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**An investigation of wellness retreat tourism experiences: a
mixed-methods study from perceived value perspective**

A thesis

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of the requirement for the degree

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, wellness tourism has developed into a rapidly growing segment of the global tourism industry, particularly driven by increasing public interest in achieving and maintaining physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. Despite this growth, wellness retreats—a distinctive and transformative subsector of wellness tourism—remain underexplored in academic literature. Grounded in the increasing urgency of mental health as a global development priority (United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being), this study investigates how wellness retreat experiences foster tourists' holistic wellbeing and their loyalty to the destination through the lens of customer perceived value.

Drawing on Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991)'s theory of consumption values and supported by the concept of Transformation Economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), and multidimensional wellness frameworks, this study aims to (1) explore the dimensions of perceived value in wellness retreat experiences, (2) develop and validate a multidimensional measurement scale of perceived value of wellness retreat experiences, (3) investigate the association between tourists' perceived value and destination loyalty, and (4) identify combinations of value dimensions that foster high levels of destination loyalty. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating qualitative thematic analysis of 936 qualified reviews of wellness retreat visitors on TripAdvisor and Google Maps Reviews, followed by quantitative surveys of 159 wellness retreat attendees at the Resolution Retreats, New Zealand. To analyse the collected quantitative data, this study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) as a symmetrical analysis method and fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) as an asymmetrical technique. This integration served to strengthen the findings and construct a composite picture of customer perceived value dimensions on the destination loyalty of wellness retreat attendees.

The findings of the Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed five dimensions of perceived value: Nutritional, Functional, Emotional, Social and Educational, and Ecological Healing. PLS-SEM results confirmed that perceived value significantly drives destination loyalty, while customer-employee interaction negatively moderates this relationship, challenging prior assumptions about the role of interpersonal engagement in tourism and hospitality contexts. Moreover, fsQCA identified five distinct configurations of value dimensions that are sufficient

for high loyalty, demonstrating that different combinations can lead to similar positive desired outcomes, depending on visitor experiences and value propositions.

Theoretically, this research advances the wellness tourism literature by differentiating wellness retreats as a distinct niche, thereby deepening the conceptualisation of eudaimonic value within tourism experiences. Furthermore, it applies the consumer perceived perspective to enhance the prediction of tourists' decision-making processes. This study also addresses the existing methodological gaps by demonstrating the transformative potential of mixed-methods approaches within the tourism and hospitality discipline. By integrating PLS-SEM and fsQCA to capture both linear and non-linear patterns in visitor behaviour, this study underscores how methodological advancements can improve our understanding of complex research phenomena. Practically, the research provides a robust measurement instrument for assessing wellness retreat experiences and offers strategic guidance to wellness managers, tourism developers, and policymakers on designing and promoting transformative tourism products. It also emphasises the need for wellness-focused governance frameworks, workforce protection, and community engagement to ensure equitable and sustainable development in wellness tourism.

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“When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.” — *The Alchemist*. This quote resonates deeply with my Ph.D. journey. The deeper I went on this

journey, the more challenges I encountered—but with every obstacle, I gained wisdom, joy, and a deeper connection with myself and others. I have learned to face fear, embrace change, and walk forward with courage, surrounded by friendship and kindness.

Thank you, all of you, for walking this journey with me.

PROLOGUE

“PhD is a journey, not a destination”

Writing this prologue brings back vivid memories of why I embarked on this journey and the invaluable lessons I have learned. Like any meaningful journey, the PhD experience is filled with ups and downs, unexpected detours, and moments of both doubt and discovery. While the final Ph.D. degree is a symbol of “extraordinary” achievement, the personal transformation that I gained during this journey matters most. For me, this journey has been life-changing—undoubtedly the most significant and meaningful phase of my life so far.

My passion for this research topic in tourism emerged from personal experience. Before starting my academic career in 2021, I worked at an upscale spa resort in my hometown of Da Nang, Vietnam—home to one of the world’s most beautiful beaches, as recognised by *Forbes Magazine*, and *UNESCO World Heritage Site Hoi An Ancient Town*. During that time, I became immersed in the world of wellness experiences and wellbeing promotion. Although I did not yet fully understand their significance, I was deeply intrigued by how these experiences affected our guests and, in subtle ways, my own life.

Then came the COVID-19 pandemic. Suddenly, the world turned its attention to personal health. I myself am not an exception. I began to adopt wellness practices more consciously mindful eating, regular physical activity, and meditation became part of my daily routine. That period marked the beginning of my personal and academic interest in wellness, which has truly shaped my perspective on the subject.

As my journey continued, so did my curiosity. While working as a tourism lecturer, I often asked myself: *What is it about wellness experiences that makes them so impactful to human beings?* That fundamental question became the seed of my research. I soon discovered that while wellness tourism was gaining attention, linked to spa tourism, it remained in its early stages both in practice and academia, particularly in Southeast Asia and Vietnam, although according to my supervisor, Skyros in Europe had promoted wellness holidays since the 1990s.

In recent years, the concept of health and wellness has been evolving rapidly across the globe, creating exciting possibilities for tourism. Wellness travel is no longer confined to spas or luxury resorts as it was some years ago. It has expanded and transformed to include diverse,

holistic experiences that support mental, physical, emotional, and even spiritual wellbeing. Post-pandemic, and even amid global uncertainties such as the cost-of-living crisis, more travellers are seeking meaningful wellness experiences, ranging from exclusive retreats and forest bathing to chakra healing, puppy yoga, and laughter therapy. Travel and wellness are becoming increasingly interconnected.

This realisation inspired my inquiry into how wellness tourism is shaping the future of tourism. Since the early 2000s, academic interest in the field has grown, with research exploring its impact on individuals' wellbeing and quality of life, and increasingly, on destination communities. However, despite this growing body of work, the full potential and significance of wellness tourism—economically, socially, and culturally—remain underexplored. There is a pressing need for more theoretical and practical research, especially within tourism and its allied sectors such as hospitality, leisure, and the wellness economy.

This thesis represents the culmination of everything I have learned and experienced throughout my PhD journey. It is not merely an academic pursuit, but also a deeply personal reflection shaped by real-world encounters and inner growth. All the lessons along the way have helped me become an independent researcher. For me, while the completion of this thesis does not represent a high level of capability or expertise in research, it does capture the essence of my personal learnings, evolving thoughts and growing confidence in dealing with various challenges of academic research. Over the years, I have honed my skills from multiple perspectives, both scholarly and personal.

One of the most profound lessons I have learned is the importance of aligning research with one's own values and real-world relevance. Studying wellness retreats required me to delve into concepts such as self-healing, balance, mindfulness, and personal transformation—concepts that not only shaped the theoretical framework of my study but also resonated deeply with my own pursuit of wellness. This alignment, combined with a real business case study, made the research process more challenging, but purposeful and rewarding.

From a methodological perspective, this project enabled me to explore and apply new methodologies and analytical tools that further enhanced my skills. I was able to capture the richness of the retreat experience from both an individual and broader perspectives. I learned that each method has its pros and cons: qualitative data can uncover nuanced emotions and

meanings that numbers alone cannot express, while quantitative findings can validate and extend those insights with broader significance. Together, they complemented each other and enriched the research findings.

Another key lesson was the importance of perseverance and adaptability. Gaining access to a wellness retreat site and encouraging participation among visitors, who often seek solitude and disconnection, posed challenges I had not initially anticipated. These experiences taught me to be patient, flexible with timelines, and strategic in navigating diverse settings. Resilience and agility become essential tools in my research toolkit.

Lastly, I came to realise the role of research as a form of advocacy. This study goes beyond theories and statistics—it bridges the gap between academic inquiry and real-world practice. I hope that it can serve stakeholders across the tourism and wellness sectors and contribute meaningfully to the conversations around the wellbeing of humans. As a tourism researcher, I now feel a greater sense of purpose in using academic work to advocate for positive change.

In sum, this research was not only a scholarly endeavour but also a reflective and meaningful chapter of my life. It has equipped me with stronger research competencies, a more unmistakable academic voice, and a deeper understanding of the kind of impact I hope to make through my work. I look forward to future projects that further explore the phenomenon of wellness tourism from diverse perspectives and with fresh emphases. Ultimately, I hope this thesis not only informs but also inspires further examination and action among its readers.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the contextual background for the present study. It commences with a macro-level discussion of growing global uncertainty and the escalating prevalence of mental health issues, followed by an examination of micro-level shifts in modern consumer values and consumption patterns. In response to these broader socio-psychological dysfunctioning, wellness tourism has emerged as a significant means of addressing the psychological and emotional imbalances characteristic of contemporary life. The chapter further offers a critical examination of research gaps within the existing tourism and hospitality literature that inform the study's direction and objectives. By addressing these research gaps, the study seeks to make meaningful contributions at the intersection of wellness, tourism, and marketing, with theoretical and practical implications for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike.

1.1 Research background

1.1.1 Human wellbeing has slowed in recent years

Psychosocial health and wellbeing are foundational to human functioning, underpinning our ability to make decisions, cultivate meaningful relationships, and shape the world we live in. Across various disciplines, philosophers have intensively debated what constitutes wellbeing (Filep, Moyle, & Skavronskaya, 2024; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). There is, however, some broad agreement about individual wellbeing conceptualisation. Originally, most scholars has separated the concept of wellbeing into two philosophical perspectives: hedonic and eudaimonic that expanded to integrate concepts such as life satisfaction, quality of life, and happiness (Filep et al., 2024; Lambert, Passmore, & Holder, 2015; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). However, the complexity of wellbeing also lies in what is “good for” a person and what is not. Consequently, later in 1990s, psychologists has begun focusing more on the individual and their personal happiness which is synonymous with “subjective wellbeing” (Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Moreover, the concept of wellbeing reflects the close interrelationship between an individual's mental state and their social experiences (C. Kumar, 2020). WHO (2022a) identifies mental health as a state of mental wellbeing that enables individuals to deal with the stresses of life, to realise their abilities, to learn well and work well and to contribute to their communities. Nevertheless, researchers pointed out that wellbeing is not necessarily indicative of mental health. In the same vein, mentally healthy people can be

unhappy (Ganghua Chen, Zhao, & Li, 2025). However, researchers agreed that positive mental health is not only a basic human right but also essential for an individual's growth and the flourishing of global societies (Gedecho & Kim, 2025).

Mental health remains a major global challenge. Mental health disorders are among the leading non-communicable diseases of the 21st century (Y. Jiang, Lyu, & Balaji, 2025; Smith & Kelly, 2006) and have been identified as the next major global health crisis (GWI, 2025). It is anticipated that more than 280 million people across the world live with depression, and over 300 million suffer from anxiety (WHO, 2022b). Millions more remain undiagnosed or lack adequate care and support. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), poor mental health costs about US\$1 trillion annually (WHO, 2022b). The causes of mental distress are found at all levels of society, from individuals and communities to global issues such as economic downturns, disease outbreaks, humanitarian emergencies, and the climate crisis (WHO, 2022a), which, put simply, threaten income, health, and mental wellbeing. The recent intensification of global volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) has further exacerbated psychological pressure and health difficulties (C. Peng, Zou, & Jin, 2025). Notably, the WHO emphasises that mental health is more than the absence of illness; it is an intrinsic aspect of individual and collective health and wellbeing (WHO, 2022c). As such, it is also possible to create policies and practices that engender positive health benefits. In recognition of this matter, the United Nations included mental health within Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, namely: "Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages" (UNWTO, 2021). While the SDGs are universally designed to provide a future-oriented, globally relevant roadmap for sustainable human and planetary development, recent assessments by WHO suggest that the world is unlikely to meet this goal without accelerated and coordinated action (WHO, 2024). These gaps reflect huge, missed opportunities in enhancing human wellbeing and highlight the need for efforts and actions across industries, including health, education, and legislation, to promote better mental health and achieve the SDGs.

One sector that holds untapped potential for promoting people's wellbeing is tourism. The ample, growing body of evidence suggests that health and wellbeing are substantially shaped by the physical environments in which people live, work, and travel, and the tourism sector has increasingly gained recognition for its role in enhancing human wellbeing (Gedecho & Kim, 2025; F. Hu, Wen, & Kozak, 2025). In light of ongoing global efforts to advance the

global SDGs, it is essential to identify targeted strategies and actions through which tourism can serve as a key driver of positive changes and significant contributions to global sustainability transitions (Neuhofer, 2025). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), a United Nations specialised agency and a leading authority in tourism, has defined sub-targets specifically for the tourism industry relying on the SDGs (UNWTO, 2023). While tourism aligns with all 17 SDGs, SDG 3, Good Health and Wellbeing, as aforementioned, is particularly relevant and pertinent to tourism and hospitality. Mental health and wellbeing have emerged as prominent themes in tourism research, given their profound significance for humanity (Buckley, 2023; G. Chen et al., 2025; Hartwell et al., 2018; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Consequently, recent academic work has underscored the importance of comprehensive research on wellbeing in tourism settings and has attempted to integrate tourism into the key objectives of the SDGs (Gedecho & Kim, 2025). Indeed, the tourism literature has long contended that travel is in part motivated by a desire to escape from the issues of daily life. As Krippendorf (1986a) argued, tourism in many aspects reflects responses to a dysfunctional society. For many, travel offers a path to healing – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Indeed, commentators have likened some aspects of tourism to a “secular pilgrimage” (Nilsson & Tesfahuney, 2018). Contemporary travellers are seeking slower, more mindful experiences that enable them to disconnect from technology and (re)connect with nature and themselves (Smith, 2016). This evolving shift in consumer lifestyles and priorities is expected to reshape their tourism consumption in the years ahead (Nandasena, Morrison, & Coca-Stefaniak, 2022). Therefore, to combat the rising mental health issues and global dysfunctions, it is imperative to effectively address the broader environments that influence our daily lives, including travel activities, to enhance individual and collective health and wellbeing ultimately.

1.1.2 The rise of the global wellness movement

In adopting a positive outlook, wellness as a concept has become increasingly prevalent as people around the world recognise the significance of healthy lifestyles and personal resilience as primary defences against potential health threats. The recent surge of the wellness movement represents, in essence, a consumer-driven response to a growing sense of physical, emotional, and societal disequilibrium, ironically made possible by the higher incomes that are often a cause of work-induced stress. In fact, “wellness” is a modern term with ancient roots. Throughout history, civilisations have sought remedies and treatments for improving health and wellbeing. Indian Ayurvedic practices date back as far as 5000 BC, while Egyptian women

around 3000 BC used cosmetics akin to those still employed nowadays. Traditional Chinese medical practices can be traced back to 1000 BC (Smith & Puczkó, 2013) and a famous Japanese “onsen” has been documented since 737 AD (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). The earliest reference to healing waters of spas (Latin *sanitas per aqua*) dates to around 1700 BC (Koncul, 2012), while the Romans developed sophisticated bathing facilities between 54 BC and 450 AD during their occupation of large parts of what has become Europe (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). These ancient practices laid the groundwork for the modern pleasure resort concept, which flourished throughout Europe from the late 18th century (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; C. M. Hall, 1992; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Furthermore, ancient civilisations across Asia and the Middle East have long recognised the benefits of massage, yoga, meditation, herbal medicines, and various sorts of healing and spiritual practices, often predating similar developments in Europe by centuries.

Arguably, the contemporary notion of wellness was initially articulated by Halbert Dunn’s ground-breaking lectures on *high-level wellness* in the US in the 1950s, defining it as an integrating alternative and preventive approach to maintain health and foster wellbeing (Martins, Neves de Jesus, Pocinho, & Pinto, 2025; Wallace & Smith, 2024). Wellness-focused and holistic approaches gained significant momentum during the 1960s/1970s, influenced by the writings and thought leadership of visionaries such as Halbert Dunn, Jack Travis, Don Ardell, and Bill Hettler (GWI, 2024). Their ideas contributed to the growth of a broader movement centred on healthy living, self-help, self-care, fitness, nutrition, diet, and spirituality practices, ultimately shaping the flourishing wellness movement of the twenty-first century. This period also witnessed the popularity of the word wellness itself and wellness-related products such as spa resorts, therapies and detox. Furthermore, it saw the birth of the self-help movement and the associated belief in the mind’s capability to transform one’s life for the better, paving the way for the concept of self-transformation in the modern world.

The Global Wellness Institute (GWI) – a nonprofit organisation - is considered the first and leading worldwide research institute in the wellness industry. In 2014, GWI published the first major report of the Global Wellness Economy, which encompasses three primary sectors: spa industry, wellness tourism, and thermal/mineral springs (GWI, 2014). Reflecting the exponential growth of wellness-related offerings in the market, its most recent report expanded this framework by adding four additional sectors: wellness real estate, workplace wellness, physical activity, and mental wellness, in their most recent report (GWI, 2024). These additions

demonstrate a rising demand for wellness goods and services in all aspects of life, from homes and workplaces to travel and daily routines. According to GWI (2018), from 2015 – 2017 (before the COVID-19 pandemic), the wellness economy grew from US\$3.7 trillion to US\$4.2 trillion, achieving an annual growth rate of 6.4%, nearly twice the pace of global economic growth, which was 3.6% during the same period. Despite the turmoil and disruptions triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the global wellness economy remained resilient, reaching a value of US\$4.4 trillion in 2020 (GWI, 2021). The underlying drivers include the expanding global middle class, population ageing, the increasing prevalence of chronic disease, and heightened consumer interest in and awareness of healthy lifestyles (GWI, 2021). The pandemic has further accelerated the emergence of wellness as a dominant consumer value worldwide. Consumers are now more conscious and mindful that every facet of their lives – including their living environments, work conditions, dietary habits, exercise routines, social interactions, and travel behaviours – influences their health outcomes, mental resilience, and overall sense of wellbeing. Moving on to the post-pandemic era, the global wellness economy reached US\$6.3 trillion in 2023, accounting for 6.03% of global GDP (GWI, 2024). This rapid rebound, fuelled by sustained and growing consumer demand for wellness, has positioned the sector as a powerful force within the global economy, surpassing the green economy, information technology, and the sport sector in economic scale (GWI, 2024).

The wellness movement has also begun reshaping national and international policymaking. Until recently, a national development was evaluated by its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita – an indicator based solely on the total monetary value of goods and services produced within a country, divided by its population. It means that the more people consume, the more developed or advanced that country is deemed to be. However, this conventional metric has been criticized and challenged for neglecting human wellbeing. Instead, for instance, Bhutan has long led the way with its adoption of ‘Gross National Happiness’ (GNH) as a national development framework. Following Bhutan’s lead, countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Ecuador, and Nigeria have established ministries of happiness (GWI, 2022a). New Zealand introduced a Wellbeing Budget to allocate public resources toward improving the country’s overall wellbeing (Ryan, 2020a). Global initiatives, such as the World Happiness Report by the United Nations, which aims to tackle global wellbeing (worldhappiness.report, 2025), and the Happy Planet Index, focusing on global sustainability (happyplanetindex.org, 2025), have further efforts to track wellbeing alongside economic progress. At the micro level, consumer values have shifted toward a wellness-

oriented lifestyle that increasingly transforms their purchasing behaviours and consumption patterns. Consequently, wellness is now embedded across mainstream consumer products and services, such as personal care and beauty (e.g., EMINENCE Skin Care), technology (e.g., Apple Fitness+), workplace wellness (e.g., wellteq), and even the metaverse (e.g., ChopraVerse). These trends have been amplified by media, influencers, and celebrities, making wellness a cultural and commercial phenomenon. As societies face mounting 21st-century challenges – ranging from the popularity of artificial intelligence and advanced technologies to climate change and cost-of-living crises - the pursuit of wellness is likely to become even more central to consumer life. Understanding and responding to this movement is essential for businesses, governments, and civil society as they strive to improve public health, resilience, and sustainable development outcomes.

1.1.3 The global proliferation of wellness tourism

For decades, the promotion of health has been one of the primary motivations for travel (Monroy-Rodriguez & Caro-Carretero, 2025). Historically, individuals journeyed to nearby rivers and mineral springs to engage in religious rituals, receive therapeutic treatments, and seek relaxation (W. Frost & Laing, 2016; C. M. Hall, 2011). In recent years, a growing body of academic and empirical research has sought to integrate diverse theoretical perspectives and findings on the interrelationships among tourism, wellbeing and health (Farkić, Filep, & Taylor, 2020; Filep et al., 2024; Gedecho & Kim, 2025; H. Kim, Lee, Uysal, Kim, & Ahn, 2015; Luo, Lanlung, Kim, Tang, & Song, 2017; Pourfakhimi, Nadim, Prayag, & Mulcahy, 2021). Although health tourism is widely regarded as one of the earliest forms of travel, it has continuously evolved, incorporating and reimagining with the new forms of health-related activities, such as visiting retreats, medical spas and beauty surgeries (Smith & Puczkó, 2016b). This constant reinvention is one of the reasons health tourism frequently appears novel to both practitioners and researchers.

Wellness tourism and medical tourism are widely acknowledged as subsets of health tourism, typically taking place in contexts such as spa resorts, wellness hotels, retreats and hospitals (Smith & Puczkó, 2016b). While the terminologies “health tourism”, “medical tourism”, and “wellness tourism” are often utilised interchangeably in publications, they represent distinct concepts (which will be elaborated further in the subsequent chapters). This study focuses specifically on wellness tourism, which is considered both a niche segment of

tourism (Damijanić, 2021) and a dominant sub-sector within the worldwide wellness economy (GWI, 2024). As defined by the GWI (2024), wellness tourism refers to travel undertaken with the aim of maintaining or elevating personal wellbeing. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, this sector has rebounded rapidly, reaching a new peak of US\$830.2 billion in 2023, with over 1,034.5 million international and domestic wellness trips recorded. It is forecast to expand at an annual growth rate of 10.2%, reaching an estimated US\$1,351.0 billion in 2028 (GWI, 2024). Tourists engage in wellness travel primarily to experience distinctive environments or location-specific offerings, such as spiritual retreats, lifestyle resorts, and beauty spas, which support body-mind-spirit wellbeing (Zhong, Sun, Law, & Qi, 2024). Consequently, wellness tourism can be seen as playing an essential role in providing opportunities for stress management, personal growth, reflection, and connection that are often difficult to obtain in modern life (Kelly, 2010). Smith and Puczkó (2008) contend that the rise of wellness tourism is driven by societal shifts, including the search for community, an obsession with self and celebrity, the simple life, new spirituality, technology, fitness, and a decrease in leisure time. Voigt and Pforr (2014) identified additional drivers, including increased holistic health awareness, faster-paced lifestyle, conspicuous consumption, rising individualism, the quest for spirituality, and population ageing.

The recent pandemic marked a turning point, and its influence has been complexed for tourism. On the demand side, while the pandemic negatively impacted global physical and mental health, it also heightened the public's attention to health and simultaneously accelerated individuals' interest in health-driven holidays (X. Su, Li, Qu, & Yin, 2025). A recent survey revealed that nearly 80% of worldwide travellers admitted that they would take more health precautions when travelling, as they are more risk-averse (Booking.com, 2021). According to the Wellness Tourism Association, approximately 78% of consumers would prioritise wellbeing-oriented experiences when returning to travel pursuits after the pandemic (WTA, 2020). As individuals increasingly filter life choices, including holidays, through a wellness lens, this trend is likely to continue in the long term (Orîndaru et al., 2021). Consequently, wellness has become embedded across tourism offerings, including the broad range of provisions from basic ashrams in India focusing on spirituality, massage therapy in Thailand, and luxury wellness retreats and spas in Austria.

On the supply side, many destinations and governments rethink and refocus their initiatives and priorities, shifting away from mass tourism towards more responsible and

sustainable models. This convergence of supply and demand has accelerated the integration of wellness into destination tourism development strategies in recent years. According to GWI (2018), the number of nations actively promoting some sort of wellness tourism increased from 65 in 2013 to over 100 in 2018. Saari (2022) asserts that most destinations possess a number of unique tourism assets that can and should be promoted for wellness tourism, such as nature (e.g. parks, squares, beaches), built environment (e.g. museums, convention centres), and commercial offerings (e.g., spas, restaurants, entertainments). For example, most European nations are well-developed markets for wellness tourism (GWI, 2018; Saari, 2022). Germany is one of Europe's most popular wellness destinations, with many healing techniques originally developed there, including Heilbad (healing bath) and Kneipp cure (Locher, Voigt, & Pforr, 2014). Austria also has a long historical development of wellness, with internationally known spas and thermal springs offering the healing effects of balneological treatments (*Austrian Wellness Report 2016*, 2016). Other European countries, including Italy, Slovenia, Montenegro, and Finland, have incorporated some forms of wellness in their national tourism strategies (GWI, 2018). In contrast, wellness destinations in Southeast Asia and India tend to be more exclusive and historical (Robert, 2022). India promoted itself as the "Land of Ayurveda" over two decades ago and recently established a National Strategy and Roadmap for Medical and Wellness Tourism in 2022 to attract tourists (pib.gov.id, 2022). Neighbouring countries, such as Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan, also promote wellness tourism experiences related to yoga, meditation, pilgrimage, spirituality, and indigenous medicine (GWI, 2018). Thailand is renowned for its high-class holistic wellness and retreats, offering a plethora of experiences and services that integrate traditional Thai therapies, Thai massage, and herbal remedies (Heung & Kucukusta, 2013). The Tourism Authority of Thailand brands the country as the "Spa Capital of Asia" (Han, Kiatkawsin, Koo, & Kim, 2020). Singapore, on the other hand, positions itself as an "urban wellness haven", a bustling city with easy access to wellness offerings for everyone. China attracts wellness tourists with its distinctive acupuncture, herbal therapies, and traditional medicine (Al-Ansi et al., 2025). Furthermore, wellness tourism is also a significant focus in some developing markets such as Latin America-Caribbean, Middle East-North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, Costa Rica presents itself as a wellness destination with the "Wellness Pura Vida" tourism campaign, which showcases healthy Costa Rican cuisine and nature (ict.go.cr, 2018). Argentina and Brazil, with their advanced aesthetic market, are attempting to promote their beauty enhancement treatments (GWI, 2018). In this increasingly competitive tourism landscape, wellness tourism emerges as a strategic pathway for destination differentiation and positioning. It explicitly aids destination development

strategy to attract tourists, diversify tourism offerings, address seasonality, increase visitors' length of stay, and rejuvenate the destination image (Wray & Weiler, 2013).

1.2 Statements of research problem

1.2.1 Theoretical gaps

Following recent market trends, scholars have increasingly devoted attention to wellness tourism. Existing literature has examined its connotations, dimensions, determinants, and consequences (Yaoqi Li, Deng, Peng, & He, 2025; Martins et al., 2025; C. Peng et al., 2025). Prior scholars have widely agreed that tourism is inherently a comprehensive experiential process in which the tourism experience plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' subjective wellbeing (Krippendorf, 1999; Ryan & Zhang, 2024). Meanwhile, it is well-established that wellness tourism experiences positively influence tourists' psychological states, emotional responses, and behaviours throughout the interaction and consumption process. For instance, Sthapit et al. (2025) demonstrated that higher degrees of escapism, co-creation, experience intensification and satisfaction of the wellness tourism experience are associated with increased levels of hedonic wellbeing, eudaimonic wellbeing, and place attachment. By conducting a survey in Shizhu, a renowned health and wellness tourism destination in China, He, Liu, and Li (2023) demonstrated that wellness tourism experience can stimulate tourist inspiration, which subsequently fosters greater tourist engagement. Al-Ansi et al. (2025) identified various configurations of wellness tourism attributes that contribute to tourist satisfaction and behavioural loyalty. Rahmani, Mackenzie, and Carr (2024) further illustrated that retreating online can improve psychological wellbeing by offering a blend of relaxation and adventure, alternative wellness services, environmentally sustainable practices, and meaningful co-created experiences. These findings demonstrate that wellness tourism experiences engage tourists in multidimensional activities that not only influence their behavioural outcomes but also promote holistic personal wellbeing. Despite recent research advances, most studies have focused on wellness tourism activities in general, while “wellness retreats” – a focal unit of this study – often fall outside the stream of wellness tourism research and thus receive less attention.

Retreats can be identified as places for quiet reflection and rejuvenation, spiritual reassessment and renewal, either alone or in a group (Kelly, 2010). Based on this definition, an extensive diversity of retreat typologies exist, some led by spiritual, religious organisations

(religious retreats), other by tourism-led motives (non-religious retreats) (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Traditionally, the term “retreat” has been associated with religious groups, where members go to specific sites owned by or associated with a certain affiliation (e.g., monasteries, convents, ashrams, temples), for a period of reflection intended to deepen or re-ignite one’s faith (Kelly, 2012), such as temple stays (Bae, Lee, & Chick, 2019), clergy retreats (Gill, Packer, & Ballantyne, 2018), or Zen Buddhist retreats (Wang, Chen, Shi, & Shi, 2021). A number of studies investigated the benefits, visitor motivations, and outcomes of religious retreat experiences (which are presented in **Table 4**). For instance, Bae et al. (2019) found that temple stays contribute to participants’ health through a range of internal psychological and behavioural changes. Wang et al. (2021) identified key motivations, including books of Master Wanxing, feeling lost and empty, dilemmas in life and career, and pursuing personal growth in Buddhism, as well as outcomes like knowledge acquisition and spiritual growth of tourists retreating at a Zen temple. Gill, Packer, and Ballantyne (2019), in their study of 17 clergy retreats in Queensland (Australia), identified three main factors that contribute to visitors’ restorative outcomes: being away, participation in spiritual activities, and disconnection from technology. Other studies by Ashton (2018) and Bone (2013) added to this body of literature by exploring motivations and experience attributes in spiritual retreats.

With the rise of the global wellness movement (as discussed in a previous chapter), however, the notion of “retreats” has expanded beyond its traditional religious form. In a contemporary setting, “retreats” have been defined as a specialised lodging segment which offers comprehensive guest services and amenities alongside access to substantial leisure and wellness spaces (Fu, Tanyatanaboon, & Lehto, 2015). Modern wellness retreats typically provide a broad spectrum of services and experiences, including accommodations, food and beverage, wellness workshops, therapies and treatments. Although their purpose primarily concentrates on relaxation and rejuvenation, retreats ideally offer some components of hedonism combined with deeper eudaimonic practices which promote self-development and self-realisation. The length of stay varies but usually last several days to optimise the wellness results. This sort of wellness retreats ranges from large international hospitality operators, such as Miraval by Hyatt, Six Senses by International Hotel Group (IHG), Veya by Banyan Group, to small, specialist operators such as CanyonRanch (<https://www.canyonranch.com/>) in the Americas, Lanserhof (<https://lanserhof.com/en/>) in Europe, Chiva-Som (<https://www.chivasom.com/en/>) in Thailand. Most retreats provide healing holiday in different environments. Retreats can be classified in several ways based on the place (e.g., The

Retreat at Blue Lagoon Iceland, Miraval The Red Sea), the environment (e.g., desert, beach, mountain), and the activities (e.g., yoga retreats, silent retreats, detox retreats). Besides, in terms of the spiritual emphasis, retreat includes religious and non-religious forms. In comparison to religious retreats, wellness retreats may have different service emphasis and tend to offer a holistic (body-mind-spirit) approach to wellness, and are often referred to as holistic retreat tourism (Kelly, 2012; Smith, 2003). Furthermore, unlike religious retreat participants who may seek spiritual enlightenment, wellness retreat attendees tend to anticipate a more purposeful experience focused on physical relaxation, emotional renewal, and personal development (Fu et al., 2015). Since the experience content, tourist motivations, and consumption contexts are different, presumably the experience of wellness retreat guests possesses its own unique characteristics that merit further investigation. Therefore, the main interest of this thesis lies in non-religious retreats and their visitor experiences.

Although a recent growing number of studies have explored customer experiences in wellness tourism, much of this research has focused on identifying customer profiles and motivations. Moreover, several such studies have tended to concentrate on day-based activities such as spa and massage activities that generally do not require an overnight stay in accommodation. Where studies have included a need for overnight accommodation, it has been found that wellness tourists vary significantly in their motivations and pursuit of wellbeing. In the early stages of wellness tourism, Smith (2003) suggested that wellness tourists, unlike other types of tourists, likely seek personal enhancement or enlightenment and prefer autonomy and personal space. Building on this conceptual distinction, Dimitrovski and Todorović (2015) proposed two groups of wellness tourists: socially active wellness tourists who seek socialisation and self-focused wellness tourists who require solitude. The Global Wellness Institute identified two wellness tourism segments: primary wellness travel, where the trip or activities (destination spas, health resorts, yoga retreats, and other immersive wellness experiences) are motivated by wellness and secondary wellness travel, where travellers are after wellness experiences or healthy options on their leisure or business trips (GWI, 2024). According to GWI (2024), secondary wellness tourists made up roughly 83% of wellness trips and expenditure in 2023. Admittedly, much of the current research in wellness tourism has primarily concentrated on this large, secondary segment. For instance, Al-Ansi et al. (2025) surveyed Chinese tourists visiting Thailand using online questionnaires. Backman, Huang, Chen, Lee, and Cheng (2023) collected data from visitors at two hot spring resorts in Taiwan, while Miseong Kim, Moon, Joo, and Yoon (2024) involved residents of Seoul (Korea). B. Liu,

Kralj, Moyle, He, and Li (2024) administered surveys to tourists in Shizhu (China) using screening questions, “Are you travelling in Shizhu county for wellness or health purposes?” to ensure participants qualified as wellness tourists. While these studies have enhanced understanding of the broader wellness tourist population, what is apparent in the existing wellness tourism research is that a picture of the wellness tourist is incomplete. The tendency to treat wellness tourists as a homogeneous group overlooks important nuances. Although general wellness tourists and wellness retreat participants are sometimes considered synonymous, their motivations and perceptions are fundamentally different, potentially leading to divergent behavioural consequences. Wellness retreat visitors often seek deeper, more transformative experiences at the destinations. The product concentration of many wellness retreats is what distinguishes them from other aspects of wellness tourism (Kelly, 2010). This distinction is particularly salient for retreat tourism, where perceptions of value or spiritual significance play a critical role. Accordingly, the present study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

Furthermore, the guest *experience* at wellness retreats remains insufficiently examined in academic research. More specifically, past research has investigated guest experience at the wellness retreats through various theoretical lenses. For instance, B. Kim and Yang (2023) identified the core wellness service components to theorise the transformative wellness service frameworks. Lyulicheva, Yap, and Hyde (2023) examined the identity transition process of wellness retreat participants and revealed four elements of retreat experiences supporting the personal transformation process: program, diet, atmosphere, and staff. Adopting a mindfulness perspective, Rana, Gangotia, and Bhatt (2025) defined five antecedents influencing mindfulness experiences in wellness retreats among Generation Z, including spirituality, nature connectedness, focused mind, self-awareness and thought regulation. Despite these valuable contributions, there are still many conceptual gaps that remain. In fact, in the tourism and hospitality industry, the actual value perceived by tourists during and after their consumption of tourism experiences is a critical consideration from a marketing perspective, as it strongly influences tourists' behavioural intentions and can ultimately affect destination performance. Notably, existing wellness retreat literature lacks detailed insights into how attendees perceive the value of the experiential retreat products. To address this research gap, the present paper seeks to advance understanding of wellness retreat experiences through the lens of consumer perceived value.

The concept of perceived value has long held a central position in marketing research. It is referred to as “the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given” (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14). From the consumer’s perspective, perceived value reflects a trade-off between the benefits obtained and the costs incurred. Over the decades, researchers have proposed a number of conceptualisations of Consumer Perceived Value (CPV) to explain why consumers make the choices they do. Moving beyond the predominant unidimensional concept of CPV, scholars have increasingly embraced a multidimensional approach, identifying various affective and experiential facets of CPV (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Holbrook, 1999; Sheth et al., 1991; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Due to the inherently “highly multidimensional” and “predominantly experiential” characteristics, tourism products and services have been a particularly relevant domain for applying CPV concepts (Gallarza, Arteaga, & Gil-Saura, 2019). While these conceptualisations of value may still be valid in many areas, it is important to acknowledge that the difference between the concepts of perceived value in the hospitality and tourism industries, in relation to other service industries, is plausible, considering the dynamic and fast-changing tourism landscape of today. Traditionally, tourism services have been conceptualised as economic commodities that provide tourists with functional values (e.g., room, food, transport) and/or hedonic values (e.g., joy, relaxation) (Lengieza, Swim, & Hunt, 2021). Yet, these benefits do not last long after the trip ends and overlook the deeper, long-term personal impacts and the positive transformations that travel can foster.

Recently, the growing popularity of “positive tourism experience”, postulated by Filep (2016) and accelerated by the unprecedented global wellness movement, has shifted attention toward life-changing, meaningful experiences for a long-term eudaimonic effect (e.g., self-actualisation, personal growth). Eudaimonic outcomes are closely linked to what have been described as *self-transcendent emotions*, which capture profound emotional states such as feelings of compassion (Lengieza et al., 2021). Such effect can manifest across a range of travel contexts, including pilgrimage tourism (van Iwaarden & Nawijn, 2024), Zen temple stay (Wang et al., 2021), and spiritual retreats (B. Kim & Yang, 2021). What these tourism experiences have in common is their transformative potential, providing a powerful inner journey that can fulfil humans’ hyper-needs (Maslow, 1943). Some types of tourism experiences, therefore, transcend mere consumption and instead function as vehicles for meeting intrinsic individual needs, incorporating opportunities for eudaimonic reflections – experiences involving time for deep contemplation and the discovery of life's meaning. This

perspective is supported by Pine and Gilmore (2011)'s projection that a transformation economy, in which curated and guided experiences for human transformation will constitute the dominant economic offering of the future. Based on this theoretical foundation, it is clear that there is no universal approach to conceptualising consumer perceived value for tourism experiences. The present study adds to the discourse on positive tourism experiences and explores the dimensions of customer perceived value within the context of transformative wellness retreat experiences.

1.2.2 Methodological gap

Recognising the gaps in the existing literature, a growing number of researchers have begun to explore this niche market of wellness tourism. Wellness retreats, as a focus of this study, can be defined as spaces designed for quiet reflection and renewal, offering visitors opportunities to restore physical and mental health and/or engage in spiritual reassessment and rejuvenation, either alone, in silence, or in a group (Kelly, 2012). Given the inherently introspective and tranquil nature of wellness retreats, past research has typically chosen a less intrusive approach, such as analysing visitor-generated content (Dillette, Douglas, & Andrzejewski, 2021; Fu et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2021) or employing the perspective of retreat operators (Dillette et al., 2021; Kelly, 2010). Furthermore, much of this scholarship has employed qualitative methodologies in nature, with relatively small sample sizes, aiming to develop rich, contextualised understandings of retreat visitors. For instance, B. Kim and Yang (2023) carried out in-depth interviews with 13 employees from various professional backgrounds at The Le Monastere des Augustines hotel (Canada) to develop a Transformative Wellness Service framework. Gill et al. (2018) interviewed 30 participants attending various clergy retreats in Australia. Lyulicheva et al. (2023) conducted interviews with eight retreat participants to explore how identity transitions occur within the context of retreats. Bone (2013) and B. Kim and Yang (2021) also employed a combination of observation and interview techniques to gain an understanding of visitor experiences at the wellness sites. Despite their significant contributions to the literature, there remains a limited amount of published research using quantitative methods (Ashton, 2018; Naidoo, Schembri, & Cohen, 2023). The tendency of wellness retreat attendees to seek solitude and minimise digital engagement made it challenging to scientifically and quantitatively study this tourism activity. This underscores the importance of the present study, which attempts to fill the methodological gap by employing a more robust approach to researching retreat visitors.

In addition, no existing research has systematically developed and validated a measurement scale to evaluate the overall perceived value of wellness retreat experiences, where the consumers assess their consumption of experiences, which subsequently affects their behavioural intentions. Although a limited number of quantitative studies have been undertaken within this context, they have predominantly relied on first-generation multivariate techniques, such as multiple regression analysis. For instance, Gill et al. (2019) employed regression to examine how environmental attributes (e.g., being mentally away, lack of discord, and fascination), retreat activities (e.g., relaxation and not spending time with information technology, spending time in reflection, spiritual activities), and retreat experiences (e.g., spiritual engagement in the context of worship, peacefulness in the context of venue) significantly predict immediate restorative outcomes. Likewise, Ashton (2018) used regression models to explore the predictive power of push factors (e.g., relaxation, escape, physical appearance, novelty, transcendence, self-esteem), and pull factors (e.g., peaceful atmosphere, far from the usual places, historical significance, natural setting, and authentic experience) on visitor satisfaction at spiritual retreats in Thailand. However, such linear and symmetric models may be insufficient for capturing the complexity of tourism experiences.

Relationships among variables in a dataset, much like those encountered in real-world settings, are frequently complex and not necessarily proportional or balanced. A phenomenon, particularly those involving human behaviours and subjective perceptions, generally involves asymmetric and non-linear relationships that might not be adequately represented by the “one-model-fits-all” approach derived from conventional regression-based methods (Pappas, Papavlasopoulou, Mikalef, & Giannakos, 2020). The regression analysis model typically focuses on estimating the net effect of individual variables on an outcome, thereby overlooking the possibility that behavioural outcomes may emerge from configurations of factors (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). Instead, the desired outcomes are simulated through mutual matching, complementing, and substituting (Yongquan Li, Li, Ruan, & Zhang, 2025). To overcome the methodological limitations of previous works, the present research draws on complexity and configuration theories, seeking to identify and capture the causal combination of perceived value dimensions that coalesce to lead to the desired consequences (i.e., customer loyalty in this study). By combining symmetric and asymmetric analysis approaches, the present study offers a holistic and combinatory perspective, expanding the understanding of how perceived value drives behavioural intentions in wellness retreat tourism.

1.3 Research objectives

In response to the claims and calls for additional research, this study pursued four main objectives and therefore addresses both its overarching aim and the research gaps previously identified:

Research objective 1 (RO1): Customer perceived value (CPV) has frequently been described as a complex construct, especially from an experimental point of view. Although CPV has become a cornerstone of marketing and tourism research, researchers nowadays continue to face challenges in defining it and determining the most appropriate dimensional framework for specific tourism contexts. Therefore, the first objective of the current study is to explore the dimensionality of perceived value within the context of wellness retreat experiences. To accommodate this objective, a four-dimensional concept of perceived value, suggested by Sheth et al. (1991) was adopted.

Research objective 2 (RO2): Building on the first objective, and acknowledging that the measurement of CPV is highly context-specific (Blut, Chaney, Lunardo, Mencarelli, & Grewal, 2024; Leroi-Werelds, 2019) as well as no preferred dimensionality of value is put forward in tourism and hospitality literature (Gallarza et al., 2019), the second objective is to develop a measurement scale tailored to this niche context. Once established, this scale will enable an examination of the dimensions of tourist value and their subsequent behavioural outcomes, specifically within the idiosyncrasy of multidimensional wellness retreat tourism experiences.

Research objective 3 (RO3): Focusing on the post-purchase moment, perceived value represents a comparison between what is “received” and what is “given” through the purchase (Sánchez, Callarisa, Rodríguez, & Moliner, 2006). At the same time, loyalty is one of the most critical determinants of a business enterprise’s long-term survival and success (H. Liu, Park, & Wei, 2024; Singh, Ps, & Bashir, 2024). Past studies have suggested that transforming regular customer into a loyal one requires businesses to provide distinctive and high-value experiences (Yoo & Bai, 2013). Similar to other forms of businesses, customer loyalty has become a strategically important indicator in order for each and every wellness retreat operator to sustainably thrive in today’s competitive marketplace. Evidently, the fragmentation within the wellness economy that offers consumers with too many options for their personal wellness promotion, such as destination spas, personal care and beauty, which has made customers

become less loyal to specific wellness solutions (Han, Kiatkawsin, Kim, & Lee, 2017). Moreover, since wellness retreat are often privately, independently operated property, they can not expect to yield loyalty through the loyalty program effectively, which requires them solely dependent on experiences offered. Consequently, there is a pressing need for a more thorough examination of consumer loyalty's precursors in the context of wellness retreat sector. Accordingly, the third objective is to test the association between CPV and consumer loyalty and to identify if the interactions between customer and employee play a moderating role in this causal relationship.

Research objective 4 (RO4): Instead of solely focusing on the net effect between perceived value and customer loyalty through structural equation modelling (SEM), the fourth goal is to identify the causal combination of value dimensions that explains customers' destination loyalty by complementarily employing qualitative comparative analysis. Following the complexity theory and fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) (Ragin, 2009), the current study will detect different equifinal configurations leading to positive customer loyalty toward wellness retreat destinations.

1.4 Significance of this study

1.4.1 Theoretical contributions

This research centres on analysing visitor experiences at wellness retreats and their subsequent behavioural outcomes. It makes several contributions to the existing body of knowledge in wellness tourism and tourist behaviour research, specifically framing around two key possible aspects. Unpacking the differences in types and forms of tourism activities has emerged as a central topic in tourism studies, including within the specialist domain of wellness tourism. However, within this discourse, wellness retreats are often overlooked or conflated with related segments, despite possessing several unique characteristics (Dini & Pencarelli, 2021). As a result, this niche sector remains under-researched. By exploring wellness retreat experiences, this study offers a more refined and nuanced understanding of this unique form of wellness tourism, thereby advancing theoretical knowledge in the tourism discipline as a whole. Moreover, although the concept of customer perceived value has been extensively employed to explain tourist behaviours across various settings, no prior work has empirically investigated this construct within the specific context of wellness retreats, given their distinct offerings. This research represents the first effort to operationalise and empirically test perceived value in this unique setting and to investigate its influence on customer loyalty. By

exploring the relationship between these two critical constructs in tourism marketing, the research enriches theoretical understanding of tourist behaviours in the tourism and hospitality literature.

1.4.2 Managerial contributions

As the global interest in health and wellbeing continues to rise, travellers are increasingly seeking destinations that offer diverse wellness-focused services and experiences (Rana et al., 2025). This growing demand has prompted many destinations to diversify their tourism products and strategically invest in wellness initiatives to attract this emerging market. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic had, for many, a negative influence on the quality of their lives, contributing to heightened stress levels and reduced senses of wellbeing. Both during and in the aftermath of the pandemic, several studies were conducted to assess the extent to which counselling and other wellness initiatives were of help.

Therefore, it is expected that the outcomes of this research will offer a holistic view of how tourists evaluate the value of wellness retreat experiences. This form of tourism products encompasses a range of practices, offerings, and philosophies aimed at supporting individuals to recharge, rejuvenate, and heal from the physical and mental stresses of their daily lives. Thus, wellness retreat experiences and destinations should be designed specifically to promote holistic wellbeing of visitors. The results of this study can guide destination management organisations (DMOs), tourism policymakers, and relevant stakeholders – including spas, resorts, wellness centres, and tourism operators – in understanding tourists' multidimensional perceptions of value. By adopting a value-based perspective proposed, practitioners can effectively design and promote appropriate combinations of wellness services and activities that deliver meaningful and transformative experiences to visitors, which in turn enhance destination competitive advantages. Ultimately, when wellness tourism activities are done the right way, their impact will be optimised and should not only foster the quality of place for visitors but also embrace the quality of life for local residents. Integrating additional wellness value dimensions found in this study into tourism will have the potential to strengthen the overall value of the tourism industry while simultaneously safeguarding its assets and promoting its long-term sustainability. Moreover, in doing this, while not answering questions about the long-term impacts of MBIs on sense of wellbeing as offered by wellness retreats, the study will include the testing of measurement of perceived wellbeing that incorporates

consideration of longer-term effects. Overall, the outcome of this study promotes a wellness retreat as a productive healthy holiday that offer a chance for travellers to really heal and enhance every aspect of their personal wellbeing.

1.5 New Zealand (Aotearoa): A context for wellness tourism development

New Zealand (also known by its Māori name, Aotearoa) has long held a prominent position as a prime international tourism destination. Between 2016 and 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic), approximately 11 million travelers visited the country, exceeding its permanent population of just 5 million (Elton, 2022). By 2019, international tourism had become New Zealand's largest export industry (MBIE, 2019). However, the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic led to border closures in March 2020, which devastated the tourism industry. The national airline, Air New Zealand, was grounded, and international arrivals were suspended (Yeoman, Schänzel, & Zentveld, 2022). The economic consequences were significant, with losses estimated at NZ\$17.28 billion compared to pre-pandemic levels (Yeoman, Postma, & Hartman, 2022). In the post-pandemic era, the tourism industry has experienced a strong recovery and will become the country's second-largest export sector by the end of 2024 (tourismnewzealand.com, 2024b). As the industry looks forward to the coming years, the focus has shifted from supporting recovery to rebuilding by 2028, emphasising a more sustainable and holistic model of tourism development in the country.

