

# Health tourism training and education and COVID-19 pandemic

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**Abstract:** Health tourism focuses primarily on physical health and also improves mental and spiritual well-being and increases the capacity of people to meet their needs and better performance in their environment and society. Education and training in health tourism is very important because it reduces medical errors and increases the satisfaction of health tourists. Recently, health tourism as well as health tourism training have been negatively affected by COVID-19 epidemic. The outbreak of coronavirus since January 2020 has severely affected many industries. Tourism education provided by universities, which requires close links with the tourism industry, has also been strongly influenced. The prevalence of COVID-19 is a major barrier to the tourism industry and education system. Although tourism education has been changed from face-to-face education to online education during COVID-19 epidemic, online education has serious constraints and cannot replace face-to-face education. In this review we aim to investigate the health tourism and health tourism education and training during COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Education, COVID-19, Mental well-being

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## 1 Introduction

### 1. 1. Health tourism

Tourism is a service activity that refers to the movement of people from one geographical location to another. Tourism is also a social, cultural and economic phenomenon that involves

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the movement of people to countries or places outside their normal living environment for personal or commercial / professional purposes. Tourism plays an essential role in the social, cultural and economic development of most countries (Hamid et al., 2021). This service industry includes various types of tourism, of which health tourism is one of the most effective types of foreign exchange earnings of countries. Health tourism is a type of tourism that focuses primarily on physical health and also improves mental and spiritual well-being and increases the capacity of people to meet their needs and better performance in their environment and society (Salehi Isfahani et al., 2021). Health tourism has attracted the attention of research centers and industry due to its benefits in physical and mental health (Yin et al., 2021). But health tourism has been seriously affected with the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 was first reported on December 31, 2019 in Wuhan, China and has since become a global epidemic. COVID-19 is rapidly transmitted between humans; Thus, physical distance has been identified as a key factor in reducing its spread, and most countries around the world have introduced quarantine and travel bans, cancellation of social events, and closure of public services to curb COVID-19 (Ellis et al., 2020). Thus, the prevalence of this disease is considered as an effective factor in reducing tourism, including health tourism. According to studies, the COVID-19 epidemic has negatively affected many different sectors of tourism and has shut down the industry for months. Although various efforts have been made since June 2020 to reopen the industry, most sectors are still facing problems. The World Tourism Organization has acknowledged the enormous damage to the tourism industry due to COVID-19 pandemic (Collins-Kriner and Ram, 2020).

## **1. 2. COVID-19 pandemic**

According to the researchers, coronavirus not only causes significant illness and death, but also causes major disorders at the local, national and global levels. Although health care is growing during the epidemic, travel is disrupted. It has affected health tourism and has reduced the travels and trips (Chhabra et al., 2021). It has been reported that the world has experienced a major crisis due to COVID-19, and most industries, especially the health tourism industry, have also faced major negative effects (Sharma et al., 2020). In fact, the outbreak of coronavirus has reduced both the number of entries and the volume of health tourism services (Ananchenkova, 2021). The growing COVID-19 crisis has had a severely negative impact on the tourism industry through a combination of trade and health regulations, and while the tourism industry has faced a number of crises in the past (Abbaspour et al., 2021), it is predicted that this the crisis will continue until the end of 2021 (Kosaka et al., 2021).

## **1. 3. COVID-19 and health tourism**

The study of the effect of COVID-19 on health tourism has been discussed from different aspects. The present study was conducted to address some of these challenges regarding the effect of the Corona virus on health tourism. The results of these studies showed that the COVID-19 pandemic could reduce the number of health tourists. Many studies have shown that the prevalence of viral diseases is of significant hindrance in attracting tourists, especially health tourists. In the midst of COVID-19 crisis, tourism researchers, while paying attention to communities in tourism destinations, also pay attention to their safety and well-being and the

costs that will be incurred due to the cessation of tourism activities (Qiu et al., 2020). Also, according to studies, crises are regular events in tourism. Many destinations have been affected by natural and man-made crises and over the years, have developed flexible tactics and strategies (Ritchie and Jiang, 2019). However, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 epidemic has been different and unique in many ways. First, it has reduced travel, hospitality and tourism around the world (UNWTO, 2020); and second, the more dramatic economic collapse. The growing crisis of COVID-19 with a combination of trade and health regulations has severely affected the tourism industry, while the tourism industry has faced several crises in the past (Abbaspour et al., 2021; Kosaka et al., 2021). Recently, Yang et al. (2020) developed the DSGE "dynamic random general equilibrium" model to understand the impact of the epidemic on global tourism. The application of this model to COVID-19 indicates a significant decrease in tourism demand in response to an increase in health risk. Research findings also show that the world is still currently in the grip of the COVID-19 epidemic, which has halted the tourism sector and created an unprecedented global economic crisis. Countries compete with different motivations to attract visitors. However, sustainable early waves have reduced tourism revenues and accelerated job loss and bankruptcy in affected countries. With a ban on international travel that has affected more than 90% of the world's population (Grech et al., 2020). The World Tourism Organization estimates that due to the reduced communications, in-flight social distance (with aircraft only half full) and other industry constraints due to the continued presence of the virus (Gössling et al., 2020) and a reduction of 80 percentage of international tourism (BROM 2020), the tourism industry faced a reduction about trillions of dollars in revenue by 2020 (UNWTO) and the hospitality industry, which accounts for 300 million jobs and approximately 10% of global GDP (Brom, 2020) was collapsed. The results of a study by Flexman et al. show that major non-pharmaceutical interventions—and lockdowns in particular—have had a large effect on reducing transmission (Flexman et al., 2020), and hence, on tourism. It has been reported that the epidemic of COVID-19 has significantly stopped the world tourism industry in 2020 (Stackpole et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a negative impact not only on the economy but also on the physical and mental health of the people (Ma et al., 2021). The impact of global infectious diseases, including COVID-19, on the tourism industry in South Korea has been studied and studies have shown that the outbreak of this infectious disease has significantly reduced the number of incoming tourists to South Korea. Medicine and re-entry into the global market, including the Korean quarantine model that succeeded in preventing COVID-19, could be a preventive response to another pandemic in the future. The policy of the medical tourism industry based on the Korean quarantine model will help revive the international medical tourism industry after COVID-19 (Seo and Kim, 2021).

