

# Investigating Characteristics, Motivations, Perceptions and Expectations of Spa and Wellness Tourists in Elounda, Crete

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## **Abstract**

*Spa and wellness tourism is one of the fastest-growing market segments in the hospitality and tourism industry. Defined as "all travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one's personal wellbeing", wellness tourism has recorded remarkable growth in the recent years. Within the US\$3.4 trillion spa and wellness economy, wellness tourism is estimated to total US\$494 billion or 14.6 percent of all 2013 domestic and international tourism expenditures. As a result, spas and wellness centres are becoming important revenue sources for hotels, resorts and destinations. Despite the enormous growth and potential of the spa and wellness market, little attention has been paid to consumers of these services. In order to successfully market or meet the demands of wellness travelers, an understanding of these group's unique characteristics is crucial. The aim of this paper is to investigate and identify wellness tourists' characteristics, motivations, preferences and perceptions, providing a better understanding of the main features of this type of tourists' behavior and expectations from a spa and wellness centre. Primary quantitative research was conducted via a structured questionnaire in a sample of 120 wellness tourists at Elounda during the 2015 season. Elounda is a lively cosmopolitan resort in Crete, the most luxurious in Greece, hosting some of the most prominent representatives of the world's social, political and economic life. Findings and discussion of this study are useful to industry practitioners (spa and wellness service providers who wish to develop appropriate marketing strategies and enhance customer satisfaction) and academic researchers interested in spa and wellness tourism.*

Keywords: Wellness, spa, tourism, resorts, Elounda, Crete

JEL classifications: I310, M310, M39, Z310, Z330

## **Introduction**

Individual health and well-being are universal desires shared by people across all ages, incomes, beliefs, cultures, and continents. As more and more consumers take preventive measures to maintain good mind and body health, prevent diseases, and to age well as they live longer, the demand for wellness industry products and services will only increase. In fact, the wellness economy has been growing rapidly in recent years because of converging global currents that defy temporary disruptions: population aging, widespread economic prosperity in emerging economies, the rise of lifestyle diseases

associated with sedentary and stressful modern living, and the failure of the conventional healthcare paradigm to help people prevent illness. As a result, the global wellness economy - which encompasses many industries that enable consumers to incorporate wellness into their lives - is estimated at \$3.4 trillion in 2013 (Global Wellness Institute, 2014).

Within this economy, wellness tourism is estimated to total \$494 billion or 14.6 percent of all 2013 domestic and international tourism expenditures. Defined as "all travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing one's personal wellbeing" (Global Wellness Institute, 2014, p. v), wellness tourism has recorded remarkable growth in the recent years, making it as one of the fastest-growing market segments in the hospitality and tourism industry. An ever-growing number of wellness-minded consumers are integrating healthy habits and activities into their travels, partly to counter a host of negative, travel related health impacts such as jet lag, poor sleep, and disruption of healthy eating and exercise (Global Wellness Institute, 2014).

As a result, spas and wellness centres are becoming important revenue sources for hotels, resorts and destinations. Not surprisingly, the spa industry has been growing by 7.7% annually, from \$60 billion in 2007 to \$94 billion in 2013, while the number of spas has increased by 6.7% annually since 2007 and is estimated at 105,591 in 2013. Spas employed more than 1.9 million people in 2013, and when revenues are considered, Europe is still the world's largest spa market, because of its relatively higher average revenues per spa (Global Wellness Institute, 2014).

Despite the enormous growth and potential of the spa and wellness market, little attention has been paid to consumers of these services. As we know, the basic principle of marketing science and consumer behaviour is that the consumer freely decides what to consume and what to reject, so he should always be the focus of any business activity. We must always remember that without tourists there can be no tourism, and recognize that if we are to manage tourism effectively, we need to understand tourists and their behavior (Horner and Swarbrooke, 2007). Consequently, in order to successfully market or meet the demands of wellness travelers, an understanding of these group's unique characteristics is crucial. The aim of this paper is to investigate and identify wellness tourists' characteristics, motivations, preferences and perceptions, providing a better understanding of the main features of this type of tourists' behavior and expectations from a spa and wellness centre.

