

The Impact of Wellness Tourism Experiences on Life Satisfaction Among Generation Z Travelers: The Mediating Role of Mental Well-Being

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Abstract

The increasing awareness of holistic health and quality of life has encouraged the growth of wellness tourism as a form of travel that provides physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual benefits. Generation Z, who faces various challenges such as digital fatigue, stress, and lifestyle pressures, increasingly seeks meaningful travel experiences that support mental recovery and self-development. This study aimed to examine the relationship between wellness tourism experiences, mental well-being, and life satisfaction among Generation Z travelers, while investigating the mediating role of mental well-being in explaining the mechanism underlying the relationship between wellness tourism experiences and life satisfaction. This study employed a quantitative approach using an explanatory cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from 412 Generation Z travelers who had participated in wellness tourism activities. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. The findings showed that wellness tourism experiences had a positive and significant effect on mental well-being ($\beta = 0.698$; $p < 0.001$) and life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.284$; $p < 0.001$). Mental well-being also had a significant effect on life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.721$; $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, mental well-being partially mediated the relationship between wellness tourism experiences and life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.503$; $p < 0.001$). The findings indicate that wellness tourism experiences contribute to improving Generation Z travelers' life satisfaction primarily through enhanced mental well-being. This study highlights the importance of designing wellness tourism programs that emphasize psychological recovery, meaningful experiences, and sustainable well-being outcomes.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the global tourism paradigm has undergone a significant transformation from purely recreation-oriented activities toward experiences that provide benefits to tourists' health, well-being, and quality of life. These changes have been influenced by increasing public awareness of the importance of maintaining a balance among physical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual health as part of the concept of holistic well-being. This shift in orientation has intensified following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has not only changed tourist travel behavior but has also increased public attention to mental health, stress management, and the pursuit of experiences that facilitate self-restoration (GWI, 2024). In this context, wellness tourism has developed into one of the fastest-growing segments of the

global tourism industry and is recognized as an approach that integrates tourism activities with the enhancement of individual well-being (Konstantopoulou et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2023).

Conceptually, wellness tourism is defined as travel undertaken with the primary goal of maintaining or improving health and well-being through various activities that support physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual balance. Unlike medical tourism, which focuses on disease treatment, wellness tourism emphasizes preventive approaches, self-development, and quality-of-life improvement through restorative experiences (Cohen, 2013). Activities included in wellness tourism encompass yoga, meditation, spa treatments, nature therapy, forest bathing, digital detox programs, mindfulness retreats, hot spring therapy, healthy food consumption, and activities based on local culture and spirituality. Therefore, wellness tourism experiences not only generate satisfaction during travel but also have the potential to create long-term psychological benefits in the form of improved mental well-being and life satisfaction (Global Wellness Institute, 2024; Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001).

The development of wellness tourism also reflects changing preferences among modern tourists, who increasingly value authentic experiences, sustainability, and personal meaning (meaningful travel). From the perspective of Experience Economy Theory proposed by (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), tourists are no longer merely purchasing tourism products or services but are seeking experiences capable of creating emotional value and facilitating self-transformation. This concept has become increasingly relevant in the wellness tourism industry, where travel experiences are viewed as processes of learning, self-reflection, and psychological recovery that can improve tourists' quality of life after the journey has ended. Thus, the success of wellness tourism destinations is not only measured by the number of visitors or tourist satisfaction levels but also by their ability to generate positive changes in individual well-being (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999).

The growing attention toward wellness tourism cannot be separated from the increasing prevalence of mental health challenges worldwide. International health organizations have identified depression, anxiety, chronic stress, and burnout as public health concerns that affect productivity, social relationships, and quality of life. These conditions encourage individuals to seek recovery alternatives beyond formal healthcare services, including tourism activities that offer relaxation, tranquility, and reflective experiences. In this context, wellness tourism is considered one of the non-clinical approaches that may support psychological well-being through a combination of physical activity, interaction with nature, mindfulness practices, and reduced exposure to daily stressors (World Health Organization, 2022).

