

Travel Perception of Wellness Tourists amid COVID - 19

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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is an infectious disease linked to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) disease that spreads primarily through contact with an infected person when they cough or sneeze (Sharma et al., 2020). This virus causes a respiratory illness with symptoms such as a cough, cold, fever, dehydration, souring, breathlessness, and potential loss of taste or smell (Bakar & Rosbi, 2020) which was first reported in Wuhan Province of China in December 2019 and later it spread rapidly worldwide (Nishiura H et al., 2020). A report by the World Health Organization (2020) the total confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide are 48.7 million cases with 1.23 million deaths as of 1st November 2020. This virus has diverse impacts on business, education, communication, health, and so on. People with weak immune systems or heart and lung disease are at higher risk of being infected (Kumar, 2020) including old age persons, children, and patients with a pre-existing clinical history like diabetes, cancer, respiratory disorders, obesity, lung disease, etc (Srivastava et al., 2020). The World Health Organization (2020) is renewing the call-to-action to stay active in line with the established recommendations for physical activity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) reported that patients with underlying health conditions are six times more likely to be hospitalized due to COVID-19 and they also have a 12 times higher death rate compared to people with no underlying conditions. To deal with health-related issues, wellness tourism is one of the effective tools in pandemic times (Sharma et al, 2020). Hence, lessons from COVID-19 are an opportunity for wellness tourism as physical exercise, meditation, yoga is emerging as one of the most protective factors- a vital part of an overarching strategy to maintain and promote our health and productivity in the ongoing struggle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the recent situation of the pandemic, the concept of wellness- staying healthy and achieving the highest potential for well-being has become very popular (Rao and Mehta, 2020). Wellness is a holistic word that reflects the positive attributes of health and it is primarily associated with health, which is well-being with the absence of illness (Bhowmick, 2018). Wellness and health tourism, as a worldwide fascinating trend of the 21st century, has

become essential for the successful development of tourism destinations (Voigt et al., 2008). Wellness is playing an important role during the outbreak of the corona virus. Wellness tourism refers to tourists traveling to encourage, enhance and improve physical, mental, or spiritual health (Dimon, 2004); and this includes one or more of the following: physical fitness programs, spa visits, medical treatment, massage experiences, health farms, and many different alternative therapies derived from different cultures (Velina, 2014). The travel perception of tourists for wellness is needed to understand during this pandemic situation. Hence, perception is defined as a group of internal sensational cognitive processes of the brain at the subconscious cognitive function layer that detects, connects, interprets, and search internal cognitive information in the brain (Wang, 2017). A large number of tourists travel to India for Ayurveda, yoga, meditation, aromatherapy, Unani, Siddha, homeopathy, naturopathy, gem therapy, pranic healing, etc (Valentine, 2016). India has a strong background of medicine and wellness tradition from ancient times ; it is a natural preference for wellness travel (Ravishankar and Shukla, 2007). Some of the world-renowned wellness tourism destinations in India are Kerala, Uttarakhand, and Goa (Bharti, 2015).

Within a short time of its existence, Uttarakhand has developed as a significant and effective destination for wellness tourism (Dikshit, 2019). Home to world fame yoga institutions, several ashrams, health centers, retreats, and high-end spas, Uttarakhand is known for its spirituality and is also known as the 'Yoga Capital of the World' (Kumar, 2017). Uttarakhand houses 272 Ayurvedic and Unani Pharmacies, 549 State Ayurvedic and Unani Clinics, and 206 AYUSH Wing established in the Allopathic hospitals. Uttarakhand Ayurveda University was established by State Government and it ensures effective and significant information, teaching, training, research, and development in Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH), while Uttaranchal Ayurvedic College & hospital is the center providing Ayurveda courses that are recognized by Central Council of Indian medicine. Rishikesh is a perfect Wellness Destination in Uttarakhand (Gupta & Vyas, 2014) for wellness tourists amid COVID -19. The demand for wellness travel is going to increase as people become more aware of their health due to this

