

The analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on wellness tourism

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Abstract. Wellness tourism, a new tourism mode that focuses on helping people maintain and condition their bodies while meeting the needs of travel and sightseeing, has grown rapidly and gained popularity in recent years. The outbreak of COVID-19 has dealt a major blow to the wellness tourism industry. This paper rationally analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on the wellness tourism industry from three aspects: tourism economy, tourists' willingness, and market recovery. The study finds that COVID-19 is probably a crucial stage to promote the development of wellness tourism. And the paper proposes strategies to cope with COVID-19 for government and enterprises respectively, such as strengthening economic policy encouragement and improving enterprises' own strength, and retains great confidence in the development of wellness tourism. Through the joint efforts of the whole society, wellness tourism can gradually thrive and eventually reach an unprecedented level of prosperity. This paper makes a systematic analysis of the blow of COVID-19, which helps the country and enterprises to make future planning to assist the recovery of wellness tourism, and has some practical significance.

Keywords: COVID-19; wellness tourism; governments and enterprises.

1. Introduction

Wellness tourism is a new type of tourism. It is a kind of in-depth tourism experience activity based on natural ecology and humanistic environment, combined with landscape viewing, cultural entertainment, health care and other forms to achieve the purpose of relaxation, pleasure and longevity. At present, wellness tourism mainly includes ecology and health tourism, sports and leisure tourism, and recreation and vacation tourism. Wellness tourism plays an important role in promoting economic development and coping with the aging population [1].

China has been a health care country since ancient times, and “Legend of Peng Zu” “Hua Tuo's Five-Animal Exercise” all reflect the Chinese nation's respect for life and desire for a long and healthy life. With the development of Chinese society and economy, the consumption ability and level of modern residents have increased significantly, consumers' confidence has also grown over these years [2], and the pursuit of healthy life has become increasingly prominent. Meanwhile, supported by the national policy guidance and industrial environment, wellness tourism has grown rapidly and become a hot spot for the development of tourism and related industries in China.

China has entered an aging society, and the elderly population is growing rapidly [3]. Based on the “Chinese Development Report 2020: Development Trends and Policies for China's Aging Population” published by the China Development Foundation, it is estimated that the number of elderly people aged 65 and above will exceed 210 million in 2025, and by 2050, there will be nearly 500 million elderly people. The accelerating pace of aging in China also means that the demand for wellness resources will become higher and higher. Moreover, the high-pressure environment of the society nowadays makes an increasing number of people stay in a subhealthy state for a long time, many of them are suffering from health problems [4], so people from all walks of life start to pay much attention to health and wellness issues. Compared with the traditional tourism pattern, wellness tourism not only attracts tourists by using the scenery and special culture of tourist attractions, but also provides tourists with diversified health care facilities and wellness service content. As medical services have shifted from “disease-centered” to “health-centered”, the concept of wellness tourism is gaining popularity [5]. The wellness tourism pattern is to help the tourism consumers to achieve a harmonious state of mental, physical and psychological health through the scientific application of

nutritious diet, recreation and health care, which is undoubtedly attractive to those who pursue a healthy life.

The sudden COVID-19 has undoubtedly brought unprecedented impact to the wellness tourism industry, but it is also an important opportunity for the industry to seek its own breakthrough development. The COVID-19 could be an opportunity to reshape tourism into a more sustainable and inclusive model [6]. Facing the blow of the COVID-19 and the increase of consumer demand afterwards, how to recover the wellness tourism industry and how to make concerted efforts between society and enterprises are the key issues discussed in this paper.

2. The impact of the COVID-19 on wellness tourism

The year 2020 was an unusual year with the emergence of the COVID-19. It has severely impacted our economic development and disrupted social stability [7]. In the background of the COVID-19, the development of wellness tourism also faced critical opportunities and challenges.

2.1 Damage to the wellness tourism economy

This sudden public health event has dealt a fatal blow to tourism enterprises nationwide. The COVID-19 has had a wide impact, and many tourism enterprises and their associated industries have been unable to carry out their business [8], there have been problems of insufficient capital supply, forced unemployment of tourism workers, the inability to recover labor expenses, pre-operational costs and other operation and maintenance fees, each Enterprises are facing huge financial pressure. In the foreseeable time, most of the tourism enterprises basically have no income, especially the small and medium-sized enterprises with insufficient capital, which make them face the risk of bankruptcy.

The COVID-19 has not only hit the travel industry, but also the entire tourism chain. To stop the spread of the COVID-19, the supply side of the tourism industry has been put to an emergency halt. All scenic spots were closed, refunds from travel agencies were common, hotel and lodging customer flow was drastically reduced, tourism and cultural performances were shut down, tourism restaurants and shopping were left unattended, tourism transportation was halted. The annual peak travel period trading was greatly reduced, and tourism-related industries such as scenic spots, hotels and transportation were facing cyclical crisis and bankruptcy.

2.2 Impact on people's willingness to travel

As a result of the COVID-19, people's activities have been greatly restricted and they can no longer travel freely as usual. A single daily outing can inadvertently even make people become close contacts, under isolation control, or even infected with the COVID-19. In such a situation, people's willingness to travel and the frequency of their trips are greatly reduced.

