

**WELLNESS TOURISM TRENDS AND THE
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WELVET PROJECT****Stevens, Terry***Prof., PhD, Director, Swansea University, Co-Chair Wellness Tourism, Global Wellness Institute*

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INTRODUCTION

This paper has been prepared to stimulate discussion within the project team about the future requirements for a pan-European 'Wellness Instructors VET Course' (Dimitrova, 2009, 2012). The importance of developing a new training program for the wellness instructor community is predicated upon the core principle that: "ultimately it is people that make a place and the tourist's experience of a place and education is at the heart and soul of enhancing the natural talent that exists in any destination" (Dimitrova, 2011, 2014; Ellis, 2013; Nesheva, 2014, 2015). International experts in the Wellness&Spa field confirm the high potential of the water influences mixed with organic Foods&Drinks in support of the human health prevention (Dimitrova, 2011, 2014; Trendafilov, 2013; Nesheva, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2016a, Polimenov, 2011, 2014).

A range of sources have been used to inform this review, including:

- 'Wellness Trends 2017' – www.globalwellnesssummit.com;
- 'Global Wellness Monthly Barometer', Global Wellness Institute;
- 'Living Well Europe: Parts 1 and 2', Kitchen, J. 2017. *Spa Business* (Issues 1/ 2);
- 'Wellness Spas: Trends', Garrow, J. 2017. *Spa Business* (Issue 1);
- 'The Future of Wellness White Paper: Ministerial Round Table', Rodde, B & Stevens, T. 2015, Swansea University;
- [www.travelweekly.com/wellness tourism predictions](http://www.travelweekly.com/wellness-tourism-predictions) (downloaded on 4th June 2017).
- "Wellness Tourism and Spa Industry: Building Bridges", Stevens, T. 2010, Global Spa Summit

METHODOLOGY:

In addition, the author has recently been appointed Co-Chair of the Global Wellness Institute's 'Wellness Tourism Panel' (www.globalwellnessinstitute.com) - together with Dr Franz Linser, Linser Hospitality of Austria – and, as a result, the opportunity has been taken to discuss these trends with members of the 'Wellness Tourism Panel'. The Intellectual products of the new job position "Wellness instructor are under the authorship and editorship of Prof. Bistra Dimitrova, D.Sc. from the National Sports Academy in Sofia. She was the representative of the Balkan cluster for Health, Wellness and Spa Tourism – partner in the WELVET project to create the VET course documents and standards. The content of the new job have also been discussed in an open forum as part of the World Wellness Tourism Summit held in London in February, 2017.

RESULTS:

The trends and their implications for the future training of people to work in the European wellness sector

The following table summarises the key trends as identified in the research (listed above) and further informed and influenced by work recently undertaken by Stevens & Associates for a range of projects

and Clients. This includes the following work all of which is relevant to the current discussions for the WELVET team:

- Preparation of a wellness lifestyle resort complex for a private sector Client in England;
- A review of luxury and wellness tourism trends for the University of Bergamo in Italy
- International benchmarking studies of 12 wellness destinations on behalf of Destination Rotorua (New Zealand)
- A review of wellness tourism trends for a hotel operator in Cyprus
- A review of wellness tourism in Istria (Croatia) for *CLAD* and *'Spa Business'* magazines (to be published in August 2017)
- A review of wellness communities for The Global Wellness Institute.

In addition, the author has consulted with the other members of the S&A WELVET team (Yvonne Lavis of Aquathermae and SwimEx) and Beverly Wilson-Smith (School of Management, Swansea University: *'Talent Bank'*).

The views and implications discussed in Table 1 are those of the author.

TABLE 1: TRENDS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

Trend	Discussion and implications
Market demand	Analysis
The continued growth of global international tourism arrivals and the importance of wellness tourism as a major growth sector driving international travel.	There will be increased levels of demand for people to work in the tourism and hospitality industry, especially those with appropriate qualifications (it should be noted that in Wales alone (population c3m people) there is a current shortage of 30,000 people to work in the tourism industry over the next 5 years. = more people needed and better qualified
There will be continued internationalisation of markets with more people travelling to different countries for both leisure and business tourism.	Internationalisation will mean more tourists from different countries, cultures and very varied experiences and expectations of what is meant by wellness tourism, this means that those working in the wellness sector must be prepared to welcome more international guest = this will require more foreign language skills, greater levels of awareness of the needs of different cultures and an understanding of the background of guests
Increasingly guests are seeking experiences – especially those that are real and authentic, that are unique to the destination; they want to participate in local rituals and customs and use local products as part of the wellness experiences	Experiences will drive tourist demand, this means that guests want to be immersed in highly local experiences = staff working in wellness will have to know about local cultures, heritage and local produce and how to apply these narratives to a wellness experience
International tourists are increasingly looking to achieve an holistic wellness experience during one holiday of trip – they are seeking destinations that offer wellness with benefits for the MIND, BODY and the SOUL	The wellness experience must satisfy the whole person in an holistic manner, this will mean providing advice and services dealing with nutrition, exercise, mental relaxation as well as traditional spa-based treatments = staff must be trained in an understanding of all aspects of this holistic approach
For the tourist it is the DESTINATION that is the most important tourism entity	The wellness resort or the wellness hotel is not an island, it exists within a wider destination and the destination as a whole is what delivers the full customer experience = wellness operators must understand and work closely with all the other components of the tourism system in a destination to deliver the complete wellness experience.
There are only TWO rules to successful tourism development: RULE ONE = you must always have a GREAT product; RULE TWO =	Wellness tourists are well travelled and discerning and they expect high quality products, they cross compare experiences, they know what they want, they know what international