#### **1. 4. Tourism education**

Training is a major part of an organization's strategy to improve the performance, abilities, skills and behavior of its employees, the implementation of training must be properly managed to achieve the goals or benefits of training effectively. Training itself is a short-term training process that uses a regular and organized procedure. This definition indicates that training is an activity designed to develop human resources through a set of activities of identification,

evaluation, and a planned learning process. Holding a training course definitely has its own goals. The goals of the training provided by the company include increasing productivity, improving quality, supporting human resource planning, increasing members' morale, providing indirect compensation, promoting occupational health and safety, preventing the expiration of skills and knowledge, and increasing the competency of participants in training. With the complexity of the training objectives to be achieved, it is necessary to have a professional training management in order to achieve the training results effectively and efficiently (Ingkadijaya et al., 2021).

The tourism industry is a very important driver of the global economy and is affecting societies around the world that are currently experiencing fundamental change. Responding to these changes requires economic paradigms and education systems based on new foundations. Humanistic tourism proposes a values-based disciplinary approach to tourism at the intersection between human management and tourism and is rooted in human dignity and social welfare. Integrating the principles of human management into higher education tourism management programs, and changing the nature of what is taught and how it is taught, will benefit students, future managers and all stakeholders (Della Lucia et al., 2021). Tourism education should complement the new theoretical and managerial perspectives that address the world in transition, because knowledge creation through innovative teaching-learning processes guides research, practice, and behavioral flows at different levels (Pirson et al., 2019). Tourism education needs to be redesigned. This redesign can greatly benefit from the integration of human management principles in education and tourism management. The value-oriented perspective of humanistic management is crucial to clarify the ethical and sustainability issues identified by the contradictions and crises of the tourism industry in developed and developing countries, and to address issues (Della Lucia et al., 2021). Universities as sources of innovative thinking and change at the highest level must play an important role in building the capacity of tourism students and future managers to lead the industry, which is facing increasing pressures to become responsible stewards, now and in the future (Giudici et al., 2020). In addition, current and future managers and entrepreneurs need to adopt value-based leadership models that pave the way for business practices that ultimately serve human goals and respect human dignity (Santonino, 2020). Organizing an activity / event requires careful organization from planning, execution to evaluation of activities. These steps are needed to measure the success of these activities (Punia and Kant, 2013). Many factors can affect the effectiveness of a training, including performance management and the environment of the training environment that can create a favorable learning environment (Mohanty et al., 2019). The growing growth of the tourism industry in recent decades has created a great demand for higher education in hospitality and tourism. Given that the ultimate goal of higher education in hospitality and tourism is to provide professional talents to the tourism industry, curriculum design and training model with traditional courses is different (Ye and Law, 2021). Many academics emphasize that hospitality and tourism education should not only focus on theoretical curricula, but should also provide opportunities for practice at the local and global levels (Liburd et al., 2018).

### **1. 5. Health tourism training**

The globalization of health care has given rise to a new form of tourism, commonly known as health or medical tourism. Medical tourism has grown rapidly and many countries are already planning for this part of tourism (Ruggeri et al., 2015). Medical tourism is a situation in which tourists seek alternative medical opportunities in other countries. Medical tourism is the use of services that improve or enhance health through medical interventions in an out-of-residence area that lasts more than 24 hours, until recently it was very difficult to understand the difference between international and medical tourists. Medical tourists leave their country of origin to receive effective medical services (high quality and low price). The industry has grown rapidly in the last two decades, and due to the high foreign exchange earnings in this industry, many countries are actively planning to enter this field. In a strategic and competitive environment, development needs to be strengthened and it must also strengthen its supporting industries (Daniel et al., 2017).