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pandemic. Some well-known wellness and yoga ashrams (institutes) in Rishikesh are Omkarananda Yoga Kendra, Yoga Niketan, Yoga study Centre, and Parmarth Niketan (Bharti, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impact of COVID-19 on Health

COVID-19 has presented unprecedented health challenges all over the world (Roman et al., 2020). Along with exclusive symptoms of the virus, a lot of people are susceptible to mental problems, emotional problems along with physical health problems due to the enforcement of exaggerated lockdown (Fig. 1). Faced with new realities of working from home, home-schooling of children, job security, and lack of physical contact with other friends and relatives, it is important to look after mental as well as physical health (Roman et al., 2020). During a severe pandemic, the closing of schools, parks, and other entertainment activities has disrupted the common man's usual lifestyle and can potentially promote distress, boredom, and confusion (Lee et al., 2005). Similarly, the amount of anxiety among students during the COVID-19 outbreak was positively associated with hampered daily life schedules and delays in academic activities (Cao et al., 2020). Almost everyone is in a great depression due to the massive spread of the novel coronavirus (Srivastava et al., 2020). The spreading of this COVID-19 creates panic among the public (Bakar and Rosbi, 2020) and has brought on another pandemic in its wake, that of Fear Psychosis- everyone everywhere is scared to death (Bhavanani, 2020). The majority of people were observed with psychological problems like stress, anger, insomnia, anxiety, irritability, fear of contracting and spreading the infection to family members, frustration, loneliness, denial, despair, suicidal tendency as well as confusion due to the disastrous impact of this virus. (Thakar et al., 2020). Previous outbreaks have reported that the physical impact of a pandemic includes obesity, inactiveness, etc (Brooks et al., 2020). Risk factors for mental health include overwhelming situations, no mental peace, social disruption of daily life, feeling vulnerable, at risk of getting infected, fear of transmitting the disease to families and loved ones (Koh D, 2020). Therefore, the harmful impact of COVID-19 on public health effects: psychologically, physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially (Roman et al., 2020).

Fig 1: Impacts of COVID-19 on Health.



Practicing Yoga during COVID-19

According to Iyengar (2006) "Yoga is not a particular religion, but is meant for individual growth and physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual balance." It has been researched (Rakel et al., 2005) that Yoga is the ultimate form of relaxation and well-being. The practice of yoga takes care of all the mental issues so it is best suited for the quarantine period during COVID-19 (Menon, 2020). Bhavanani (2020) stated that stress, fear, and negative emotions are known to weaken our immune system while Yoga (including meditation), mindfulness, positive emotions, and relaxation strengthen it. Thakar (2020) said that yoga is a great tool as the stretching poses help to reduce tension in muscles and joints and can help relax the sympathetic system. Some of the yoga poses are excellent for managing blood pressure thereby reducing anxiety symptoms (Maddox, 2015). Yoga is not only practiced regularly but also on vacations or trips. For some people practicing yoga constitutes the main purpose for their vacations (Letho et al., 2006). Mintel (2007) studies that Yoga is a way to control the body and mind and the best tool for physical fitness and self-well being. An individual's involvement level with yoga, physical health as well as mental health positively contribute to the proclivity to travel for yoga (Letho et al., 2006). The promotion of yoga as a subdivision of wellness and spirituality, to tap into these motivations, appears to have gained great popularity in the yoga market of India (Chen et al., 2013). According to Gupta (2018), Rishikesh has been perceived as an effective wellness tourism destination, by tourists, with all necessary facilities and services. Kumar (2017) already studied that places such as Rishikesh and Haridwar, in Uttarakhand, have huge potential to serve wellness tourists from all corners of the globe.