never forget rule one	benchmarks are like and they expect quality = wellness staff must understand quality standards and quality experiences and undertake benchmarking with international best practice
Innovation and creativity in product development and service delivery is essential	It is essential that wellness products and services are regularly refreshed and renewed, this has to be done in innovative and creative ways in order to maintain relevance in the market place = staff have to be motivated and encouraged to find new ideas and be allowed to experiment and evaluate new innovations
The sharing economy is dynamic and influential. Tourists are increasingly seeking out shared experiences with local people using a wide range of social media and sharing platforms.	Wellness staff must be aware of the opportunities and challenges this brings for the creation of new tourist wellness experiences.
Supply side – the wellness providers (hoteliers, resorts, spas and destinations)	
Providers expect wellness staff to have a deep understanding of their guests and be able to establish a close (friendly but highly professional) relationship with them	Staff must have good communication skills, be culturally aware of their guests' backgrounds and be confident in the guest/host relationship
Providers will increasingly expect their wellness staff to cross sell other services and treatments as well as increase utilisation of treatments rooms and be able to sell products all of which will make the business more sustainable, capable of operating year-round and securing the employment of staff.	Staff must be good at selling, they must understand the commercial principles of running a wellness centre and must be good at managing resources (spaces, people, finance)
The wellness destination and the local community will increasingly expect all people working in the industry to have a good knowledge of the local areas, its heritage, culture and local products to promote to the tourist.	Wellness staff must be trained in all aspects of the heritage and culture of the host destination
The wellness industry is constantly searching for new ideas to re-invent the physical architecture and design as well as the flow and environment for the guest experience	Wellness staff must contribute to identifying new ideas and contributing to these discussions
The overall environmental factor (responsible, sustainable tourism development, energy efficient design of buildings, recycling strategies, clean air and sourcing local materials) is directly shaping new product development and influencing customer choice.	Wellness staff must be fully aware of these opportunities and must be able to articulate these aspects of the experience to customers

At the heart of these trends is a clear shift for those working in the wellness tourism industry to be able to DELIVER highly personal, customised, guest experiences.

The benefits of high levels of guest satisfaction are a DIRECT result of a POSITIVE interaction between the guest and the wellness team members. Higher levels of guest satisfaction will result in:

- (A) Greater potential for repeat visits in the future;
- (B) Higher levels of spending in the local economy;
- (C) Greater levels of positive word of mouth recommendations and the positive messaging on social media;
- (D) Higher levels of interaction with the local community resulting in positive benefits for all involved

DISCUSSION:

The following schedule of questions is NOT comprehensive. Other members of the WELVET team are invited to suggest new questions and add ideas for discussion.

S&A believes that we are at a moment in time where there are a number of major shifts in the way tourists are choosing their wellness experiences. Increasingly they are looking at the destination as a whole and the holistic approach taken in that destination to deliver an integrated, highly customised and very high quality guest wellness experience.

Table 2: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Where do good ideas come from to ensure product innovation and creativity and the ability to refresh the offer?	Learning journeys and study visits, staff exchanges and visits, international case studies and best practice, scholarships, meeting colleagues from different countries?
How can the wellness staff make a direct contribution to creating the unique selling proposition for a spa, wellness hotel or wellness resort?	Incentivisation, local familiarisation courses, brain storming and think tanks, local projects, meeting with local specialists in food, drink, heritage and culture? Understanding art, culture, performance?
Most of these trends identify the need for wellness staff to have a range of skills that go beyond those associated with giving technical massage or other forms of treatments. What is the new set of skills that we have to consider?	Understanding anthropology, learning foreign languages, introduction to psychology, reading guest expectations? Sympathy, empathy? Understanding the whole persons needs and motivations – from looking good and feeling good to learning new skills.
What is the role of new technologies in helping deliver this new skill set?	
What should be the balance in any new course between traditional content and the introduction of this new type of content?	

CONCLUSIONS:**Examples of international best practice**

The following destinations offer tourists an integrated and holistic approach to their wellness experience supported by well and appropriately trained wellness and hospitality staff.

TABLE 3: DESTINATIONS

Destinations	Websites
Terme Euganee Abano Montegrotto, Italy	www.consorziotermeeuganne.it/www.abanomontergottosi.it
Baden-Baden, Germany	www.baden-baden.de
Terme Olimia, Slovenia	www.terme.olimia.si
Mali Losinj, Croatia	www.visitlosinj.hr
Bregenzwald, Austria	www.bregenzwald.at
Bairersbronn, Germany	www.Biaersbronn.de

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