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Identifying and Ranking Critical Motivational Dimensions for the Choice of Wellness Tourism: An Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) Approach

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Abstract: This exploratory study aims to determine the elements that impact travellers' decisions to choose wellness tourism. Motivation criteria have been prioritized to determine the most influential reason tourists decide to engage in wellness tourism. This study investigates the motivational factors that influence the decision to choose wellness tourism. These factors were ascertained by conducting an extensive review of the relevant literature and considering the preferences articulated by wellness tourism-seeking visitors. The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) was employed to assess seven identified criteria and thirty-three sub-criteria, to determine their relative importance in motivating tourists to choose wellness tourism. The findings indicate, in accordance with the proposed hierarchical model, that motivational factors including “the desire to challenge myself physically,” “the desire to find peace for myself”, “the desire to look and feel better”, “the desire to maintain a balanced diet”, and "the desire to focus on one's inner self” - are the critical factors that motivates tourist to choose wellness tourism.

Introduction

In recent years, the tourism sector has undergone significant transformations, most notably the rise of wellness tourism as a prominent and growing domain (Majeed and Gon Kim, 2023). The transition is propelled by current societal transformations marked by a surge in stress and exhaustion resulting from contemporary existence's rapid and demanding nature (Mota et al., 2023). Owing to these conditions, there has been a noticeable decline in output and general well-being, making the need for restorative interactions even more critical than before (Smith and Puczkó, 2008).

Wellness tourism endeavours to offer tourists a refuge that caters to the holistic well-being of their physical and mental states. These facilities include a range of therapeutic experiences, encompassing spa treatments and mindfulness practices, which function as catalysts for renewal (Singh, 2022). Tourism is not solely a recreational pursuit, rather, it has developed into an essential coping strategy that offers relief from everyday pressure and aids in the restoration of one's effectiveness (Gössling et al., 2012). The potential of wellness tourism is significant as a pivotal catalyst for the rapid expansion of India's thriving tourism industry (Chhabra, 2020). In the context of a rapidly growing economy and the increasing pace of lifestyle changes, the significance of wellness tourism is amplified owing to its capacity to provide restorative advantages (Khandelwal and Barua, 2024). This form of tourism encompasses detoxifying and holistic therapies that promote rejuvenation of individuals' physical, mental, and spiritual aspects (Kachhara and Jain, 2024). India is a highly regarded wellness tourism destination due to its extensive legacy of time-honored techniques, including Ayurveda, yoga, meditation, acupuncture, naturopathy,

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and panchakarma (Chou, 2024). These traditional healing modalities have garnered significant interest and appeal among wellness travellers worldwide (Meneses et al., 2024).

The concept of wellness can be traced back to approximately 4200 BC (Jha, 2021) when the Sumerians sought to restore their health through the practice of bathing in thermal springs and fountains situated within temples. The origins of medical treatment can be dated to around 1500 BC (Jha, 2021), when the Greeks established a fundamental basis for this field by constructing a temple dedicated to their God of Medicine (Singh and Kumar, 2024). Throughout history, there is ample evidence of individuals venturing beyond their national borders to access appropriate medical care. Currently, medical tourism is practiced in more than 50 countries, with developing countries in South Africa, Asia, and Latin America seeing the greatest growth in this sector. (Watson and Stolley, 2012). Although the term "wellness" is relatively recent, the underlying concept has existed for millennia. According to Turner (2000), ancient historical societies like Rome, Greece, and other Asian countries established the fundamental principles of health and wellness that are still relevant today (Raj et al., 2023). Modern wellness practices demonstrate the enduring wisdom gained from ancient civilizations. Deeply rooted cultural practices such as Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine in multiple Asian regions are derived from ancient spiritual beliefs and therapeutic techniques, impacting different facets of daily life (Panchal, 2012).

Literature in the area of wellness tourism is growing extensively, and available literature majorly focuses on health and wellness tourism (Smith and Puczkó, 2008), challenges and opportunity in wellness tourism (Andreu et al., 2021), wellness tourism dimensions (Dillette et al., 2021) health tourism and hotel industry (Mueller and Kaufmann, 2001) and quality of life and wellness tourism (Luo et al., 2018).

