

# THE STATE AND PROSPECTS OF WELLNESS TOURISM IN THE SUMY REGION

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## ABSTRACT

*Introduction:* Wellness tourism is a fairly new concept that has emerged relatively recently and has become another consequence of globalization. But every year, wellness tourism is gaining momentum and more and more people around the world are discovering new opportunities. In the Sumy region, there are all prerequisites and factors for development of health (wellness) tourism, but this area is not yet sufficiently researched and analyzed. It is this complexity and lack of studies on the topic that determined the choice of research subject and confirmed its relevance.

*Objectives:* The aim of this article was to investigate the situation and identify the prospects for development of health tourism in Sumy region of Ukraine.

*Methods:* During literature review for this work textbooks, scientific manuals, works of domestic and foreign authors, articles, as well as publications in periodicals, electronic publications and the World Wide Web were used. The data and materials provided by the studied entities (sanatoriums), travel agencies, medical centers) were analyzed. In the process of research and analysis of the health tourism market of Sumy region of Ukraine various methods of research were used, such as: observation method, comparison method, abstract-logical method (theoretical generalizations and formulation of conclusions), questionnaires and sociological studies.

*Results:* The result of our study is formulation of the theoretical foundations of wellness tourism; research of the factors that form the prerequisites for the successful development of health tourism in Ukraine; research of the health tourism market in Ukraine in general and Sumy region in particular; searching for ways to overcome the problems that exist in the sphere of health tourism in Sumy region, as well as developing recommendations for improving the current state of tourism.

*Conclusions:* Ukraine in general and Sumy region in particular have significant medical and recreational tourism potential, but the level of development of health tourism is unsatisfactory. For health tourism to become a full-fledged part of the tourist space of the region, it is necessary, at the state as well as at the regional level, to focus efforts on solving the tasks listed in these articles.

**Keywords:** health tourism, Sumy region of Ukraine, inbound tourism, resorts, medicine and treatment.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Today, in this fast-paced and taxing time, any adult needs a break from stressful situations to maintain their physical and mental health. Consequently, health tourism is one of the most popular types of recreation. This is due to its accessibility to virtually all age groups, as well as the undoubted health benefits from visiting resorts and health resorts. Wellness tourism is also becoming increasingly popular trend in the development of world tourism. Medicine plays an important role in the international tourism industry.

According to World Tourism Organization estimates, treatment and rehabilitation are among the most important motivations for tourism. Over the last 15 years, the number of trips for health and treatment purposes has increased by 10% worldwide. Wellness tourism is gaining global popularity because its flows have spread across all the continents of our planet. This form of tourism is the most stable, year-round, in-demand and promising [10].

The problems of medical tourism are covered in the works of many Ukrainian scientists, such as A. Babkin, V. Bogolyubov, Yu. Bezrukov, A. Vetnev, I. Kozlov, O. Lyubitseva, M. Malska, E. Stepanov, E. Sukharev, N. Fomenko, I. Shalkovskaya and others in different periods of time.

Wellness tourism is a fairly new concept that has emerged relatively recently and became another consequence of globalization. But every year, wellness tourism is gaining momentum and more and more people around the world are discovering new opportunities. Thus, first and foremost, this type of tourism performs important social functions related to treatment and prevention of diseases, as well as promotes various activities aimed at protecting health of the population. From the economic point of view, for the state introduction of new types of tourism enables new markets for tourist services to be introduced and, accordingly, to generate higher revenues [7].

However, despite the fact that in Ukraine, and in particular in Sumy region, there are all prerequisites and factors for the development of health tourism, this area is not yet sufficiently researched and analyzed. It is this complexity of the topic and its lack of study that has determined the choice of research that confirms its relevance.

Therefore, the aim of this article was to investigate the situation and identify prospects for development of health tourism in Sumy region of Ukraine.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Wellness trips have a long history. Even the ancient Greeks and Romans used healing springs and places with favorable climates to improve their health. Times have changed, but

the motivation for traveling has remained the same. The healing properties of natural factors continue to attract patients to resort areas. The flows of tourists traveling for medical and recreational purposes are not as plentiful as those of tourists who want to relax and have fun, but they are growing rapidly, their geography is expanding [1].

In modern tourism terminology, the most popular and accurate definition of the concept of “wellness, health or medical” tourism is the following: health and wellness tourism involves the movement of residents and non-residents within state borders and beyond them for a period of no less than 20 hours and no more than 6 months for health purposes, for the prevention of various diseases of the human body. According to the index of person-days of stay, health tourism occupies less than 1% in the global tourist turnover, and more than 5% in the income structure, makes it one of the most profitable branches of tourism. Around the world, leisure industry theorists are busy searching for the most exotic entertainment, but the opportunity to restore health during exciting tours is the most appreciated [2].