The paper is divided into five parts. Following this introduction, section 2 presents a literature review on research related to spa-goers and wellness travelers' characteristics and motivations. Section 3, introduces the methodology of the research, while section 4 elaborates on the results, presenting both the demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as several aspects of their experience in a resort spa. Finally, in section 5 the main conclusions, along with the limitations encountered are discussed.

## **Literature Review**

As mentioned above, despite the considerable growth rate of the spa and wellness market, only a few studies focused on spa-goers and

wellness travellers. A number of these studies focus on spa-goers' preferences, behaviour and satisfaction. Kucukusta and Guillet (2014) investigated the preferences of the spa-goers. Their findings revealed that mid-level prices, a high level of therapist qualifications, a high level of privacy, a full range of spa facilities, and branded spa products are preferred by customers. Moreover, therapist qualifications, price, and level of privacy are found to be the most important attributes in making spa bookings. Kim et al. (2010), examined consumers' behavioural intention to spa visiting, by applying the extended theory of planned behaviour. Their results indicated that "perceived behavioural control", "past experience", and "spiritual wellness" appeared to be significant predictors to behavioural intention to spa visiting. They believe that possible explanations are that those who have visited spas are most likely to revisit spas. They seem to be repeat visitors. Seeking to identify the factors that affect spa-goers' satisfaction, Loureiro, Almeida and Rita (2013) conducted a survey to individuals who received spa service experience in Portugal. Their results revealed that atmospheric cues and involvement are important antecedents of relaxation and pleasure. The feeling of relaxation is more important to lead to satisfaction than pleasure, and pleasure does not impact directly and significantly on word-of-mouth. Relaxation is the core emotion in spa context.

In addition, Sherman, Clemenz and Phillip (2007) recognize that there is an emerging male market within the spa industry and consider if men and women differ in their service preferences at spas. Their analysis indicated significant gender differences on the importance ratings of 12 out of 18 common spa services: aromatherapy, body scrub and exfoliation, facial, fitness facilities, lymph drainage, manicure, mud or seaweed wrap, pedicure, Pilates, Shiatsu, sport massage, and yoga. On the other hand, the services that men and women rated similarly in decreasing order of importance were Swedish massage, nutritional counselling, steam and sauna, hydrotherapy, spa cuisine, and reflexology. Towards this direction, Tsai, Suh and Fong (2007) aimed to understand male spa-goers, as they recognise them as a growing customer segment. The results of their study indicate that the most cited reason why male spa-goers patronized a hotel spa was relaxation, and the most consumed service was body massage. Elias-Almeida, Miranda and Almeida (2016), tried in their study to clarify the significance of customer delight as an antecedent to customer loyalty, in five-star hotel spas in Portugal. Their results indicated that satisfaction had a direct positive effect on customer delight and, consequently, influences the effect of customer delight on customer loyalty. Moreover, Chen, Chang and Wu (2013) aimed in their research to establish customer service factors for wellness tourism from both service providers and customer perspectives, and to determine whether gender and age factors affect older tourist opinions of customer service. They identified eight crucial customer service factors that can be used for determining the preferences of older consumers in wellness tourism. From high to low, they are personnel services, environments, healthy diet, relaxation, health promotion treatments, experience of unique tourism resources, social activities, and mental learning.

Another research topic within the context of spa and wellness industry is the motivation of spa-goers and wellness tourists. Konu and Laukkanen (2010) investigated tourists' motivations as predictors of their interest in wellbeing tourism holidays as opposed to tourists who are not interested in wellbeing holidays. Their results showed

