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# WELLNESS TOURISM - AN ANALYSIS OF TOURIST PREFERENCES AND PERCEPTIONS IN PUDUCHERRY

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## **ABSTRACT**

*People have been travelling for health from the ancient time. Now people are more aware of the importance of health. They consciously plan to have a healthy body and mind. Hence, travel for health is getting more popularity and it is a widely preferred form of vacationing. Medical tourism, Health tourism and Spa tourism are very common and are popular forms of fitness based tourism. Wellness is relatively a new trend with very impressive growth rate. Wellness is the special state of health focussing on the overall sense of wellbeing. Wellness tourism has become an emerging tourism market and one of the fastest growing domestic and international travel segments. Pondicherry, one of the popular beach destinations in South India and the former French colony, attracts large number of tourists and is a preferred destination for wellness tourists. The non religious spiritual ambience in Puducherry, especially in Auroville along with opportunities for yoga, meditations and alternative medicines offer a significant potential for health and wellness tourism. This paper is an attempt to evaluate the prospects of wellness tourism in Puducherry. The study is centred on Auroville, the spiritual centre of Puducherry. The data were collected using questionnaire from tourists who visited Auroville for wellness reasons. The data were analysed using SPSS and interpreted to know the demographic and tripographic features of wellness tourists to Puducherry. Their preferences in wellness activities and perceptions on the physical settings, quality of services and opportunities for wellness tourism were also evaluated. The results of the study disclose features of wellness tourism market and the dimensions of wellness tourism experiences in Puducherry.*

**Keywords:** *Health Tourism, Wellness Tourism, Medical Tourism*

## Introduction

Wellness is a holistic word which has become popular in the modern world with an ancient origin. Wellness is primarily associated with health, which is wellbeing with absence of illness. Wellness reflects the positive attributes of health. Health and wellness are of essential in the tourism industry as well. In today's fast and hectic life, health is the most ignored area. A large percentage of the society cannot find time to take care of their health. Moreover, the stressful work culture spoils their health too. Surprisingly, the health consciousness among people has increased many folds. Health and wellness together form a notable niche tourism market. This segment comprises of two types of tourists. First group of tourists are those who follow a wellness lifestyle and hence want to incorporate wellness activities into their trips to maintain their health and fitness while travelling. Second group who are looking for a wellness vacation, with a specific intention of physical and mental wellbeing, losing weight, getting fit, managing stress so on (K Velina, 2014). The global Wellness Institute research confirms that wellness is one of the most resilient markets which grew 10.6% in the last two years. The wellness industry represents 5.1% of the total global economy and within that more than 14 percentage form wellness tourism market.

India is a country with a strong background of wellness tradition from the ancient times. India's traditional medicine of Ayurveda is one of the oldest health care systems which have been practised for more than thousand years. Ayurveda, yoga and meditation are the most popular wellness tourism products of India. Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, with the intention of promoting India as a 365 days destination, has identified some niche products in which Medical & wellness tourism is an important one. With this rich heritage of 'wellness', India has enormous potential for wellness tourists and huge possibilities to become a lucrative wellness tourism destination.

Pondicherry, a union territory of India is one of the popular tourist destinations of South India. Pondicherry is admired for its French architecture, serene beaches and spiritual vibes. The sightseeing in Pondicherry can be completed in a day or two. It has much more to offer if tourists have more time to spend. Pondicherry is a Special Interest Tourist destination for tourists in search of spiritual experience, volunteering, health, wellness and heritage. Auroville, as the hub and along with few other resorts and spas, the destination offer huge opportunities for tourists in search of health and wellness. The immense possibilities for wellness tourism in Puducherry is more integrated into spiritual activities like yoga, meditation and ayurveda is yet to be tapped.

## **Review Scan**

### ***The Origin of the Concept 'Wellness'***

The concept of 'wellness' is of ancient origin. The modern concept of wellness was originated in India from BC 3000 -1500 in Ayurveda, a holistic system which brings harmony between body, mind and spirit. Traditional Chinese Medicine (3000-2000BC) is another oldest system of medicines, in which the treatment like acupuncture itself has become core modern system of wellness. Large number of Alternative health care systems and healing practices like Homeopathy, Osteopathy and Naturopathy were introduced in 19<sup>th</sup> century in US and Europe.