Health tourism is based on balneology. Balneology is a medical scientific discipline that studies the healing properties of natural climatic and physical factors, the nature of their effect on the human body, the possibility of their use for treatment and prevention of diseases, as well as for the purpose of health improvement [6].

Health tourism has a number of distinctive features. First, the stay at the resort, regardless of the type of the latter and the disease, should be long-term, at least three weeks. Only in this case the desired health effect is achieved. Secondly, treatment at resorts is expensive. Although relatively cheap tours have recently been developed, this type of tourism is mainly aimed at affluent clients who are increasingly focusing not on a standard set of medical services but on an individual wellness program. Another feature is that the resorts are visited by people of the older age group, when chronic diseases exacerbate or the body weakens and is unable to cope with daily stresses at work and at home. Accordingly, these tourists choose between resorts that specialize in treatment of a specific disease, and resorts of mixed type, which have a positive impact on body and contribute to recovery [8].

Recently, the health tourism market is changing. Traditional sanatorium resorts are no longer a place of treatment and recreation for the elderly, and are becoming multifunctional wellness centers designed for a wide range of consumers. Modern transformations of resort centers are caused by two circumstances. First of all, the change in the nature of the demand for health services. Healthy lifestyles are coming into fashion, and there is a growing number of people around the world who maintain good physical fitness and need for anti-stress programs. Mostly middle-aged people who prefer active rest and are often limited in time.

According to many experts, consumers of this type of services will be the main clients of health resorts and guarantee the prosperity of health tourism in the XXI century.

The second reason for the reorientation of resorts is that their traditional support, including financial support, from municipalities and the state is diminishing. Health resorts have to diversify their product to reach new segments of the consumer market and attract additional customers. Keeping wellness function, resorts make a more diverse program of patient stay, conduct cultural and sports activities. They offer a wide range of wellness services. Thalassotherapy is very popular in seaside hotels lately, and the programs such as “Anti-cellulite”, “Phyto-Beauty-Rejuvenation” are in high demand. The duration of treatment and rehabilitation courses becomes more flexible [1].

Health tourism is divided into many categories: speleotherapy, phytotherapy, aerotherapy, thalassotherapy, spa-therapy and many others. Its main directions are climatotherapy, balneotherapy and mud treatment - the same categories are widely represented in our country.

Ukraine has all the necessary resources for development of wellness tourism. It is the richest country in Europe in terms of quantity and quality of natural factors - mineral waters, therapeutic muds and climatic conditions.

Ukraine has huge reserves of medicinal mineral waters, namely, mineral waters of almost all major balneological groups. Consequently, balneotherapy is developing. Likewise, huge reserves of therapeutic muds on the territory of Ukraine contribute to the development of mud cure. The natural conditions of Ukraine also contribute to the development of climate treatment. Nowadays seaside, mountain and plain climatotherapy is developing on the territory of Ukraine.

Table 1 shows the distribution of resources used by health tourism by regions of Ukraine.

Many regions of Ukraine, despite their significant therapeutic and recreational potential, including the availability of various natural healing resources (mineral waters, mud deposits, recreational forests, etc.), are underdeveloped tourist regions. These include and Sumy region, located in the north-east of Ukraine, which has significant therapeutic and recreational tourism potential (sufficient number of sunny days per year, healing mineral waters and mud, wellness forests and other resources). The territory of the region has a favorable geographical position, unique historical and cultural monuments, a wide network of nature reserves and, in a natural and climatic aspect, is favorable for the development of health tourism.

In Sumy region there are 37 sanatorium and resort establishments of different functional purpose, which serve more than 67.1 thousand visitors annually, among them 4.9 thousand are foreigners, about 16.2 thousand people are improving their health [4].

