

**AN INVESTIGATION OF TOURISTS'  
MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS OF USING HEALTH  
AND SPA FACILITIES IN FIVE-STAR RESORTS  
IN KOTA KINABALU, SABAH**



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UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH

**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH  
2011**

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**UMS**

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**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS  
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SABAH  
2011**

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## DECLARATION

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## CERTIFICATION

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Millions of thanks.

## ABSTRACT

### AN INVESTIGATION OF TOURISTS' MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS OF USING HEALTH AND SPA FACILITIES IN FIVE-STAR RESORTS IN KOTA KINABALU, SABAH

The changing needs in the population and the growing health-concern that is germinated in today's society have led to healthier lifestyle practices. People consume healthy and balanced diets and participate in various kinds of activities from mainstream exercises to frequent visits to sport and wellness centers. Likewise, the tourists seek to participate in activities that improve their health and well-being, including visits to health and spa centers at a particular holiday destination. It argues that a deep understanding of consumer profiles and their key motivations within this context is vital in order to sustain the growth of health and spa tourism business. This research seeks to understand the health and spa tourists' motivation that are grounded in their own words during their visits to health and spa service centers in Sabah, Malaysia. The main objectives are to describe the perceptions and identify the key motivations of health and spa among international tourists, and explain their travel behaviors in health and spa tourism by extending the push-pull motivation theory that focuses on the individual's psychological factors (motivation, perception and attitude towards health and spa) and the destination's (Sabah's) health and spa attributes. Data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews with 21 foreign tourists who had utilized health and spa services in Sabah, Malaysia. The finding reveals that the health and spa tourists' motivations are mainly attributed to the push factors, which related to the psychological needs of the tourists including escape, rest and relaxation. The pull factors (health and spa attributes) mainly as the key attributes of the whole spa experiences, in addition to key attractiveness to the tourists to visit health and spa, which including professionalism, spa treatments and the physical environment of the spa establishment. This contributes to a better understanding of health and spa in terms of push (health and spa tourists' key motivation) and pulls (key attractiveness of local health and spa) factors. It benefits the health and spa service providers in terms of developing appropriate marketing strategies that concentrate on fulfilling the psychological needs of the tourists, and enhanced tourist satisfaction by paying attention to the key attributes that eventually contribute to a more remarkable spa experiences. However, due to the nature of the qualitative study and the type of respondent (foreign tourists) of this research, it limits the generalizability of the research findings. It suggests a comparative work in a similar context in different locations and countries would prove beneficial for the possible validation of the findings. Additionally, the generalization of the research findings can be extended through further research such as the use of these motivational factors as variables in the quantitative approach in other context of health and spa tourism – health and spa tourists' satisfaction, spa treatment preferences, or perceptions and expectations.

**Key words:** health and spa, tourist profiles, pull and push motivation factors, tourist lifestyle, marketing strategies for health and spa business.

## ABSTRAK

Perubahan keperluan populasi dan peningkatan kepentingan kesihatan di kalangan masyarakat telah mengubah corak hidup masyarakat kepada amalan hidup yang lebih sihat. Ia turut memberi kesan kepada perubahan asas tingkahlaku pelancong serta pemasaran produk-produk pelancongan. Terdapat semakin banyak penglibatan pelancong dalam aktiviti-aktiviti yang menambahbaik kesihatan mereka termasuk lawatan ke pusat kesihatan dan spa di destinasi percutian. Difahami bahawa profil pengguna dan faktor motivasi mereka adalah penting untuk pembangunan perniagaan pelancongan kesihatan dan spa. Kajian ini mengkaji faktor motivasi pelancong berkenaan pusat kesihatan dan spa dari sudut pandangan mereka semasa lawatan mereka ke tempat-tempat tersebut di Sabah, Malaysia. Objektif kajian adalah untuk menjelaskan persepsi dan mengenalpasti faktor motivasi berkenaan kesihatan dan spa di kalangan pelancong antarabangsa, justeru menjelaskan tingkahlaku pelancong tersebut berdasarkan konsep motivasi "push-pull", di mana fokus utama adalah terhadap faktor tolakan – psikologi (termasuk motivasi, persepsi, tingkahlaku terhadap kesihatan dan spa) dan faktor tarikan pusat kesihatan dan spa di Sabah. Kutipan data dilakukan melalui temu ramah bersama 21 orang pelancong antarabangsa yang menggunakan servis kesihatan dan spa di Sabah, Malaysia. Hasil kajian mendapati bahawa motivasi utama adalah motivasi faktor tolakan yang berkenaan dengan keperluan psikologi pelancong, termasuk unsur-unsur "escape", "rest and relaxation". Manakala motivasi faktor tarikan adalah lebih kepada unsur-unsur penyumbang ke atas pengalaman spa secara amnya, seperti faktor profesionalisme, rawatan spa yang ditawarkan dan rupa pusat spa terbabit. Hasil kajian memberi pemahaman yang lebih lanjut dalam bidang ini yang dapat dilihat dari segi faktor tolakan dan tarikan. Kajian ini membolehkan pengusaha pusat kesihatan dan spa merancang strategi pemasaran yang lebih berkesan untuk memenuhi keperluan asas pelancong serta dapat meningkatkan tahap kepuasan pelancong dengan meneliti faktor-faktor penyumbang kepada pengalaman spa yang lebih baik. Disebabkan "nature" kajian kualitatif serta jenis responden dalam kajian ini menghadkan "generalisasi hasil kajian, maka kajian dalam konteks yang sama di lain tempat dan negara adalah lebih baik untuk memastikan ketepatan hasil kajian. Generalisasi kajian juga boleh dilanjutkan dengan kajian kuantitatif dalam konteks kesihatan dan spa, dengan menggunakan pembolehubah – faktor motivasi hasil dari kajian ini, seperti kepuasan pelancong kesihatan dan spa, rawatan spa, persepsi serta harapan berkaitan kesihatan dan spa.