that previous experience of wellbeing holidays, the number of annual holiday trips, together with pull factors "water park and/or spa", "natural sites" and "easy access to the destination", and push factors "refreshing myself", "experiencing fashionable/trendy places" and "aesthetic experiences" significantly increase the likelihood of tourists being interested in taking wellbeing holidays. Another study from Mak, Wong and Chung (2009), examines the underlying factors that motivate travellers to search for spa experiences while travelling and attempts to explore the different perceptions of the spa experience and identify the relevant socio-demographic characteristics of spa-goers. Their analysis revealed that "relaxation and relief", "escape", "self-reward and indulgence", and "health and beauty" are important factors that motivate travellers to visit spas. In addition, Chen, Prebensen and Huan (2008) focused on wellness travellers in order to investigate their motivation. They found that relaxation, pursuing multiple activities, recreation, and enjoying nature are the top four motivations, while in terms of the ranks of importance, relaxation is the leading indicator. The research by Rančić *et al.* (2016), aimed to identify the motivational characteristics of the tourists visiting the wellness centers and to study the relationship between the tourists' healthy-living behavioral patterns and the motivational behavior in relation to the wellness facilities in Slovenia. Their results showed that the users of the wellness services in Slovenia have a reasonably good attitude towards the guidelines of a healthy lifestyle, with some minor differences in the individual factors. They mostly have positive attitudes towards the personal safety, the moderate use of alcohol, and the regular physical activity. They also respect the guidelines for healthy nutrition. Their main motives for coming to the wellness center are: the effortless activity (physical rest), the enhancement of the quality of life and the relaxation. Rančić, Pavić and Mijatov (2014) also tried to understand the spa and wellness tourists' motivation during their visits to spa and wellness service centres in Slovenia. They conclude that the motives for visiting the wellness centres at the hotels in Slovenia are numerous and they depend a lot on the everyday healthy life style of the visitors. In addition, they depend on many other factors connected to the socio-demographic characteristics of the visitors, or on the characteristics of the wellness centers.

On the other hand, Kucukusta, Pang and Chui (2013) examined the selection criteria that inbound travellers use to gain insight into how demographic factors and travel characteristics affect their spa-related decisions. Their results revealed that relaxation, pampering, and beautification were the main reasons that people visited hotel spas; with the three most important major selection dimensions being therapists, price, and product and treatment types. Of the 28 selection criteria studied, professional skills, product and service knowledge, sense of privacy, range of facilities, and product branding were the most important attributes. Another study from Suresh, Ravichandran and Ganesan (2011), tried to understand the influence of customer lifestyle factors on wellness centre loyalty. Their results indicate that overworked individuals and those seeking a balance between work and family life would be the most loyal to wellness centres. In their study, Voigt, Brown and Howat (2011) explored and compared the benefits sought by three different types of wellness tourists: beauty spa, lifestyle resort, and spiritual retreat visitors. In total, six benefit factors emerged from their principal axis factor analysis: transcendence; physical health and appearance;

escape and relaxation; important others and novelty; re-establish self-esteem; and indulgence.

Other researchers focused on segmenting wellness tourists mainly applying cluster and segmentation analysis. They argue that by identifying the different market segments existing in this industry, marketing strategies can be made more focused, further refined, and consequently, more effective. Hui et al. (2012) conducted an exploratory study in wellness-hotel visitors by performing a market segmentation analysis. The results of their cluster analysis revealed that there are three clusters, namely, independent, undemanding, and demanding guests. Significant differences were found among the three market segments for their preferences in various wellness-hotel infrastructures and health expertise. Koh, Yoo and Boger Jr. (2010), administered a survey to customers visiting hotel spas in Texas, in order to identify different market segments among spa goers, based on a set of benefit variables. They identified three distinct customer segments based on the benefits sought by spa goers: escapists, neutralists, and hedonists. Pesonen, Laukkanen and Komppula (2011), also tried to segment wellbeing tourists according to the benefits they seek from local wellbeing products. They concluded in four segments of wellbeing tourists: outdoor types, nature enthusiasts, sightseers and culturalists. These segments differ from each other in the benefits they seek and in interest in wellbeing holidays, but are quite similar regarding to their socio-demographic factors. Towards this direction, Kamenidou et al. (2014) examined wellness travellers, aiming also in segmenting customers of the thermal spring baths of Pozar Aridaia, Greece, based on perceived importance of the wellness facilities. Their cluster analysis exported three clusters: the customers with high demands, the ones with moderate demands and the mostly indifferent in demands customers. Chen, Liu and Chang (2013) highlighted the following seven customer wellness service factors: "health promotion treatments", "mental learning", "experience of unique tourism resources", "complementary therapies", "relaxation", "healthy diet", and "social activities". According to these service factors, they divided older adults into a holistic group, physiocare group, and leisure and recreation group using cluster analysis. Moreover, Global Wellness Institute (2014) identified two types of wellness travelers: those who take a trip entirely for wellness purposes (primary wellness travelers) and those who engage in wellness activities as part of a trip (secondary wellness travelers). Secondary wellness travelers constitute the largest segment and account for 87% of wellness tourism trips and 84% of expenditures. The number of secondary wellness trips has grown faster than primary wellness trips from 2012-2013.