The wellness tourism industry has experienced rapid growth in recent years and has become one of the leading sectors within the global tourism economy. According to a report by the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), the market value of the global wellness economy continues to increase and is projected to exceed USD 9 trillion by the end of this decade, with wellness tourism representing one of its major contributors. This growth is driven by increasing tourist demand for travel experiences that not only provide entertainment but also support physical health, mental well-being, and personal development (Global Wellness Institute, 2024).

Changes in tourist behavior following the pandemic have accelerated this development. During the pandemic, mobility restrictions, social isolation, and economic uncertainty contributed to increased stress, anxiety, and psychological fatigue among various population groups. After travel restrictions were lifted, many travelers began choosing destinations that offer natural environments, wellness activities, reflection spaces, and opportunities to restore life balance. This phenomenon indicates that wellness tourism is no longer perceived as an exclusive tourism segment but as an increasingly relevant need within modern society (Global Wellness Institute, 2024; Konstantopoulou et al., 2024).

Globally, various countries have developed wellness tourism destinations with distinctive characteristics. Thailand integrates spa services, traditional therapies, and herbal remedies into its tourism products. Japan utilizes onsen (hot spring) culture, forest therapy (shinrin-yoku), and Zen practices as major attractions. South Korea has developed nature-based healing programs and temple stays, while European countries combine modern health facilities with the concepts of slow tourism and sustainability. The success of these destinations demonstrates that wellness tourism has evolved into a tourism development strategy oriented toward improving quality of life while generating economic value.

Indonesia has enormous potential to develop wellness tourism due to its rich natural resources, cultural diversity, and traditional health practices. Destinations such as Bali, Yogyakarta, Ubud, Labuan Bajo, Lake Toba, and various mountainous regions provide environments that support yoga, meditation, natural ingredient-based spa treatments, herbal therapies, and spiritual practices rooted in local wisdom. In addition, traditions such as herbal medicine, traditional massage, water therapy, and culture-based meditation practices represent competitive advantages that can be developed as part of wellness tourism products. This potential has become increasingly relevant due to the growing demand among domestic and international tourists for authentic, sustainable, and health-oriented travel experiences.

However, the development of wellness tourism does not solely depend on the availability of physical facilities but also on the ability of destinations to create meaningful experiences. Modern travelers increasingly evaluate destination quality based on emotional experiences, connections with nature, social interactions, and opportunities for self-reflection. Therefore, understanding how wellness tourism experiences influence psychological well-being and life satisfaction has become an important issue in the development of the health-oriented tourism industry.

Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is a demographic group that has grown up in a digital environment characterized by high levels of connectivity. From an early age, this generation has become accustomed to using the internet, social media, and digital technologies as integral parts of daily life. These characteristics have shaped distinct lifestyles and consumption preferences compared with previous generations, including differences in travel behavior (Dimock, 2019).

On the one hand, technological advancement provides easy access to information, communication, and various opportunities for self-development. On the other hand, intensive digital media use may increase the risk of psychological challenges, such as fear of missing out (FoMO), digital fatigue, social anxiety, pressure to remain productive, and work–life imbalance. Various studies indicate that Generation Z experiences relatively higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms compared with previous generations, making this group an important target for mental health promotion programs (Twenge et al., 2019).

These conditions influence how Generation Z perceives tourism activities. For this generation, travel is no longer merely an opportunity for leisure but also serves as a means of self-care, psychological recovery, seeking meaningful experiences, strengthening self-identity, and improving quality of life. Generation Z tends to select destinations that offer authentic experiences, interaction with nature, health-related activities, environmental sustainability, and opportunities for emotional and spiritual development. They are also increasingly interested in activities such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness retreats, digital detox programs, forest bathing, and community-based activities rather than mass tourism oriented toward consumption (Gan et al., 2023; Sthapit et al., 2025).

