



Wellness Tourism Roundtable *Beyond The Data*

The Headlines and priorities from the wellness tourism roundtable anchored around the following aspects;

Education at all levels

What is wellness tourism? Why is it important to governments, private sector and consumers? There is a continued need to provide support, in understanding the scope of wellness tourism services and product and also, support in understanding the cross sector benefits, such as, creation of jobs, management of healthy populations, GDP contribution and socio economic impact.

Clarity and definition

Wellness Tourism is defined but is still somewhat unknown. There is a requirement to illustrate and support enablement of country and destination specific definition so that a sense of ownership and authenticity prevails. It is important to avoid the perception of backward engineering offerings into a 'set' definition and instead, tailor a definition to suit the country, destination or venue.

Ophelia Yeung of SRI International emphasized the need for science-based research to further define wellness and validate the hype.

Global definition;

“Wellness tourism is travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one’s personal wellbeing”

Communication and messaging

Accuracy and factual base remains important for credible positioning. Cultivating partnerships to support consistent message distribution. What wellness is *not*, is recognised as information that is as valuable as what it actually is.

Collaboration

One of the most recognised needs within the public and private sector is the 'join up' of similar businesses to hasten a more knowledgeable and informed proposition of wellness tourism.

Talal bin Ali emphatically lobbied for more concrete results, "less scholarly talk and academia, more practical initiatives that move the GWI charter forward and help stakeholders get things done."

Current status advantages;

- There is receptiveness and an awareness now that hasn't existed so strongly previously – the reality of rising health costs; both for the public sector and corporate businesses alike – prevention, self-initiated health and preventive medicine are all needs that can be met within wellness travel.
- This status leads to a need and a priority to truly quantify the economic benefit to the bottom line of businesses when wellness within travel and equally, wellness as a daily pursuit is put into practice.
- There remains a perception for some, that wellness tourism is something niche and high end only – making wellness and wellness tourism affordable and accessible to the mainstream consumer needs as much attention and as much messaging – hot springs and wellness camps were discussed as affordable family pursuits and what wellness travellers seek, do and visit needs wider dialogue.

Already established commitments that support this output:

1. Commitment from the Global Wellness Institute to update the economic numbers annually – there will always be current data to draw from.
2. Wellnessevidence.com – clinical evidence of wellness practice – newly launched, bringing the credibility of wellness into established clinical, corporate and academic communities.
3. Commitment to an annual, country-based, Wellness Tourism Congress series in 2015 and beyond.

The purpose of the established commitments and many that will emerge in addition to the above, serve many of the headlines mentioned – in particular, education, collaboration and communication – also buy in. Within our industry there is already some foundational understanding and knowledge for wellness tourism. External to this we still have many bases to cover but the momentum and recognition is evident.

At the conclusion of the Roundtable co-moderator Anni Hood asked each person to provide a one-word description of the meaning of wellness. At least half cited "spa," with a few citing "well-being," "happiness," and "prevention." Most definitions arose from each individual's rather limited vision, implying that a broader and more objective understanding is required in order for the industry to mature.

We might conclude from this roundtable session that Wellness Tourism remains nascent, with greater need for definitions, identification of key wellness tourism categories, growth drivers and strategies for weaving wellness tourism into the total tourism, hospitality and wellness ecosystem.