Finally, another research area regarding spa and wellness tourism is the determinants of expenditures in spa and wellness services. Medina-Muñoz and Medina-Muñoz (2012) analysed wellness tourist demand and identified the determinants of expenditure during a stay in a wellness destination. Their results revealed that the principal determinants of expenditure on wellness services are the characteristics of the trip, behaviour as international travellers and some socio-demographic attributes of the tourists. Moreover, according to Global Wellness Institute (2014), wellness travelers tend to be wealthier and more educated, and as a result their tourism spending is significantly higher than the average tourist, making them "high-yield" tourists. International wellness tourists spend 59% more and domestic wellness tourists spend 159% more than the average tourist.

## Methodology

For the purposes of the research, a self completed structured questionnaire consisting of four sections, based on literature review, was designed. In the first section, visitors were asked to provide some basic information about their vacations, such as the number and characteristics of persons in their travelling party, the reasons for choosing the destination and the specific resort for their holidays, the information sources for the destination and the specific resort, the number of visits in the destination in the past, and their length of stay. The second section asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement (using a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") to a number of statements regarding spa and wellness tourism, such as the importance of the existence of a spa as a major reason for choosing a destination or a resort, the importance of wellness activities on their holidays, and the visit in spas at their residence place. In addition, the second section asked respondents to indicate how important are several factors when choosing a spa, to a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from "unimportant" to "extremely important". The third section focused on travellers' visit in the specific resort spa in Elounda region, and contained questions regarding the information sources about the spa, the reasons for visiting the spa, the level of satisfaction from the visit to the spa (using a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from "poor" to "excellent"), and their experience in the spa compared to their expectations. The last section contained questions about respondents' profile utilizing several demographic variables, i.e. gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, income and nationality.

The survey took place in a Resort & Spa in Elounda, between June, 1<sup>st</sup> and August, 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Elounda is a small town on the northeast coast of the island of Crete, Greece. It skyrocketed in the late 60s when the first luxury 5-star hotel of Crete was built there. A building boom of luxury accommodation turned this small fishing village into the lively cosmopolitan resort it is today, the most luxurious in Greece, hosting some of the most prominent representatives of the world's social, political and economic life (Trihas, Zouganeli and Antonaki, 2012). Elounda is home to some of the finest hotels and resorts in the world. In fact, it is the place with the highest concentration of Greece's five-star resorts. Elounda is the epitome of a luxurious holiday. It should be also mentioned here that the resort where the survey conducted is a premium all inclusive, adults only resort. A total of 120 usable questionnaires were collected through personal interviews with spa customers that were approached at random, after they received wellness services in the spa. They were informed of the nature of the survey and were asked to complete the questionnaire. The collected data were statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0. Descriptive statistics were used to investigate travelers' characteristics, motivations, expectations and perceptions. To investigate the relationship between travelers' attitudes, a series of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were conducted.

## Findings

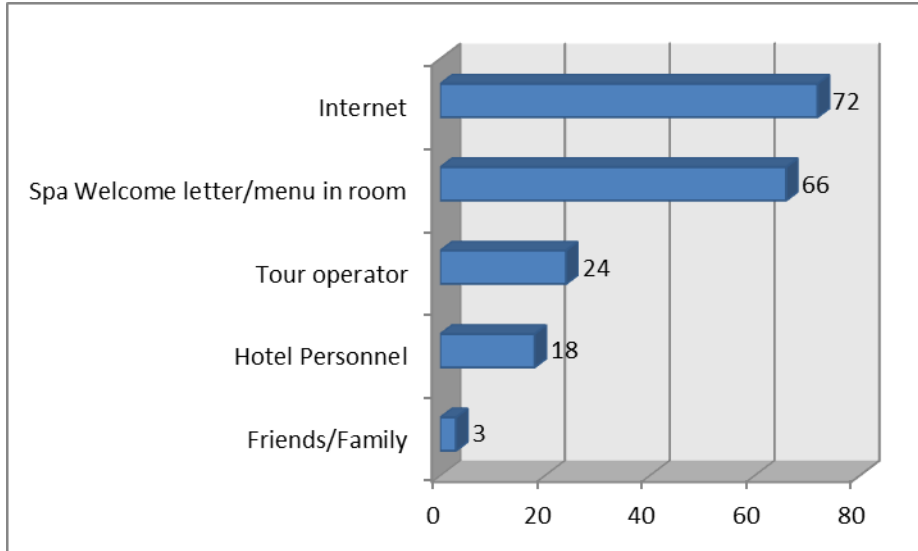
The demographic and other characteristics of the 120 respondents in total, from the guests of a specific Resort & Spa in Elounda, Crete, are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Sample Information**

