cases globally is increasing. According to *World Health Organization Statistics 2010* (WHO, 2012), the incidence of cancer is projected to increase

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45% from 2007 to 2030. The 21st century is also likely to see a huge increase in the incidence of epidemic and cardiovascular diseases, among others. Because of the information network operating globally, more and more people today are becoming increasingly conscious of their lifestyle and feel responsible for their health. The tourism industry aims to meet health-related needs by offering products and services to improve people's quality of life (Chen *et al.*, 2008).

In Chinese culture, maintaining balance and harmony in and between the physical and the social environment is perceived to be the key to achieving good health and longevity (Leung, 1998). However, growing number of chronic diseases (WHO, 2000), long working hours and difficult working conditions due to economic growth in Asia have negatively affected the physical and mental well-being of its population (Tsui, 2008). Moreover, ageing is not only an issue for western countries but also for China. There is a significant increase in the ageing population (BBC News, 2000). According to United Nations (2010), the number of people over 60 in China is approximately 167 millions. In 10 years time, this number is expected to be 248 million, and by 2050, it is expected to be 437 million. With ageing population in China, there will be a significant need for social elderly care services, wellness products and clinics, and integrative medicine using both western and traditional medicine practices. However, little is known about wellness tourism resources and potential of developing wellness tourism in China (Coughlin, 2010).

Traditional Chinese wellness practices including herbal, acupuncture, hot springs and Chinese medicine treatments and modern wellness programs and centers are attracting many people. In Beijing, for instance, well-educated young professionals, especially women, are the target market of wellness clubs (Godfrey, 2004). The rise in prosperity of Chinese, the desire to enhance personal health and the growing awareness, knowledge and understanding across Asia of diseases together have raised the level of interest in wellness tourism in China.

Countries in Asia engaging in health and wellness tourism are competing with each other to attract more tourists from around the

world. However, there is a lack of research studies to evaluate the potential for wellness tourism development in China. To meet the growing trend for wellness travel in the region, the adequacy of wellness services and facilities need to be explored, especially in China where there is a rapid demand. This paper thus takes an exploratory approach to analyze China's wellness tourism resources and its potential development. There are two specific research objectives: to investigate the attributes and resources considered necessary for the development of wellness tourism in China and to identify and rank effective methods for promoting wellness tourism in the nation. The perceptions and ideas of the surveyed experts provide implications for wellness tourism not only in China but also in other potential destinations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Health and wellness tourism

Health tourism is a broad concept that encompasses both wellness and medical tourism. Health tourism is a niche or special interest market of the tourism industry, and many countries are currently planning legally and practically for this market. It is a fast-growing sector worldwide, with the number of both travelers and significant commercial operations increasing. Health tourism makes a significant contribution to the economy of many countries, which are increasingly offering healthcare facilities and services to foreign customers.

Emphasizing the supply side, Goodrich and Goodrich (1987) defined healthcare tourism as 'the attempt on the part of a tourist facility or destination to attract tourists by deliberately promoting its healthcare services and facilities, in addition to its regular tourist amenities' (p. 217). Taking a demand side perspective, Van Sliepen (in Hall, 1992) viewed health tourism as comprising three elements: staying away from home, health as the primary motive and occurring in a leisure setting.

Bennett *et al.* (2004) argued that distinguishing health tourism from the wider tourism phenomenon is essential. The product perceptions of both suppliers and consumers influence the extent to which more specialized

travel experiences, such as medical treatment, are promoted in mainstream markets. Bennett *et al.* (2004) stated that health tourism covers pilgrimages to major rivers for physical and spiritual cleansing, traveling to warmer climates, and government encouragement of the provision of local healthcare services to visitors, sea water treatments, hospitals' offering services for not only patients but also accompanying family members and visiting centers for health-related activities or medical treatments.

According to Adams (2003), wellness research and practice should be oriented towards identifying causes of wellness rather than causes of illness. The notion of balance has been highlighted by many authors (e.g. Myers *et al.*, 2005; Ren *et al.*, 2007).

The concept of wellness was first proposed by Dunn (1959), who defined it as a special state of health comprising an overall sense of wellbeing, which sees man as consisting of body, spirit and mind and being dependent on his environment. According to Mueller and Kaufmann (2001), wellness tourism is a division of health tourism and generally involves healthy people. They defined wellness tourism as 'the sum of all the relationships and phenomena resulting from a journey and residence by people whose main motive is to preserve or promote their health' (Mueller and Kaufmann, 2001, p. 7). Wellness tourism involves the efforts by individuals to preserve an already healthy state through activities provided by healthcare facilities (Mair, 2005) and covers six interrelated dimensions: physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, social and environmental (Greenberg, *et al.*, 1995; Hales, 1997; Corbin, *et al.*, 2001). According to Smith and Puczko (2008), approach towards health and wellness is mainly about prevention from illnesses, and these phenomena are largely affected by media and popular psychology.

