

UPDATED
FOR
COVID-19

LÁSZLÓ PUCZKÓ - IRVING STACKPOLE

MARKETING HANDBOOK for Health Tourism

2021

INTRODUCTION

The markets for wellness, health, dental, and medical tourism exist around the world. The United Nations World Trade Organization (UN WTO) has labeled these markets as “health tourism.” As more service providers and destinations seek to expand, or begin the search for health tourism markets, the authors recognized a need for a down-to-earth, easy-to-understand marketing handbook.

This is the Marketing Handbook for Health Tourism.

We have purposefully kept the content non-academic, although we reference sources, so that our readers can explore additional information for themselves. Our offer is a comprehensive, easy-to-use Handbook, which will be useful to a sophisticated medical facility, an agency managing health travelers, as well as a tourism board.

The authors are very sensitive to the range of marketing knowledge among our audiences. Some who read this Handbook will have significant training and experience in marketing, while others will have very little, or none at all. We have tried to strike a balance, so that this Handbook can be useful to as many as possible.

The global markets for health tourism are complex and varied. As we emphasize in this Handbook, there is no “one-size-fits-all” formula for marketing success. Developing and improving marketing effectiveness in health tourism depends upon careful planning, research, and persistence.

During this global pandemic, when travel & tourism markets have declined around the world, marketing health tourism is especially difficult. Unanswered questions such as: How will these markets recover?, When will the markets recover?, Which segments will return first?, and How will consumer behavior be changed? These are questions we are all working to answer.

The authors sincerely hope that this Handbook contributes to these efforts!

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WHAT IS
"HEALTH TOURISM?"

Health Tourism connects traveling with the additional purposes and benefits of healing, health, wellness, and well-being¹.

Tourism, travel, and vacations have always been about relaxation, regeneration, escape, or indulgence. Traveling and tourism activities contribute to the general well-being of the travelers.

When people travel for the primary purpose of receiving treatments and services to help improve their health and well-being – this is "Health Tourism."

Health is a resource for everyday life. It is a positive concept, emphasizing social & personal aspects, as well as physical capabilities.

"Well-being" is a very broad description, of course. Therefore, the services being sought to improve "well-being" can be very different – from simple massage or spa treatments to highly sophisticated medical procedures. The underlying similarity is the intention of the consumer to access and consume these services at a destination that requires travel.

DEMAND & MOTIVATION FOR IMPROVING WELLBEING

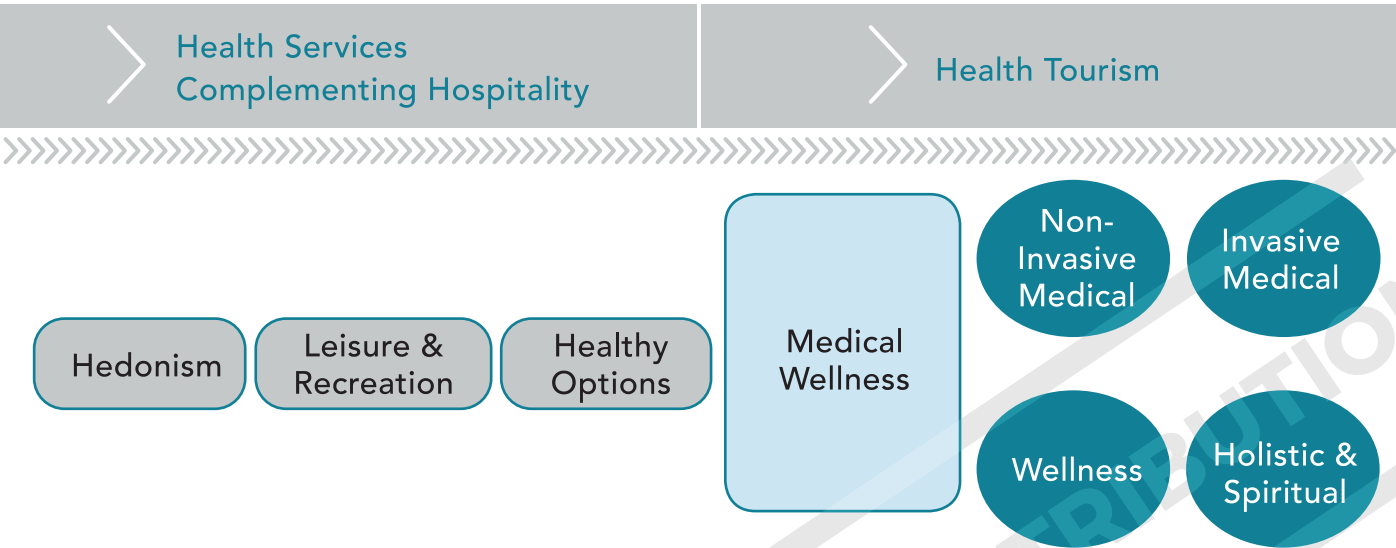


Figure 1. Demand & Motivation for Improving Well-Being

Health Tourism includes all the activities and services, either medical interventions or wellness treatments, intended to improve the well-being of the travelers. It includes everything from visits to traditional health resorts, wellness treatments, spas, and holistic programs (such as meditation), all the way to evidence-based medicine and life-saving surgical interventions. Regardless of motivation, many travelers can benefit from health-related services, like visiting a thermal/hot spring bath or spa. These travelers are not health tourists, however, but tourists who purchase health services.