**Kata kunci:** kesihatan dan spa, profil pelancong, factor motivasi tolakan dan tarikan, gaya hidup pelancong, strategi pemasaran perniagaan kesihatan dan spa.



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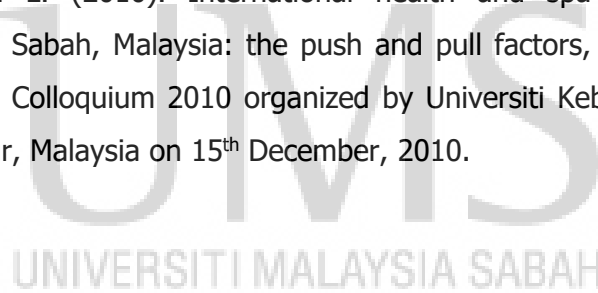
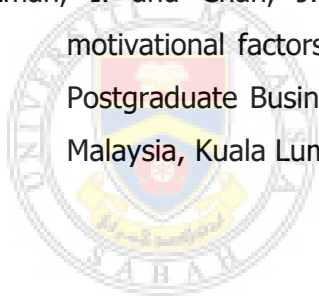
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Azman, I. and Chan, J. K. L. (2010). International health and spa tourists' motivational factors in Sabah, Malaysia: the push and pull factors, Regional Postgraduate Business Colloquium 2010 organized by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2010.



# CHAPTER 1

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

### 1.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research background, the problem statement of the research, as well as the objectives and questions of the current research. It also presents the scope of this research.

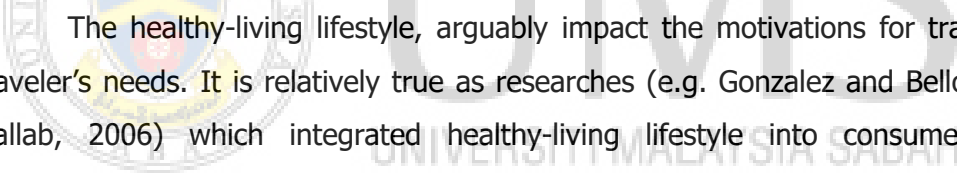
### 1.1 Tourism Industry

Tourism industry is seen as one of the most important global industries, which contributes to global economic development, creating employment and generating wealth to many countries (Page and Connell, 2006). From the mere 25 million international arrivals registered in the 1950s, tourism had climbed to the impressive figure of 700 million international travelers by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and generated a considerable proportion of the GDP in most countries of the world (Costa and Buhalis, 2006). According to preliminary results published by UNWTO, international tourist arrivals increased by 4.5 percent to 850 million in 2006 (Freitag and Pyka, 2008) and the World Tourism Organization predicts that international tourism arrivals alone will number over 1.56 billion by 2020, with average growth rates in Asia and the Middle East forecasted to be over 6 percent between 1995 and 2020 (Greaves, 2008).