The core target for New Zealand tourism is stated as “Enrich Aotearoa New Zealand and all who visit - Kia rangatira a Aotearoa me ngā manuhiri katoa” (tourismnewzealand.com, 2024a). This reflects the dual purpose of tourism to not only benefit the environment, foster the national economy, and improve the quality of life and wellbeing of New Zealanders, but also to deliver a positive visitor experience. According to Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA), New Zealand's largest independent industry association, the number of visitors was no longer the key performance indicator for success but rather the wellbeing of residents and the environment at its core (Ryan, 2020a). Accordingly, three strategic intentions guide national tourism policy over the next four years (2024-2028):

1. Build an extraordinary desire for New Zealand as a year-round destination
2. Convert desire for New Zealand into off-peak visitation
3. Accelerate the New Zealand tourism sector to become a world leader in sustainability

Moreover, for a long time, New Zealand has been globally recognised as ‘pure’ and ‘green’, making the country a prestigious tourist destination (Bone, 2013). For over 25 years, the “100% Pure New Zealand” campaign has successfully promoted New Zealand tourism in its part and in New Zealand’s wider country brand (Ryan, 2020a). The “100% Pure New Zealand” campaign has consistently created brand recognition and built trust with potential visitors, but it has also evolved from showcasing the country’s natural landscapes and manaakitanga (hospitality). In 2025, Tourism New Zealand launched a revitalised version of “100% Pure New Zealand”. According to Tourism New Zealand Chief Executive René de Monchy, this new global campaign was a rejuvenation for the old one, which also aligns with the three strategic intentions (rnz.co.nz, 2025).

Within this strategic framework, wellness tourism presents a compelling opportunity for New Zealand, aligning well with Tourism New Zealand’s “100% Pure New Zealand” branding and Tourism New Zealand’s strategic intentions. The 100% Pure tagline reflects the country’s unique experience, geography, people and landscapes (Carter, 2019). With wellness tourism, the destination offers experiences that enhance tourists’ health and wellbeing, including physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing (Prideaux, Berbigier, & Thompson, 2014). Wellness tourism also highlights the vital role of natural conservation, environmental protection, and sustainability (Voigt, 2014). Natural landscapes also possess healing powers, in contrast to the harmful, polluted, and stressful urban life. Given that nature-based wellness is integral to the wellness tourism market, New Zealand’s natural scenery is one of the country’s unique selling points and serves as a vital asset for the development of wellness tourism (Reichenberger & Yeoman, 2022). As nature is a very important setting and “amenity” for wellness tourism, the development of such type of tourism can provide important incentives for governments and communities to protect their natural asset and enhance their sustainability efforts, which will align well with the third strategic intention. Moreover, wellness tourism is seasonally resilient – offering year-round indoor and outdoor wellness experiences – and therefore supports the second strategic goal of off-peak visitation.

There is also a growing domestic and international demand for wellness travel. Domestically, New Zealanders themselves are highly wellness-oriented, ranking third highest in Google searches of “retreats” and with 28% of domestic travelers prioritising wellness activities in their holiday planning (Pollok, 2025). Historically, New Zealand has utilised its

abundant natural thermal resources, which are widely available throughout the North Island, for tourism. The Māori local people traditionally visited Waiwera (which means ‘hot water’) to heal themselves in the therapeutic warm waters. They would immerse themselves in holes dug along the beachfront, with mineral water gently surrounding them (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). Today, wellness-focused tourism offerings include immersive spa and retreat experiences that blend traditional practices with luxury and eco-conscious design. Moreover, the trend towards natural environments for thermal spa and wellness facilities in New Zealand also extends to the design of outdoor hot spring pools created to blend in with the landscape, such as Secret Spot Hot Tubs Rotorua (<https://secretspot.nz/>), Waikite Valley Thermal Pools (<https://www.hotpools.co.nz/>), and Wai Ariki Hot Springs & Spa (<https://www.wai-ariki.co.nz/>). In 2023, New Zealand entered the top 20 global spa destinations (Bywater, 2023) And according to GWI (2018), it ranks among the top ten wellness tourism markets in the Asia-Pacific region, attracting about 341,000 international wellness visitors in 2017. These travelers spent approximately US\$2,758 per trip, significantly higher than the average of about US\$2,115. However, New Zealand’s performance still lags behind regional competitors in terms of overall wellness arrivals (GWI, 2018). GWI (2018) listed the top 20 wellness tourism destinations and gives Australia a look in at number 14, but no sign of New Zealand. There are a plenty of wellness retreats that have put the country firmly on the global wellness tourism map, such as Aro Hā – the winner of 17 international awards (Thorner, 2020), Resolution Retreats named New Zealand’s Best Wellness Retreat by the World Spa Awards for several years (Durie, 2022). They all provide a comprehensive wellness package for retreat visitors, including private luxury accommodations, well-designed wellness programs, and activities in immersive natural environments. Overall, New Zealand’s wellness retreat tourism has largely been used by domestic visitors. International visitors are attracted to outdoor activities like hiking, water sports, and skiing as they are just iconic New Zealand tourism. The tranquil environment found in New Zealand, blends spa treatments, its pristine landscape and outdoor activities that promote physical fitness and mental clarity. This signals the untapped potential of wellness tourism for further development and investment to attract both domestic and international visitors.

1.6 Study site: Resolution Retreats

Resolution Retreats (<https://resolutionretreats.co.nz/>), which is located near the researcher’s place of residence, was chosen as a study site for several reasons. First, the venue

is located in a secluded location amidst natural beauty by some distance from major tourist attractions in both the Waikato specifically and New Zealand as a whole. Resolution Retreats provides a complete restorative environment for relaxation and rejuvenation. It offers a live-in venue with tailored wellness programs to support guests' holistic wellbeing, including various therapeutic activities, educational sessions, and organic healthy meals. At the Retreat, guests can stay for a minimum of 3 days to 7 days or up to three weeks. The retreat programs cover a variety of wellness topics, from weight loss, fasting, and professional resilience. The property minimises any technological contacts (e.g., television, phone) to facilitate personal connections. Furthermore, although it is expanding to male visitors, the retreat is still focused and marketed to be exclusively for women. Prior studies by Kelly (2012) and Voigt et al. (2011) also suggest that wellness tourists are primarily women in their 30s or 40s, and are from middle- to higher-income groups. Kelly and Smith (2016) indicated that women often report a higher level of anxiety in their personal lives and tended to be attracted to engage in wellness retreats as they offered space, time and support to reflect on their daily lives, self-concept and anxiety levels. Women are considered the primary target customers for retreat tourism (Lyulicheva et al., 2023). Consequently, conducting research on this site will be beneficial for future strategies targeting this market.

Second, Resolution Retreats has been nominated as New Zealand's Best Wellness Retreat for several years and was a winner in 2020, 2022, 2023 (the year of this study's conduct), and 2024. The nominations for this award are checked and vetted to ensure the relevance and qualifications of the property meet the criteria (worldspaawards.com, 2025). According to the World Spa Awards, a wellness retreat nominee is defined as a destination that provides an escape from daily routines, delivering integrated spa and wellness services designed to support mind, body, and spirit, as well as overall healthy lifestyle through practices encompassing nutrition and a comprehensive fitness program. Being internationally recognised by the World Spa Awards is a recognition of the exceptional standards and excellent experiences that Resolution Retreats provides for its clientele. Therefore, this unique case offers researchers a significant opportunity to explore and address research objectives regarding wellness retreat experiences and their potential positive psychological outcomes for retreat participants. Additionally, analysing the case of Resolution Retreats allows this study to extrapolate findings from an internationally recognised best practice case to other case organisations in this niche sector.

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

The structure of the thesis consists of seven chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Literature review, (3) Methodology, (4) Research Findings, (5) Discussion, (6) Implications, and (7) Conclusion and Limitations. The content of each chapter is briefly summarised as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research background, outlining the current context and key issues that motivated the author to conduct this research. It presents the research problem, identifies theoretical and methodological gaps in the current literature, and articulates the research objectives that guide the overall investigation and inform the subsequent research design.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature to establish a solid theoretical foundation for the study. It traces the historical development and contemporary landscape of wellness tourism, including definitions, characteristics, and major wellness destinations worldwide. Foundational theories of travel motivation are explored to provide context for understanding tourists' wellness tourism motivations. Key concepts relevant to this research, including transformative (wellness retreat) experiences, customer perceived value and customer's destination loyalty, are also covered. The chapter concludes with the development of research hypotheses, which address the identified gaps in existing knowledge.

Chapter 3 details the research paradigm and methodology adopted in the study. Justifications are provided for the use of a mixed-methods approach, followed by a description of the data collection procedures. Analytical methods and software tools are also outlined to facilitate the step-by-step report of research findings illustrated in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings in two main sections: qualitative and quantitative. The results of the data analysis methods discussed in Chapter 3 are reported in detail, providing empirical insights into the research topic of this study.

Chapter 5 discusses the key findings in relation to the research objectives and gaps outlined in Chapter 1. The discussion is structured around the qualitative and quantitative results separately, followed by a synthesis of insights in the general summary of the discussion.

Chapter 6 outlines the theoretical, methodological, and managerial implications of the study. It discusses how the research contributes to the academic literature and offers practical insights for the development of wellness tourism.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by highlighting the significant achievements of the research. It also acknowledges the study's limitations and proposes several avenues for future research, with the aim of advancing knowledge in wellness retreat tourism and related fields.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of wellness tourism, beginning with a broader discussion of health tourism before moving towards a deeper consideration of the differences between wellness tourism and medical tourism. The literature review also focuses on the perspectives of travel motivation from fundamental, classical theories to the most recent studies investigating tourist motivations in the wellness tourism context. In addition, relying on the backdrop of *The Experience Economy* by Pine and Gilmore (1998) as well as their recent updates regarding Transformations (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), a review and explanations of transformative wellness retreat experiences are discussed. As a focal point of this study, consumer perceived value theories and their applications in tourism research are presented, indicating further details of research gaps of this prevalent concept in the context of wellness retreat settings. Finally, hypotheses are proposed in an attempt to address the research gaps of this study.

2.1 The Evolution of Wellness Tourism

2.1.1 *The past and present-day health tourism*

Health and tourism share a long-standing relationship (C. M. Hall, 1992). Health is one of tourism's most ancient travel motives (Damijanić, 2019). There is a long historical tradition of people travelling to nearby rivers and mineral springs since ancient times for religious rites, medical treatments and relaxation (W. Frost & Laing, 2016; C. M. Hall, 2011). The concept of travelling for health reasons has a complex and rich history; it originated in natural and holistic health practices based on the utility of natural hot and thermal springs (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; C. M. Hall, 1992). According to Smith and Puczkó (2008), the oldest evidence of bathing culture, for instance, was uncovered in the valleys along the river Indus in Tibet, where an ancient civilisation with water ducts, bathrooms, and bath pools existed. As previously stated, the old cultures of Asia and the Middle East developed various health practices dating back thousands of years. For example, Indian Ayurveda dates back to approximately 5000 BC, Chinese medicine to around 1000 BC (Smith & Puczkó, 2013), and the Japanese “onsen” tradition, based on approximately 26,000 natural geothermal springs, is traced back to around 737 AD (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). The Pharaoh Cleopatra is said to have built one of the world’s first spa resorts near the Dead Sea in about 25 BC (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). Similarly, the Polynesian peoples in the Asia-Pacific region have been drawn to springs and built entire villages in such areas (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). From the perspective

of Western culture, the archaeological remains of Roman baths continued to exist throughout the medieval period and became an integral part of Western culture. The Romans established bathing facilities between 54 BC and 450 AD while occupying large areas of what has become Europe (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). They used the waters at mineral spas and hot springs as therapeutic treatments for health and recovery purposes, which later became an emerging trend among the European elite in the 17th century (W. Frost & Laing, 2016; C. M. Hall, 2002; Lötter & Welthagen, 2022; Smith & Kelly, 2006). This laid the foundations for the modern pleasure resort concept developed throughout Europe from the late 18th century (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; C. M. Hall, 1992; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Moreover, people in the Middle Ages knew nothing about viruses and transmissible diseases; they believed that illnesses were often considered a consequence of an imbalance in the soul or an intervention by God. They were extremely superstitious: shamans, priests, or spiritual leaders were greatly important where religions, spirituality, and wellness converged (Wallace & Smith, 2024). People still believe that crystals and spiritual healing energies can be used to cure sicknesses. Hospitals were often built adjacent to religious institutions, such as monasteries, where physical healing was combined with spiritual faith and prayer.

The 18th and 19th century in Europe was known as the Age of Enlightenment, where science and knowledge challenged the widespread patterns of faith based on the Christian religion. Questioning and structured analysis of observations, including in matters of health, has increasingly become the norm of knowledge. From a wellness viewpoint, the introduction of vaccination and pasteurisation transformed public health and hygiene. Visiting spa destinations became a trend (as aforementioned), and medical professionals began to advocate the desirable effects of “taking the water” to cure various disorders (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Spas were set up around mineral and hot springs and expanded into fashionable resorts all over Europe (Wallace & Smith, 2024). Some at that time would even claim that a visit to a spa could cure all diseases. In the 1980s, the conventional concept of health tourism expanded to include massage centres, health clubs, diet therapies, physiotherapies, beauty treatments, detoxification treatments, thalassotherapy, hydrotherapy, and other related services. (C. M. Hall, 1992; Smith & Puczkó, 2008). The growing demand in the 19th century led to the combination of health motivations and other interests. For example, spas started to develop casinos, dance halls, and other entertainment facilities (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). This period from the Middle Ages to the end of the 19th Century was a period of evolution. In Europe, the bathing areas and spas that initially were the prerogative of courts and aristocracies slowly became more democratic,

so that by the late 19th century, the new professional classes created by the industrial revolution also “took the waters” and the working classes began to take their seaside holidays. The foundation of what today is the wellness industry can be traced back to the last decades of the nineteenth century.

With the advent of widespread car ownership and the commencement of flight-based package holidays in the 1960s, tourism slowly became the international industry that it is today. Equally, by the late 20th century, health was also increasingly globalised, driven by international travel and heightened health awareness in society (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). In a society profoundly shaped by globalisation, advancements in information and communication technologies, and the liberalisation of markets, new and more accessible health management products and services were offered to people (Gustavo, 2010). In the euphoria of longevity, maintaining fitness and wellbeing has become an ideology for all age and income groups (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). Additionally, the growing interest in “eternal life” among many baby boomers during this period has been manifested in an increasing preoccupation with preventive therapies on an individual level (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). This interest in, at least the delaying of death through good health, has also led to more extreme attempts to perpetuate life, even to the extent of millionaires investing in cryonics. However, that is not a topic for this thesis, albeit that phenomenon exemplifies contemporary societies with health and quality of life issues (Thau, 2020). On the other hand, an increasing concern over issues such as occupational depression, sleep deprivation, eating disorders, and the excessive use of technology has resulted in a need to slow down, to be more mindful. As a result, C. M. Hall (1992), more than three decades ago, was able to identify health tourism as a small yet significantly important niche tourism market in many nations. Even today, people continue to find ways of relaxation to maintain health and enhance wellbeing through spas, meditation, and exercise in natural settings. Undoubtedly, health tourism has been and continues to be one of the fastest-growing sectors of contemporary tourism in the first decades of the 21st century (C. M. Hall, 2002).

The health tourism industry generates expenditures of some US\$1.340 trillion, and the health tourist is estimated to spend 3 to 4 times more than an ordinary tourist in the destination country (Shabankareh, Nazarian, Golestaneh, & Dalouchi, 2025). Globalisation, the advancement of technologies, and an increase in the ageing population have further accelerated the growth of health tourism in recent years. The health tourism industry, along with its

associated practices of health, leisure, and tourism, has undergone substantial reinvention, thereby resulting in new dimensions, concepts, spaces and services. These developments appeal to a market demand that embraces a holistic approach to the body, reflecting an evolving vision and definition of health (Gustavo, 2010). In response, the industry has experienced significant diversification in health facilities, including hospitals, clinics, convalescent homes and, more generally, health and social institutions, health and spa resorts, due to the necessity for various core and supporting products and services (S. I. Kim et al., 2024; Ridderstaat, Singh, & DeMicco, 2019). Moreover, the increasing hybridisation of health-related products, different philosophies and therapies are gaining ever-greater popularity, including Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) and Digital Detox Retreats. As a result, the supply within the broader domain of health tourism has become increasingly diverse and heterogeneous (Gustavo, 2010).

2.1.2 Wellness tourism as a subsector of health tourism

The development of health tourism, encompassing the emergence of several sub-sectors, growing research on health tourist profiles, preferences and motivations (Shabankareh et al., 2025; Smith & Puczko, 2015), has prompted governments and related organisations to have a clear definition of the concept before the determination of policy. Health tourism was initially defined by the International Union of Tourist Organisations (IUTO) in 1973 as the development of health services that leverage a country's natural resources, particularly mineral-rich waters and climatic conditions, for therapeutic purposes (C. M. Hall, 1992). While this early definition recognised the importance of natural elements, it failed to explicitly recognise the advancing developments in health tourism, such as surgeries, yoga, meditation, or technology-based interventions. Consequently, that former definition is now too narrow and outdated to encompass the wide, multifaceted characteristics of contemporary health tourism. From a business perspective, Goodrich and Goodrich (1987, p. 217) referred to health tourism as “the deliberate attempt on the part of a tourist facility (e.g., hotel) or destination (e.g., Baden, Switzerland) to attract tourists by promoting health-care services and facilities in addition to regular tourist amenities”. According to these two researchers, healthcare services may include medical examinations by qualified doctors and nurses at the resort or hotel, as well as special diets and treatments for various diseases and ailments. Unlike the IUTO (1973) definition, this definition of health tourism is not limited to the use of natural resources, but it is considered to be ambiguous in the term *health-care services and facilities* and implies that health is a

secondary motivation, which may not reflect the primary motivations of many health tourists. Further, given that many tourists already practice forms of health-related activity (e.g. yoga, massage, fitness) at home, Goeldner (1989) viewed health tourism as including three factors: (1) staying away from home, (2) health [as the] most important motive, and (3) “done in a leisure setting” (C. M. Hall, 1992, p. 151). This definition seems to capture the primary health motivations and the experiences of health tourism and especially works well with more contemporary health tourism where trips are designed around health and wellbeing improvement. However, it neglects the supply side of the industry.

By acknowledging the significance of health tourism products to destinations, C. M. Hall (2002) provided a definition of health tourism that integrates both demand-side (tourist motivations) and supply-side (services and destinations) perspectives. The definition stated that health tourism refers to a travel involving an overnight stay away from one’s usual place of residence, undertaken with the intention of maintaining or enhancing personal health and includes the supply, facilities and destinations offering such benefits. Hall’s definition encompasses a broad spectrum of health-related activities, but it has been debated whether spiritual health should be included, as this perspective on life is deemed fundamental to people worldwide in the modern day (Smith & Puczkó, 2015). Therefore, with the range of new health-related products available and the growing desires of modern tourists, Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) suggested a definition of health tourism – arguably the most comprehensive and sophisticated - as the totality of interactions and outcomes arising from individuals temporarily relocating from their usual place of residence to enhance, maintain, or restore their physical, mental, and social wellbeing through the utilisation of health-related services (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). The inclusion of physical, mental and social wellbeing in this definition aligns with the widely accepted definition of health by the World Health Organisation (WHO), acknowledging that health is more than just the absence of illness and is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing (WHO, 1948). Recognizing that spirituality is a significant component of health, Smith and Puczkó (2015, p. 206) defined health tourism as being “centrally focused on physical health [and] also improved mental and spiritual well-being and the increased capacity of individuals to satisfy their own needs and function better in their environment and society”. According to Smith and Puczkó (2008), spirituality is a holistic discipline which refers to all facets of the spiritual experiences, including the psychological, bodily, historical, political, aesthetic, intellectual, and other dimensions of the human subject. This definition shifts the health approach from passive to active by emphasising personal

transformation and holistic personal wellbeing, which makes it particularly relevant to the modern, wellness-oriented values of health tourism.

Until now, academic scholars have not gained a consensus on the precise definition of health tourism (Zhong, Deng, Morrison, Coca-Stefaniak, & Yang, 2021; Zhong et al., 2024). Terminologies including “health tourism”, “medical tourism”, and “wellness tourism” have been frequently utilised in the literature interchangeably, although they arguably refer to distinct concepts. However, it seems that previous tourism scholars have agreed that the term health tourism serves as an umbrella category encompassing organisational sub-sectors such as spa tourism, wellness tourism, and medical tourism (Gustavo, 2010; Monroy-Rodriguez & Caro-Carretero, 2025; Smith & Puczkó, 2015). Alternatively, Agalarova, Rozanova, Stytsiuk, and Tavakov (2023) simplify the classification into two sub-categories: medical tourism and health improvement tourism. In broad terms, health tourists are individuals who travel to other destinations to obtain health, medical, and/or wellness services for various motivations (Wong & Sa’aid Hazley, 2021). An example of factors driving the need to travel for health procedures includes high surgery costs, inadequate health insurance coverage, long waiting times, poor health accessibility, and ease of travel (Shabankareh et al., 2025). Moreover, many individuals travel abroad to access more advanced health services than those available in their home countries (Seow, Choong, Choong, & Moorthy, 2022). Thus, from the viewpoint of tourists’ health-related motives, a clear distinction can be drawn between those travelling to maintain or enhance their health (wellness tourists) and those seeking treatment for a specific medical condition (medical tourists). However, this distinction can at times be ambiguous and difficult to apply in practice for some cases, meaning that some forms of wellness treatments can be a part of medical products (e.g., thalassotherapy, traditional medicine, energy healing) and wellness resorts can offer medical-oriented services (e.g., executive physicals, gut microbiome assessments, sleep analysis, blood analysis, genetic testing, MRI scans, musculoskeletal assessments, oxygen therapy, immunotherapy, bioelectric therapy) – sometimes called “medical wellness”. Consequently, health tourism is considered a much broader term encompassing both wellness and medical tourism. **Figure 1** presents the broad range of medical and wellness products and facilities that are a subset of health tourism, as suggested by Smith and Puczkó (2008).

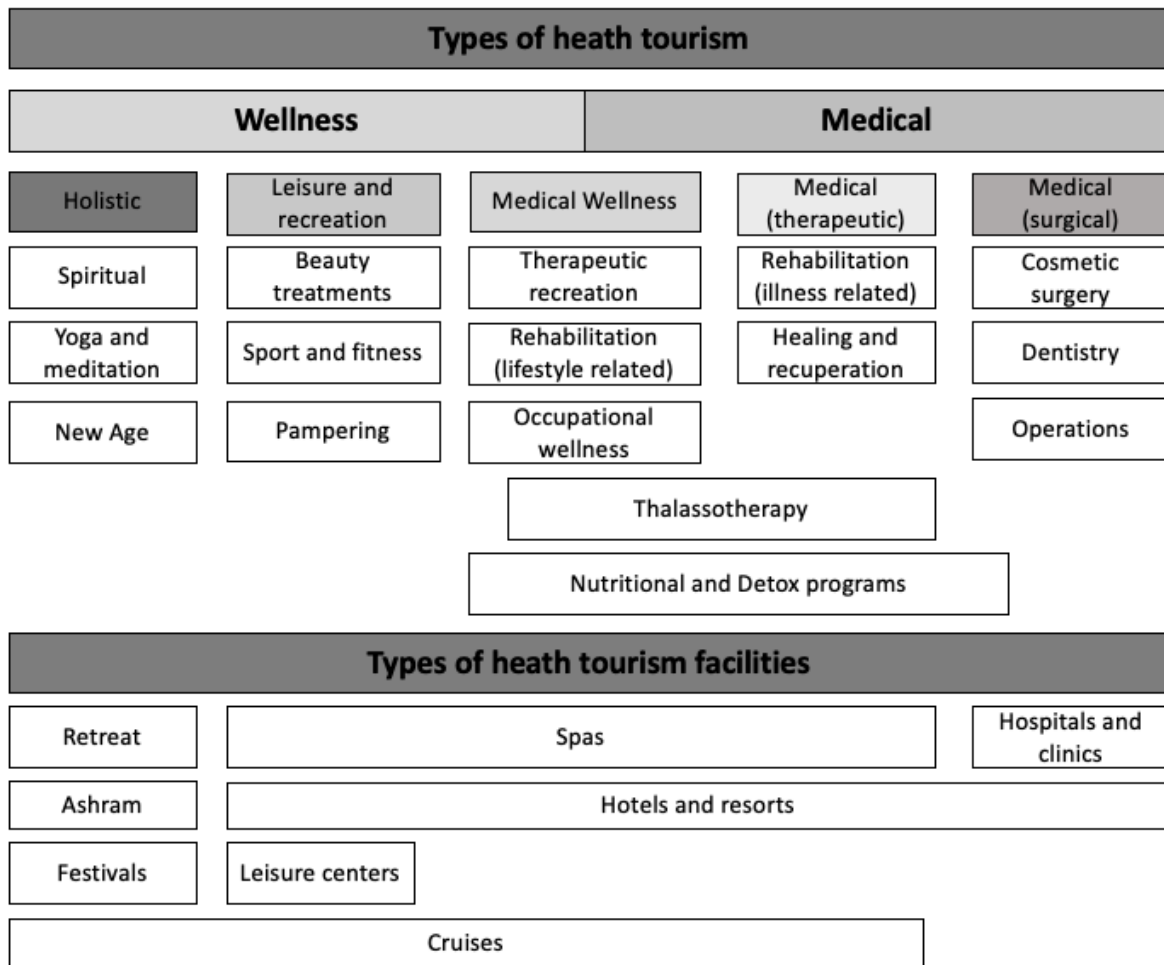


Figure 1. A spectrum of Health Tourism

Source: Smith & Puczko (2008)

2.2 Wellness tourism

2.2.1 Defining wellness tourism

Consumers are willing to pay more for travel products and experiences that cater to their desire for wellbeing, contributing to the exponential growth of wellness tourism (Al-Ansi et al., 2025; Martins et al., 2025). Before discussing wellness tourism, it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of health and wellness concepts, as one challenge is that the term “wellness” is often confused with definitions of health. The terms are sometimes employed interchangeably, but often emphasise very different concepts (Smith & Puczko, 2008; Voigt, 2014). Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing in the absence of illness or infirmity (WHO, 1948). Smith and Kelly (2006) argued that wellness is much more than freedom from the risk of disease. Wellness is a multidimensional concept that may consist of physical, mental, spiritual, sexual, educational, occupational, economic, political, social, cultural, ethical, environmental and existential attributes (K.-H. Chen, Liu, &

Chang, 2013). Thus, wellness is fundamentally oriented toward fostering harmony across mental, physical, spiritual, or biological health in general. It is more strongly associated with encouraging positive lifestyle changes and participation in healthy activities than with treating or curing a specific medical condition (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). Based on this research, wellness encompasses human health from a comprehensive perspective, emphasising that individuals will actively preserve and promote their own health.

The concept of wellness was first (allegedly) proposed by an American doctor Halbert Dunn, in 1959 when he described “high-level wellness” as a state of health, including an overall sense of wellbeing, viewing human beings as composed of body, mind, and spirit, and as fundamentally dependent on their environment (Heung & Kucukusta, 2013; Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Smith and Kelly (2006) agreed the much-cited definition of wellness by Myers, Sweeney and Witmer (2005) as a lifestyle focused on achieving optimal health and wellbeing, wherein individuals seek to harmonise body, mind, and spirit to engage more fully with both human and natural environments. This definition underscores the integration of body, mind, and spirit and aligns with holistic wellness models while highlighting connection to social factors. Additionally, GWI (2021, p. 1) defined wellness as “the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to the state of holistic health”. It can be seen as a complement to the earlier definition by conceptualising wellness as an active behaviour, which is more useful in a practical context. Essentially, wellness represents an active, comprehensive, individualistic approach to healthcare and lifestyle choice that aims to prevent illness and promote a state of well-being. The growing acceptance of a multidimensional perspective on wellness has led to different definitions, depending on whether emphasis is placed on the benefits sought by wellness tourists or on the attributes of the destination, the facilities and services (Voigt, 2014).

Wellness tourism has recently emerged as a significant area of interest in academic literature (Yaoqi Li et al., 2025; Martins et al., 2025). This form of tourism involves travellers seeking out destinations that offer wellness treatments, fitness programs and other wellness-related activities and services that promote holistic wellbeing (Mikulić, Šerić, & Krešić, 2024). Tourism researchers have widely agreed that wellness tourism is a subset of health tourism (Baum, Lockstone-Binney, & Nimri, 2025; K.-H. Chen et al., 2013; Damijanić, 2019; Heung & Kucukusta, 2013; Laing & Weiler, 2007; Mikulić et al., 2024; Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001), whereas various researchers have employed the term in different ways, leading to ambiguity in

its definition (Jeong, 2024; Martins et al., 2025; Voigt, 2014). On the one hand, some definitions emphasise the significance of wellness-related tourism activities. For example, in the early exploration of wellness tourism, Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) defined it as the sum of all the relationships and phenomena arising from travel by individuals whose primary motivation is to maintain or enhance their health. This definition of wellness tourism is widely cited due to its simplicity and clarity. Mueller and Kaufmann (2001) further argued that individuals travelling for wellness purposes should stay in specialised accommodations and require a comprehensive service package that includes physical fitness, healthy nutrition, meditation, and mental activities. These two researchers acknowledged that wellness tourism services and facilities are constantly evolving. Moreover, Smith and Puczko (2013) defined wellness tourism as “the trips aiming at a state of health featuring the harmony of the body, mind and spirit, self-responsibility, physical fitness, beauty care, healthy nutrition, relaxation, meditation, mental activity, education, environmental sensitivity and social contacts as fundamental elements” (p. 208). This definition recognises wellness as a multidimensional concept, aligning with contemporary understandings of wellness. However, it contains many elements, making it difficult to measure (e.g., education). These definitions uniquely concentrate on the supply side of wellness tourism from a destination’s point of view.

On the other hand, several definitions of wellness tourism emphasise the specific motivations of wellness tourists. For instance, the Global Wellness Institute (GWI) stated that wellness tourism is travel related to the purpose of maintaining or enhancing an individual’s wellbeing (GWI, 2018). Although this definition stands apart from passive approaches where people purposefully seek enhanced wellness, it is a broad approach to the definition of wellness tourism since wellbeing improvement can be found in various types of tourism. Indeed, travel has the potential to contribute to diverse dimensions of health and wellbeing, including the physical and psychological benefits of rest and relaxation, the social benefits of connecting with other stakeholders, and the intellectual benefits of learning about new destinations (Smith & Puczko, 2008). Hence, Voigt (2014, p. 33) suggested wellness tourism is “*the sum of all phenomena resulting from a journey by individuals whose motive in whole or in part is to maintain or promote their health and wellbeing, and who stay at least one night at a facility that is specifically designed to holistically enable and enhance people’s physical, psychological, spiritual and/or social wellbeing, and that ideally also takes into account environmental and community wellness in a sustainable manner*”. This definition is considered more structured and practical in both research and industry to identify, measure, and classify.

However, requiring an overnight stay may omit significant segments, such as a day spa or a day retreat. The most recent definition formed by UNWTO stated wellness tourism as a form of travel aimed at preserving and improving multiple facets of individual wellbeing, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, occupational, intellectual, and spiritual aspects (UNWTO, 2018). Wellness tourists typically participate in preventative and health-promoting activities aimed at enhancing their lifestyle, including fitness routines, nutritious diets, relaxation practices, indulgent treatments, and various forms of therapeutic interventions at the destinations. This is, so far, the most current, widely accepted conceptualisation of wellness tourism (Lopes & Rodríguez-López, 2022; Smith, 2021).

Despite the varied operationalisation of wellness, scholars generally concur on the importance of preserving its multidimensional character. In this study, to examine tourist motivations and behaviours, the motivational-oriented descriptions by Voigt (2014) and UNWTO (2018) are adapted to capture the motivations and preferences of individuals engaging in wellness tourism. Therefore, wellness tourism in the present research is proposed as *“types of tourism which is taken by individuals whose motive in whole or in part is to maintain or promote their health and wellbeing, and who stay at a facility that is specifically designed to improve and balance all of the main domains of human life including physical, mental, emotional, occupational, intellectual and spiritual”*.

2.2.2 Differences between wellness tourism and medical tourism

There is still considerable debate among tourism researchers about whether wellness tourism and medical tourism represent two distinct typologies (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001; Puczkó & Bachvarov, 2006; Zhong et al., 2021) or alternatively, overlap with each other (C. M. Hall, 2011; Laing & Weiler, 2007; Zhong et al., 2021). One of the primary reasons for this ambiguity lies in the varying interpretations and meanings ascribed to the terms “wellness tourism” and “medical tourism” across different countries, cultures, and research domains (C. M. Hall, 2012). Voigt (2014) also indicated that these terms are often employed interchangeably but typically illustrate very fundamentally different concepts. Voigt (2014) supported the viewpoint that such confusing use of wellness and medical tourism causes too broad a conceptualisation and generalisation. Hence, it is critical to distinguish between wellness and medical tourism as fundamentally different tourism segments in the literature.

From one viewpoint, Voigt and Pforr (2014) suggest medical tourism is rooted in the biomedical health paradigm that primarily concentrates on the treatment or cure of diseases, while the wellness tourism approach emphasises the promotion of health and overall wellbeing through a holistic integration of various aspects, such as body, mind, spirit, environmental, and social elements, along with active personal responsibility, healthy lifestyle choices, and the realisation of human potential. Puczkó and Bachvarov (2006) defined medical tourism as the utilisation of services at a specific location to receive therapeutic treatment or to stay at a medical resort, with a minimum duration of stay typically required for the purpose of curing particular illnesses. Moreover, medical tourists are considered sick patients and travel to seek potential treatments for a particular illness (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001; Puczkó & Bachvarov, 2006; Smith & Puczkó, 2013; Zhong et al., 2024). In contrast, individuals who engage in wellness tourism are typically healthy but actively seek facilities and activities designed to foster their wellbeing (Martins et al., 2025). Wellness tourism integrates different wellness-related programs and treatments, often incorporating natural agents, to satisfy tourists' complex desires. Voigt and Pforr (2014) also indicated that both types of tourism are generally set in different locations and recruit staff from different source pools. Medical tourism generally relies on orthodox health professionals, namely doctors and nurses, to provide treatment, whereas wellness tourism personnel tend to employ non-mainstream medical professionals but instead include complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practitioners, beauticians, nutritionists and lifestyle coaches, or even religious figures such as monks (Voigt, 2014). Additionally, contrary to medical tourism, wellness activities are proactive and voluntary (GWI, 2018). **Table 1** illustrates the significant differences between wellness tourism and medical tourism.

Table 1. A comparison of medical tourism and wellness tourism

Characteristics	Medical tourism	Wellness tourism	Authors
<i>Approach</i>	Illness curation	Health promotion Disease prevention	(C. M. Hall, 2011; Voigt, 2014)
<i>Customer</i>	Undertaken by people who are sick	Undertaken by people who are healthy	(Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001; Smith & Puczkó, 2013)
<i>Service offers</i>	Medically necessary, invasive, and/or overseen by a doctor.	Non-invasive and non-medical in nature.	(GWI, 2018; Voigt, 2014)

Characteristics	Medical tourism	Wellness tourism	Authors
<i>Employees</i>	Orthodox health professionals (doctors and nurses)	Not mainstream health professionals (CAM practitioners, beauticians, nutritionists and lifestyle coaches, or even religious personnel)	(Voigt, 2014)
<i>Locations</i>	Hospital or medical centre	Health spa resorts	(K.-H. Chen et al., 2013)
<i>Interaction</i>	Reactively	Proactively	(GWI, 2018)

On the other hand, there is evidence of overlap between medical tourism and wellness tourism. **Figure 2** illustrates a representation and overlap of medical and wellness tourism in the general context of health tourism. It proposes the continuums of health from illness to wellness and health promotion from curative, preventive, to promotive. As discussed in the previous part, while medical tourism focuses on curative (typically at private clinics, corporate hospitals), wellness tourism emphasises health promotion and disease prevention (at beauty spa hotels/resorts, lifestyle resorts, spiritual retreats). However, they are not mutually exclusive (C. M. Hall, 2011). Indeed, Laing and Weiler (2007) demonstrate that wellness tourism and medical tourism can overlap in terms of psychological benefits. While certain types of wellness tourism focus on enhancing mental and spiritual health, surgical procedures that improve physical appearance can also contribute to improved mental and physical wellbeing. GWI (2018) reported that some top-end destination spas and resorts (e.g., therapeutic lifestyle retreats, medical spas) may provide curative and promotive treatments and are typically operated by licensed medical professionals. Additionally, due to increasing hybridisation between wellness and medical tourism offerings, Voigt (2014) suggested the term “medical wellness”, which represents the overlap between wellness and medical tourism offerings. Many medical wellness providers (e.g., medical hotels, medical spas) now serve both medical and wellness visitors simultaneously. Medical wellness is a feature of some spa destinations, which means a medical practitioner-supervised wellness programme as well as other spa services may also include health institutions. For example, balneotherapy (water-based medical therapies) are accepted as a legitimate form of medicine organised within the healthcare system, but also focused on relaxation and recreational benefits (Smith & Puczkó, 2016a). Thus, balneology sits somewhere on the border between wellness and medical tourism. According to GWI

(2021), the “medical wellness” domain is also quickly expanding and becoming a primary medical-type offering by spas, health resorts, and sanatoriums. These providers often extend their services to relatives or companions who accompany an ill patient as well (Voigt, 2014).

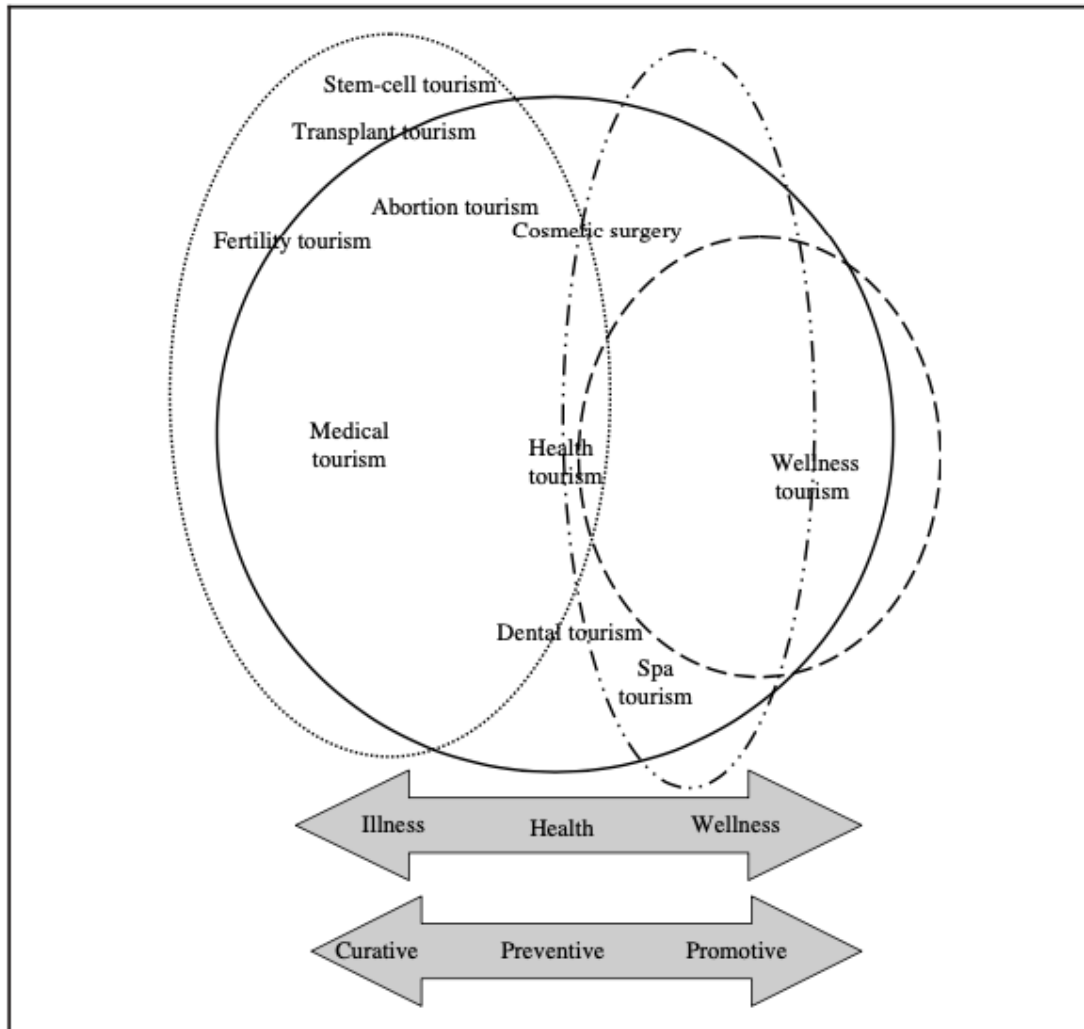


Figure 2. Medical tourism and wellness tourism in the overall context of health tourism

Source: Hall (2011)

2.3 Wellness retreats as a tourism destination

2.3.1 The concept of tourism destination

“Without tourist attractions, there would be no tourism” (Lew, 1987, p. 554). This illustrates the fundamental role of tourist attractions in the existence of tourism. Lew (1987) identified three characteristics of tourist attractions: ideographic, organisational, and cognitive perspectives. The ideographic view considers the general attributes of a place, such as natural beauty, climate, culture, social characteristics, built facilities, and so on. The organisational perspective focuses on attractions' spatial, capacity, and temporal nature. The cognitive

perspective refers to studying the tourists' perceptions, emotions, behaviours, and expectations while they are visiting a tourist attraction. Lew (1987) further proposed that tourist attractions, or destinations, comprise all factors of a "non-home" environment that drive individuals to leave their usual place of residence. These factors include the landscapes to visit, activities to partake in, experiences to remember, as well as supporting components such as transportation, accommodations, and dining facilities.

To define a tourist attraction, MacCannell (2013) proposed that a tourist attraction is conceptualised as an empirical association involving a tourist, a sight, and a marker or image that confers significance upon the site. The UNWTO defines a tourist attraction as a physical or cultural characteristic of a specific location that individual travellers or tourists perceive as fulfilling one or more of their leisure-related needs. These characteristics may be ambient, such as climate, culture, vegetation, or scenery, or they may be specific to a place, including events like theatre performances, museums, or natural features such as waterfalls (UNWTO, 2000). In sum, the term "attraction" includes not only the historical landmarks, amusement parks, and notable natural landscapes but also the services and facilities that cater to the daily needs of visitors (Lew, 1987).

The term "destination" was commonly used in the early 2000s (Framke, 2002). Discussing the concept of destination in the literature, Framke (2002, p. 105) proposed a destination as the collective combination of interests, activities, facilities, infrastructure, and attractions that together establish the unique identity of a location. He further indicates that the destination has a static dimension (the place) and a dynamic dimension (the combination of agents and products/services). Voigt and Pforr (2014) asserted that although numerous definitions of a destination exist, fundamentally, a destination is a geographical location selected by tourists as the focus of their travel, fulfilling their needs and expectations. Remarkably, the precise geographical boundaries of such destinations are often ambiguous and are commonly delineated according to administrative or political structures. UNWTO identified a tourism destination as a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries where visitors can spend an overnight. It is the cluster (colocation) of products and services, activities and experiences along the tourism value chain, and a basic unit of tourism analysis (Saari, 2022, p. 3). Thus, this is critical for establishing destination management organisations (DMOs) to strategically plan, integrate, and collaborate for the long-term development of the tourism destination.

As the demand for positive psychological wellbeing continues to grow internationally, tourists are increasingly looking for destinations that offer various wellness-oriented experiences and products (Al-Ansi et al., 2025). This trend has led destinations to strategically offer wellness services and position themselves as wellness-oriented places to attract travellers (Al-Ansi et al., 2025; GWI, 2018; Rawlinson & Wiltshier, 2016). In wellness tourism, destinations are required to provide a comprehensive positive wellness experience to foster tourists' holistic wellbeing (S. I. Kim et al., 2024). Therefore, a wellness destination can be defined as a particular type of travel destination renowned for wellness-oriented offerings, encompassing a variety of services, facilities, and experiences designed to promote the *holistic wellbeing of visitors* (B. Liu et al., 2024). Concerning geographical scale, wellness tourism destinations vary widely, ranging from multinational or multiregional areas to national, regional, and local levels, including islands, cities, communities, or individual, independent resort complexes (Voigt & Pforr, 2014). At the multiregional level, a report by GWI (2021) indicated that wellness tourism is intensively concentrated in North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific. An example is the "Alpine Wellness" initiative in Europe, which reflects the distinctive features of the Alps by promoting wellness products primarily in South Tyrol (Italy), Bavaria (Germany), Switzerland, and Austria (Pechlaner & Fischer, 2006). Nationally, Austria was among the pioneering countries to strategically leverage wellness tourism by offering treatments that cater to the body-mind-spirit desires, drawing on cultural and natural resources such as hot springs (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). Conversely, Hawaii, widely recognised as a premier wellness destination, is noted for its prominence in the wellness industry, which does not utilise its thermal waters. The successful case of Hawaii also reflects a different approach to wellness destinations, focusing on wellness solutions instead of hot spring bathing. Moreover, many regional wellness destinations have been developed by the countries. For instance, *The Wellness Valley* aims to connect carefully selected tourism entrepreneurs, including hotels, tour operators, and beaches, to create and sell wellness vacations in Romagna (Italy) (wellnessvalley.it, 2022). Regarding properties, three classifications of wellness tourism operators can be identified, namely beauty spa resorts/hotels, lifestyle resorts, and spiritual retreats.

2.3.2 *Wellness retreat destinations*

The scope of this study focuses on wellness destination as a single, independent tourism operator which is specially designed to holistically enable and promote individual's physical,

psychological, spiritual and/or social wellbeing. According to Voigt (2014), three distinct core providers of wellness tourism include Beauty spa hotels/resorts, Lifestyle resorts, and Spiritual retreats. The primary focus of beauty spa hotels/resorts is on physical care and non-invasive beauty treatments. In contrast, lifestyle resorts encompass a broader range of health-promoting domains, including nutrition, exercise, and educational classes or workshops, all typically integrated into a comprehensive program tailored to the individual needs of customers. Lifestyle resorts can come in various size and levels and generally require substantial investment due to the need for extensive facilities, specialised experts, and dedicated spaces. Spiritual retreats, on the other hand, are generally based on some specific teachings or philosophy (e.g., yoga, Taichi, Vipassana) and require participants to adhere to a structured routine and schedule. Compared to the two other types, spiritual retreats tend to offer more basic accommodations, as participants often stay in temples, monasteries, ashrams, or yoga and meditation centres and are sometimes expected to engage in communal activities such as washing dishes after meal. However, the boundaries among these three typologies of wellness tourism operators are increasingly fluid due to ongoing diversification and specialisation within their wellness offerings.

This paper considers wellness retreats as a tourism destination and offers insights into this emerging niche sector of wellness tourism. Retreat is a special lodging segment that offers most or all amenities throughout a guest's visit and supplies access to substantial recreation or leisure space (Fu et al., 2015). Based on the aforementioned typologies, wellness retreats lean toward a lifestyle resort. Wellness retreats provide a place where visitors can escape from the monotony, stress and busyness of their everyday lives. They offer a diverse range of healing or health-enhancing therapies, such as yoga, meditation, fitness, nutritional programs, mindfulness activities. The length of stay can vary but is typically several days with the common length of time being six to ten days. Many visitors are experiencing the negative effects of urban living, work-related burnout, or personal circumstances; thus, wellness retreats offer them a quiet, peaceful and therapeutic environments to be healed. Besides their primary purpose is rest and relaxation, some retreats offer a deeper eudaimonic experience which foster self-realisation and self-development. Hence, the wellness retreats are also quite closely connected to spiritual travel which comes from the process of wanting to connect with the true self.