Generation Z also has a tendency to share travel experiences through social media. Although this behavior can contribute to destination promotion, their motivation is not solely driven by the pursuit of social recognition but also by the desire to document experiences with

personal and emotional value. Therefore, the quality of travel experiences has become a more important consideration than merely the availability of physical facilities.

These characteristics position Generation Z as a potential market segment for the development of wellness tourism. However, the complexity of their psychological needs requires destination managers to design experiences that are genuinely capable of supporting mental recovery, enhancing well-being, and creating sustainable positive changes. Therefore, understanding the relationship between wellness tourism experiences, mental well-being, and life satisfaction among Generation Z is important from both academic and practical perspectives, serving as a foundation for developing destinations and services that are more effective and relevant to this generation's needs.

Generation Z faces various challenges that may affect mental health and life satisfaction, including academic pressure, career demands, intensive social media use, and economic uncertainty. These conditions have increased the need for activities that support physical and psychological well-being.

Mental health has become a global issue receiving increasing attention, particularly among Generation Z, who have grown up in a highly connected digital era. This generation encounters various challenges, including academic pressure, career competition, economic uncertainty, and intensive social media exposure, which may contribute to increased stress, anxiety, and reduced psychological well-being. Recent research indicates that Generation Z's well-being is influenced by various internal and external factors, including fear of missing out (FoMO), screen time, resilience, and social support. Therefore, diverse approaches are required to improve their quality of life and mental health.

Along with increasing awareness of holistic health, wellness tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry. Unlike conventional entertainment-oriented tourism, wellness tourism emphasizes experiences that support physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual balance through activities such as yoga, meditation, spa treatments, mindfulness, healing retreats, forest bathing, and digital detox programs. Recent literature reviews indicate that research on wellness tourism has developed toward a multidimensional perspective that positions well-being as the primary objective of tourism experiences (Global Wellness Institute, 2024; Gan et al., 2023).

Furthermore, wellness tourism is rapidly developing as a form of tourism focused on improving health, relaxation, mindfulness, and quality of life. Various activities, such as yoga, meditation, spa treatments, healing retreats, and digital detox programs, are increasingly attractive to Generation Z. However, limited research has examined the extent to which wellness tourism experiences influence mental well-being and life satisfaction among Generation Z travelers, particularly within the Indonesian context. Generation Z represents one of the tourist groups showing considerable interest in wellness tourism. For this generation, travel is no longer merely a form of recreation but also a medium for self-recovery, stress management, searching for life meaning, and personal development. Research on wellness tourism motivation among Generation Z indicates that physical health improvement, escape from routine, new experiences, self-esteem development, and the pursuit of life balance are important determinants of wellness tourism travel decisions (Liu et al., 2023; Konstantopoulou et al., 2024).

Several studies have demonstrated that wellness tourism experiences can improve psychological well-being, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty through the development of eudaimonic well-being and enhanced mental health. Beyond providing emotional benefits, these experiences encourage tourists to achieve higher quality of life through restorative and reflective activities. However, studies specifically examining the relationship between wellness tourism experiences, mental well-being, and life satisfaction among Generation Z travelers remain limited, particularly in the Indonesian context. Previous studies have primarily focused

on travel motivation, tourist behavior, or revisit intentions, while the mechanisms through which wellness tourism experiences contribute to improved mental well-being and life satisfaction have not been sufficiently explored empirically. This research gap is significant considering Indonesia's substantial potential to develop wellness tourism destinations based on nature, culture, and local wisdom.

Based on this description, this study aims to examine the relationship between wellness tourism experiences, mental well-being, and life satisfaction among Generation Z tourists in accordance with their characteristics and needs.

Although research on wellness tourism has experienced significant progress in recent years, most studies have continued to focus on tourist motivation, destination satisfaction, revisit intention, and destination loyalty. Research examining the impact of wellness tourism experiences on long-term psychological outcomes, particularly mental well-being and life satisfaction, remains relatively limited. Furthermore, most existing studies have positioned psychological well-being as an outcome variable rather than as a psychological mechanism (mediating mechanism) that explains how tourism experiences contribute to improvements in individual quality of life.