		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Gender	Male	39	32,5
	Female	81	67,5
Age	18 to 24	15	12,5
	25 to 34	24	20,0
	35 to 44	12	10,0
	45 to 54	42	35,0
	55 and over	27	22,5
Marital Status	Single	27	22,5
	Engaged	9	7,5
	Married	78	65,0
	Divorced	6	5,0
Education Level	Basic	36	30,0
	Bachelor's degree	57	47,5
	Master / Doctorate	21	17,5
	Not Stated	6	5,0
Occupation	Employed	72	60,0
	Unemployed	3	2,5
	Business owner	30	25,0
	Retired	15	12,5
Annual Income	Under €15,000	9	7,5
	€15,000 to €30,000	21	17,5
	€30,001 to €50,000	48	40,0
	€50,001 or more	27	22,5
	Not Stated	15	12,5
Nationality	German	21	17,5
	British	81	67,5
	French	9	7,5
	Indian	2	1,7
	Belgian	4	3,3
	Dutch	3	2,5
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>120</b>	<b>100,0</b>

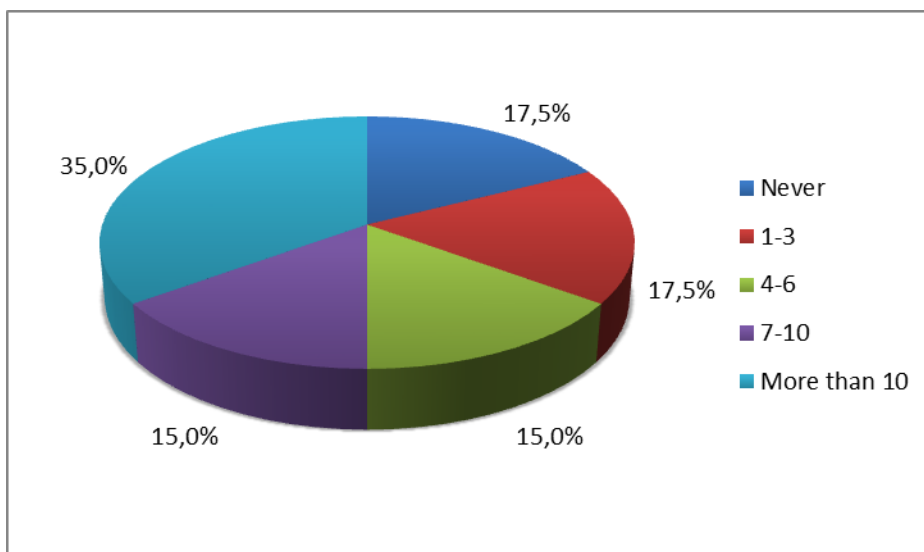
Female spa guests (67.5%) seem to be double than the male guests (32.5%). The majority of the guests were between 45-54 years old (35%) in comparison to the minority (10%) for ages 35-44. More than half of the respondents (65%) were married, followed by singles (22.5%), while divorced guests only reached a 5%. Regarding the educational level, most of the spa guests (47.5%) had graduated college, followed by 30% of guests with basic education. Only 17.5% were having Master's education while 5% did not state the level of education. Moreover, 60% of the spa guests were employed, 25% business owners and 12.5% retired. 2.5% was unemployed the moment that the research was taking place. Concerning about the annual income of the spa guests 40% of them stated that this was between 30,001 and 50,000€ and 22.5% more

than 50,001€. Even 17.5% of guests earning 15,000-30,000€ per year were visiting the spa, and that presumes that people from different economic status seem to need to enjoy spa facilities and treatments. In terms of the nationality, 67.5% of the respondents originated from the UK, 17.5% from Germany, 7.5% from France and 1.7- 3.3% from India, Holland and Belgium.