Consider the following key points before embarking on marketing your service and/or location:

IS HEALTH AT THE CORE OF WHAT YOU DO?

- If the answer is "Yes," then the destination and the service provider is targeting the markets for Health Tourism.
- If health-related services are supporting elements of what you do – your value proposition – then you may find customers who will look for, and appreciate healthy options, but their travel will not be health-motivated.

Research has shown that visiting a coast, or a forest – even briefly – has positive impacts on travelers' well-being. Does this mean that anyone who visits the coast, or a forest is a health tourist? No.

Hotels are adapting their amenities to offer more healthy options, such as fresh fruit juices in the minibar, exercise areas, or a running concierge. Does this mean that

anyone who enjoys a healthy drink from the minibar is a health tourist? No.

Only travel where the primary aim is consuming a health-related, wellness, or medical service qualifies as Health Tourism.

"Wellness" goes beyond the physical to incorporate all aspects of life. The word was popularized by Halbert Dunn² who described wellness as purpose in life, active involvement in satisfying work and play, joyful relationships, a healthy body and living environment, as well as the presence of happiness. Wellness is therefore "holistic," bringing physical, emotional, social, environmental, occupational, and financial aspects of life under the same umbrella term – wellness.



Can you, and should you, promote your offering as a “wellness” service? From a marketing point of view, the critical issue is the expectations of the consumer and the provider’s ability to meet or exceed those expectations. The term “wellness” has become overused and some say tired. The “wellness everything” trend, sometimes also called “wellness-washing,” should encourage destinations and providers to use different terms, and we encourage careful, infrequent use of these, and other overused terms. Your marketing communications should use terminology close to your core Value Proposition (see *Chapter 5 – Your Message*).

Medical or healthcare motivations range from elective procedures, such as plastic surgery to life-saving interventions, such as open-heart surgery. There are major differences between wellness and medical tourism in terms of motivations or drivers. Wellness tourists travel voluntarily and seek services and programs that improve their well-being and happiness.

In contrast, medical tourists need to travel, often to distant destinations, to receive important or necessary medical services. These decisions are often involuntary. This distinction is an important difference between wellness and medical tourism for marketing purposes.

When travel is not possible, such as during the pandemic, markets for health tourism are disrupted. Remote care (telehealth & telemedicine) can continue. Also, the desire and motivation of consumers to travel for healthcare services continue, and this demand becomes pent up. As soon travel is possible, and providers become available market activity will resume.



Customer – Individual who or organization that chooses to purchase your services

Consumer – The person who or organization that uses (consumes) your services

Provider – The individual who or organization that produces the services

CASE STUDY

The natural thermal/hot spring water lake of Hévíz (Hungary) has been used for healing, rehabilitation, and cures since Roman times. The city's services have been traditionally specialized on medical interventions, especially for orthopedic diseases. It has a specialized hospital with outpatient services, as well as hotels with medical services.

Marketers of the city used to refer to the town as a medical tourism destination. During the last 10-15 years, wellness services have been introduced at many of the hotels so that a combination of medical and wellness services are now offered. Hévíz is more recently marketed as a Health Tourism destination, where guests as well as patients can find the services they seek.

Points to Remember

Health Tourism describes a very broad array of consumer activities from simple spa treatments to life-saving medical surgeries, where the primary motivation for traveling is the improvement of health and well-being.

Marketing Health Tourism describes the actions and activities of destinations, providers, and others who want to increase the awareness of and preference for specific locations or providers among health tourists. Successful Health Tourism marketing depends on:

- Clear, specific definition of the service being offered (**Your Offer**),
- A core value proposition that is in demand by prospective consumers, and
- Identifying the customers/consumers whom you are attempting to attract.



Describe Your Prospective Customers

Take time to carefully consider and answer the following questions to clarify your prospective customers.

or needs and, importantly, how s/he describes the services that result in the desired outcome (Their Words).

1. Describe who your customer is as clearly as possible.
For example, is your customer a man or a woman, young or old? Where does s/he live? Are s/he married or single? What kind of lifestyle does s/he have? Be as specific as possible – even giving the “person” a name!

3. Then describe what you offer that can address these wants or needs, and the words you typically use to describe them (Our Words).

This exercise will help you to know your Ideal Customers, as well as clarify your value proposition. Create messages and images that will appeal to your intended audience.
2. Then describe the outcomes and solutions she/he wants

The Marketing Handbook

Exercise 1:

DESCRIBE YOUR PROSPECTIVE CUSTOMERS

This exercise will help you know your customers, clarify your value proposition, and create messages and images which appeal to your customers.

Describe who your customer is as clearly as possible

- For example, is your customer a man or woman, young or old?
- Where does s/he live?
- Is s/he married or single?
- What kind of lifestyle does s/he have?
- Be specific. You can give them a name!

Describe the outcomes and solutions s/he wants or needs

And importantly how s/he describes those services. (“Their words”).

Describe what you offer

That address these wants or needs, and the words you typically use to describe these services (“Our words”).



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