Previous research has generally been conducted in countries with well-established wellness tourism industries, such as South Korea, Japan, China, Thailand, and several European countries. Empirical evidence from developing countries, particularly Indonesia, which possesses significant potential for developing nature-based, cultural, spiritual, and holistic health destinations, remains limited. This condition indicates the existence of a geographical gap (contextual gap) that requires further investigation.

From the perspective of tourist characteristics, Generation Z represents a group that experiences considerable exposure to stress, anxiety, burnout, and digital fatigue. However, most research on wellness tourism continues to examine tourists in general populations or adult age groups, resulting in limited understanding of the role of wellness tourism experiences in improving the mental well-being of Generation Z. In fact, this generation demonstrates distinct travel preferences by prioritizing authentic experiences, mental health, self-care, and personal development over conventional forms of tourism.

Based on these gaps, this study develops a model that examines the relationship between wellness tourism experiences, mental well-being, and life satisfaction by positioning mental well-being as a mediating variable. This model is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying how wellness tourism experiences enhance life satisfaction among Generation Z tourists, while also expanding the literature on wellness tourism within developing country contexts. Based on this background, this research is formulated through several research questions. First, this study examines whether wellness tourism experiences positively influence the mental well-being of Generation Z travelers. Second, it investigates whether mental well-being positively affects the life satisfaction of Generation Z travelers. Third, this research explores the direct relationship between wellness tourism experiences and life satisfaction. Finally, this study analyzes whether mental well-being mediates the relationship between wellness tourism experiences and life satisfaction.

Based on these research questions, the objectives of this study are to examine the relationship between wellness tourism experiences and the mental well-being of Generation Z tourists, analyze the effect of mental well-being on life satisfaction, investigate the direct association between wellness tourism experiences and life satisfaction, and assess the mediating role of mental well-being in the relationship between wellness tourism experiences and life satisfaction.

The novelty of this research lies in developing a conceptual model that integrates wellness tourism experiences, mental well-being, and life satisfaction among Generation Z

travelers. This study positions mental well-being as a mediating variable to explain the psychological mechanism through which wellness tourism experiences contribute to enhanced life satisfaction. Furthermore, this research provides empirical evidence from Indonesia as a developing country with substantial potential for wellness tourism development based on natural, cultural, and spiritual resources. By focusing on Generation Z tourist behavior, this study contributes to enriching the existing literature by highlighting the role of health-oriented tourism experiences in improving psychological well-being and overall quality of life.

Research on wellness tourism continues to expand, with many studies primarily focusing on travel motivation, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty. However, studies examining the influence of wellness tourism experiences on mental well-being and life satisfaction, particularly among Generation Z tourists, remain limited. Moreover, empirical evidence regarding the mechanisms through which wellness tourism experiences improve life satisfaction through mental well-being in the Indonesian context is still insufficient. Therefore, further research is needed to provide empirical evidence regarding the relationship between wellness tourism experiences, mental well-being, and life satisfaction among Generation Z tourists as a foundation for developing more effective and sustainable wellness tourism destinations and services.

Research on wellness tourism has generally emphasized travel motivation, tourist satisfaction, and destination loyalty, whereas investigations into its influence on mental well-being and life satisfaction, especially among Generation Z, remain scarce. In addition, empirical evidence regarding how wellness tourism experiences enhance life satisfaction through mental well-being in Indonesia remains underexplored. Therefore, this study seeks to answer several research questions: (1) Do wellness tourism experiences influence the mental well-being of Generation Z tourists? (2) Does mental well-being influence life satisfaction among Generation Z tourists? (3) Do wellness tourism experiences directly influence life satisfaction? (4) Does mental well-being serve as a mediating variable in the relationship between wellness tourism experiences and life satisfaction?

