

# Sustainable travel for wellbeing: Tourist experiences in Chinese destinations

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## Abstract

Immersion in nature, culture and connection, physical and mental wellbeing are travel drivers which are intertwined with one another in wellness tourism. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand this phenomenon by analysing the positive health experiences of tourists in different types of nature-based wellness tourism destinations in China. Guided by grounded theory, and netnographic approach, this research used over 600,000 words of travelogue content on Mafengwo travel platform, for the past five years up to March 2023. A three-level coding approach was used to compare the impact of five different types of wellness tourism destinations on tourists' health experiences. The results show that tourists' mental health experiences are more notable in water-based destinations and traditional wellness culture destinations, while physical health experiences are more notable in forest, mountain, and hot spring destinations. The findings show that Chinese tourists highly value connection to nature as a source of holistic wellbeing, while wellbeing is further enhanced through availability of resources and activities targeted to meet physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual wellbeing of tourists. Suggestions are made to help enhance the health experience of tourists. The results are notable for constructing wellness tourism destinations in practice and provide theoretical references for future research on wellness tourism destinations.

**Keywords:** tourist wellness experiences, wellness tourism categories, wellness tourism destinations

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## Introduction

Wellness tourism is a rapidly growing subcategory of health tourism where people who consider themselves healthy, seek tourism activities to prevent illness and to improve their general health and wellbeing (Mueller & Kaufman, 2000; Lee et al., 2020). Wellness tourism is an evolving multidimensional concept composed of a range of experiences and activities, designed to promote positive thinking, brain challenge, spiritual, physical, social, environmental, and mental wellbeing (Smith & Puczko, 2014). Some of these activities include visits to hot springs, spas, life coaching, gastronomy experiences, sports and adventure activities, exploration of historical places and artefacts, engagement in culture, music, dance and art festivals, pilgrimage, meditation, relaxation, and nature-based activities (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Heung & Kucukusta, 2013; Jiang et al. 2018; Ohe, et al., 2017; Smith & Puczko, 2008). In western research literature, spa and hot spring tourism are often categorised separately from other wellness tourism activities since these two types of tourism are well researched for their therapeutic benefits.

In Chinese culture, wellness is based on self-care practices for health, *Tian re-he-yi* (building a connection between the universe and humans in a holistic way), *yin and yang* (balance) and the theory of the five elements (Huang & Xu, 2018). Hence what Chinese wellness tourists enjoy doing is to be in a quality natural environment. Environmental aspects, including fresh air, clean water, and natural features are the most important attributes considered by the Chinese in choosing a wellness tourism destination (Heung & Kucukusta, 2013). Different to western categorisation of wellness tourism as beauty/body care, nutrition, relaxation, and education, in China, wellness tourism is grouped based on the therapeutic landscape features as forest health and wellness, river/lake, ocean health and wellness, hot spring health and wellness, climate health and wellness, and traditional Chinese medicine health and wellness (Yu, 2019).

Wellness tourists also consider availability of traditional Chinese medicine practices such as traditional massage, acupuncture, fire cupping, moxibustion, and medicinal herb interventions in their chosen destinations (Peng et al. 2023). Popular tourist experiences include viewing herbal medicinal plants in their natural landscape, learning about medicinal plants, visiting historical and cultural landscapes, and visiting traditional medicine museums (Heung & Kucukusta, 2013). While travel away from polluted cities for health and wellbeing is a recent phenomenon, wellness activities such as sitting meditation, breathing focused exercises, sitting in natural environments, and

food therapy have been popular traditional practices in Chinese culture (Huang & Xu, 2014). People travel long distances to well-known places for health, wellness, and rehabilitation. Such places are believed to provide a range of physical, mental, and spiritual healing experiences (Huang & Xu, 2018)

The demand for modern Chinese wellness tourism is driven by stressful workplaces, increasing health consciousness, and an expanding middle class with a strong economy. It is also partly driven by an aging population with increasing demand for health product consumption, and the Healthy China Initiative by the state to promote health awareness among all generations of Chinese (Yu & Lu, 2023; Song, 2018; Yang & Chang, 2019). Wellness tourism is also one of the mainstream consumption products for the younger generation as they move towards a holistic wellness orientation (Zhang, 2022). As the COVID-19 epidemic gradually fades from the public's view, the public's desire to enjoy a wellness lifestyle has rekindled, and the wellness tourism industry is a fast-growing segment of tourism in China (Cheng & Yin, 2022).