But there is a positive side to its blow. Before the COVID-19, the main consumer group of wellness tourism was still the old people. The outbreak of the COVID-19 has caused a serious threat to people's health and life safety, but at the same time it has also enhanced the public's health awareness [9]. This makes all age groups pay more attention to health, and will continue to increase health consumption expenditure, wellness tourism meets this kind of demand, so it will be more popular.

2.3 Difficult economic recovery in post-COVID-19

The duration of COVID-19 affects the level of public concern about response mechanisms, health and safety, and crisis management capabilities. The longer the COVID-19 continues, the slower the recovery. And the travel industry is limited by time and space constraints, it is difficult to compensate for business losses by means of delay. After the COVID-19 is over, the market will have a buffer period and it will be difficult to grow rapidly and explosively in a short period of time, while social distancing measures and the avoidance of crowds will be either mandated or demanded [10]. The extent to which the tourism industry can recover after the COVID-19 depends on the momentum and stimulation of demand. With a strong demand, the market can recover and the industry can revive.

3. Government booster initiatives

3.1 Strengthen special policy support to assist the recovery of enterprises

In order to support enterprises to overcome the hardship, the central authorities and local governments have introduced various fiscal and financial support policies such as tax reduction. All kinds of wellness tourism enterprises, especially the small and medium-sized enterprises, were facing a capital shortage, the governments have introduced a series of support policies such as temporary refund of travel agency quality deposit. Recognizing the practical difficulties of various types of tourism enterprises, the governments have introduced further tourism-specific support policies, increased financial support for tourism, promoted financial and credit support during special periods, and established recovery incentives for tourism enterprises to help small and medium-sized enterprises to survive from the difficulties and comprehensively promote the recovery of the tourism market.

3.2 Ensure the safety of travel journeys

Ensuring tourism safety is a prerequisite for domestic tourism recovery in the post-COVID-19 era. In order to ensure tourism safety, targeted tourism safety management approaches should be adopted: first, the government to introduce a precise and flexible emergency normalized management; second, different levels of government division of labor clear hierarchy and management; third, based on the nature of the event, the probability of occurrence, development direction and other perspectives, to propose transparent and open information management measures; fourth, different interests and multi-sectoral participation in collaborative management. Fifth, is also the key point, adopt “reservation system” and make it normalized, so that tourist destinations, such as scenic spots, have a more accurate prediction of the overall flow of visitors at each time, thus avoiding the pressure brought by the intensive influx of tourists to scenic spots, reducing the phenomenon of poor experience brought by the excessive concentration of tourists, and can reduce the risk of disease transmission.

3.3 Building a safe and effective tourism major disease surveillance and prevention system

The COVID-19 has shown that the tourism industry has a poor ability to resist the risk of major infectious diseases. In order to change this situation, after the COVID-19, the tourism industry should put efforts in building a safe and effective system for monitoring and preventing major diseases in tourism, enhancing the tourism industry's ability to resist risks, and ensuring tourists' safety when traveling. The society vigorously promotes the construction of a new model combining government control and high-tech means (artificial intelligence, block chain) control, to monitor the COVID-19 and tourism safety, to eliminate tourists' worries, so that people can travel with ease and safety when the COVID-19 declines, and ensure the sustainable and uninterrupted development of tourism after the COVID-19.

4. Self-reliance of enterprises

4.1 Develop crisis coping strategies and improve crisis management

In response to the blow of the COVID-19, enterprises should fully summarize and learn from this experience, research and develop crisis management strategies, continuously improve the details and content of the enterprise emergency program, develop effective crisis management methods, and strive to achieve scientific prevention & control of the COVID-19 in the future, enabling enterprises to carry out operation management in an orderly manner during the critical period.

4.2 Committed to market research and development

4.2.1 The need of wellness tourism for sub-healthy people

Sub-healthy people hope to maintain mental vitality, relieve the pressure of work and life, improve the state of sub-health and enhance the level of health through wellness tourism. Therefore, for this kind of people, enterprises should focus on developing recreation and fitness tourism products, based on excellent ecological environment, taking sports, leisure and entertainment as the main way. Through tourists' active participation in activities such as ecological experience, forest bathing, outdoor fitness sports, to promote physical and mental health. Enterprises can also rely on suitable climate resources, medical resources, to develop some medical check-up tourism products, so that tourists can get professional health management and consulting services in a comfortable and quiet environment, such as professional medical examination, rehabilitation physical therapy, special nutritional diet, multivitamin mineral treatment.

4.2.2 Focus on people with high quality of life

These people generally have a high cultural literacy, while paying attention to the health of physical functions, more attention to the soul and spiritual comfort. According to this characteristic, enterprises can focus on developing cultural and wellness tourism products, such as humanistic wellness resources based on national wellness culture, Taoist wellness culture, Chinese and Western medicine wellness culture and artistic wellness culture, and develop wellness tourism products such as wellness academies, lecture halls, museums, exhibition halls and wellness culture study classes, which focus on popularizing wellness culture and wellness knowledge to tourists. In addition, based on natural and humanistic resources, enterprises can develop spiritual wellness activities such as yoga and meditation, as well as various leisure and cultural wellness activities such as tea, chess and cards, movie watching, dancing, photography and reading. At the same time, enterprises can also focus on the development of some tourism and recreation products, such as parks designed with the natural environment and recreational services as core elements.

