

# The Boston Globe

## You know what's healthy? The wellness travel industry

By Diane Bair and Pamela Wright Globe correspondents, Updated December 5, 2019, 6:00 a.m.



Industry leader Six Senses, a leader in wellness travel, will open a lodge in Bumthang, Bhutan, in 2020, and as in all Six Senses resorts, it will feature integrated fitness, food and sleep programs, along with a new jet lag recovery plan. SIX SENSES

There's certainly nothing wrong with a fly and flop vacation, and who can argue with an afternoon massage and maybe cocktails at sundown? Relaxing, sure, but today's travelers are looking for more ways to stay healthy and fit on the road.

Wellness travel — what the Wellness Tourism Association ([www.wellnesstourismassociation.org](http://www.wellnesstourismassociation.org)) defines as “travel that allows the traveler to maintain, enhance or kick-start a healthy lifestyle, and support or increase one's sense of well-being”— is soaring. It's now the fastest-growing segment of the travel industry, growing more than twice as fast as tourism overall.

“That shouldn't be surprising,” says Anne Dimon, president of the Wellness Tourism Association. “We've become more proactive with the state of our own health, conscientiously making changes in our daily lives, adopting healthier practices and habits. We want the same when we travel.”

According to the Global Wellness Institute ([www.globalwellnessinstitute.org](http://www.globalwellnessinstitute.org)), the world wellness tourism industry grew 6.5 percent annually from a \$563 billion market in 2015 to \$639 billion in 2017. Tourism overall grew at 3.2 percent for the same period. The forecast is for wellness tourism to grow even faster at a predicted 7.5 percent increase annually to reach \$919 billion through 2022.

It looks like people are willing to spend more money for wellness experiences and programming, too. According to GWI, international wellness tourists spent an average of \$1,528 per trip in 2017, 53 percent more than the typical international tourist. Domestic wellness tourists spent even more, an average of \$609 per trip, which is 178 percent more than the average domestic tourist.

Industry experts say that several factors are driving the growth. People have more money, have more knowledge about what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, and are prioritizing wellness in their daily lives. And as vacation time becomes scarce and more valuable, our idea of a vacation has changed.

“Vacations used to be about excess, splurging,” says Beth McGroarty, research director for the Global Wellness Institute. “It was about too many fine meals, late nights, partying. But that’s not sustainable. If you only have about a week of true vacation a year, you can’t afford to come back feeling worse.”

But the biggest thing pushing wellness travel, experts say, may well be the little thing in your pocket (or likely in your face.) The proliferation and seduction of smartphones have left us constantly bombarded with images and noise, and often emotionally disconnected. Enough already! we’re saying.

“We live in a fast-paced, noisy and increasingly stressful world,” says Dimon. “It’s important to our health and overall sense of well-being to simply get away from it all every now and then. Taking a wellness vacation — even someplace close and for just a few days — allows us the perfect opportunity to do that. Giving ourselves time for ‘self-care’ is truly the new luxury.”

The industry has responded with an ever-increasing lineup of wellness options and programming, destination retreats, and a slew of groundbreaking initiatives.





Hilton has introduced Five Feet to Fitness, an in-room fitness concept that includes a dedicated space with 11 pieces of fitness equipment, as well as a kiosk that provides more than 200 fitness videos. HILTON

### **Expansion of wellness retreats**

Leaders in the industry continue to expand to meet the growing need. Canyon Ranch, a pioneer in the wellness industry for four decades ([www.canyonranch.com](http://www.canyonranch.com)), recently opened Canyon Ranch Wellness Retreat Woodside, set on 16 acres in Woodside, Calif. It's the company's first retreat model, "dedicated to the power of transformation," with community-driven, back-to-nature activities, along with its signature medical, spa, and fitness activities.

Miraval ([www.miravalresorts.com](http://www.miravalresorts.com)), long revered by wellness travelers for its Miraval Arizona wellness resort, just opened its second location in Austin, Texas, and a third location is slated to open in the Berkshires in late 2020.

Industry leader Six Senses ([www.sixsenses.com](http://www.sixsenses.com)) opened Six Senses Gangtey in Bhutan in October 2019, following the opening Six Senses Krabey Island in Cambodia, and properties in [Paro](#), [Thimphu](#), and [Punakha](#) earlier in the year. A final lodge in Bumthang is slated to open in

March 2020, and the company announced it now has approval and plans to open the first ever resort in the Galapagos Islands, focusing on the integration of community, environment, and well-being. All Six Senses resorts feature integrated fitness, food and sleep programs, along with a new jet lag recovery plan.