The word wellness is in usage from 1650s as opposite to illness meaning 'state of good health' (Oxford Dictionary). Halbert L Dunn (1959) used the term 'wellness' for the first time when he introduced a holistic state of health involving body, mind and spirit as well as ones immediate environment or surroundings. He promoted wellness as 'High level wellness'. This work got published in 1961 and received wide acceptance in 1970s. Dr. John Travis, Don Ardell, Dr. Bill Hettler were also the pioneers of this wellness movement. Dr. John Travis and his associates got inspiration from Dunn and conceived the idea of wellness, designed models and assessment tools and finally took initiative to start National wellness Institute in US. (<https://www.globalwellnessinstitute.org>). Travis (1984) defined wellness as 'a state of being, an attitude and an ongoing process not a static state which we reach and never have to consider again.

### ***Conceptualising Wellness***

The word wellness was conceptualised by different authors in different period of time as a holistic state of body and mind which is not just opposite to illness. (Clark, 1996; Dunn, 1977; Jonas, 2005; Lafferty, 1979; Lorion, 2000; Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer, 2005; Sackney, Noonan, and Miller, 2000; Sarason, 2000). The World Health Organisation defines wellness as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity" (1948). WTO also refers it to 'peoples' abilities to perform family, work, and community roles; their ability to deal with physical, biological, psychological, and social stress; the extent to which they experience feelings of well being; and their state of equilibrium with their environment'.

Myers, Sweeney, and Wittmer (2005, p. 252) opine that wellness is ‘a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being in which the body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live more fully within the human and natural community.’

Jonas (2005, p. 2) differentiates health and wellness, as ‘health is a state of being, whereas wellness is a process of being’. Author defines wellness as ‘a way of life and living in which one is always exploring, searching, finding new questions and discovering new answers, along the three primary dimensions of living: the physical, the mental, and the social; a way of life designed to enable each of us to achieve, in each of the dimensions, our maximum potential that is realistically and rationally feasible for us at any given time in our lives.’

Wellness is clearly a complex concept, incorporating elements of lifestyle, physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing and one’s relationship to oneself, others and the environment. The Deutscher Wellness Verband (2008) suggests that the term ‘medical wellness’ can be used to somehow integrate the concepts of health and wellness.’ (book on wellness, p54). Mueller & Kaufmann (2001) distinguished wellness and cures based on demand. They assume that wellness is pursued mainly by ‘healthy’ people with an aim of preventing diseases. They prefer for service packages for physical fitness, beauty care, relaxation, healthy diet etc. whereas, the other group look for treatments for their diseases.

### ***Dimensions of Wellness***

Here are different dimensions for wellness. Different studies and results view wellness in the following dimensions.

1. Physical wellness
2. Psychological (Emotional) wellness
3. Social wellness
4. Intellectual wellness
5. Spiritual wellness
6. Occupational wellness
7. Environmental wellness

Physical wellness is primarily maintaining health through continuous physical activities. Self health care and choice of healthy life style are part

of this wellness. Emotional wellness is psychological which includes a person's outlook towards health. It is influenced by his positive attitudes, beliefs, self-esteem and determination. Self realisation, relationships and the ability to cope with difficult situations in life lead to emotional wellness. Social wellness is one's feeling of comfort, belongingness and togetherness which include interactions with people, community and nature. Intellectual wellness is the state of optimal level of intellectual performance. This form of wellness is essential to have creative thinking and application of knowledge. Spiritual wellness is innate and is the condition realising oneself and the soul. It reveals the purpose and meaning of life. Occupational wellness bestows one with the ability to enjoy work and to realise the value and gains at work. Personal satisfaction is the result of this wellness. Environmental wellness encompasses the immediate environment of a person like family, workplace, community and nature. Wellness of a person is the combination of all these dimensions which are integral to the holistic wellness (Anspaugh et al, 2008).

### ***Determinants of Health and Wellness***

There are long lists of factors which determine the health and wellness status which include personal, social, economic and environmental. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) identifies 11 health determinants: *Income and social status, Social support networks, Education, Employment and working conditions, Social environments, Geography, Physical environments, Healthy child development, Health services, Gender, and Culture* (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Few other factors include, Aboriginal status, food security, housing quality, affordability, and security and geography (Raphel, 2004).