**Table 1.** Wellness tourism resources by regions of Ukraine

Administrative units (regions)	Wellness tourism resources		
	Types of mineral waters	Types of therapeutic mud	Types of climate
Vinnytsia Oblast	Radon	Peat mud	Flat forest steppe
Volyn Oblast	Sodium chloride	-	Flat forest
Dnipropetrovsk Oblast	Sodium chloride	-	Plain steppe
Donetsk Oblast	Sodium chloride, sulfide	Mainland silt	Flat forest steppe
Zhytomyr Oblast	Radon	-	Flat forest
Zakarpattia Oblast	Carbon dioxide; hydrogen sulfide; arsenic	-	Mountain forest
Zaporizhia Oblast	Sodium chloride, sulfide	Seaside silt	Plain steppe, seaside steppe
Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast	Hydrogen sulfide	Peat mud	Mountain forest
Kiev Oblast	-	-	Flat forest
Kirovohrad Oblast	Radon	-	-
Luhansk Oblast	Sodium chloride	-	Flat forest steppe
Lviv Oblast	Sodium chloride	Peat mud	Flat forest steppe
Mykolaiv Oblast	Sodium chloride	-	Seaside steppe
Odessa Oblast	Sodium chloride	Sulfide seaside silt	Seaside steppe
Poltava Oblast	Sodium chloride	Peat mud	Flat forest steppe
Rivne Oblast	Sodium chloride	Peat mud	Flat forest
Sumy Oblast	Sodium chloride	Peat mud	Flat forest steppe
Ternopil Oblast	High content of organic matters	Peat mud	Flat forest steppe
Kharkiv Oblast	High content of organic matters	-	Flat forest steppe
Kherson Oblast	-	Sulfide seaside silt	Seaside steppe
Khmelnitskyi Oblast	High content of organic matters	-	Flat forest steppe
Cherkasy Oblast	Radon	-	Plain moderate forest-steppe
Chernihiv Oblast	Iron	-	Mountain forest
Chernivtsi Oblast	Sodium chloride	Peat mud	Flat forest

The area is located within two physical-geographical zones - Polesia and Forest-steppe. The climate of the region is temperate continental, with warm summers and moderately cold winters. More than 300 rivers flow through the region. They all belong to the Dnieper basin. The largest of them are: Desna, Seim, Sula, Psel, Vorskla. There are 33 large lakes and 1,660 ponds and reservoirs within the region. Sumy region has considerable potential for development of resort industry [4].

The territory of the region is one of the most ecologically safe zones of Ukraine, has excellent places for health improvement and rest.

## RESULTS

Our analysis of the sanatorium and health resort infrastructure of Sumy region, which can be used for the purpose of health tourism, revealed that there are 19 establishments in the region, incl. 4 - sanatoriums (3 of them are for children), 3 - sanatoriums-preventive health centers, 12 recreation bases. During 1990-2018 years the number of health resorts in the region decreased by 76.5%, and the number of beds (beds) in them by 71.8% [5].

Territorially in the Sumy region sanatoriums are unevenly distributed and concentrated in only 4 districts - Sumy, Shostka, Okhtyrka and Lebedyn.

According to existing classifications of resorts, they are divided into mud, climatic and balneological resorts, where clients are treated with natural mineral waters. Some sanatoriums offer several different health and wellness profiles, such as the Tokari sanatorium located in the Lebedyn district of Sumy region (oblast), where natural mineral waters, local peat mud and various medical procedures are used for treatment and rehabilitation [9]. That is, this sanatorium at the same time belongs to balneological, climatic and mud categories. It specializes in rehabilitation and treatment of people affected by the Chernobyl disaster, children and adults, war and labor veterans, people with disabilities and other people in need of health improvement. For balneological procedures the source of mineral water of chloride-sodium composition of type "Mirgorod" (water "Tokarevskaya") is extracted from a depth of more than 1000 m. This water allows to treat diseases of the gastrointestinal tract, kidney and liver disease.

"Sosnovy resort Buimerovka on Vorskla" which is located in the Sumy region 6 km from Okhtyrka, on the bank of the Vorskla river can be classified as balneological and climatic type, it is popular not only in Ukraine, but also abroad [3]. This establishment opened in 2005 and provides visitors with tourist and health-improving services. Built according to RCI international standards, the resort offers various types of recreation: beach, SPA, sports, fishing, horseback riding, eco-tourism, mushroom and berry gathering, corporate leisure and conference tourism.

A separate category consists of children's sanatoriums, which can serve tourists of this age category. There are 3 establishments of this type in the Sumy region: the Lebedinsky Children's Multidisciplinary Sanatorium, the Antituberculosis Children's Hospital (Sumy), and the Shostka Regional Children's Antituberculosis Sanatorium. The combination of medical treatment with the recreational opportunities of the available forest recreational resources contributes to the development of these facilities as center of health tourism.