There is a scarcity of research on the motivational factors that influence Indian tourists' choices of wellness tourism. Therefore, this study aims to identify the essential motivational elements that influence the selection of wellness tourism and subsequently prioritize them based on their calculated global weights. This study has two objectives:

- To determine the various motivational criteria and their sub-criteria from the available literature. So, the players in the tourism sector specific to wellness tourism understand the needs of tourists regarding question “what motivates tourists to choose wellness tourism?”
- Prioritizing these motivational criteria and sub-criteria according to the calculated weights to give tour operators an understanding of the most important factor motivating tourists to opt for wellness tourism and subsequently enhance services in relation to service offerings in wellness tourism.

Literature review

According to a 1997 study by Iso-Ahola, people are motivated to travel based on their personal sense of well-being. As a result, people are going on trips to become healthier (Letho et al., 2006). Several dimensions of wellness have been identified (Chen et al., 2008; Letho et al., 2006). These dimensions include the physical, spiritual, social, and intellectual components. Activities such as yoga and learning about the principles of wellness are beneficial. Additionally, research has shed light on the reasons for pursuing psychological well-being, relaxation, and escapism (Puczkó and Bachvarov, 2006). Several researchers have investigated both the push and pull motives (Aleksijevits, 2019; Azman and Chan, 2010; Hallab, 2006). While on the other hand, many researchers concentrated primarily on push motives (Konu and Laukkanen, 2010; Mak et al., 2009). Naylor and Kleiser (2002) investigated the advantages individuals look for when visiting a fitness resort and spa in the United States. Their findings combined the functional and psychological benefits. The psychological benefits identified included indulgence, self-exploration, physical well-being, shedding pounds, and pursuing a desirable encounter. Their findings indicate a lack of advantages associated with relaxation, escapism, or stress alleviation (Kumar et al., 2023).

The research carried out by Kessler et al. (2020) primarily focused on two different objectives. The Wellness Tourist Motivation Scale (WTMS) is a metric that was developed because of the investigation into the elements that inspire individuals to participate in wellness tourism. This investigation led to the development of a metric that can be used to measure the motivations of individuals. The following seven categories of motivation are included in this scale: physical activity and fitness, nutrition and diet, mindfulness and meditation, rest and recovery, wellness education, personal well-being, and environmental disconnection. Further based on the literature survey, the criteria for motivational factors to adopt wellness tourism the literature is summarized as below (Table 1).

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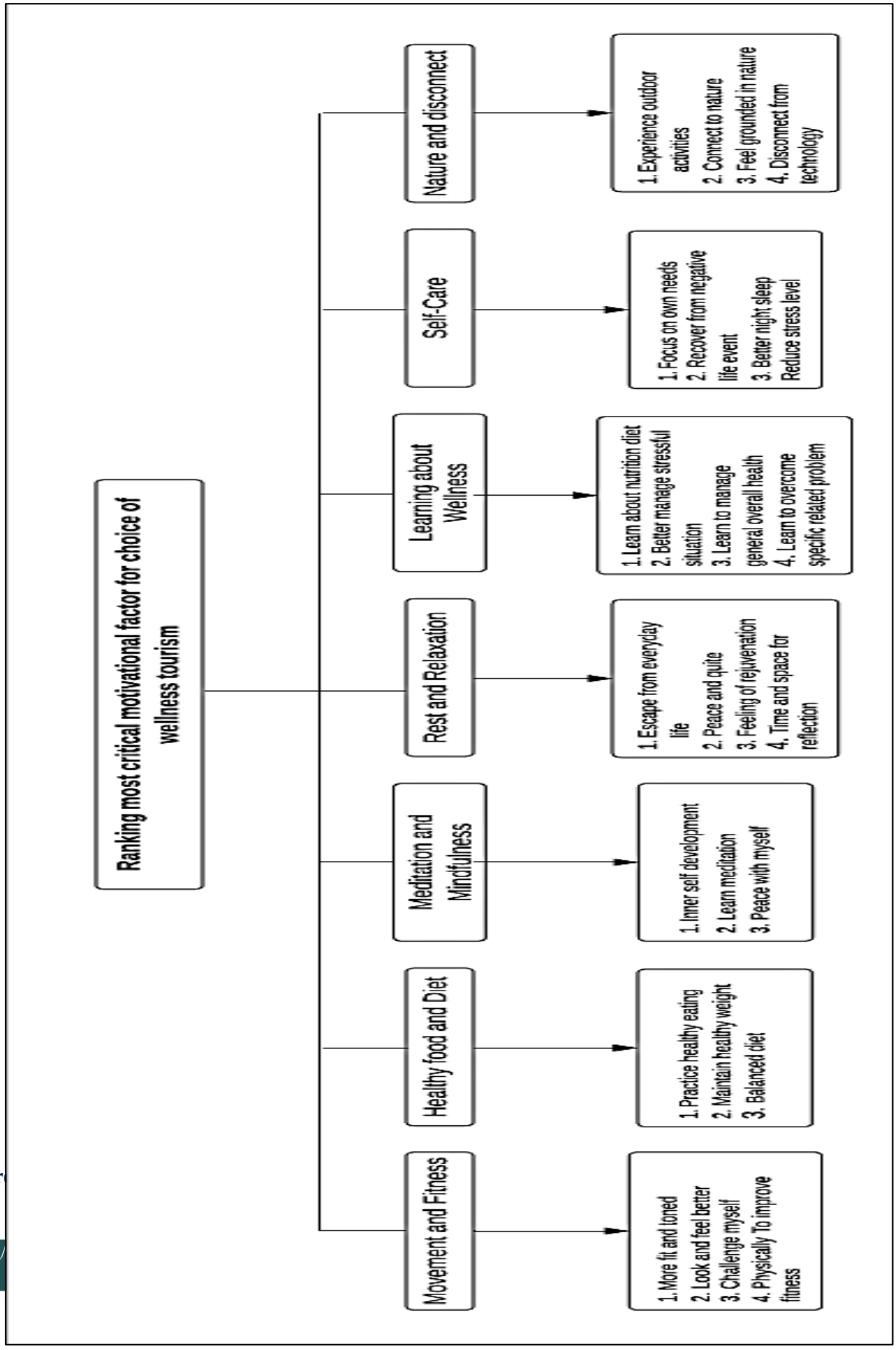
Table 1. Literature Summary.