### ***Wellness - A Holistic Tourism Product***

Wellness addresses human health in a holistic or comprehensive sense and assumes that each person will actively participate in protecting their health, in preventing diseases and will not leave all these to medication (Melanie Smith László Puczkó, 2009). The psychological and the physical benefits from travel and tourism activities have gained acceptance all over the world. In the modern days people are giving more emphasis for their health and wellbeing. Health and wellness is a major travel market around the world, which is fast growing and contemporary.

Wellness tourism is described as 'travel associated with the goal of maintaining or enhancing one's personal wellbeing and includes pursuit of physical, spiritual or environmental wellness while travelling for leisure or

business' (Spafinder, 2015). A survey conducted among the travel agents of North America and Europe by Spafinder wellness 365 for State of wellness Travel Report reveals access to beach, pools and swimming facilities, healthy cuisines, nature, fitness facilities outdoor adventure, traditional sports, being socially responsible, weight loss programs, spiritual healing, alternative medicines etc. are the major wellness elements in the order of rank.

The spectrum of health tourism given below gives an explicit overview of health tourism which includes, physical healing, beauty treatments, relaxation & rest, leisure/ entertainment, life & work balance, psychological and spiritual.

Physical Healing	Beauty Treatments	Relaxation/ Rest	Leisure/ Entertainment	Life/Work Balance	Psychological	Spiritual
Medical Spas/baths Mofetta Surgerytrips Rehabilitation retreats	Cosmetic surgery trips  Hotel/day spas	Pampering spas/baths Wellness hotels Thalasso therapy centres	Spa resorts with ' fun waters'  Sport/ fitness holiday	Holistic centres Occupational wellness workshops	Holistic centres Workshops (e.g. Hoffmann, psycho-drama)	Meditation Retreats Yoga Pilgrimages

Source: Smith, M., Puczko, L. (2009)

Based on the motivation, age and interests tourists will select the form of wellness that may be mainly for rest & relaxation, physical healing or for spiritual reasons. Spa Tourism is the most popular form of wellness tourism. Water based treatments like thermal pools, steam rooms and saunas used for the relaxation and healing is called spa. There are varieties of spas based on the form and dimension of the wellness activities it offers. Tourism that provides the visitor with a range of activities and treatments which are aimed at balancing the body-mind-spirit is called holistic tourism which is usually aimed for overall wellness. These holistic retreat centres are purpose-built centres for practicing the guests on body, mind and spirit activities including yoga, community meeting, interaction, self expression and creativity time and relaxing fun time.

Yoga and meditation form prime sub-sectors of holistic tourism as well as spiritual tourism. Yoga and meditation are practices which are ideal to have a healthy life and hence are a part or main component of a holiday. It is a fact that having separate statistics for wellness, healthcare and medical tourism, because, the services provided in the destination for all these categories are more or less similar.

A board was formed to provide the guidelines to promote Indian system of Medicines known as AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy). The mushrooming of wellness centres in India is a major concern. NABH (National board for Accreditation of Hospitals and Health care services) in consultation with AYUSH have prepared guidelines for the approval of wellness centers in India.

### ***Spirituality - The Core of Wellness***

Some authors argues that spirituality is at the core of wellness (e.g. Devereux & Carnegie, 2006; Pernecky & Johnston, 2006 ; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). This represents a shift away from orthodox religion towards a kind of transcendent spirituality, where one aims to develop beyond the self and the ego. Heelas and Woodhead (2005) suggest that a slow but steady spiritual revolution is taking place in which secular spirituality is taking over from traditional religion. Some Western psychologists such as Freud believed that religion was detrimental to the emotional health of the individual. Few others believed that spirituality was the essence of what it meant to be human. Indeed, the word 'spirituality' comes from the Latin 'spiritualitas', an abstract word, related to the Greek word 'pneuma' meaning breath, the essence of life.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main aim of this paper was to determine the prospects of wellness tourism in Puducherry and to understand the profile of wellness tourists. The study also intends to unveil the tourist perception on the major wellness attributes of Pondicherry.

### **The Methodology**

A study focussed on tourist perception on wellness was conducted from February to April, 2017 in Pondicherry. Tourists involving in any of the wellness activities were focussed for the study and samples were selected from identified wellness centres located in the Auroville area which is the main centre of wellness tourism in Puducherry. 110 questionnaires collected through convenient sampling method were used for the study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section was designed to collect information on the socio-demographic profile of tourists. The second section was to unveil the tripographic profile of tourists and the third section involved questions related to tourist's perceptions on Pondicherry as a wellness tourism destination. The key attributes of a wellness tourism destination like, Natural setting of the place, Quality of the destination and Opportunities for

wellbeing in Pondicherry were evaluated using Likert scale. Independent sample T-test was applied to assume the differences in the perception on wellness variables based on Nationality and Gender.