**Figure 1: Information sources about spa visited**

The majority of the guests that visited the Spa (60%) had been informed about the Spa through the internet. Next in the list was the welcome letter and voucher that the guests receive upon their arrival in the Resort, so 55% of the guests noted that they heard about the Spa through this promotional activity. The tour operators seems that informed only 20% of the guests to visit the spa and the information about the spa from hotel personnel only reached to influence the 15% of the guests.



**Figure 2: Number of times visited a spa in the past**



35% of the guests that received a treatment stated that they had visited a spa for more than 10 times in the past, in contrast with all the other possible answers given, varying from never to 10 times where the average answers were between 15-17.5%. We conclude that the majority of the respondents are experienced and regular spa-goers.

In the following part of the research the participants were asked to indicate in a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) on how important wellness activities are when they are on vacation. The percentages for all the 5 aspects were all very close. The majority of the guests agreed that the word "spa" in the name of a Resort influences them positive in order to choose the specific hotel for their holidays, and generally agreed that the existence of the spa in the resort was quite a major reason why they chose this place for their holidays (Table 2).

**Table 2: Spa guests' level of agreement on various statements regarding spa and wellness tourism**

	Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Strongly agree	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
The existence of the spa in the region was a major reason to choose Elounda for my vacation	7,5	12,5	52,5	22,5	5,0	3,05	0,924
The existence of the spa in the hotel was a major reason to choose the specific resort for my vacation	0,0	17,5	42,5	35,5	5,0	3,28	0,809
The word "spa" in the name of a resort influences me positively to choose this hotel for my holidays	0,0	12,5	47,5	30,0	10,0	3,38	0,831
Wellness activities are more interesting to me than any other type of activities when I am on holidays	2,5	22,5	45,0	20,0	10,0	3,13	0,958
I am visiting Spas even at my residence place (when not on holidays)	10,0	15,0	20,0	45,0	10,0	3,30	1,149

Application of ANOVA to investigate the significant effects of the demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, marital status, education, occupation, income, nationality) on their ratings of the five aspects on how important wellness activities are when they are on vacation (see Table 2), revealed some statistically significant

effects in a number of cases. Namely, *age* appeared to have some influence on respondents' perceptions about 'the existence of the spa in the region was a major reason to choose Elounda for my vacation' ( $p=0.030$ ). The same goes for *education level* ( $p=0.000$ ), *occupation* ( $p=0.002$ ), *annual income* ( $p=0.003$ ) and *nationality* ( $p=0.030$ ). The age groups "35 to 44" and "55 and over", the holders of Master/PhD, the employed or retired persons, with income 30,000 Euro or more, the Germans and the Dutch tend to disagree declaring that the existence of the spa in the region was not a major reason to choose Elounda for their vacation. Regarding the second aspect about 'the existence of the spa in the hotel was a major reason to choose the specific Resort for my vacation' some statistically significant effects are also revealed for *education level* ( $p=0.005$ ), *occupation* ( $p=0.009$ ) and *nationality* ( $p=0.001$ ). The unemployed persons, the persons with the lower income and the Dutch seem to disagree with this statement. Continuing with the third aspect 'The word "spa" in the name of a resort influences me positively to choose this hotel for my holidays', the statistically significant effects concern *education level* ( $p=0.025$ ) and *nationality* ( $p=0.035$ ). The guests with basic education or Master/PhD and once more the Dutch appear to be more negative and disagree. *Nationality* seems to influence respondents' perceptions regarding the fourth aspect ( $p=0.001$ ) but also the fifth aspect ( $p=0.000$ ) along in this case with *age* ( $p=0.028$ ), *marital status* ( $p=0.031$ ), *education level* ( $p=0.000$ ) and *occupation* ( $p=0.001$ ). Generally, Dutch guests appear to disagree or strongly disagree with the total of the statements about wellness activities. However, the latter is not to be trusted because of the low representation of Dutch people in the sample (only 3 persons).