Wellness tourism offers considerable economic gain to the nation as wellness tourists are usually wealthier and spend significantly more on their vacation compared to other tourists (Heung & Kucukusta, 2013; Yeung & Johnston, 2014). Wellness tourists are also drawn to wellness destinations that are known for their natural and cultural resources: the local flora and fauna and popular local attractions (Lim et al. 2016).

Previous studies on wellness tourism mainly focused on the wellness tourism industry's development status and trends. For example, the evaluation of wellness tourism products (Ji, 2020; Phuthong et al., 2022), industry analysis studies of specific wellness tourism destinations (Wang et al., 2020), factors influencing the wellness tourism industry (Zhao et al., 2020), and industry development studies (Zhao & Sun, 2020). However, to date, few studies have qualitatively explored the different types of landscapes in a unified study to explore the demand side of wellness experiences in these landscapes. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the wellness experiences as perceived by travelogues visiting therapeutic scenic sites in China (Guo et al., 2019). There is not much research published in English on Chinese wellness tourism from a Chinese perspective, thus, this paper also aims to address this gap in research.

## Literature review

### Defining Health and Wellness Tourism

Health tourism is the sum of relationships and phenomena that occur when people change their location and place of residence to a place other than their usual place of residence, primary residence, or work in order to promote, maintain, or to some extent, restore their physical, mental, and social health (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). It is characterized by giving health value to the product, and by attracting tourists with health needs through the health value of the product (Büyükoğkan et al., 2021).

Wellness tourism is one of the subtypes of health tourism, whereby healthy people travel to improve their health and wellbeing, in contrast to people with illnesses seeking specific treatments or specific medical care; and is done in a leisure setting (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). A way to distinguish wellness tourism from other types of health tourism is to compare how tourists enhance their health during tourism activities. Wellness tourists maintain and improve their health mainly through moderate forms of activities such as nature viewing, hot spring bathing, and food therapy. In contrast, health tourists may travel to seek medical treatments such as surgery, dental care, balneology, and thalassotherapy to cure existing illnesses or for rehabilitation purposes (Li et al., 2020).

Wellness tourism can be classified according to business models, consumer characteristics, and wellness resources (Li et al., 2021). Since the research presented in this paper was to explore the positive health experiences of wellness resources, the major wellness tourism scenic spots in China were classified into three major categories, namely, forest and mountain, water bodies, and traditional health culture. The water category includes the ocean, hot springs and lakes, and wetlands, and the traditional wellness culture category includes Chinese medicine and Taoist wellness culture.

### Health Experience of Tourists

Enhancing and maintaining health are the main needs of wellness tourists (Li et al., 2019), and health needs motivate them to purchase wellness tourism products (Kessler et al., 2020). In the existing studies, tourists' physical health experiences are mainly focused on the relief of fatigue, the enhancement of sensory state, and the improvement of physical fitness (Cui, 2023; Meng & Zhang, 2021). Mental health refers to a productive and satisfying, sustained mental state (Liu & Cui, 2013). The mental health experiences of tourists during tourism activities are focused on three main areas: relief of negative emotions,

enhancement of positive emotions, and recovery from mental illness (Liu & Cui, 2013; Meng & Zhang, 2021).

For tourists, their culture and connection experiences refer to the interpersonal interaction, knowledge learning, self-role integration, and self-regulation involved in tourism activities. Tourists are able to gain positive cultural experiences through finding connections with local people, culture, and history; as well as with those on the journey with the tourist. Improved social relationships, improved family relationships, increased sense of family role integration, and expanded knowledge during tourism activities, enhance the harmony between tourists and with their families, and with the surrounding social environment of the holiday destination (Wang & Liu, 2022; Zheng et al., 2017).

Existing studies have confirmed a significant relationship between the environment of wellness tourism scenic areas and tourists' positive health experiences (Liu et al., 2023). In wellness tourism destinations, well-being experiences which emotionally and intellectually engage and transform tourists are at the centre of their managerial actions (Dini & Pencarelli, 2020).