Spa activities a treat during COVID-19

The spa is defined as “entities devoted to enhancing overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body, and spirit” (Mak et al., 2009). The International Spa Association (ISPA) classified spas into eight major categories according to the facilities and treatments provided: club spa, cruise ship spa, day spa, destination spa, hotel spa, medical spa, mineral spring spa, and resort spa (Kazandzhieva, 2014). A medical spa, mineral spring spa, and some other spa therapies are effective during this pandemic. Sibi and Sherry (2017) stated that spa is the most popular form of wellness tourism which includes water-based treatments like thermal pools, steam rooms, and saunas used for relaxation and healing. Azman and Lian Chan (2010) revealed that health and spa tourist motivation is largely attributed to personal needs and lifestyles, the price and the functionality/performance of health and spa service providers. Some surveys showed that people are living with greater fear, worries, and stress since the beginning of the COVID-19 (Bhavanani, 2020). The adverse effects of lockdown on collective mental health are apparent worldwide. A similar study by Mak et al. (2009) in Korea shows that tourists were motivated by relaxation away from daily life while involving in spa activities. The value of Spa business to society is the saleable services it provides to domestic and foreign tourists to satisfy their needs and health goals: de-stress, detoxification, and cleansing, deep relaxation, anti-aging, etc (Srivastava and Sharma, 2009). A few studies showed that location is one of the important factors for the growth of wellness and spa products and the reasonable prices of spa and wellness treatments also attracted wellness tourists from Asian countries (Smith & Kelly, 2006). Csapo and Marton (2017) stated that visitors spend more time and more money on spa and wellness than on any other tourism product and there is a strong spatial concentration of the spa and wellness demand among tourists for mental peace. Hashemi et al. (2015) have explored that self-satisfying and self-fulfillment (push factors) and the spa attributes (pull factors) are the motivational factors to spa visitation in Malaysia to provide deep insights into what motivates spa tourists to visit the spa in Malaysia.

Search for Traditional Medicine and Treatment

Traditional medicine system is phrased by modern scientist as alternative, non-conventional, or complementary medicine (Ravishankar and Shukla, 2007). Practices of traditional medicines are highly influenced by factors such as civilization, history, culture, and philosophy. This system of medicine is considered to be safe because of its long historical use, as experiences passed on from generation to generation (Samal, 2015). Traditional beliefs highly influence the practice of alternative medicine systems all over the world, especially in Asia and Latin America (Kala, 2017). Nowadays, these medicines are used in combination with allopathic treatment in symptomatic alleviation and prophylaxis of COVID-19. WHO (2008) defines traditional medicine as "including diverse health practices, approaches, knowledge, and beliefs incorporating plant, manual techniques, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises applied individually or in combination to maintain well-being

as well as to treat or prevent illness". According to Kala (2017), the traditional systems of medicine in India include Ayurveda, Unani, homeopathy, and Siddha. It is one of the oldest systems of medicine and effective in eliminating various diseases through traditional medical wisdom (Mintel, 2007). In the COVID-19 situation, various studies revealed that those people having strong immunity have a higher recovery rate against COVID-19 (Srivastava et al., 2020). Ayurveda has gifted many immunity boosters and regimes to maintain health and overcome this pandemic (Patadiya and Joshi, 2020). Samal (2015) stated that the Indian system of medicine has gained a lot of appraisals owing to its various characteristic features, the system struggled with a great degree of uncertainty earlier and progressed ahead with a vision to be a globally accepted system. According to Max Neuburger (2015) the medicine of the Indians, if it does not equal the best achievements of their race, at least nearly approaches them, and owing to its wealth of knowledge, depth of speculation, and systematic construction takes an outstanding position in the history of oriental medicine-translated. Muhammad (2020) in his article stated that Traditional Indian medicine like Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy has emerged as a key measures for the prevention of COVID-19. He continued by saying that numerous remedies (such as drinking boiled lemongrass, drinking boiled garlic juice, swabbing nose with garlic juice, coconut oil, jamu drink, tong sui, kariyat, etc.) are being circulated through verbal interactions and on the Internet in some counties like Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, etc. In China, scientists and doctors have recommended using Traditional Chinese Medicine as a cure for COVID-19 (Ling, 2019). Proper consumption of Indian herbs like Brahmi, Jyotishmati, Vacha, and Shankhpushpi can aid in the management of mental health due to financial crisis and social well-being in lockdown (Patadiya and Joshi, 2020). Since these botanical plants and herbs having a low cost, minimum toxicity and it has the potential to enhance immunity to fight against COVID-19 and other infectious diseases and play an important role in maintaining the well-being of the people (Patadiya and Joshi, 2020). A wide range of herbal drugs are produced in the hilly areas of Uttarakhand (Rana, 2015) and this pandemic can be an opportunity for the tourists to experience them.