Nevertheless, the reasons for travelling are varied which contribute to different types of tourism; ethnic tourism, cultural tourism, historical tourism, environmental tourism, recreational tourism, and business tourism (Valene L. Smith's identification of several types of tourism, in Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). One of the emerging travel trends at present that is corresponding to population's growing health consciousness, which resulted from the healthy-living lifestyle



practices, is health-related travel (Chon and Singh, 1995; Yeoman, 2008). Chon and Singh (1995) stated that the changing lifestyles, a focus on increasing personal needs, and more active travel participation have given a new meaning to value. And so, people are becoming more health conscious and they travel for healthy activities or participate in activities that promote their health and well-being, which eventually will increase the demand for health and wellness-related products/services at the holiday destinations. This type of holiday/vacation is more famously known as "health/wellness tourism", which can be defined as the general term for a touristic sojourn with the aim of maintaining, stabilizing and regaining health, during which (in order to differentiate it from a normal holiday), health services form a focal and vital part (Kaspar, 1996; as cited in Schobersberger, Greie and Humpeler, 2004; Mueller and Lanz Kaufmann, 2001). The services are related to various physical or psychological subcategories, which may include; medical check-up, beauty treatment, slimness, fitness, diets and so on (Schobersberger *et al.*, 2004).



The healthy-living lifestyle, arguably impact the motivations for travel and traveler's needs. It is relatively true as researches (e.g. Gonzalez and Bello, 2002; Hallab, 2006) which integrated healthy-living lifestyle into consumer/tourist behaviors had shown a strong dependency relationship between tourists' behaviors and lifestyle factor, and healthy-living habits and travel characteristics. Furthermore, Greaves (2008) stated that leisure time has become a key opportunity to enhance well-being and find sense and escape in increasingly complex and hectic lives. With increasing cost of healthcare and health consciousness that are germinated in today's society, health and wellness tourism has becoming increasingly recognized around the world.

Despite of the growing number of the international tourists worldwide, the phenomenon of tourism is not new. The officially accepted definition of tourism is that it comprises activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure,

business and other purposes such as visiting friends and relatives. Meanwhile, the tourist, defined as any person on a trip between two or more countries or between two or more localities within his or her country of usual residence, who would have many reasons or agendas at the destination country (WTO's, definition of tourism and tourist, in Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). Thus, arguably the people who are travelling for health and wellness or utilized any health/wellness-related services/products at the holiday destinations may be considered as the tourists and the tourism industry as well.

## **1.2 Health and Wellness Tourism**

Debatably, the development of health and wellness tourism can be resonated with the echoes of the great economic growth and major demographic shift, occurring in most countries across the globe. The society is aligned between the consumer's strong interest in health and the rising affluence, resulting in plethora of consumer products, whether anti-aging creams or medical procedures (Yeoman, 2008). People are practicing a healthy-living lifestyle to keep them fit and healthy. This lifestyle, the researchers – Ryan and Travis (1981); as cited in Kammermann *et al.* (1983) and Nahrstedt (2004), had termed "wellness" which can be described as a way of life, that an individual creates to achieve his/her highest potential for well-being, consists of actions that the individual able to control, such as how they exercise, eat, manage stress, and perceive the environment, and achieving a high-level of wellness involves continual striving for a more healthful way of living. Similarly, according to Mueller and Lanz-Kaufmann (2001, in Yeoman, 2008), wellness is viewed as a way of life, which aims to create a healthy body, soul and mind through acquired knowledge and positive interventions. Besides the balanced state of the trio (body, soul and mind), Yeoman (2008) added some fundamental elements of wellness such as self-responsibility, physical fitness, beauty care, healthy nutrition, relaxation, mental activity and environmental sensitivity.

### **1.2.1 Health and Spa Tourism**

Over the past decades, traveling for health purposes, health and wellness-oriented activities have been recognized around the world. The existing of different health practices and approaches of the people from different regions have also been well-

documented in the literature (e.g. Goodrich and Goodrich, 1987; Smith and Kelly, 2006; Connell, 2006). Smith and Puczkó (2009) stated that, in historical terms, health and wellness practices have been very much embedded in regional and local traditions and cultures, with available natural resources also determining the forms of wellness that were developed.

The earliest visit to mineral springs and coastline areas for social agendas later turned into healing places, at which many medical practitioners advocated the medicinal value of mineral waters and sent their patients to places where mineral springs were known to exist (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2006). The hot mineral springs in Belgian Ardennes were discovered to have the power to cure many skin problems (Miller, 1996; as cited in Mak and Wong, 2007). Moreover, Durie (2006) also wrote about "taking the waters" in the 1800s in the hydro towns of Scotland or German spas such as Baden Baden (Yeoman, 2008). As there are pools of mineral springs in America and Europe regions, the health and wellness practices evolved these natural resources, complemented with other healing or rejuvenate therapies of the local people (e.g. Ancient Maya tradition – Mexico). On top of that, Schobersberger *et al.*, (2004) suggested that many elements of the integrated health holiday are included, at which adventure, entertainment, and outdoor sports play important roles.

