

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Hospitality should make wellness more accessible, customized

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Consumers primarily take wellness trips to reboot. Image credit: Waldorf Astoria

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK One of the biggest opportunities in the \$639 billion wellness tourism industry is the incorporation of healthy practices into trips that are not taken primarily with well-being in mind.

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Only about 11 percent of wellness tourism is tied to vacations that are fully centered on rebooting or reconnecting, with the rest comprising wellness moments outside of dedicated trips. During a panel at The New York Times Travel Show on Jan. 24, speakers discussed how wellness is being woven into regular stays, from multigenerational travel to business trips.

"The wellness concept can be very intimidating, but what we need to understand is the client's needs in advance," said Adalberto Rodriguez, marketing executive at [ICT/Costa Rica Office of Tourism](#). "So the most important thing is to understand what they understand by the wellness concept.

"[Wellness] can mean very many different things," he said. "So once we understand the customer's needs, it's going to be better for us so we can offer a more personalized and more suitable [experience] for that particular client that we have."

Health and hospitality

According to research from Travel Market Report, boomers make up 36 percent of all wellness travel. Comparatively, Gen X and millennials each account for approximately a quarter of wellness tourism.

Steve Smotrys, vice president of sales for North America at [Cunard](#), said that while boomers may take more of these trips, their leading position is probably more tied to having a greater opportunity to travel than their younger counterparts.



*Canyon Ranch spa aboard Cunard's Queen Mary 2. Image credit: Canyon Ranch*

Forty-four percent of wellness trips are three to five days long, but an equivalent group travels for seven days. Experts also see trends such as business travelers adding on some days to a work trip to recover and sightsee.

Wellness does not mean the same thing to all people, requiring hospitality companies such as travel advisors to get to the heart of what each individual desires. However, the top reason why consumers plan wellness trips is to reboot, followed by reconnecting with themselves.

Most wellness trips are taken with significant others or friends. Moderator Geraldine Ree, executive director at [Travel Market Report](#), noted that girlfriend getaways are the top growing category in travel.

For instance, a woman might take a trip with friends to celebrate a divorce and reconnect with her newly single self.

Some hospitality brands have spoken directly to this trend. For instance, Rosewood Hotels & Resorts appealed to female guests with a campaign celebrating friendship and offering exclusive travel packages ([see story](#)).

While family wellness travel is less common, [Hilton's](#) senior director of global wellness, Melissa Walker, sees an opportunity for kid-friendly activities, since children often lack access to fitness centers.

Mr. Smotrys also sees the potential for solo wellness travel, as consumers seek out a new community of strangers. In response, Cunard has created single occupancy staterooms.

The top wellness must-haves are fitness, nature and peace and quiet.

Individuals also welcome the opportunity to disconnect. Whereas the strength of a WiFi signal used to be a perk, today guests are seeking out opportunities to unplug.

Some destinations, including Costa Rica, have a natural value proposition for wellness tourism. Mr. Rodriguez described how many of the nation's spas are surrounded by nature.

Costa Rica was among the top five wellness destinations in a Virtuoso survey ([see story](#)).



*Costa Rican wellness is often tied to nature. Image credit: Visit Costa Rica*

Where nature is not as accessible, hotels can infuse plants into the interior design. Hilton has been incorporating biophilic design into some of its properties, bringing greenery inside.

Aside from what happens on property, hospitality firms have the potential to have a longer impact on guests' wellness journeys. For instance, Ms. Walker sees the opportunity for hotels to offer up tips for jetlag recovery.

Jennifer Lee, vice president at [Travel Planners International](#), spoke to the role that travel advisors can play in extending the wellness experience just by asking consumers to share memories from their trip.

Environmentally friendly

More than half of affluents plan to incorporate wellness aspects into their future travels, as more people look to balance self-care with unique experiences.

According to a survey from MVI Marketing, more than 60 percent of travelers expect hospitality brands to offer wellness options at their properties. More than 50 percent also named social media platforms as their inspiration for wellness and luxury travel ([see story](#)).

More than 80 percent of affluents are interested in wellness travel, as global demand grows for experiences that emphasize physical and mental well-being.

According to a report from Altiant, less than 70 percent of high-net-worth individuals feel relaxed despite high levels of happiness and wealth. Chinese affluents report the lowest levels of happiness while being the most likely to prefer relaxing trips rather than active vacations ([see story](#)).

Wellness is linked to sustainability, as consumers desire positive travel.

Ms. Ree pointed out that travel is the only category that touches on all 17 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Both Cunard and Hilton, which includes the Waldorf Astoria brand, are making efforts to eliminate plastic.

"If we're going to make a real big impact, it's the people that aren't paying attention to it, that don't understand it, that aren't already into it, is who we're really trying to affect," Ms. Lee said. "I think the way you can do that is use words in your vernacular like respect, curation, use words that are very emotionally charged that help connect the person that you're talking to away from the logic of 'how much is that hotel room' to 'what is your experience going to be.'

"That's how you make the connection," she said. "You don't make change by shoving it down someone's throat...You make change by the way you act, what you say, what you do, how you present yourself on a regular basis, and I think it's the same thing in the selling process and in the presentation process."