Closer to home, the Japanese-influenced Shou Sugi Ban House ([www.shousugibanhouse.com](http://www.shousugibanhouse.com)) opened in 2019 in the Hamptons, the first wellness retreat of its kind on Long Island. Focus is on the healing arts, and the property includes a meditation building, tea lounge, gardens, a ceremonial fire circle, and rooftop spa.

“The idea was to create an environment and program which would bring people back to a simple appreciation for their natural surroundings, and allow for quiet contemplation, while at the same time fostering human connection,” says Amy Cherry-Abitbol, cofounder & CEO, Shou Sugi Ban House.

### **Fitness goes mainstream**

While there are travelers whose primary goal is wellness, the bulk of the wellness tourism market comes from travelers who want to participate in wellness experiences while on a leisure or business trip. These mainstream travelers make up 89 percent of wellness trips and 86 percent of expenditures.

Top hotel brands recognize this and continue to launch wellness programming to meet the growing need. For example, Westin Hotels ([www.westin.com](http://www.westin.com)) has introduced new Eat Well menus and has partnered with top fitness companies like Peloton and TRX to equip rooms and fitness centers. It also employs 250 Run Concierges who take guests on runs, and has a Gear Lending service, providing running shoes and apparel for \$5 a day at select hotels worldwide.

InterContinental Hotels Group says its EVEN Hotels ([www.evenhotels.com](http://www.evenhotels.com)), launched as its first mainstream hotel brand focused on wellness, has been a resounding hit with both leisure and business travelers. There are now 11 EVEN Hotels across the United States, with another 24 in the pipeline, including their first property in China and another five locations in the United States opening in 2020. EVEN Hotels feature in-room training zones, Eat Well menus, cooling, eucalyptus fiber bedding, and ergonomic work stations. They are also piloting the MIRROR home gym system — a machine that streams live and on-demand workout classes — at select hotels.

Hilton ([www.hilton.com](http://www.hilton.com)) has introduced Five Feet to Fitness, an in-room fitness concept now available in nearly 20 properties across the United States with more in the works. Every Five Feet to Fitness room includes 11 pieces of fitness equipment, as well as a kiosk that provides more than 200 bespoke guided fitness videos. Rooms have a meditation chair, blackout shades, Biofreeze to ease muscle tension, and a selection of protein and hydration beverage options. “As guests become more fitness-focused in their day-to-day lives, they increasingly want access to the same at-home gym amenities when traveling. They are looking for quick, effective, and convenient ways of pursuing their fitness and wellness goals,” says Teresa Flyger, director of Global Brand Wellness, Hilton.

### **Healthy cruising**

The cruise industry has jumped on the wellness bandwagon, too, with healthier meals, state-of-the-art fitness centers, expanded spa programming, wellness partnerships (think: Canyon Ranch, Exhale, and Weight Watchers at sea), and a slew of wellness-themed cruises.

Later this year, Blue World Voyages will launch the first cruise line specifically designed for adults who are active and health-conscious (and those who aspire to be). There will be a bow-to-stern deck devoted to sports and fitness, with a training gym, bike-fitting station, batting cages, golf, soccer and hockey simulators, spinning and TRX studios, and lap pool. Another deck will be devoted to a luxury spa, yoga studio, and sports medicine clinic.

Also, trending is the focus on traditional experiences, connecting passengers to local cultures. A perfect example of this is the LivNordic Spa on Viking’s ocean ships (free to all passengers.) The spa experience draws upon the holistic wellness philosophy of Scandinavian culture and includes the only Snow Grotto at sea (with actual snow). Guests can partake in the Nordic Bathing Ritual, a wellness tradition which dates back centuries and involves alternating heating and cooling activities to help detox the body, relax muscles, and boost circulation ([www.vikingcruises.com](http://www.vikingcruises.com)).



The Japanese-influenced Shou Sugi Ban House opened in 2019 in the Hamptons, the first wellness retreat of its kind on Long Island. SHOU SUGI BAN HOUSE



## **The future**

“Wellness travel used to be focused on pampering and luxury, more about wealthy women losing weight and getting beauty treatments,” says McGroaty. “It’s a much more comprehensive idea now, encompassing physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.”

Industry experts predict more focus on mental and spiritual wellness, and a greater connectedness to fellow travelers and local communities, as well as natural environments.

“People are seeking something to turn on their beliefs, to ignite their spirituality,” says McGroaty. “We want simplicity but we also have a profound need to connect with people and nature.”

In the end, the industry will respond to what we crave, and that certainly means no more needing a vacation after your vacation.