Wellness service users are generally identified as relatively healthy people who do not require curative treatments but seek to enhance their overall wellbeing through holistic approaches. As previously discussed, wellness retreat experiences not only offer a place for relaxation, stress relief and escapism, but also enhance their physical fitness and body image, fulfil psychological needs related to self-identity, and foster transcendence through personal reflection, contemplation and the pursuit of meaning (Smith, 2023). The discussion in the following sections will dive deeper into the theories of tourist motivations, subsequently provide a comprehensive literature review of the current studies on the motivations of wellness tourists.

2.4 Tourist motivation

2.4.1 Theories of travel motivation

The motivational studies of tourists have received steady attention since the inception of this curriculum (Beard & Ragheb, 1983; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Ryan & Glendon, 1998; Šimková & Holzner, 2014). Motivations are not directly observable and are commonly considered the significant driver behind all actions (Iso-Ahola, 1982; Martins et al., 2025; Pearce & Lee, 2005). Motivation constructs subsume the antecedents and processes underlying the development of intentions and choice behaviours to satisfy a physical or psychological need (Kanfer, 1990). Thus, scholars have developed various theories to explain why people behave as they do, including partaking in leisure activities (Beard & Ragheb, 1983).

One motivational theory that has gained traction and arguments is Maslow (1943)'s hierarchy of needs. The theory presents human needs in increasing order of motivational strength: the physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, self-esteem needs, and then ultimately, the self-actualisation need (Maslow, 1943; Pearce & Caltabiano, 1983). The movement has occurred from a state of tension, which displays a quest for the restoration or equilibrium (Crompton, 1979; Krippendorf, 1982). Despite many critiques, Maslow's theory has been influential in informing thought, especially its strong connection with the tourism perspective (Güzel, Sahin, & Ryan, 2020; Ryan, 2002). Less experienced visitors satisfy needs lower in Maslow's hierarchy. In contrast, the experienced visitors are more concerned with self-esteem and self-actualisation, which is conceptualised as a willingness to take a psychological risk to be one's sense of self. Later, travel motivations and Maslow's list of needs were investigated by early tourism scholars (Beard & Ragheb, 1983;

Dann, 1981) and in recent wellness tourism (Chi, Chi, Deng, & Price, 2024; Yaoqi Li et al., 2025; Saari, Grénman, & Varhelahti, 2023). Based on Maslow's model, Pearce (1996) proposed the Travel Career Ladder (TCL) to offer a transparent system for categorising the broad range of tourist motives. Pearce postulates five motivational levels, consisting of (1) relaxation needs, (2) safety/security needs, (3) relationship needs, (4) self-esteem and development needs, and (5) self-actualisation/fulfilment needs (Pearce, 1996; Pearce & Lee, 2005). In Pearce's model, these motivations can be sorted into two approaches: self-directed and other-directed. Although there are many implications for this travel motivation theory, its empirical validity is still questioned (Ryan, 1998). In an attempt to refine the TCL theory, Pearce and Lee (2005) proposed a travel career pattern (TCP) approach. In these conceptual reformulation, 14 motivational factors were identified including (1) escape/relax, (2) novelty, (3) relationship (security), (4) relationship (strengthen), (5) autonomy, (6) nostalgia, (7) self-development (personal development), (8) self-development (host-site involvement), (9) self-actualize, (10) nature, (11) romance, (12) isolation, (13) stimulation, and (14) recognition. It is suggested that highly experienced travellers focused on motivations in terms of self-development and nature seeking, while low-experienced travellers emphasised stimulation, personal development, romance, and recognition. The TCP reinforces the fundamental travel motivations in the TCL (escape/relax, novelty, relationship, and self-development) as the backbone of all travel motivation.

From the sociological perspective, Krippendorf (1982) has perceived holidaying as a result of the 'social dysfunctioning' of the society. The researcher asserted that human beings are driven to travel by the wish and longing to escape from the monotony of daily reality. The boredom may come from the cold rationality of offices, the impoverishment of human connection, the degradation of nature, and the repression of emotions, which lead to stress, physical and psychological exhaustion, and spiritual emptiness (Krippendorf, 1986b). Focusing on escapism as one of the most fundamental forms of motivation for tourists, Iso-Ahola (1982) referred to two motivations for tourist activity: the desire to escape the everyday environment and, second, to seek an intrinsic reward through travel. In Iso Ahola's social psychological model of tourism motivation, both approaches interact with personal and interpersonal areas of activity. Accordingly, the model covered four aspects of tourist motivations: (1) the individual may escape the personal world (e.g., personal problems and difficulties) or (2) the interpersonal world (e.g., colleagues, family), and (3) individual may seek personal reward (e.g., rest and relaxation, education), or (4) interpersonal rewards (e.g., interaction with friends, relatives).

Iso Ahola's theory was operationalised and empirically examined in different tourism scenarios by Snepenger, King, Marshall, and Uysal (2006).

Furthermore, "push and pull" approach in connection with tourist motivation has been the most frequent used in the tourism studies (Martins et al., 2025), particularly in wellness tourism (Kessler, Lee, & Whittingham, 2020; Saari et al., 2023; Subawa, Mimaki, Mimaki, Baykal, & Utami, 2023). The push factors refer to tourist motivation per se, whereas the pull factors include external stimuli primarily associated with attributes and attractiveness of the destination, which induce the traveller to visit after the initial decision to undertake a trip has been made (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Ryan, 2020a). In terms of the push factors, they are associated with socio-psychological motives (Crompton, 1979). In the early work by Dann (1977), push elements for a vacation are conceptualised by anomie and ego-enhancement. Accordingly, anomie lies in the desire to transcend the sense of isolation obtained in everyday lives, motivating people to "get away from it all" during a holiday. Ego-enhancement, on the other hand, relates to personality needs and the desire for recognition. Following the study of Dann, Crompton (1979) revealed seven push social-psychological motives, including (1) relaxation, (2) prestige, (3) exploration and evaluation of self, (4) facilitation of social interactions, (5) escape from a perceived mundane environment, (6) regression, (7) enhancement of kinship relationships. Prayag and Ryan (2011) identified common push factors in the literature: escape, novelty, social interaction, and prestige. In essence, push factors are defined by reference to the question: what motivates tourists to travel? Dann (1977).

On the other side, pull factors are identified as the elements affecting when, where, and how tourists travel. Crompton (1979) asserted that pull factors explain the choice of destination. An example of pull factors can be found in Dann (1977), describing sunshine and sea as attracting tourists to a given resort. Güzel et al. (2020) also indicated that pull factors are related to unique characteristics of a destination, such as favourable weather, friendly people, and delicious local food. Uysal and Jurowski (1994) suggested that pull factors encompass tangible resources (e.g., beaches, recreation facilities), cultural attractions, visitors' perceptions and expectations (e.g., novelty, benefit expectation), and the marketing image of the destination. Remarkably, prior studies agreed that push and pull factors represent two distinct decision-making stages occurring at different times; however, analytically, push factors precede pull factors (Dann, 1977, 1981; Güzel et al., 2020; Klenosky, 2002). In other words, individuals are first pushed by internal motivational factors to consider travel and subsequently pulled or

attracted by the specific attributes of a tourism destination. **Table 2** presented the summary of travel motivations theories in tourism research.

Table 2. Historical psychological theories relating to travel motivations

Authors	Theory	Travel motivations
Maslow (1943)	Maslow’s hierarchy of needs	Physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, self-esteem needs, and the self-actualization need
Pearce (1996) Pearce and Lee (2005)	Travel Career Ladder/ Travel Career Pattern	Escape/relax, novelty, relationship, and self-development
Iso-Ahola (1982)	A Social Psychological Model of Tourism Motivation	Personal/ Interpersonal escaping the everyday environments Personal/ Interpersonal seeking intrinsic rewards
(Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981; Klenosky, 2002; Uysal & Jurowski, 1994; Yuan & McDonald, 1990)	Push-pull factors	Push factors refer to intrinsic motivators Pull factors refer to external stimuli

As discussed in the above literature review, although there has been substantial progress in the topic of tourist motivation, no commonly accepted theoretical or conceptual framework has been established (Pearce & Lee, 2005). According to Beard and Ragheb (1983), compared to the physiological needs underlying basic behaviours such as eating and seeking warmth, no clear external drivers are compelling people to engage in particular travel activities. Iso-Ahola (1982) also added that motivation is one of the most critical antecedents of leisure travel. Given the complexity of the motivation construct on tourism, the difficulties in examining this area are considerable (Prayag & Ryan, 2011). It is even more dynamic from the wellness tourism perspective (Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015). While discussions on wellness tourism and motivations of wellness tourists are readily available and provide essential insights, researchers, underscoring the complexity of wellness, have called for further investigations into the motivations of tourists in relation to wellness. S. I. Kim et al. (2024) suggested that wellness is not just a travel destination, but a momentous journey that helps meet tourists’ needs in comprehensive experiences. It consists of a holistic tourist experience from attractions, lodging, amenities, location, and interpersonal connections (Majeed & Kim, 2022). With the development of wellness tourism in recent years, the motives for wellness travel thus become

quite complex and the research on the motivations of wellness tourists has garnered considerable attention across various contexts. The wellness destinations became the place that nurtured the bodies and the spirits of holiday-takers and wellness-seekers. The following section presents a comprehensive review of the current literature on tourists' motivations for visiting wellness destinations.

2.4.2 A comprehensive review of motivation factors for wellness tourism

Wellness-seeking travellers are a broad and diverse group of consumers with different motivations, interests, and values. Most studies found that relaxation is a primary motive of wellness travellers who mainly seek to escape and rest from everyday routines (Ashton, 2018; Bočkus, Vento, Tammi, Komppula, & Kolesnikova, 2023; Damijanić, 2021; Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015; Hritz, Sidman, & D'Abundo, 2014; Huh, Lee, & Lee, 2019; E. Kim, Chiang, & Tang, 2017; Lim, Kim, & Lee, 2016). This includes the desire for rest, escapism, self-care and rejuvenation, often in serene and natural environments. They recuperate from physical illness or mental stress and then restores lost energy or health. Research also found a strong motivation for many wellness tourists to connect with nature and engage in outdoor activities (Kessler et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2016). Moreover, improving physical and mental health is a significant motivator. This includes motivations related to fitness, diet, beauty and general health awareness (Damijanić, 2019; Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015; Dryglas & Salamaga, 2018; Huh et al., 2019; Kessler et al., 2020). Past studies also suggested that the appeal of luxury and high-status experiences drives wellness tourism. This includes the desire for high-end services and prestigious wellness destinations (Chi et al., 2024; E. Kim et al., 2017). Another key motivator is improving social relations and engaging in social activities. Wellness tourists desire socialisation and building interpersonal connections during their trip, according to the study of Dimitrovski and Todorović (2015), Bočkus et al. (2023), Chi et al. (2024) and Xia, Lee, and Kim (2024).

The wellness holiday serves as a catalyst for self-exploration, allowing individuals to create their own sacred spaces. Wellness retreats particularly motivated participants to self-diagnose their needs or issues. Maslow (1943) early work also recognised the pursuit of peak experiences and self-actualisation to fulfil one's full potential on a physical, emotional, and mental level. Prior research has shown that self-development is one of the primary motives visitors seek at destinations (Ashton, 2018; E. Kim et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2016). Specifically,

Aleksijevits (2019) demonstrated that visitors are more willing to learn a particular new skill on a wellness holiday. Bočkus et al. (2023) revealed that wellness tourists in different countries are looking for both hedonistic and eudaimonic wellness experiences, not as materialistic pursuits, but as an expression of self-actualisation and self-fulfilment. Chi et al. (2024) investigated the drivers motivating visitors to stay at wellness hotels by employing Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Their research found that self-development, represented by knowledge and wellness-seeking motives, is the core of wellness hotel motivations and behaviours.

Well-known theories in tourism suggest that obtaining self-actualisation is one of the consequences that visitors wish to achieve through trips. Holidaying, such as visiting sacred sites and engaging in rituals and meditation, offers people time to reflect. Based on the literature review, rather than using the word "self-actualisation", past studies highlighted an intentional search for spiritual benefits through wellness experiences, such as transcendence (Ashton, 2018), restoration (Huh et al., 2019), spiritual & medical improvement (Xia et al., 2024), and personal development (Bočkus et al., 2023), that motivate people's participation in wellness trips. Wellness tourism is among the oldest forms of tourism if one considers the historical quests for spiritual healing (Smith & Kelly, 2006), exemplified by the Greeks and others who travelled to consult oracles and shamans, as well as pilgrims visiting holy places (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). Historical evidence from Syrian, Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Chinese cultures described the role of visiting sacred springs to obtain therapeutic and spiritual benefits (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Voigt, 2014). Steiner and Reisinger (2006) asserted that spirituality helps people explore personal meanings and purpose in life. Spirituality also emphasises life's meaning and self-actualisation. Nowadays, wellness no longer simply focuses on the physical health of the body; it also encompasses spiritual, psychological, and mental elements of experience. Consequently, self-actualisation in wellness reflects a feeling of wholeness, inner harmony and peace that allows looking beyond oneself (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006). A summary of push motivation factors of wellness tourists is presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3. A summary of internal motives of wellness travellers

Authors	Tourism Context	Method	Country	Sample	Motives
Hritz et al. (2014)	Wellness tourism	Quantitative study (survey, N=315)	USA	College student (Gen Y)	Physical activity Newness Escape Visiting friends and relatives
Dimitrovski and Todorović (2015)	Spa tourism	Quantitative study (survey, N=165)	Serbia	Visitors who have visited spa hotels	Rejuvenating Socialization and excitement Hedonism Obsession with health and beauty Relaxation Escape from routine
Lim et al. (2016)	Wellness tourism	Quantitative study (survey, N=573)	South Korea	Visitors at an arboretum	Relaxation and rest Self-exploration Novelty Sightseeing
E. Kim et al. (2017), subsequent study by (B. Liu, Li, Kralj, Moyle, & He, 2022)	Wellness tourism	Quantitative study (survey, N=756)	Taiwan	Visitors at hotels and tourist attractions	Self-development Relaxation and escape Novelty and knowledge Prestige and luxury
Ashton (2018)	Spiritual retreat tourism	Quantitative study (survey, N=400)	Thailand	Visitors at the spiritual retreats	Transcendence Novelty Physical appearance Escape Relaxation Self-esteem
Dryglas and Salamaga (2018)	Spa resorts	Quantitative study (survey, N=2050)	Poland	Visitors at spa resorts	Tourism Prevention Treatment
Aleksijevits (2019)	Wellness holiday destination	Mixed-method study	UK	Customers from travel agency	Self-development Self-satisfaction
Damijanić (2019)	Wellness tourism	Quantitative study (survey, N=548)	Croatia	Visitors staying in wellness hotels	Health trend Relaxation and award Novelty

Authors	Tourism Context	Method	Country	Sample	Motives
Huh et al. (2019)	Spa tourism	Quantitative study (survey, N=309)	USA	Visitors at luxury hotel/resorts	Seeking pleasure Spiritual and medical restoration Stress reduction and relaxation
Kessler et al. (2020)	Wellness tourism	Mixed-method study	Diverse	Members of wellness association	Healthy food and fitness Nature and outdoors Self-care
Bočkus et al. (2023)	Wellness tourism	Qualitative method (Survey, N=1,485)	Finland, Russia, Lithuania	Visitors	Resting and relaxation Status Beauty and appearance Personal development Nature and outdoors Socialization
Chi et al. (2024)	Wellness tourism	Mixed-method, multi-study	North America	Individuals who were interested in wellness services	Value for money Incongruence Knowledge seeking Wellness seeking Prestige seeking Social influence Escapism seeking Relatedness seeking
Xia et al. (2024)	Spa tourism	Quantitative study (survey, N=270)	China	Spa goers	Spiritual & medical Entertainment & networking Relaxation Aesthetics

Prior studies in tourism and psychological science has demonstrated that a wellness-related products can be transformative (Aleksijevits, 2019; Fu et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2016; Rana et al., 2025); Xia et al. (2024). Yet, the mechanisms by which retreat experience positively impact visitors' lives were not fully explored. More specifically, the connections between the experience content and the wellness retreat settings and personal transformations of retreat participants remains unearthed. The next section will discuss about the theory of transformation first coined by Pine and Gilmore (2013) that leads justifications of the transformative benefits of wellness retreat tourism experiences.

2.5 Transformative experiences

2.5.1 Transformation Economy

The concept of impermanence recognises that the human condition is in a constant state of flux, that things change in our lives on many levels. In today's era, characterised by constant change, the notion of customer transformation has gained significant relevance (Robledo, 2024). Customers increasingly seek meaningful experiences that resonate on a personal and emotional level and possess the potential to be life-changing (Celuch & Neuhofer, 2024). In line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954), self-actualisation represents the highest level of state a person could obtain, which connects to transformative experiences promising to lead to epistemic and emotional expansion. For their part, Pine and Gilmore (2013) predicted that transformation will be the next wave of economic phenomena. They emphasised the role of the distinct economic offering that provides customers opportunities to achieve their personal aspirations. Further, Nelson (2017), in his book *The Transformational Consumer*, indicated that there are an expanding group of people who consciously view their consumption as a means for personal development and growth, and are constantly making progress toward living a healthier, wealthier, wiser life. Transformation can be considered as a strategic mindset towards an aspirational goal to take the business to the next level of performance to elevate its market proposition (Kandampully et al., 2021). Thus, these perspectives underscore the critical role of transformation in customer research and firm practices.

Transformative experiences are regarded as the most profound among all experience types because of their rarity and persistent outcomes (Zimbatu & Russell-Bennett, 2025). Such experiences facilitate the achievement of personal goals and development, resulting in significant changes in individuals' mindset, beliefs, and behaviours (Celuch, Neuhofer, & Rihova, 2025). Given its significance, transformative experiences have garnered considerable attention in service marketing research over the recent years (Heinonen & Sörhammar, 2024; Kandampully et al., 2021; Robledo, 2024). While it tends to be viewed as a value-added element to current service offerings (Fu et al., 2015), some experiences are so meaningful and impactful that they change us in some significant way. Transformations happen by a process of critical reflection, whereby individuals reassess and reframe assumptions about a particular subject through various experiences (Teoh, Wang, & Kwek, 2021). According to Robledo (2024), a change may include an individual's cognitive, psychological, physiological, affective, or spiritual dimensions. Such transformations are a distinct economic offering. While

experiences happen inside of us, transformations change us from the inside out. Individual customers must be committed to achieving their own aspirations under the guidance of others. With transformations, the customer *is* the product (Pine & Gilmore, 2013). According to Robledo (2024), these customers tend to consider their buying decisions as a way to improve their personal lives, elevate their wellbeing while aligning with their self-identity. Furthermore, the environments in which transformation can be triggered are manifold (Celuch, 2024). Indeed, transformation emerges through the accumulation of varied experiences and exposure to different environments and contexts (Robledo, 2024). Consequently, businesses have been recognising the significance of designing experiences that enable customers to engage in self-exploration and personal growth, facilitating their evolution into improved versions of themselves. Despite the growing recognition of transformation's significance and its economic potential, the current literature provides only a limited understanding of this concept that stimulates further exploration and inquiry into this emerging topic.

2.5.2 Transformative tourism experiences

As the world economy undergoes a transition, the tourism industry is also poised for transformation over the next few decades, driven by digitalisation and a growing middle class (Neuhofer, 2025). Tourism activities today are no longer viewed merely as a sort of commodity consumption; rather, they can be understood as pathways to fulfilling an individual's intrinsic needs. It can be seen as an extended service that is distinct from the vast service of everyday life (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2017). From this perspective, tourism experiences can hold special meanings and be linked to personal growth and life-changing outcomes. Therefore, the tourism experience is transformative in nature (Yuchen Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2023). Indeed, Reisinger (2013) suggested that "transformation takes place where one can engage with the unknown; with unfamiliar places, people and their activities" (p. 28), highlighting that travel to any destination can serve as a powerful catalyst for transformation. The transformative potential of tourism is often attributed to its capability to evoke liminality, or a temporary release from everyday routines, facilitating a transition from the mundane centre of daily life to a sacred periphery (Kirillova et al., 2017). As a consequence, tourism and hospitality services have become the main contexts for transformative experience studies (Bueddefeld & Duerden, 2022; Celuch et al., 2025; Dilletta, Douglas, & Andrzejewski, 2019; Neuhofer, 2024; Sheldon, 2020).

Transformative outcomes resulting from tourism and hospitality experiences are extensively documented within the literature (Lyulicheva et al., 2023; Sheldon, 2020; Teoh et al., 2021). Traditionally, tourism has been conceptualised as a means of escapism, driven by personal hedonic motivations relating to desires or felt need (Ryan & Zhang, 2024). Nevertheless, while such tourism experiences offer a temporary escape from everyday routines, tourists ultimately have to return home again. For some, however, travel represents more than simple escapism, serving instead as a pursuit of deeper, more meaningful objectives. From a sociological perspective, Krippendorf (1982) perceived holidaying as a result of the ‘social dysfunctioning’ of society. According to Krippendorf (1986b), these dysfunctional societies may result from the cold rationality of offices, the impoverishment of human connection, the degradation of nature, and the repression of emotions, which lead to stress, physical and psychological exhaustion, and spiritual emptiness. These factors also represent an example of the “disorientating dilemma” phase of Mezirow (1994)’s transformational theory. Generally, on one hand, individuals may physically travel to mountains and lakes in search of escapism and relaxation, and on the other hand, they can embark on an inner psychological journey that fosters greater maturity, wisdom, and completeness (Reisinger, 2013). Ryan and Zhang (2024) added that the holiday can represent an escape from everyday routines which at one end of a possible continuum means a hedonistic escape into pleasure, and at the other end of a possible dimension, an opportunity to question what the daily life pattern is about, what does it mean and how does it contribute to positive senses of being. In this perspective of existential-humanistic philosophy, a tourist is considered a human being in their wholeness, rather than an organism with reactions to outside stimuli, and who is wondering about their existence. They are often positioned within what has been described as an existential predicament, wherein concerns about the meaninglessness of life and experiences of universal alienation are paramount (Kirillova et al., 2017). As a result, holidaying offers an opportunity to deal with the existential predicament by facilitating processes of self-exploration, self-discovery and the re-evaluation of self-understanding (Reisinger, 2013). The search for self-actualisation is also presented in various well-known tourism motivational models of psychologists like Maslow (1943)’s hierarchy of needs, Pearce’s travel career ladder (Pearce & Lee, 2005), and the theory of flow (Czikszenmihalyi, 1990). Maslow (1943) proposed the idea of “peak” experience to illustrate the moments in which individuals experience a heightened Cognition of Being (also known as B-Cognition). According to Maslow (1943), such “peak” experiences are characterised by disorientation in time and space that enables a person to feel alive. The concept of flow, suggested by Czikszenmihalyi (1990) in his book *FLOW: The Psychology of Optimal*

Experience, has close connections with Maslow (1943)'s idea of "peak" experience. However, "peak" experiences require greater magnitude and intensity (Kirillova et al., 2017). Teoh et al. (2021) indicated that transformative tourism experiences can arise when consumers internalise staged experiences, thereby prompting life-changing forms of self-actualisation.

Moreover, tourism researchers have for a long period recognised that certain types of tourism possess a particular transformative power, capable of altering individuals' orientation toward the world. This concept originates from spiritual literature, particularly in religious contexts, and has since been employed in a variety of research domains. For example, historically, travellers have pursued transformation through spiritual or religious tourism, such as pilgrimages (Cheer, Belhassen, & Kujawa, 2017; Sheldon, 2020). Moufakkir and Selmi (2018) indicated that spiritual tourists visited the Sahara Desert to seek a connection with God or their inner selves, to find solitude, and foster self-development, achieve psychological or physical well-being, physical emptiness, or internal refreshment. Coghlan and Weiler (2018) and Tomazos and Murdy (2024) examined the transformative change in volunteer tourism and found that transformation is an individualised process, and self-reflection is an essential element at all stages of the process. Brown (2009) investigated the transformative impact of students' international sojourns, and it was demonstrated that being removed from familiar environments supported self-discovery and improved their interpersonal skills. Also, in an educational tourism setting, Teoh, Wang, and Kwek (2024) revealed that the international educational traveller's motivations and different experiences contribute to transformations. By conducting a study in various groups of travellers, including backpacker tourism, voluntary tourism, and study tours, X. Huang, Wang, and Wu (2024) constructed a transformative tourism framework and connected it to travellers' wellbeing outcomes. By examining spa visitors, Voigt, Brown, and Howat (2011) found that wellness tourism experiences foster individuals to regain their confidence and self-esteem, ultimately impacting their self-transformation. The transformative potential of tourism is frequently attributed to its capability to provide liminality, or temporary transitory emancipation from routine life (Kirillova et al., 2017; Lyulicheva et al., 2023; Neuhofer, 2025). However, transformation is not solely place-dependent; it also relies on the tourists themselves and their intrinsic motivations. Tourists are increasingly distancing themselves from the materialistic and secular environments, seeking instead simpler and more natural settings that allow them to reconnect with their authentic selves (Smith, 2003). The connection to transformative holidays comes from the process of wanting to connect with the true or authentic self and to become a better version of self.

Retreating may be one of the ways in which tourists can confront their worries in an alternative environment and learn how to address them better in everyday life when they return. As discussed earlier, for flow experience to occur, participation is voluntary (Ryan & Zhang, 2024). They are often self-motivated by exploration, self-realisation, self-improvement, development and personal growth. Tourism experiences serve as a powerful vehicle for transformation, and ultimately have the potential to enhance senses of wellbeing (X. Huang, Wang, & Wu, 2024). Given this, tourism researchers are encouraged to further explore the transformational dimension of tourism and the potential benefits that a transformation brings. If travel is genuinely transformative, it can – and arguably should – remain a life priority, notwithstanding economic recession or pandemic.

2.5.3 Transformative wellness retreat experiences

The preceding discussions have underscored that tourism in many forms plays a significant role in personal transformation. Building on this, the remainder of this chapter focuses specifically on the role that wellness tourism can play in fostering human transformations. It is essential to note that this chapter reviews the concept of retreat experiences in both religious and non-religious contexts.

Wellness travellers represent a heterogeneous consumer segment, characterised by diverse motivations, interests, and values. Most studies found that relaxation is a primary motive of wellness travellers who mainly seek to escape and rest from everyday routines (Ashton, 2018; Damijanić, 2021; Dimitrovski & Todorović, 2015; Hritz et al., 2014; Huh et al., 2019; E. Kim et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2016). In addition, holidaying may function as a chance or catalyst for self-exploration that allows individuals to create their own holy places (Ryan, 2003). Self-exploration and self-development are also important internal motives that tourists search for when participating in wellness experiences (Aleksijevits, 2019; Kessler et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2016). The wellness tourism sector encompasses a variety of activities, including visits to spas, thermal baths and wellness hotels, clinics providing surgery and medical procedures, and spiritual or holistic retreats (Reisinger, 2013). Previous research has largely concentrated on wellness tourism within the lodging sector and has highlighted health and spa features (Damijanić, 2021; Dryglas & Salamaga, 2018; Huh et al., 2019; E. Kim et al., 2017). Although the transformative potential of tourism experiences has been documented within these wellness subcategories, there is still a paucity of evidence within concrete business environments, such as all-inclusive resorts and wellness retreat centres. Given the increasing

popularity of wellness retreats and their potential for significant positive impacts on participants' lives, there is a need for deeper insights into the transformational nature of retreat experiences, separate from short-term studies of spas, hot pools and massage. Specifically, this study is interested in the personal transformations that occur during retreat stays and the mechanisms that facilitate such transformative experiences.

A “retreat” has been characterised as a distinctive lodging category that typically offers a comprehensive range of amenities throughout a guest’s stay and provides access to various spiritual, recreational activities or leisure-oriented space (Fu et al., 2015). Conventionally, the term “retreat” conveys meanings of respite, refuge, and rest. Historically, retreats have been linked to religious communities, where individuals gather at sites owned by or affiliated with a particular faith for periods of reflection, with the goal of deepening or revitalising their spiritual beliefs (Kelly, 2012). Such traditional retreat houses, frequently associated with Buddhist or Christian, offer accommodation for individuals in search of peace, quiet, and spiritual nourishment (Heintzman, 2013). However, retreats in a tourism context are defined as a place where visitors can stay and participate in programs designed to foster holistic body-mind-spirit wellbeing (Kelly, 2012). According to Reisinger (2013), unlike other forms of lodging, retreats are intended to facilitate quiet reflection, rejuvenation, and opportunities for regaining good health, and/or to provide a time for spiritual reassessment and renewal, either alone, in silence, or in a group. Typically, most retreats are situated in tranquil, scenic environments, such as a small village by lakes, the sea, or near forests. Many holistic retreats deliver a variety of activities, including classes, therapies, treatments, and dietary programs, which can help individuals achieve specific desired states.

Voigt et al. (2011) classified spiritual retreat visitors as one of three key segments within wellness tourism, alongside beauty spa visitors and lifestyle resort visitors. However, it is important to recognise that retreat visitors are not necessarily spiritual tourists. Kelly (2012) identified five types of retreat visitors, including refuge seekers, learners, exploratory dabblers, reinforcers, and spiritualists. Fu et al. (2015) also proposed three distinct groups of retreat guests: those seeking physical and psychological balance, those seeking bodily therapeutic benefits, and those seeking spiritual enhancement. Many individuals visit holistic retreat centres aiming for personal healing or to embrace deeper meaning in their lives. The term “holistic” underscores an approach that considers the integration of the body, mind, spirit, and other human domains. By employing customer-generated online reviews, Fu et al. (2015)

suggested that the mechanism of a transformative guest experience at retreats in Thailand comprises four key elements: “pre-trip state of mind”, “domains of changes”, “retreat activity participation”, and “stimuli in the service environment”. B. Kim and Yang (2021) conducted the in-depth interviews at the Le Monastere des Augustines wellness hotel in Quebec City (Canada) and proposed a four-stage transformative wellness process, consisting of “realisation”, “involvement”, “transformation”, and “appreciation”. Lyulicheva et al. (2023) employed a qualitative method to investigate the transformative experiences within wellness retreats, indicating that such retreats provide liminal spaces in which tourists engage in identity play and identity work while in a transitional state. **Table 4** provides more information about the prior works in the retreat tourism settings.

Table 4. Review of the studies on (religious and non-religious) retreat tourism

Study	Tourism context	Research objectives	Methods	Sample	Study site	Main findings
B. Kim and Yang (2021)	Wellness tourism (wellness hotel)	Explore primary features of the wellness hotel experience. Operationalise a transformative process of healing at the wellness hotel	Three qualitative methods: interviews (N=8), participant observation, and guest online reviews	Participants on site	The Le Monastere des Augustines hotel (Canada)	4 critical factors of the wellness hotel experience: the museum and its inspiring reflections, the historical facilities and the power of quietness, the wellness lifestyle and its lasting impact, and the religious encounters, caring staff, and feeling of being cared for 4-stage transformative process: realisation, involvement, transformation, and appreciation
Bae et al. (2019)	Religious tourism (temple stay)	Understand the perceived temple stay experience among international visitors	Qualitative (Interview, N=21)	Participants on site, and some were contacted via SNSs using the search keyword “temple stay”	Korea	A temple stay experience promotes health for participants through various direct/indirect changes that occur in individual determinants of health.
Kelly (2010)	Wellness tourism (retreat)	Explore the offerings, motivations, experiences, and contextual aspects of the wellness retreat operators	Qualitative (interview survey, N=50)	Retreat operators	Worldwide	This study revealed the retreat operators’ motivations, experiences, product offerings, and operational issues.
Fu et al. (2015)	Transformative	Investigate the transformative guest experience	Qualitative (Online review, N=4)	119 Oline guest reviews	Thailand	This study revealed the pre-trip state of mind (physical challenge, work challenge, existential challenge), changes induced (bodily change,

Study	Tourism context	Research objectives	Methods	Sample	Study site	Main findings
	experience (retreat)	and the process of changes at the retreat centres				emotional change, attitudinal change, skill change), and stimuli (activity programs, service delivery, physical setting)
B. Kim and Yang (2023)	Transformative experience (wellness hotel)	Uncover the wellness products and results of wellness from the service provider's perspective. Theorise the transformative service framework	Qualitative (Interview, N=13)	Employees with various backgrounds	The Le Monastere des Augustines hotel (Canada)	Several basic wellness service elements were identified and aligned with the six dimensions of the wellness theoretical framework (physical, emotional, occupational, social, intellectual, and spiritual)
Dillette et al. (2021)	Wellness tourism (wellness retreats)	Examine the dimensions of the wellness tourism experience and how they support for holistic wellness	Qualitative (netnography), N=20)	1216 TripAdvisor reviews		Four main strategies to create a holistic sense of wellness for travellers: body, mind, spirit, and environment
Gill et al. (2018)	Religious tourism (Spiritual retreats)	Explore how the participation in spiritual retreats promotes restorative outcomes	Quantitative (3 rounds survey, N=152) and qualitative study (semi-structured interviews, N=30)	Clergy	4 retreats in Queensland (Australia)	Participants' perception of the benefits of the retreats: Restorative, social, spiritual, and cognitive benefits

Study	Tourism context	Research objectives	Methods	Sample	Study site	Main findings
Voigt, Howat, and Brown (2010)	Wellness tourism	Explore hedonic and eudaimonic wellness experiences	Qualitative (Semi-structured interview, N=27)	Visitors to beauty spas, lifestyle resorts, and spiritual retreats	Australia	Hedonic experience attributes: pleasure, relaxation, sensory stimulation, and short-lived. Eudaimonic experience characteristics: belongingness to a special social world, career development, effort & perseverance, knowledge, training & skills, fulfilling & identity-building, long-lived.
Lyulicheva et al. (2023)	Wellness tourism (holistic wellness retreats)	Explore the identity transition process during the wellness tourism experience	Qualitative (semi-structured interview, N=8)	Visitors at holistic wellness centres	One centre in Spain	Liminal space (program, diet, atmosphere, staff) Motives for: self-exploration, learning, social contact, shared experiences, participation in activities, commitment to do self-work
Ashton (2018)	Spiritual tourism (spiritual retreats)	Explore push and pull factors, and how they influence tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit	Quantitative (Survey, N=400)	Visitors to Thai temples	Five places in Chiang Mai (Thailand)	Push factors: transcendence, novelty, physical appearance, escape, relaxation, self-esteem. Pull factors: authentic experience, natural setting, peaceful atmosphere, far from the usual places, and historical significance.
T. Jiang, Ryan, and Zhang (2018)	Spiritual tourism (Buddhist retreat)	Explore secular and pilgrims in the setting of a Zen-Buddhist Monastery	Qualitative (Interview, N=39)	Week long retreats	Chinese temples (China)	Six processes identified: a) The interactions of outward oriented tourists b) Separating and rendering c) The unity of heaven and man d) Zen found in activity e) Enlightenment and guidance found in and with others f) Sacred context
Bone (2013)	Wellness tourism (spiritual retreat)	To understand tourists' motivations and their desires at the spiritual retreats	Qualitative (Interview, N=10)	Visitors and stakeholders in the retreats	Two retreats (New Zealand)	Four themes emerged and were discussed: feeling part of a community, desire to escape, the therapeutic landscape, and spirituality

Study	Tourism context	Research objectives	Methods	Sample	Study site	Main findings
Gill et al. (2019)	Religious tourism (spiritual retreats)	Investigate the environmental attributes, activities, and experiences of spiritual retreats that result in restorative consequences	Mixed method (Survey, N=268 with open-ended questions)	Retreat attendees	17 clergy retreats in Queensland (Australia)	Three factors: being away, participating in spiritual activities, and disconnecting from information technology
Wang et al. (2021)	Religious tourism (Zen retreats)	Explore the motivations and consequences of staying at Zen retreats	Qualitative (tourist feedback, N=520)	Retreat attendees	Donghua Zen Temple (China)	Four motivations: books of Master Wanxing, feel lost and empty, Dilemmas in life and career, and pursue personal growth in Buddhism. Zen retreat experience: Knowledge growth and spiritual growth
Naidoo et al. (2023)	Wellness tourism (wellness retreats)	Explore the demographics, motivations and experiences of retreat guests in various sites worldwide	Quantitative (survey, n=2661)	Retreat attendees	Worldwide	The most critical elements for attendance were relaxation and holiday, to improve general health and learn coping mechanisms, and to reduce stress and improve mental health. The outcomes include health improvement, stress reduction, learning coping mechanism
Rana et al. (2025)	Wellness tourism (Wellness retreats)	Investigate the mindfulness journey of Generation Z during their visits to wellness retreats	Qualitative (Interview, N=26)	Retreat attendees	Wellness retreats (India)	Five factors influencing the mindfulness experience at wellness retreats: spirituality, nature connectedness, focus mind, self-awareness and thought regulation

Although prior research has addressed the issues of transformative experiences within the wellness domain (Fu et al., 2015; B. Kim & Yang, 2023), empirical evidence on guest experiences within context of wellness retreats remains under-explored. Rooted in a service environment, the customer consumption in the wellness retreat does not occur in a vacuum. The formation of the service experience and perceived value in service ecosystems lies upon the interactions (1) between customers and service environments; (2) between customers and service personnels; and (3) among customers (Xie, Guan, He, & Huan, 2022). These three primary aspects are fundamental to inform the nature of this study. In particular, the role of service contextual environment offered by retreat operators is examined to understand how a service experience brings about changes in visitors' behaviours and transformations. *By investigating the value perceptions, mechanisms, and outcomes of transformational experiences in this niche market, researchers can offer a more nuanced understanding of how various forms of tourism experiences can contribute to personal transformation.*

2.6 Customer perceived value

2.6.1 The concept of customer perceived value in tourism research

Customer perceived value (CPV) is recognised as one of the most fundamental and prominent concepts within both academic scholarship and managerial practice. Over three decades ago, Zeithaml (1988) proposed an almost universally accepted definition of customer value. The researcher defined CPV as “the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given” (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14). Since then, the concept of CPV has continued to attract substantial research attention into the twenty-first century. These developments reflect the marketing discipline’s growing emphasis on “value creation”. Organisations increasingly acknowledge that perceived value is a crucial strategic element for establishing and sustaining competitive advantage (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). CPV serves as a key metric for successful businesses, enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty, thereby driving long-term profitability. Accordingly, CPV has become a central concept in both marketing and service research.

Importantly, CPV is subjective and individually defined, rather than being objectively determined by firms (Holbrook, 1999). Its perception varies across customers, cultural contexts, and temporal settings (Sánchez et al., 2006). For example, past research suggested that international tourists tend to place greater emphasis on functional and emotional values, whereas domestic tourists prioritise social values in the context of traditional accommodation

stays (Rasoolimanesh, Iranmanesh, Seyfi, Ari Ragavan, & Jaafar, 2023). Males prioritise emotional values, while females value perceived social benefits in the homestay business (Yimin Zhao, Chau, Shen, Duan, & Huang, 2020). These variations imply that customers interpret value through their own lenses shaped by needs, knowledge, skills, backgrounds, prior experience and/or financial resources (Leroi-Werelds, 2019). Gallarza-Granizo, Ruiz-Molina, and Schlosser (2020) found that the dimensions of value, including social enjoyment, cleanliness, aesthetics and cost, are greatly influenced by cultural contexts (Guatemala, Spain, and Germany). Sánchez et al. (2006) indicated that value perceptions can shift across different phases of the consumption process: before purchase, during purchase, during use, and after use. In tourism specifically, the factors determining perceived value may differ before travel and after the experience and can be impacted by a variety of internal and external factors. These values may also reflect peripheral or core values: the former being contextual and possibly temporary, while the latter tend to be less sensitive to context and more consistent.

A thorough examination of the current literature finds that two primary research approaches have been employed to conceptualise customer perceived value in marketing scholarship. The first approach views CPV as a unidimensional construct. Based on this point of view, perceived value is regarded as a singular, overarching concept that can be assessed through self-reported items evaluating consumers' perception of value (Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). In this approach, CPV is primarily related to a utilitarian perspective. Many prior works have followed this approach in tourism and hospitality settings, such as hotels (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019), restaurants (Cankül, Kaya, & Kızıltaş, 2024) and tourism experiences (Abou-Shouk, Zouair, Abdelhakim, Roshdy, & Abdel-Jalil, 2024; Aizat, Md Zain, Hanafiah, Asyraff, & Ismail, 2025; S. Lee, Phau, Hughes, Li, & Quintal, 2016; Pandža Bajš, 2015). Although this approach has the advantage of simplicity, other researchers argue that this conceptualisation of CPV represents a narrow approach to the concept, as it may overlook its theoretical complexity, particularly within service contexts. Thus, more advanced measures have been developed to capture the various ways in which consumers assess the value of products and services.

The second approach posits that CPV is a multidimensional construct comprising different interrelated elements that establish a holistic conceptualisation of CPV. This perspective is more prevalent in marketing literature since it allows scholars to overcome the excessive concentration on a "give-versus-get" trade-off and aligns with contemporary

theoretical advancements in consumer behaviours (Yu, Lang, Zhao, Liu, & Hu, 2023). To address the complexity of perceived value, studies have expanded their framework beyond the predominant utilitarian perspective on CPV to incorporate affective and experiential dimensions using a multiple-item scale. The foundations of this multidimensional conceptualisation of CPV can be traced back to influential works by Babin et al. (1994), Sheth et al. (1991), Sweeney and Soutar (2001), and Holbrook (1999). Such a perspective has since been widely and deeply employed within tourism and hospitality research, where it offers richer insights into tourist behaviour by acknowledging the diverse value elements embedded within tourist experiences (See **Table 5** below).

Table 5. Review of the concept of perceived value and its applications in tourism research

Concept	Dimensions	Characteristics	Applications in the tourism context
Babin et al. (1994)	Utilitarian value	Instrumental, goal-oriented, rational, functional, cognitive, and serve primarily as means to achieve specific objectives.	Shopping tourism (Sirakaya-Turk, Ekinci, & Martin, 2015), restaurant (Ryu, Han, & Jang, 2010) and (Hwang, Kim, Joo, & Kim, 2022), technology (S.-T. Chang, 2024; Y. Chen, Tao, Zheng, Yang, & Li, 2025; Y. Hu, 2021; Kuo, 2024)
	Hedonic value	Reflecting the experiential and emotional value of purchase, characterised by non-instrumental, affective and hedonic dimensions	
Sheth et al. (1991)	Functional value	Derived from an option's ability to deliver functional, utilitarian, or physical outcomes	VR tourism (Zhu et al., 2025), souvenir shopping (Deng, Lu, Lin, & Chen, 2021), night-time tourism (Y. Jiang & Hong, 2023)
	Emotional value	Derived from an option's ability to evoke emotional or affective responses	
	Conditional value	Derived from an option based on the particular context or circumstances confronting the decision-maker	
	Epistemic value	Derived from an option's ability to stimulate curiosity, offer novelty, and fulfil a desire for knowledge	
	Social value	Derived from an option's connection or affiliation with one or more particular social groups	

Concept	Dimensions	Characteristics	Applications in the tourism context
Sweeney and Soutar (2001)	Emotional value	Obtained from the emotional responses or affective states elicited by a product	Wellness tourism (Xie et al., 2022), traditional guesthouse (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020), shopping tourism (Choi, Law, & Heo, 2018), eco-travel package (Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018), community-based homestay (Rasoolimanesh, Dahalan, & Jaafar, 2016), temple stay (Song, Lee, Park, Hwang, & Reisinger, 2015), restaurant (Mendonça da Costa Birchal, Cunha Moura, & Vasconcelos, 2025)
	Social value	Obtained from a product's capability to strengthen or reinforce an individual's social self-concept or social identity	
	Functional value (price/value for money)	Obtained from a product based on its ability to minimise both immediate and future costs, offering economic efficiency and financial prudence	
	Functional value (performance/quality)	Obtained from the consumer's perception of the product's overall quality and anticipated performance in fulfilling its intended purpose	
Mattsson (1991)	Emotional value	Focused on the feelings of the consumers	General tourism (Barnes, Mattsson, Sørensen, & Friis Jensen, 2020),
	Practical value	Focused on the physical and functional perspectives of the purchase	
	Logical value	Focused on the rational and abstract features of the purchase	
Holbrook (1999)	Efficiency	Output/input, convenience	Hotel (Gallarza, Arteaga, Del Chiappa, Gil-Saura, & Holbrook, 2017), (Gallarza et al., 2019), general tourism (Gallarza & Gil, 2008)
	Play	Fun	
	Excellence	Quality	
	Aesthetics	Beauty	
	Status	Success, impression management	
	Ethics	Morality, virtue, justice,	
	Esteem	Possessions, reputation, materialism,	
	Spirituality	Sacredness, ecstasy, faith, rapture, magic	

2.6.2 Customer perceived value of a tourism experience

Tourism and hospitality services are considered excellent contexts for descriptive studies on the topic of value as they are “highly multidimensional” and “predominantly experiential products” (Gallarza et al., 2019). Upon further examination of the tourism and hospitality literature, two distinct approaches have been identified within value research. First, there is a significant interest in identifying the dimensionality of tourist perceived value (intra-

variable approach). Secondly, earlier works have attempted to examine the relationship between perceived value and other relevant determinants and consequences in tourism studies (inter-variable approach).

From the intra-variable perspective, the multidimensional nature of customer perceived value has been widely recognised both in theory and in empirical studies. Consequently, numerous researchers have adopted frameworks such as Babin et al. (1994)'s bidimensional utilitarian/hedonic value (Y. Hu, 2021; Hwang et al., 2022; Ryu et al., 2010; Sirakaya-Turk et al., 2015) or Holbrook (1999)'s eight types of value (Gallarza et al., 2017; Gallarza et al., 2019; Gallarza & Gil, 2008). Many prior studies also utilised the PERVAL scale from Sweeney and Soutar (2001) to tourism and hospitality experiences (Choi et al., 2018; Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2016; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020; Song et al., 2015; Xie et al., 2022). Sheth et al. (1991)'s five dimensions of value were also popular (Deng et al., 2021; Y. Jiang & Hong, 2023; Zhu et al., 2025). Beyond these established models, scholars have expanded the conceptualisation of CPV by introducing new dimensions such as cultural value in cultural heritage tourism settings (H. Liu et al., 2024), green value and safety value in nighttime tourism (Y. Jiang & Hong, 2023), memory value in souvenir shopping (Deng et al., 2021). Lastly, as evidence of the context-specific characteristics of CPV, some studies have developed measurement scales to assess CPV in new contexts, such as quick-service restaurants (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020) or temple visits (Yu et al., 2023).

From an inter-variable perspective, the link between CPV, its determinants and consequences are gaining increased attention due to its dual function in influencing both pre-purchase and post-purchase phases. CPV not only affects consumers' decision-making before purchase but also significantly impacts post-purchase outcomes such as customer satisfaction, intention to recommend and return behaviours (Al-Sabbahy, Ekinici, & Riley, 2004). Numerous studies have explored the influence of perceived value on various aspects of tourist behaviour, including satisfaction (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Gallarza et al., 2017; Gallarza et al., 2019; H. Liu et al., 2024; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020), behavioural intentions (Cheung, Leung, Cheah, & Ting, 2022; Y. Hu, 2021; M. Kim et al., 2024; Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018; Martin, Izquierdo, & Laguna-Garcia, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020), loyalty (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Gallarza et al., 2017; Gallarza et al., 2019; Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018; H. Liu et al., 2024), destination attachment (Y. Jiang & Hong, 2023), and life satisfaction (Yu et al., 2023). The consensus across these studies highlights the imperative role of perceived value in

leading to tourists' subsequent decisions and behaviours. Notably, the majority of this research utilises multi-dimensional measurement scales to assess perceived value in relation to diverse tourism products and services. **Table 6** presented primary tourism research employing multidimensional approaches to perceived value, its antecedents, and consequences.