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design using a cross-sectional survey. The research examined the relationships among Wellness Tourism Experience (WTE), Mental Well-Being (MWB), and Life Satisfaction (LS), including the mediating role of MWB. The unit of analysis consisted of Generation Z tourists who had participated in wellness tourism activities. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 to examine the direct and indirect relationships among latent constructs (Hair et al., 2022).

Population, Samples, and Sampling Techniques

The study population was Generation Z tourists. Respondents' inclusion criteria included: (1) aged 18–29 years at the time of the survey; (2) have traveled for health or welfare purposes; and (3) have participated in at least one wellness tourism activity, such as yoga/meditation retreat, spa wellness, healing retreat, forest or nature-based therapy, mindfulness program, digital detox, or spiritual tourism. The sampling technique used is **purposive sampling** because respondents must meet specific experiences that are in accordance with the research objectives. The source manuscript recorded 412 responses that met the criteria and was used in the analysis. (Hair et al., 2022)

Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected through an online structured questionnaire. Each item is measured using a five-point Likert scale, from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Wellness Tourism Experience is measured by seven indicators representing relaxation, stress reduction, energy recovery, self-understanding, meaningful health experiences, connection to nature, and

spiritual/reflective values. Mental Well-Being is measured by six indicators that reflect calmness, positive energy, stress management, life meaning, optimism, and self-understanding. Life Satisfaction is measured by five indicators that adapt the cognitive evaluation of life satisfaction globally from the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985).

Data Analysis

The PLS-SEM analysis was carried out in two stages. First, evaluate the measurement model to assess the reliability of indicators, convergent validity, internal consistency, and discriminant validity. The criteria used include outer loading ≥ 0.70 ; Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.50 ; Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability ≥ 0.70 ; and HTMT < 0.85 as conservative criteria. The Fornell–Larcker criterion is also used as an additional check. Second, structural model evaluation was carried out through collinearity assessment (VIF), coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), effect size (f^2), path coefficient, and hypothesis testing with bootstrapping 5,000 subsamples. The effect of mediation is determined based on the significance of the indirect influence of WTE $\rightarrow$ MWB $\rightarrow$ LS and the existence of direct influence of WTE $\rightarrow$ LS.

Research Ethics

Respondents' participation is voluntary. Respondents obtained information about the purpose of the research before filling out the questionnaire, the respondents' identities were kept confidential, and the data was used only for academic purposes. Data collection and processing is carried out with the principles of informed participation, confidentiality, and proportionate use of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

The study involved 412 Generation Z respondents. The majority of respondents were women (61.7%), in the age range of 18–25 years old (83.5%), undergraduate/undergraduate education (70.9%), and dominated by students (44.7%) and workers (39.8%). Based on the frequency of participating in wellness tourism, 53.6% of respondents did it 1–2 times per year, 33.7% 3–5 times per year, and 12.7% more than five times per year. This composition shows that the sample mainly represents Generation Z in the higher education and early career phases, i.e. phases relevant to stress issues, life transitions, and self-care needs.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	158	38,3
	Women	254	61,7
Age	18–21 years old	176	42,7
	22–25 years old	168	40,8
	26–29 years old	68	16,5
Education	High School/equivalent	62	15,0
	Undergraduate	292	70,9
	Postgraduate	58	14,1
Jobs	Students	184	44,7
	Employees	164	39,8
	Entrepreneur/Freelancer	64	15,5
Frequency of wellness tourism	1–2 times/year	221	53,6
	3–5 times/year	139	33,7
	>5 times/year	52	12,7

Evaluation of the Measurement Model

All indicators have an outer loading between 0.778–0.881, thus meeting the threshold of 0.70. AVE values WTE = 0.663, MWB = 0.670, and LS = 0.745; in total exceeding 0.50. Cronbach's alpha is in the range of 0.901–0.914 and composite reliability in the range of 0.923–0.936. Thus, the convergent validity and internal consistency of the construct are met.