### **Theoretical framework**

The triadic interaction theory was developed from Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Originally used to explain the relationship between human learning behaviour, the social environment, and individual cognition, the theoretical model was subsequently shown to apply to consumer behaviour research (Feng & Deng, 2021). The theory has been used in the tourism and hospitality fields to explore consumer value perceptions and behaviours, host behaviour, and tourism development models (Du & Geng, 2020).

According to the triadic interaction theory, tourists' health experiences are influenced by the tourism environment including accommodation and restaurant facilities; tourists' behaviours including seeking connection with natural, cultural, and social environment of the tourism destination; as well as by individual factors such as age, education level, family roles, social support available, and purpose for seeking a health tourism experience (Abdullah, 2019; Bandura, 1986).

We studied wellness tourism through exploration of what tourists found significant in their wellness tourism destination experiences, for example do these destinations meet human needs such as need for fresh air,

nutrition, safety and security, human connection, knowledge seeking, and transcendence, finding meaning and purpose in life (Maslow & Lowery, 1998). Self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (2008) states that people are intrinsically motivated to seek autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Satisfaction of these three needs contributes to psychological and physical wellbeing, mindfulness, and vitality.

## Methodology

The present study used grounded theory as research method guidance, a method that emphasizes bottom-up theory construction (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### Case Sites Selection

Since the research adopted a textual analysis method to analyse the positive health experiences of tourists in wellness tourism destinations, the case sites were selected based on typical wellness thematic characteristics, and sufficient and accessible sample data. Through filtering, six wellness tourism destinations were selected for the study: Enshi Pingbaoying National Forest Park, Sanya Wuzhizhou Island Tourist Scenic Area, Ning'an Jingpo Lake Scenic Area, Mianyang Yakwang Valley Tourist Resort, Maoshan Oriental Salt Lake City Dao World Scenic Area, and Zhuhai Imperial Hot Spring Resort.

### Data Collection

Travelogues about the health experiences in the case sites were collected from the online travelogue-sharing platform Mafengwo, using Octoparse software. Mafengwo is a popular website for sharing travelogues, a form of user generated content which excludes reviews. There are many well-known travel bloggers sharing their travelogues (travel diaries) on this platform. Travelogues were specifically chosen because they are more about recording and sharing tourist experiences and feelings. After successfully acquiring the travelogues, data was screened and randomly sorted. Mafengwo does not provide data on individual factors such as age, education, and family status of travellers, hence, the health experience data could not be analysed by individual factors.

The screening criteria were as follows: the release date of the travelogues was within five years from March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018, to February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023, followed by the exclusion of content duplication, less textual content, and suspected inflow advertising, and choosing travelogues with complete expression and

rich details. After selection, 223 valid travelogues were obtained, totalling over 600,000 characters. The next step was to disrupt the original order, which was done by Excel, and the first two-thirds of the travelogues were extracted after the order was disrupted and coded step by step using NVivo 12. The remaining one-third of all travelogues, 74 in total, were randomly selected for the data used in the theoretical saturation test. After testing, the concepts were all covered by the previous categories, so it can be judged that this study reached saturation based on the selected research material.

## Findings

Grounded theory emphasizes discovering theories by progressively extracting critical information from the research content and gradually transforming it from monolithic labelled content into three-dimensional concepts. This process includes coding and saturation testing, where the coding step can be further divided into open coding, axial coding, and selectivity (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Miao & Xie, 2021). After open coding of the travelogues, 512 initial codes were obtained, followed by merging the contents with the same meaning to obtain 475 non-duplicate initial codes. Finally, 33 concepts were obtained by further abstraction and generalization.

Axial coding was used to organise the 33 concepts obtained into 4 main categories: core wellness resources, health experience, infrastructure services and facilities, and tourist behaviour. The 12 subcategories and concepts addressed under these four categories are shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Axial coding of tourist health experiences**

Main Category	Category	Concept
Core Wellness Resources	Landscape Resources	Human and cultural landscapes
		Natural ecological landscape
	Specialty wellness resources	Marine resources
		Hot spring resources
		Chinese Medicine resources
		Taoist Medicine resources