Table 6. A review of the main multidimensional conceptualisations of customer perceived value with the focus on benefits

Authors	Perceived value concept	Antecedent	Outcomes	Tourism context	Country
Xie et al. (2022)	Functional value, emotional value, price/value for money, social value	Customer-environment interaction, customer-service employee interaction, customer-customer interaction	Customer engagement	Wellness tourism	China (N=528)
Gallarza et al. (2017)	Holbrook's customer value (Efficiency, service quality, play, aesthetics, status, esteem, ethics, escapism)	N/A	Satisfaction Loyalty	Hotel	Mediterranean country (N=585)
Rasoolimanesh et al. (2020)	Functional value, emotional value, social value	N/A	Satisfaction, revisit intention	Traditional guesthouse	Iran (N=316)
Choi et al. (2018)	Functional value (quality/performance), emotional value, social value, functional value (price/value for money)	Shopping destination trust	N/A	Shopping tourism	Hong Kong (N=708)
Gallarza-Granizo et al. (2020)	Service quality, social enjoyment, cleanness, aesthetics, cost (self-developed)	N/A	Satisfaction, loyalty	Quick service restaurant	Cross culture (N=456)
Gallarza et al. (2019)	Holbrook's customer value (Efficiency, excellence, status, esteem, entertainment, aesthetics, ethics, escapism)	N/A	Cognitive satisfaction, Affective satisfaction, Loyalty	Hotel	Spain (N=340)
M. Kim et al. (2024)	Emotional value, utilitarian value, epistemic value	Physical wellness, emotional wellness, social wellness,	Behavioural intention	Wellness tourism	Korea (N=401)

Authors	Perceived value concept	Antecedent	Outcomes	Tourism context	Country
		intellectual wellness			
Minseong Kim and Thapa (2018)	Quality, emotional, price, social	N/A	Flow experience, satisfaction, environmentally responsible behaviour, destination loyalty	Eco-travel package	Korea (N=300)
Deng et al. (2021)	Functional value, memory value, emotional value, social value, conditional value	Tourist value co-creation, psychological ownership, authenticity	N/A	Souvenir shopping	China (N=533)
Y. Hu (2021)	Utilitarian value, hedonic value	N/A	Attitude toward using service robots, future behavioural intention	Service robot in hospitality and tourism settings	China (N1=129, N2=268)
H. Liu et al. (2024)	Social value, emotional value, cultural value	Objective authenticity, constructed authenticity, existential authenticity	Flow experience, satisfaction, destination loyalty	Cultural heritage tourism	China (N=315)
Cheung et al. (2022)	Emotional value, functional value, relational value, entitativity value	Emotional user-generated content, rational user-generated content	Impulse buying, future purchase intention	Tourism digital platforms	China (N=538)
Martin et al. (2021)	Perceived authenticity, sensorial experience, food destination value	N/A	Intention to return, intention to recommend	Culinary tourism	Spain (N=439)
Touni, Kim, Haldorai, and Rady (2022)	Functional value, social value, entertainment value	Customer engagement	Booking intention, customer-brand relationship strength	Social media pages in the hospitality	Facebook (N=396)
Zhu et al. (2025)	Functional value, emotional value, epistemic value, social value, conditional value	N/A	User satisfaction, WOM intention, continuance intention	VR tourism	China (N=509)
Y. Jiang and Hong (2023)	Functional value, economic value, emotional value, social value, epistemic	N/A	Destination attachment	Nighttime tourism	China (N=339)

Authors	Perceived value concept	Antecedent	Outcomes	Tourism context	Country
	value, green value, safety value				
Rasoolimanesh, Iranmanesh, et al. (2023)	Functional value, emotional value, social value	N/A	Satisfaction, revisit intention	Traditional guesthouses	Iran (N=316)
Feng, Chen, and Lai (2021)	Functional value, emotional value	Experiential quality (immersion, participation, fun)	Satisfaction	B&B stays	China (N=433)
Yu et al. (2023)	Quality, price, emotional value, social value, educational value, physical attributes, non-physical attributes (self-developed)	N/A	Tourist satisfaction, life satisfaction	Temple visits	China (N=537)
Y. Chen et al. (2025)	Social value, utilitarian value, hedonic value	Live streamer characteristics (expertise, interaction) and live scene characteristics (immersion, aesthetics, novelty)	Engagement	Travel live streaming	China (N=255)
S.-T. Chang (2024)	Utilitarian value, hedonic value	Coolness, Affinity	Behavioural intention	Service robot-equipped restaurant	Taiwan (N=554)

Value, Satisfaction, Loyalty are well-established themes in tourism and hospitality research. Concepts such as customer value and customer loyalty are regarded as cornerstones of an industry that depends heavily on customer retention and positive word-of-mouth. While customer perceived value has been widely recognised as a critical antecedent of customers' decision-making process and post-purchase behaviours, the literature review highlights the need for continued investigation into the Value-Satisfaction-Loyalty (V-S-L) chain in additional tourism contexts. Moreover, while the first linkage (V-S) and second linkage (S-L) have been over researched (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Gallarza et al., 2019; Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2025), and there are still unexplored areas of the direct linkage (V-L) although the relationship is proven in a few tourism contexts (Gallarza et al., 2017; H. Liu et al., 2024; Rasoolimanesh, Iranmanesh, et al., 2023). Since there is no consensus on what the direct or indirect effects on the V-S-L chain should be (So, Yang, & Li, 2025), it is important to clarify the causal modelling of value in relation to loyalty.

2.7 Customer loyalty

As a fundamental concept in marketing, brand loyalty and/or consumer loyalty essentially denote that a person repeatedly buys the same brand (Oppermann, 2000). In the hospitality industry perspective, it is referred to as a customer's repeat visitation or repeat purchase behaviour while including the emotional commitment or expression of a favourable attitude toward the service provider (Yoo & Bai, 2013). According to Singh et al. (2024), customer's commitment includes revisiting the destination, recommending the destination to others and spreading positive and credible word-of-mouth about the destination. Therefore, business management, including the hospitality and tourism sector, aims to cultivate a loyal customer who are strongly motivated to repeat patronage. It has long been evidenced that increased customer loyalty cuts down customer acquisition costs and improves revenue, which eventually result in greater profitability (Shoemaker & Lewis, 1999). According to Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil (2018), loyal tourists not only provide a stable revenue stream but also function as informal information channels that connect networks of friends and other potential customers. Moreover, these customers tend to be less price-sensitive and demonstrate a higher willingness to pay, while the cost of serving them is comparatively lower, more likely to spread positive word-of-mouth about a company to others and increase a possibility of revisit/repurchase (Koo, Yu, & Han, 2020). Thus, hospitality marketers make eminent attempts to maintain and promote customer relationships to further obtain their long-term retention.

Marketing studies, including customer loyalty topics, in the hospitality discipline has been intensively growing and scholars are still trying to figure out different ways to foster customer loyalty (Singh et al., 2024; So et al., 2025). The conceptualisation of customer loyalty in tourism studies has developed three main approaches: behavioural, attitudinal, and composite (Almeida-Santana & Moreno-Gil, 2018; Lv & McCabe, 2020; Oppermann, 2000). Behavioural loyalty refers to visitors' judgements of their likelihood of returning to a location, as well as the frequency of their visits. From this point of view, loyalty is evaluated by the number of times a tourism product is purchased, or a place is visited (J. S. Chen & Gursoy, 2001), implying that higher repeat visitation indicates greater loyalty. On the other hand, tourism scholars argued that it is difficult for visitors to return to the same destination or repurchase a tourism experience due to novelty-seeking and a marginal decrease in tourism consumption, and a whole range of other factors (J. S. Chen & Gursoy, 2001; H. Liu et al., 2024). Thus, attitudinal loyalty captures visitors' positive effects and their willingness to recommend to others (H. Liu et al., 2024). One might also note that McKercher and Prideaux

(2024) and Ryan (2003) have suggested that tourists may be loyal to an activity, especially in sports-oriented tourism; however, the same generic points about attitudes, motives, and behaviours tend to apply. Composite measures of loyalty are obtained by combining both behavioural and attitudinal dimensions. In tourism literature, revisit intention and recommendations are the most employed measures for customers loyalty, which are either assessed in separate variables (intention to return and intention to recommend) (Martin et al., 2021; Meleddu, Paci, & Pulina, 2015; Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur, & Leistriz, 2013; Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Rather, & Hall, 2022) or a customer loyalty as a whole (Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018; H. Liu et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2023). In the present study, the composite loyalty approach encompasses intention to revisit (behavioural loyalty) and intention to recommend (attitudinal loyalty). Given that a wellness retreat trip is a unique, niche, and high-priced product that is less likely to be repeatedly purchased, willingness to recommend the product to others may be particularly relevant in this context. Surprisingly, the number of available studies in this setting that address the critical sources of visitor loyalty remains somewhat limited.

2.8 Customer-employee interaction

The foregoing literature review highlights that while most previous studies analysed the link between perceived value and loyalty, they have largely overlooked the interactive role of the customer-employee relationship. Within service marketing theory, customer-employee interaction is recognised as a critical construct, defined as “a series of interactions between participants, processes and physical elements” (Tax & Stuart, 1997, p. 107). As a consequence, the role of this interaction must not be underestimated in the service delivery process. Nevertheless, there remains ambiguity regarding what constitutes an interaction episode, including when it begins or concludes within the continuum of the service process. In the tourism literature, researchers have stressed the importance of focusing on customer-employee interaction during service encounters, as that is the point when value creation and destruction primarily occur (Mustelier-Puig, Anjum, & Ming, 2018). As a result, several studies have been carried out on how customers perceive the interaction while receiving services in the tourism and hospitality industry (Castellanos-Verdugo, de los Ángeles Oviedo-García, Roldán, & Veerapermal, 2009; Jing Li, Ma, Shao, & Zhang, 2024; Prayag & Lee, 2019; Wieseke, Geigenmüller, & Kraus, 2012). Past literature also provides a plethora of dimensions with which to measure and track customer-employee interaction and customer loyalty in general

service contexts. For example, Gremler and Gwinner (2000) found a positive association between enjoyable interaction and loyalty intention. Lloyd and Luk (2011) demonstrated that a sense of comfort in the interaction positively influences customer satisfaction, eventually resulting in positive word-of-mouth. Additionally, the customer focus of employees is positively related to customer loyalty (Dean, 2007). Agyeiwaah, Dayour, and Zhou (2022) revealed that affective employee commitment has a positive association with customers' attitudinal loyalty. Moreover, customer-employee bond positively generates satisfied and loyal customers (Uslu & Caber, 2022). Nonetheless, scant research empirically explores the moderating role of customer-employee interaction in the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty. The choice of customer-employee interaction as a moderator is not only to fill this research gap but also based on several reasons.

Theoretically, customer-employee interaction represents a dynamic process embedded throughout the consumption experience, particularly in high-contact service delivery environments, which is especially relevant to the tourism and hospitality discipline (Guofu Chen & Li, 2021). This concept was assessed differently in the past literature. In the study of Guofu Chen and Li (2021) customer-employee interaction is characterised as a customer receiving personal care, useful help, and a sense of genuineness from employees. Jing Li et al. (2024) operationalized customer-employee interaction by three key factors: gratitude, partner quality, and social support. For their part, Y.-K. Lee, Jeong, and Choi (2014) proposed that interaction quality comprises high interaction, friendliness, and quick responses. This is because customer-employee interaction encompasses features of human interaction as the interpersonal exchange between service providers and customers, as well as service encounters as an engagement to fulfil customers' needs (Baker, 2024). Overall, although there is no universally accepted scale to operationalise customer-employee interactions, dimensions such as mutual understanding, friendliness, competence, and effectiveness have frequently been identified across service contexts (Prayag & Lee, 2019). In this study, customer-employee interaction is conceptualised as a customer's perception of their interactions with employees at the time of service consumption (Guofu Chen & Li, 2021). These interactions play an integral role in uplifting customer perceived value and overall experience (Karim & Mehzabeen, 2025). However, the outcomes of this interaction are subject to certain settings and may be either positive or negative (Baker, 2024). In the context of wellness retreat experiences, it is argued that the interaction between visitors and employees is critical as it holds significant power shaping the visitors' stay experiences. This interpersonal relationship is the heart of most

service experiences since service is indistinguishably connected with employees (Karim & Mehzabeen, 2025). Thus, examining the role of customer-employee interaction as a moderator helps to reconfirm the essential role of employees in the wellness retreat context.

2.9 Hypothesis development

2.9.1 The multidimensionality of perceived value of wellness retreat experience

The preceding section outlined two primary approaches to the conceptualisation of CPV: the unidimensional and the multidimensional construct. Both approaches offer valuable contributions, with the unidimensional approach providing a simplified assessment of CPV and the multidimensional approach enabling a more comprehensive understanding of its complexity. On the one hand, several prior works have utilised the one-dimensional approach to assess CPV in different settings, such as hotels (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019) and general tourism experiences (S. Lee et al., 2016; Pandža Bajš, 2015). On the other hand, the multidimensional approach of CPV seems to be widely employed, as evidenced by Table 2. However, there remains a lack of consensus regarding the precise conceptual dimensions that define CPV (Leroi-Werelds, 2019). Despite this divergence, a considerable agreement in previous studies is that a higher-order structure exists for perceived value. Based on the majority, this study adopts the view of CPV as a second-order construct. Additionally, hospitality and tourism are fully experiential services, often entail a high level of customer involvement (Gallarza et al., 2017). Visitors can experience simultaneously several elements: affective and cognitive, social and personal, active and reactive (Gallarza & Gil, 2008). Within wellness retreat contexts specifically, past research has revealed various distinct characteristics of wellness retreat experiences. For example, by carrying out the study in The Le Monastere des Augustines wellness hotel (Canada), B. Kim and Yang (2021) proposed four key elements of the wellness hotel experience: the museum and its inspiring reflections, the historical facilities and the power of quietness, the wellness lifestyle and its lasting impact, and the religious encounters, caring staff, and feeling of being cared for. The study of Ashton (2018) suggested four attributes of spiritual retreats, including authentic experience, natural setting, peaceful atmosphere, far from the usual places, and historical significance. In addition, Voigt et al. (2010) demonstrated that eudaimonic experiences, such as knowledge, training & skills, fulfilling & identity-building, and long-lived, were much more prevalent in spiritual retreats. Therefore, this study suggested proposition one where customer perceived value is established in a multidimensionality. Particularly, the construct is theorised to comprise four dimensions:

functional value, emotional value, epistemic value, and social value, following the framework established by Sheth et al. (1991).

Proposition 1 (P1): The construct of perceived value of wellness retreat experience (PVWRE) is multidimensional, rather than unidimensional, in nature.

2.9.2 The relationship between perceived value of wellness retreat experiences and customer loyalty

While recent research has expanded the antecedents of loyalty to include more novel constructs, the Value-Satisfaction-Loyalty (V-S-L) chain remains fundamentally applicable to different services, especially within the tourism and hospitality area (Gallarza et al., 2019). Perceived value has been consistently defined as a critical determinant of customer loyalty (So et al., 2025). Aligned with the V-S-L chain, prior studies demonstrated that consumers' value perceptions indirectly impact loyalty through satisfaction in various research settings, including hotels (Gallarza et al., 2017), restaurants (Cankül et al., 2024; Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020), nature-based tourism (Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018), cultural heritage tourism (H. Liu et al., 2024), or technology in tourism (Abou-Shouk et al., 2024). In the meantime, some researchers argued that perceived value may also exert a direct influence on customer loyalty (Gallarza et al., 2017; H. Liu et al., 2024; Martin et al., 2021). There remains a lack of consensus regarding whether the V-S-L chain should test direct, indirect, or both pathways. Since the indirect impact of perceived value on customer loyalty via satisfaction has been extensively documented, its direct effect has typically received less emphasis in empirical examination and is often not explicitly hypothesised.

Much research has reported diverse consequential outcomes of transformative retreat tourism experiences. Fu et al. (2015) demonstrated that the change occurred by transformative experience at retreat centres can be operationalised by three angles: temporary-enduring changes, minor-major changes, and tangible-intangible changes. A study of Gill et al. (2018) revealed the positive influence of retreat experiences on attendees' mental state, including restorative, spiritual, social and cognitive benefits. Wang et al. (2021) found that participants in Zen retreats experienced a change in their knowledge and spirituality. Naidoo et al. (2023) included various outcomes such as health improvement, stress reduction, and learning coping mechanisms. Although current studies have shown different impacts of transformative retreat

experiences, none of them have empirically examined the destination loyalty behaviours of retreat participants, which is crucial from the entrepreneur perspective. Given that transformative tourism experiences have been evidenced that it can profoundly and positively change tourists' values, attitudes, and behaviours, in the context of wellness retreat experience, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Perceived value of wellness retreat experience has a positive influence on customer loyalty.

2.9.3 The moderating role of customer-employee interaction

In wellness retreat settings, customers generally engage with employees, often referred to as hosts, facilitators, guides, coaches, or wellness managers, during the course of receiving services. Accordingly, for the present study, customer-employee interaction is assessed by the customer's subjective sense of whether the employee is knowledgeable, friendly and customer-oriented. According to Tomazos and Murdy (2024), retreat personnel are instrumental in creating safe experiential spaces, facilitating meaning-making, and promoting self-inquiry via workshops, seminars, and other retreat activities that support personal transformation. These people are also called "spiritual guides" or "international healers" (Smith, 2003). They are well-trained in the mindset and skillset to help guide retreat attendees through anticipation, preparation, "peak" experience and post-retreat. Similar to services, this dynamic interaction between employees and customers can subsequently elevate customer's satisfaction and loyalty. The more positive these interactions, the higher the perceived value and positive experience. Thus, this study proposes that customer-employee interaction positively moderates the association between perceived value and destination loyalty within wellness retreat experiences.

From a theoretical perspective, drawing on the reciprocity principle in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), customers who perceive beneficial interactions with employees may be inclined to reciprocate with positive attitudes or behaviours toward the employee or the business, rewarding the perceived benefits within the social exchange relationship. Previous studies showed that customer-employee interaction, characterised by empathy (Bahadur, Aziz, & Zulfiqar, 2018) emotional intelligence (Prentice & Nguyen, 2020), rapport (Delcourt, Gremler, Van Riel, & Van Birgelen, 2013), strengthen the positive relationship between

perceived service value and customer loyalty. It is indicated that when employees demonstrate empathy and emotional intelligence, customers are more likely to perceived higher service value, which in turn boosts satisfaction and loyalty outcomes, including repurchase intentions and positive word-out-mouth. The interaction between employee and customers act as a catalyst, making the perceived value more salient and impactful in driving loyalty. On the other hand, this moderating effect of customer-employee interaction varies across the service contexts. Paparoidamis, Tran, and Leonidou (2019) found that employees' cultural intelligence can either strengthen or weaken the perceived value – loyalty link, depending on the market settings. In the specific context of this study, wellness retreat attendees may choose to withdraw from external interactions and shut themselves off from the world, instead turning inward and focusing on the nurturing environment of the retreat itself. The mismatch between retreat visitors' expectations and service employees' interactivity could render visitors less likely to revisit the retreat or spread a positive word-of-mouth. However, in agreement with social exchange theory, customers' awareness that a host is interacting in a positive manner may contribute to a favourable assessment of service performance, thereby elevating the level of their retention behaviours. On the basis of this rationale, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): The relationship between PVWRE and customer loyalty is strengthened (weakened) when customer-employee interaction is high (low)

2.9.4 The equifinality in the research model

The primary principle of complexity theory is equifinality, which implies that a particular outcome of interest can be achieved through multiple alternative combinations of causal conditions, each forming a sufficient configuration to produce the desired result (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). In other words, the same outcomes can be achieved from configurations or causal recipes stemming from one or more factors. In the present study, the dimensions of perceived value associated with wellness retreat experiences are considered critical causal conditions that may combine in various ways to explain the positive behavioural outcomes of consumers. For example, within wellness tourism settings, Xie et al. (2022) demonstrated that the customer-environment interaction, customer-service employee interaction, and customer-customer interaction foster the value creation, eventually leading to greater customer engagement. M. Kim et al. (2024) indicated that all attributes of wellness tourism positively

influence the perceived values of wellness tourists, subsequently impacting future behavioural intentions. Moreover, Ashton (2018) confirmed that the attributes of authentic experience, natural setting, a peaceful atmosphere, far from the usual place and historical significance contribute to spiritual retreat tourists' satisfaction and their intention to revisit. Based on this reasoning, this study proposes proposition two that configurations may comprise a combination of more than one dimension of perceived value of wellness retreat experiences.

Proposition 2 (P2): No single best dimension of perceived value of wellness retreat experiences leads to high customer loyalty, but multiple, equally effective dimensions exist.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the paradigm and methodological foundations of this thesis, shaping the overall research design and informing the selection of data collection and analysis methods. It commences with a concise overview of four key research paradigms, each offering distinct contributions to the understanding of truth and reality. This is followed by a discussion of the rationale for selecting a postpositivist approach as the guiding framework for this study. The chapter then elaborates on the research design, including the chosen methods, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques, ensuring alignment with the study's research questions.

3.1 Research paradigm

Research is a process of systematic inquiry through which data are collected, analysed, and interpreted to “understand, describe, predict, or control an educational or psychological phenomenon or to empower individuals in such context” (Mertens, 2019, p. 2). Underpinning the various research methods are varying philosophical assumptions concerning, among other considerations, the nature of the association between the researcher, the subject matter under investigation, and the relationship between the researchers and the sources of information. These relationships, sometimes called the paradigm, impact how knowledge is examined and interpreted (N. Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Wilson, 2014). Thomas Kuhn – a philosopher of science – first proposed the concept of a paradigm as an approach to being in the world in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962 (Heron & Reason, 1997; Tashakkori, Teddlie, & Teddlie, 1998). Although there are varying nuanced definitions of research paradigms in social science, at its core a paradigm represents a way of seeing the world (Mertens, 2019). The definition of Guba and Lincoln (1994) is the first and most concise: the paradigm is a set of basic beliefs that address the ultimate or first principle. Ponterotto (2005) suggested that a paradigm is a collection of interconnected assumptions regarding the nature of the social world, serving as a philosophical and conceptual foundation that guides the systematic investigation of that world. Creswell and Creswell (2017) employed the term “worldview” to refer to a researcher’s overarching philosophical perspective on the world and the nature of inquiry, which shapes the assumptions and approach they bring to a study. Thus, the paradigm leads the researcher to embrace the philosophical assumptions about the research and in the choice of tools, instruments, participants, and methods utilised in their study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ponterotto, 2005). The paradigms of the social sciences provide

a diversity of ways to look at human social life. Additionally, each makes its own assumption, so that each separate paradigm contributes to understanding the others' deficiencies while ignoring the perspectives that the others present (Babbie, 2020).

Each research paradigm is characterised by three philosophical assumptions or primary questions by (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005) and a fourth is added by (Heron & Reason, 1997; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) as follows:

- 1) The ontological question: what is the form and nature of reality, and, therefore, what can be known about it?
- 2) The epistemological question: what is the nature of the relationship between the knower and the would-be-known?
- 3) The methodological question: what is the nature of systematic inquiry? How can the knower go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?
- 4) The axiological question: what is the nature of values and ethics?

More specifically, the ontological concerns the nature of reality and being (Ponterotto, 2005). Epistemology addresses the association between the “knower” (the research participants) and the “would-be knower” (the researcher) (Ponterotto, 2005). The methodology relates to the processes and procedures by which the research is carried out (Ponterotto, 2005). Axiology pertains to the values of being and the question of what human states or experiences ought to be valued in and of themselves (Heron & Reason, 1997). Collectively, these aspects assist researchers in defining an appropriate research paradigm, which in turn often guides the adoption of a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approach.

Social scientists have established various paradigms to understand social behaviours (Babbie, 2020; Ponterotto, 2005). There are four much-discussed paradigms in the literature: positivism/post-positivism, constructivism, transformative, and pragmatism (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; N. Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Mertens, 2019). Each makes its own philosophical assumptions about the nature of social reality. For example, from a philosophical perspective, the post-positivism paradigm indicates that the world exists independently of our perceptions of it, whereas the constructivism paradigm considers that reality is constructed through our interpretations and meanings (Morgan, 2014). Over recent decades, debates regarding the superiority of one or the other of two major paradigms (positivism and constructivism) have risen in the social and behavioural sciences. Consequently, that debate came to be called the “Paradigm Wars” (Gage, 1989).

The nature of the “battle” between positivists and constructivists was described by Guba and Lincoln (1994). Positivism underpins quantitative methods based on the premise that the physical universe exists independently of humans and can be measured by numbers based on universal laws, as illustrated by the force of gravity. Constructivism underpins qualitative methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Tashakkori et al., 1998) in that data arises from human interaction. Hence, the debate between these two paradigms has sometimes been mentioned as the qualitative-quantitative debate (Tashakkori et al., 1998). Participants in such a war were called “wrestlers” (Datta, 1994) or “warriors” (Tashakkori et al., 1998). Fortunately, the ongoing debates about the two paradigms have contributed to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of positivism/post-positivism and constructivism as frameworks for conducting social research (Morgan, 2014). Indeed, the quantitative-qualitative divide is an oversimplification of the debate in data arising from qualitative research, which can, of course, be measured using quantitative measures, as is illustrated later in this thesis.

Babbie (2020) suggested that each paradigm compensates for the disadvantages of the other by suggesting complementary perspectives that can generate helpful lines of inquiry. Kuhn argued that competing paradigms might co-exist simultaneously, especially within emerging fields of research. While tourism studies have become increasingly structured with a growing history of research by comparison with the physical and many other social sciences, it remains underdeveloped in that, arguably, its multi-disciplinary nature inhibits the development of theories unique to itself. On the other hand, in an increasingly complex world, that may well be an advantage. Equally, concepts of co-existence of paradigms within a research design might founder on the incompatibility of the underlying assumptions, e.g., between post-positivism and constructivism (Alise & Teddlie, 2010). This viewpoint has been called the *incompatibility thesis*. Thus, in an attempt to make peace between the two major paradigmatic approaches, the pragmatism paradigm emerged. Pragmatists refer to “mixed methods”, which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative characteristics. Within the pragmatism paradigm, the compatibility thesis indicates that integrating qualitative and quantitative methods represents a sound research strategy (Alise & Teddlie, 2010). Therefore, pragmatism serves as a contemporary paradigm that challenges and replaces earlier dichotomous thinking regarding differences between research approaches (Morgan, 2014). The following sections examine some of the key features of differing philosophical approaches to research.

3.1.1 Post-positivism (and positivism)

Positivism and its successor, post-positivism, have historically served as the prevailing paradigms in educational and psychological scholarship (Mertens, 2019). Positivism is grounded in the assumption that the social world can be investigated using the same empirical and objective methods employed in the natural sciences. It presumes that research can be conducted in a value-free manner and that causally based explanations can be formulated to account for social phenomena (Mertens, 2019). Generally, this requires the establishment of a series of hypotheses that are tested through a statistical process to determine the failure of a null hypothesis. That is, positivism examines general laws that describe constant associations between variables through observation and measurement (N. Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

However, several issues inhibit such a strict position regarding positivism, as many aspects of human experience are not directly observable yet remain vital to understanding social phenomena, eventually leading to the emergence of post-positivism in the 1950s in an attempt to address such concerns with positivism (Alise & Teddlie, 2010; Mertens, 2019). Post-positivists still maintain beliefs about the significance of observation and measurement of the objective reality “out there” in the world (Mertens, 2019). They both emphasise identifying and generalising cause-and-effect relationships that can be studied empirically (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ponterotto, 2005). Jennings (2001, p. 37) pointed out that both positivism and post-positivism are based on the use of observable and testable facts, which serve as the basis for generating generalisations and developing theories aimed at explaining behaviours or relationships within both natural and social contexts.

Unlike the conventional positivism paradigm, post-positivism suggests that researchers should modify their arguments to understand truth as a matter of *probability* rather than absolute certainty (Mertens, 2019). Besides, while positivists assume an objective, knowable reality, postpositivists accept that reality exists but can only be imperfectly apprehended (Ponterotto, 2005). On the methodological basis, the researcher is required to commence with hypotheses deductively derived from empirically supported theories (Jennings, 2001). The outcomes of that process support or reject the theory, thereby potentially leading to necessary revisions and undertaking additional investigations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Jennings, 2001). Methodologically, post-positivism is more closely aligned with quantitative research than qualitative research approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ponterotto, 2005; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Jennings (2001) observed that most tourism research has been grounded in

the post-positivist paradigm, and many would still adhere to that viewpoint more than two decades later, as generally shown in several reviews of research.

As a result, concerning the four questions mentioned above, post-positivism is characterised as follows (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005):

- **Ontology:** reality is assumed to exist independently of human perception but can only be known imperfectly due to the inherent limitations of human cognition. Consequently, it can only be probabilistically known (Jennings, 2001)
- **Epistemology:** postpositivism recognises that while researchers inevitably influence and may introduce some bias into the research process, striving for objectivity and maintaining independence between the researcher and the subject of inquiry remain essential guiding principles.
- **Methodology:** primarily uses quantitative methods, including questionnaires, observations, documentary analysis, experiments and quasi-experiments. However, there has been a growth in mixed methods (Jennings, 2001).
- **Axiology:** knowledge is propositional, which proposes or declares realities rather than beliefs. Knowledge is intrinsically valuable (Jennings, 2001).

3.1.2 Constructivism

Since the 1970s, newer paradigms have emerged to alternate the role of positivism/post-positivism, one of which is constructivism (Alise & Teddlie, 2010). With the growth of social sciences research in the last 50 years or so, constructionism has come to take its place alongside post-positivism as perhaps the two most well-known research philosophies (Wilson, 2014). The constructivism (or interpretivism) paradigm indicates that reality is established in the minds of people, and this must be revealed via deep reflection and interactive researcher-participant conversation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Wilson, 2014). In constructivism, researchers seek to comprehend the intricate nature of lived experiences by interpreting the meanings individuals ascribe to their own realities, thereby prioritising the perspectives of those who directly engage with the phenomena under investigation (Mertens, 2019). Hence, the purpose of a constructivist is to be actively engaged in their study through high degrees of interaction and participation.

Moreover, according to Jennings (2001), and differing from post-positivism, constructivism recognises multiple realities for explaining a phenomenon rather than a single causal relationship or one overarching theory. Additionally, the research process, by definition, tends to the subjective rather than the objective. The constructivist paradigm emphasises the interaction between the researcher and the object of investigation, through which richer and more detailed meanings can be discovered (Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivist researchers utilise a qualitative methodology to collect insights from the empirical world, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and case studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Jennings, 2001; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). They concentrate on the settings where individuals live and work, aiming to understand participants' historical and cultural context from an insider's rather than an outsider's perspective, as would be the case under a post-positivism paradigm. The more open-ended the questioning, the better, since this allows the researcher to listen carefully to what people say and do in their everyday lives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). However, there are varying schools of thought as to the questioning process. The phenomenological approach tends to ensure that the questioner does not impose a research agenda on the informant, and questions tend to ask for clarification of the respondents' views on topics they have raised. Such questions would include, for example, "... can you give me an example of what you mean?" and "... why is that important to you." This can be successful but equally might create an unequal conversation. More traditionally, the researcher will introduce the research topic, and a conversation ensues where both speakers explore the subject matter, but it remains possible that while gaining data, the true importance to the respondent may not be fully disclosed.

In sum, the characteristics of each philosophical approach of the constructivism paradigm are described (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Jennings, 2001; Ponterotto, 2005):

- Ontology: reality is understood as multiple and socially established.
- Epistemology: emphasises the dynamic interaction between researcher and participant to assess the "lived experience" of the participant. Reality is intersubjective and affected by the context of the circumstance (e.g., personal experience, perceptions, external environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher). As a result, constructivist research favours a personal and interactive mode of data collection.
- Methodology: prioritises intensive researcher-participant engagement and immersion over an extended period in the participant's lives. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth

interviews, observation, and focus groups, are preferred. Empirical materials will be interpreted using coding, content analysis, grounded theory analysis, etc.

- Axiology: Knowledge is considered propositional and transactional, with intrinsic value as a means to promote social change and emancipation.

3.1.3 Transformative

The transformative approach was established in the 1980s through the work of critical theorists, participatory action researchers, Marxists, feminists, minorities, and people with disabilities (Mertens, 2019). These scholars challenged the structural laws and theories imposed by post-positivism, arguing that they did not adequately represent the lived experiences of marginalised people in society. They asserted that the research must address structures of power and social justice, discrimination, and oppression in ways that empower informants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Transformative researchers deliberately align themselves with marginalised or less empowered groups, engaging collaboratively with them to promote social change and challenge existing power structures. Thus, in the transformative paradigm, research inquiry is inherently linked to a political change agenda aimed at confronting social oppression wherever it occurs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The transformative paradigm provides an overarching framework to investigate assumptions related to power, social justice, and cultural complexity throughout the research process (Mertens, 2007). Typically, transformative research begins with a focus on a specific social issue (e.g., empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression, and alienation). Participants may help to design the research questions, collect data, and analyse the information (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As a result, this approach gives voice to participants, increases their consciousness, and advances change agendas to improve their lives. The transformative approach has emerged from critical analysis that also required researchers to be aware of the silences, those things not stated, as such silences can represent acts of acquiescence that actually are being formulated by the powerful.

The four philosophical approaches related to the transformative paradigm are demonstrated (Mertens, 2007, 2010) as follows:

- Ontology: various realities are socially developed; however, these must be explicitly situated within social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, racial, gender, age, and disability contexts.

- Epistemology: The researcher-participant interaction is necessary for the study to know realities.
- Methodology: Research methods should be adapted in consideration of cultural complexity, power dynamics, or discrimination and oppression. The researcher can select quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods.
- Axiology: ethical considerations encompass respect for cultural interaction norms and define beneficence in terms of the promotion of human rights and the rise in social justice.

3.1.4 Pragmatism

Pragmatism can be categorised into two periods: an early phase spanning between 1860 and 1930, and a neo-pragmatism period from the 1960s to the present (Mertens, 2019). Pragmatists agree that this approach emerges from actions, situations, and consequences rather than from predetermined conditions, as emphasised in post-positivism (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Rejecting the notion of an absolute, unified reality, the pragmatism paradigm is not bound to any fixed philosophical system or conception of reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Instead, it offers a flexible framework of assumptions regarding knowledge and inquiry that underlies mixed-methods research, distinguishing it from purely quantitative approaches rooted in positivism/post-positivism and purely qualitative approaches grounded in constructivism (Denscombe, 2008). Each of these approaches creates its own research world, shaped by distinct contexts, standards, and assumptions about the nature of inquiry (Morgan, 2014). Hence, pragmatism prefers multiple methods, various viewpoints and perspectives, and various types of data collection and analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This paradigm grants researchers the flexibility to select the research methods, techniques, and procedures that best suit their research objectives and needs. Therefore, using a mixed-method approach based on pragmatism provides the most comprehensive understanding of a research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Creswell, with various co-authors, tends to the view that it is the research context and question that should set the agenda, not the assumptions that lie behind any given research question. While this is, in principle, a readily defensible position, it does run the risk of collecting sets of data that are not easily reconciled with each other because of the differing assumptions behind the varying paradigms. Much, therefore, depends on the research

objectives, and if one objective is to create generalities that can inform policies, then the potential lack of certainty may be a limitation of a “pragmatic” approach. On the other hand, the diversification of research methods does create new knowledge that can be of use.

To summarise, pragmatism is characterised by four philosophical approaches as described below (Jennings, 2001; Onwuegbuzie, Johnson, & Collins, 2009) :

- **Ontology:** There is a single “real world”, yet individuals hold their own unique interpretations of that world.
- **Epistemology:** Knowledge is constructed and grounded in the reality of the world as we experience and live in it. Consequently, the researcher must engage with diverse community members to fully understand and solve a research problem.
- **Methodology:** Research focuses on the research problem itself and employs pluralistic approaches to generate knowledge about that problem.
- **Axiology:** Knowledge is both propositional and intrinsically valuable, serving as a potential means of social emancipation. It involves ethical considerations.

Table 7 summarised the main characteristics of each research paradigm.

Table 7. Summary of answers to the paradigm-defining questions

Basic beliefs	Post-positivism	Constructivism	Transformative	Pragmatism
Ontology (Nature of reality)	One reality, based on probability rather than certainty	Multiple, socially constructed realities	Multiple versions of reality are based on social positioning	Single reality and that all individuals have their own unique interpretation of reality
Epistemology (Nature of knowledge; relationship between knower and would-be-known)	Objectivity, although it is acknowledged that there may be researcher bias	Intersubjective. Connection between researcher and participant	Connection between researcher and participant; considering a consciousness of cultural complexities and issues of power	Objective and subjective in order to solve problems. Relationships in research are determined by what the researcher deems appropriate to that particular study.
Methodology (Approach to systematic inquiry)	Quantitative (primarily)	Qualitative (primarily)	Qualitative (dialogic), quantitative and mixed methods can be used	Match methods to specific questions and purposes of research; mix methods typically used

Basic beliefs	Post-positivism	Constructivism	Transformative	Pragmatism
Axiology (Nature of ethical behaviour)	Knowledge is propositional and of intrinsic value	Knowledge is propositional and transactional and is a way to achieve social change and emancipation	Respect for cultural norms and beneficence is defined in terms of the promotion of human rights and an increase in social justice, reciprocity	Knowledge is propositional and of intrinsic value and a potential means to social emancipation

One implication of the above table and the discussion is that the researcher should be transparent and reflective about the research process and project. It also implies that the viewpoint that “science-based” research is wholly objective and free from subjectivity is a contestable position. It also highlights that the skill set of the researcher is also a matter of concern in that inappropriate use of questions or faults of interpretation may introduce further problems when seeking to follow recommendations being offered.

3.1.5 Justification of the selection of the post-positivism paradigm

The post-positivism paradigm is adopted in this research for several reasons. First and foremost, regarding ontology, as aforementioned, post-positivists suggested that reality can never be fully apprehended, only approximated. Wilson (2014) added that post-positivism depends on multiple methods to assess as much of reality as possible. Thus, in terms of the selected method of analysis, although quantitative methods tend to be dominant, post-positivism also allows some types of qualitative analysis, especially analyses that create numbers as part of the outcomes, such as word count and classical content analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The present study uses a mixed-methods research approach that will be discussed in more depth later.

Moreover, in terms of epistemology, post-positivism considers objectivity and researcher-subject independence in the research process. Researchers should eliminate their biases and maintain minimal interaction with the research participants when conducting the research (Ponterotto, 2005; Wilson, 2014). Given the background of a researcher not from New Zealand, there is an absence of an impact due to being a “New Zealander” involved in the tourism industry of this country. To that extent, the goal of the study process is to be objective. To avoid personal biases, the researcher designs and follows strict research guidelines (e.g., interview protocols, the use of self-completion questionnaires) to minimise interaction with

research participants. On the other hand, which is not to say there is an absence of evaluations about the quality of the services being provided to the participants. Nonetheless, it is intended that the research is quantitative in nature and hence the reliability of the data can be tested by quantitative statistical procedures that include tests of reliability within the dataset.

Third, regarding generalisation, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), post-positivist study aims for an explanation, eventually enabling the prediction and policy making regarding the phenomena. The knowledge that is built through a post-positivism paradigm is based on a deductive perspective, moving from theory to observations recorded by the researcher and measurement completed by the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), thereby enabling generalisation to be made with predictable confidence. Wilson (2014) asserted that post-positivists strive to make the findings applicable to a wide population. These characteristics of the post-positivism paradigm are aligned with the present research objectives. This research intends to explore and develop measurement instruments of the primary constructs (perceived value of wellness retreat experience) by a qualitative method, and then to examine the theoretical framework to generalise to a broader context.

Last, but not least, post-positivism envisages that various laws or theories, which require examination, verification, and refinement to enhance our understanding of reality. Thus, post-positivists commence with a theory, gather data to test its validity, and then revise and further investigate as needed. In this current study, different behavioural theories are utilised to establish a conceptual research framework and develop relevant statements describing the causal relationship of interest. With the purpose of theory testing (either supporting in the current context or rejecting the theory), a post-positivism paradigm is more appropriate (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Quantitative research approach

Originating mainly from psychology, strategies of inquiry related to quantitative research emerged in the post-positivism perspective in the late 19th and throughout the 20th century (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Consequently, qualitative research has increasingly been employed to help generate and formulate hypotheses, which can then be tested and refined through scientific and statistical research methods and models (Walle, 1997). This research

approach, which bears the imprints of post-positivism paradigm, statistical examination, and the scientific method, continues to dominate nowadays. Interest in the quantitative research approach across different topics of the tourism and hospitality discipline has risen significantly since 1945, when a “quantitative revolution” in various areas transformed the techniques and practices utilised in scholarly research (Assaf & Tsionas, 2019; Provenzano & Baggio, 2020). The social science shifted from a “subjective” analysis of social phenomena that primarily relied on interviews, focus groups, case studies, textual analysis and direct observations to statistical procedures and mathematical reasoning.

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) suggested that the quantitative approach is associated with gathering, analysing, interpreting, and presenting numerical information. The quantitative approach concentrates on strictly quantifying observations (data) and careful control of empirical variables (Ponterotto, 2005). Answers to quantitative research questions are displayed in numerical format. In the area of tourism research, as in much of the social sciences, the predominant quantitative method continues to rely on one-off cross-sectional surveys for a quantitative approach (Dolnicar, Zinn, & Demeter, 2024). Quantitative methods employ various statistical procedures that consist of (1) describing the phenomenon of interest and/or (2) identifying significant differences between groups or among variables (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). These approaches have also involved more complicated techniques such as structural equation modelling, hierarchical linear modelling, logistic regression, and experiments with many variables and treatments (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). However, even the most sophisticated quantitatively analytical examinations may be susceptible to methodological pitfalls and biases in data collection.

3.2.2 Qualitative research approach

Qualitative research has been employed in various domains, including anthropology, sociology, education, psychology, history, and literature (Ponterotto, 2005). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) asserted that the qualitative approach is associated with the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of narrative information. Thus, the answers to qualitative research questions are presented in narrative form, often incorporating participants’ own words to illustrate psychological events, experiences, or phenomena. The qualitative approach utilises different inductive and iterative techniques, such as narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, case study research, and so on (Creswell &

Creswell, 2017). Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are empirical methods in that they involve the collection, analysis, and interpretation of observations or data (Ponterotto, 2005). As a form of social science, tourism research favourably employs a qualitative approach during the exploratory stage of the research process, which is particularly significant in an effort to specify indicators and attributes of complex tourism concepts and constructs for subsequent measurement purposes (Mason, Augustyn, & Seakhoa-King, 2010). However, the main criticisms of qualitative techniques are the degree of bias generated in the giving and in the recording of subjective impressions and the lack of generalisability from a limited case (McIntosh, 1998).

3.2.3 Mixed methods research approach

Although both quantitative and qualitative approaches are powerful tools, their strict guidelines often require scholars to refrain from using insight, intuition, and other non-rigorous knowledge, especially in the tourism discipline, where multiple forms of evidence and information are needed to understand people's feelings and experiences (Walle, 1997). As a result, purely statistical tools are increasingly being supplemented with qualitative techniques since they are capable of dealing with the complex issues in marketing and tourism. Such concerns have led to the emergence of mix-methods technique among consumer behaviourists, opening up new ontological, epistemological, and methodological opportunities (Provenzano & Baggio, 2020). The mixed methods approach refers to integrating or combining qualitative and quantitative research and data within a single research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Various paradigms have been suggested as a philosophical foundation for the mixed-methods approach, including pragmatism and the transformative paradigm (Alise & Teddlie, 2010). Mixed-method research bridges epistemological differences among paradigms by incorporating various methodological approaches (Cheng, Pearce, Kim, & Lee, 2025). According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), a mixed methods approach is identified as research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry. However, as a consequence of differing ontological and epistemological positions and their influences on methodology, many scholars still see themselves as either qualitative or quantitative researchers (Mason et al., 2010). Nevertheless, this research method has gained popularity primarily because it utilises the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to address the complexity of the research problems (Truong, Xiaoming

Liu, & Yu, 2020). Therefore, a mixed-methods approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of social and behavioural dynamics by integrating diverse perspectives and data sources, thereby uncovering insights that may remain obscured when relying solely on a single methodological approach.

Mixed methods researchers advocate for the utility of both inductive and deductive reasoning to simultaneously pursue theory generation and hypothesis testing within a single study, without privileging one over the other (Jogulu & Pansiri, 2011). The fundamental premise underlying this approach is that combining qualitative and quantitative methods offers a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of a research problem than either approach in isolation (Truong et al., 2020). Additionally, Denscombe (2008) outlined several reasons for applying mixed methods in social science research: 1) to enhance the accuracy of data; 2) to create a comprehensive picture of the findings; 3) to avoid biases by using a single-method approach; 4) to establish the analysis and build on initial findings through contrasting sorts of data or method; and 5) to support sampling procedure. More importantly, mixed-methods data analysis can amalgamate statistical and thematic analytic approaches, allowing findings to be presented in both narrative and numerical forms. Through the combination and comparison of multiple data sources, analyses, and processes, the mixed methods approach fosters triangulation, which subsequently strengthens the study's findings (Jogulu & Pansiri, 2011). Furthermore, the complementary nature of qualitative and quantitative techniques has been advocated in tourism studies because of their experiential consumption in nature (McIntosh, 1998).

Different typologies of mixed methods have been suggested in the literature by various scholars. Creswell and Creswell (2017) described three fundamental mixed methods designs: convergent parallel mixed methods, explanatory sequential mixed methods, and exploratory sequential mixed methods. Cameron (2009) proposed four major mixed methods research design types, namely triangulation (QUAN + QUAL), embedded (QUAN + qual or QUAL + quan), explanatory (QUAN -> qual), and exploratory (QUAL -> quan). Based on these prior works, Jogulu and Pansiri (2011) suggested subcategories of mixed methods based on concurrent/sequential and equal/dominant status. Researchers proposed the concurrent-equal approach (QUAL + QUAN), concurrent-dominant status (QUAL + quan or QUAN + qual), the sequential-equal status approach (QUAL -> QUAN or QUAN -> QUAL) and sequential-dominant status (QUAL -> quan or quan -> QUAL or QUAN -> qual or qual -> QUAN). While

each type of mixed methods research involves unique opportunities and challenges, in their review of research using mixed-method design in the tourism and hospitality discipline, Truong et al. (2020) found that most studies utilised a dominant approach focusing on specific methods, accounting for 61% of the sample of studies they found. Cheng et al. (2025) and Li Huang, Zan, Lv, and Zhao (2025) indicated that the use of mixed methods was a response to the rising complexity and dynamism of research problems in tourism and hospitality.

3.2.4 The use of mixed methods research in this study

Having considered the above discussion, this study adopted an exploratory mixed-methods research design to explore and expand the understanding of the research problems. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), this research approach involves an initial qualitative data collection and analysis phase, which subsequently informs the development of a quantitative instrument administered to a broader sample. Such a design is particularly suitable for research domains where existing scholarship is limited, allowing qualitative insights to guide the formulation of quantitative hypotheses (Cheng et al., 2025). Furthermore, although qualitative and quantitative methods rest on distinct philosophical and methodological foundations, they can bring many potential benefits when properly combined (Kurtaliqi, Miltgen, Viglia, & Pantin-Sohier, 2024). More specifically, based on the category by Jogulu and Pansiri (2011), the present study employs a sequential-dominant status approach (qual -> QUAN), which entails an initial phase of qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by a separate quantitative phase, with a strong emphasis on the quantitative method in explaining and interpreting the study's findings. Cheng et al. (2025) suggested that sequential designs offer a more nuanced understanding compared to concurrent designs by addressing their inherent limitations. Researchers employed qualitative methods in the first study to gather a wealth of information about the research context and initially explore the phenomenon. Such qualitative techniques are effective in capturing and documenting participants' lived experiences, including their thoughts and feelings, through personal narratives, thereby offering a richness of information and enhancing validity (McIntosh, 1998). Exploratory qualitative studies of this kind commonly serve as the initial stage in sequential mixed-methods research within tourism (Mason et al., 2010). By using qualitative data as an exploration stage, an instrument is subsequently developed, addressing the inadequacies or absence of existing instruments, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Then, the survey is administered to collect the quantitative data. The use of mixed-method research can address the context-specific phenomena in tourism

and hospitality research (Truong et al., 2020). Therefore, the present study employs a sequential-dominant status research design to first explore and develop a measure of the perceived value of transformative wellness retreat experiences through a qualitative study (netnography), and then to test the proposed research model using a quantitative study (questionnaire).

3.3 Research design

3.3.1 Qualitative phase: Netnography

Fundamentally, qualitative methods enable researchers to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of individuals, places, and cultures via rich engagement and sometimes immersion within the context under investigation (Zina, 2021). Following research objective 1, which aims to explore tourist experiences at the wellness retreat destination, netnography is utilised to analyse retreat experiences via user-generated content on online travel communities. Eventually, in this stage, the qualitative method is expected to establish the measurements of wellness retreat experiences' perceived value for the survey in a later stage.