**Table 3: Importance of various factors when choosing a spa**

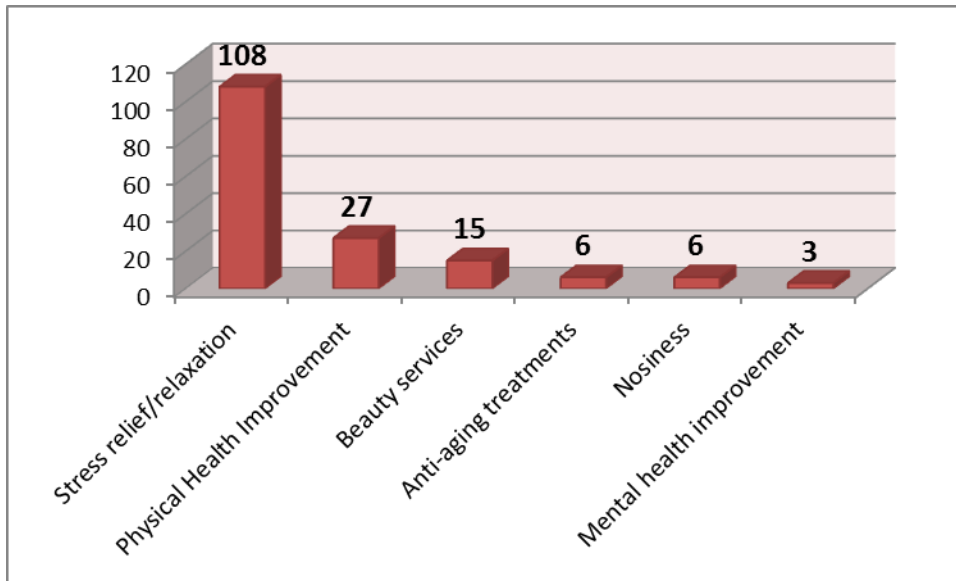
	Unimportant				Extremely important	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Facilities and equipment	0,0	2,5	32,5	22,5	42,5	4,05	0,924
Location and environment	2,5	2,5	27,5	40,0	27,5	3,87	0,931
Variety of services	0,0	1,7	23,3	40,0	35,0	4,08	0,805
Quality of services	0,0	2,5	7,5	27,5	62,5	4,50	0,745
Personnel behavior and courtesy	0,0	2,5	7,5	25,0	65,0	4,53	0,744
Staff knowledge	0,0	1,7	8,3	20,0	70,0	4,58	0,717
Personnel hygiene	0,0	2,5	10,0	15,0	72,5	4,58	0,774
Cleanliness and maintenance	0,0	0,0	10,0	12,5	77,5	4,67	0,650
Competitive prices	0,0	0,0	15,0	57,5	27,5	4,13	0,643
Decoration/Ambience	0,0	2,5	12,5	45,0	40,0	4,22	0,761
Reputation	0,0	2,5	37,5	40,0	20,0	3,77	0,793
Personalized treatments	0,0	7,5	35,0	27,5	30,0	3,80	0,958
Privacy	2,5	2,5	12,5	40,0	42,5	4,18	0,923
Spa Brand Name	7,5	22,5	50,0	17,5	2,5	2,85	0,885

Well known skincare brand	7,5	15,0	52,5	20,0	5,0	3,00	0,926
Reviews (e.g. TripAdvisor)	2,5	5,0	32,5	42,5	17,5	3,68	0,909

Subsequently, the participants were asked to rate the importance of various factors that influence them when choosing a spa. Most of the aspects were rated high, with greater importance to be given to the cleanliness and the maintenance of a spa (Mean=4.67). Secondly, the participants of the research rated the staff knowledge and hygiene as extremely important (Mean=4.58), followed by the personnel behavior and courtesy (Mean=4.53). Interestingly the fact that next in their preferences was the quality of services (Mean=4.50) shows clearly that for the spa guests most important is the ambiance of a spa and the staff's grooming standards than the treatment they will receive. Aspects as the spa's decoration, privacy, competitive prices variety of services and facilities were rated high as well. Surprisingly the reviews in sites such as TripAdvisor are not as important for the spa guests (Mean=3.68). Less interest is given from the spa guests about the notability of the skincare brand that a spa is using (Mean=3.00) and even less in the spa brand name (Mean=2.85). Although the importance of these factors confirm the results of previous studies, the low rating of spa brand name and the well known skincare brand contradict the findings of other studies, in which branded spa products are preferred by customers (see Kucukusta and Guillet, 2014).