Criteria	Sub Criteria	Focus	Literature
Movement and Fitness	More fit and toned Look and feel better Challenge me physically To improve fitness.	The concept of "Movement and Fitness" is a comprehensive strategy for improving individual health and well-being. This encompasses participating in physical activities to enhance physical fitness.	Little (2012).
Healthy Food and Diet	Practice healthy eating Maintain healthy weight Balanced diet	Refers to the emphasis on adopting healthy eating patterns and adhering to a well-balanced diet.	Pagaldiviti and Dash (2023).
Meditation and Mindfulness	Inner self-development Learn meditation Peace with myself	Refers to individual advancement by focusing on internal self-improvement and acquiring meditation skills.	Norman and Pokorny (2017)
Rest and Relaxation	Escape from everyday life Peace and quiet Feeling of rejuvenation Time and space for reflection.	The focus is to offer individuals refuge from their daily routines, providing them with tranquillity and serenity.	Yoon and Uysal (2005)
Learning about Wellness	Learn about nutrition diet Better manage stressful situations Learn to manage general overall health Learn to overcome the specific related problem	Refers to travellers' nutrition, stress management, and general health maintenance.	Knowles et al. (2004).
Self-Care	Focus on own needs Recover from negative life event Better night sleep Reduce stress level	This concept of "Self-Care" entails to one's personal requirements, creating a favourable setting for recuperation from adverse life experiences.	Furnham and Forey (1994).
Nature and disconnect	Experience outdoor activities Connect to nature Feel grounded in nature Disconnect from technology	This emphasises participation in outdoor pursuits and establishing a connection with the natural environment.	Huang and Xu (2018).

Methodology and Development of the AHP Model

The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) is a multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) technique commonly employed to make decisions when several criteria or aspects are involved (Krenicky et al., 2022). Various researchers have used this method to solve multi-criteria decision-making for complex problems, such as deciding on the most favorable solution, ranking, and prioritizing among critical factors (Pecchia et al., 2011; Krenicky et al., 2022). The AHP methodology splits the problem of making decisions with multiple criteria into a hierarchical structure with at less than 3 levels: aim (objective), criterion, and decision alternatives (Saaty, 1980). The AHP approach generally consists of the following phases:



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In the first phase, a suitable hierarchy model was constructed, which included objectives, criteria, and sub-criteria based on a literature survey Bulawit et al. (2024). The hierarchical model (Figure 1) consists of an objective at level 1, which specifies the ranking of the necessary motivational dimensions for the selection of wellness tourism. Level 2 encompasses the primary elements/criteria considered when evaluating the essential motivational aspects influencing tourists' choice of wellness tourism. Seven criteria and 26 sub-criteria at Level 3 were established. Because the objective of the study is solely to prioritize and rank the components, the AHP model does not include any choice alternatives.