Main Category	Category	Concept
Health Experience	Social Adaptation	Social role adaptation
		New environment adaptation
		Knowledge gain
		Overcoming difficulties
	Physical Health	Improves and enhances sensory state
		Relieves physical discomfort
		Physical condition enhancement
	Psychological Health	Positive emotions enhancement
Negative emotions reduction		
Infrastructure Services and Facilities	Catering	Meal service
		Meal type
		Beverages
	Transportation	Transportation
		Road infrastructure
	Leisure and Entertainment	Shopping facilities
		Recreational facilities
		Leisure and recreation programme
	Accommodation	Accommodation facilities
		Accommodation services
	People Services	Service attitude
Service behaviour		
Tourist Behaviour	Resource Interaction Behaviour	Dining
		Watching
		Travelling
		Recreation
		Residence
	Interpersonal Interaction Behaviour	Socializing

The core category of this study was the health experience of tourists in wellness tourism destinations. This core category connects all main categories, concepts, and codes into a whole and forms a clear, logical framework, which deduces a complete story around the health experience that tourists get in wellness tourism destinations: In the process of tourism activities in wellness tourism

destinations, tourists feel the change of health state through the interaction with various tourism resources, intentionally or unintentionally, so that the potential health value of wellness tourism resources is transformed into the actual health experience of tourists as shown in Figure 2.

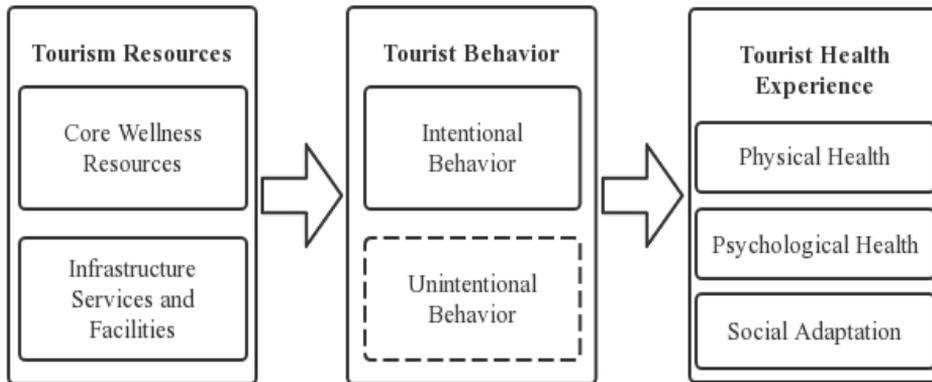


Figure 2. A theoretical model of the impact path of tourists' health tourism experience

From the data in table 1, it can be seen that the travellers used landscape and speciality wellness resources for physical, social, emotional, and intellectual wellbeing. Spiritual and environmental wellbeing were not categorically mentioned though interaction and been in nature were viewed as enhancing wellbeing. In the infrastructure, facilities, and services category only food and beverage services were highlighted as wellness experiences, while accommodation, transportation and shopping services were not described from a health and wellness promoting perspective. Social wellness was described in the joy of sharing the experience with loved ones and interactions with other travellers.

### Tourists' Wellness Experiences

Findings showed that wellness experiences described covered the wellness dimensions highlighted by Smith and Puczko (2008), namely physical, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of wellness. Smith and Puczko highlight that motivation, life-stage and interests dictate the form of wellness selected, thus, it is possible that online travel diaries do not cover all aspects of wellness equally, since travelogues are written by a subgroup of online savvy wellness tourists with time and motivation to write.

## Tourists' Physical Wellness Experiences

Tourists' physical health experience in the wellness tourism destination is mainly described as sensory state enhancement, relief of discomfort, and basic body state enhancement. The most mentioned by tourists is the power of nature to heal through sensory state enhancement. The data in the travelogues show that escaping the fast paced, toxic urban environments to immerse themselves in nature are highlighted as improving respiratory and cardiac health.

*"People living in the city dip in the primeval forest, feel great, breathe smoothly, nourish the eyes, the face, and the heart."*

*"It is a natural air therapy field that significantly promotes dissolving phlegm, relieving cough, calming asthma, and treating many respiratory diseases."*

Other physical health experiences, such as better sleep quality and enhanced immunity through their accommodation and restaurant experiences were also mentioned.

*"It seems like a long time since I've been so relaxed, listening to the rain and sleeping peacefully all night."*

*"The reasonable combination of vegetables and meat not only nourishes the body, but also strengthens the immune system."*

The growing importance of nutrition and food to tourists in wellness tourism destinations were highlighted by the frequency of statements about food and their nutritional value.