Spirituality

Spiritual tourism is not just religious tourism like a pilgrimage; one word which puts a human being on the highest pedestal of life. Spiritual tourist seeks something worth being and can give new richness or even new direction to their lives (Melchers, 2006). In the current pandemic situation, people live in anxiety and stress (Thakar et al., 2020). Several studies have supported the positive effect of spirituality on mental health, especially in times of crisis and acute diseases, virtual worships and meditation can be the perfect solution to create mental peace and relaxation in people (Fardin, 2020). Rana (2015) discussed that the motives of tourists behind visiting ashrams have been with the belief that religious places give peace of mind and spiritual satisfaction. Aggarwal (2008) identified some basic features for spiritual tourism that tourists are not looking for luxury but arduous journeys to meet the divine goal or simple

life & the technology, and mostly they believe that religious places give peace of mind and they feel spiritually satisfied. Nicolaides and Grobler (2017) stated that spirituality is indeed an important consideration for some tourists and it is viewed as promoting quality of life and thus offers rewards given that most people believe that a higher divine power influences their lives. During the COVID-19 outbreak, spirituality and meditation can be one of the apt methods to create mental relaxation (Fardin, 2020). Spirituality and religion can help humans in trauma and times of crisis. Thus, spirituality is found to be one major attraction for international tourists in Rishikesh and this place has outstanding tourism products and has the potential to become a major spiritual tourism destination. At the time of this global pandemic of Corona-virus disease 2019 (COVID-19), spiritual care is contributing as a coping strategy for practitioners and families (Fardin, 2020).

Hypotheses

- H1: Yoga has a significant impact on tourists’ Travel Perception during COVID-19
- H2: Spa services has a significant impact on tourists’ Travel Perception during COVID-19
- H3: Traditional Indian treatment has a significant impact on tourists’ Travel Perception during COVID-19
- H4: Spirituality has a significant impact on tourists’ Travel Perception during COVID-19
- H5: Tourists’ demographics have a significant impact on their Travel Perception during COVID-19

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Due to the COVID-19, people are restricted to, mostly, one place where they operate office work, business and all other things which they were operating from different places. This unusual restriction of the people has diverse ill impacts on their health and well-being which is evident from the past literature. People are trying to go out for fitness, mental peace, and other health related purposes. Thus, this quantitative research work aimed to understand the perception of wellness tourists visiting Rishikesh (Uttarakhand, India) during the times of COVID-19. Study dimensions i.e., Yoga, Spa, Traditional Indian Treatment, and Spirituality were identified from the literature review and a questionnaire was developed to accomplish this research aim which was responded to by 250 domestic wellness tourists. Travel perception of tourists was measured on 5 points Likert scale where 1 was considered as Highly Disagree and 5 as Highly Agree. Only 232 usable responded questionnaires were considered for the final analysis. However, apart from the descriptive analysis, hypotheses were tested by employing one sample t and One-way ANOVA techniques with the help of SPSS.

DATA ANALYSIS

The demographics analysis of the respondents says male respondents (62.1%) are more than female (37.9%). Out of the

total sample size, most respondents are from the 41 to 60 years age group (44.4%) followed by the 21 to 40 years age group (40.5%). Generally, they are doing a job (33.2%) and studies (31.9%) while as least are involved in agricultural activities (6.5%). Similarly, the results indicate that most of the respondents are married (69%) as compared to unmarried (31%). Maximum respondents are well educated having Graduate (33.2%) and PG (45.7%) degrees. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents (43.5%) are having up to 5 lac annual income followed by the 5 to 10 lac (27.2%), 10 to 15 lac (19.8%) and while as least number of the respondents (2.6%) are having more than 15 lac annual income.

Table 1: Results of Factor Analysis.