Qualitative research methods are especially beneficial for exploring the complex symbolic worlds that shape people's needs, desires, meanings, and choices. The most popular qualitative methods in social science studies include focus groups, personal interviews, and ethnography. Each method has its own pros and cons. For example, focus groups or interviews are less time-consuming and simpler than ethnography. On the other hand, their obtrusiveness and artificiality are significantly higher than those of ethnography. To address the drawbacks of ethnography, “netnography” has emerged as an innovative qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research principles to the emerging characteristics of computer-mediated environments (Kozinets, 2002). Within online communities, people can express themselves both implicitly and explicitly by showing their personal opinions, desires, expectations, experiences, and beliefs (Tavakoli & Mura, 2018). By doing so, they produce a large volume of data about consumers' patterns, which has proved popular for business. Designed by Kozinets (1997), netnography is identified as a qualitative approach that systematically, immersively, and multimodally applies observations, digital traces, and/or forms of elicitation (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). Over the past decade, this qualitative approach has gained increasing traction among social scientists for its advantages. Firstly, compared to conventional ethnography, netnography is generally far less time-consuming and elaborate.

Secondly, in comparison to focus groups and interviews, netnography is far less obtrusive, less costly and more timely. However, one must also acknowledge the limitations of this method, which include its narrow focus on online communities, the need for researchers' interpretive skills, and the lack of informant identifiers present in the online context, resulting in difficulty generalising results to groups outside the online community sample (Kozinets, 2002).

By its very nature, tourism revolves around experiences that are fleeting, multi-sensory, and profoundly subjective. As a domain within the social sciences, tourism research seeks to comprehend these experiences, the underlying motivations, and their wider sociocultural and economic impacts. Although the conventional research techniques, such as surveys and structured interviews, are effective for gathering demographic information and describing tourist behaviours, they are often inadequate for capturing actual behaviours or for fully apprehending the emotional, imaginative, cultural, and serendipitous aspects which characterise tourism experiences (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). Tourism-related topics are frequently discussed on online social platforms and have become a pivotal part of tourist experiences (Wu & Pearce, 2014). The evolution of the Web alongside the widespread adoption of digital gadgets, software applications, and user interfaces has significantly expanded the digital footprint of tourism. These advancements are not only transforming the nature of available data but also creating new forms of tourism experiences, encompassing both physical and digital activities, thereby offering various opportunities for researchers to study the behaviours of tourists and different tourism stakeholders (Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019). Thus, netnography provides a distinctive lens through which to observe real-time, unmediated narratives from tourists and tourism stakeholders, effectively bridging digitally derived data with qualitative academic exploration (Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024; Tavakoli & Mura, 2018). Many scholars in tourism have acknowledged the importance of this methodology and applied it in various tourism contexts, ranging from ecotourism (Ruhanen, 2019), wellness tourism (Dillette et al., 2021), dark tourism (Quang et al., 2023), rural tourism (An & Alarcón, 2021), wine tourism (Kotur, 2022), among other topics. Further, netnography sometimes grants researchers access to otherwise hard-to-reach populations, for example, solo female travellers (Karagöz, Işık, Dogru, & Zhang, 2021), tourists with pets (Ying et al., 2021), and digital-free tourists (Zhang & Zhang, 2022).

3.3.2 Quantitative phase: Questionnaire

This study aimed to develop the *Perceived Value of Wellness Retreat Experience Scale* to measure the phenomenological characteristics of retreat experiences and test the proposed research framework to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. As a result, a structured questionnaire is designed to collect quantitative data. According to Dolnicar et al. (2024), survey represent the gold standard in tourism studies. The questionnaire method offers a quantitative or numerical description of trends, attitudes, or opinions within a population by studying a sample drawn from that population. Based on the outcomes obtained from this sample, the researcher can then generalise findings to the broader population (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A self-completion questionnaire is chosen for many advantages among various types of questionnaires in social research. First, the questionnaire will be distributed at the research site, where self-completion is appropriate. Second, it allows participants to conveniently accomplish the survey at their own pace, which increases the validity of the data as respondents can express their opinions flexibly, especially when they are on the trip. However, this method will take more time for researchers to gather data to obtain a sufficiently large sample size, and lower response rates may be a possible consequence if the researcher does not choose the right time to distribute the questionnaire at the research site (Jennings, 2001). The survey will be cross-sectional, with data gathered at a single point in time.

Figure 3 illustrates the research design of the present research.

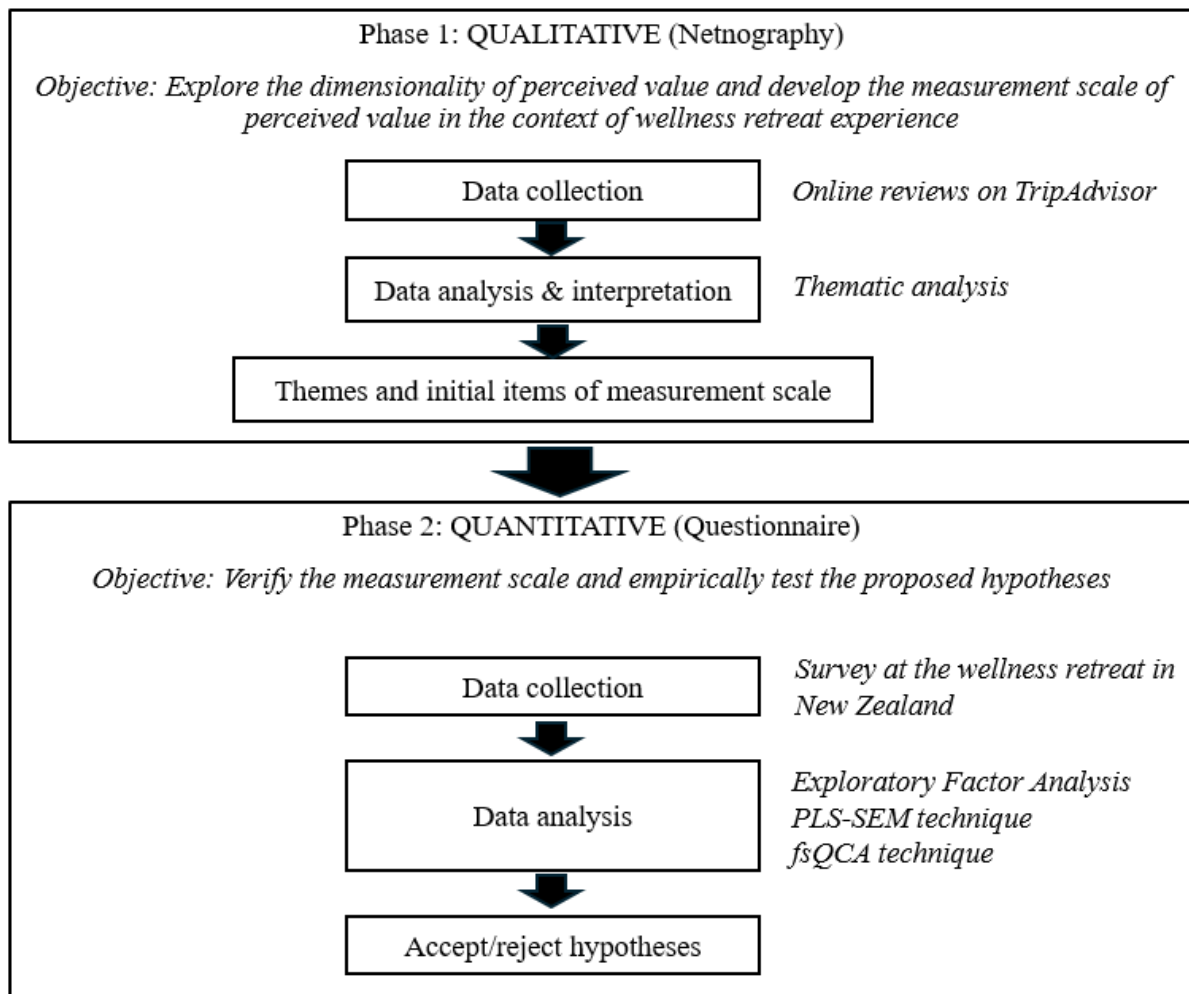


Figure 3. The overview of the research design in this study

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Data collection for the qualitative method

The netnography research method is grounded in a framework of established guidelines combined with adaptable procedures that emphasise researcher engagement, ethical considerations, and contextual sensitivity. These procedures are continuously refined to keep pace with technological and cultural advancements (Kozinets, 2002, 2015; Kozinets & Gretzel, 2024). In their latest article, the creators - Kozinets and Gretzel (2024) - provided an update on netnography's methodology with four fundamental stages: research focus, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and research communication. Although these stages follow a sequential logic, they may overlap and require multiple iterations throughout the research process.

According to Kozinets' (2002) recommendations, researchers must first identify specific online forums that are appropriate for the research purposes. Some selection criteria include (1) choosing a segment, topic, or group that is more focused and directly relevant to the research question; (2) prioritising platforms or communities with higher volumes of activity or “traffic” in terms of postings; (3) targeting those with a larger number of distinct contributors or message posters; (4) ensuring the presence of detailed, descriptively rich data that can support in-depth analysis; and (5) identifying sites that exhibit a greater degree of interaction among members, particularly of the kind aligned with the objectives of the research inquiry. Ultimately, Tripadvisor.com and Google Maps Review were chosen as the target sites. Tripadvisor.com is the most popular travel community site, and it has been utilised intensively in past tourism studies (Kirova, 2021; Kotur, 2022; Quang et al., 2023; Ruhanen, 2019). This online travel community site has also been recognised as a reliable traveller-generated review platform and is trusted by travellers and tourism businesses (Quang et al., 2023).

Initially, a search on TripAdvisor was conducted to generate a list of sample wellness retreats in New Zealand using the keyword phrase “wellness retreat”, which generated approximately 1,000 results. The wellness retreats in New Zealand were chosen as the study context as the destination is reputable for attracting high-profile, health and wellness-oriented holidaymakers. However, based on the definitions of wellness retreats in this study, the researcher first scanned the websites of those offering wellness experiences to eliminate any inappropriate results, including self-service retreats and “guest house” retreats. Then, researcher, having a short-list of businesses, thought it appropriate to make a second visit to the websites to check if they consider themselves a “wellness retreat” which offers wellness packages, healthy dining, and wellness-related recreational activities. The provision of overnight accommodation was also considered as an important criterion. The final sample consists of nine wellness retreats. They are an intimate and exclusive wellness retreat destinations, where visitors can indulge in massage, yoga, meditation, spa treatments, and physical training. These retreats are located across New Zealand. Similar to wellness retreat across the globe, they focus on providing a place to unwind, find balance, and nurture the soul through nutrition, mindfulness, and therapies, as clearly stated on their websites. However, some of these selected properties have a very limited number of reviews on the TripAdvisor platform due to the operation of their businesses and their exclusive clientele. To address this issue, Google Maps Reviews was added. Since the introduction of the Local Guide program in 2015, Google Maps has evolved into an expansive platform for user-generated content (Leiras

& Eusébio, 2024). Thus, Google Maps Reviews has a large number of active users and provides rich information.

Then, customer online reviews of these wellness retreats were collected using the Web Scraper Chrome extension. Following the reverse chronological order based on the published date, the sampling process commenced with the most recent posting day and proceeded backwards to the earliest entries. The data extracted in Excel format included the textual content of the reviews as well as the star ratings of the retreats. Researcher also coded the retreat names by number from 1 to 9 to ensure anonymity. The details are presented in **Table 8** below. As shown in the **Table 8**, the number of reviews reflected the total amount of reviews that were originally collected (scraped) from TripAdvisor/ Google Reviews before data cleaning was done. The final number of reviews is the remaining number of reviews after data cleaning and were used for further content analysis. The outcomes of this phase of the research are reported in detail in the next section. A key objective of this initial study was to explore the dimensionality of customer perceived value in the wellness retreat contexts, then establish a measurement scale that would be of use in the subsequent questionnaire.

Table 8. Detailed information on the qualitative data sample

Retreat Code	Number of TripAdvisor reviews	TripAdvisor star ranking (1-5 stars)	Final number of TripAdvisor reviews	Number of Google reviews	Google review ranking (1-5 stars)	Final number of Google reviews	Total reviews	Total word count
1	10	5	9	44	4.9	33	42	3485
2	6	5	5	30	5	28	33	3275
3	188	5	188	3	5	3	191	21101
4	59	5	58	72	5	64	122	12476
5	254	5	240	29	4.9	24	264	29661
6	43	5	43	12	4.7	11	54	4879
7	9	5	8	46	5	39	47	3126
8	42	4.5	42	3	5	2	44	4985
9	92	5	92	53	5	47	139	18855

3.4.2 Data collection for the quantitative method

3.4.2.1 Measurement scales

A self-administered questionnaire was utilised to collect quantitative data. The instrument was structured into three main sections. The first page of the survey also presented

more detailed information, including details required by a University Ethics Committee. Next, the main body of the survey comprised a series of items that required participants to evaluate their experiences and behavioural intentions at the wellness retreat. Drawing on the findings of the qualitative study, the scale of perceived value of wellness retreat experience (PVWRE) was employed, consisting of 28 items. Customer loyalty was measured by two items (Prebensen, Woo, & Uysal, 2014), adjusted to the context of this study: “I would recommend attending this Retreat to friends and family” and “I would love to attend another Retreat at this property in the future”. Many of the remaining items emerged from the site analyses described below, reinforced by a literature review and observation at and discussion with staff at the Retreat. The customer-employee interaction scale was measured by three items: “The wellness managers were knowledgeable”, “The wellness managers did all to make my stay enjoyable”, and “The wellness manager was friendly and approachable”, which were modified from those of Xie et al. (2022). The term “Wellness managers” was deliberately adopted in this study, as this specific job title are used at the research site to refer to in-house personnel including experts and staff responsible for logistics, catering and accommodation. All items were presented in a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1, standing for “strongly disagree”, to 5, standing for “strongly agree”, with the additional option of “Not Applied/Appropriate/Did not use”. The final section included demographic questions about their gender, age, education, income, and relationship status. The questionnaire was provided in the Appendix B.

3.4.2.2 Sampling method

The target population of this stage is a wellness retreat visitor who has been staying in a specific wellness retreat. A purposive sampling strategy was deployed to recruit participants for the survey. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique in which specific contexts, individuals or events are chosen deliberately in order to offer important information that cannot be gained from other choices (Wilson, 2014). There are several pros and cons associated with using purposive sampling methods. Regarding advantages, this method is appropriate for small populations, allowing the researchers to target cases with particular characteristics relevant to the study. Given that this study’s population is difficult to reach, selecting a critical case for the present research that will offer valuable insights into the holistic perspective of the wellness retreat experiences is important. These insights gained from an information-rich case can inform future strategies for other forms of wellness retreats in the tourism industry. However, one of the significant drawbacks is the potential for inappropriate

sampling that can inhibit any generalisation of research findings to the broader population (Wilson, 2014).

3.4.2.3 The selection of critical case – Resolution Retreats

To access this exclusive targeted sample, researcher began by contacting Resolution Retreats (as introduced in the Introduction chapter) to express the purposes of the study. An initial field visit was also conducted to familiarise myself with the study sites, their services and wellness offerings. After several discussions that also involved presenting results from the initial web scrapping, the retreat management board granted permission to conduct the survey on their property. Data collection was conducted from January 2024 to December 2024. The survey lasted for a year to collect enough responses that would permit meaningfully statistical analysis. As mentioned earlier, the Resolution Retreats offers a 3- or 7-day wellness package with a limited number of participants per cohort. A hard copy format was preferred because the Retreat is considered a digital-free area, and respondents have limited access to the Internet. A self-completed questionnaire was left on the table at the reception and dining hall to get the attraction of potential respondents. Initially, the response rate was relatively low, as few participants were willing to complete the survey voluntarily. To increase participation, a small journaling notebook was offered as a token of appreciation for respondents' time and contribution. In addition, retreat employees were well informed about the study and its objectives, enabling them to assist in promoting the questionnaire to visitors during wellness workshops. Participants were able to drop their completed survey into a box that was locked. It was also made clear to participants that their involvement was voluntary, no names and other means of personal identification was required, and perhaps most importantly, no member of the Retreat could see individual responses and the only person with a key to the box was, in fact, the researcher. Finally, a total of 159 qualified questionnaires were collected and used for further analysis. All processes of data collection were approved by the University Ethics Committee and by the Retreat (see Appendix A for ethical approval).

3.4.3 Data triangulation

The concept of triangulation was first proposed in social studies by Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest (1966). Data triangulation refers to drawing on multiple data sources or collecting data across different time points to investigate a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Mertens, 2019; Wilson, 2014). Denzin (2017) further suggests the

application of more than one research method to examine the same phenomenon as methodological triangulation. Thus, the terminology of triangulation is often used to delineate a mixed-methods design (Cameron, 2009; Li Huang et al., 2025; Kwok, 2012). It is argued that the different methodologies used lead to differing ontologies and epistemologies, which may result in destroying the very foundations of the paradigms (Davies, 2003). Despite the objections, scholars admit that triangulation can enrich both the breadth and depth of inquiry by amplifying the strengths of the data. Tourism and the related field of leisure have strong historical evidence of employing data triangulation.

In the present study, data collection involved two stages: the initial qualitative phase, followed by a quantitative phase, as described in the previous section. Creswell and Creswell (2017) assert that research using an exploratory sequential mixed methods design needs to ensure the validity of the qualitative data. Therefore, the qualitative stage must be conducted appropriately to ensure the validity of the findings before moving on to the quantitative stage. Many researchers suggested using the triangulation approach, not only to provide various ways of looking at the same phenomenon but also to enhance the credibility of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Mertens, 2019; Patton, 2014). However, a triangulation approach to data collection needs to be built into the data collection setup to reduce the risk of chance associations and systematic biases (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Wilson, 2014). Patton (2014) asserts that triangulation is employed to examine the consistency in findings across different data sources or research approaches. According to Cheng et al. (2025), triangulation can contribute to the verification and validation of the findings and enable researchers to cross-check results.

3.5 Data analysis

3.5.1 Qualitative analysis methods

According to Wilson (2014), there is no definitive approach to performing qualitative data analysis. Therefore, it is essential to have a clear plan for the process that must be addressed to analyse the qualitative data effectively. Wilson suggested common steps to carry out qualitative analysis, including (1) transcribing data, (2) reading and generating categories, themes and patterns, (3) interpreting data, and (4) writing up a report (Wilson, 2014). Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2017) also proposed the data analysis process in qualitative research, as illustrated in **Figure 4**.

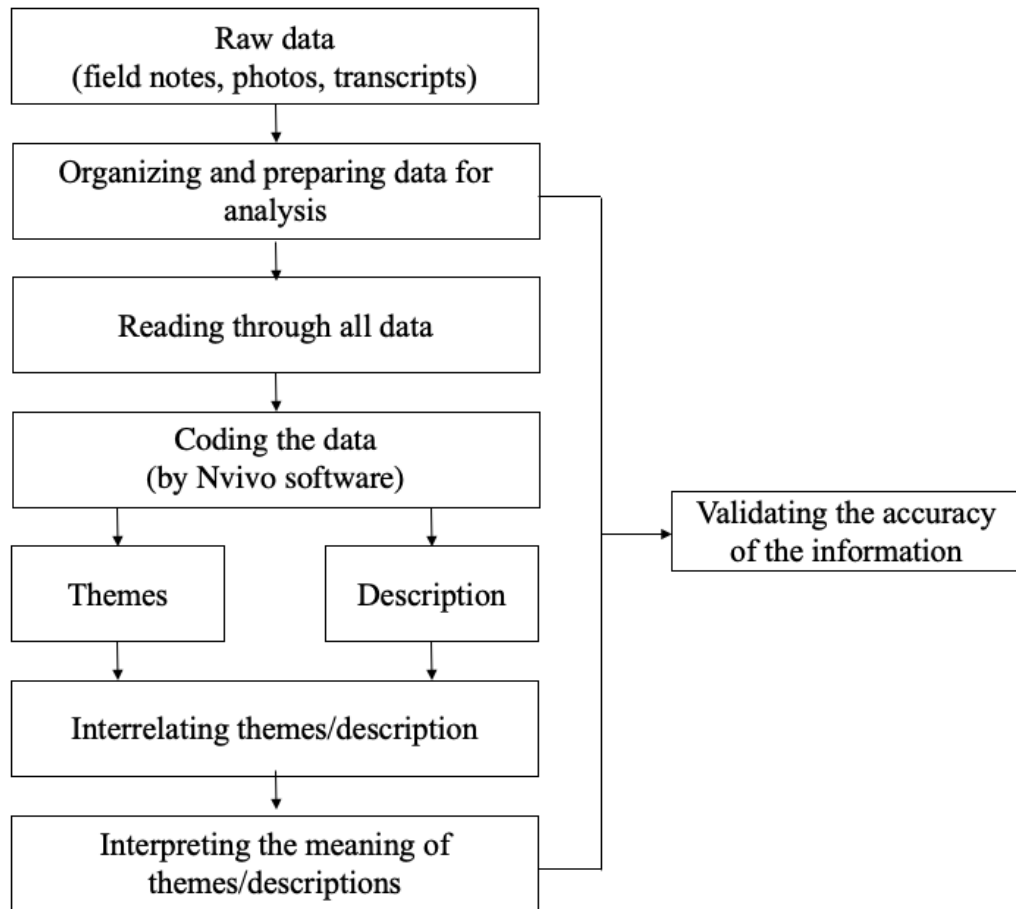


Figure 4. Data analysis in qualitative research

One advantage of web scrapping is that it avoids the need to transcribe recordings or notes into text, but this also means that it is essential that the researcher immerses themselves into the text. Such immersion is gained by initial reading designed to gain a holistic overview of the text. Editing of the text as described below also helps to establish an understanding of the content. At this point, the researcher begins to organise and prepare the data for analysis. Researcher spent some time organising the data. Using an Excel file, very short of one or two sentences with very general expressions (e.g, “Amaaaaazing! Everyone needs to see it”, or “Outstanding wellness retreat”, or “One of the best weekends - exceeded all my hopes and expectations!!”) and some non-English reviews were noted as expressions of high levels of satisfaction, but it is evident that they fail to provide details of how and why the informant is satisfied. Also, at this stage, a basic grammar and spelling check is undertaken to ensure all words are written correctly, but this also helps to clarify synonyms where the same meaning is present, even if different words are used. All final reviews were then assigned number coded. The first number represented the unique retreat code (ranging from 1 to 9 as shown in **Table**

8) and the second number indicated the review sequence. For example, review #1.49 means it belongs to wellness retreat #01 and is the 49th review in the dataset. All in all, a total of 936 guest reviews were harvested, yielding approximately 101,000 words.

The next stage was to immerse myself in the data through reading, rereading, and reading through the data to develop a deep familiarity with the material (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This stage gives the researcher a general sense of the information and helps identify patterns and themes in the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Wilson, 2014). Maintaining well-labelled and systematically organised data is essential, as it supports the accuracy of data analysis and facilitates precise reporting of findings (Mertens, 2019). In this beginning step, the frequency counts of words were performed to generate a comprehensive list of words that characterised visitors' experiences at the wellness retreats. Thereafter, the researcher systematically examined and reviewed the words on the list. The word frequency analysis technique permitted the identification of replications and similar ways of expressing ideas (e.g., villa/room/accommodation, friendly/hospitable, knowledge/knowledgeable, yoga class/yoga session, or feeling/feel). Additionally, attention was paid to the use of a singular or plural (e.g., accommodation/ accommodations, massage/massages, treatment/treatments, activity/activities). Several possible variations of specific words that carry the same meanings, such as 'massage', 'sauna', and 'hot tub' could be replaced by 'Spa experience', and 'meal', 'food', 'breakfast', and 'dinner' replaced by 'Food experience'. Ambiguities and specific reference to a given member of staff, brand names, or specific rooms were removed from the more generic analysis. This step of word standardisation is thought to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

The next stage involves the process of coding the data. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), coding is the process of categorising data and labelling those categories with terms that often emerge from the participants' actual language (called an *in vivo code*). A code can be a keyword, theme, or category within a transcript. Two approaches to coding data are suggested by (Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Patton, 2014; Wilson, 2014), namely inductive and deductive. The former aims to discover new concepts, themes, or categories by examining the data. The latter starts with a predetermined theory or theme and then uses it to guide the analysis. The present study will employ a deductive approach, which involves a coding analysis that allows the researcher to refer to a specific set of codes previously identified and based on existing theory (Wilson, 2014). The PVWRE was initially operationalised as a

multidimensional construct incorporating four theoretical dimensions, including functional value, emotional value, epistemic value, and social value, stemming from Sheth, Newman, and Gross's (1991) concept of perceived value. Sheth et al. (1991) suggested a theory of consumption values comprising five distinct consumption values that influence consumer choice behaviours, which can be applied across a diverse range of product categories (consumer nondurables, consumer durables, industrial goods, and services). This concept of perceived value has been applied to various tourism and hospitality settings, including virtual reality tourism experience (Zhu et al., 2025), souvenir shopping (Deng et al., 2021), and nighttime tourism (Y. Jiang & Hong, 2023). Given the widespread applicability and familiarity of this concept among tourism scholars, this theoretical foundation was used to explore the key themes. Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2017) suggest that a research study should have five to seven themes.

A final step in qualitative data analysis is interpreting findings and drawing conclusions, which evaluates the usefulness and centrality of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). By linking to the research questions and objectives, the qualitative component of this study seeks to develop a theoretical model that explains the wellness dimensions of wellness retreat experiences. Thus, the instrument can be generated by utilising the quotes to write survey items, applying codes to define variables that organise these items, and grouping the codes into broader themes that form the basis of the measurement scales (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.5.2 Quantitative analysis methods

3.5.2.1 Symmetric approach (Partial least squares structural equation modelling)

Structural equation modelling (SEM) enables researchers to simultaneously estimate and examine complex theories with empirical data (Sarstedt, Ringle, Smith, Reams, & Hair Jr, 2014). SEM applications have become mainstream across different areas of business research in recent years (L. Lee, Petter, Fayard, & Robinson, 2011; Mikulić & Ryan, 2018; Sarstedt et al., 2014). SEM is defined as “a second generation of multivariate analysis, with substantial advantages over first-generation techniques such as principal components analysis, factor analysis, discriminant analysis, or multiple regression because of the greater flexibility that a researcher has for the interplay between theory and data” (L. Lee et al., 2011, p. 306). According to Hair, Matthews, Matthews, and Sarstedt (2017), what has made SEM so popular is its enhanced capability to assess the reliability and validity of multi-item construct measures

and to test relationships within structural models. The SEM technique permits the simultaneous testing of the interconnections among one or more independent constructs and one or more dependent constructs with a comprehensive framework (L. Lee et al., 2011; Mikulić & Ryan, 2018). SEM integrates two powerful statistical methodologies: exploratory factor analysis and structural path analysis (Hair et al., 2017). Hence, compared to conventional regression that requires separate regression equations to examine each hypothesised relationship, SEM enables simultaneous testing of numerous relationships among theoretical constructs within a single, integrated model (L. Lee et al., 2011; Sarstedt et al., 2014). Ryan (2020b) further added that SEM offers richer detail regarding the statistical associations among all the constructs included in a model. Given that this study proposes a set of relationships among multiple variables, it suggests that Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is the most suitable technique for investigating these relationships.

Furthermore, with SEM, direct and indirect variables are examined together in a comprehensive model (Hair et al., 2017). This capability supports a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the proposed research model by allowing the investigation of mediating and moderating constructs to be thoroughly tested as part of the analysis, which is particularly valuable when explaining behaviours or perceptions of actions (L. Lee et al., 2011; Mikulić & Ryan, 2018). Thus, SEM is well-suited for exploring the possible mediating effects in the current study's proposed model. However, similar to other statistical methods, SEM are also built on a series of assumptions that the researcher needs to consider (Ryan, 2020b). To summarise, SEM is a comprehensive technique considered the appropriate quantitative data analysis method to address the research questions of the current study.

Researchers can select two SEM techniques: covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) and variance-based partial least squares (PLS-SEM) (Kurtaliqui et al., 2024). Although both techniques share the same foundational principles, they have different characteristics and different assumptions that make them fit specific research purposes (do Valle & Assaker, 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2014). The comparison between CB-SEM and PLS-SEM is illustrated in **Table 9**. Fundamentally, CB-SEM is primarily utilised to confirm established theory (e.g., explanation). On the other hand, PLS-SEM is a prediction-oriented technique, typically employed in exploratory research, although it can be applied in confirmatory research contexts (Hair et al., 2017). From a statistical perspective, CB-SEM is used to estimate model parameters by minimising the difference between the model-implied covariance matrix and the

observed empirical covariance matrix, with model confirmation achieved by an evaluation of the goodness-of-fit indices (Ryan, 2020b). Conversely, the objective of PLS-SEM is to maximise the variance explained in the dependent variable(s) (Hair et al., 2017). Notably, PLS-SEM does not provide a traditional goodness-of-fit measure (Ali, Rasoolimanesh, Sarstedt, Ringle, & Ryu, 2018). Instead, it utilises an iterative algorithm that estimates parameters via a sequence of least squares regressions, explicitly generating construct scores by applying weights to the sums of the observed items associated with each construct (do Valle & Assaker, 2016). According to Sarstedt et al. (2014), PLS-SEM is particularly effective for estimating complex path models involving numerous constructs (typically more than five), multiple structural path relationships and/or many indicators per construct (typically more than six). Additionally, PLS-SEM enables flexibility for investigating advanced modelling features, such as moderator variables, nonlinear relationships, or hierarchical component models. Another advantage is its suitability for analysis with a relatively small sample size, whereas CB-SEM requires a larger sample (Ryan, 2020b; Sarstedt et al., 2014). However, researchers still disagree on what constitutes a ‘large sample’ (Mikulić & Ryan, 2018). One can also observe that while it is often stated that PLS-SEM is appropriate for small samples, as it has evolved to permit analysis of differences between sub-groups, effectively, such analysis requires larger samples. Additionally, one also needs to take into account effect sizes, and better fits do appear to require larger samples (Ellis, 2010). Finally, it is important to note that CB-SEM assumes normal data distribution while PLS-SEM is designed to accommodate non-normal data (Hair et al., 2017). By reason of the fact that generally in tourism people are not drawn to visit places where they expect to be disappointed, and that expectation has been shown to be a determinant of satisfaction, it is quite common for tourist and guest perceptions of place and experience to be negatively skewed.

Table 9. Common differences between CB-SEM and PLS-SEM

	CB-SEM	PLS-SEM
<i>Objective</i>	Explanation	Explanation and prediction
<i>Measurement philosophy</i>	Common variance only (factor-based)	Total variance (composite-based)
<i>Data</i>	Normally distributed	Non-normally distributed
<i>Sample size</i>	Large (N \geq 100)	Smaller (N \leq 100)
<i>Measurement model</i>	Reflective	Reflective and formative
<i>Evaluation</i>	Goodness-of-fit	No established goodness-of-fit

Source: Adapted from Hair et al. (2017)

It should also be noted that there are differences between the bases of specific SEM software packages. Smart-PLS is very popular, but, for example, WARP-PLS provides better guidance where non-linear relationships may exist between variables. There are, however, a number of characteristics of PLS-SEM that are especially crucial for its prevalent application in tourism and hospitality studies (Ali et al., 2018; do Valle & Assaker, 2016; Ryan, 2020b). PLS-SEM is utilised in the present paper due to several significant advantages. First, the primary objective of this research is to examine the interrelationship between the perceived value of a wellness retreat experience and tourists' behavioural outcomes, which aligns with PLS-SEM's causal-predictive nature. PLS-SEM has established itself as a prominent approach for estimating such relationships for several reasons, including the ease of mapping potential relationships. Second, the data collection is based on purposive sampling, a non-random sampling technique that differs from random sampling, which may result in non-normally distributed data, which, as noted previously, is common when analysing holiday (time-out) periods. PLS-SEM can effectively handle this type of data. Third, considering the small sample size of the current study, PLS-SEM is entirely appropriate (Kurtaliqui et al., 2024). Finally, PLS allows for the examination of complex models consisting of several latent variables, structural paths, and moderating effects, which is well-suited for the proposed model comprising the multidimensional antecedents (PVWRE), moderator (customer-host interaction), and consequence (destination loyalty). It was for these reasons that PLS-SEM was selected for handling the modelling and data characteristics in the present study.

3.5.2.2 Asymmetric approach (fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis)

Recent research has demonstrated the effectiveness of using SEM studies combined with other techniques, such as fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis or necessary condition analysis, in explaining complex phenomena (Kurtaliqui et al., 2024). Given the predictive nature of this research, the fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) was applied in conjunction with PLS-SEM to enhance the explanatory power of the findings. The combination of these two techniques strengthens the findings by providing adequate combinations of determinants that generate destination loyalty. Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) is an asymmetric data analysis technique that integrates the logical reasoning and contextual depth characteristic of qualitative approaches with the generalisability and case-handling capability of quantitative methods, offering an alternative to symmetric theoretical

frameworks and tools (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) enables the identification of logically simplified statements that capture various combinations, or configurations, of conditions associated with a particular outcome. These combinations are particular sets of causal variables that work synergistically to signal the presence of an observed or targeted outcome.

This asymmetric approach of analysis offers several advantages across various fields, including business and management research, by addressing the limitations of conventional symmetric models (SEM), as highlighted by Rasoolimanesh, Ringle, Sarstedt, and Olya (2021) and Pappas and Woodside (2021). Generally, the primary purpose of the asymmetric approach is to investigate how varying combinations of independent variables produce particular outcome levels across diverse groups of cases (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). There are three principal variants of this approach: crisp-set QCA (csQCA), multi-value QCA (mvQCA) and fuzzy-set QCA (fsQCA). The present study employed fsQCA, originally introduced by Ragin (1987), which has since become the standard methodological tool for asymmetric analyses in regression-based models. In recent years, the application of fsQCA has expanded considerably within diverse social science areas, especially marketing (S. Kumar, Sahoo, Lim, Kraus, & Bamel, 2022), information systems (Pappas & Woodside, 2021), and tourism (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), where it helps in theory development and testing. The application of fsQCA helps identify patterns of factors leading to an outcome, extending beyond the traditional identification of correlations between independent and dependent variables.

More specifically, fsQCA provides two types of configurations of causal conditions that are sufficient or necessary for producing a particular result of interest. These configurations can be characterised by the presence, absence, or a “do not care” condition of specific factors. Both necessary and sufficient conditions lead to a distinction between core elements, which have a strong causal relationship with the outcome, and peripheral elements, which indicate a weaker relationship with the outcome. The strength of these causal relationships is determined by two leading indicators: consistency and coverage. Consistency measures the degree to which a causal combination consistently results in the outcome, ranging from 0 to 1. Coverage represents the proportion of cases with a particular outcome that are attributed to a specific causal condition. The goal is to find an optimal balance, where the identified solution is both empirically robust and theoretically meaningful, with consistency and coverage values falling within acceptable thresholds to ensure its validity and the relevance of the findings. If the

solution has a high consistency but low coverage, it is not particularly compelling because it fails to describe many cases. Similarly, if a solution has a high coverage but low consistency, it is deemed not convincing since that solution fails to reliably produce the outcome frequently enough to support a strong causal inference. To perform fsQCA analysis, the researcher followed the steps proposed by Pappas and Woodside (2021). The ideal situation is therefore one of high consistency and coverage. The problematic solutions may be found in solutions that combine high or low consistency with opposite conditions in coverage that yield “do not care” type options, and here, the researchers are often resorting to far from optimal solutions based on their own experience and knowledge of the wider literature. Nonetheless, it is here contended that such solutions are not without value as they can motivate other researchers to develop different hypotheses, creating better solutions.

3.6 The use of software

3.6.1 Qualitative software programs: Nvivo

As hand-coding is a laborious and time-consuming process, qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) has become more commonly used by researchers (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). While such programs permit analysis of far larger data sets, it has been suggested that the use of QDAS has been a negative development for academic research when researchers adopt these approaches as an alternative to actually reading the text. Nevertheless, QDAS can potentially enhance the quality of qualitative research in several meaningful ways (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). Primarily, they support researchers in organising, sorting, and searching for information in the database. There are various qualitative software tools available, and they share similar features for analysing qualitative data, such as coding schemes, the ability to create interrelated codes to explore relationships among them, and various forms of analysis (e.g., word frequency, word cloud). Although the researcher still needs to read and assign codes line by line, this process may be faster and more efficient than hand coding, especially in an extensive database. Moreover, QDAS enables more transparent analytical processes that enhance the validity and trustworthiness of the findings (Woods et al., 2016). The ability to support an analysis using network diagrams and measures, such as coherence measures, can help to verify conclusions reached by the researcher.

Consequently, with new technology enabling researchers to analyse more data, faster, and in more complex ways, the use of QDAS has expanded over the last two decades (Robins

& Eisen, 2017). In an assessment of QDAS, Sotiriadou, Brouwers, and Le (2014) proposed two categories: manual handling of qualitative data software (e.g., NVivo and Atlas.ti) and automated analysis based on statistical properties of text (e.g., Leximancer). However, there is limited evidence regarding which tool is best suited for analysing specific forms of data, particular research types, or which tool generates the most trustworthy results (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). Sotiriadou et al. (2014) suggested that social science researchers make their decisions based on factors such as the type and size of the dataset, their own competence and skills in data interpretation, and their desired level of engagement with the data analysis process. Moreover, since the work of Sotiriadou et al. (2014), improvements in the software have brought a closer relationship between the two approaches.

In this present paper, the researcher employed NVivo software to analyse qualitative data for several reasons. Firstly, given the plethora of QDAS tools available to researchers, NVivo has been the longest and most used software program (Woods et al., 2016). NVivo is the most cited QDAS in research publications (lumivero.com, 2025). Second, NVivo software is provided free of charge at the researcher's university to support social science research, and the researcher is familiar with using NVivo's features. Third, regarding the level of engagement in data analysis, NVivo provides researchers with robust functionalities for classifying, sorting, and organising qualitative data. It also supports data management and facilitates processes such as thematic identification, insight development, and drawing conclusions (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). Critically, however, NVivo requires researchers to manually code the data and develop themes, a process that remains highly interpretive and subjective. As such, one might argue that this mode of data analysis aligns more closely with the constructivism paradigm, in contrast to the post-positivism paradigm adopted in this study. Consequently, data familiarisation is critical to ensure data reliability and validity, as well as to reduce potential bias. Furthermore, NVivo has undergone numerous transformations with the application of the latest technologies, enabling the software to perform coding automatically, categorise and summarise results with relatively less bias than before, and the results are arguably more transparent than previously.

3.6.2 *Quantitative software program: SPSS*

SPSS initially stood for *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*. After IBM acquired the parent company in 2009, the name was rebranded as SPSS (*Statistical Product and Service*

Solutions) to promote its predictive analytics capabilities, aimed at helping users “*connect data to effective action by drawing reliable conclusions about current conditions and future events*” (Ho, 2017, p. 10). SPSS has long been a dominant tool in the social sciences for quantitative data analysis. It is widely employed by market researchers, health researchers, survey companies, government, education researchers, marketing organisations, data miners, and others engaged in statistical analysis (Bala, 2016). SPSS enables researchers to perform a range of statistical procedures, from basic descriptive statistics to complex multivariate analyses, and to visualise data through histograms, scatter plots, and other graphical representations. Apart from statistical analysis, SPSS can support a wide range of data formats, data management and data transformation within the software as researchers gather large-scale datasets from surveys, experiments, and various sorts of observations. Since its creation, SPSS has been the most commonly used applied math package and plays a crucial role in social science (Bala, 2016; Suresh, 2015). It has become an indispensable and powerful quantitative data analysis software for both beginner and advanced researchers.

When conducting quantitative research, data must be gathered and analysed to address the research questions posed and to examine the proposed hypotheses. During the data analysis stage, the question is which method of analysis is performed by the software. In this study, the researcher utilised SPSS for several reasons. First, SPSS enables the researcher to examine the assumptions underlying inferential statistics, such as tests of normality and the detection of outliers, which can guide the researcher when performing further analyses. Second, SPSS allows for descriptive and frequency analyses to be visually presented through various diagrams (e.g., histograms, scatter plots), providing the researcher with a holistic view of their quantitative data to ensure its reliability and validity. Third, SPSS undertakes both comparison (e.g., t-tests, ANOVA, Chi-square test) and correlational (e.g., Pearson correlation) statistical tests, covering univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses using parametric and non-parametric statistical techniques. In the second research objective of this study, the researcher intends to refine and validate the variable items used in the measurement scale by using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). SPSS is an appropriate statistical tool, as it offers comprehensive outcomes. SPSS also performs EFA using several extraction estimation techniques, such as Principal Component Analysis and Maximum Likelihood. Additionally, to describe the association between two categorical variables and identify contrarian cases in the dataset to perform further analyses, a crosstabulation analysis is employed. SPSS software

allows researchers to transform a dataset into categorical variables and then perform the Crosstabs Analysis within the application. As a consequence, SPSS is employed in this study.

3.6.3 Quantitative software program: SmartPLS 4.0

As discussed in the previous chapter, the main objective of this paper is to investigate the causal and effect associations between the independent and dependent variables. Thus, PLS-SEM analysis was selected as the principal statistical tool. With the growing popularity of PLS-SEM, the application of SmartPLS software has been witnessing a similar upward trend (Cheah, Magno, & Cassia, 2024). This software offers a user-friendly graphical user interface that certainly facilitates its popularity in social science research. It features a wide range of modelling and algorithm options. In the latest version 4.0, it provides notable enhancements, including a redesigned user interface, upgraded performance, novel algorithms, and additional statistical routines beyond standard PLS-SEM (Cheah et al., 2024).

SmartPLS software is employed in the present study for several reasons. First, structural equation modelling is well suited to testing complex interrelationships between observed and latent variables. SmartPLS facilitates the execution of standard PLS-SEM analyses with excellent usability. In this study, a two-step process of model evaluation in PLS-SEM was adopted, following Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The first step involves examining the measurement models, and the second step consists of analysing the structural model with different indicators and metrics. This two-stage procedure, supported by SmartPLS, improves interpretability and facilitates model assessment (Cheah et al., 2024). Second, its user-friendly interface also allows the researcher to include moderating effects directly within the software, eliminating the need for external data processing. Compared to its previous version, version 4 allows users to conveniently specify moderating paths, draw single-headed arrows from the moderator to the direct effect between variables, and examine the interaction terms and their effects within the reporting output. Third, the standardised scores of constructs generated by SmartPLS were used as inputs for fsQCA in the later stage of analysis in the present study.

3.6.4 Quantitative software program: fsQCA

fsQCA can be freely obtained on the website www.fsqca.com. Relying on Boolean algebra and configurational relationships, different combinations of conditions that result in the presence, absence or negation of outcomes can be compared with each other (S. Kumar et

al., 2022). The software uses computer algorithms to simplify this type of data. The data matrix is reformulated as a “truth table”, and the information in the truth table reflects all possible condition combinations and their corresponding outcomes. fsQCA software has been developed to facilitate the analysis of truth tables. fsQCA also enables the researchers to perform data calibration, which is arguably the most critical step in the fsQCA procedure (Mendel & Korjani, 2018). Moreover, two primary analyses can be conducted by fsQCA: necessary conditions analysis to identify the key conditions that influence the outcomes and sufficient conditions analysis to determine the different combinations of conditions that can generate the outcome. Thus, the present study employed fsQCA to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex, nonlinear, and synergistic factors influencing high destination loyalty.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter reports the results and findings derived from the step-by-step methods of data analysis that were illustrated in Chapter 3. To address four research objectives, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, involving a first phase of qualitative study, followed by a separate quantitative phase, with a strong emphasis on quantitative methods for explaining and interpreting the findings of this study. Accordingly, the results of qualitative analysis are first presented to uncover the dimensionality of perceived value in the wellness retreat. Subsequently, Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted to examine the proposed measurement scale and establish the final dimensions of perceived value of wellness retreat experience. Partial Least Squares Structured Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was then utilised to evaluate the structural model and investigate the proposed hypotheses. Finally, the outcomes of the fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) for high customer loyalty were presented.

4.1 Findings of the qualitative study

4.1.1 First aim: Exploring the dimensions of perceived value of wellness retreat experiences (PVWRE)

4.1.1.1 Word frequency and Word cloud

The first stage was to identify initially and, if possible, confirm themes existing within the text derived from the web scraping exercise from the sources tabulated in Table 10. After conducting data standardisation, a frequency count was undertaken, and the results were then assessed for the existence of synonyms. **Table 10** illustrates a list of the top 30 most frequent keywords in the narratives. Among these keywords that respondents used to describe the retreat experience, the dominant keywords include “host”, “food”, “room” and “spa”. These results provided the overall picture for the in-depth data analysis. Based on these results and the data familiarisation step, an initial coding was undertaken to identify common ideas within the four established themes. The following sections provide more detailed information on the findings and offer an in-depth interpretation.

Table 10. Top 30 most frequent words

No.	Word	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
1	Host	1551	3.85
2	Food	968	2.40
3	Retreat	785	1.95
4	Room	727	1.80
5	Spa	593	1.47
6	View	450	1.12
7	Feel	407	1.01
8	Amazing	405	1.00
9	Beautiful	356	0.88
10	Experience	349	0.87
11	Stay	326	0.81
12	Yoga	315	0.78
13	Activity	253	0.63
14	Delicious	223	0.55
15	Home	190	0.47
16	Lovely	180	0.45
17	Life	166	0.41
18	Perfect	165	0.41
19	Stunning	152	0.38
20	Healthy	127	0.31
21	Comfortable	121	0.30
22	Loved	120	0.30
23	Session	120	0.30
24	private	115	0.29
25	fantastic	109	0.27
26	enjoyed	106	0.26
27	relaxing	105	0.26
28	good	104	0.26
29	luxury	103	0.26
30	meditation	103	0.26

Additionally, **Figure 5** shows the word cloud of the 1000 most frequent words, reflecting a wide range of benefits obtained from the wellness retreat experiences. One of the most prominent themes is physical benefits, highlighted by frequently mentioned words such as *room*, *spas*, *food*, *comfortable*, *healthy*, *yoga*, and *meditation*. These terms suggest that wellness retreat participants highly value the opportunity to rejuvenate their bodies through comfortable accommodation, wellness treatment, nourishing foods, and customised wellness

programs. The inclusion of words in the word cloud, such as body, health, and session, further reinforces the importance of physical value during the retreats.

Besides physical benefits, the word cloud illustrates a strong emphasis on emotional benefits. Words such as relax, feel, healing, fantastic, and enjoyed suggest many guests experience a positive state of emotions, mental improvements and a deep sense of relaxation during the retreat stay. The intensive use of emotion-related words found in the reviews implies that retreats offer a hedonic benefit that helps individuals disconnect from daily stressors and have a break from life.

Another possible theme is social and interpersonal connection, with words like *host*, *team*, *welcoming*, *hospitality*, and *people* standing out. These expressions underscore the significance of human interaction and the hospitality of retreat staff. Retreat participants seem to value not only the professionalism and attentiveness of the service team but also the sense of community and belonging that the retreats foster during their stay.

The natural and aesthetic environment also plays a critical role in shaping guests' experiences at the wellness retreats. The prominence of words such as view, stunning, nature, beautiful, river, and spectacular indicates a strong benefit of the retreat's natural surroundings. These elements contribute to a peaceful and immersive atmosphere, allowing attendees to feel connected to nature and facilitating the connection to their true selves. The visual beauty and tranquillity of the retreat setting appear to add another layer of wellness benefits for visitors.

Lastly, the word cloud reveals a sense of holistic, transformative benefits obtained by wellness retreat attendees. Words such as *experience*, *journey*, *perfect*, and *life* reflect the comprehensive and memorable nature of retreat participation. These expressions highlight the significance of a comprehensive wellness program that integrates deep relaxation with meaningful experience to create a life-changing moment for visitors during their visit.