For many countries, wellness tourism development is an important way of creating a competitive advantage. Sheldon and Park (2008) stated that developing wellness tourism in a region can encourage entrepreneurship, enhance the sense of place of a destination, and health of the local residents, provide economical benefits, and create environmental preservation and quality products.

Since the present study is focusing on the development and marketing of wellness tourism in China, existing models and previous studies were reviewed and form the conceptual framework for investigation. In addition to the models related to sustainable wellness tourism development, models on tourism product development were also reviewed. Sheldon and Park (2008) introduced a sustainable wellness destination model, which is adapted from Ritchie and Crouch (2000) destination competitiveness and sustainability model (Figure 1).

The model has four stages. The first stage is the supporting factors and resources for wellness tourism. The factors include infrastructure, superstructure, residents' hospitality and knowledge of healing practices, destination atmosphere. In China, for instance, wellness culture has already been infused to the culture for many years in order to maintain a harmonious wellbeing both physically and spiritually. In the second stage, natural and cultural resources, traditional healing/ therapeutic/ wellness resources are constructing the core wellness resources and attractors. Healing waters and hot springs are part of natural resources of China. In addition, the knowledge of healing factors through traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) has already been the cultural wellness resource. The third stage represents wellness destination policy and planning and is mainly related to destination's possessing a

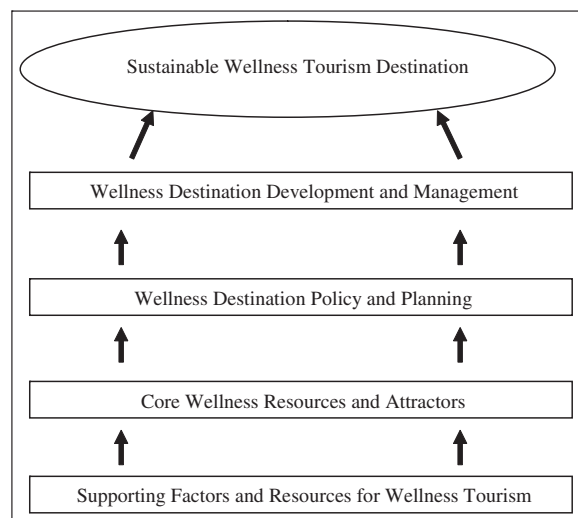


Figure 1. Model of sustainable wellness destination (Sheldon and Park, 2008).

clear vision, goals, collaborated planning and development policy between private and public wellness service providers and monitoring. After the planning stage, the final stage includes the factors regarding the wellness destination development such as human resource, training, education, certification programs and building associations among and between the wellness industry and public sector.

A conceptual structure of wellness tourism was then developed by Sheldon and Bushell (2009) to provide with a broader definition (Figure 2). The conceptual structure maps the relationship among different types of tourism experiences associated with wellness, wellness tourists' motivations and factors in their choices, and wellness tourism destinations attributes. Sheldon and Bushell (2009) concluded that the holistic structure of wellness tourism encompasses a range of tourism experiences with wellness products, infrastructure, facilities, and natural and wellness resources.

In terms of tourism product development, Chaisawat's (2006) proposed a model for policy and planning (Figure 3). The external environment in the Chaisawat's model indicates several elements. These are political/legal factors, world/regional associations and forums in tourism, social and cultural factors,

economic and technological factors. Chaisawat (2006) stated that these policies and planning factors exist to satisfy the needs and wants of the demand factors, which are international and domestic tourists and local people. The needs and wants of demand factors in the model consist, accommodation, attractions and activities, institutional elements, other tourist facilities, and other infrastructure. To attract so called 'demand factors', marketing holds an intermediary role between needs and target customers.

### Wellness tourism in Asia

Western tourists are interested in Eastern philosophies and the therapies offered in various Asian countries, such as shiatsu and onzen (hot springs) in Japan, Chinese acupuncture, reflexology, tui-na and tai chi in China, ayurvedic practices in India, and traditional Thai massage in Thailand. Such alternative health treatments are available in Western societies, but tourists are often keen to visit their place of origin (Smith and Kelly, 2006). The spa sector in Europe has also traditionally provided health care and treatment to patients.