*"The breakfast the next morning is also a super surprise to me as a foodie, so much delicious food, my stomach is not enough."*

*"Food Colour restaurant is located next to the Bug Two Inn, and the Daozen fixed food is its specialty, millet mixed grain rice with individual small dishes, natural health."*

Not all wellness destinations include gastronomy and nutrition as a wellness practice. The tourists, however, show adaptability in seeking new gastronomic experiences for wellness promotion.

*“Noon on the hotel buffet, 178 a, a lot of fancies, nothing delicious, super crowded, not worth it, but the island on this market, to adapt.”*

In addition to experiencing the improvement of the basic health state, tourists also described the improvement of the bad health state through sensory stimulation by engaging with local flora.

*“The pungent flowers are beautiful and have a pleasant fragrance, especially for headaches and nasal congestion.”*

### **Tourists’ Spiritual Wellness Experiences**

Detachment from the urban environment, and associated fast paced living was one of the factors highlighted as facilitating body and mind wellbeing. While the spiritual dimension of searching for meaning and higher purpose of human existence were not explicitly mentioned, references to the sacredness of nature, and human enlightenment through being in nature and meditation were mentioned.

*“Let’s run away from the hustle and bustle of the city together to experience the double enjoyment of body and mind ~”*

*“You can also view the miraculous scenery of the sacred trees, Qin Xian medicine aura, Zen enlightenment, nourishing the tired body, so that tourists away from the hustle and bustle of the city, in the pristine valley beauty to feel the pleasure of health.”*

### **Tourists’ Psychological Wellness Experiences**

The enhancement of tourists’ emotional health state is manifested in acquiring positive emotions and alleviating negative emotions through relaxation, and self-care, spending quality time with oneself and with loved ones, and switching off from work or everyday life. Emotion is one of the external manifestations of mental health state, and positive emotion can enhance mental health (Dong et al., 2012). The highest number of actions, and experiences mentioned by tourists in their travelogues was about having a positive emotional experience. According to the descriptions in the travelogues, tourists were influenced by the resources and services of the wellness destination, and they were able to experience different levels of positive emotions and mindfulness.

*“We were exceptionally happy and joyful!”*

*“The diving moment really took your breath away and amazed you.”*

The findings show that the weakening of negative emotions is mainly manifested through opportunity to remain still, meditate, and reflect on the peacefulness and beauty experienced in the natural landscapes, making the emotions more stable.

*“The most fascinating thing about this place is its primitive and simple countryside. That isolated beauty will fill your heart with peace and hope, making time seem to stand still here.”*

### **Tourists’ Social Wellness Experiences**

Importance of connecting with loved ones through opportunities for spending time together in wellness tourism destinations were highlighted.

*“Together has been the sixth year, really happy that you are still by my side, although we are gathering less and less, thank you for your trust and companionship, said together, we have to cheer hard together!”*

### **Tourists’ Intellectual Wellness experiences**

In a new environment, tourists seek new knowledge through cultural experience programs, cultural learning venues, and other services or facilities within the destination.

*“Performing the ancient salute to Ge Hong is also a very sacred thing, and the hand is not just placed back and forth, so I got a special person to teach it, and it is considered to be in good shape.”*

Overcoming difficulties is also an important part of engaging in the world through problem solving and creativity. For example, wellness destination tourists challenge themselves by observing others doing things they thought they cannot do, hence developing self-confidence and self-esteem to achieve personal goals.

*“Looked at other people walking on the top, was scared at that time... want to go and afraid to go... and then the courage to go up to find not much higher.”*

### Tourists' Cultural Wellness Experiences

The findings showed that traditional Chinese medicine culture-based wellness tourism destinations were associated most frequently as a core wellness resource to obtain improved physical health experiences followed by Taoist health culture experiences.

The number of crossover nodes between art and wellness experiences in the selected destinations was relatively small. However, when tourists watched cultural performance programs at destinations, they described experiencing multiple dimensions of wellness including emotional and intellectual wellness.