Figure 5. Word cloud

4.1.1.2 Thematic content analysis

Theme 1: Functional value

According to Sheth et al. (1991), functional value refers to the perceived utility obtained from a product’s capacity for functional, utilitarian, or physical performance (p. 160). For wellness retreat experiences, retreat attendees actively and continuously attempted to maintain an optimum level of personal physical activity, with a focus on nutrition and self-care (Roscoe, 2009). Voigt et al. (2011) also demonstrated that wellness tourists primarily seek physical health benefits. These are catered for by various wellness and recreational activities at the retreat that are purposely designed to improve cardiovascular fitness, enhance flexibility and strength, support healthy diet practices, promote preventive health measures and early illness detection, and encourage the avoidance of harmful substances (Damijanić, 2019), and more recently, the importance of the right amount and quality of regular sleep. Retreat programs typically involve a combination of these activities, therapies, and diet changes to enhance physical health holistically. In addition, the functional benefits of these activities on tourists are proven in various fields, such as medicine (Cohen, Elliott, Oates, Schembri, & Mantri, 2017) and life science (Liao, Zuo, Xu, Law, & Zhang, 2023). Some keywords that are relevant to this dimension include “food”, “room”, “stay”, “spa” and “activity”.

The fundamental component for many holidaymakers is that of accommodation, as it satisfies the basic needs of tourists (Ryan, 2003), and a wellness retreat is not an exception. The study found several references to the role of accommodation as a means of enhancing wellness in customer reviews. Additionally, “room” and “stay” represented the highest number of interpretive codes, indicating their essential importance to visitors’ perceived benefits. Abraham, Solomovich, Barnea-Levy, and Cohen (2025) suggested that a calm and restorative environment is crucial for fostering sleep quality during visitor stays. The example review below illustrates the varying importance of the room, amenities and overall setting within the Retreat:

“Our room was luxurious and well appointed. We enjoyed the private deck which was surrounded by bush and seascape, perfect for relaxation and contemplation.” (Review 3.36)

“The location is awe inspiring and helps instil tranquillity and humility due to its magnificence. The architecture and built environment is completely sympathetic to its surrounds, as well as being seriously tasteful.... This is a superb place which is beautifully designed and eco friendly. 360 degree view of the lake and surrounding mountains from every room” (Review 1.9)

Findings also demonstrated that most wellness retreat visitors placed value on food as an integral part of their retreat experience in the realm of food and beverage. It is undeniable that healthy food consumption is a significant component of retreat value, influencing visitors’ dietary habits, health perceptions, and future food choices. Health improvements are evidenced to result from healthy eating, which is often emphasised in many reviews which emphasise fresh, local, plant-based, organically produced food, and well-prepared by the chef. Additionally, reviews from numerous wellness retreat attendees also reflected on the variety of food options available to accommodate diverse dietary requirements. Some examples are below:

“The food is exceptional. Locally sourced where possible- the meals are nutritious, wholefood but decadent in the right ways. Staying at [Retreat name] is nourishing. It reminds me to slow down and pay attention to the beauty of simple things- a nourishing meal, the beauty of a beech forest, some deep breaths, a good night of sleep.” (Review 4.102)

“The breakfast was varied both days and was very tasty. My gluten free requirements were catered for. We liked the fact that we could eat when we chose to. Both evening dinners were superb, and we had canapés beforehand with drinks - wine, gin and whiskey were supplied. Wine with dinner was lovely. My sister has a severe garlic allergy, and this was not a problem for the chef who was delightful.” (Review 5.73)

Additionally, wellness retreat experiences also commonly offer activities and programmes that encourage personal exercises and self-care practices, scheduled along with daily routines (Cohen et al., 2017). Such wellness-oriented activities, such as exercising, yoga, meditation, health workshops, spa and treatments, significantly add benefits to visitors’ holistic wellness (Liyuan Huang & Xu, 2014). Most wellness properties offer a wide range of wellness programs, including spa, sauna and beauty services, fitness, therapies, treatments, fitness and excursions, depending on the length and focus, to encourage the active participation of wellness tourists. Below are examples of reviews about physical wellness dimensions:

“Every yoga class is different and catered to all levels, challenging hikes daily with the most breathtaking scenery, massages were the perfect way to end the day, and I looked forward to that daily.... again, every massage was different and amazing” (Review 1.8)

“The balance of both body work and emotional healing was the perfect combination of just what I needed. I indulged in sauna treatments, massages and cranio-sacral work, and yoga, which were all amazing and helped relax my sore and tired body. The meditation sessions, amazing selection of books and DVDs, journal work, conversations over cups of tea, and walks and drives around the area were all so fantastic and helped me switch off from the outside world and give myself a space to look at myself within, which is where the real miracles came for me at [Retreat name]” (Review 9.77)

Theme 2: Emotional value

Emotional value refers to “the perceived utility obtained from a product/service’s capacity to arouse feelings or affective state,” Sheth et al. (1991, p. 161). The consumption of services and experiences is frequently connected to emotional responses. This dimension is reflected in the desire of visitors for hedonistic experiences, which aim to provide pleasure, relaxation, and happiness. Feeling relaxed, refreshed, and rejuvenated was among the most frequently reported emotional states in the reviews. The emotional benefit is directly associated

with a reaction to a specific object or event experienced (Pearce, 2009), and previous studies have found emotional benefits in the wellness retreat setting (Fu et al., 2015; B. Kim & Yang, 2023). Wellness tourism experiences are evidenced to elicit positive emotional states, which later generate a positive spillover effect on an individual's creativity, productivity, and well-being (B. Liu et al., 2022; Pearce, 2009). Many guests partake in the wellness retreat experience seeking emotional support, and the experience helps them better regulate their emotional states. Fredrickson (2001) suggested that individuals can enhance their favourable psychological conditions by cultivating experiences of positive affect as a means to deal with adversity. Fu et al. (2015) suggested that visitors arrived at the retreats in a negative state, and the experience helped them regulate their emotional state and take away a more positive outlook to share with others at home. The following are examples of reviews mentioning their emotional state changes when attending the wellness retreats:

“A week at [Retreat name] made me feel alive, invigorated, with a magnificent lightness of head, soul and limb. The experience lifted the fog in my brain and everything in life felt easier and simpler when I came home. My eyes and skin looked clearer, dark circles banished, body trimmed ... but the real joy was the way I felt ... much more than the fact that I looked healthier. I am sleeping better, more energised, have fewer aches, feel calmer, more relaxed and in a great mindset to appreciate life. The mindfulness practice is invaluable and has given me the tools to sustain this state.” (Review 1.7)

“Within 5 days [Host] transformed me from being burnt out, stressed & unhealthily to now feeling a refreshed, relaxed, excited lady with strong clarity in where I am heading.... Believe me that was no easy task!” (Review 9.36)

Theme 3: Epistemic value

Epistemic value refers to “the perceived utility obtained from a product/service's capacity to arouse curiosity, provide novelty, and/or satisfy a desire for knowledge” (Sheth et al., 1991, p. 162). This is considered a multifaceted concept that emphasises the importance attributed to individual learning, understanding, and other cognitive achievements. Indeed, learning values are commonly found in tourism experiences (Luo et al., 2017; Mwesiumo & Abdalla, 2023). Drawing on the experience economy theory of Pine and Gilmore (2011), this value dimension reflects the educational aspect of experiential attributes. (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) highlight the learning component of experience as recognising the active participation

of customers in experiences that enhance their knowledge and skills, ultimately contributing to their intellectual growth and broadening their horizons. Past studies in retreat contexts, including Fu et al. (2015), Wang et al. (2021), Gill et al. (2018), and Voigt et al. (2010), have similarly indicated that visitors obtain new knowledge, learn new things, or enhance their skills as outcomes of their retreat experiences. Similarly, this type of value is reported in many reviews. Such skills and knowledge acquisition appear to be a result of attending wellness workshops, yoga, and life coaching, where participants are educated on how to heal and nurture their body, mind, and spirit. Some guests confirmed this view, writing:

“We gained new insights into how dining can be delicious and entirely healthy at the same time and were even taught how to cook some of our favourite dishes to make the revelations long-lasting.” (Review 3.173).

“I loved learning about new things related to myself and what we can contribute to the world with our insights” (Review 9.96)

“I plan to take what I learned and apply it often throughout the rest of my life.” (Review 9.22)

While some wellness retreat participants generally make a significant effort to acquire knowledge, understanding, or skills, they also gain numerous durable benefits, including self-actualisation, self-enrichment, and self-awareness, as presented in multiple reviews. The number of reviewers expressed how wellness retreat experiences could improve their way of living and self-actualisation, and provided them with some tools to live a better life. Notably, this aspect of epistemic value suggests that the beneficial outcomes of wellness retreat experiences may be enduring, in contrast to the typically more transient benefits of other forms of leisure tourism. Participation in wellness retreat experiences can be referred to as a process of learning the meaning and purpose in life, developing values and a personal belief system (Smith & Puczkó, 2008). In this context, visitors take advantage of a retreat experience that is not merely a conventional touristic journey of physical movement, representing instead an inward adventure toward greater self-exploration. Wellness activities such as yoga, meditation, and therapies are intentionally designed to transcend mere bodily functions and sensory environments to permit individuals to pursue deeper, more meaningful and worthwhile experiences of self-improvement and personal growth (Voigt, 2014). These values obtained

during the retreat experience were also likely to be sustained in participants' life after the trip. The below narratives exemplify this type of customer value:

“[Host] took me through a journey and guided me to look inwards and get to the causes of my pain and unconscious behaviours. I was able to feel them, let them go and forgive. I carried deep and heavy pain in my chest. I was beside myself with unbearable anxiety but by the end of this retreat I was genuinely free of it. The value of going inwards and doing so freely and safely is honestly the best form of love you can give yourself! Better than any antidepressant or avenue that doesn't allow you to feel. We're humans we need to feel our feelings and traumas. We need to process them, or they'll stay with us forever and constantly reappear as signals to do something.” (Review 9.6)

“Has definitely left a positive mark in my life with a gentle awakening of how one can improve and be the best versions of ourselves.” (Review 1.2)

“This time of monumental change is forcing us as a race to reassess our priorities and practices, and in it's painful and challenging way providing an opportunity to create a whole new paradigm of existence. [Retreat name] has an indescribable magic that enabled us to truly and safely explore the deepest crevices of thought, the scary, chunky, embarrassing, roadblocks in our heads that sit just beyond our immediate accessibility.” (Review 1.34)

Theme 4: Social value

Social value refers to “the perceived utility acquired from a product/service's association with one or more specific groups” (Sheth et al., 1991, p. 161). People need human contact and interaction. Thus, their choices of a product or service often involve and are driven by social value. As forms of leisure tourism, wellness holidays create a social forum for travellers who can share common experiences without prior knowledge of each other's backgrounds (Ryan, 2003). Wellness travellers are supported to enhance personal relationships and meet other like-minded and non-judgmental people while staying in-house (Bone, 2013). A life can be uplifted or degraded depending on the people with whom it interacts. Several reviewers expressed the social value that they gained through the wellness retreat:

“My small post lockdown group of strangers became a glowing and connected community that shared their goals and vulnerabilities in such a courageous, warm and empathetic unit that we were able to grow and thrive together.” (Review 1.34).

“I gained so much from this time, laughed so much, connected with some amazing women.” (Review 4.60).

One of the social factors that obviously exerts an integral influence on an individual's value is the environmental aspect, with respect to how their consumption affects the environment and the social community (Smith & Puczko, 2008). The social value of wellness retreat experiences is not only about taking care of an individual's well-being, but also about opening up to various societal and environmental contexts. Wellness retreat experiences can benefit society by incorporating altruistic activities, such as environmental conservation and sustainability, which align with the individual visitor's values. Two essential terms that reviewers mentioned are sustainability and eco-friendliness. Wellness retreat participants can perceive those ecological benefits in their consumption. Some guests specifically voiced such opinions:

“This is a superb place which is beautifully designed and eco-friendly” (Review 1.9).

“I was also so thrilled with their deep commitment to a low-carbon operation with goals to become carbon neutral in the near future” (Review 4.2).

4.1.2 Item generation

Hinkin (1995) identified two fundamental approaches to item development: deductive and inductive. Deductive scale development relies on the application of a classification schema or typology established prior to data collection. This approach requires a thorough investigation of the phenomenon alongside an extensive review of the literature to develop a clear theoretical definition of the construct under examination. On the other hand, inductive studies typically develop scales by asking a sample of respondents to describe their feelings or behaviours, with these responses then classified through content analysis based on keywords or emergent themes. In this study, a deductive approach was employed by investigating online reviews in which individuals described their experiences at the wellness retreats, then categorising them into themes discerned from the previous qualitative study. Consequently, the initial items

presented the common expressions of wellness retreat visitors. The author then engaged in an iterative process of reading the items and referring to the original coding, revising the wording to ensure both clarity and accuracy.

One of the main concerns in this stage is the content validity of the new measurement. Each statement was scrutinised to ensure precision and appropriateness of wording. These initial items for the four dimensions of PVWRE were subsequently subjected to face validity by three experts appointed for the study. These experts include one tourism researcher who has a good knowledge of tourism-related research, consultations, and is very well acquainted with the scale development process in general. The other two experts are the representatives of the independent wellness retreat of the study site (a general manager and wellness program coordinator) who have extensive experience in the wellness retreat operations. Each statement was evaluated to get rid of redundancy and ambiguity and to establish face and content validity. The wording in several items was revised to enhance their relevance and clarity. In this early stage, items with subtle variations in meaning were considered acceptable, as the scale would be further refined in later stages to produce the final (Churchill Jr, 1979). As a result, a total of 28 measurement items were included in the questionnaire for the quantitative study. **Table 11** illustrates the final revision of items that were used in the survey at the Resolution Retreats. At this point, the content validity of the scale is evaluated. After carefully editing the item pool, further refinement would await actual data (Churchill Jr, 1979).

Table 11. Revised items to ensure content validity

Value dimension	Aspect	Item
Functional value	Room	My chalet is comfortable and clean
		My chalet feels luxurious and had everything I needed
	Food	The meals are a good balance of nutrition and flavour to support my health goals
		There is a good variety in foods served
		All dietary requirements are catered for
	Recreation	The fitness and Yoga sessions are engaging and enjoyable
		The fitness and Yoga sessions cater for all abilities
		There are walking tracks, pool, boutique gym available for use
	Spa	I feel refreshed and rejuvenated after my spa treatments
		I am comfortable in the spa and feel very satisfied with my spa treatments
		My spa therapist listens to my needs and provides a positive customer experience

Value dimension	Aspect	Item
	Workshop	The health-focused workshops are informative and engaging
		There are clear take-home messages in all the workshops
Emotional value		I feel refreshed at the Retreat
		I feel very looked after at the Retreat
		I feel at peace at the Retreat
		I feel challenged psychologically
Epistemic value	Cognitive learning	My knowledge of nutrition has increased, and I feel equipped in this area to make sustainable changes
		My knowledge of movement and exercise has increased, and I feel equipped to include this in my lifestyle post retreat
		My knowledge of healthy habits has increased, and I feel equipped to implement some healthy changes in my lifestyle
	Self-exploration	The Retreat gives me the space to reset and refocus on me
		Spending time at the Retreat has helped me to slow down and focus on my wellbeing more
		Spending time at the Retreat has had a positive effect on my life
		I feel inspired to implement wellness practices into my life
Social value	Environment	The Retreat maintains eco-friendly practices
		The Retreat encourages sustainable living
	Interpersonal	I enjoy meeting other guests at the Retreat
		I make new connections at the Retreat

4.2 Findings of the quantitative study

4.2.1 Descriptive analysis

Firstly, SPSS was employed to perform descriptive analysis to identify the characteristics of survey participants. **Table 12** presents the demographic information of respondents. The majority of respondents are middle-aged, with the largest groups being 45-54 years (35.2%) and 55-64 years (23.9%). Among the sample, over 62.9% hold undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications. Most respondents are married or partnered with children (55.3%). For income, two-thirds earn above average (48.4 per cent above average; 18.2 per cent well above average). These characteristics of the sample aligned with the research of Kelly (2012) and Voigt et al. (2011) in terms of the profile of retreat tourists.

Table 12. Respondents' demographic information

Demographic	Item	Frequency (N=159)	Percent
Age	18-24	4	2.5
	25-34	17	10.7
	35-44	30	18.9
	45-54	56	35.2
	55-64	38	23.9
	65-74	13	8.2
	75+	1	0.6
Education	High school	31	19.5
	College/Polytech	28	17.6
	Undergraduate	49	30.8
	Postgraduate	51	32.1
Relationship status	Single, living alone	16	10.1
	Single, living with others	25	15.7
	Married/partner, and no children	30	18.9
	Married/partner, and children	88	55.3
Income	Well below average	5	3.1
	Below average	10	6.3
	Average	30	18.9
	Above average	77	48.4
	Well above average	29	18.2
	Prefer not to say	8	5.0

4.2.2 Second aim: Scales validation

4.2.2.1 Purifying the measure: Exploratory factor analysis

These data refer to the surveys completed by respondents at the Resolution Retreats. Firstly, to ensure that the data were normally distributed and appropriate for exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the skewness and kurtosis of the measurement items were examined. There are no universally agreed-upon cut-off criteria to determine the magnitude of skewness or kurtosis values that would indicate non-normality. However, scholars used the recommended thresholds of multivariate normality of ± 2 for skewness and ± 3 for kurtosis (Shi, Han, & Samaniego-Chávez, 2024). **Table 13** showed that 11 out of 28 items have skewness within ± 2 and kurtosis within ± 3 . These mixed results, which indicated non-normality for some items, were expected, as discussed in the methodology chapter, due to various factors. First, the study utilised purposive sampling, which is a nonprobability sample. This sampling method can introduce biases and skew the sample's representation of the broader population. The second reason that potentially leads to non-normality is the relatively small sample size ($N = 159$) of the present

study, which may make it harder to observe a normal distribution. While certain statistical examinations, such as the t-test, ANOVA and linear regression, have a “normality assumption”, the present study primarily utilised PLS-SEM analysis that can perform well with non-normally distributed data. Therefore, the issue of non-normality of distribution was not considered to be a problem in the analysis of this study. Furthermore, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)’s Measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) value of the preliminary 28 items was 0.866, and Barlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2=2339.97$, $df=378$; $p<0.001$), indicating that the data were satisfactory to perform EFA.

When asked “Kindly rate each statement below based on your experience at the Retreat”, for all the items, the means were higher than 3 (in a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1=“strongly disagree”, to 5=“strongly agree”), demonstrating the positive overall experience perceptions of retreat attendees at the study site. This result aligned with its positive TripAdvisor star ranking and Google review ranking. More specifically, the best-supported components, as chosen by visitors, were the “Epistemic value – Self-exploration” items, which had high mean scores (between 4.78 and 4.83) including the items: *The Retreat gives me the space to reset and refocus on me*, *Spending time at the Retreat has helped me to slow down and focus on my wellbeing more*, *Spending time at the Retreat has had a positive effect on my life*, and *I feel inspired to implement wellness practices into my life*. These results underscore the spiritual transformative power of the wellness retreat experience. The items of “Epistemic value – Cognitive leaning” had the lowest mean scores (between 4.38 and 4.62), including the items: *My knowledge of nutrition has increased, and I feel equipped in this area to make sustainable changes*, *My knowledge of movement and exercise has increased, and I feel equipped to include this in my lifestyle post retreat*, and *My knowledge of healthy habits has increased, and I feel equipped to implement some healthy changes in my lifestyle*. For the items in the “Functional value” category, spa and wellness workshops were highly valued by respondents, with the mean score ranging from 4.79 (*My spa therapist listened to my needs and provided a personalised experience*) to 4.88 (*There were clear take-home messages in all the educational sessions*). The mean scores of items of emotional value and social value are significantly different between neutral and strongly agree.

Table 13. The results of descriptive analysis

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D	Skewness	Kurtosis
My chalet is comfortable and clean	159	1	5	4.85	0.466	-4.666	30.355
My chalet felt luxurious and had everything I needed	159	2	5	4.66	0.561	-1.643	2.941
The meals were a good balance of nutrition and flavour to support my health goals	158	3	5	4.70	0.523	-1.549	1.519
There was good variety in the food served	159	3	5	4.72	0.529	-1.721	2.105
All dietary requirements were catered for	154	1	5	4.73	0.637	-3.548	16.026
The fitness and Yoga sessions were engaging and enjoyable	159	1	5	4.72	0.575	-2.730	11.070
The fitness and Yoga sessions catered for all abilities	159	1	5	4.62	0.664	-2.015	5.312
There were walking tracks, pool, gym, and outdoor activities available for use	159	1	5	4.67	0.735	-2.677	7.560
I felt refreshed and rejuvenated after my spa treatments	157	2	5	4.84	0.474	-3.397	12.558
I was comfortable in the spa and felt very satisfied with my spa treatments	158	3	5	4.83	0.394	-2.077	3.283
My spa therapist listened to my needs and provided a personalized experience	157	2	5	4.79	0.494	-2.669	8.237
The health-focused workshops were informative and engaging	159	1	5	4.80	0.500	-3.726	21.010
There were clear take-home messages in all the educational sessions	159	3	5	4.88	0.344	-2.829	7.587
I felt refreshed at the retreat	156	3	5	4.78	0.476	-2.032	3.443
I felt very looked after at Retreat	159	2	5	4.79	0.508	-2.954	10.882
I felt at peace at the retreat	159	4	5	4.85	0.359	-1.969	1.899
I feel challenged psychologically	159	2	5	4.25	0.926	-0.848	-0.530
The retreat gave me the space to reset and refocus on me	158	1	5	4.82	0.472	-4.191	26.796
Spending time at Retreat has helped me to slow down and focus on my wellbeing more	159	1	5	4.78	0.523	-3.428	17.472
Spending time at Retreat has had a positive effect on my life	157	3	5	4.83	0.395	-2.067	3.236
I felt inspired to implement wellness practices into my life	158	1	5	4.78	0.525	-3.415	17.356
The retreat maintains eco-friendly practices	154	3	5	4.66	0.576	-1.466	1.172
The retreat encourages sustainable living	154	2	5	4.55	0.648	-1.268	1.084
I enjoyed meeting the other guests at Retreat	159	1	5	4.64	0.598	-2.180	7.934

Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D	Skewness	Kurtosis
I made new connections at Retreat	159	1	5	4.35	0.835	-1.269	1.371
My knowledge of nutrition has increased, and I feel equipped in this area to make sustainable changes	159	2	5	4.62	0.614	-1.534	2.019
My knowledge of movement and exercise has increased, and I feel equipped to include this in my lifestyle post retreat	159	2	5	4.38	0.761	-1.037	0.389
My knowledge of healthy habits has increased, and I feel equipped to implement some healthy changes in my lifestyle	159	2	5	4.59	0.608	-1.382	1.687
Valid N (listwise)	142						

Then, EFA was conducted using the principal components method as recommended by Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2019). Principal component analysis considers the total variance and derives factors that may include small proportions of unique variance and, in some cases, error variance (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). For factor rotation, as there are no definitive rules to prescribe the use of either orthogonal or oblique techniques, this study employed PROMAX (oblique rotation method), which allows for correlations among the factors. The following cut-off criteria were employed: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values greater than 0.50, factors' eigenvalues exceeding 1.0, communalities above 0.50, and factor loadings greater than 0.5 (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). Moreover, when a variable is cross-loading, the following criteria were used to determine potential deletion (Hair, Black, et al., 2019):

1. Both loadings for a variable must exceed the significance threshold of 0.50
2. Each loading is squared, and the ratio of the larger squared loading to the smaller one is calculated.
3. Interpretation of the ratio is as follows:
 - Between 1.0 and 1.5: problematic cross-loading; the variable with the smaller loading is a strong candidate for deletion to achieve a simpler structure.
 - Between 1.5 and 2.0: potential cross-loading; deletion is considered based on the interpretability of the resulting factors.
 - Greater than 2.0: ignorable cross-loading; although both loadings are significant, the smaller one can be disregarded for interpretive purposes.

Several rounds of EFA resulted in the removal of 8 items, including five with low factor loading (<0.5), two with cross-loading issues, and one with low communality. The final EFA was performed with the remaining 20 items. The result of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test ($KMO=0.794$) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2=1391.97$, $df=190$; $p<0.001$) was significant, confirming the adequacy of the data for factor analysis. As presented in **Table 14**, items were classified into five factors, collectively explaining 65.31% of the total variance. All five factors had eigenvalues greater than 1, with all items meeting the communality criterion (>0.5), and exhibiting factor loadings ranging from 0.532 to 0.933 on their respective factors.

Next, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was taken into consideration to assess whether the factors could be identified and if a hierarchical order existed. Maslow categorised human needs into five: the physiological, safety, belonging and love, self-esteem, and self-actualisation needs. These needs outline a progression from basic to higher-order needs, forming an integrated whole. Although there are criticisms of Maslow's theory as not being proven by empirical evidence, the applicability of this theory to tourism is vast and evidenced by the numerous studies that cite his work (Ryan & Zhang, 2024). Furthermore, the hierarchical order resonates closely with the holistic, multidimensional nature of wellness, which encompasses physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of wellbeing within wellness tourism experiences (Yaoqi Li et al., 2025). As shown in **Table 14**, by examining the five components, factor 1 was labelled "Nutritional healing" and consisted of 2 items associated with food that adds to customers' diet and nutrition during the retreat stay. Factor 2, labelled "Functional healing", contained five items related to the fundamental offers of the retreat, which are accommodation and spa treatments. Factor 3, labelled "Emotional healing", comprised five items describing the intrinsic feelings derived from engaging in the retreat's activities. Factor 4, namely "Social and educational healing", contained six items associated with establishing relationships with other customers and gaining new knowledge during the stay at the retreat. Finally, factor 5, labelled "Ecological healing", encompassed two items related to the customer's perception of environmental concerns of the retreat. Following the EFA, the internal consistency reliability of the extracted factors was estimated. All Cronbach's alpha values of the five factors exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency or reliability (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). Thus, the scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with the identified factors collectively accounting for more than 50% of the total variance.

This finding also provides support for Proposition 1, which stated that the perceived value of the wellness retreat experience is multidimensional. From the results, it can be confirmed that customer value is a second-order variable with a wide range of dimensions, namely nutritional healing, functional healing, emotional healing, social & educational healing, and ecological healing.

Table 14. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

	Factor loading	Communality	Item-to-total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigenvalue	% of variance
Factor 1: Nutritional healing				0.809	1.178	5.890
There was good variety in the food served	0.933	0.823	0.679			
The meals were a good balance of nutrition and flavour to support my health goals	0.885	0.766	0.679			
Factor 2: Functional healing				0.784	1.896	9.48
My spa therapist listened to my needs and provided a personalized experience	0.795	0.679	0.590			
I felt refreshed and rejuvenated after my spa treatments	0.769	0.612	0.588			
I was comfortable in the spa and felt very satisfied with my spa treatments	0.683	0.568	0.504			
My chalet is comfortable and clean	0.642	0.629	0.528			
The retreat gave me the space to reset and refocus on me	0.532	0.697	0.593			
Factor 3: Emotional healing				0.767	1.975	9.87
I felt refreshed at the retreat	0.941	0.626	0.430			
I felt at peace at the retreat	0.741	0.633	0.573			
Spending time at Retreat has had a positive effect on my life	0.648	0.566	0.562			
I felt very looked after at Retreat	0.594	0.631	0.663			
There were walking tracks, pool, gym, and outdoor activities available for use	0.557	0.519	0.577			
Factor 4: Social and educational healing				0.851	6.442	32.21
I made new connections at Retreat	0.903	0.700	0.696			

	Factor loading	Communality	Item-to-total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigenvalue	% of variance
My knowledge of nutrition has increased, and I feel equipped in this area to make sustainable changes	0.870	0.760	0.756			
My knowledge of movement and exercise has increased, and I feel equipped to include this in my lifestyle post retreat	0.783	0.613	0.662			
My knowledge of healthy habits has increased, and I feel equipped to implement some healthy changes in my lifestyle	0.740	0.662	0.702			
I enjoyed meeting the other guests at Retreat	0.711	0.572	0.559			
I feel challenged psychologically	0.555	0.589	0.544			
Factor 5: Ecological healing				0.800	1.572	7.860
The retreat encourages sustainable living	0.808	0.734	0.669			
The retreat maintains eco-friendly practices	0.756	0.685	0.669			

4.2.2.2 Common method bias: Harman's single-factor analysis

Common method bias (CMB) remains a critical yet often overlooked issue in behavioural research (S. B. MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), as well as in tourism research, particularly (Min, Park, & Kim, 2016). A lack of thorough consideration and assessment of common method variance in research work may lower the validity of the findings. Despite its significance, the remedies for resolving it are still not well understood in the existing literature (Podsakoff, Podsakoff, Williams, Huang, & Yang, 2024). Approaches for dealing with common method effects can be categorised into three different techniques: preventive, detective, and corrective (Aguirre-Urreta & Hu, 2019). Of the detective techniques that seek to alert researchers to the presence of CMB, Harman's Single-Factor Test is the most widely applied. The test relates to loading all observed variables into an exploratory factor analysis and then examining the unrotated factor solution to determine how many factors are necessary to account for the majority of the variance present in the collected data (Aguirre-Urreta & Hu, 2019). In the present study, because all variables are collected from one single source using a similar response method (Kock, Berbekova, & Assaf, 2021), common method effect is potential. Therefore, Harman's single-factor method was employed to assess whether common method variance was a concern. The outcome showed that a single factor made up 32.732% of the variance, which falls below the recommended threshold of 50% (Hair, 2009). Thus, common method bias does not pose a significant threat to the validity of this study.

4.2.2.3 Reflective vs. Formative: Confirmatory tetrad analysis

Previous analysis revealed that PVWRE is measured as a second-order construct. To accurately evaluate its measurement model, it is necessary to determine whether its dimensions are reflective or formative in nature, as suggested by Rasoolimanesh, Ali, Mikulić, and Dogan (2023). Thus, this study employs confirmatory tetrad analysis (CTA-PLS) to empirically test and evaluate the causal relationships between latent variables and to verify the appropriateness of the indicator specification within the measurement models (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). CTA helps to identify whether a reflective construct has been incorrectly modelled. According to Gudergan, Ringle, Wende, and Will (2008), a construct can be considered reflective if all tetrads are statistically equal to zero, signifying that the indicators stem from a common conceptual domain. Conversely, if any tetrad differs significantly from zero, the null hypothesis is rejected, suggesting that the construct should be modelled as formative. To carry out CTA, the hypothesis ($H_0: \text{tetrad}=0$) is put in an examination utilising bootstrapping to generate the p-

value and the biased-corrected confidence interval. If the p-value is less than 0.05 and zero does not fall within the biased-corrected $CI_{0.05}$ and $CI_{0.95}$, then the H_0 is rejected, and one can conclude the reflective measurement of latent variables. SmartPLS was used to perform CTA, which requires four indicator variables per construct. As a result, social and educational healing, emotional healing, functional healing and **perceived value of transformative wellness retreat experience (PVWRE)** were duly examined. The results showed that all p-values of social and educational healing, emotional healing, and functional healing are greater than 0.05, indicating reflective constructs. For PVWRE, the majority of cases have a p-value greater than 0.05. Thus, it can also be concluded that PVWRE is a reflective construct.

4.2.2.4 Assessments of measurement quality of the second-order reflective-reflective construct

As discussed in the previous chapter, a two-stage approach was adopted to test the structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). In the first step, the measurement model fit was examined. The examination of measurement model validity is crucial as without sound measures, the constructs themselves cannot be meaningfully interpreted (Hair, Black, et al., 2019). Once a satisfactory measurement model was confirmed, the second step involved assessing the structural model. Convergent validity was evaluated using four primary metrics: factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha (CA), composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). As illustrated in **Table 15**, all factor loadings were greater than the commonly accepted threshold of 0.5 (Usakli & Kucukergin, 2018). Both CA and CR values exceeded the accepted cutoff value of 0.7, while all AVE values surpassed the minimum acceptable value of 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In sum, these results collectively demonstrated that the construct measurement exhibited acceptable convergent validity.

Table 15. Assessment of the convergent validity of the construct measurement

Construct	Item	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Nutritional healing	F11: There was good variety in the food served	0.932	0.809	0.830	0.838
	F12: The meals were a good balance of nutrition and flavour to support my health goals	0.898			
Functional healing	F21: My spa therapist listened to my needs and provided a personalized experience	0.725	0.780	0.813	0.528
	F22: I felt refreshed and rejuvenated after my spa treatments	0.746			
	F23: I was comfortable in the spa and felt very satisfied with my spa treatments	0.617			
	F24: My chalet is comfortable and clean	0.719			
	F25: The retreat gave me the space to reset and refocus on me	0.811			
Emotional healing	F31: I felt refreshed at the retreat	0.568	0.790	0.816	0.544
	F32: I felt at peace at the retreat	0.762			
	F33: Spending time at Retreat has had a positive effect on my life	0.734			
	F34: I felt very looked after at Retreat	0.800			
	F35: There were walking tracks, pool, gym, and outdoor activities available for use	0.798			
Social and educational healing	F41: I made new connections at Retreat	0.792	0.863	0.873	0.597
	F42: My knowledge of nutrition has increased, and I feel equipped in this area to make sustainable changes	0.851			
	F43: My knowledge of movement and exercise has increased, and I feel equipped to include this in my lifestyle post retreat	0.794			
	F44: My knowledge of healthy habits has increased, and I feel equipped to implement some healthy changes in my lifestyle	0.826			
	F45: I enjoyed meeting the other guests at Retreat	0.688			
	F46: I feel challenged psychologically	0.664			
Ecological healing	F51: The retreat encourages sustainable living	0.915	0.792	0.794	0.828
	F52: The retreat maintains eco-friendly practices	0.904			

Regarding discriminant validity, this study adopted the approach recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which involves comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct (shown on the diagonal) with the correlation of coefficients (displayed on the off-diagonal). As shown in **Table 16**, all the diagonal values exceeded the corresponding off-diagonal values, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity. Moreover, the Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was evaluated. All HTMT values were below the recommended cut-off value of 0.9 (Agarwal & Sahu, 2022). Collectively, these findings verify the discriminant validity of the five-proposed construct measurement, and that also confirms the independent nature of the factors.

Table 16. Results of Discriminant Validity Tests Based on Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio and Fornell–Larcker Criterion

	Functional healing	Ecological healing	Emotional healing	Nutritional healing	Social and educational healing
Functional healing	<i>0.726</i>				
Ecological healing	0.315 (0.428)	<i>0.910</i>			
Emotional healing	0.466 (0.554)	0.357 (0.445)	<i>0.737</i>		
Nutritional healing	0.223 (0.268)	0.157 (0.196)	0.450 (0.551)	<i>0.915</i>	
Social and educational healing	0.436 (0.502)	0.369 (0.452)	0.47 (0.546)	0.284 (0.329)	<i>0.772</i>

Note(s): Italic diagonal elements are the square roots of the AVE while off-diagonal elements are inter-constructed correlations between constructs. HTMT ratios are indicated in parentheses.

4.2.3 Third aim 1: testing the relationship between perceived value of transformative wellness retreat experience (PVWRE) and customer loyalty

From the results of EFA, the study established a research model to investigate the relationship between PVWRE, customer-employee interaction, and customer loyalty. The proposed relationships are illustrated in **Figure 6**. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was conducted to examine the research framework.

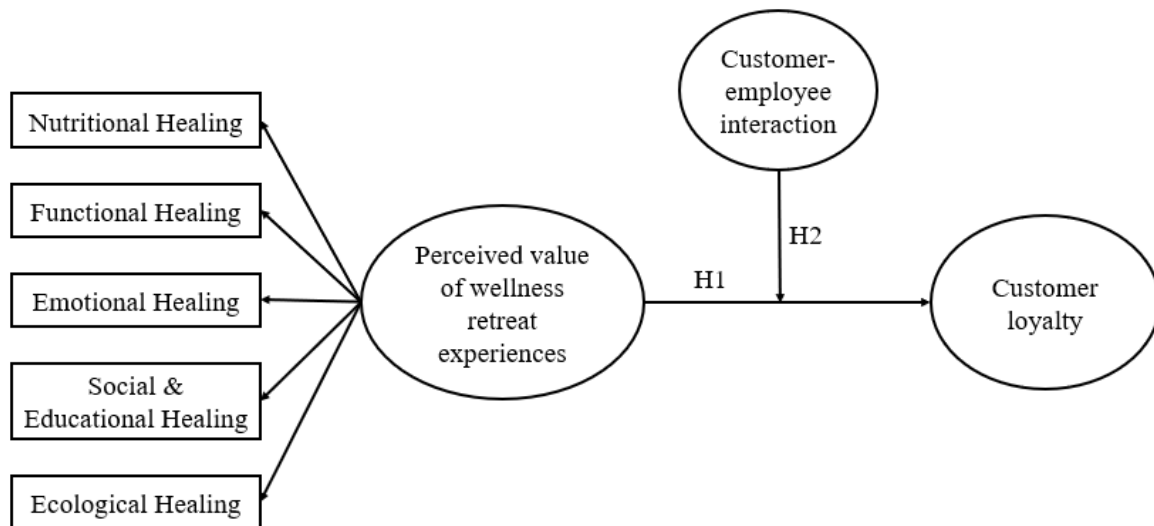


Figure 6. Research framework

Second-order latent variable score (PVWRE) was calculated by first using the repeated indicator approach. In the second stage, these latent variable scores were treated as manifest variables in the high-order measurement, allowing examination of the causal relationship between PVWRE and customer loyalty. Customer loyalty was measured by two items (Prebensen et al., 2014), adjusted to the context of this study: “I would recommend attending this Retreat to friends and family” and “I would love to attend another Retreat at this property in the future”. The structural model was assessed using two key outcomes: the coefficient of determination (R^2) and the statistical significance and relevance of the path coefficients (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). The R^2 value indicates the amount of variance explained in each of the endogenous constructs and thus represents the explanatory power of the model. The R^2 ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values showcasing greater explanatory power. As illustrated in **Figure 7**, the R^2 value of the structural model is 0.712, which can be considered substantial, according to Hair, Risher, et al. (2019). Moreover, the results of PLS-SEM (**Table 17**) showed the significant positive effect of PVWRE on customer loyalty ($\beta=0.624$, $t\text{-value}=8.147$, $p\text{-value}<.001$). Thus, the positive relationship between PVWRE and customer loyalty (H1) is confirmed.

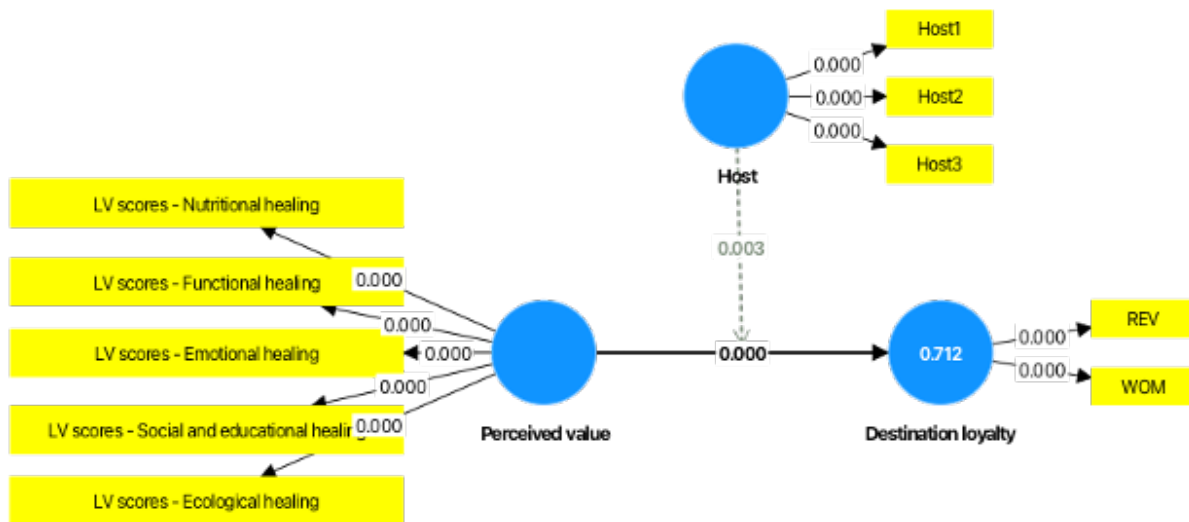


Figure 7. Results of model testing

4.2.4 Third aim 2: testing the moderating effect of customer-employee interaction.

It was also predicted that the positive effect of PVWRE on customer loyalty is strengthened by customer-employee interaction. The customer-employee interaction scale was measured by three items “The wellness managers were knowledgeable”, “The wellness managers did all to make my stay enjoyable”, and “The wellness manager was friendly and approachable”, which items were modified from those used by Xie et al. (2022). The term “Wellness managers” was deliberately employed in this study, as this specific job title are used at the research site to refer to in-house personnel including experts and staff responsible for logistics, catering and accommodation.

The moderating effect was determined by the beta coefficient of the interaction between PVWRE and the interaction dummy variable. The analysis revealed that the beta coefficient of the interaction PVWRExInteraction was negative and was statistically significant ($\beta=-0.154$, $p\text{-value}<.005$). Thus, hypothesis 2 was rejected. The result indicated that the positive relationship between PVWRE and customer loyalty is moderated by customer-employee interaction. Such that the relationship weakens as customer-employee interaction increases. Specifically, as customer-employee interaction increases by one unit, the impact of PVWRE on customer loyalty decreases by 0.154. The graph yielded from the simple slope analysis presented in **Figure 8** shows that the positive influence of PVWRE on customer loyalty is stronger with low customer-employee interaction. A low level of customer-employee interaction is one standard deviation (SD) unit below its average (depicted by the red line), while a high level of customer-employee interaction is one standard deviation unit above its

average (depicted by the green line). Because of the negative moderating effect of the moderator and the endogenous constructs, the slope of the red line is steeper than that of the green line. Hence, with low levels of customer-employee interaction, the positive association between PVWRE and customer loyalty becomes stronger. The next chapter will discuss the plausible explanations of this unexpected result.

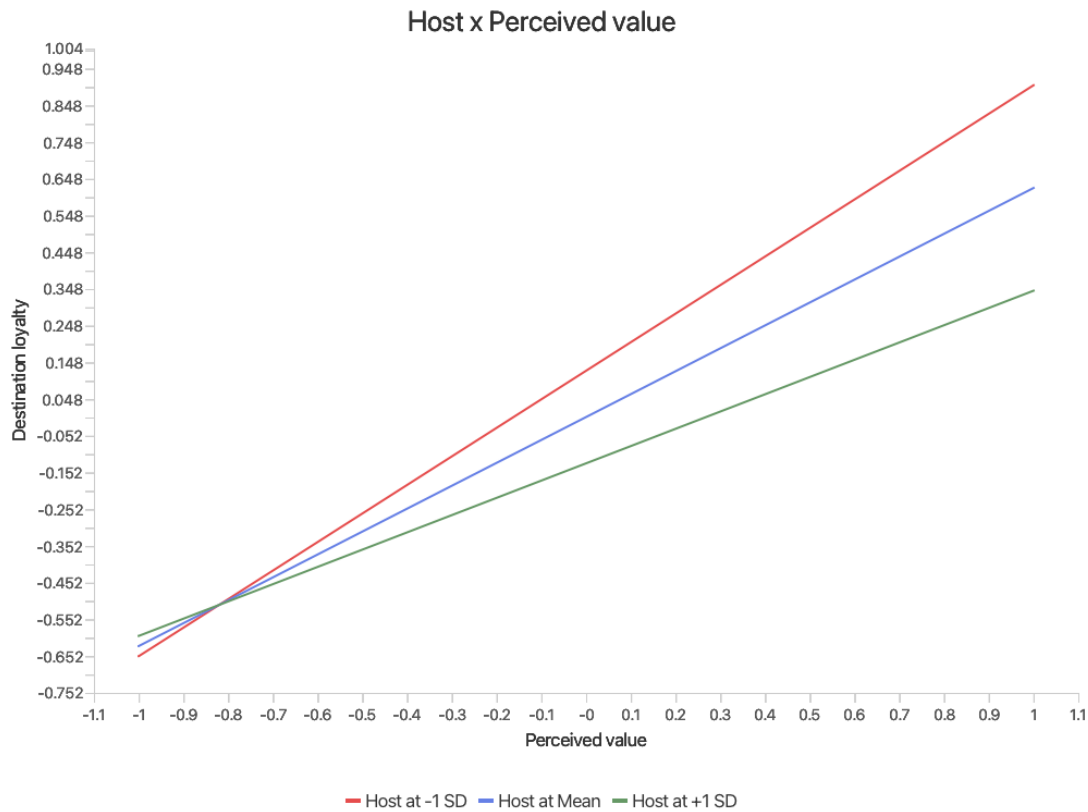


Figure 8. Perceived value and customer loyalty: the moderating role of customer-employee interaction

Table 17. Summary of model testing

Relationship	Beta	SD	T statistics	P values	Hypothesis testing
Direct effect: PVWRE -> Loyalty	0.624	0.077	8.147	0.000	Confirmed
Moderating effect: Interaction x PVWRE -> Loyalty	-0.154	0.051	2.987	0.003	Rejected

4.2.5 Contrarian case analysis

Prior to performing the fsQCA analysis, a contrarian case analysis was performed to detect the presence of contrarian cases within the dataset. Contrarian cases commonly arise in large data sets ($n \geq 100$) and warrant examination to uncover patterns that are overlooked by

conventional symmetric approaches (Woodside, 2014). This analysis enables us to assess how many cases in the sample deviate from the dominant patterns, as such cases are often excluded from the outcome of a traditional regression-based model (Pappas & Woodside, 2021; Woodside, 2014). Woodside (2014) argues that while symmetric tests evaluate the accuracy of high values of X (an antecedent condition) predicting high values of Y (an outcome condition) and low values of X indicating low values of Y, asymmetric tests more accurately reflect real-world scenarios by considering the opposite or contradictory patterns that may occur in certain cases. As a result, examining the data for such contrarian cases is essential. In other words, some configurations might explain a large portion of the sample according to a symmetric approach, whereas other configurations may only account for smaller segments of the sample, capturing cases typically classified as outliers. Importantly, the impact of a single condition may vary, either positively or negatively, based on its interplay with other elements within a configuration (Brush, Guo, Hunting, & Frethey-Bentham, 2024). Therefore, detecting contrarian cases is valuable for identifying outliers and assessing the extent to which such cases elude explanation by primary effects. Moreover, the findings of contrarian case analysis will further support the necessity to carry out configurational analysis, which investigates complex combinations of antecedents to provide richer explanations (Woodside, 2014).

In this study, contrarian case analysis was conducted using SPSS software to divide all variables into quintiles and then perform cross-tabulations using the quintiles. A quintile analysis involved ranking the respondent cases from the lowest to the highest quintile for each measured construct. To do so, the total sample was split into five equal groups. Once the quintiles for all variables were obtained, a cross-tabulation procedure was conducted to explore the relationships among the variables. The identification of contrarian cases was discovered by generating a contingency table. The results revealed that, in certain instances, a low degree of independent variables (Nutritional healing, Functional healing, Emotional healing, Social & educational healing, and Ecological healing) led to the outcome variable (high customer loyalty). Conversely, there were also cases where a high degree of these independent variables was related to a low degree of customer loyalty. The results are illustrated in **Table 18**. Contrarian cases are those located in the top-right and bottom-left of the contingency table, when a positive association is expected between the variables. These cases represent both low-condition (Nutritional healing, Functional healing, Emotional healing, Social & educational healing, and Ecological healing) and high-outcome (Customer loyalty) (top-right of table, negative contrarian cases) or high-condition and low-outcome (bottom-left, positive contrarian

cases) responses. While there is no established guideline indicating a specific percentage of contrarian cases required to justify a configurational analysis, the findings of this study revealed the existence of different relationships among the variables beyond the main effect. This supports the rationale for conducting a configurational analysis. **Figure 9** illustrates the proposed configurational model for fsQCA analysis.