Laing and Weiler (2008) identified four main reasons why Asia is a global leader in health and wellness tourism. First, Western tourists

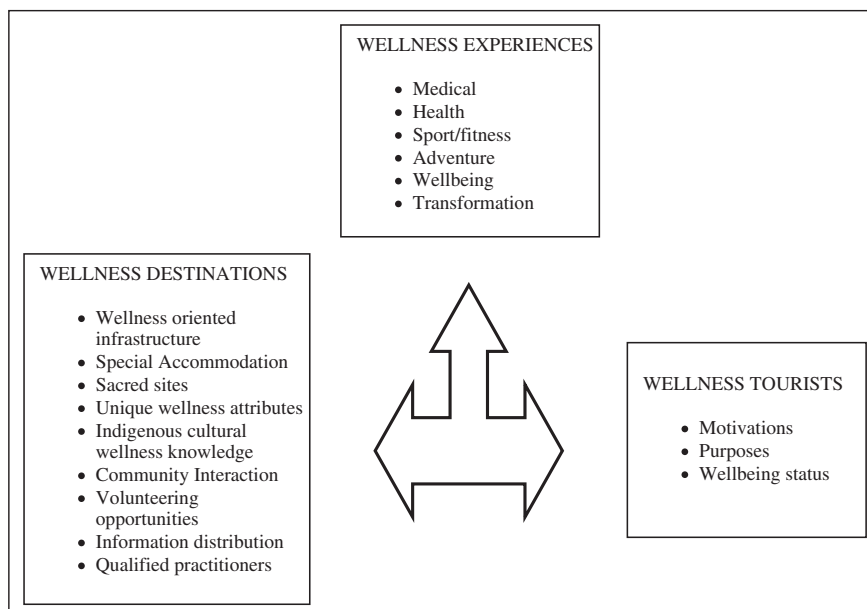


Figure 2. Conceptual structure of wellness tourism (Sheldon and Bushell, 2009).

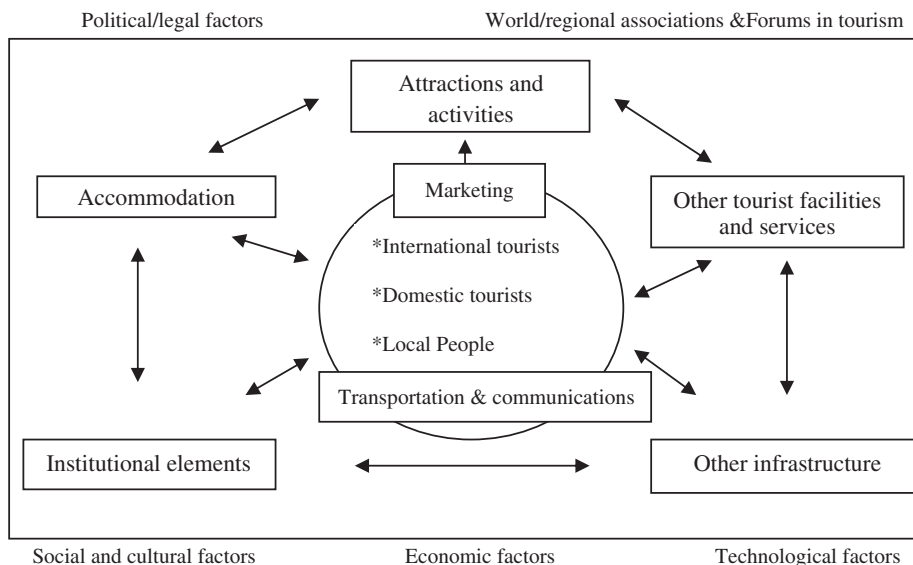


Figure 3. Model for tourism policy and planning for Thailand (Chaisawat, 2006).

are seeking a return to nature and natural elements, and Asian spas are able to offer authentic treatments and remedies. Second, using natural or herbal products for cosmetic treatments is a recent trend. Natural ingredients such as sandalwood and therapies including sesame massage and seaweed masks are featured in Asian spa packages. Third, Asia has the advantage of natural beauty and exotic landscapes, which is in harmony with the wellness concept. Research shows that location is an important factor in developing a wellness product (Wightman and Wall, 1985; Smith and Kelly, 2006). Finally, the low cost of health and wellness treatments in Asian countries is the main motivation for wellness tourists to travel to Asia, especially people who are seeking medical treatment.