*"The wonderful performances leave one with laughter and a deep sense of the contemporary and modern interpretation of Taoist culture."*

*"The hilarity on stage quietly brought me in, hissing and wildly reckless, releasing the long-suppressed depression."*

### Tourists' Environmental Wellness Experiences

Lakes and forests, hot springs, marine resources, and traditional Chinese medicine resources are the primary basis for distinguishing the wellness destinations from other tourism destinations and are featured as wellness destinations on their websites.

Almost all of the case sites in this paper are far from urban areas and have good ecological environments with good air quality. Tourists reported *"smooth breathing," "lung cleansing"* and other respiratory enhancements in these natural ecological landscapes, brought through the fresh air and high negative ion content of the air.

This kind of health experience is not only from the excellent air quality but also from substances volatilized by plants which can adjust the body's state, such as enhancing the body's immunity, promoting nerve balance, boosting blood circulation, and regulating mood (Peng et al., 2020). In addition to improving the basic health state, some tourists also mentioned that their discomfort could also be relieved, especially the relief of the overall fatigue state.

Among the intersection nodes of health experience and natural ecological landscape, the number of intersection nodes related to mental health experience is the largest, and it is mainly reflected in the expression of

positive emotions related to the beauty of the landscape and the wonder and tranquillity experienced.

*“The sea of flowers here is denser and more flourishing, and the Xingyi trees are taller, and many of them are ancient trees at first glance, yet there are few tourists, and it is such a pleasant little thing in spring to spend a sweet and beautiful time here without being disturbed.”*

*“What is even more amazing is the wonderful sunrise that gives us the privilege to watch the wonderful moment when the sun leaps out of the sea of clouds.”*

*“Because I have already viewed the night view of the hanging waterfall, I still look forward to viewing the scenery during the day, and I didn’t expect Mirror Lake to be so stunning during the day!”*

*“For me, who has always loved flowers and plants, this is a place that pleases me. I have recorded with my camera the appearance and name of every herb that I have seen on my walks.”*

Immersion in natural landscapes triggered reflection about their role towards planetary health, coexistence, and human choice.

*“The water pouring down the lake rolled with waves and flowed to nowhere, but deep in my heart, it was a singing river, thousands of years of uninterrupted flow witnessed how many vicissitudes of the earth, and I was shocked by its momentum, a sense of awe of nature instantly wrapped around me, thus, learning to coexist with nature in the process of society is a choice we humans must make .”*

### **Tourist Behaviour Related to Tourist Health Experience**

The number of cross-nodes between the health experience category and the tourist behaviour category in the coding results reached 82% of the total number of health experience nodes. A summary of the cross-node content, and the results of the number of cross-nodes are shown in Table 2, demonstrating the high links between landscape and mental wellbeing, and of tourist engagement in leisure and entertainment activities on wellness. The most links from the travelogues were for mental health benefits and physical health benefits when compared to other wellness dimensions.

Table 2. Number of Crossover Nodes Between Tourist Behaviour and Health Experience

Category	Concept	Social/ cultural/ spiritual Wellness	Physical Health	Mental Health	Total
Resource Interaction Behaviour	Catering	1	6	18	25
	Landscape	9	49	113	171
	Transportation	5	0	4	9
	Leisure and Entertainment	25	61	80	166
	Accommodation	0	5	7	12
Interpersonal Interaction Behaviour	Socializing	22	1	9	32
Number of Crossover Nodes		62	122	231	415
Number of Non-cross Nodes		23	37	34	94
Total		85	159	265	509

### Comparison of Tourist Health Experiences in Different Wellness Tourism Destinations

In order to compare more intuitively the similarities and differences between the health experiences tourists have in different wellness tourism destinations, we conducted a comparative study using the number of nodes. The frequency of mentions of a topic in textual materials can represent a measurement marker of the importance of this topic, and this research method has been applied to tourism studies using travelogues as research materials with good results (Ma et al., 2021; Wen & Yu, 2023). In this study, we attempted to process the number of nodes by dividing the number of nodes in the corresponding category of each type of wellness tourism destination by the number of valid travelogues of that type of wellness tourism destination to obtain the average number of nodes in the corresponding category per article for overall comparison and divided the resulting values into six different levels representing different cross-node frequency levels, which eventually presented The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The Number of Cross-node Levels of Tourist Health Experiences