On the contrary, the common health and wellness practices in Asia are of different cultural traditions in spite of many mineral springs that can be found notably in Japan. Accordingly, the recent trend is that the western tourists are seeking solace in Eastern philosophies and therapies (for example, Thai massage, Indian Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Japanese Shiatsu) and these alternatives have already pervaded in many Western societies, but tourists are often just as keen to visit the origin of the practices (Smith and Kelly, 2006; Yeoman, 2008). Mak, Wong and Chang (2009) stated that more international tourists are turning towards Asia to seek new experiences in health rejuvenation. This phenomenon has created a new dimension for the hotel and tourism industry

as these culturally different health and wellness practices are adopted as an approach by the industry members to attract more tourists experiencing the uniqueness of the old tradition practices within a modern atmosphere – the provision of health and spa services/facilities at tourist destination countries. As stated by McNeil and Ragins (2005), today's spa is a combination of ancient traditions and modern mechanical wonders.

Arguably, with the presence of concern on health and well-being, health and spa are seemingly popular among the tourists. The health and wellness centers are springing up in many tourism destinations especially in Asian countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and India, although spa tourism is not a new phenomenon (Hudson, 2008). Furthermore, McNeil and Ragins (2005) suggested that spa participation is currently showing incredible growth, as more consumers turn to spa facilities as venues to improve their health and well-being. Although health and spa is considered luxury, it is seen as much more necessity (Madanoglu and Brezina (2008), and factors like, personal space, time out, escapism, and retreats are always seen as the factors which contribute to spa visitation Mak *et al.*, (2009).

Smith and Puczkó (2009) stated that, although spa may differ widely in terms of what they offer, that is their services or treatment supply; they have one thing in common which is the aspiration to improve health and well-being. Subsuming spa as a sub sector of the health and wellness tourism (Mak and Wong, 2007; Smith and Puczkó, 2009), it has increasingly become an important economic and marketing strategy for hotel/resort operators to attract tourist visitations (Madanoglu and Brezina, 2008). These resort spas may not be so oriented towards complete health and wellness programs, but it offers the chance to relax and unwind using some spa facilities, sports and leisure activities (Smith and Puczkó, 2009). Madanoglu and Brezina (2008) stated that health and spas appeal to resort guests as they provide a secluded realm where guests can escape from their busy everyday lives and stress. Similarly, this applies to Sabah, Malaysia as a tourist

destination, at which most resort hotels have taken the opportunities to expand new market and offer new experiences based on health and spa services/facilities (Chan, 2009). According to Chan (2007, in Smith and Puczko, 2009), the local people (Malaysian) associated health and wellness mainly with personal well-being and lifestyle, stress release for working people in urban areas and a new form of leisure/tourism activities for foreign tourists which includes spa and body treatments for personal well-being (stress release) and beauty/cosmetic surgery.

### **1.2.2 Health and Spa in Sabah, Malaysia**

Sabah is one of the states in Malaysia, at which its nature, culture and adventure tourism are well-promoted to foreign tourists from many countries. The international tourist's arrivals from Europe, America and Oceania have reached 112,773 in the year 2010 compared to 110,729 international arrivals reported in the year 2009 (the preliminary figure as reported by the Research Division, Sabah Tourism Board; 2011). In conjunction with Sabah tourism promotion, the tourists were mainly attracted to the nature, culture and adventure activities that Sabah has to offer. The recent trend of health and spa tourism has created opportunities to the hotel/resort operators to introduce health, wellness and spa activities to their guests (Chan, 2009). Consequently, the health and spa establishments are rapidly growing in Sabah, as there are 112 reflexology centers and 68 beauty centers registered in Kota Kinabalu area alone (Kota Kinabalu City Hall, 2009). Additionally, the exclusive spas are highly promoted in numbers of resort hotels including Nexus Resort Karambunai (Borneo Spa), Shangri-La Tanjung Aru Resort (CHI Spa), Shangri-La Rasa Ria Resort (The Spa at Dalit Bay), and Sutera Harbour Resort (Body Senses and Mandara Spa), at which each of these spas conveys a different theme/idea (Borneo, Chinese and Balinese) to reflect their own spa images as well as the key attractiveness to the tourists. Therefore, it is arguable that there are extended key motivation factors of tourists' visitation to health and spa facilities/services at a particular holiday destination.