Throughout Asia, health resorts are trying to meet the needs of the growing health tourism market (Bywater, 1990). There is also considerable growth potential in the leisure side of the spa and health resort business (Smith and Jenner, 2000; Douglas, 2001). Cockerell (1996) found that people visiting spas or health resorts either sought medical treatment or had traditional tourist motivations. Health-oriented social trends, the aging population, the desire to maintain youth and health and the back-to-nature movement are factors stimulating the wellness tourism demand (Lee and King, 2008).

India, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore are popular health and wellness tourism destinations. India is positioning itself to be a major medical destination, offering everything from alternative treatments to the most complex procedures in the world (Connell, 2006; Singh, 2008). Medical tourists visiting India also seek wellness treatments including ayurvedic treatments, yoga therapy, meditation and diet counseling, among others. The wellness industry has annual estimated revenues of approximately \$2.5 billion. Thailand is also a significant health tourism destination in Asia. Thailand's competitive advantage in this sector is pricing (Cohen, 2008). Its spa sector has also grown significantly (Lee and King, 2008). The Tourism Authority of Thailand (2003) stated that the various high-quality spa services and products that integrate traditional Thai herbal treatments, the low cost of treatments, the indigenous feel of the design, architecture and service of spas and experienced staff are the key strengths of the Thai wellness market. In Malaysia, healthcare programs cover medical care, wellness and fitness, which are included as components under health tourism (Wong, 2003). Singapore is a well-established medical center in Asia and has sophisticated facilities. Although the number of city spas is increasing and there is interest in TCM, demand is mainly for hospital services, with approximately 150 000 visiting for this purpose in 2001



(Henderson, 2004). Competition is strong, however, from countries such as Malaysia and Thailand, and the Economic Review Committee of the Ministry of Trade and Industry recommended more clinical research, the recruitment of more staff, closer co-operation between the public and private sectors, intensified marketing and an easing of restrictions on advertising (Henderson, 2004).

### China and wellness culture

China's health and wellness industry is growing rapidly; however, it is still in the early stages (Lee and King, 2008). With greater demand coming from foreigners and locals, dramatic growth is expected. In particular, spas are becoming big business in China, which has an ancient tradition of massage, bathing and seeking balance. Chinese are known for being fitness conscious. Many seniors exercise daily in parks, and Chinese of all ages enjoy reflexology sessions and Chinese massages as well as water therapies in bathhouses in the pursuit of health and longevity (Chapman, 2007).

Chinese strongly value a harmonious and balanced relationship with nature (Leung, 1998). In Chinese culture, it is believed that attaining harmony of the internal and external environments is a prerequisite of wellness (Ren *et al.*, 2007). The ancient Chinese held that the structure of the human body is similar to the universe and that human life is a small cosmos existing within the big cosmos of nature.

Confucianism and Taoism strongly influence Chinese culture. Harmony is a basic tenet of Confucianism. Taoism (Daoism), which has roots going as far back as the sixth century BC, began to gain strength as a religion in China around 200 AD. Taoists are devoted naturalists who preach solitary living and practice alchemy in the search for long life and even immortality.

Traditional Chinese medicine, dates back 5000 years, is one of the wellness tourism strengths of China. TCM therapies include very old therapy techniques, and it is an integral part of Chinese culture. In addition to treating illness, TCM improves the immune system by focusing on strengthening the body's defenses and enhancing its capacity for healing and to maintain health. TCM techniques include

acupuncture, moxibustion (the burning of the incense-like dried mugwort herb), Tui Na (a form of massage therapy), Taiji Quan (a yoga-like 'internal' martial art that relieves stress and fosters well-being through specific movement and posture routines), and cupping or fire cupping (involves placing cups that have had the oxygen removed from the air inside via a flame, creating a suction effect when the cup is placed on the skin (Jahnke, 2002; Yu *et al.*, 2006). In TCM, the person is treated as a unified entity; balance is considered as the secret to good health and a preventive medicine to illness (Leung, 1998).

Alternative therapeutic approaches have been used in western countries widely (Schuster, Dobson, Jauregui and Blanks, 2004). The continuous efforts for promotion of TCM by China successfully increased the number of licensed TCM practitioners and providers in the USA (Patwardhan, Warude, Pushpangadan and Bhatt, 2005). As the home of TCM and with more than 180 spa centers, 5000–8000 bathhouses and an increasing number of spa brands, China is positioned to be a leader in the wellness market in Asia (Global Spa Summit 2008).