4.3 Accelerate the application of information technology in wellness tourism

Information technology and intelligence have been fully integrated into the tourism industry, and the application of information technology can be seen everywhere, whether in tourism products, tourism marketing, or tourism enterprise operation and management. During the COVID-19, many tourists scenic spots, museums and tourist destinations suspended offline tours and actively developed online resources to provide services to the public in the form of "cloud tourism", which has greatly improved the digitalization of tourism and presented a new development trend of informatization, quality and integration. In the future, wellness tourism should make use of new technologies such as 5G, actively expand the use of AI, VR, big data and other new technologies in the service, and use information technology to intelligently upgrade wellness tourism. In the marketing of wellness tourism, relying on the network platform to carry out the promotion of wellness tourism bases, products and services, information exchange and online booking. For the management of wellness tourism, using the online service platform to provide information consultation, complaint handling and supervision, especially to provide online reservation, the implementation of real-name ticketing and touring means for wellness communities. Through big data, enterprises can analyze the information of wellness consumers for efficient management. Based on "Internet+", tourism enterprises work together with professional medical institutions to provide one-on-one health consultant services to tourists online.

5. Conclusion

Based on the survey method and literature research method, the paper analyzes the effects of the COVID-19 on the wellness tourism, explores the opportunities and challenges of the wellness tourism

industry in the COVID-19, simulates the growth of consumer demand for tourism after the COVID-19, and analyzes a number of initiatives to promote the wellness tourism.

From the perspective of industry development, a sudden crisis will often give rise to the transformation and upgrading of an industry. After 40 years of vigorous development, China's tourism industry has entered a new stage of development and is facing the urgent need for transformation and upgrading. In recent years, with the development of the economy and people's desire for a better life, the national awareness of health has become more and more important, and the concept of health has become increasingly mature, health and tourism has become a common and sustained demand hotspot. After the COVID-19, people's concern for physical and mental health will be raised to an unprecedented level, and the onslaught of the COVID-19 has led to a growing desire for health. It is foreseeable that in the post-COVID-19 period, tourism featuring "health and wellness" will receive more attention and meet the expectations of tourists, China's wellness tourism will have a new development opportunity. Wellness tourism will be a dynamic and fast-growing new area [11].

After the COVID-19 outbreak, members of the wellness tourism industry have made many efforts and changes in the face of the crisis, and these practices have broadened our thinking for further analysis of the impact of the COVID-19. The speed and performance of China's tourism industry in responding to major emergencies is satisfactory. In the face of the losses and impacts caused by the COVID-19, the authorities and other relevant departments were able to actively make arrangements in line with the needs of COVID-19 prevention and control, and most tourism enterprises also reacted quickly and took the initiative to carry out self-help and mutual assistance work, while the corresponding response policies are also being intensively introduced, which further strengthens our confidence and determination to overcome the crisis. Although the COVID-19 has had a great impact on wellness tourism, there are still opportunities in danger, and the outbreak of the COVID-19 may become an important chance for further reform and upgrading of the wellness tourism industry.

Facing the impact of the COVID-19 and its unpredictable trend, people should not only see the enormous losses caused by the COVID-19, but also rationally analyze the opportunities arising from the COVID-19 under the premise of accepting the reality, and try to turn the crisis into opportunities. Wellness tourism industry professionals should neither be extremely pessimistic nor mindlessly optimistic, they need to consider the damage of the COVID-19 to wellness tourism, but also be confident in its development resilience. Tourism, as the first of the five happy industries, is not only an important one to meet the growing needs of people to pursue a better life, but also the essential support industry to help the cause of poverty eradication in China to be successfully completed. When the COVID-19 came, wellness tourism was directly impacted by its highly sensitive characteristics, the losses were inevitable, but this pain is transient. A high level of economic resilience in a country will help the tourism industry overcome the serious challenges caused by the COVID-19 [12]. China's tourism industry has been through reform and opening up for more than 40 years of development, temporary hardships cannot change its general trend of flourishing upward. Facing the critical situation caused by the COVID-19, China's tourism industry will be able to weather the storm as long as it cooperates, strengthen mutual assistance, responds positively and works together.

6. Limitation

The influence of the COVID-19 is not only reflected in the intensity of the event, but also the development stage, duration, and location of the COVID-19 may have an impact on the public's willingness to travel for wellness. Therefore, further attention can be paid to the impact and behavioral response arising from the time, duration, and space of the COVID-19 in the future research. This paper lacks rigorous quantitative analysis and model construction, and there may be some bias in the data collection. It focuses on theoretical analysis and qualitative issues, and more precise research will be conducted in the future to analyze the situation of wellness tourism industry and the psychological changes and behavioral changes of consumers towards wellness tourism after the COVID-19.

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