Wellness Tourism Destination Type	Core Category		Social Adaption	Physical Health	Psychological Health	Total
Forests and Mountains	Core Wellness Resources	Humanistic Landscape	0	0	1	3
		Natural Ecological Landscape	0	2	1	
	Infrastructure Services and Facilities		0	1	1	1
	Tourist behaviour		1	2	1	3
			1	3	2	5
Marine	Core Wellness Resources	Humanistic Landscape	0	1	0	4
		Natural Ecological Landscape	0	1	1	
		Marine Resources	0	1	2	
	Infrastructure Services and Facilities		1	1	1	1
	Tourist behaviour		1	1	3	3
			1	1	3	4
Lake Wetlands	Core Wellness Resources	Humanistic Landscape	0	0	1	3
		Natural Ecological Landscape	1	1	2	
	Infrastructure Services and Facilities		0	0	1	1
	Tourist behaviour		1	1	3	4
			1	1	3	4
Hot Spring	Core Wellness Resources	Humanistic Landscape	0	0	1	4
		Natural Ecological Landscape	0	0	1	
		Hot Spring Resources	1	2	1	
	Infrastructure Services and Facilities		1	1	2	2
	Tourist behaviour		1	2	3	5
			1	3	3	5

Wellness Tourism Destination Type	Core Category		Social Adaption	Physical Health	Psychological Health	Total
Chinese Medicine Culture	Core Wellness Resources	Humanistic Landscape	1	0	1	5
		Natural Ecological Landscape	1	1	2	
		Chinese Medicine Resources	1	1	2	
	Infrastructure Services and Facilities		1	0	1	1
	Tourist behaviour		1	1	2	4
			2	2	3	5
Taoist Medicine Culture	Core Wellness Resources	Humanistic Landscape	1	0	1	4
		Natural Ecological Landscape	1	1	1	
		Taoist Medicine Resources	0	1	1	
	Infrastructure Services and Facilities		1	1	2	3
	Tourist behaviour		2	1	4	5
			2	2	4	5

Note: Level 0 (single node frequency = 0), Level 1 ( $0 < \text{single node frequency} \leq 0.5$ ), Level 2 ( $0.5 < \text{single node frequency} \leq 1.0$ ), Level 3 ( $1.0 < \text{single node frequency} \leq 1.5$ ), Level 4 ( $1.5 < \text{single node frequency} \leq 2.0$ ), Level 5 (single node frequency > 2.0)

The first step was to compare the overall differences in tourist health experience nodes in various types of wellness tourism destinations. The average node frequency of health experience-related nodes was also calculated separately when the average frequency of cross-nodes was calculated to make the comparison result more clearly. The data showed that tourists mentioned health experiences once or more in each travelogue on average, with the highest frequency of 3.16 times per travelogue in the category of Taoist health culture, followed by the category of hot springs, Chinese medicine culture and forest, and mountains, all with frequencies of 2 times or more per travelogue. This indicates that the frequency of health experiences in the above three categories of wellness tourism destinations is the highest in the travelogues.

### **Tourism infrastructure and wellness experience**

Tourism infrastructure can be described as lodgings, food and beverage, beauty, fitness and relaxation activities, excursions, shopping, and in-country transportation experiences of tourists.

The comparative analysis shows that the core wellness resources of wellness tourism destinations with traditional culture as the base have more opportunities to bring wellness experiences to tourists. At the same time, the level of the number of intersection nodes between the human landscape and tourists' health experiences in each type of wellness tourism destination is not optimistic. The intersection nodes of social and cultural wellness experience and human landscape are present in all traditional wellness cultural destinations, but they are not found in any of the remaining four case sites.

Except for the Taoist health and culture category and the hot spring category, the number of nodes of the crossover between infrastructure services and facilities and health experience in the travelogues of the remaining destinations is low, and the average frequency of nodes per travelogue is less than or equal to 0.5. However, the tourists are more satisfied with the infrastructure construction of the Taoist health and culture case study and the hot spring case study, while in the other case studies, there is more dissatisfaction with the lack of infrastructure services. This shows that ecologically mindful comfortable lodging, and transportation; nutritious food and beverage services; shopping experiences, excursions and activities designed for cultural, spiritual, and intellectual wellness, can minimise bad emotions of tourists and provide basic support for tourists to obtain an optimal wellness tourism experience.