## **Results and Discussions**

### ***The Prospects of Wellness Tourism in Puducherry***

The image of a wellness destination lies on the key endowed resources like, Nature, Scenery, Local culture, Authenticity and the reputation of the destination. These form the pull factors of the destination. The core products of the destination should include quality services to enhance health, wellbeing and relaxation like wellness treatments, sauna and pool facility, outdoor / indoor sports. The supporting services include quality accommodation, restaurants and transportation services. (Donna Dvorak, Susanna Saari & Telle Tuominen, 2014) Pondicherry is a heritage town with beautiful beaches, well planned towns and streets rich heritage and spiritual aura and unique life style. Pondicherry and Auroville are exposed to multicultural activities and life style. It is true that Pondicherry offers opportunities to be experienced in different areas of interest of tourists. Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, temples, Jeeva samadhis and churches attracts large number of spiritual tourists. Gandhi mandapam, Dupleix statue, Raj Nivas, French war memorial, Aayi mantapam and the white town expose the French legacy of Puducherry. Promenade, Serenity and Chunnambara are beautiful beaches of Pondicherry.

The core wellness tourism resources in Puducherry include, the healing centers like Quiet Healing centre, Auroville, Auroville retreat, Martuvam healing forest, meditation centers like Matrimandir, Heartfulness meditation centre and Manavalakalai mandram, Spiritual centre like Aurobindo Ashram. Sri Aurobindo Ashram is where tourists come to seek spiritual harmony and enlightenment and is popular for yoga and meditation. Auroville is an international township named after Sri Aurobindo and is the best place for people who seek spirituality. The wellness activities in Auroville also include Auroville Dental centre, Arka- A place for senior citizens and holistic wellness, Integrated health-place providing classical homeopathy and support to women and children, visit to organic food processing and sirulina unit, and various sports and recreation facilities . Pondicherry also has good number of quality centres for beauty treatments and Ayurveda treatments. The best reviewed hotels and resorts like Dune Eco village, Le Pondy Beach Resort, Wind flower, Ananda Inn, Le Royal Park, Shembaka Hotel, The promenade, The Accord offer spas and massage centers for their guests. The blend of French and Tamil culture, presence of significant number of festivals and

events, antique and modern shopping centres, multi cuisine and speciality restaurants, varied accommodation units and opportunities for adventure and cultural activities are the supporting services for wellness tourists in Pondicherry.

### ***Profile of Wellness Tourist Market***

Wellness is all about of feeling better. As everyone wants to feel better, the market of wellness tourists includes all the segments irrespective of age, nationality and other demographic features. But, there are some limitations for few who could not become wellness tourists.

<b>Variables N=101</b>		<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	Male	62.6
	Female	37.4
Age	26-35	57.4
	36-45	22.6
	46-55	9.6
	56-65	5.2
	66 and above	5.2
Nationality	Indian	70.4
	Foreign	29.6
Occupation	Employed	82.6
	Self employed	13.0
	Student	1.7
	Other	2.6
Income	Below 25000	17.4
	25000-50000	33.0
	50000-75000	18.3
	75000-100000	17.4
	Above 100000	13.9

*Source: Questionnaire*

The proportion of male and female respondents of this study conducted in Puducherry show the ratio of 3:1. A significant percentage of the respondents belong to the age group of 26-35 and 36-45. Male respondents dominated female respondents in the study. 70.4 % among the respondents were domestic tourists and the remaining were foreign tourists. Wellness tourism is affordable

for people with regular income who can be able to bear the expenses. 82.6% of the respondents were employed and 13% were self-employed.