The influx of foreign investment into China, including the spa business, the growth in the tourism industry and hotel construction and the rising income of Chinese professionals have stimulated the growth of health tourism in China. This sector has also been fueled by the preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games and the Games themselves, as more hotels that include wellness centers have been built, and more potential consumers for sports and fitness have been created. Wellness and spa centers in China are mainly located in Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong and Shenzhen, and 70% of them are located within hotels. The wellness sector continues to grow in second-tier cities such as Xian, Hangzhou and Tianjin, while the major frontiers are the tropical Hainan Island in the South China Sea, Yunnan province in the south and Indochina (*China Economic Review – 'The Business of Pampering'*, 2005). China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) recently announced that year 2012 has been themed as '2012 China Happiness & Health Tour' to promote wellness tours in China. CNTA further declared in overseas campaigns that the

promotion will strive to build up a more positive image of tourism in China. Moreover, it will amplify China's natural and cultural tourism products and boost the development of new operational types of tourism and the upgrading of the industry (CNTA, 2011). Therefore, this study aims to assess the potential of wellness tourism in China by investigating the necessary attributes for its development and the effective promotion methods.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study is to examine the development and marketing of wellness tourism in China in terms of attributes, resources and promotional activities from the point of view of wellness tourism experts. A structured questionnaire was distributed to all the participants of the 2009 International Wellness Tourism Summit Forum in Wuyi, China. The completed questionnaires were collected immediately after the conference. The participants at the conference have diverse backgrounds and are mainly health and tourism scholars, industry professionals and government and health officials from various parts of China. Moreover, the subject of the forum was specifically focusing on China's wellness industry, which makes the forum the right place to collect data for the present study.

The questionnaire was originally prepared in English and then translated into Chinese using the back translation method (McGorry, 2000). The questionnaire, which included both closed and open-ended questions, was composed of three parts. The first part listed 14 attributes related to the development of wellness tourism, which respondents were asked to rate on a five-point scale (1 = least favorable; 5 = most favorable). The second part had nine items concerning methods to promote a wellness tourism destination in China. The respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of these methods on a five-point scale (1 = least effective; 5 = most effective). Finally, the third section of the questionnaire included demographic questions.

The wellness attributes were developed through three stages. First, the attributes in both parts were adapted from previous studies

and the related literature (i.e. Mueller and Kaufmann, 2001; Chaisawat, 2006; Sheldon and Park, 2008; Sheldon and Bushell, 2009). These previous studies focused on wellness tourism development and development models. To determine the relevant attributes, not only the models related to sustainable wellness tourism development were explored but also models on tourism product development were also reviewed. Accordingly, eight wellness attributes and resources were identified: fresh air and clean water, landscape, natural resources, peaceful environment, safety, relaxing environment, healthy cuisine and TCM. In China, wellness culture can also be treated as unique wellness attribute, and TCM is part of indigenous cultural wellness resource. Natural and cultural resources, traditional healing/ therapeutic/ wellness resources constitute the core wellness resources and attractors in China (e.g. Jiuzhaigou Valley in Sichuan Province, Mount Tai in Shandong Province, South China Karst in Yunnan Province and Hangzhou West lake in Zhejiang Province). Fresh air and clean water, hot springs are considered as natural resources of China (e.g. Enping and Qingyuan in Guangdong Province, Qionghai in Hainan Province, Yunnan Province). Second, the derived attributes were evaluated and reviewed by two focus groups. The first focus group was composed of six academics in the health and wellness tourism field. The other focus group consisted of six industry professionals working in the health tourism sectors. The suggestions and feedback from these experts led to the incorporation of six additional wellness tourism destination attributes and one more promotion method into the related sections of the questionnaire. These attributes include transportation, quality of therapeutic services and practitioners, accommodation services, health and wellness centers, existence of excellent recreation facilities and existence of excellent convention centers. Third, the procedure is repeated with two tourism planners to validate the attributes related to wellness tourism in China.

Descriptive statistics were used to explore the nature of the responses and to rank the wellness tourism attributes and promotion methods. Factor analysis was conducted to group all of the attributes under specific

dimensions, and correlation analysis was used to analyze the relationship between these dimensions and the promotion methods.

## FINDINGS

Out of 300 questionnaires distributed, 140 completed ones were returned. After discarding extreme and incomplete questionnaires, 131 were used for the final analysis. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. The majority of the respondents (57.2.0%) were aged between 20 and 35, 32.9% were 36–45, and 6.1% were 56 or above. Sixty-eight percent of respondents were male. Regarding education, 13% of respondents held an associate diploma, 48% a bachelor's degree, 40% a master's degree, and 24% a doctoral degree. Among the respondents, 37% worked in the tourism industry, 37% in education, 9% in the health industry and the rest in various other industries.