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Wellness Tourism Experience	0,912	0,931	0,663
Mental Well-Being	0,901	0,923	0,670
Life Satisfaction	0,914	0,936	0,745

The validity of the discriminator is also fulfilled. The square root of the AVE of each construct is higher than the correlation between constructs on the Fornell–Larcker criterion. The values of HTMT WTE–MWB = 0.742, MWB–LS = 0.801, and WTE–LS = 0.713, all below 0.85. These results show that WTE, MWB, and LS are empirically different constructs.

Structural Model Evaluation

No collinearity problem was found because the entire VIF was well below the 5 limit (WTE → MWB = 1,000; WTE → LS = 1.624; MWB → LS = 1.624). The R^2 value shows that WTE explains 48.7% of MWB variations, while WTE and MWB together explain 61.2% of LS variations. The Q^2 value for MWB is 0.314 and LS is 0.421 (>0), so the model has predictive relevance. Effect size showed a large influence of WTE on MWB ($f^2 = 0.472$), a large influence of MWB on LS ($f^2 = 0.581$), and a small–moderate influence of WTE on LS ($f^2 = 0.126$).

Table 3. Structural Model Evaluation Results

Model indicators	MWB	LS
R^2	0,487	0,612
Q^2	0,314	0,421

Hypothesis Testing and Mediation

Bootstrapping 5,000 subsamples shows the entire hypothesis is supported. WTE had a positive and significant effect on MWB ($\beta = 0.698$; $t = 18.742$; $p < 0.001$), so H1 was accepted. MWB had a positive and significant effect on LS ($\beta = 0.721$; $t = 20.315$; $p < 0.001$), so H2 was accepted. WTE also had a positive direct effect on LS ($\beta = 0.284$; $t = 5.642$; $p < 0.001$), so H3 was accepted. The indirect influence of WTE on LS via MWB was significant ($\beta = 0.503$; $t = 15.874$; $p < 0.001$), so H4 was accepted. Because direct and indirect influences are both significant and unidirectional, the pattern formed is complementary partial mediation.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Pathway	β	t-value	p-value	Verdict
H1	WTE → MWB	0,698	18,742	<0.001	Supported
H2	MWB → LS	0,721	20,315	<0.001	Supported
H3	WTE → LS	0,284	5,642	<0.001	Supported
H4	WTE → MWB → LS	0,503	15,874	<0.001	Supported

Wellness Tourism Experience and Mental Well-Being

The H1 findings show that the more positive the wellness tourism experience, the higher the mental well-being of Generation Z travelers. Relatively strong pathway coefficient ($\beta = 0.698$) and large effect size ($f^2 = 0.472$) confirm that the experience of relaxation, self-restoration, involvement in health activities, connection with nature, and spiritual/reflective experiences are not just travel attributes, but serve as a source of psychological recovery. These findings are consistent with **Experience Economy Theory**: the value of experiences arises when individuals are emotionally engaged and acquire effective and potentially transformative experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998, 1999).

From the perspective of **Self-Determination Theory**, wellness activities can provide space for autonomy through the choice of activities that suit personal needs, competence through mastery of health practices or mindfulness, and relatedness through social and community interactions. The fulfillment of these basic psychological needs is related to better functioning and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For Generation Z, this mechanism is important because the travel experience can be a break from digital routines and academic and work stresses, while also providing a context for reflection and emotional regulation.

Mental Well-Being and Life Satisfaction

H2 shows that MWB is the strongest predictor of LS ($\beta = 0.721$; $f^2 = 0.581$). This means that the benefits of wellness tourism on quality of life are especially meaningful when the experience is truly translated into a calmer, optimistic, meaningful, and adaptive mental state. These results are in line with the positive psychology and PERMA approaches, which place positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment as important elements of flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Life satisfaction itself is an individual's global cognitive evaluation of his or her life (Diener et al., 1985), so that an improvement in a relatively stable mental state can encourage a more positive evaluation of life.