### ***Tripographic Profile of Wellness Tourists***

		<b>Percentage</b>
Sources of Information about the destination	Internet	28.7
	Travel Magazines /Newspapers	7.0
	Friends and relatives	60.9
	Blogs	1.7
	Others	1.7
Duration of stay	1-2 Day	56.5
	3-5 Day	13.9
	5-7 Day	1.7
	More than 1 week	27.8
Spending in Puducherry	Less than 10000	44.3
	10000-20000	41.7
	20000-30000	7.8
	30000-40000	4.3
	50000 And above	1.7
Accommodation preferred	Hotels	34.8
	Beach resort	22.6
	Service apartments	1.7
	Guest house	27.8
	Any other	13
Frequency of visit	First time	38.3
	2-3 Times	36.5
	3-4 Times	7.0
	More than 5 times	18.3

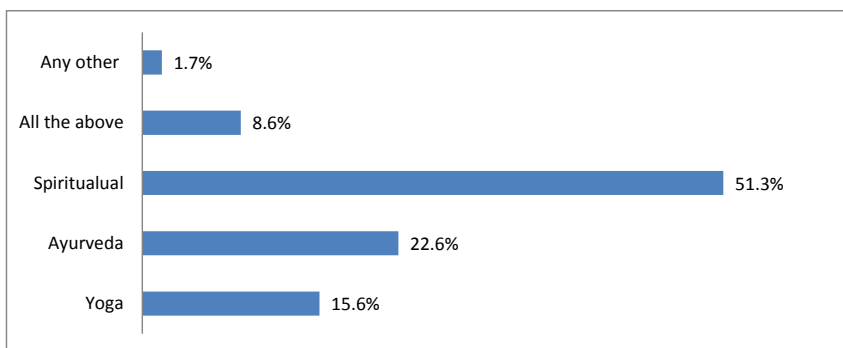
*Source: Questionnaire*

Wellness tourists are more likely to be referred tourists. The findings of the study reveal that 60.9% of the respondents are referred by their friends and relatives. Internet is the source of information for 28.7 % of the respondents, who give value for feedbacks and testimonials given by the satisfied travellers. The literature on wellness tourism reflects the view that wellness tourists visit

places for short breaks, during shoulder season and are high spenders. The study in Pondicherry also bring to the similar finding that, average duration of stay of wellness tourists is 1-2 days (56.5%). But a significant percentage of 27.8% stay in Pondicherry for more than one week. They are the primary wellness tourists. 41.7% of the respondents spent more than Rs.20000 in Pondicherry. Choice of accommodation in a destination is highly based on the motives of travel. A considerable percentage of the respondents stayed in Hotels in Pondicherry (34.8), followed by Beach resorts (22.6) and Guest houses (27.8). Beach resorts and guest houses are ideal choice of accommodation for tourist in Pondicherry. Resorts have wellness facilities including spa which are suitable for high end tourists and guest houses are located close to the wellness centers in Auroville which are preferred by cost conscious tourist. It is interesting to note that wellness tourists are mostly repeated visitors. Only 38.3% of the respondents visited Pondicherry for the first time. Others are repeated tourists who planned to have wellness activities in their next visit.

### ***Wellness Tourism Motivations in Puducherry***

It is important to know the travel motives of the tourists to visit a destination, which help in assessing the tourist behaviour, to understand expectations and to offer services matching with their expectations.



Source: *Questionnaire*

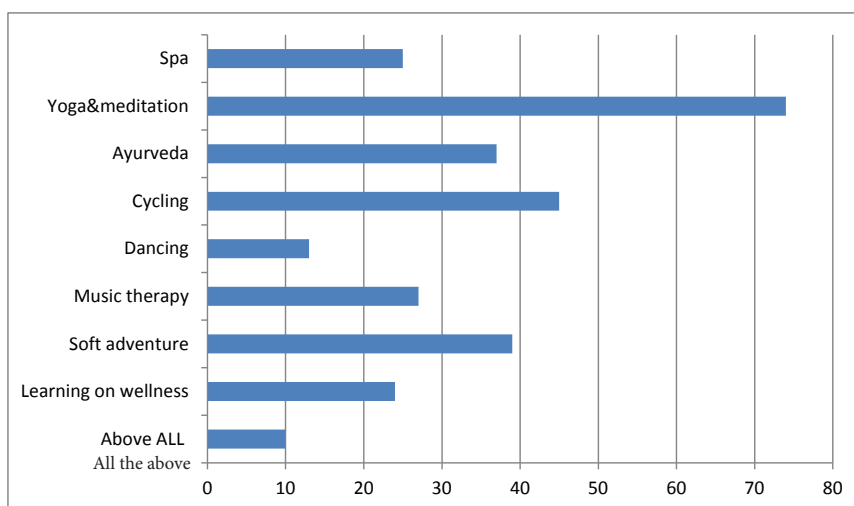
### **Wellness Tourism Motivators in Puducherry**

The study reveals that more than half of the wellness tourists are motivated with the spiritual opportunities in Puducherry. Facilities like Ayurveda and Spas attracts a good number of tourist to Pondicherry. Yoga is another factor promoting wellness tourism in Pondicherry. There is a significant number who are motivated for all the three - Spirituality, Ayurveda and Yoga. Hence

it can be opined that the wellness tourism in Puducherry at present is highly centered on these three popular wellness attributes.

