

ADAPTING THE WELLNESS OFFER IN SLOVENIAN SPAS TO THE NEW COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONDITIONS

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a markedly negative impact on global tourism, and on the other hand, has offered new opportunities for researchers to analyze the resilience of tourism industry in such conditions. Recently, a number of scientific articles have emerged claiming that the COVID-19 pandemic could represent an opportunity for significant changes in tourism. This refers to changing practices at several levels, along with the spread of new ethical principles. The pandemic has also made people aware of the importance of “well-being”. Even without a pandemic, wellness tourism has been one of the fastest-growing types of tourism in recent years. Many people see wellness as a solution to the mental health crisis caused by the pandemic. In all parts of the world, including Slovenia, natural spas have tried to adapt to new conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our analysis confirms that visitors to Slovenian spas strongly support introduction of new/alternative activities and thus dispersion of visitors to several locations. They showed the greatest interest in visiting nature in the vicinity of spas, which is also expected as a result of the closure during the pandemic. The purpose of our article is to give suggestions for offering alternative activities in Slovenian natural spas. However, adapting the wellness offer in spas should ensure that the basic traditional principles of wellness are maintained.

Keywords:

wellness, offer, Slovenia, spas, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Considering the ability of the virus to spread rapidly (SARS-CoV-2), governments all over the world were forced to implement lockdowns. Tourism cannot operate successfully if it is devoid of the mobility of people (Sharma et al., 2021). In terms of the way things played out in the past, this industry was always able to recover swiftly from all kinds of troubles that it had to face, i.e. pandemics, epidemics, disasters, and other predicaments. Local, regional, or national governments are assisting in its recovery by trying to attract investors by offering them tax breaks, tempting land-use rules, etc. (Brouder, 2020; Ioannides and Gyimóthy, 2020). Grave problems call for accelerated technological changes. Technology is an essential force when it comes to making sure there is flexibility inside the industry of tourism.

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It is able to cope with the problems regarding the pandemic. These problems include ensuring tourists aren't infected with the virus, uncovering the infected and tracing their contact, enabling online education for learners, etc. (Hall et al., 2020). During the course of the pandemic and after it, national tourism comes to the foreground since most tourists come from nearby areas (Haywood, 2020). Those who provide tourism service ought to alter their unsustainable product offers and thus insist on a new demand. These measures could link, provide support, and look after the entire industry of tourism so that everyone benefits from it (Stankov et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

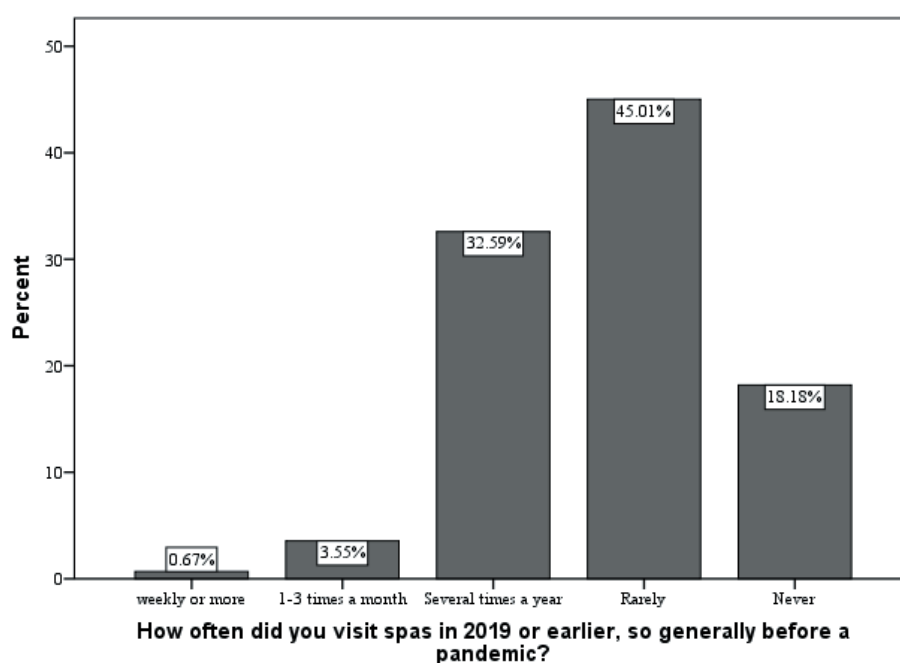
The research about adapting the wellness offer in spas and offering alternative activities in Slovenian natural spas is a part of a survey "Research on energy, spas and energy tourism" conducted online from 04.05.2021 to 04.08.2021. There were 130 male (31.60%) and 282 female participants (68.40%) from different Slovenian municipalities such as Brežice, Ljubljana, etc. Most participants completed Bachelor studies (56.70%), while the smallest percentage completed primary school (2.00%). The mean age of participants is 54.