Table 18. Contrarian case analysis results

			Percentile Group of Customer Loyalty (CL)			Total
			1	2	4	
Percentile Group of Nutritional Healing (NT)	1	Count	12	5	12	29
		% within Percentile Group of NT	41.4%	17.2%	41.4%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	48.0%	31.3%	10.2%	18.2%
	2	Count	6	6	11	23
		% within Percentile Group of NT	26.1%	26.1%	47.8%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	24.0%	37.5%	9.3%	14.5%
	4	Count	7	5	95	107
		% within Percentile Group of NT	6.5%	4.7%	88.8%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	28.0%	31.3%	80.5%	67.3%
Total		Count	25	16	118	159
		% within Percentile Group of NT	15.7%	10.1%	74.2%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Percentile Group of Functional Healing (FN)	1	Count	12	7	12	31
		% within Percentile Group of FN	38.7%	22.6%	38.7%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	48.0%	43.8%	10.2%	19.5%
	2	Count	7	5	21	33
		% within Percentile Group of FN	21.2%	15.2%	63.6%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	28.0%	31.3%	17.8%	20.8%
	4	Count	6	4	85	95
		% within Percentile Group of FN	6.3%	4.2%	89.5%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	24.0%	25.0%	72.0%	59.7%
Total		Count	25	16	118	159
		% within Percentile Group of FN	15.7%	10.1%	74.2%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Percentile Group of Emotional Healing (EM)	1	Count	17	2	8	27
		% within Percentile Group of EM	63.0%	7.4%	29.6%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	68.0%	12.5%	6.8%	17.0%
	2	Count	5	8	27	40
		% within Percentile Group of EM	12.5%	20.0%	67.5%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	20.0%	50.0%	22.9%	25.2%

	4	Count	3	6	83	92
		% within Percentile Group of EM	3.3%	6.5%	90.2%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	12.0%	37.5%	70.3%	57.9%
Total		Count	25	16	118	159
		% within Percentile Group of EM	15.7%	10.1%	74.2%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Percentile Group of Social & Educational Healing (SE)	1	Count	<i>15</i>	<i>5</i>	16	36
		% within Percentile Group of SE	<i>41.7%</i>	<i>13.9%</i>	44.4%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	<i>60.0%</i>	<i>31.3%</i>	13.6%	22.6%
	2	Count	<i>6</i>	<i>3</i>	16	25
		% within Percentile Group of SE	<i>24.0%</i>	<i>12.0%</i>	64.0%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	<i>24.0%</i>	<i>18.8%</i>	13.6%	15.7%
	3	Count	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>27</i>	33
		% within Percentile Group of SE	<i>6.1%</i>	<i>12.1%</i>	<i>81.8%</i>	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	<i>8.0%</i>	<i>25.0%</i>	<i>22.9%</i>	20.8%
	4	Count	1	2	<i>13</i>	16
		% within Percentile Group of SE	6.3%	12.5%	<i>81.3%</i>	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	4.0%	12.5%	<i>11.0%</i>	10.1%
	5	Count	1	2	<i>46</i>	49
		% within Percentile Group of SE	2.0%	4.1%	<i>93.9%</i>	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	4.0%	12.5%	<i>39.0%</i>	30.8%
Total		Count	25	16	118	159
		% within Percentile Group of SE	15.7%	10.1%	74.2%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Percentile Group of Ecological Healing (EC)	1	Count	<i>14</i>	<i>2</i>	28	44
		% within Percentile Group of EC	<i>31.8%</i>	<i>4.5%</i>	63.6%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	<i>60.9%</i>	<i>12.5%</i>	24.1%	28.4%
	2	Count	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	11	19
		% within Percentile Group of EC	<i>15.8%</i>	<i>26.3%</i>	57.9%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	<i>13.0%</i>	<i>31.3%</i>	9.5%	12.3%
	4	Count	6	9	<i>77</i>	92
		% within Percentile Group of EC	6.5%	9.8%	<i>83.7%</i>	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	26.1%	56.3%	<i>66.4%</i>	59.4%
Total		Count	23	16	116	155
		% within Percentile Group of EC	14.8%	10.3%	74.8%	100.0%
		% within Percentile Group of CL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: Cases in **bold** represent contrarian cases. Cases in *italics* represent main effects.

4.2.6 Fourth aim 1: Analysis of necessity for high customer loyalty

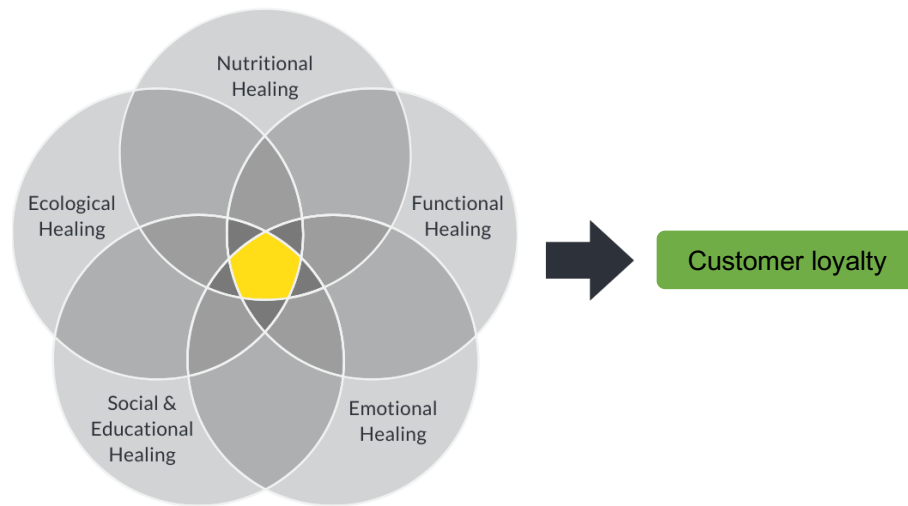


Figure 9. Configuration model of fsQCA analysis

The necessary condition analysis was performed to define core and peripheral conditions. Core conditions refer to those that are indispensable within any configuration, indicating a strong causal association with the outcome. In contrast, peripheral conditions are considered less essential and may even be exchangeable, as they demonstrate a weaker causal linkage to the outcome (Kaya, Abubakar, Behraves, Yildiz, & Mert, 2020). By assessing each configuration’s consistency, the necessity of conditions for the occurrence of the dependent variable or outcome can be determined. A condition is classified as “necessary” when its consistency score exceeds 0.90, and as “almost always necessary” when it falls between 0.80 and 0.89 (Afonso, Silva, Gonçalves, & Duarte, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

This study analyses the high customer loyalty (DL) as an outcome condition by considering five antecedents (nutritional healing, functional healing, emotional healing, social and educational healing, and ecological healing) with two conditions for each (presence–absence (represented by “~”)) as presented in **Figure 9. Table 19** illustrates the outcomes of the fsQCA examination for these conditions in predicting high customer loyalty. The results show that none of the individual antecedents reached the 0.90 threshold required to be deemed strictly necessary. This suggests that no single condition alone is sufficient to consistently produce high customer loyalty. Additionally, the outcomes also reveal that emotional healing, functional healing, and nutritional healing exhibit consistency scores above 0.8, classifying them as “almost always necessary” conditions for achieving a high level of customer loyalty. Thus, a sufficient condition analysis was needed to uncover sufficient combinations of causal conditions that contribute to the high customer loyalty.

Table 19. Necessary conditions for the outcome (high customer loyalty)

Condition	Consistency	Coverage
Nutritional healing	0.861458	0.939543
~Nutritional healing	0.250276	0.742977
Functional healing	0.871629	0.930628
~Functional healing	0.263444	0.830681
Emotional healing	0.867608	0.942845
~Emotional healing	0.253115	0.758865
Social & educational healing	0.782527	0.923678
~Social & educational healing	0.319981	0.787044
Ecological healing	0.771487	0.915934
~Ecological healing	0.338275	0.822154

4.2.7 Fourth aim 2: Analysis of sufficiency for high customer loyalty

The fsQCA was conducted in accordance with the methodological guidelines proposed by Pappas and Woodside (2021). First, one of the most critical steps in fsQCA is data calibration. In this study, the standardised construct scores generated by PLS-SEM were employed as input for fsQCA. These scores were calibrated within the range of [0-1] within the fsQCA software. Specifically, values of minus three were calibrated as zero (indicating full non-membership), values of zero were treated as the crossover point (0.5), and values of three were calibrated as one (indicating full membership) (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

Subsequently, a truth table was generated to identify which combinations of antecedent conditions or configurations were sufficient to produce the outcome of interest. The truth table contributes to obtaining the possible paths, providing 2^k rows, where k is the number of determining conditions, with each row denoting a unique combination of these conditions. Once the truth table was prepared, it was sorted by frequency and consistency (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). To refine the analysis, thresholds for both frequency and consistency were applied to eliminate insufficient configurations in the further analysis. A higher frequency threshold means each configuration includes more cases, but it may reduce the total coverage of the sample explained by the retained configurations. The frequency threshold was set to 3, as recommended for sample sizes exceeding 150 (Pappas & Woodside, 2021; Seyfi, Rasoolimanesh, Vafaei-Zadeh, & Esfandiar, 2024), meaning that any configuration with fewer than three cases was excluded from further analysis. Once deleting configurations with low frequency, a consistency threshold was applied, with a minimum value of 0.8 (Cifci, Kahraman, Tiwari, & Rasoolimanesh, 2023; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021), which exceeds the

recommended threshold of 0.75 (Ragin, 2009). According to Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021), consistency scores above 0.80 confirm the sufficiency of a configuration to generate an outcome. **Table 20** illustrates the truth table created by fsQCA. In addition to raw consistency, fsQCA also calculated the Proportional Reduction in Inconsistency (PRI) consistency score, which serves as an alternative metric for evaluating the consistency of subset relations in social science research. Ideally, PRI consistency values should be high and close to the raw consistency score and generally exceed 0.50. Additionally, the scores of SYM consistency, which stands for Symmetric Consistency, were calculated to aid researchers when examining both the presence and absence of the outcome (Pappas & Woodside, 2021), which is not applicable in the present study, as presence/high customer loyalty is considered.

Table 20. Truth table

Nutritional healing	Functional healing	Emotional healing	Social & educational healing	Ecological healing	number	Customer loyalty - High	raw consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
1	1	1	1	1	40 (38%)	1	0.997199	0.996324	0.996324
1	1	1	1	0	10 (48%)	1	0.992383	0.986047	0.986046
1	1	1	0	1	9 (57%)	1	0.978373	0.961312	0.974086
0	1	1	1	1	9 (66%)	1	0.986037	0.965482	0.967447
1	1	1	0	0	6 (71%)	1	0.97982	0.959271	0.959271
1	0	1	1	0	5 (76%)	1	0.991041	0.974152	0.974152
1	0	0	0	0	4 (80%)	1	0.928704	0.70155	0.707031
1	1	0	0	0	4 (84%)	1	0.971514	0.909738	0.909739
1	0	1	1	1	4 (88%)	1	0.988065	0.969989	0.972073
1	1	0	1	1	3 (91%)	1	0.985575	0.96462	0.96462
1	0	1	0	1	3 (94%)	1	0.963873	0.875621	0.875621
0	1	1	0	0	3 (97%)	1	0.951383	0.812903	0.812903
0	1	1	0	1	3 (100%)	1	0.951748	0.807262	0.830459

The fsQCA technique generates three sets of solution outputs for sufficient configurations: the complex solution, the parsimonious solution, and the intermediate solution. Here, a “solution” refers to a set of causal configurations that consistently lead to the outcome, in this case, high customer loyalty, and are supported by a substantial number of cases (Pappas & Woodside, 2021). Each solution provides a different perspective on the causal pathways associated with the outcome of high customer loyalty. First, the complex solution includes all observed conditions from the truth table without allowing any logical remainders to simplify the explanation. While this solution is highly conservative and mirrors the empirical data closely, it may be overly complicated and difficult to interpret in practice. Second, the parsimonious solution incorporates all possible logical remainders to reduce and simplify the model as much as possible. Although this provides the most concise explanation, it may include simplifying assumptions that cannot always be theoretically justified. Last, the intermediate solution represents a balanced approach, using only those logical remainders which are theoretically plausible and supported by existing literature to simplify the model. This is generally recommended to be interpreted in the literature because it strikes a balance between parsimony and complexity, providing a theoretically meaningful explanation that still fits the empirical data well (Cifci et al., 2023; Pappas & Woodside, 2021; Seyfi et al., 2024). The intermediate solution was selected for interpretation in the present study due to its balance between complexity and interpretability.

Furthermore, the sufficiency of each configuration within the solution set was evaluated based on two criteria: consistency and coverage. Thresholds were established at a consistency value greater than 0.80 and a coverage value exceeding 0.20, as recommended by Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021). Consistency and coverage are two critical indicators to evaluate the whole solution and each configuration. Consistency, conceptually similar to the correlation coefficient in structural equation modelling (SEM), represents the extent to which a causal configuration produces the specified outcome. Configurations with high consistency (> 0.8) reveal the pathways that almost always lead to the desired outcome condition. Additionally, coverage, analogous to the coefficient of determination R^2 , indicates the proportion of the outcome explained by the whole solution or each configuration. A coverage value exceeding 0.2 confirms that the configuration is sufficiently explanatory (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings from the fsQCA regarding configurations for high customer loyalty are presented in **Table 21**. The sufficient configuration for the outcome includes six

causal combinations. Importantly, the results indicate that no single condition alone was sufficient to produce customer loyalty, thereby reconfirming the results of the prior necessity analysis. Each solution demonstrated distinct combinations in which the examined conditions could be either present or absent, depending on their interplay with other conditions. In the results, black circles (●) indicate the presence of a condition, while crossed-out circles (◻) denote its absence. Blank spaces signify a “do not care” status, indicating that the condition may be either present or absent in that particular configuration. The consistency values for each configuration, as well as for the overall solution, exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.8, indicating that these causal pathways reliably lead to the outcome of high customer loyalty. Furthermore, the overall solution yielded a high coverage of 0.841, implying that a substantial proportion of the outcome was covered by the six identified solutions. Therefore, these findings underscore the configurational and heterogeneous nature of the dimensions of perceived value in wellness retreat experiences (PVWRE) in producing high levels of customer loyalty.

Table 21. Configurations leading to high customer loyalty

Configuration	Solution					
	1	2	3	4	5 (removed)	6
Nutritional healing			●	●	●	●
Functional healing	●	●				●
Emotional healing	●	●	●	●	◻	
Social & educational healing	◻		●		◻	●
Ecological healing		●		●	◻	●
<i>Consistency</i>	0.946	0.974	0.992	0.971	0.916	0.994
<i>Raw coverage</i>	0.277	0.654	0.658	0.626	0.105	0.551
<i>Unique coverage</i>	0.027	0.053	0.069	0.009	0.009	0.016
Frequency cutoff: 3 Consistency cutoff: 0.928704 Model: CL=f(NT, FN, EM, SE, EC) Solution coverage: 0.84135 Solution consistency: 0.94895 <i>Note: Black circles (●) indicate the presence of a condition, crossed-out circles (◻) indicate the absence/negation, and blank cells represent “don’t care” conditions.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Consistency:</i> The degree to which a configuration consistently results in the outcome ● <i>Raw coverage:</i> The extent to which a configuration covers the outcome cases. ● <i>Unique coverage:</i> A particular configuration, without overlap with other configurations, captures cases of the outcome. ● <i>Overall solution coverage:</i> The total coverage by all configurations together. ● <i>Overall solution consistency:</i> The degree to which all configurations consistently result in the outcome. 						

After removing Solution 5 due to low coverage (less than the cutoff of 0.2), for high customer loyalty to occur, solutions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 reflect combinations of the simultaneous presence of five factors (social and educational healing, emotional healing, functional healing, ecological healing, and nutritional healing). Each solution is described as follows:

Solution 1 indicates that visitors have high customer loyalty when the following conditions are simultaneously present: 1) a high level of emotional healing and functional healing, and 2) a low level of social and educational healing. Ecological healing and nutritional healing are not relevant in this scenario. This solution explains the outcome of 27% of the sample.

Solution 2 demonstrates that high customer loyalty is derived from high levels of emotional healing, functional healing, and ecological healing. Social and educational healing, and nutritional healing are not relevant in this scenario. This solution explains the outcome of 65% of the sample.

Solution 3 indicates that high customer loyalty can be resulted from high levels of social and educational healing, emotional healing, and nutritional healing. Functional healing and ecological healing are not relevant in this scenario. This solution explains the outcome of 66% of the sample, indicating the most impactful solution.

Solution 4 shows that high customer loyalty can also be derived from the high levels of emotional healing, ecological healing, and nutritional healing. Social and educational healing and functional healing are not relevant in this scenario. This solution explains the outcome of 63% of the sample.

Finally, solution 6 reveals that high customer loyalty happens when there is the presence of high levels of social and educational healing, functional healing, ecological healing, and nutritional healing. Emotional healing is not relevant in this scenario. This solution explains the outcome of 55% of the sample.

The findings from both the necessary and sufficient condition analyses offer empirical support for Proposition 2. Particularly, the necessary condition analysis indicated that no single antecedent, in isolation, was sufficient to ensure the presence of customer loyalty. Furthermore,

the sufficient condition analysis suggested five different causal paths that equifinally lead to high customer loyalty. Accordingly, it can be concluded that multiple dimensions of PVWRE contribute to achieving high customer loyalty within the context of wellness retreat experience.

4.2.8 Testing for predictive validity

In the final step, the predictive validity of the configurational model was assessed using an out-of-sample approach (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Assessing predictive validity is crucial for determining how effectively the proposed configurational model can predict the dependent variable in additional samples (Gigerenzer & Brighton, 2009; Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011; Pappas, Kourouthanassis, Giannakos, & Chrissikopoulos, 2016; Pappas & Woodside, 2021). This evaluation is vital, as a model with a good model fit does not inherently guarantee robust predictive capability. For predictive validity testing, researcher followed the details and instructions outlined by Pappas and Woodside (2021). Initially, the sample (N=159) is randomly split into two groups: a subsample (n=80) and a holdout sample (n=79). In the next step, the same fsQCA procedures were applied to the subsample, including the creation of the truth table and sufficiency analysis. As presented in **Table 22**, the patterns of complex antecedent conditions consistently indicated a high level of customer loyalty in the subsample, with an overall solution consistency and coverage 0.963 and 0.761, respectively. These findings were then tested against the holdout sample.

Table 22. Complex configurations indicating high customer loyalty for subsample

Models from subsample	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	Consistency
Model 1: Nutritional healing*Functional healing*Emotional healing	0.695	0.165	0.968
Model 2: Functional healing*Emotional healing*Social & educational healing*Ecological healing	0.597	0.067	0.985
Overall solution consistency: 0.963 Overall solution coverage: 0.761			

Subsequently, the identified sufficient configurations obtained from the subsample were used as input. Each configuration (or model, representing various combinations of either present or absent conditions) was treated as a single, composite variable by using the function *fuzzyand(x,)* within the fsQCA software, applied to the holdout sample data. These composite models were then plotted against the outcome variable (customer loyalty) using the holdout

dataset. Following the guidance of Pappas et al. (2020), the configurations derived from the subsample and holdout sample should demonstrate a similar level of consistency and coverage. It means that if the holdout sample's XY plot shows acceptable and similar consistency and coverage values for the sufficient configurations derived from the subsample, the predictive validity of the configurational model can be confirmed (Pappas & Woodside, 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). The fuzzy XY plots for the two causal models predicting high customer loyalty are depicted in **Figure 10** and **Figure 11**. The results for testing Model 1 against high customer loyalty revealed a high consistency score (0.997) and high coverage (0.689). Similarly, Model 2 demonstrated a very high consistency score (0.999) and strong coverage of customer loyalty (0.581). These predictive tests for two models indicate that the high-consistency models derived from the subsample perform equally well in predicting outcomes in the holdout sample. Therefore, the findings confirmed the robust models' predictive power in explaining high customer loyalty.

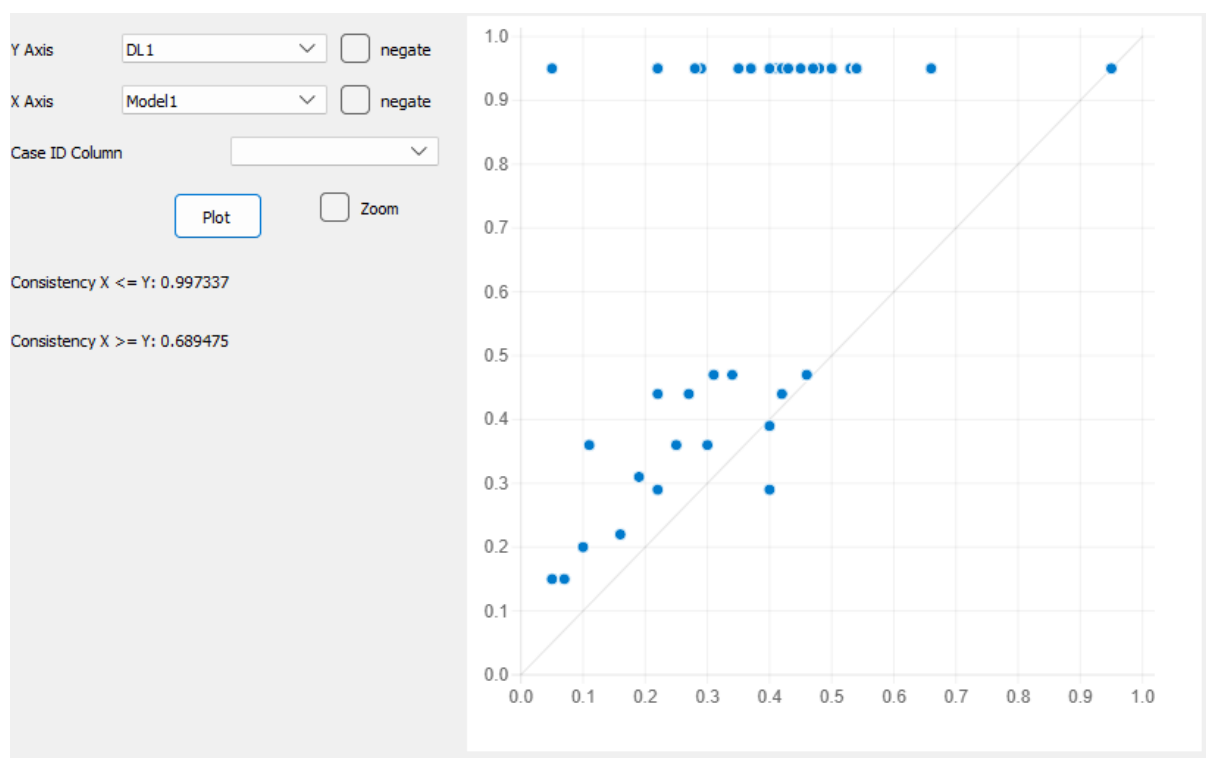


Figure 10. The XY plots for Model 1 to predict customer loyalty based on holdout sample
Note: Consistency=0.997, coverage=0.689

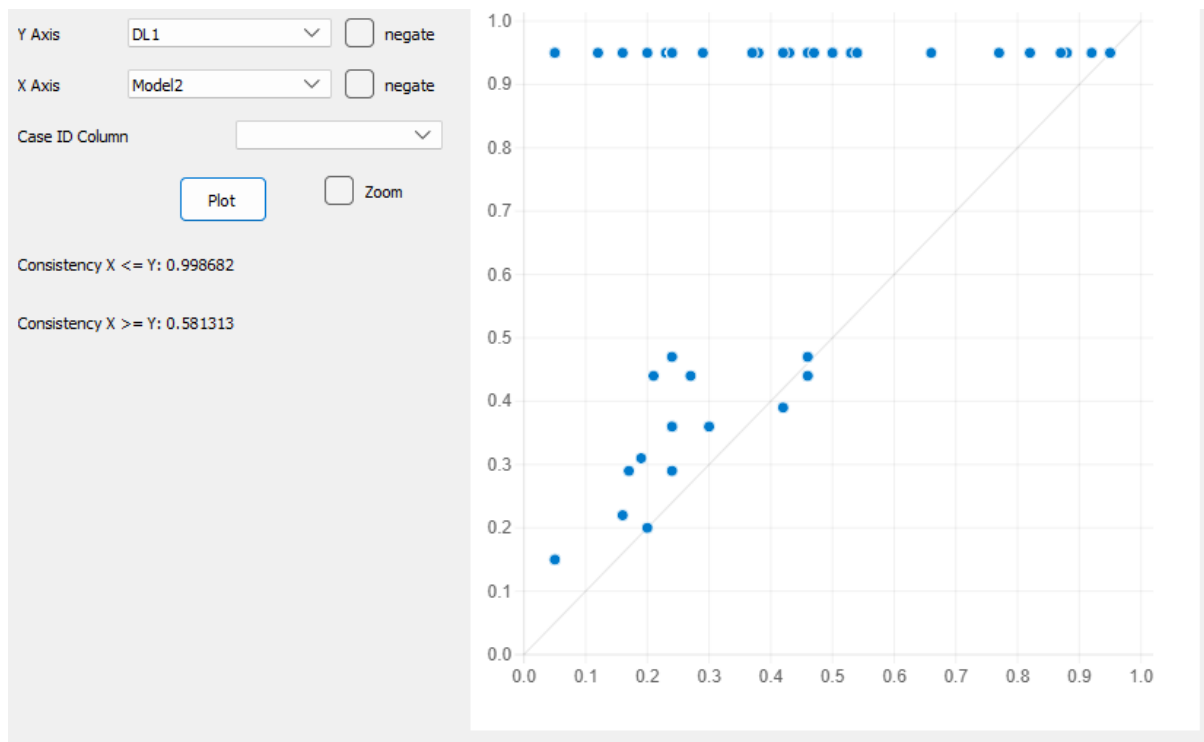


Figure 11. The XY plots for Model 2 to predict customer loyalty based on holdout sample
Note: Consistency=0.999, coverage=0.581

4.3 Summary of findings

The value typologies, suggested by Sheth et al. (1991), have framed consumer perceived value research in tourism for years. Based on the qualitative exploration, this research suggested that the consumer perceived value of wellness retreat experience comprises four primary aspects: functional, emotional, epistemic, and social benefits. Arguably, this multidimensional perceived value concept matches with the motivations of wellness tourists who primarily seek to improve and balance their holistic (body-mind-spirit) wellness. Similar to past studies, this research found that functional benefits (physical, fitness, nutrition) were the major outcomes of wellness retreat experiences, as these descriptors were frequently used by the retreat attendees. Wellness retreat experiences also foster the emotional benefits by triggering emotional change, and visitors can better regulate their (positive and negative) feelings. Social benefits, including personal connection, community, and environment, can be obtained through the wellness retreat experiences. Interestingly, although the epistemic benefits are intrinsic, it seems emerging as possessing “greater knowledge” of self, which implies a higher or broader personal worldview, includes personality changes such as self-actualisation, positive self-concept and quest for meaning in life.

Furthermore, the result of the quantitative study revealed five components of perceived value of wellness retreat experiences (PVWRE), namely nutritional healing, functional healing, emotional healing, social & educational healing, and ecological healing. To further explore the role of PVWRE, the net effect of the association between perceived value and customer loyalty was examined. It was revealed that the five-dimensional perceived value of wellness retreat experience positively associates with customer loyalty. Unexpectedly, this relationship was weakened when the level of customer-employee interaction was strong. Lastly, the fsQCA results indicate that each individual dimension contributes to destination loyalty, albeit in varying contexts and in combination with other dimensions. This finding highlights the interrelated and interactive nature of wellness dimensions in fostering positive outcomes for both individuals and wellness retreat destinations. Predictive tests reconfirmed the capability of the configurational model to predict high customer loyalty. A thorough discussion of these findings will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter offers a thorough discussion of the findings presented in the previous chapter. Employing a mixed-methods approach that includes both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study conceptualised the perceived value of the transformative wellness retreat experience, empirically investigated its relationship with customer loyalty, and explored the moderating role of customer-employee interaction. The discussions commence with the findings of the qualitative study, followed by the quantitative results. Together, these discussions paint a comprehensive picture of retreat visitors' value perceptions and how the retreat transformation impacts their post-visit behaviours.

5.2 Discussions of qualitative results

Drawing upon the established theory of consumption value (Sheth et al., 1991) that frames consumer value research in tourism and hospitality (Deng et al., 2021; Hallem & Barth, 2011; Y. Jiang & Hong, 2023; Zhu et al., 2025), the qualitative research proposed four perceived values of wellness retreat experiences: functional, emotional, epistemic, and social value. This framework aligns with the articulation of the holistic conception of wellness, encompassing a diverse range of benefits and complexities highlighted in six dimensions of wellness (Hettler, 1980), the eleven characteristics of optimal health (Witmer & Sweeney, 1992), and the wheel of wellness (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Unlike other forms of tourism experience, wellness retreat experiences consciously attempt to rejuvenate visitors on multiple levels (Kelly, 2012). Such offerings act as unique instrumental triggers, facilitating deeper and more intensive benefits that support the creation of eudaimonic experiences while fulfilling diverse facets of consumer perceived values. Accordingly, the adoption of a multidimensional approach to perceived value is appropriate in the present study's settings and resonates with the complex wellness research paradigm that emphasises the holistic integration of mind, body, spirit, environment, and overall quality of life.

From a theoretical perspective, functional value indicates a consumers' perception of a product's core utility and benefits (N. Peng & Chen, 2019). In the context of the current study, the functional value denotes the practical and utilitarian benefits that visitors derive from their retreat stay. Prior research has demonstrated that the key characteristics of functional value in the lodging settings include price, host provider, service, and establishment characteristics (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020; Rasoolimanesh, Iranmanesh, et al., 2023). Likewise, Jamal,

Othman, and Muhammad (2011) revealed that functional value in community-based homestays is associated with establishment features and price. As a form of accommodation, wellness retreats address the fundamental needs of visitors through an all-inclusive offering that encompasses room, spa and massage services, healing sessions, yoga, meditation, fitness, nutrition, and seminars or workshops on a variety of topics. Consequently, several functional value attributes emerged from the qualitative findings of this study, including food, room, spa, and wellness activities. These findings are also reflected in the work of Lyulicheva, Yap, and Hyde (2023), who proposed that program, diet, and atmosphere create a liminal space at a holistic wellness retreat.

Unlike tangible and utilitarian products, tourism products are experimental and hedonically driven with an emphasis on emotional value. Hedonism and enjoyment specifically differentiate wellness tourism products from medical tourism, as discussed in the previous chapter. In case of this study, it was found that these values are often communicated through positive feelings such as joy, love, and relaxation. Retreats are often characterised as spaces for quiet reflection and rejuvenation (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Visitors begin their retreat journey with the most important activity within wellness, which is rest or relaxation. They recuperate from physical illness or mental stress and then restore lost energy or health. The findings are consistent with prior studies that demonstrated various emotional states obtained from wellness trips, such as the feeling of being cared for (B. Kim & Yang, 2021), or being away (Bone, 2013; Gill et al., 2019). However, escapism represents only one aspect of the retreat tourism experience. Escapism can be offered in the form of hedonic or fun activities taking place in a restorative environment. Some visitors come to the retreats to encounter and overcome negative emotions or life events. Thus, Fu et al. (2015) revealed that retreat participants exhibited greater emotional maturity in managing stressful circumstances following their retreat experience compared to their pre-trip conditions. Prior research also suggested that by offering a therapeutic environments, such wellness retreats support individuals alleviate the stress associated with everyday life and elevate positive emotions. The hedonic benefits of wellness retreats are increasingly being derived from nature and landscape-based wellness practices, which can be passive (e.g., enjoying fresh air and stunning views) or active (e.g., outdoor recreation).

Additionally, the present study found that retreat guests perceived the social dimension of their experience from both social and environmental perspectives, aligning with the six

dimensions of wellness concept developed by Hettler (1980). Social wellness, as highlighted in the findings of this study, emphasises the interdependence with others and with nature. First, the aspects of social value that stand out the most from my findings are related to being in a social environment of like-minded people. Wellness retreat experiences create a social opportunity for them to meet, converse, and exchange cultural and experiential insights. Previous work also emphasised the social benefits of retreat experiences. For example, Gill et al. (2018) noted that social benefits were the most commonly acknowledged by retreat participants. Lyulicheva et al. (2023) suggested that in the context of a holistic wellness retreat, consumers co-create value not only for themselves and service providers but also for other participants by sharing their travel experiences. Such co-creation can be achieved through shared activities such as after-retreat gatherings and communal meals where wellness-related topics are discussed. In contrast, Voigt et al. (2010) suggested that spiritual retreat visitors often take a trip alone and focus on themselves, rather than on others. However, the presence of a supportive, like-minded “community” may, in some cases, encourage individuals further along their journey of self-discovery.

Going beyond the traditional notion of interpersonal connection value, the present qualitative study extended the original conceptualisation of the social value of Sheth et al. (1991) by showing a significant relationship between self and environment. Although wellness tends to be a personal journey, the shared pathways in increasingly sustainable and eco-friendly retreats pave the way for better future. The physical space in which wellness retreats are embedded serves as a critical foundation for delivering a positive and holistic wellness experience. According to Smith (2003), one of the motivations of the spiritual wellness tourist is the pursuit of simple, nature-based experiences that promote harmony with the natural world. Prior scholarship on wellness tourism has similarly emphasised the important role of a restorative environment in fostering positive psychological outcomes (Backman et al., 2023; B. Liu et al., 2024). In line with this, wellness retreat participants in the present study recognised the environmentally sustainable values of their consumption. Their perception is that the natural landscapes are inherently therapeutic and have healing powers.

Moreover, epistemic value can arise from products or experiences that satisfy curiosity or the desire for novelty, manifesting through diversity-seeking or exploratory behaviours (M. Kim et al., 2024). The study found that wellness retreat experiences are not perceived as the end products, but rather as tools that visitors can assimilate and incorporate into their lives to

establish a long-term habit of wellness. Such practices encourage guests to develop healthier routines, for example, cultivating proper eating habits that sustain their wellness beyond the retreat. The visitor gained new knowledge, skills, and practices, often framed as a philosophical approach to life or as techniques in yoga, meditation, and eating. The findings of this study of epistemic value are consistent with the research of Fu et al. (2015) that demonstrated the skill or knowledge acquisition as a consequence of the retreat experience. Participants in Gill et al. (2018)'s study also reported the cognitive benefits of the wellness retreat experience. Thus, these findings are also based upon the central concept of travel: tourism inherently offers an opportunity to learn about the world (Ryan, 2003). In actual practice, wellness retreats offerings can be exclusively devoted to eudaimonic levels and epistemic value that enable self-reflective and existential enlightenment through the experiences. These findings underscored the key role of wellness retreat as a tourist destination that not only is consistent with the spiritual travellers but facilitate personal transformation.

Apart from cognitive learning, the present study also found that wellness retreat participants considered their experiences to be intensely fulfilling, and for some, these experiences helped them learn to know themselves better. Through engagement in a variety of retreat activities, attendees were able to explore new self-concepts and roles, supporting a process of self-exploration and reflection on their perceived world (Lyulicheva et al., 2023). Unlike other conventional forms of tourism, the wellness retreat experience goes beyond vacation and relaxation – it provides transformative power (B. Kim & Yang, 2021). Such transformation is marked by a stable shift towards a new way of functioning, characterised by an expanding sense of centrality, deeper knowledge, and greater capacity for self-love (Chandler, Holden, & Kolander, 1992). Previous studies have shown that participation in wellness tourism can result in self-discovery, self-actualisation and identity-building (Lyulicheva et al., 2023; Voigt et al., 2010). Kelly and Smith (2016) also suggested that self-development is a primary concentration of this type of tourism. Following to Rana et al. (2025), visitors viewed wellness retreats as places for spiritual growth, and the mindfulness activities, such as meditation, yoga, and chanting, led them towards greater spirituality, deepening their connection with themselves and the world. Wellness retreat offerings go beyond superficial conceptions of health, such as physical or external beauty, typically linked to functional values, by promoting inner harmony through psychological, mental, and spiritual dimensions. For many participants, retreats provide opportunities to confront personal concerns in a new, different setting and develop more effective coping strategies for everyday life upon their

return, thereby initiating a transformative process. The findings also indicated that spiritual benefits are a part of the epistemic value that also needs to be attended to and promoted as much as other benefits.

5.3 Discussion of quantitative results

5.3.1 Dimensions of PVWRE

The second aim of this research is to establish PVWRE to measure wellness retreat visitors' experiences from the perspective of consumption value theory. A qualitative study was carried out to define preliminary themes and items. The results of this first stage found 28 unique items. In the second stage, the scale was purified using EFA. By adopting a multidimensional approach to perceived value, the EFA outcomes address the complexity of the perceived value concept by uncovering five components of benefits from transformative wellness retreat experiences, including nutritional healing, functional healing, emotional healing, social and educational healing, and ecological healing. A total of 20 items was finally identified.

The first element of PVWRE is labelled Nutritional Healing, which is often influenced by consumer perceptions and preferences for what constitutes a “healthy” option. This is particularly relevant to the wellness retreat experience settings, where healthy eating is a primary focus. Two items are associated with this dimension, including “There was good variety in the food served” and “The meals were a good balance of nutrition and flavour to support my health goals”, which are closely tied to consumers' perception of healthiness. Most of the retreats serve healthy food options, and guests were asked to spend longer than usual to appreciate the moment of eating and the feeling that their body is being nourished by the meal provided.

Functional Healing is the second dimension resulting from EFA, representing the utilitarian perspective of wellness retreat experiences, including room, atmosphere, and spa. Five items are associated with this dimension. It is evident that the spa constitutes a fundamental element within these wellness establishments, typically encompassing facilities such as a swimming pool, sauna, various wellness treatment services, and the presence of wellness professionals who provide personalised care and guidance. The spa offers a basic option for supporting and enhancing guests' physical and mental health, responding to their desire to “be [physically] well” (Dini & Pencarelli, 2021). Three out of these five items are

related to spa experience, consisting of “My spa therapist listened to my needs and provided a personalised experience”, “I felt refreshed and rejuvenated after my spa treatments”, and “I was comfortable in the spa and felt very satisfied with my spa treatments”. Additionally, as a sort of accommodation, providing rejuvenating environments, such as comfortable rooms and therapeutic landscapes, helps individuals relieve the stresses of daily life. Such spaces offer visitors opportunities to reconnect with a sense of life purpose through healing processes embedded within environments intentionally designed to reflect and promote wellness principles (B. Kim & Yang, 2021). The last two items reflect these benefits, including “My chalet is comfortable and clean” and “The retreat gave me the space to reset and refocus on me”.

The third dimension, Emotional Healing, reflects the hedonic perspective of wellness retreat tourism product. It highlights the intrinsic enjoyment derived from being involved in activities that are absorbing (Blut et al., 2024). The results of EFA revealed five items in this value dimension, including “I felt refreshed at the retreat”, “I felt at peace at the retreat”, “I felt very looked after at Retreat”, “Spending time at Retreat has had a positive effect on my life”, and “There were walking tracks, pool, gym, and outdoor activities available for use”. As a form of tourism activity, retreat visitation carries hedonic characteristics that produce pleasure, relaxation, and rejuvenation. Moreover, past research has indicated that the feeling of being cared for is a critical element of the wellness hotel experience (B. Kim & Yang, 2021). Fu et al. (2015) suggested that guests who attended retreats during periods of personal difficulty experienced emotional shifts that, in combination with the retreat experience, enhanced their ability to regulate their emotions. Moreover, a good state of mind can be achieved through the wellness activities that retreat guests participate in, as these activities demand participants’ focus and awareness, potentially encouraging contemplation, self-reflection, and heightened bodily sensations. On the other hand, spiritual retreat experiences may also elicit negative emotions stemming from challenging circumstances that require resilience and perseverance to overcome (Voigt et al., 2010). Indeed, adverse life events themselves may serve as a motivating factor for individuals to engage in a spiritual retreat. This negative state of feelings may be the catalyst for the positive psychological growth of retreat visitors.

The fourth dimension, namely Social and Educational Healing, refers to the two benefits of the wellness retreat experience: improving relationships with other customers and learn new things. There are two items related to the social aspect, including “I made new

connections at the Retreat and “I enjoyed meeting the other guests at the Retreat”. This finding aligns with Bone (2013)’s research that implied the significance of the social dimension of retreat tourism in attracting visitors. The retreat community fosters friendship, collective energy, a sense of belonging, and acts of care or support, elements conceptualised as spiritual companionship, spiritual connectedness, shared goals, or camaraderie. Furthermore, the learning aspect refers to the knowledge that visitors acquire by participating in the wellness experience. Wellness retreat experiences often necessitate active intellectual and/or physical participation, fulfilling visitors' desire to gain new skills or knowledge. For instance, participants frequently reported developing new competencies and insights through religious or philosophical teachings and practices such as meditation and yoga. Additionally, the retreat’s dietary principles, including a plant-based diet and detoxification programs, enabled guests to gain new nutritional knowledge and observe how these lifestyle adjustments affected their bodies and minds. B. Kim and Yang (2021) also noted that the wellness practices embedded throughout the retreat environment are designed to produce long-lasting effects, empowering guests to maintain similar healing practices upon returning to their everyday lives. Four items are associated with this value aspect including “My knowledge of nutrition has increased and I feel equipped in this area to make sustainable changes”, “My knowledge of movement and exercise has increased and I feel equipped to include this in my lifestyle post retreat”, “My knowledge of healthy habits has increased and I feel equipped to implement some healthy changes in my lifestyle” and “I feel challenged psychologically”.

The fifth dimension is labelled Ecological Healing, referring to customers’ perceptions of environmental concern during their retreat visitation. Immersion in a natural environment is a key part of the wellness experience. Nature functions not only as a backdrop but also as an active agent in facilitating personal transformation (Fu et al., 2015). Prior research in environmental psychology has established that contact with nature promotes individual health and wellbeing. Hot and mineral springs are part of health and wellness promotion (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009). Natural surroundings (e.g., rivers, lakes, mountains, and clean air) play a fundamental therapeutic role where many people associate place with their health (Baer & Gesler, 2004). Additionally, the consumption of wellness experiences can foster environmental conservation, as retreat participants reported recognising and valuing their chance to support eco-friendly enterprises and broader environmental sustainability. Two items reflecting these ecological benefits include “The retreat encourages sustainable living” and “The retreat maintains eco-friendly practices”.

5.3.2 Outcomes of PVWRE

The third objective of this research was to determine whether PVWRE affects post-visit behavioural outcomes, specifically customer loyalty. After identifying the salient dimensions of PVWRE, a scale to measure PVWRE was developed, and a model was proposed to explore the association between PVWRE and customer loyalty. The outcomes supported the validity of the developed measurement instrument as a second-order reflective-reflective construct, comprising five value dimensions. All experiential dimensions were incorporated into this relationship, so the influences among them were intertwined.

Structural equation modelling analysis through PLS-SEM revealed a positive association between the perceived value of wellness retreat experiences and customer loyalty. Specifically, when visitors perceived the benefits of having a wellness retreat as greater, they were inclined toward high retention, expressed through intentions to revisit and recommend the retreat destination to others. This finding is consistent with prior research demonstrating a positive and direct impact of perceived value on tourist loyalty in tourism experience-based contexts (Hallak, Assaker, & El-Haddad, 2018; S. H. Kim, Holland, & Han, 2013; Jian Li, 2021; Pandža Bajš, 2015). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this present study is the first to empirically examine this relationship within the context of wellness retreat tourism experiences. Furthermore, prior research has indicated that perceived value significantly affects tourist satisfaction, which subsequently drives loyalty (Gallarza, Gil Saura, & Arteaga Moreno, 2013; Hasan, Abdullah, Lew, & Islam, 2020; Prebensen et al., 2014; Valverde-Roda, Moral-Cuadra, Aguilar-Rivero, & Solano-Sánchez, 2022). These findings collectively underscore the pivotal role of perceived value in building customer retention. When visitors perceive high value, they are more likely to be satisfied with their purchase, thereby increasing their likelihood to repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth. Accordingly, the present findings corroborate earlier studies, pinpointing both the theoretical and empirical support for the critical interplay between perceived value constructs and loyalty in shaping tourist behaviour.

5.3.3 The moderating role of customer-employee interaction

In relation to the fourth objective, which uncovered the moderating role of customer-employee interaction, the findings demonstrated that the positive association between PVWRE and customer loyalty is weakened by the higher level of customer-employee interaction. In other words, the more value is perceived, the more loyalty increases, and the stronger the

customer-employee interaction, the more loyalty decreases. This negative moderation contradicts previous research that highlighted the important role of customer-employee relationships for positive behavioural outcomes (Fu et al., 2015; Y.-K. Lee et al., 2014; Jing Li et al., 2024; Yim, Tse, & Chan, 2008). These previous works argued that the interactions formed between guests and trainers or other participants during their stay fostered “a spirit of fun and friendship”. That is, other forms of commercial hospitality aim to satisfy guests and facilitate their repeat visit by promoting the meaningful connection between customers and staff. In the context of wellness retreat stay, a paradox exists between the essence of customer perceived value and employee interaction. Wellness retreats are distinct from other tourism activities in that they provide opportunities for personal reflection, solitude, and quiet meditation, typically guided by spiritual leaders, healers, instructors, or wellness managers (Smith, 2003). Clearly, these wellness retreats take place in tranquil and peaceful environments, intentionally disconnecting participants from external stimuli. Kelly (2010) noted that most retreat operators belong to the “craft tourism” category (small-scale, independent operations) rather than the larger industrial or commercial hospitality providers (economy hotels). This observation was confirmed at the study site, where the retreat operated with minimal staff, primarily a few key front-of-house personnel. Secondly, visitors often attend wellness retreats to withdraw from social interaction, choosing instead to focus on themselves, engage with the nurturing environment of the retreat, and avoid any external distractions if possible. Close interpersonal interactivity may interfere with the cultivation of equanimity, which is essential for self-transformation (Pagis, 2015). These findings therefore reinforce the view of wellness retreat experiences as a type of transformational tourism, wherein participants voluntarily engage in reflection and visitation to achieve meaningful personal changes. For that transformative process to be effective, maintaining distance from guests is implicitly required in many cases (e.g., Vipassana retreats, Silent meditation retreats), and this is consistent with retreats associated with belief systems, secular or religious (Jiang, Ryan & Zhang, 2018). On the other hand, participants in the study of B. Kim and Yang (2021) reported that even minimal interactions, such as brief greetings, were sufficient to convey a sense of care. However, the difference between the two findings can be partly explained by the differences in the sample. In this present study, all the respondents were attending a specific retreat scheduled by the retreat, whereas in B. Kim and Yang (2021)’s case, the location was operating as a commercial hotel offering primarily peace and quiet with additional wellness facilities such as a spa and massage facilities. Pagis (2015) proposed the term “silent interaction” and found that self-transformation can be obtained through the silent interaction

with others in the retreat settings. Moreover, according to Pine and Gilmore (2011), in the transformation economy, hosts (also known as transformation elicitors) guide customers (also known as aspirants) through a series of experiences. Pine and Gilmore (2011) cited the old saying “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink” to imply that these transformations must be made by the customer. Therefore, it is understandable that the positive association between PVWRE and loyalty will be enhanced if there is less interaction between the customer and the employee when the guest seeks reflection and self-assessment. Wellness retreat experience may be considered as an example of the interactivity paradox in the domain of hospitality based on its transformative nature.

While the present research found that the excessive interaction with staff may hinder customers’ transformative processes in the wellness retreat settings, it is equally clear that social environments can facilitate such transformation. As a key dimension of therapeutic landscapes, (Baer & Gesler, 2004), social environments emerge from interactions among individuals that cultivate a sense of belonging, community, and attachment. Within wellness retreats, social spaces – ranging from group activities to informal interactions – provide opportunities for participants to step outside their everyday routines and engage in deep reflection and self-discovery. According to Fu, Tanyatanaboon, and Lehto (2015), encounter with “otherness”, whether cultural or interpersonal, can trigger self-transformation, awakening, detachment from the mundane, and a heightened sense of connectedness to broader phenomena beyond the self. Although many wellness retreat participants primarily seek self-realization and personal development, they also often desire a sense of community and strive to cultivate psychological, emotional or spiritual communion with others. Retreat settings support these aspirations by fostering shared experiences, peer encouragement, and collective rituals. Lyulicheva, Yap, and Hyde (2023) further highlight that personal identity transition within wellness retreats is co-created, as visitors generate value not only for themselves but also for others through the sharing of experiences. Social engagement helps participants recognize they are not alone in their struggles, thereby enhancing feelings of acceptance and mutual support. The emergence of “*communitas*”—a sense of togetherness and shared humanity—has been shown to predict enduring improvements in psychological wellbeing and social connectedness, particularly when participants engage in self-disclosure and emotional exchange. Thus, social connections create a liminal space that not only enables but actively encourages transformative experiences.

