

Foreword

Health tourism is probably one of the fastest growing forms of tourism. Health tourism is a rather multifaceted industry since it has several segments. We can talk about medical tourism, wellness tourism, spa tourism, and holistic and spiritual tourism. In most countries, spas are key elements of the supply in the beauty and luxury segments. This is particularly the case for Western European, most Asian or North American markets. On the contrary, there are several countries around the world that have been developing tourism based on natural assets, such as hot springs or healing microclimate. Although there are numerous countries that have rich natural resources, e.g. Japan, South-Korea and New Zealand, in these countries hot springs have been used for wellness and not for medical services.

Central and Eastern European, as well as many Southern European countries, such as Russia, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Italy, Spain and Portugal have been using their hot spring resources for healing and medical services. The thermal or hot springs of Spain, Italy and Portugal are key elements of thermalism and balneotherapies which are administered and supervised by medical personnel. Many facilities (baths, sanatoria, hotels, rehabilitation centres) as well as destinations have rich history since the high classes have been turning to natural healing for centuries. After the Second World War, due to the democratization of healthcare based on natural healing assets, several facilities were built, extended or refurbished. Health tourism to these centres is a key form of tourism in most of the mentioned countries.

This volume presents a wide range of work. The variety of the cases and examples ensure the reader that health tourism, especially health tourism that builds on natural resources, is most certainly a very prosperous field for development. The chapters highlight some really important questions and challenges the industry is facing.

Chapter 1 discusses the ever critical questions of relevant legislation. There is very limited EU level regulation and legislation exist that would relate to thermal resources. Nature or heritage protection legislation may not focus on the key points the protection of thermal assets would need, therefore these questions are really of paramount importance.

Chapter 2 gives an international overview of thermalism in terms of its possible use in health and/or wellness tourism. How old fashioned structures and facilities could and should face the expectations of new segments and the competition created by new facilities and industries leaves players with a lot to accomplish. Chapter 10 discusses in what areas of life and lifestyle thermal resources and approaches can bring change to one's life and therefore can improve wellbeing and quality of life.

Franchising as a management and expansion concept arrived to the world of spa and wellness in the last 5–10 years. There are several companies and brands that could benefit from this. Still, as we can see it in Chap. 3, there is no uniform solution for success. Franchisors and franchisees need to provide solutions for several questions and what works in one franchise may not work for another.

Marketing in health tourism is exceptionally complex. This is due to the sometimes very different understandings of the same words in countries, cultures or languages! Chapter 4 highlights the opportunities and challenges of cross-border cooperation in branding. Chapter 5 has a case from Italy. The authors carried out a comprehensive research which looks at how guests of either traditional or 'new' segments may consider the existing supply of thermal springs and destinations.

Thalassotherapy enjoys a new revival. This traditional healing (and wellness) approach has been available for a long time at seaside destinations. Still, in the last couple of years, destinations, spa and beauty brands rediscovered thalassotherapy. Three chapters focus on the various aspects of thalassotherapy. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 look at the various aspects of quality management in the Spanish thalassotherapy centers, such as motivation and barriers of implementing such standards.

Chapter 9 discusses a rather complex as well as very important question, i.e. the wellbeing of senior segments (or the questions of ageing, if you like). The introduction of some key findings of the research under the IMSERSO Program can provide input for further development and policy making in thermalism.

This title is a great collection of cases, best practices and development ideas, as well as challenging questions. Thermalism or thalassotherapy have been around for some time and have their traditional uses. Still, there are new ways, forms and approaches that can and should be considered. As it is suggested by the authors, natural resources in health, wellness or healing can bring in new alternatives through which wider spectrums of the society can improve their health and wellbeing.

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