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and frequencies are used to concisely describe the data collected and explain the reasons for offering alternative activities in Slovenian natural spas. Independent samples t-test is conducted to determine whether there is a difference in the options guests would support if spas needed to make urgent changes to their work to ensure health conditions between males and females.

RESULTS

Most tourists visited spas in 2019 or earlier before a pandemic rarely (45.01%) or several times a year (32.59%), while the least tourists visited spas weekly or more (0.67%) (Fig. 1). The primary reason for visiting the spa is relaxation, while the least important reason is healthy food. Other reasons for visiting the spa are physical activity, mental activities/education and medication or healing.

Figure 1. How often did you visit spas in 2019 or earlier, so generally before a pandemic?



Source: Authors' calculations



The results show that guests would support the most introduction of new/alternative activities and thus dispersion of visitors to several locations if spas needed to make urgent changes to their work to ensure health conditions ($M = 4.08$; $SD = 0.83$), followed by the time limit for visits with advance booking ($M = 3.47$; $SD = 1.14$) and unchanged implementation of activities, but in compliance with the regulations of wearing a mask, maintaining distance, disinfection ($M = 3.38$; $SD = 1.16$), while guests would support the least price increase and thus reduction in the number of guests ($M = 2.51$; $SD = 1.07$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the options guests will support if spas need to make urgent changes to their work to ensure health conditions

Variables	N	M; SD
Price increase and thus reduction in the number of guests.	426	2.51; 1.07
Unchanged implementation of activities, but in compliance with the regulations of wearing a mask, maintaining distance, disinfection.	426	3.38; 1.16
Introduction of new/alternative activities and thus dispersion of visitors to several locations.	426	4.08; 0.83
The time limit for visits with advance booking.	426	3.47; 1.14

Source: Authors' calculations

When it comes to the offer of additional activities during the visit to the spa, the tourists would prefer Nature: natural parks, sea/river/lake shore, followed by Recreation: hiking, cycling, outdoor relaxation techniques (yoga, meditation), forest selfness ..., whereas the option they would prefer the least is Entertainment: outdoor events and animations (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the type of tourist offer tourists would prefer to visit as additional activities during the visit to the spa

Variables	Rank
Nature: natural parks, sea / river / lake shore ...	1
Recreation: hiking, cycling, outdoor relaxation techniques (yoga, meditation), forest selfness ...	2
Culture: museum, city, collection ...	3
Events: lectures on healthy living, cooking courses for preparing healthy food ...	4
Industry: a tour of nearby production plants (e.g. power plants, factories).	5
Entertainment: outdoor events and animations	6

Source: Authors' calculations

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the paper was to give suggestions for offering alternative activities and adapting the wellness offer during the COVID-19 pandemic in Slovenian natural spas. The survey results showed that guests would support introduction of new/alternative activities and thus dispersion of visitors to several locations if spas needed to make urgent changes to their work to ensure health conditions. Still, they would not agree with price increase and reduction in the number of guests. Furthermore, guests would like to visit natural parks, sea/river/lakeshore, hike, or relax doing yoga or meditating. Therefore, Slovenian natural spas should adapt their wellness offer during the COVID-19 pandemic and include more relaxing activities that would help guests enjoy spas and help them temporarily forget about the current problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and adapt to new living conditions. However, adjusting the wellness offer in spas should ensure that the basic traditional principles of wellness are maintained and that guests are satisfied with the new offer.



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