5.3.4 Conditions of high customer loyalty

Drawing upon relevant literature and complexity theory, this paper sought to explore how the interplay among various dimensions of PVWRE accounts for the conditions leading to high levels of customer loyalty. The findings from the fsQCA analysis revealed that none of these dimensions alone proved to be either necessary or sufficient in achieving elevated customer loyalty. Instead, five distinct combinations emerged as causally sufficient configurations that encourage visitor retention behaviours, thereby underscoring the complexity of the perceived value concept. The findings of this study may serve as a classification of retreats by their offerings (e.g., activities, nutrition, environment, spiritual emphasis), aligning with a typology of retreats (Kelly & Smith, 2016). It is important to note that wellness retreats often distinguish themselves through the unique ways they market and structure their offerings.

First, of particular interest in the findings is the prominent role of emotional healing, which appeared as a central element in four out of five solutions. This finding aligns with the necessary condition analysis results, which show that emotional healing demonstrated the highest coverage. It is suggested that this finding reflects a fundamental benefit of the tourism product - that travellers desire to escape and relax in different environments, as is implicit in Pearce (1996) Traveller Career Ladder theory and Iso-Ahola (1982) social psychological model of tourism motivation. From this perspective, wellness retreat experiences primarily produce pleasure and relaxation that contribute to visitors' positive psychological health. Emotional healing benefits are also found in past studies of wellness tourism experiences. For instance, the feeling of being cared for is one of the key components of wellness hotel experiences (B. Kim & Yang, 2021). Visitors also reported emotional changes at the end of the retreat visit and demonstrated a high degree of satisfaction with their retreat experience (Fu et al., 2015). Gill et al. (2018) demonstrated a significant and positive influence of spiritual retreat activities on attendees' mental state. Therefore, this result underscores the importance of the hedonic value of wellness retreat experiences.

Specifically, emotional healing can lead to high customer loyalty with either the presence or absence of other dimensions of benefits. Among the retreat guests, two paths of the content of the wellness retreat experience can be observed. First, there is a group of customers who are motivated by functional benefits when staying in the wellness retreat (Solutions 1 and 2). It was noted that emotional healing, when combined with functional

healing, will enhance visitors' destination loyalty at the wellness retreats. Often, the functional and emotional healing benefits stem from wellness retreat centres specialising in wellness services, including a wide variety of activities such as treatments, yoga, meditation, coaching, and wellness workshops, and often offering spa facilities. Such activities require mental concentration on the body and may lead to contemplation, reflection, and a sense of relaxation. This can be observed in some mind-based retreats that purely emphasise rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation with various mindful activities such as meditation, mindfulness and counselling (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Spa destinations can be sorted in this solution as they provide experiences for the care and enhancement of an individual's physical and mental health, specialising in treatments, massage, mental activities, and physical fitness (Dini & Pencarelli, 2021).

Another group of participants is interested in weight management and is motivated to participate in the diet-based programs (Solutions 3 and 4). One can also observe wellness retreats taking advantage of the healing aspects of food by providing a balanced diet and healthy food options to aid in the visitors' transformative process. B. Kim and Yang (2023) proposed the concept of "eating at home", whereby wellness retreats offer nutritious and organic food to guide participants' dietary styles that guests can take home to form better eating habits in their daily lives. Dini and Pencarelli (2021) proposed the term "enogastronomic experience" to describe this wellness "offer", identifying it as a focus on the healing benefits of food. Kelly and Smith (2016) identified this type of retreat as "health retreats", which are typically based on specific nutritional experiences such as juicing, fasting or a healthy diet.

One of the key differences among wellness retreats is the social and educational benefits that promote healing. The findings showed that these benefits can be absent (Solution 1) or present (Solution 3), while combined with other benefits. These results are reflected in some spiritual retreats where visitors can practise silent meditation or personal reflection. This form of retreat is either religious or secular, and often includes meditation in its activities and concentrates on individual spiritual development (Gill et al., 2019). On the other hand, there are some retreats that strive to foster the co-creation values by creating shared events and social aspects of the wellness programs (e.g., shared lunch, discussions), which eventually help facilitate the process of self-development.

Another interesting finding relates to the enhanced ecological healing benefits, which are reflected in solutions 2 and 4. Wellness tourism experiences are being linked to environmental sustainability through various practices that aim to balance visitors' wellbeing with ecological wellbeing. Specifically, the development of wellness retreats can be considered as a type of sustainable tourism, driving economic growth while preserving natural resources. Wellness retreats view the reduction of natural resource consumption as a means to foster interaction with nature, thereby reinforcing the connection between personal health and environmental well-being. One consequence is that such perception may enhance revisitation. The retreats that employ these benefits include eco-retreats or nature-based retreats, in which the environment itself significantly contributes to the guest's wellness experience (e.g., therapeutic landscapes) (Kelly & Smith, 2016). Many wellness retreats are situated in remote, rural settings, and their value propositions often tie to all aspects of nature, such as therapeutic scenery, quiet and unspoilt surroundings, and distinctive natural resources (e.g., minerals, geothermal water) that ultimately promote personal wellness. Furthermore, wellness tourists are often identified as part of the emerging LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) market segment. LOHAS consumers distinguish themselves from mainstream consumers by prioritising products and experiences that align with health and sustainability values. Their consumption patterns reflect a concern not only for their own wellbeing but also for broader environmental and social impacts (Voigt & Pforr, 2014). In response to this demand, wellness tourism providers have been increasingly motivated to incorporate sustainable practices into their daily business operations (Kelly & Smith, 2016).

Lastly, of a total of five different configurations resulting in the positive customer loyalty identified within the setting of wellness retreat experiences, only one possible configuration, that of nutritional, functional, social, educational and ecological healing, excluded emotional healing (Solution 6). In this case, contrary to the previous observations about the significance of emotional healing benefits, other factors were also essential. This may be because getting enough sleep (functional healing), eating a balanced diet (nutritional healing), and fostering healthy relationships (social & educational healing) can positively impact the emotional states. In total, one finds equifinal, conjunctive, and asymmetrical causal relations being expressed by participants seeking holistic wellness benefits, but the core lies in emotional healing. Kelly and Smith (2016) suggested the body-mind-spirit retreat model, which provides a holistic provision of activities (e.g., yoga, meditation, nutrition, exercise, groupwork) that foster the revival of the physical, spiritual, and social aspects of an individual.

5.4 Summary of discussions

This study adopted a multidimensional perspective on perceived value, and the findings suggested that the value perceptions of wellness retreat visitors extend beyond purely functional benefits to also encompass emotional, social, and epistemic benefits. Like other types of tourism products, wellness retreat experiences contain a clear functional component, including accommodation, food, and wellness-oriented recreation; however, the emotional benefits remain a critical part of visitors' value evaluations. More than that, wellness retreat experiences hold the potential to elicit strong epistemic benefits, which help visitors achieve the meta-needs – self-actualisation and self-transcendence. The social aspect of perceived value in the context of this study also highlights the interdependence not only with other people but also with nature.

The primary purpose of this research was to conceptualise perceived value within the wellness retreat experience and to investigate its effect on retreat visitors' loyalty. The result of EFA led PVWRE to be operationalised as a second-order construct consisting of five major elements: nutritional healing, functional healing, emotional healing, social & educational healing, and ecological healing. With regard to those benefits accorded to retreat visitors, many past studies note that retreat experiences foster the change of body, emotion, attitude and cognition (Fu et al., 2015; Gill et al., 2018). Moreover, the positive association between PVWRE and customer loyalty was also confirmed in the context of wellness retreats, where the findings indicate the critical role of perceived value constructs in shaping tourist loyalty behaviour. Remarkably, this study reveals the customer-employee interactivity paradox: the positive association between PVWRE and loyalty is enhanced when the interaction between customer and employee is less, due to the nature of the wellness retreat. Wellness retreat attendees prefer autonomy and personal space to fully engage with their true selves and attempt reconciliation of personal dissonances. Lastly, the study has offered a more comprehensive picture of the “recipe” of high customers' destination loyalty in the wellness retreat sector, as evidenced by the five configurations identified.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents the implications derived from the research findings of two studies that examined tourists' loyalty intentions toward transformative wellness retreat experiences. The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, consisting of two successive phases. The first study utilised a qualitative approach to uncover the multidimensionality of value as perceived by retreat attendees, identifying four key thematic dimensions of value. The second study involved the development and empirical validation of a multidimensional perceived value scale specific to wellness retreat experiences, examining its relationship with customer loyalty through a quantitative approach. The objective of this chapter is to outline the theoretical, managerial, and policy implications emerging from the findings of both studies. These are elaborated in the sections that follow.

6.1 Theoretical implications

First, mental health and wellbeing have long been recognised as essential to the development and sustainability of society. At the same time, tourism activities have increasingly been acknowledged for their potential role in supporting and enhancing individual travellers' psychological health. A rising body of research in tourism scholarship has been carried out from different perspectives, such as investigating the influence of tourism on mental health (Buckley, 2023; Gedecho & Kim, 2025; F. Hu et al., 2025), or examining how tourism promotes wellbeing (L. Chang, Vada, Moyle, & Gardiner, 2024; Filep et al., 2024; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; L. Su, Tang, & Nawijn, 2020; Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016; Zins & Ponocny, 2022). These studies highlight the significance of the tourism industry in promoting mental health across various age groups and demographics. However, despite these valuable research achievements, the connection between tourism and individual health enhancement remains an under-investigated area (Gedecho & Kim, 2025; F. Hu et al., 2025). Building upon these foundational and empirical works, the present study seeks to broaden this discourse by examining how wellness tourism facilitates transformative experiences that engage travellers in body-mind-spirit wellbeing journeys.

Second, wellness tourism, a subcategory within the broader domain of health tourism, has recently experienced exponential growth, largely driven by consumers seeking exceptional therapeutic environments and specialised wellness services and experiences (Martins et al., 2025). The surge has been accelerated by heightened global health awareness following the

COVID-19 pandemic (Valente-Mosqueda, Thakur, Calero-Sanz, & Orea-Giner, 2025), contributing to the sector's rapid rebound and positioning it as a core component of the global wellness economy (GWI, 2024). In parallel, academic interest in wellness tourism has been gaining significant momentum, and this research field is projected to continue attracting scholarly attention in the years to come. For a long time, researchers have sought to illuminate the connotations, dimensions, determinants, and consequences of wellness tourism experiences (Yaoqi Li et al., 2025; Martins et al., 2025; C. Peng et al., 2025). In doing so, prior works have delved extensively into the study of wellness tourism as a whole, leaving the “wellness retreat” – a focal unit of this study – outside the mainstream of wellness tourism research. Therefore, this paper has made a novel empirical contribution by exploring, developing and testing an integrated theoretical framework to uncover tourists' perceptions of wellness retreat experiences and their associated positive behavioural outcomes. This study lays the necessary theoretical foundation for advancing wellness retreat research and sets the stage for more nuanced investigations within this emergent area of tourism scholarship.

Third, although substantial research within tourism management has addressed the conceptual complexities surrounding the construct of consumer perceived value (Choi et al., 2018; Deng et al., 2021; Y. Jiang & Hong, 2023; Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2016; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020; Song et al., 2015; Xie et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2025) as well as its behavioural consequences (Cheung et al., 2022; Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020; Gallarza et al., 2017; Gallarza et al., 2019; Y. Hu, 2021; M. Kim et al., 2024; Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018; H. Liu et al., 2024; Martin et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020), a clear gap remains regarding its application in the wellness retreat context. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no prior work has particularly investigated the components of customer perceived value in wellness retreat experiences, despite their distinct offerings and benefits (Kelly, 2012; Smith, 2003). As a result, this study a) explored the dimensions of wellness retreat experiences through the thematic analysis and b) developed and validated a measurement instrument of perceived value of wellness retreat experiences, comprised of 20 items, and c) extended the existing Value-Satisfaction-Loyalty chain by introducing a direct link between perceived value and loyalty components. This integrated approach responded to recent scholarly calls for more studies that combine intra-variable (within-dimension) and inter-variable (across-variable) research in consumer perceived value research (Blut et al., 2024; Gallarza et al., 2019). Accordingly, the findings of this study enrich the current literature on customer perceived value in marketing and expand the conceptualisation of customer value

within tourism management. The study emphasised that customers assess wellness retreat experiences through a multidimensional lens. More precisely, the paper followed Sheth et al. (1991)'s perceived value framework, which has been widely adopted in various contexts of tourism experiences (Deng et al., 2021; Y. Jiang & Hong, 2023; Zhu et al., 2025). The qualitative findings supported Sheth et al. (1991)'s theoretical structure by identifying four value dimensions relevant to wellness retreats, encompassing functional, emotional, epistemic, and social value. Moreover, the results affirm that multiple value dimensions can co-exist and occur simultaneously within the same service experience, reinforcing the idea of “compresence” of value types (Gallarza et al., 2017).

Fourth, the proposed multidimensional conceptualisation of perceived value in the wellness retreat context extended existing theories of perceived value (Holbrook, 1999; Sánchez et al., 2006; Sheth et al., 1991) and aligns with broader holistic wellness frameworks (Hettler, 1980; Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). By establishing and empirically validating a multidimensional scale to measure customer perceived value in wellness retreat experiences, this study contributes a novel theoretical and methodological tool to the literature. Specifically, the research confirms perceived value as a second-order reflective construct, recognising its inherence in complex wellness-related theories and practices. In this sense, the second-order model of perceived value clarifies the multidimensional nature of perceived value as a higher-order concept and retraces to the multifaceted nature of tourism experience (Gallarza & Gil, 2008). Given that perceived value is both subjective and context-dependent (Holbrook, 1999; Sánchez et al., 2006), the scale developed in this study not only enriches the body of research on tourism product consumption but also serves as a methodological instrument for future studies targeting to evaluate tourist experiences. Ultimately, it advances a more holistic understanding of tourist behaviours and offers a foundation for ongoing theoretical development in tourism research.

Fifth, this study investigated the direct influence of customer perceived value on visitor loyalty, providing new insights into this relationship within the context of wellness retreats. While previous empirical research has consistently reported direct or indirect associations between perceived value and positive behavioural intentions, such findings have largely been confined to the specific tourism and hospitality contexts, such as hotels (Gallarza et al., 2017), restaurants (Cankül et al., 2024; Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020), nature-based tourism (Minseong Kim & Thapa, 2018), and cultural heritage tourism (H. Liu et al., 2024). Given that

wellness retreats represent a distinct form of accommodation, offering integrated amenities throughout guest's stays, along with access to substantial recreation or leisure space (Fu et al., 2015), this study made a novel contribution to the relevant literature by investigating visitors' perceived value and its influence on customer loyalty within this underexplored context. Going beyond existing applications, this study takes a step forward and empirically illustrates that positive perceived value drives a higher level of loyalty toward wellness retreat destinations. These findings emphasised the significance of creating high-value experiences that drive long-term visitor commitment.

Another theoretical contribution of this study lies in its extension of the growing body of research on transformation economy, a concept initially coined by Pine and Gilmore (2011). Since tourism experiences can hold special meanings and foster life-changing positive improvements to consumers, certain forms of tourism are inherently transformative in nature. The term transformative tourism experiences refers to the moments when tourists undergo profound changes during and/or after a travel experience (Yuchen Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2023). Recent scholarship has unveiled the power of transformative experience in various tourism settings, such as spiritual tourism (Cheer et al., 2017; Moufakkir & Selmi, 2018; Sheldon, 2020) and volunteer tourism (Coghlan & Weiler, 2018; Tomazos & Murdy, 2024) and the topic continues to garner attention from tourism scholars. However, while prior studies have acknowledged that different tourism settings offer a distinctive pathway to transformation, further investigation of various tourism contexts is warranted to design more effective tourism activities that can facilitate and trigger transformative outcomes. The findings of this study provide new insights into the tourist transformation process, specifically within the context of wellness retreats. It not only illuminates the personal factors that shape transformative wellness retreat experiences but also establishes a nexus to destination management and visitor loyalty. By doing so, the study bridged the gap between research on transformative experiences and destination marketing strategies. It offers a fresh theoretical perspective on how body-mind-spirit healing effects inherent in wellness retreats can be leveraged to capture their transformative potential, ultimately fostering tourists' retention. This contribution enhances theoretical understanding in the domain of tourism transformations, particularly as it relates to designing and marketing tourism offerings that yield lasting psychological and behavioural impacts.

The study revealed that customer-employee interaction significantly and negatively moderates the positive association between customer perceived value of wellness retreat experiences and their destination loyalty. While past research has consistently highlighted the vital role of customer-employee relationships in shaping tourists' behavioural intentions, this study suggests the presence of an "interactivity paradox" derived from "silent interaction" in wellness retreat settings. This research challenges the prevailing assumptions and previous conclusions suggesting that self-formation and self-transformation are primarily constructed through social interaction, thereby extending current understandings of the multifaceted nature of tourism experiences, which traditionally place high emphasis on the role of interpersonal interactions. In detail, these crucial insights contribute to the existing body of literature on tourism and hospitality by demonstrating the potentially detrimental effect of excessive employee interactions on transformative tourism experiences. Different from traditional commercial products, the effective transformative process requires a degree of solitude, introspection, and social distance in many cases, and wellness retreat is a vivid example (Jiang, Ryan & Zhang, 2018). In such a unique context, minimising interactivity can strategically support the psychological space needed for personal reflection and transformations.

6.2 Methodological implications

This study makes several noteworthy methodological contributions, specifically by resolving the limited application of quantitative and mixed-method strategies in the study of wellness retreats. While prior retreat tourism research has conventionally relied on qualitative methods due to the introspective and immersive nature of these experiences (Dillette et al., 2021; Fu et al., 2015; B. Kim & Yang, 2023; Lyulicheva et al., 2023; Rana et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2021), only a limited number of studies have adopted quantitative techniques (Ashton, 2018; Naidoo et al., 2023). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first study to comprehensively investigate wellness retreat experiences using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The mixed-method research approach enables a more holistic understanding of the research phenomenon by capitalising on the respective advantages of both qualitative depth and quantitative generalisability (Cheng et al., 2025). In the current study, this strategy allowed for a richer insight into the multidimensional nature of perceived value in tourism experiences and its association with visitor loyalty, offering methodological robustness and greater explanatory depth. Beyond, the utility of a mixed-methods strategy also responds to broader calls for methodological innovation and rigour in tourism and hospitality studies (Cheng et al., 2025;

Truong et al., 2020). By demonstrating how qualitative insights can inform a quantitative framework, the study offers one building block for future research to tackle the growing complexity of tourism phenomena.

Furthermore, this study contributes methodological innovation by integrating Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with Fuzzy-Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). Recent works have highlighted the complementarity of these two techniques in offsetting one of the limitations inherent in a single approach and increasing the validity and utility of studies (Kurtaliqi et al., 2024). While PLS-SEM was employed to evaluate net effects and test linear, symmetric relationships between perceived value dimensions and customer loyalty, fsQCA was used to uncover configurational and combinational patterns by revealing multiple causal pathways that lead to high levels of destination loyalty, thus improving a model's predictive power. This dual-analysis strategy aligns with the complexity theory, acknowledging the interconnectedness of determinants involved in the consumer's decision-making process. Most previous studies have relied on a single round of data collection and analysed it using a single method (e.g., multivariate statistical analysis or thematic analysis). This complementation of these two prediction-oriented methods in this study enriches the idea of utilising diverse analytical approaches to examine the complex phenomena of consumer behaviours. The findings demonstrate the advantages of combining symmetric and asymmetric methods to generate deeper and more nuanced insights, paving the way for future scholars to refine and expand frameworks in the domain of tourism experiences.

Although this study makes a meaningful methodological contribution by highlighting the advantages of quantitative approaches, researcher acknowledged that quantitative questionnaires alone are insufficient for capturing the emotional and psychological dimensions of tourism experiences—particularly within transformative wellness retreat settings. Transformation is a process and often unfolds after the experience, not immediately measurable at the site. Wellness retreaters may realise the impact weeks later after their checkout. Beyond, personal transformation and emotion are complex, dynamic, and highly contextual — rating them on a Likert scale may oversimplify, which researcher may miss the underlying mechanism and meaning. Qualitative methods, therefore, can offer a richer, more nuanced insights into a process of transformation. Approaches such as reflective journals, participant observations, and follow-up interviews allow researchers to capture evidence of long-term

transformation and to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences over time. At the same time, the quantitative data can offer an assessment of the personal transformation process at a given point of time, providing a useful basis for comparison across different stages (pre-, during, and post-visit) and among different groups of participants. When integrated efficiently, quantitative and qualitative approaches can yield a more comprehensive understanding of transformation in wellness retreat contexts.

6.3 Managerial implications

This research offers valuable practical implications for tourism operators, marketing managers, and experience designers within the wellness retreat sector, as well as for the broader tourism and hospitality industry, which seeks to develop transformative tourism products. First, through its qualitative exploration, this study advances an understanding of how wellness retreat participants perceive value across functional, emotional, epistemic, and social aspects. These insights might be helpful for practitioners aiming to design and deliver meaningful experiences and messages that elicit transformative outcomes. By adopting a consumer perceived value perspective, destination managers can better align their development strategies and service offerings with the diverse needs and desires of wellness tourists, thereby maximising business performance and positive impacts. Additionally, understanding the multidimensional nature of perceived value enables marketers and experience designers to craft engaging and targeted value propositions. For instance, emphasising functional value, such as health-oriented activities (e.g., weight-loss programs, fitness, sleep-optimised room), can be directly linked to body changes and physical transformations, a key outcome in wellness tourism. Similarly, creating emotionally resonant and intellectually stimulating activities can foster the emotional and epistemic value dimensions, contributing to visitors' psychological wellbeing and self-growth. The outcomes from this paper also encourage practitioners to adopt a more intentional, profound approach to value creation by strategically shaping touchpoints that trigger different dimensions of value throughout the guest's wellness journey. Practitioners should be aware of how they can maximise customer perceived value and how they might find original concepts to deliver various value elements through their experiences.

Second, the findings offer practical guidance for practitioners seeking to assess the customer-perceived value of their intentional transformative tourism products. While such measurements have been formulated to some extent, assessing the values of transformative wellness retreat experiences is unavailable. This study contributes by introducing a

multidimensional measurement instrument that enables destination managers to assess the effectiveness of wellness retreat offerings systematically. To implement this, destination managers are encouraged to collect data throughout guests' visitation to capture visitors' experiences, expectations, real-time perceptions, and transformations observed in participants during the retreats. Thus, the administration of this measurement instrument enables destination managers to precisely evaluate their service standards and outcomes. For example, if a participant reports dissatisfaction with a spa treatment, such feedback can be promptly reflected in the respective items of the scale. In turn, the wellness manager may precisely track the deficiencies and follow up in a timely manner to rectify or improve their experiences. These insights derived from this measurement may serve as a baseline for continuous quality enhancement, allowing retreat providers to tailor programs better to meet guests' transformation-related goals and to monitor business performance over time.

Third, from a consumer behaviour perspective, this research reinforces the significance of viewing tourism experiences via the lens of value multidimensionality (Gallarza & Gil, 2008). The study identified five crucial elements of customer perceived value, including Nutritional healing, Functional healing, Emotional healing, Social & educational healing, and Ecological healing. These dimensions reflect the diverse and interrelated aspects of wellness retreat activities that visitors experience and value. These findings help managers interpret the values consumers experience during service consumption in a more comprehensive, broad, and holistic way. Rather than focusing on a singular benefit (e.g., relaxation or fitness), providers should adopt it to systematically design and deliver their wellness services in ways that resonate with the target market. They should look for the provision of strategic combinations of these values: the visitors may accomplish multiple and varied nutritional, functional, emotional, social, educational, or ecological benefits while staying at a wellness retreat destination or becoming involved in any wellness-oriented activities.

Further to the previous point, scholars concur that any transformative experience relies on a "judicious blending" of different ingredients or what has been described as a strategic "recipe" (Gallarza et al., 2017). Consistent with this perspective, the present study found that complex combinations of value dimensions, rather than any single factor, are more effective in explaining tourists' destination loyalty. By applying fsQCA as a set-theoretic approach, the research identified multiple causal configurations, or "recipes," that predict high loyalty among wellness retreat participants. These findings underscore the interdependence of specific values,

confirming that an asymmetric approach is necessary to capture the dynamic interplay between value dimensions. Based on these configuration models, those responsible for experience design should adopt a holistic and integrative approach that moves beyond a singular value focus and instead tailors offerings according to the most effective value combinations, therefore avoiding any type of marketing myopia. This study revealed five high-performing configuration models, each offering a differentiated path to fostering visitor loyalty. For instance, the host can provide visitors with physical and emotional-enhanced benefits that basically meet the standards of a wellness retreat (Solutions 1 and 3). Furthermore, combining high-quality wellness services with ecological features (e.g., eco-friendly, green promotional retreats) should be considered (Solutions 2 and 4). Meanwhile, managers can also focus on creating an integrated wellness program to appeal to the holistic wellness seekers (Solution 6). Contemporary consumers often multitask in their value assessments, skilfully trading off different value types against the costs incurred (Blut et al., 2024). As such, the equilibrium between the five value elements is probably unequal, and the respective weights of each of them in the overall value perception of consumers should vary. Accordingly, these identified solutions provide practitioners with actionable guidance for developing their value proposition strategies and business models effectively. To optimise available resources and meet market demands, they should select the optimal mix of experience features that not only meet consumer expectations but also align with the destination's branding and positioning.

Moreover, this paper supports the broader assertion that the notion of value is a crucial driver in strategic business management (Boksberger & Melsen, 2011; Gallarza et al., 2019). More importantly, this findings added to the point that perceived value is greatly situation-specific (Leroi-Werelds, 2019), such that both the value and its consequences are subject to the contextual variables (e.g., type of business, stage of consumption). The lack of empirical evidence of such contextual factors challenges managers when deciding which benefits to offer and which possible outcomes to aim for. This paper enriches the existing literature by empirically validating the crucial role of customer perceived value in explaining visitor loyalty in wellness retreat settings, or wellness tourism more broadly. Accordingly, managers should actively monitor and nurture the perception of value across dimensions, recognising that higher perceived value is strongly associated with increased loyalty. In turn, a greater loyalty will engender future competitive advantage (Patterson & Spreng, 1997).

Last but not least, one of the study's most novel and significant managerial insights relates to the role of customer-employee interaction. While prior research has widely documented the integral role of interpersonal interaction in various tourism and hospitality contexts (Agyeiwaah et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2015; Y.-K. Lee et al., 2014; Jing Li et al., 2024; Yim et al., 2008), this study yields a contrasting idea in wellness retreat settings. Particularly, the presence of highly interpersonal interactivity in experience delivery triggers a negative influence on the positive association between perceived value and visitor loyalty. This is especially relevant to the unique perspective of wellness retreats, which aim to create a serenity for self-reflection, self-realisation, and self-healing. The findings suggest that excessive customer-employee interaction may disrupt the internal, reflective, and self-oriented nature of transformative wellness experiences. Therefore, providers should adopt an inward-focused facilitation approach, minimise unnecessary external interactions while still ensure supportive guidance. It is undeniable that massage therapists, spa staff, yoga instructors and retreat hosts play an essential role in the retreaters' experience. However, this study's findings suggest that employees should be trained to act as subtle enablers, creating private, quiet, and non-intrusive environments where guests can fully immerse themselves in their personal wellness journey. Visitors come to retreats to be with themselves, and they rarely make friends or keep in close contact with other people. Thus, staff training programs should emphasise emotional intelligence, active listening, and minimalist communication techniques that guide attendees toward self-discovery without overwhelming them with social interactions. In short, destination managers should also keep in mind customer-employee relationship management when designing a transformative wellness experience.

6.4 Policy implications

Wellness tourism has rapidly emerged as an expanding segment within the global tourism industry (Baum et al., 2025; Martins et al., 2025). Paradoxically, its growth potential remains underutilised for societal development. It is often viewed narrowly as visiting spas and hot springs by the government and policy-makers (Baum et al., 2025). In reality, they are not the only form of wellness tourism. A further barrier to development is the lack of comprehensive and standardised data, which inhibits effective policymaking in many nations. Despite consumers' high awareness of wellness tourism, GWI (2018) claims that it was not until 2013 that its parameters and defining characteristics were first identified as representing a globally significant industry. Additionally, the overlap between medical and wellness tourism, and related domains such as ecotourism and sustainable tourism, has contributed to

confusion among policymakers. This lack of clarity has made it challenging to produce reliable statistics about the market size and economic impact, and trends in consumer demand (Voigt & Pforr, 2014), or to develop consistent quality assurance and management systems (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Against this backdrop, this article puts forward several policy recommendations relevant to tourism ministries, destination management organisations, and other governmental agencies responsible for tourism, economic growth, and public health.

Firstly, the government should emphasise the transformative benefits of wellness tourism for the potential customers, particularly retreat tourism, in their tourism promotions. As demonstrated in this study, wellness tourism encompasses a far richer and more diverse experience, offering opportunities for travellers to engage in lodging, culinary, local gyms, yoga studios, traditional healers, excursions, arts and crafts, attractions, and events. This study identified five components integral to a destination's wellness tourism offerings. Examples include healthy cuisines (nutritional healing), wellness-oriented recreations (functional healing), or wellness-supporting environments (ecological healing). As these dimensions do not operate independently but rather interconnect, policy interventions should integrate them holistically, depending on destination resources and development goals. Additionally, national and local government authorities are encouraged to administer the scale developed in this research to evaluate wellness tourists and probe more deeply into their wellness experience at the destination and their level of loyalty. Regular implementation of this measurement tool will help build a more robust evidence base to inform destination strategies. Data collected from the survey administration will also serve as a valuable resource for benchmarking performance, monitoring trends, and supporting investment decisions across the tourism ecosystem.

Secondly, governments should foster a broader understanding of wellness tourism's contributions to local communities and economies. Public policy plays a pivotal role in shaping the wellness ecosystem at the destination level, encompassing a range of factors such as economic and social policies, urban planning, transportation infrastructure, and environmental regulations. Based on this study's findings regarding the five perceived value dimensions and their effects on customer loyalty, local authorities are well-positioned to support a wellness-oriented lifestyle among residents by fostering wellness-facilitating environments, incentivising healthy behaviours, and increasing access to wellness amenities. For instance, the government can design public spaces and activities that promote physical and emotional wellness through walking trails, meditation areas, and fitness facilities for visitors and locals

alike. Increasing the engagement of locals and residents and making them feel welcome and valued in these activities not only contributes to their wellbeing but also reduces community-tourist tension, promotes social cohesion, and minimises unconscious biases or discrimination at the destination. Additionally, the qualitative findings highlight that wellness retreat tourists are strongly motivated by community-oriented values, as evidenced by their consumption of locally produced foods, indigenous wellness products, and practices, underscoring the importance of local business involvement within the wellness tourism value chain. Consequently, governments could develop incentives and policies to support the participation of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), artisans, and community-based organisations to be involved in the wellness economy. This could include grants, training, or marketing support. In this perspective, this study provides a foundation for cross-cutting and actionable ideas for wellness programs, policies, and collaborations that meet the needs of both visitors and local residents, advancing SGD3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.

Lastly, this study revealed the role of human resources in wellness tourism, including massage therapists, spa staff, yoga instructors, and retreat hosts – whoever being asked to de-stress and revitalise their clients, but their role and wellbeing are largely overlooked (Baum et al., 2025). They are expected to be calm, warm, nurturing, and (sometimes) 24/7 available while navigating demanding, high-quality workloads, irregular hours, low pay, and poor working conditions (Varga, Mistry, Ali, & Cobanoglu, 2021). In some cases, hospitality and spa workers may even be stereotyped or misperceived as working in the sex industry (J. Frost, Van Dijk, & Ooi, 2023). Given that the wellness economy, specifically the wellness tourism sector, is still largely unregulated in many countries (GWI, 2022b), gaps between standards and regulations leave employees vulnerable. Employees in the wellness area play a crucial role not only in implementing wellness initiatives but also in promoting the well-being of individuals (Baker, 2024). This study revealed the adverse moderating effect of customer-employee interaction in the association between customer perceived values and destination loyalty, which emphasises the impact of the workforce on the transformative experiences. It is suggested that employees are likely to form negative feelings (e.g., annoyed, antagonistic, burnout, undervalued) during interactions with visitors, leading to related consequences. To address this, workers should receive external support to help enhance their wellbeing. Employee wellness programs by employers can be an effective tool for ensuring their wellbeing and job satisfaction (Varga et al., 2021). While governments might not mandate employers to

prioritise worker wellbeing, they can encourage professional accreditation or recognition by society. Government and policies could also support education, training, and certification programs to enhance their long-term career prospects, advancement opportunities, and job security. By safeguarding and uplifting the wellness of the tourism workforce, governments contribute not only to decent work conditions but also to the sustainable delivery of high-quality, transformative tourism experiences.

6.5 Summary of implications

This study offers several theoretical contributions that deepen the understanding of tourism experience management, particularly within the context of wellness retreats. First, by empirically validating a multidimensional framework of customer perceived value based on Sheth et al. (1991), the study advances existing theories of value and supports its relevance in wellness-oriented tourism. The second-order reflective measurement scale of perceived value reinforces the notion that tourists assess wellness retreat experiences through a multidimensional lens. Second, the study contributes to the growing discourse on transformative tourism by illustrating how wellness retreat experiences facilitate personal transformation. In doing so, it bridges the gap between theories of transformation economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2011) and visitor loyalty, offering new insights into how transformative tourism experiences drive long-term behavioural outcomes. Third, the study extends the Value–Satisfaction–Loyalty framework by establishing a direct positive impact of perceived value on consumer loyalty. Lastly, the current paper challenges prevailing assumptions about the universal benefits of social interaction in tourism experiences.

Methodologically, this study is among the first to adopt an exploratory sequential mixed-methods approach, thus expanding the methodological scope of retreat tourism research. Furthermore, the combined use of PLS-SEM and fsQCA provides a robust methodological framework for future tourism research to adopt a multi-method analysing perspective, ultimately enriching the understanding of consumer behaviours. From a managerial point of view, this study recognised the multidimensionality of value, which helps managers strategically design and promote wellness programs that resonate with the diverse needs and expectations of wellness visitors. By using fsQCA to identify different causal configurations, this study's findings empower managers to optimise experience design and resource allocation by focusing on targeted value propositions. Moreover, managers should ensure that service staff are properly trained to respect privacy and promote serenity for personal growth and

transformation. For government and policymakers, this study underscores the need to integrate value dimensions into tourism planning and policies to foster the well-being of visitors, local communities, and tourism workforces.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of the final chapter of this thesis is to outline reflective commentary and concluding remarks in relation to the research objectives of this paper. This study set out to explore how perceived value derived from transformative wellness retreat experiences influences destination loyalty, using a multidimensional and mixed-methods approach. Drawing upon both qualitative and quantitative insights, the research offers an integrated understanding of consumer experiences and behaviours within the unique context of wellness retreats. In doing so, it addresses crucial gaps in the literature and lays a foundation for future inquiry. This chapter concludes by discussing the research's limitations and proposing several promising directions for further investigation to advance theory, practice, and policy in tourism and wellbeing scholarship.

7.1 Conclusions

Mental health and wellbeing, as highlighted in Goal 3 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, have increasingly drawn scholarly attention within tourism studies due to their centrality to human development (Gedecho & Kim, 2025). Tourism has been widely acknowledged as an effective means of enhancing wellbeing, facilitated through engagement with nature, novel experiences, physical activity, social interaction, and positive affect (F. Hu et al., 2025; Y. Jiang et al., 2025). In response to growing consumer interest in health and wellbeing, the wellness economy has witnessed the remarkable expansion worldwide in the aftermath of the pandemic (GWI, 2024). In parallel, wellness tourism has emerged as a prevalent travel trend and transformed itself. It had conventionally concentrated on relaxation, sensory pleasures, and enjoyment by promoting high-end resorts and destination spas. A paradigmatic shift now redefines wellness tourism through the lens of holistic perspectives, increasingly focused on tourists' personal transformation (Liao et al., 2023). When defining wellness as being holistic, scholars and practitioners emphasise the multidimensional nature of wellness, encompassing physical, mental, spiritual, social, environmental (and so on) components. Therefore, the present study was carried out to explore the holistic benefits of transformative wellness retreat tourism experiences.

This research constructed a multidimensionality of consumer perceived value of wellness retreat experiences (RO1). Drawing on Sheth et al. (1991)'s theory of consumption values, the qualitative study identified four key domains of values, including functional,

emotional, epistemic, and social value, as central to how retreat attendees evaluate their experiences. Then, this study operationalised and validated the multidimensional scale of perceived value of wellness retreat experience (RO2). Exploratory Factor Analysis's outcomes led to the perceived value of wellness retreat experiences to be conceptualised as a second-order reflective construct, encompassing five elements, including Nutritional, Functional, Emotional, Social & Educational, and Ecological Healing benefits. Third, the study empirically tested the influence of perceived value on customer loyalty (RO3). The outcomes demonstrated that the perceived value of wellness retreat experience is a vital antecedent of customers' retreat loyalty, conceptualised as recommend and revisit intention. Additionally, contrary to previous findings in hospitality and tourism disciplines, customer-employee interaction negatively moderated this relationship, revealing a paradoxical effect within wellness retreat contexts where introspection and "silent interaction" are essential for the transformative experience. Regarding RO4, the present research provided a more comprehensive picture of the five different configurations that lead to customer loyalty, as evident in the fsQCA results. These findings highlight that destination loyalty can be achieved through multiple pathways, not necessarily requiring the presence of all value elements. In conclusion, all four proposed research objectives are effectively assessed and successfully accomplished, offering new theoretical and practical contributions. This study, therefore, provided valuable, actionable insights for destination managers and policymakers aiming to create and promote transformative tourism experiences.

7.2 Limitations and future research

While this study provides profound implications, the findings should be interpreted with an understanding of some limitations, which also offer avenues for future research. First and foremost, the outcomes of this study were based on a sample of retreat attendees recruited through a purposive sampling strategy at the study site. While the sample size met the requirements for a sufficient and thorough data analysis (Hair, Black, et al., 2019; Kurtaliqi et al., 2024), a larger sample would further improve the reliability of the exploratory factor analysis results. Previous studies have also acknowledged that the subject in the retreat research context is challenging to reach, due to the exclusive and secluded nature of this form of tourism experience (Bone, 2013; Lyulicheva et al., 2023). Particularly, the study site used in this research project accommodates a very limited number of participants at a time, aiming to maintain the retreat's tranquillity and privacy. Although the survey covered a long period of time to include as many respondents who stayed and participated in the one to several-day

retreat programs at the site as possible to ensure the validity and reliability, future study can obtain the larger sample size by expanding the questionnaire to different retreat venues domestically in New Zealand (while remaining mindful of competitive sensitivities) or internationally (which might require extra resources).

Second, comparative research is highly encouraged for future research in the wellness retreat settings. As the fsQCA findings suggest, different retreats offer distinct product features and value propositions. This study focused on an upscale holistic wellness retreat offering complex and professional wellness services (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019), which may not represent the diversity of the wellness retreat market. Other categories of wellness retreat should be taken into consideration for further investigation, such as eco-retreats (environmental-focused), weight-loss retreats (nutritional-focused), fitness retreats (functional-focused), as these cater to various needs and desires of customers. Investigating such variations can help paint a more complete picture of wellness tourism as a whole. Additionally, while the present study provided a profound insight into the target customers of wellness retreats through the characteristics of the sample (middle-aged women, high educational level, and high income), the dominance of this population in the current literature of wellness retreat tourism implies a limitation in efforts to diversify market understanding. Thus, future studies should seek more diverse samples from various cultural backgrounds (e.g., West and East) and more diverse population of wellness retreat customers (e.g., Baby Boomers, Millennials, and Gen Z) to examine the robustness of the proposed perceived value scale as well as compare how different groups/cultures assess the benefits of wellness retreat experiences differently. Furthermore, future studies would benefit from the inclusion of male participants in investigating wellness retreat tourism experiences as this group is largely excluded in the prior research (partly because men are far less likely to engage in such wellness retreat experiences). The continued popularity of the wellness economy could drive men to become increasingly open to exploring travel for their health and wellness practices (Halliday, 2023). Male and female differences in perceptions toward wellness retreat activities are noticeable and worth examining (Kelly & Smith, 2016).

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. The adoption of a postpositivism lens may present challenges, as it is often closely associated with quantitative research, rendering it less suitable for a mixed-methods design (R. Hall, 2013). To address this limitation, future studies could integrate the transformative paradigm alongside the

postpositivism approach. Within the transformative paradigm, community members play a role as coresearchers and active promoters in shaping research questions and processes (Sweetman, Badiee, & Creswell, 2010). Given the complex interactions observed between customers and employees in wellness retreat settings, combining these two paradigms may enhance understanding of interpersonal dynamics, particularly in relation to cultural differences and gender perspectives (Paparoidamis et al., 2019). Consequently, the application of mixed-method research under the transformative paradigm has the potential to offer significant methodological contributions to future tourism scholarship.

Furthermore, even though the scale provides useful implications for researchers and practitioners to assess wellness retreat visitors' experiences, the visit provides opportunities for spiritual nourishment and existential experience, which may not be fully captured by certain survey items. Thus, to amplify the transformative impacts of wellness retreat tourism experiences, future studies could examine several potential topics including visitors' transformation motivations, personal transcendence, and the influence of these experiences on their consciousness by adopting qualitative approaches. Future research could also focus on the permanency of the transformation by using a longitudinal study as only a longitudinal study could delve deeper into whether there is a long-term transformative effect after visitors return home. Transformative benefits are only truly possible with the regular practice of what is learned into one's everyday life, and that may be the critical distinction between general tourism experiences and truly transformative ones. Although the proposed measurement scale in this study includes items reflecting guests' intentions to implement wellness practices post-retreat (e.g., "I felt inspired to implement wellness practices into my life", "My knowledge of movement and exercise has increased", and "I feel equipped to include this in my lifestyle post retreat"), it remains essential to capture actual behavioural outcomes over time empirically. Longitudinal data collection would enable the examination of how wellness intentions manifest into lifestyle changes and whether these behaviours translate into repeat visitation or brand advocacy. This is particularly relevant to destination loyalty since this construct, by its very nature, emphasises a longitudinal perspective by examining lifelong visitation behaviours of visitors, rather than a purely cross-sectional point of view in which future visitation is unlikely to be connected to current visitation or, more broadly, to past experience per se (Oppermann, 2000). As such, this study serves as a foundational benchmark for future longitudinal work that seeks to understand the long-lasting effects of transformative tourism.

Finally, there is a need to integrate various factors and mechanisms that enable or inhibit the transformative benefits of wellness experiences and their consequences. Future studies could investigate how a variety of types of wellness tourism activities (e.g., yoga retreats, fitness retreats, mind-based retreats) and their distinct attributes can be leveraged to remedy mental health problems. Moreover, while this study adopted the perceived value concept to understand tourist behavioural outcomes, this conceptual lens may oversimplify the complex interplay of expectations and preconceived images that may impact the acquisition of experiences before, during, and after visitation (Ryan & Zhang, 2024). Nevertheless, the concept of consumer perceived value fundamentally involves a trade-off between benefits and costs, which remains a valuable framework for exploring tourist behaviours (Leroi-Werelds, 2019). This study focused solely on the positive benefits; however, future research should also explore how visitors assess the costs of purchase (e.g., price, time, effort) and how these factors influence visitors' epistemic values, overall value evaluations, and visit decisions. Moreover, possible adverse effects, such as travel-induced stress, including physical, psychological, psycho-social, and environmental strain (Felkai & Kurimay, 2017), may affect the health outcomes of wellness tourists and should be taken into consideration in future research. Future research lines should also focus on analysing contextual variables, such as cultural engagement, therapeutic landscapes, or the implementation of emerging technologies, which will offer timely and relevant insights into how to tailor each visitor's wellness journey, ultimately cultivating their loyalty.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Approval of ethics applications

WAIKATO MANAGEMENT SCHOOL
TE RAUPAPA



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Tai Mai
By email: maixuantai3012@gmail.com

18/12/2023

Dear Tony

Ethics Application WMS 23/132
Promoting wellbeing through wellness tourism: a New Zealand case study

The above research project, as outlined in your submitted application, has been granted Ethical Approval for Research by the Waikato Management School Human Research Ethics Committee.

Please note: should you make changes to the project outlined in the approved ethics application, you may need to reapply for ethics approval.

Best wishes for your research.

Kind regards,

Amanda Sircombe

Amanda Sircombe
WMS Research and Postgraduate Manager

Appendix B – Self-administered questionnaire at Resolution Retreats

Dear Valued Retreat Guest,

We are committed to care for your holistic wellbeing.

Resolution Retreats is proud to collaborate with The University of Waikato on a research project regarding guest's experiences of wellness retreat. We embrace to curate a brilliant wellness experience for you to ensure your state of wellbeing. To achieve this, we kindly request your valued feedback about your experience while here at our Retreat.

The questionnaire can be completed within approximately 5-10 minutes. By submitting this questionnaire, you are giving us consent to use the provided information for further analysis. Please rest assured that all your responses will remain confidential and private. You also can decline to answer any questions. Your name, address and other personal details are not required.

Should you have any questions about this research project, you are welcome to reach out to me, or contact the principal researcher via the email address or phone number below.

We extend our sincere gratitude for choosing Resolution Retreats in your journey to wellbeing, and we hope you have a wonderful stay with us.

With warm regards,

Joelene Ranby

Wellness Manager

Tony Mai (Researcher)

Mobile: +64 290 208 7496

Email: tm489@students.waikato.ac.nz

Kindly rate each statement below based on your experience at the Retreat (If you do not have an opinion or have not used a service, please tick 'Not Applied')

Your Current Wellbeing	<i>Totally disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not applied</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Totally agree</i>	<i>Not Applied</i>
My chalet is comfortable and clean	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My chalet feels luxurious and had everything I needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The meals are a good balance of nutrition and flavour to support my health goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There was a good variety in the foods served	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All dietary requirements are catered for	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The fitness and Yoga sessions are engaging and enjoyable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The fitness and Yoga sessions cater for all abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There were walking tracks, pool, boutique gym available for use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel refreshed and rejuvenated after my spa treatments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am comfortable in the spa and feel very satisfied with my spa treatments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My spa therapist listens to my needs and provides a positive customer experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The health-focused workshops are informative and engaging	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There are clear take-home messages in all the workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel refreshed at the Retreat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel very looked after at Retreat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel at peace at the retreat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel challenged psychologically	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Retreat gives me the space to reset and refocus on me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spending time at the Retreat has helped me to slow down and focus on my wellbeing more	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spending time at Retreat has had a positive effect on my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel inspired to implement wellness practices into my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Retreat maintains eco-friendly practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Retreat encourages sustainable living	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoy meeting other guests at the Retreat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I make new connections at Retreat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My knowledge of nutrition has increased and I feel equipped in this area to make sustainable changes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My knowledge of movement and exercise has increased and I feel equipped to include this in my lifestyle post retreat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

My knowledge of healthy habits has increased and I feel equipped to implement some healthy changes in my lifestyle						
The Wellness managers are knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Wellness managers do all to make my stay enjoyable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Wellness managers are friendly and approachable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall Wellness Experience						
Attending Retreat is a special experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would recommend attending this Retreat to friends and family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would love to attend another Retreat at this property in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Additional comments

Demographic information

1. *What is your age group?*

18-24

35-44

55-64

75-84

25-34

45-54

65-74

85+

2. *What is your gender?*

Male

Prefer not to say

Female

3. *What is the highest level of education you have completed?*

High school

Undergraduate

College/Wintec/Polytech

Postgraduate

4. *I am currently...*

Single, living alone

Married/ partner, and children

Single, living with other(s)

Married/ partner, and no children

5. *Considering the average household income in your home country (e.g., in New Zealand is NZD 125,000, in Australia is AUD 90,000), how would you define your monthly household income level?*

Well below average

Above average

Below average

Well above average

Average

Prefer not to say

Please submit this survey by depositing it in the nearby submission box.

Thank you so much for being part of our retreat family. Stay in touch, and stay happy and healthy!

XX Joelene, and the Team.

APPENDIX C – Photos of data collection at the Resolution Retreats

Photo 1 – A paper-based survey and submission box in the Retreat’s dining hall at the first stage of data collection (The NZ\$1 donation to the Retreat’s Breast Cancer Fund did not seem to work well)



Photo 2: Paper-based survey and submission box at the Retreat’s reception area at the second stage of data collection (when the incentive was changed to a 12-week Accountability Journaling giveaway - and it worked remarkably well!)



Photo 3 – Resolution Retreats’ main entrance on the final day of data collection. Farewell to the team.