Chan (2009) stated that the recent tourism development focused on the concept of healthy-living lifestyle where spa and wellness are viewed by the hotel

operators as one of the potential tourism products and services that can be offered to international tourists during their vacations in Sabah. Chan (2009) further stated that the growth of spa and health services business can be witnessed in resort hotel sector, and in the commercial sector such as individual private operated centers located in the shopping malls and business commercial buildings in Sabah.

As health and wellness is seemingly continued to reside in people everyday's life, it is unexceptional that health and wellness demands among tourists at the holiday destinations will continue to grow as well. Yet the understanding of health and wellness tourists' behaviors is limited especially from health and spa tourism context. Thus, this research aims to understand the health and spa tourists' behaviors by capturing the motivational factors of the tourists who stayed at the resort hotels and had used the health and spa services and facilities offered by the respective resort hotels during their holidays.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

There is a growing trend in attracting health and spa tourists worldwide. Previous research works related to health, wellness and spa tourism were conducted mainly in Western countries, especially in America and Europe (e.g. Mueller and Lanz Kaufmann, 2001; Supapol, Barrows and Barrows, 2006; Ringer, 2007). The researchers highlighted the current issues and trends of health and wellness tourism in both regions (America – Canada and USA; and Europe – Switzerland) which have significant implications for health and wellness providers. In addition, many available researches in health tourism were focusing on medical tourism rather than wellness and spa tourism until recently researchers have started to study on wellness aspect in tourism which have provided significant health and wellness practices between regions (e.g. Nahrstedt, 2004; Smith and Kelly, 2006; Smith and Puczko, 2009). Smith and Puczko (2009) presented a diversification of health and wellness – aspects and practices across the regions in the world, which are different to one another, including the health and spa practices, which numbers of researchers had also stated these differences (e.g. Nahrstedt, 2004; Ringer, 2007; Mak and Wong, 2007; Mak, Wong and Chang, 2009).

With the growing popularity of health, wellness and spa experiences among the tourists, the promotion of health and spa has becoming an important consideration in promoting and marketing strategies for local health and spa providers, as well as the hotels and resorts businesses at the holiday destinations. Equally, as resort hotels and commercial sectors are growing to offer health and spa in Sabah, it is vital to understand the tourists' behaviors and their key motivational factors, especially the international tourists. However, to date, there is a lack of studies on health and spa tourism and no research that has been done which directly relate this niche tourism to push-pull factors motivational concept, and investigate to what extent the destination's health and spa attributes have influences on the individual tourist's motivation factors. Therefore, this gap and issue are addressed by this study.

Furthermore, despite of the expansion and popular demand of health and spa services/activities by both local and international tourists, there is a little understanding of the health and spa consumers in Malaysian context. Therefore, this qualitative study attempts to understand the health and spa tourists' motivations that are grounded in their own words during their visits to health and spa service centers in resort hotels, in Sabah, Malaysia. This research extends the push-pull motivational concept in order to provide some insights of the emerging and growing health and spa tourism business sector. It aims to provide a deep understanding of tourists' profiles and their key motivational factors in health and spa tourism context which is vital in order to sustain the growth of health and spa tourism business in Sabah, Malaysia.

#### **1.4 Conceptual Framework**

The research focuses on health and spa tourists' behaviors, the framework of this research is based on established theory and leading literature in the related field (Sinkovics *et al.*, 2008) – health, wellness and spa tourism, and tourist motivation studies. The push-pull factors motivational concept is utilized in this research, with modifications being made to focus into health and spa tourism, which is likely to be

more central on the motivational factors of the health and spa tourists and the holiday destination's health and spa attributes.

Accordingly, the push factors are considered to be socio-psychological motivations that predispose the individual to travel (Oh *et al.*, 1995), which evolves tourist's personal attributes, or a demand-side approach which is to understand tourist's decision-making process, such as attitudes, perceptions, and learning and motivation factors – the four major psychological factors of the individual's purchase behavior (Gilbert, 1991; Knowles *et al.*, 2004). Meanwhile the pull factors are those that attract the individual to a specific destination once the decision to travel has been made (Oh *et al.*, 1995). This may include tangible resources such as beaches, recreation facilities and historic resources, as well as travelers' perception and expectation such as novelty, benefit expectation and marketing image of the destination (Yoon and Uysal, 2005).

Figure 1.1: The Research Theoretical Framework for Health and Spa Tourist Motivation