### Attributes and resources for the development of wellness tourism

Based on the literature review, a list of attributes that were likely to be considered favorable for the development of wellness tourism in China was generated. The respondents were asked to rate each attribute on a five-point

Likert-type scale (1 = least favorable; 5 = most favorable). Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the attributes.

The results reveal that fresh air, a beautiful landscape and natural resources were the most favorable attributes for the development of wellness tourism, followed by a peaceful environment, a safe and a relaxing environment. Attributes with mean values of 4.0 and below were convenient transportation/easy accessibility, TCM, healthy cuisine, high-quality therapeutic services and practitioners, and modern and beautiful accommodation. Qualified healthcare centers, excellent recreation facilities and excellent convention centers were ranked the lowest, with mean values of 3.70, 3.60 and 3.33, respectively.

To identify the underlying dimensions of the attributes and the extent to which each dimension is explained, factor analysis was conducted. In the analysis, the attributes listed in the first part of the questionnaire were summarized and sorted into three groups, which facilitated the further interpretation of the data through correlation analysis.

Barlett's test of sphericity, which tests the presence of correlations between variables, yielded a value of 721.161 and reached statistical significance ( $p = 0.000$ ). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents ( $N = 131$ )

	<i>N</i>	%		<i>N</i>	%
<i>Age</i>			<i>Marital status</i>		
20–25	26	19.8	Single	51	38.9
26–35	49	37.4	Married	80	61.1
36–45	20	15.3	Missing	6	4.6
45–55	23	17.6	<i>Monthly income (HK\$)</i>		
Missing	5	3.8	Less than 10 000	79	60.3
56 or above	8	6.1	10 001–20 000	17	13.0
<i>Gender</i>			20 001–30 000	8	6.1
Female	55	42.0	30 001–40 000	13	9.9
Male	68	51.9	40 001 or above	2	1.5
Missing	8	6.1	Missing	12	9.2
<i>Education</i>			<i>Industry</i>		
Associate diploma/diploma	13	9.9	Tourism industry	37	28.2
Bachelor's degree	48	36.6	Health industry	9	6.9
Master's degree	40	30.5	Education	37	28.2
Doctoral degree	24	18.3	Other	39	29.8
Missing	6	4.6	Missing	9	6.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>100.0</b>



Table 2. Attributes and resources considered favorable for the development of wellness tourism in China

Rank	Attributes and resources	N	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Standard deviation <sup>b</sup>
1	Fresh air and clean water	131	4.67	0.760
2	Beautiful landscape	130	4.47	0.828
2	Natural resources	129	4.47	0.849
3	Peaceful environment	131	4.41	0.893
4	Safe environment	130	4.38	0.857
5	Relaxing environment	130	4.37	0.899
6	Convenient transportation/easy accessibility	129	4.00	0.935
7	Traditional Chinese medicine/treatment	127	3.94	1.041
8	Healthy cuisine	130	3.92	0.898
9	High-quality therapeutic services and practitioners	124	3.84	0.914
10	Modern and beautiful accommodation	127	3.80	1.062
11	Qualified health and wellness centers	125	3.70	0.925
12	Excellent recreation facilities	124	3.60	1.019
13	Excellent convention centers	126	3.33	1.043

<sup>a</sup>Mean scale: 1–5 (1 = least favorable, 5 = most favorable).

<sup>b</sup>Standard deviation: dispersion of the data deviating from the mean.

was .849, which is within the acceptable limit. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation was performed. It yielded three factors that accounted for 60.9% of the total variance. Table 3 presents the results of the factor analysis

of the attributes considered favorable for the development of wellness tourism in China.

The table shows that among the three dimensions, 'Environmental and safety attributes' had the highest mean value (4.47), followed

Table 3. Factor analysis results for the attributes considered favorable for the development of wellness tourism in China

	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance explained	Mean	F value	Cronbach's alpha	<i>p</i>
<b>Factor 1 – Environmental and safety attributes</b>		5.874	41.959	4.47	5.101	0.86	0.000
Fresh air and clean water	0.786						
Peaceful environment	0.725						
Beautiful landscape	0.711						
Safe environment	0.705						
Natural wellness resources	0.563						
Relaxing environment	0.546						
<b>Factor 2 – Supporting facilities</b>		1.525	10.891	3.73	18.186	0.82	0.000
Excellent convention centers	0.800						
Modern and beautiful accommodation	0.745						
Excellent recreation facilities	0.671						
Convenient transportation	0.574						
Healthy cuisine	0.496						
<b>Factor 3 – Health facilities</b>		1.123	8.023	3.83	3.934	0.78	0.02
Qualified health and wellness centers	0.791						
High-quality therapeutic services and practitioners	0.786						
Traditional Chinese medicine/treatment	0.709						

by 'Healthcare facilities' (3.83) and 'Supporting facilities' (3.73).