Factor s	Factor Loadi ng	Varian ce %	Eigen Value	YOGA
Enhance mental wellness	0.542			
Indulge in Yoga practices	0.514			
Improve physical health	0.465			
Community Involvement	0.449			
Sports and fitness	0.413			
Reconnect with myself	0.388	20.441	3.982	
Controlling negative emotions	0.367			
Gain insight of balance	0.348			

SPA				SPIRITUALITY			
Qualification of spa professionals	0.521			Seeking miracles and solace in the face of misfortune	0.827		
Range of spa treatments	0.474			Suitability here for mental relaxation and evaluation of self	0.615		
Relaxation and recreation	0.438	11.12	2.568	To deepen my spirituality	0.562		
Stress reduction/pampering	0.386			Enhancing my spiritual connection	0.556	9.637	1.982
Beauty treatments	0.303			Visiting Ashrams	0.463		
TRADITIONAL INDIAN MEDICINE				Attending Religious and spiritual proceedings			
Ayurvedic system of medicine	0.587			To give back to the earth	0.336		
Herbal products	0.483						
Emergency medical care	0.422	10.074	2.366				
High quality practitioners	0.35						
Healing therapies	0.351						

To apply factor analysis, data suitability was checked. However, data is suitable for factor analysis with its 0.734 value which is greater than 0.05, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity value is also significant which is less than 0.05. As shown in Table 1, four study factors (Yoga, Spa, traditional Indian Medicine, and

Spirituality) have extracted from 25 variables after applying factor analysis. These factors explain 37% of the variance of data.

The first factor has eight variables namely enhance mental wellness (.542), to indulge in yoga practices (.514), to improve physical health (.465), community involvement (.449), sports and fitness (.413), to reconnect with myself (.388), controlling negative emotions (.367) and to gain a sense of balance (.348). This factor is responsible for 3.982 of Eigenvalue and 20.441% of the percentage of variance.

The second factor consists of five variables namely qualified spa professionals (.521), range of spa treatments (.474), relaxation and recreation (.438), stress reduction/pampering (.386), and beauty treatments (.303). However, the Eigenvalue and percentage of the variance of this factor are 2.568 and 11.120% respectively.

The third factor has five variables viz. ayurvedic system of medicine (.587), herbal products (.483), emergency medical care and the availability of ambulance services (.422), high-quality practitioners (.350), and healing therapies (.351). This factor is liable for 2.366 of Eigenvalue and 10.074% of the percentage of variance.

The fourth and the last factor constitutes seven variables namely seeking miracles and solace in the face of misfortune (.827), suitable atmosphere for mental relaxation and evaluation of self (.615), to enhance my spiritual connection (.556), visiting ashrams (.463), attending religious and spiritual proceedings (.393), to give back to the earth (.336) and to deepen my spirituality (.562). However, the Eigenvalue of this factor is 1.982 and its percentage of variance is 9.637%.

Hypotheses Result

Results of the proposed hypotheses are given away in Table 2. As revealed in the table, the p-value of Yoga is significant at .00 which is less than α (.05) value (i.e., $p < \alpha$ or $.000 < .05$) with its mean and SD values 3.7435 and .38253 respectively. Therefore, the assumption that ‘Yoga has a significant impact on tourists’ Travel Perception during COVID-19’ in hypothesis first (H1) is supported.

The p-value of Spa is significant at .00 which is less than α (.05) value with its mean and SD values 3.6069 and .42958 respectively. Hence, the assumption that ‘Spa services have a significant impact on tourists’ Travel Perception during COVID-19’ in hypothesis second (H2) is accepted.

Table 2: One sample t- test results.

Factors	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean	S.D	Hypotheses position
Yoga	29.606	.000	3.7435	.38253	Supported
Spa	21.519	.000	3.6069	.42958	Supported

Tradition al Indian Medicine	19.359	.000	3.6603	.51955	Supported
Spiritualit y	22.747	.000	3.6619	.44325	Supported

The p-value of Traditional Indian Medicine is significant at .00 which is less than α (.05) value with its mean and SD values 3.6603 and .51955 respectively. Thus, the assumption that ‘Spa services have a significant impact on tourists’ Travel Perception during COVID-19’ in hypothesis third (H3) is confirmed positively.