### **Conclusions**

Guided by grounded theory, this study constructs a wellness tourism experience influence path model for wellness tourism tourists by coding level by level. The four core categories of the model were core wellness resources, infrastructure services and facilities, tourists' behaviours, and wellness experiences. Based on the causal links demonstrated by tourists in the original text, combined with logical inferences, the theoretical relationships among the four core categories are inferred, and tourists obtained wellness experiences by adopting intentional interactions with nature-based environmental resources, and by engaging in other wellness resources and activities made available to them. Travelogues described health benefits in all seven dimensions of wellness including cultural, environmental, intellectual, physical, psychological, social

and spiritual dimensions, experienced through visiting natural landscape based tourism destinations. They also commented on adequacy of infrastructure and services to promote wellness. The wellness experiences obtained may have been intentional through motivation and knowledge to gain wellness and at times may have gained wellness experiences through unintentional interactions with core wellness resources and service facilities.

The wellness experience obtained through intentional behaviour requires cognitive cost, i.e., the tourist needs to use the corresponding resources proactively through judgment to obtain the optimal wellness experience required by the individual subjective to individual personality, health and fitness level, time available, cultural, and family context. The other type of health experience begins to function when the tourist is at the destination, and the tourist does not need to make deliberate choices about his or her behaviour to obtain a healthy experience if the destination is designed and maintained to ensure wellness experiences. The highest number of crossover nodes between tourists' health experience nodes and natural ecological resources in the travelogues indicates that both pathways are closely related to natural ecological resources, so attention should be paid to maintaining and improving the quality of natural resources in the destination, as well as provision of guided activities to develop connection to nature.

Secondly, the relationship between different types of resources and health experience was analysed and compared through the classification analysis of cross-node frequencies. It is found that there are differences in the cross-nodes among different types of wellness tourism destinations, and the differences are mainly reflected in the cross-nodes concerning core wellness resources. The frequency of cross-nodes between core wellness resources and mental health was higher in water-based wellness tourism destinations and traditional cultural and wellness destinations. The frequency of cross-nodes between core wellness resources and physical health experiences is higher in forest and mountain case sites and hot spring destinations in the water category. Scenic area operators can reasonably develop marketing strategies based on this feature, and other promotional content close to the expected tourist expectation content, to enhance tourist satisfaction. Tourists can also choose the type of wellness tourism that meets their health needs based on this finding, such as forest and mountain wellness tourism destinations for those requiring to improve their basic physical quality and water wellness tourism destinations for those needing to relieve psychological stress.

Finally, the number of cross-nodes indicates that tourists' behaviour is important in facilitating tourist wellness experiences from destination resources. Related studies confirm that different behaviours are indeed important factors that influence health outcomes. When people adopt pro-health behaviours, they achieve more positive health outcomes and health literacy is a key factor in encouraging people to adopt the right health behaviours (Luo & Song, 2023; Xue et al., 2021). Therefore, scenic spots management should also provide tourists with trained ecological environmental features and excursion guides to ensure that tourists can obtain more desirable health experience results through proper behaviours. The management teams and staff need resources and training to ensure infrastructure, services and facilities are designed and maintained for wellness promotion in multiple dimensions of wellness.

Wellness tourism can disrupt the tranquillity and peace of a place. Hence, travelogues can also inform the public of waste disposal facilities, landscape architecture and design of facilities, local activities where tourists can contribute to the wellbeing of the local communities and nature conservation; so that wellness tourism can bring in social benefit to both the natural environment, the local community, and the wellness tourists (Huang & Xu, 2014).

The present study has some limitations. Firstly, it is based on travelogues from only one platform. Only one scenic spot for each category was selected. Not all wellness tourism destinations can meet the standards for tourism services provided in the selected sites. Expanding the category of destinations designed for different wellness dimensions can be used to explore whether new categories emerge. Comparison with travelogues on other platforms can highlight socio-cultural dimensions of wellness perceptions more comprehensively. Secondly, because this research is based on qualitative research and only relies on a logical inference to construct an influence path model, it is not possible to determine whether the association between the categories is statistically significant. Finally, this study only explored tourists' positive health experiences in wellness tourism destinations through using travelogues, hence, wellness experiences from the built environments such as accommodation types, food and beverage services, and organised educational and cultural activities, which might have been more frequent in user generated reviews were excluded.

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