This study's respondents consist of ten individuals, namely young, middle-aged, and elderly tourists. These respondents regularly participate in wellness tourism and visit various wellness centers across India. These centers inclusive of Ananda in the Himalayas and Narendra Bhawan in Rishikesh, Vana Retreat in Dehradun, Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort in Parwanoo, Wildflower Hall in Shimla, and The Himalayan in Manali. The respondents belong to diverse professional backgrounds, like software engineers, young and seasoned academicians, and homemakers.

Further, Pairwise Comparison and Priority Setting for all items (factors, criteria) at each level are conducted to establish their relative importance using Saaty's scale, which ranges from one to nine (Saaty, 1980). At this stage, tourists who particularly opted for wellness tourism are asked to provide their opinions. In the next stage, the consistency of the data is checked. The purpose of this check is to guarantee that the judgements are consistent. According to the concept put forth by Saaty (1980), a Consistency Ratio (CR) of 0.10 or lower shows an acceptable level of inconsistency within the comparison matrix, which enables the ranking outcomes to be accepted. If CR is greater than 0.10, the ranking results cannot be accepted. It is necessary for a person to make a decision to examine the evaluation procedure in this scenario. Finally, to synthesize the result, the calculated weighted sum of the priorities was used to determine the overall ranking of the factors using global weights (Table 2).

Analysis and Discussions

The AHP table (Table II) shows the criteria, sub-criteria, and their local and global weights, which are essential for making a well-organized conclusion

Table 2. Composite Priority global and local weights for criteria and sub-criteria.

Criteria	Local weights	Sub-criteria	local weights	global weights
Movement and Fitness	0.113	More fit and Toned	0.070	0.014
		Look and feel better	0.298	0.058
		Challenge myself Physically	0.561	0.110
		To improve fitness	0.070	0.014
Healthy food and diet	0.196	Practicing healthy eating	0.292	0.041
		Maintain healthy weight	0.295	0.042
		Balance diet	0.413	0.058
Rest and Relaxation	0.141	Inner self	0.433	0.060
		Learn meditation	0.101	0.014
		Peace with myself	0.466	0.064
Learn about wellness	0.138	Escape from everyday life	0.23	0.03
		Peace and quite	0.25	0.03
		Feeling rejuvenation	0.25	0.03
		time and space for reflection	0.27	0.04
Self Care	0.138	Learn about nutrition diet	0.249	0.034
		better manage stressful situation	0.233	0.032
		Learn to manage general overall health	0.268	0.037
		learn to overcome specific related problem	0.249	0.034
Meditation and Mindfulness	0.138	Focus on own needs	0.388	0.053
		Recover from negative life event	0.179	0.025
		Better night sleep	0.129	0.018
		Reduce stress level	0.304	0.042
Nature and Disconnect	0.138	Experience outdoor activities	0.114	0.016
		Connect with nature	0.372	0.051
		Feel grounded in nature	0.339	0.047
		Disconnected from technology	0.176	0.024

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considering many criteria. The main criteria are 'Movement and Fitness,' 'Healthy food and nutrition,' 'Rest and Relaxation,' 'Learn about wellness,' 'Self Care,' 'Meditation and Mindfulness,' and 'Nature and Disconnect.' Each criterion was assigned a local weight, reflecting its significance in relation to the overall objective. Each main criterion has sub-criteria with specific local weights. The local weights indicate the significance of each sub-criterion in relation to the major criterion to which it belongs. Global Weights are crucial numbers that indicate the overall significance of each sub-criterion in the decision-making model. Global weights are determined by multiplying the local weight of a sub-criterion by the local weight of its corresponding major criterion. The criterion healthy food and diet" has the highest local weight of 0.196, signifying that it is the most crucial element for job satisfaction among all criteria. The sub-criterion 'Balance diet had the highest local weight (0.413) under the category 'Healthy food and diet, indicating its significance. The global weight of 0.058 is the highest for this criterion, indicating its significant importance in the model. The sub-criterion 'Challenge oneself Physically' in the 'Movement and Fitness' category has the greatest overall weight (0.110) among all sub-criteria, suggesting that it is considered the most important for job satisfaction within the entire model. 'Peace with myself' falls under the 'Rest and Relaxation' category and carries a high worldwide weight of 0.064, indicating its importance in job satisfaction.