Similarly, the p-value of Spirituality is significant at .00 which is less than α (.05) value with its mean and SD values 3.6619 and .44325 respectively. Therefore, the assumption that ‘Spirituality has a significant impact on tourists’ Travel Perception during COVID-19’ in hypothesis fourth (H4) is supported.

Table 3: One way ANOVA test results.

Demograph ics	Sum of Squares	F	Sig.	Hypotheses position
Age	126.099	1.743	.116	Supported
Gender	54.621	1.048	.498	Supported
Education	183.569	.909	.641	Supported
Occupation	397.776	1.020	.526	Supported
Annual Income	264.892	1.142	.414	Supported
Marital Status	49.655	.947	.600	Supported
Total	159.871	1.159	0.441	Supported

According to table 3, the ANOVA results are significant. There is no statistically significant difference between the means of the different groups of wellness tourists' demographics in the study area as the significance values (p) of all the groups of wellness tourists are greater than our alpha value ($\alpha=.05$) and so are the F-values. The value of F for Age is 1.143, which reaches significance with a p-value of .116 (which is greater than the .05 alpha level). Similarly, the F value of Gender is 1.048 which ranges significance with a p-value of .498 (i.e., $.498 < .05$ or $p < \alpha$ level). Education variable is having F-score .909 with its .641 significance score (i.e., $.641 < .05$ or p greater than α level) and F-score of Occupation is 1.020 having significance value .526 (i.e., $.526 < .05$ or p greater than α level). Likewise, Income variable is having F-value 1.142 and p-value .414 ($p = .414$ which is greater than α .05 level). Marital Status aspect has F-value .947, which touches significance with a p-value of .600 (which greater than the .05 alpha level). In the same way, as per the ANOVA analysis output, the overall demographics F value is 1.159 which reaches significance with a p-value of 0.440, which

is greater than 0.05 (alpha value). Therefore, it is concluded that the tourists' demographics have a significant impact on their Wellness Travel Perception during COVID-19 in the study area which directs towards the acceptance of our assumed hypothesis.

DISCUSSIONS

COVID-19 outbreak is a global challenge as this pandemic has affected the human population in almost every possible way. The impact of COVID-19 is so deep that it becomes a threat to public health. Wellness is a multi-dimensional and complex concept that incorporates physical, mental, social, environmental, and cultural factors (Deutscher Wellness Verband, 2008). One can choose very few destinations for wellness tourism in India. The prime wellness tourism activities along with supporting factors like tourist attractions, accessibility, link with nature are responsible for selecting a wellness destination. Moreover, wellness is highly linked to peace, Serenity, and the environment (Sibi and Abraham, 2017). The results of the study reveal that Rishikesh is associated with a wide range of wellness activities and facilities and it is also supported by Gupta and Vyas (2014). Hence, the study analyzed the travel perception of wellness tourists visiting Rishikesh and presents that the attributes of wellness tourism, i.e. yoga, spa, Indian medicine treatment, and spirituality in the present study are significantly important for the wellness tourist visiting Rishikesh. The study also revealed that the perception of tourists towards the factors of wellness tourism is good and the majority of wellness tourists are satisfied with the wellness services offered to them in Rishikesh.

Results of Yoga as one of the wellness attribute revealed that the majority of tourists visited Rishikesh during COVID-19 for yoga practices to enhance mental and physical conditions. Yoga aimed to unite the body, mind & soul. The experts have also proved the role of Yoga in improving physical and mental health during this pandemic (Telej and Gamble, 2019). The effectiveness of Yoga and Pranayama in respiratory distress and anxiety in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has been aptly supported by Thakar (2020). Tourists are attracted towards yoga as it helps to become more aware of our body's posture, alignment, and patterns of movements which help in getting flexibility and calming the mind in the stress struck environment (Pal, J, 2016). COVID-19 is responsible for stress, fear, and negative emotions which are known to weaken our immune system while Yoga mindfulness, positive emotions, and relaxation strengthen it (Bhavanani, 2020) which is also supported by this study results. Letho (2006) indicated that serious yoga practitioners would just travel to practice yoga (yoga as a trip purpose). Gupta (2018) has revealed that yoga is very popular in Rishikesh and most of the tourists visit Rishikesh to experience yoga.