To assess internal consistency, each group was separately subjected to reliability analysis. The Cronbach's alpha values of all of the dimensions were within acceptable limits ( $\alpha > 0.75$ ) (Nunnally, 1978).

### Methods for promoting wellness tourism

Based on various medical and health tourism studies, a set of potential methods for promoting wellness tourism was identified. The respondents were asked to rate each method on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = least effective; 5 = most effective). Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of the effective methods for promoting wellness tourism in China.

Advertising in mass media (mean value of 4.38) and governmental support (mean value of 4.29) were identified by the respondents as the most effective methods for wellness tourism promotion, followed by organizing regional events, national/international campaigns and advertising on the Internet (mean values ranging from 3.99 to 4.09) and advertising on TV health channels and collaboration with medical and wellness travel agents.

### Correlation between attributes and promotion methods

To determine the most effective methods for promoting different kinds of facilities and attributes and to examine the relationships among these variables, correlation analysis was conducted. Correlation analysis is a way

to evaluate the statistical correspondence between two sets of values (in this case, the values of favorable wellness tourism attributes and those of effective promotion methods). The analysis produced significant results, which are presented in Table 5.

Pearson correlation coefficient analysis reveals the direction and degree of the association between two sets of values and allows the testing of the statistical significance of the relationship. The strongest relationship was between environmental and safety attributes and advertising on the Internet, whereas organizing regional events strongly affected wellness facilities.

The correlation between environmental and safety attributes and various promotion methods, save for national/international campaigns and collaboration with medical and wellness travel agents, was significant. In general, advertising on the Internet, in health magazines and in mass media were found to be the strongest methods for promoting wellness tourism. Organizing regional events, national/international campaigns and governmental support also had strong and positive relationships with the attributes.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

All of the attributes were found to be favorable (mean scores ranged from 3.33 to 4.67). Topping the list were environmental ones, including fresh air and clean water, beautiful landscape, natural resources (e.g. hot springs) and a peaceful and safe environment. To develop wellness tourism in a sustainable

Table 4. Effective methods for promoting wellness tourism in China

Rank	Methods	N	Mean <sup>a</sup>	Standard deviation <sup>b</sup>
1	Advertising in mass media	125	4.38	0.869
2	Governmental support	125	4.29	0.905
3	Organizing regional events	125	4.09	0.862
4	National/international campaigns	125	4.08	0.903
5	Advertising on the Internet	126	3.99	1.084
6	Advertising on TV health channels	126	3.87	1.088
7	Collaboration with medical travel agents	126	3.81	1.093
8	Advertising in health magazines	125	3.78	1.028
9	Collaborative action between the public and private sectors	125	3.77	1.066

<sup>a</sup>Mean scale: 1–5 (1 = least effective, 5 = most effective).

<sup>b</sup>Standard deviation: dispersion of the data deviating from the mean.

Table 5. Results of the Pearson correlation analysis of wellness tourism attributes and promotion methods

	Environmental and safety attributes	Supporting facilities	Health facilities
Collaborative action between the public and private sectors	0.202*	-0.054	0.143
Governmental support	0.279**	0.129	0.188*
National/international campaigns	0.068	0.238**	0.234*
Organizing regional events	0.292**	0.218*	0.346**
Advertising in mass media	0.385**	0.200*	0.119
Advertising in health magazines	0.248**	0.202*	0.129
Advertising on TV health channels	0.262**	0.210*	0.109
Advertising on the Internet	0.393**	0.235*	0.189*
Collaboration with medical travel agents	0.171	0.209*	0.064

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

way, a destination should showcase and protect its unique mix of natural resources and the local culture (Sheldon and Park 2008).

Convenient transportation/easy accessibility and TCM were among the top 10 attributes. The respondents believed that easy accessibility of wellness destinations within China was important. To achieve this, good air transportation to main hubs in China and safe land transportation to the wellness spots are necessary. In their study of the hot springs sector, Lee and King (2008) found that safety and security issues were important among Taiwanese respondents.