Also, during the study, it was found that in 2018 - 2019 there were 3 health resorts in the region. One of them is the “Oldysh” climatic sanatorium under sponsorship of JSC Sumykhimprom specializing in treatment of diseases of nervous, respiratory and musculoskeletal systems. To improve the health of the employees the sanatorium “Izumrud” functions under the patronage of Shostka state-owned plant “Star” and preventive clinic services JSC "SMNVO" (Sumy). However, the facilities of these establishments are not used as points of health tourism.

Our analysis also revealed that despite the presence of significant medical and recreational tourism potential in the region, the level of development of this type of tourism is unsatisfactory. The reasons for this are the lack of support from state bodies of local self-government, insufficient funding, lack of investments, advertising, shortcomings in the territorial organization of the sanatorium and resort economy, etc. Also, health resorts of Sumy region are absolutely uncompetitive in the world market due to lack of modernization, introduction of new technologies, improvement of service level, medical care and promotion.

In the study of the tourism market, it is also important to analyze the activity of tourism companies. In order to study the place they occupy in the functioning of this area, we have developed a number of questions and conducted a survey among a number of tourist companies of Sumy region of Ukraine. The survey revealed that wellness tourism in Sumy region market is actually in its infancy, and to transform it into a developed industry, it takes a lot of effort and time on the part of all relevant entities that seek to develop it. Initiatives and appropriate measures for the promotion of health tourism should come from those entities that are interested in profit from the industry. We are talking about private tourism companies, as well as health resorts, which form the market for health tourism. And upon researching the market, study trends and customer requests, it is possible to see that health tourism is a very promising service industry. However, this niche of the market today is virtually unfilled and undeveloped.

## **DISCUSSION**

The sanatorium and spa industry will be able to actively develop in the direction of health tourism and bring significant profits to the Sumy region, provided that the authorities support entrepreneurial initiatives. For this purpose, it is necessary to modernize the material and technical base of the existing resort and sanatorium establishments and planning of their territories, to attract investors, including, but not limited to foreign ones, to expand

recreational services and leisure activities, to improve the skills and wages of service personnel of institutions of this type.

To attract the attention of foreign tourists, resorts of Sumy region of Ukraine need to solve a number of problems related to their financing, management and modernization. The foundation for development (design) of health-improving tourist product of Ukrainian resorts should be based on the latest SPA-technologies that improve the quality of rest and health. For this purpose, it is necessary to develop fundamentally new approaches to activity of sanatoriums on the basis of borrowing experience of market management of the international resort sanatoriums-hotels; to fully meet the needs of consumers in recreation, treatment, relaxation and wellness during their stay at a particular resort.

Also, at the moment, the state of legislative support for development of health resorts is a current problem, as tourist activity is a complex subject of legal regulation, and often is regulated by both traditional and special normative acts.

The modern development of health resorts should be based on a comprehensive and simultaneous combination of health, recreational and leisure services, which directly determines the need to create an appropriate optimal market infrastructure that serves such territorial tourist and recreational complexes. However, the tax system, as one of the elements of the economic mechanism, does not properly stimulate the development of recreational activity in Ukraine as a whole and in Sumy region in particular.

We believe that the material and technical base of tourism in the Sumy region should be significantly strengthened in the future, and the comfort at the hotel industry should be improved. The most promising types of recreational activity in the region should be: long-term rest, sanatorium and recreational health improvement; sports and health tourism, leisure, recreation (85% of the total population of tourists). In order to promote health tourism in Sumy region, various presentations, exhibitions and negotiations with representatives of foreign countries should be held in regards to possible cooperation.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Summarizing all of the above, we can conclude that the Sumy region has a significant medical and recreational tourism potential, but the level of development of health tourism (wellness) is unsatisfactory. There is absolutely no support of state bodies of local self-government, insufficient funding, lack of investment, advertising, shortcomings in the territorial organization of the sanatorium and resort economy, etc. Also, health resorts of



Sumy region are absolutely uncompetitive in the world market due to lack of modernization, introduction of new technologies, improvement of service level, medical care and promotion.

For health (wellness) tourism in Ukraine as a whole and in the Sumy region in particular to become a full-fledged part of the tourist space, it is necessary, at the state and regional level, to focus efforts on the following tasks: creation of a system of effective incentives for development of domestic medicine, modernization and development of spa treatment, increase in sales of relevant services, retraining and advanced training of staff of sanatorium and resort establishments, creation of an appropriate material and technical base; substantiation of real sources of financing, cooperation with the institutes of power and public organizations on the issues of solving problems in the development of wellness tourism, launching the new product of health tourism in the international market.

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