### **1. 6. Health tourism education and quality of health tourism**

Today, human life is accompanied by amazing changes. Organizations must be prepared to face these huge changes. The purpose of this preparation should not be just the provision of technology and equipment. Rather, the employees of the organization must be experts, which is an important and valuable asset. A successful organization pays more attention to human resources, which can be the key to its success (Abbaspour and Badri, 2016). Education in medical tourism is very important because it reduces medical errors and increases the satisfaction of medical tourists (Kacha et al., 2016). Training is a tool to improve the quality of performance, solve management problems, empower an organization's manpower and increase efficiency. Training programs should be developed for the effective performance of relevant individuals who have specific roles and responsibilities in the tourism and healthcare sectors (Daniel et al., 2017). Better integration and synergy between tourism education and industry will lead to the goal of sustainable development (Tiwari et al., 2021).

### **1. 7. COVID-19 pandemic and health tourism training**

The outbreak of coronavirus since January 2020 has severely affected many regions and industries. Hotel and tourism education provided by universities, which requires close links with the tourism industry, has also been strongly influenced. The COVID-19 pandemic is a major barrier to the tourism industry and education system. Fortunately, learning of the SARS outbreak in 2003, hospitality and tourism educators have consistently adapted response measures to the unknown pandemic situation and made every effort to maintain the functioning of the education system. Hence, hospitality and tourism education in this period has changed from face-to-face education to online education. Most training classes, seminars and workshops are held online to reduce unnecessary face-to-face activities (Ye and Law, 2021). Although many studies have analyzed the impact of the epidemic on the tourism industry and numerous suggestions have been made to revive this sector, tourism education has been largely ignored. Tourism and family courses offered by higher education institutions are essentially part of the tourism system. Instructors need to be able to deliver training courses in a variety of ways that enable them to cope with the short- and medium-term effects of teaching in the

COVID-19 era, while also being proficient in predicting the future (Tiwari et al., 2021). The current situation of the COVID-19 epidemic has highlighted the vulnerability of tourism. Sustainable tourism must be fully implemented to deal with this and other crises. And sustainable tourism education must accompany this process, especially in terms of students' professional skills that are necessary to overcome crisis situations (Mínguez et al., 2021). Education can provide learners with the knowledge, values, and skills needed to understand the complexity of sustainability (Berjozkina and Melanthiou, 2021). To overcome these consequences, many studies have shown the importance of digital education. Transformation in education, especially in tourism education, has a significant impact on fostering a desire for learning and love of tourism students at a time when the tourism industry is declining due to COVID19 epidemic (Trong et al., 2021).

### **1. 8. Health tourism education and the post COVID-19 period**

At present, with the onset of an evolving world following the outbreak of COVID-19, changes in work styles, skill requirements, industry expectations and priorities are significantly anticipated (Séraphin and Yallop, 2021). The academic community has conducted conceptual and perceptual research to predict the post-COVID-19 period (Zheng et al., 2020). After a critical analysis, it was found that one of the broad topics around which research in tourism and hospitality is conducted is "the evolution of tourism" (Prideaux et al., 2020). Considering the change in consumer behavior, there is a need to redefine tourism (Wen et al., 2020), by adopting a community-focused approach (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020) in the tourism and hospitality sectors (Zheng et al., 2020). Some studies have focused on describing the post-COVID-19 scenario in different countries (McCartney, 2021). Some researchers believe that the epidemic is an opportunity for the tourism industry to reset or revise itself (Lapointe, 2020). Seraphin (2020) believe that tourism education has a strong transformative potential in the current situation. Increasing pressure on the tourism industry to play a leading role has led to the Future Tourism Education Futures Initiative. The TEFI framework is a value-based tourism education program recognizing the need to guide tourism to the future in a positive, responsible and effective way. Ethics, knowledge, stewardship, professionalism and reciprocity are five interrelated values that should govern the development of the tourism world, and a tourism education program should be considered to train responsible leaders (TEFI 2010). These principles are interrelated and show permeability. COVID-19 has influenced the delivery of training courses and, most importantly, their need to master the use of new technologies for teaching. In the post-COVID-19 phase to transform tourism education, a two-pronged management approach that balances innovation in tourism education, it is suggested. The nature of tourism education is inherently multidisciplinary, suggested in the post-COVID-19 phase. Students should be encouraged to use the multifaceted aspects of their degree and work in different departments to remain flexible (Wen et al., 2020). The tourism education sector needs government and industry support to rebuild trust among students. Governments should plan by following international organizations such as the UNWTO, which has provided a technical assistance framework to strengthen industry (UNWTO, 2020). Online programs for developing students' skills, designing curricula with industry collaboration, and developing faculty for technical knowledge lecturing should be welcomed in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase. In addition,

badges and certificates can be used to motivate them to fill the skill gap among tourism graduates. This form of accreditation provides an opportunity for graduates to develop skills that are considered critical to the tourism industry (Tiwari et al., 2021).

## 2 Conclusion

Education and training in health tourism is very important because it reduces medical errors and increases the satisfaction of health tourists. Health tourism as well as health tourism training have been negatively affected by COVID-19 epidemic. Tourism education provided by universities, which requires close links with the tourism industry, has been strongly influenced and the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the change in consumer behavior after COVID-19 pandemic, there will be a need to redefine health tourism by adopting a community-focused approach in the health tourism training.

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## Conflict of interests

The author has no conflicts of interests to declare.

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