Direct Influence of Wellness Tourism Experience on Life Satisfaction

H3 showed that WTE retained a direct effect on LS ($\beta = 0.284$; $p < 0.001$), although its strength was smaller than that of the path through MWB. This indicates that meaningful wellness experiences can contribute directly to life evaluation through a sense of achievement, new experiences, relaxation, and personal meaning. However, the size of the MWB $\rightarrow$ LS line suggests that the design of wellness products should not stop at aesthetics, facilities, or momentary pleasure. Programs that provide opportunities for reflection, healthy habit building, and the integration of after-trip benefits have the potential to produce more sustainable impacts. These findings support Park and Ahn (2022) that travel experiences that produce both pleasure and meaning can contribute to life satisfaction, while complementing Liu et al. (2023) who emphasize the path of wellness experiences to well-being through psychological mechanisms.

The Role of Mental Well-Being Mediation

H4 affirms MWB as a complementary partial mediator. The indirect influence of $\beta = 0.503$ is greater than the direct influence of WTE $\rightarrow$ LS of $\beta = 0.284$. These findings reinforce **the Bottom-Up Spillover perspective**: positive experiences in specific domains, in this case wellness journeys, can improve psychological states in the personal domain, which in turn "spillover" into the evaluation of life as a whole. Thus, the main mechanism that explains the relationship between WTE and LS is improved mental well-being, although WTE still has a direct contribution. The mediation pattern is in line with the bottom-up spillover logic used by Liu et al. (2023): positive experiences in the travel domain first enhance psychological evaluation in more specific domains before contributing to well-being or broader life evaluations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study connects the perspective of the experience economy with positive psychology and spillover mechanisms in one empirical model. The main contribution

is to place mental well-being not only as a journey outcome, but as a mechanism that passes on the benefits of wellness experiences towards life satisfaction. Practically, destination managers and service providers need to design experiences that integrate four elements: relaxation and stress reduction, participatory wellness activities, connection with nature or local culture, and spaces for reflection and meaning-making. For the Generation Z market, programs can be packaged in a flexible, authentic, accessible, and digital balance manner without eliminating their need for social connectivity.

The growth of the global wellness economy also shows the managerial relevance of this theme. The Global Wellness Institute reports that the global wellness economy will reach USD 6.8 trillion in 2024 and projects it to be close to USD 9.8 trillion by 2029. These developments reinforce the need for destinations to develop wellness products that are not only commercial, but also have a clear benefit proposition for the well-being of tourists (Global Wellness Institute, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that Wellness Tourism Experience (WTE) had a positive and significant effect on Mental Well-Being (MWB) and Life Satisfaction (LS) among Generation Z travelers. Mental Well-Being also had a positive and significant effect on Life Satisfaction and functioned as a complementary partial mediator in the relationship between Wellness Tourism Experience and Life Satisfaction. These findings indicated that the benefits of wellness tourism for life satisfaction were derived not only from the travel experience itself but also, importantly, through improvements in tourists' positive psychological conditions.

The findings confirmed that wellness tourism could be understood as a transformative experience that integrated relaxation, self-recovery, participation in wellness activities, connection with the environment, and the pursuit of meaning. For destination managers, the results suggested shifting product development strategies from merely providing "wellness amenities" toward creating "well-being outcomes," namely experiences designed to provide travelers with psychological benefits that could be sustained in their daily lives.

This study had several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limited the ability to draw conclusions regarding long-term changes in well-being. Second, purposive sampling and online data collection may have limited the generalizability of the findings to the broader Generation Z population. Future research should consider longitudinal or pre-post travel designs, probability-based or multi-site sampling approaches, and comparisons across different types of wellness tourism, including nature-based tourism, spa experiences, spiritual tourism, mindfulness retreats, and digital detox programs. Future studies may also expand the model by incorporating potential moderating variables, such as experience intensity, perceived authenticity, nature connectedness, digital fatigue, or frequency of wellness tourism participation.

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