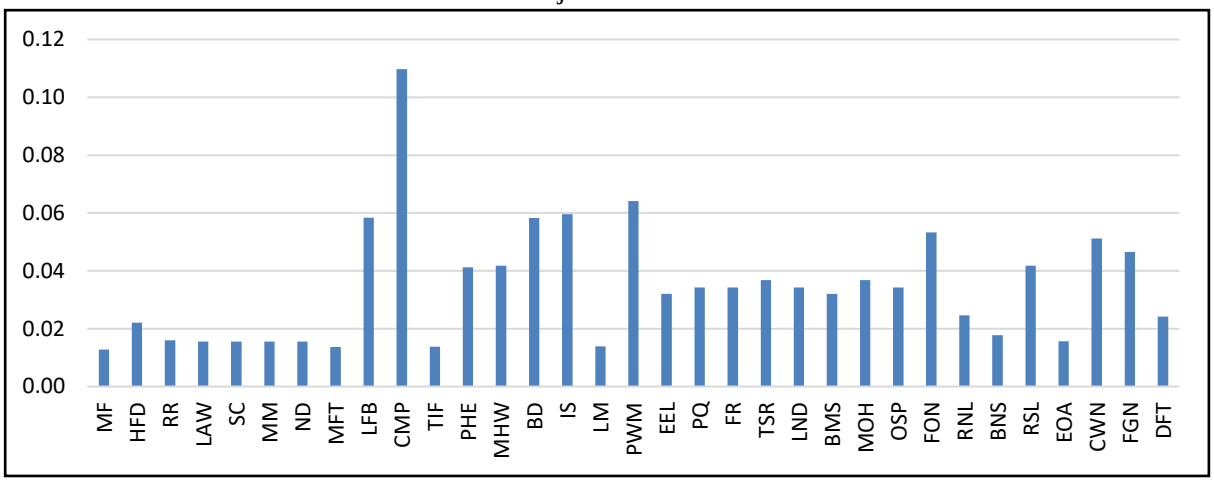

Figure 2. Priority level of Sub-criteria for choice of wellness tourism

The graphical representation (figure 2) provides a clear depiction of the priority level of all the essential sub-criteria that encourage tourists to select wellness tourism. Among the factors that have been highlighted as the motives for wellness tourism, the factors that have gained higher priority are the following: "the desire to challenge myself physically", "the desire to find peace for myself", "the desire to look and feel better", "the desire to maintain a balanced diet", and "the desire to focus on one's inner self". This clearly indicates that tourists seek wellness tourism to achieve physical and mental well-being.

Conclusion

The study employs the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to determine and prioritize the key motivational factors influencing tourists when selecting wellness tourism. The data show that tourists value intrinsic well-being, with ' challenge me physically ' and ' peace with myself' being the most significant criteria. This finding indicates a preference for activities that cause physical difficulties and mental tranquillity. The importance of a balanced diet and inner self highlights the significance of nutritional and spiritual factors in wellness tourism. These results emphasize the importance of both physical fitness and mental tranquillity in driving wellness tourism. These findings have practical significance for anyone involved in the wellness tourism sector. Service providers should customize their services to incorporate physical challenges for tourists and opportunities for mental tranquillity and self-examination. Highlighting balanced nutrition and personal growth in marketing and service development could address these outlined motives. This method could assist policymakers in creating structures that promote the comprehensive advancement of wellness tourism, perhaps resulting in higher visitor satisfaction and return visits, thereby promoting a sustainable growth trajectory for India's industry.

This study's findings on the prioritization of motivational factors for wellness tourism significantly contribute to both the theoretical understanding of consumer behaviour in the wellness tourism sector and the extension of motivation theories in tourism. By demonstrating that individual motivations for wellness tourism are multifaceted, encompassing physical, psychological, and spiritual needs, it supports a broader

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theory of wellness tourism motivations. Additionally, the novel application of the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) approach provides a unique contribution to multi-criteria decision-making theories within tourism motivation research. This methodological innovation could inspire future research aimed at unraveling complex consumer decision-making processes across various tourism niches, thereby enhancing the theoretical landscape of tourism studies.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors of this study affirm that there are no competing interests with regards to the publication of this material.

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