Destinations need to develop their special wellness features. TCM is a cultural asset and major attraction among wellness tourists, and its promotion can aid wellness tourism development. The quality of medical services and accommodation facilities reflect the healthcare and tourism culture of a destination. Today, medical and wellness tourism destinations (e.g. India, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand) also promote wellness tourism by offering post-surgery wellness treatments. Consequently, excellent medical centers and excellent recreation facilities are developed to meet the needs of health and wellness tourists.

Almost all of the listed methods for promoting wellness tourism in China were rated as effective, with advertising in mass media and governmental support considered the most effective. Advertising in mass media easily reaches the target market, especially local wellness tourists.

Correlation analysis yielded significant and fairly strong relationships between promotion methods and favorable attributes. Government support is considered beneficial for advertising in foreign countries. This can be performed by organizing mega events, festivals or activities, which have themes related to the wellness spot. Governments can also promote wellness tourism in national tourism marketing campaigns and provide support for this niche area. Advertising on the Internet was considered to be more effective than either advertising on TV health channels or that in health magazines. Collaboration with medical and wellness travel agents was rated as important to reach health tourists, including those who might need wellness products after medical treatment.

The study reveals information on the attributes favorable for the development of wellness tourism in China and effective methods for the promotion of this sector. In addition, a number of implications for wellness tourism providers are deduced:

- The first and very important issue regarding wellness tourism sector in China is the quality of the wellness product. Wellness product can be improved with proper training and benchmarking with international wellness facility brands. International service standards should be adopted particularly for those wellness service providers that strive for attracting international customers.

- Preventive measures for safety, security and sanitation of wellness products should be formulated as a government policy.
- A collaborative approach should be adopted between private and public service providers in the wellness tourism area to monitor the development. Private and public partnership could be encouraged in the industry to attract local and international wellness tourists.
- Government support is crucial at all stages of wellness tourism product development. Government support and promotion should be required as the first move to speed up the development. Stimulating investment through proper policies and regulations would eliminate financial and operational risks of investors and also solve the capacity problem.
- To overcome the lack of facilities and attractions and poor investment potential, the Chinese government could lower the land costs and other related costs as to attract new investments in China's wellness destinations.
- Provision of information on the Internet about the wellness spots and travel details are also very important since the Internet is commonly used as main tool for acquiring relevant information for travel. This can be performed as a part of national promotional campaign.
- An official organization comprising both public and private sectors should be established to monitor, supervise and manage the wellness tourism industry in China.

## CONCLUSION

There are many advantages to developing wellness tourism. It can encourage investment to the region, increase employment rate, and enhance sense of place of a destination and health of the local residents (Sheldon and Park 2008). Wellness tourism is in its infancy in China but has huge potential.

Among the Asian destinations that promote health tourism, China has much more to offer with its existing rich and sophisticated culture and spirituality, natural resources and human capital. The study findings have several important practical implications for the

development of wellness tourism in China. The respondents were experts who were attending the 2009 International Wellness Tourism Summit Forum, which was held in Wuyi, China, and organized by the International Tourism Studies Association (ITSA). Hence, the results of the study provide industry and government decision makers with an expert assessment of those attributes that are considered necessary for the development of this niche market (environmental assets including fresh air, clean water and the natural landscape were considered to be the most important) and the most effective methods for promoting wellness tourism in China (advertising in mass media, governmental support and organizing new regional events were believed to be the most effective).

By taking a broad approach and having a country-specific focus that includes coverage of China's cultural and spiritual background, the study also makes valuable theoretical contributions to China's health tourism literature and suggests future directions for the development of wellness tourism.

Expert opinions about wellness tourism development in China were gathered to determine those factors that can increase China's level of wellness tourism and competitiveness in this sector. Future studies that focus separately on each sector and compare the expectations of each sector regarding wellness tourism could also provide valuable information for the development of this market. Government involvement should also be further investigated, given the crucial role played by government in the development of wellness tourism. In addition, future studies could gather information from wellness tourists to determine the factors affecting their choice of wellness tourism resorts or centers in China.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

This study is not without limitations. First, very few studies have been conducted about wellness tourism in China. Moreover, there is a lack of wellness tourism literature in general. Therefore, items used in the questionnaire are not well tested elsewhere. Second, the sample may not be representative enough since only the experts who attended the wellness tourism

forum were taken. There might be other experts who did not attend the conference. Third, sample size is rather small, given that responses are limited to the number of attendees in the forum. Future studies may look at the barriers for development of wellness tourism in China and the motivation of wellness tourists with a larger sample.

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