### ***Preferred Wellness Activities in Puducherry***

Yoga and meditation ranked first in the favorite wellness activities of tourists in Puducherry. The meditation centre inside Matrimandir and the Aurobindo ashram offers the tourists wonderful time to meditate in a calm and spiritual ambiance. Cycling was the second choice for the respondents. A good number of local communities, Aurovilians and tourists usually travel in cycle. Soft adventure activates especially, beach based and others are enjoyed by a good number of tourists. Aayurveda, music therapy, spas and learning on wellness are few other wellness activities in Puducherry.

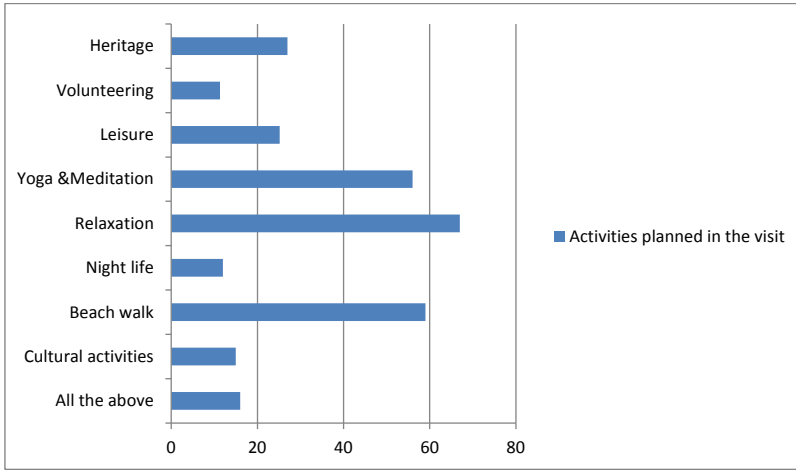


Source: Questionnaire

### **Preferred Wellness Activities**

#### ***Wellness Activities Planned in the Present Tours***

The wellness tourist mostly aims at relaxing mind and body. They find various activities to relax and refresh. Beach walk and yoga & meditation are the activities planned by the tourists in their present trip. Heritage, leisure and cultural activities also enlisted in the tourist itinerary in Puducherry.



Source: Questionnaire

### Wellness Activities Planned in the Present Tours

#### *Tourist Perception on the Wellness Tourism Attributes of Puducherry*

Independent sample T-test was conducted to examine the perceptual difference among the domestic and International tourists on the natural setting of Puducherry, quality of the destination and opportunities for wellness in Puducherry, the major three criteria in assessing the scope of wellness tourism in a destination. The following hypotheses are tested in the study.

H1 Tourist perceptions on natural setting of Puducherry varies on Nationality.

H2 Perceptions on quality of destination is influenced by the nationality of tourists.

H3 Tourist perception on opportunity for wellness tourism in Puducherry is influenced by Nationality.

**Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means
		F	Sig.	T
Pondicherry is a calm place	Equal variances assumed	11.733	.001	-3.239
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.444
Pondicherry is a beautiful destination	Equal variances assumed	5.145	.025	.279
	Equal variances not assumed			.308
I feel more relaxed after visiting Pondicherry	Equal variances assumed	12.701	.001	2.250
	Equal variances not assumed			2.391
Pondicherry offers peaceful ambience	Equal variances assumed	5.356	.022	3.265
	Equal variances not assumed			2.846
Pondicherry offers different activities which can refresh & rejuvenate	Equal variances assumed	25.974	.000	-.853
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.154

H1: Tourist perceptions on natural setting of Puducherry varies on Nationality.

The results show that, tourist perception on natural setting of Puducherry varies significantly based on nationality. Domestic and international tourists have different opinion on the nature, beauty, ambience to relax, peacefulness and opportunity to refresh and rejuvenate in Pondicherry. Hence the alternative hypothesis (H1) may be accepted.

**Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means
		F	Sig.	T
Natural setting of Puducherry is suitable for wellness		.007	.935	2.427
				2.096
Quality SPA & treatments facilities are available in Puducherry		.162	.688	.374
				.390

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means
	F	Sig.	T
Accommodation in Puducherry are of good quality	12.026	.001	-.589
			-.737
Happy with the quality of Food Available in Puducherry	3.886	.051	-1.359
			-1.619
Pondicherry is a clean & hygienic Area	1.007	.318	2.728
			2.409

Source: Questionnaire

H2 Perceptions on quality of destination is influenced by the nationality of tourists.

The results reveal that there is no much difference in the perception of domestic and international tourists on the quality of destination. Only about the quality of accommodation in Puducherry their opinion differs. Hence the alternative hypothesis cannot be accepted.

#### Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means
	F	Sig.	T
Pondicherry gives a novel experience of vibrant local culture	.029	.864	.594
			.542
There are opportunities to learn about wellness activities in Puducherry	5.791	.018	-.351
			-.404
Puducherry offers opportunities for 'Soft 'adventure activities	4.217	.042	1.922
			2.356
There are opportunities to socialise	.001	.975	-3.823
			-3.920
Opportunities to develop new skills	4.764	.031	-.915
			-.983

Source: Questionnaire

H3 Tourist perception on opportunity for wellness tourism in Puducherry is influenced by Nationality.

There is perception difference among different nationality on the opportunity to learn about wellness tourism and opportunities to develop new skills on wellness tourism in Puducherry. Both foreign and Indian tourists unanimously agree that Pondicherry gives a novel experience of vibrant local culture, opportunity for soft adventure activities and also a chance to socialise.

### **Suggestions and Conclusion**

It is a fact that wellness is a multi-dimensional concept which incorporates physical, mental, social, environmental and cultural factors. One of the main barriers for optimum wellness is the busy and hectic schedule of life and lack of time. Hence, when one plans for a holiday to relax, they prefer to include relaxing and rejuvenating wellness activities even though it is time-consuming and expensive. In India there are very few destinations one can choose for wellness tourism. Tourist attractions, accessibility, location, link with nature are supporting factors along with the prime wellness tourism facilities while selecting a destination. Moreover wellness is highly linked to peace, Serenity and environment. Fortunately, all these factors support and facilitate in Puducherry.

Pondicherry as a tourist destination has quiet a good and unique attractions and experience to offer for all age groups. But even then, the heritage and the beaches are only highlighted among all. These two attract large number of domestic and foreign tourists to Pondicherry. The potential for special interest tourists for volunteering, wellness, rural experience, community activities etc are less explored, which are some of the best and unique experiences tourists can have in Puducherry.

The tourists visiting Puducherry, could be clearly distinguished based on their interest as destination focussed and experience focussed. Destination focussed tourists spent their time mostly in the heritage town and beaches of Pondicherry. The other group search for different experiences in and around Auroville. Likewise, around 70% of the wellness tourism activities are centered on Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. The reality is, vast resources for wellness tourism are not marketed well. Taking into consideration of the fact that, tourist visiting Auroville are interested to have a novel experience of spirituality, wellness, being close to nature and community and to leave their contribution to the nature and environment after their visit. The holistic experience of the visit keeps them physically and mentally refreshed and healthy.

Understanding the need of different market segments and offering them the best experience from the best available resources is the responsibility of destination promoters and the service providers. Hence a clear distinction between the destination focussed and activity focussed tourists need to be understood and marketed the services. It is also noted that the information on the wellness services are not communicated well. To make the services accessible for them is very important. The authenticity and genuineness of the wellness services also need special care because as this is about health and expensive and sensitive in nature.

The study gives clear evidence that there is a growing market for wellness tourism in Puducherry. Hence, the lucrative market can be tapped by using suitable marketing strategy. It is worth mentioning that the wellness tourism market might not be the main stream market of Pondicherry. Rather, a new market needs to be attracted who are primary wellness tourists.

It is also essential to take steps to ensure the quality of wellness services provided in the destination. There should be a regulatory system to ensure the quality of spa related and other services. The categorisation system for the spa and ayurvedic centers is an essential requirement to reduce the exploitation in the field of wellness tourism. In tourism, resource based approach and sustainability are key ingredients to achieve destination competitiveness. There is a high need to have a positive and subjective link between wellness tourism and wellbeing.

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