The spa is another important wellness attribute that has a significant impact on travel perception of wellness tourists during at the time of COVID-19, as largely, tourists preferred qualified spa professionals, range of spa treatments and relaxation and recreation with knowledge of ancient Indian sciences and modern western treatments where prescribed guidelines are also been followed. McNeil and Ragins (2005)

suggested that spa participation is currently showing growth, as more tourists turn to spa facilities to improve their health and well-being. A study by Pesonen and Komppula (2010) in Hong Kong shows that among the important motivators for spa wellness are physical relaxation, pampering, personal reward, an escape from work, peace, and overall health improvement. The adverse effects of lockdown on collective mental health are motivating people to visit the spa for deep relaxation and mental peace (Sharma et al., 2020).

Indian Systems of Medicine are among the well known oldest systems of medicine globally (Ravishankar and Shukla, 2015). Indian traditional treatment methods, such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Naturopathy, and Homoeopathy, have demonstrated its adequacy during COVID-19 (Rao and Mehta, 2020). Consistent with the study results, the Ayurvedic system of medicine and herbal products were most preferred by wellness tourists. Ministry of Ayush recommended taking herbal tea, golden milk, and chyavanprash as it is helpful during this COVID-19. Ayurveda is a complete medical system that takes into consideration the physical, psychological, philosophical, ethical, and spiritual well being of mankind (Kurup, 2004). The study revealed that various people across the world depend upon the traditional systems of medicines to meet their primary health care needs and to boost their immunity at the time of this pandemic which is also backed by Patadiya and Joshi (2020).

Spiritual life is considered very peaceful and divine where an individual is connected to God (Dar, 2020). Gupta and Vyas (2014) supported to present study by stating that spiritualism is one of the main reasons for tourists to visit Rishikesh. Seeking miracles and solace in the face of misfortune, suitable atmosphere for mental relaxation and evaluation of self and to enhance spiritual connection are some significant motivations for the wellness tourists (Nicolaidis and Grobler, 2017) which are also observed, during COVID-19 times, in this study. According to the results, during the COVID-19 outbreak, spirituality and meditation are effectively sought aids by tourists to get mental peace. Spirituality results in the study of Dar (2020) revealed that visiting for mental peace, self-discovery, ascetic practices, and seeking enlightenment were very important motivations for tourists. Therefore, spirituality and religion can help humans in coming out from trauma to tranquility.

The study results revealed that the demand for wellness tourism will increase along with the effect of COVID-19 on human well-being as per their demographics. Irrespective of age, occupation, education, income, and other demographics, tourists were significantly involved in wellness tourism activities during the current pandemic time, this has been also studied by Droga (2020). People are inclining towards wellness as there is a range of wellness attributes such as spa, yoga, ayurvedic centers that provide- from rejuvenation to de-stress to detoxification (Indolia and Lasiyal, 2019).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

COVID-19 is a new pandemic that affected human health and well being adverse. Hence, this quantitative study intended to divulge the tourists perception of the major wellness attributes amid COVID-19. The study proved that wellness tourists consider Rishikesh to be a significantly important destination for yoga, spa, traditional medicine, and spirituality. Besides, Rishikesh tends to attract and serve wellness tourists in pandemic situations. Rishikesh has a greater advantage for domestic tourists because of its spiritual and holy sites while yoga and spirituality are the main motivations for international tourists. Demographic attributes and travel perception of wellness tourists are significantly associated with each other which illustrates that both tend to increase together i.e., tourist will travel more for wellness if pandemic ill impacts increases.

This study provides important insights into the development and promotion of wellness tourism products and services in Rishikesh across the globe during pandemic crises. Analysis of destination wellness service quality and marketing approaches are much-needed research areas for future research in the present study area.

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