

HEALTHCARE

Thoughtful travel, metaverse driving wellness industry

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Wellness travel is poised for a comeback. Image credit: Global Wellness Institute/Tourism and Events Queensland

By KATIE TAMOLA

A melding of past wellness practices and innovative techniques will influence several sectors, according to the nonprofit Global Wellness Institute.

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In the year ahead, GWI is anticipating popular practices, with a focus on concepts such as intentional and thoughtful travel and wellness infiltrating the metaverse. Additional trends include a calling for wellness brands to stray from marketing that promotes toxic masculinity and to rely on regenerative agriculture.

"One thing that this forecast makes clear is that the future of wellness will be anything but a restart' of 2019," said Susie Ellis, CEO and chair of the [Global Wellness Institute](#), in a statement. "What consumers now need most, what they perceive as true wellness,' has profoundly changed."

Wellness consumers want

The top 10 wellness trends expected in 2022 include dirty wellness, toxic masculinity coming clean, shifting from wellness tech to technological wellness, changes in senior living, travel, innovative tech closing the gender gap, next-gen naturalism, health and wellness certifications and the metaverse.

"Dirty wellness" is a trend that includes regenerative agriculture, which promotes techniques that restore the earth's soil's biodiversity.



Consumers are investing more in their physical and mental wellness. Image courtesy of Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group

"Regen" or "soil-certified" refers to a certification process using soil tests that identify that practices are being used to regenerate soil on that farm. More wellness brands are expected to shift to regen-farm-sourced ingredients.

Acknowledgment that men are also experiencing body image issues is also a trend.

According to a U.K. survey, half of men aged 16-40 struggle with their mental health due to body image issues, attributing mainstream media and social media to their negative feelings.

Wellness brands are becoming aware of toxic masculinity a concept that is defined by adherence to traditional male gender roles which promote unrealistic body expectations and inhibit emotional expression and aim to prevent it in their messaging.

Also in line with gender-based issues, the report acknowledges that several women's health conditions are underfunded and under-researched.

In turn, startups and technology companies are trying to expand and improve research data through artificial intelligence (AI), apps and wearable devices. The goal is for better representation in trials, data and health information collection, which can lead to healthier and more beneficial practices promoted for all.

A shift from wellness tech to technological wellness is also imperative, which serves as a call to prioritize health regarding how and how often we engage with technology. Brands need to implement technology in a more thoughtful way, working collaboratively with technology companies to create apps that promote health in thoughtful ways, as opposed to obtuse and obsessive food intake trackers.

Urban bathhouses and wellness playgrounds are also seeing an uptick in popularity.

New or renovated bathhouses featuring hydrothermal bathing such as saunas, steam rooms and pools, large-scale wellness water resorts or public parks, cities and brands around the world are growing increasingly interested in making this kind of wellness accessible.

Additionally, public playgrounds that merge nature and art with wellness are transforming cityscapes with new manmade beachfronts, scenic boardwalks, pop-up wellness classes and even water sports becoming available in unexpected urban environments like New York, Paris, London, Sydney, Madrid and Tokyo.

With life expectancies continuing to grow, people are retiring later and growing more interested in being active and engaged in personal growth. Brands can reduce age segregation, increase social connections and craft offerings that decrease loneliness which can promote the overall health of clients.

Next-gen naturalism also cannot go unnoticed in the wellness space, as more consumers shift to self-reliance. As wellness reverts to fundamentals, next-gen naturalism calls for a simplification of one's life and placing a renewed focus on the natural world and ancient practices.

Although naturalism and self-reliance are thriving, the benefits of health and wellness coaching cannot be disregarded. Coaches trained in the art and science of promoting healthy changes may be the missing link in both healthcare and wellness.

Certified health and wellness coaches can work with doctors, insurers, employers and others in the promotion of positive wellness practices.



Wellness will infiltrate the metaverse. Image credit: Shutterstock

The future of wellness also includes an entity that is permeating every sector within the cultural landscape: the metaverse. With an increasingly technologically advanced society and additional social forces including the COVID-19 pandemic, experts predict the "wellness metaverse" is inevitable.

Consumers are actively seeking new technologies that can better engage and impact their health including virtual reality, augmented reality. The metaverse is expected to create several opportunities for the global wellness economy.

Thoughtful travel

The future of travel is also based on intention.

Consumers are looking to foster meaningful connections with themselves and others in their travel plans for 2022, from pursuing new and exciting experiences to following packages that allow them to revel in the beauty of nature.

Trips can be an opportunity for travelers to feel inspired and restored.

Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts has inspired travel lovers to get excited about reconnecting with the world, loved ones and themselves.

"Reconnect With The World" is a three-part video series and audio podcast series featuring conversations with people about life-changing trips, reminding the world of the importance and power of connections through travel. The second episode follows professional adventurer and entrepreneur Georgina Miranda through Costa Rica ([see story](#)).

Organizations such as bespoke travel company Black Tomato are taking thoughtful trips to a new level, crafting packages that help people connect with their loved ones, beloved authors and more.

Most recently, Black Tomato is working with Agatha Christie Limited and the author's great-grandson as the organization's official travel partner in celebrating 100 years since the author's Grand Tour. To mark the anniversary, Black Tomato is curating several journey packages that will invite consumers to follow in the beloved writer's footsteps through Africa, Australasia and more ([see story](#)).