Moreover, some significant effects ( $p < 0.05$ ) were detected concerning the respondents' evaluation of various factors when choosing a spa (Table 3). Specifically, gender appeared to influence respondents' perceptions about the importance of 'facilities and equipment' ( $p=0.048$ ), 'quality of services' ( $p=0.010$ ), 'personnel behavior and courtesy' ( $p=0.005$ ), 'staff knowledge' ( $p=0.017$ ), 'cleanliness and maintenance' ( $p=0.048$ ), 'competitive prices' ( $p=0.005$ ), 'privacy' ( $p=0.004$ ), 'spa brand name' ( $p=0.006$ ), and 'reviews' ( $p=0.002$ ). The only factors that are evaluated higher from men - in comparison with women - are 'cleanliness and maintenance', 'spa brand name' and 'reviews'. Moreover, age seems to affect respondents' perceptions on the importance of 'facilities and equipment' ( $p=0.020$ ), 'variety of services' ( $p=0.000$ ), 'quality of services' ( $p=0.002$ ), 'personnel hygiene' ( $p=0.007$ ), 'cleanliness and maintenance' ( $p=0.005$ ), 'competitive prices' ( $p=0.000$ ), 'decoration/ambience' ( $p=0.001$ ), 'personalized treatments' ( $p=0.000$ ), 'privacy' ( $p=0.000$ ), 'spa brand name' ( $p=0.001$ ), 'well known skincare brand' ( $p=0.001$ ) and 'reviews' ( $p=0.028$ ). The age group '35 to 44' appears to consider as very important or extremely important the above factors when selecting a spa. The *marital status* is another factor that influence respondents' feelings about the importance of 'location and environment' ( $p=0.000$ ), 'competitive prices' ( $p=0.035$ ), and 'reviews' ( $p=0.000$ ). These factors are not very important for engaged people when they choose a spa. Next, some significant effects were detected concerning the effect of *education level* in the respondents' perceptions about the importance of 'privacy' ( $p=0.005$ ), and the effect of *occupation* in the perceptions for 'cleanliness and maintenance' ( $p=0.030$ ), 'competitive prices' ( $p=0.000$ ), 'decoration/ambience' ( $p=0.001$ ), and 'spa brand name' ( $p=0.046$ ). Finally, *income* and *nationality* seems to influence the perceptions about the importance of the most factors cited, revealing some more statistically significant effects.

Significant percentage of guests that reaches 90% mentioned that the main reason for visiting the spa is for stress relief/relaxation. The other reasons mentioned are physical health improvement (22.5%), followed by beauty treatments (12.5%), anti-aging treatments (5%), nosiness (5%), and finally mental health improvement with just 2.5%. These results also confirm the results of previous studies. Especially relaxation is found in many studies as a main reason that people visited spas (Tsai, Suh and Fong, 2007; Mak, Wong and Chung, 2009; Voigt, Brown and Howat, 2011; Chen, Chang and Wu, 2013; Kucukusta, Pang and Chui, 2013)



**Figure 3: Reasons for visiting the spa**

**Table 4: Level of satisfaction from the visit to the spa**

	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Facilities and equipment	0,0	0,0	15,0	30,0	55,0	4,40	0,738
Variety of services provided	0,0	0,0	5,0	30,0	65,0	4,60	0,586
Personnel behavior and courtesy	0,0	0,0	0,0	25,0	75,0	4,75	0,435
Staff hygiene	0,0	0,0	0,0	20,0	80,0	4,80	0,402
Cleanliness	0,0	0,0	7,5	15,0	77,5	4,70	0,603
Arrival experience	0,0	0,0	0,0	30,0	70,0	4,70	0,460
Quality of services provided	0,0	0,0	2,5	30,0	67,5	4,65	0,529
Knowledge of staff	0,0	0,0	5,0	27,5	67,5	4,62	0,581
Cost	4,2	10,8	30,0	35,0	20,0	3,56	1,060
Decoration/ambience	0,0	0,0	15,8	28,3	55,8	4,40	0,749

Generally the guests that visited the specific Resort Spa and participated in the research were satisfied almost to an excellent level. The only aspect that was rated in a lower level was the cost of the treatments (Mean=3.56). Nevertheless, the guests were extremely satisfied with the hygiene of the staff (Mean=4.80) and their courtesy (Mean=4.75). Very high in their rating was the cleanliness (Mean=4.70) and the arrival experience (Mean=4.70) and then the quality of the

services (Mean=4.65). High rating had also the knowledge of the staff (Mean=4.62), then the variety of the services (Mean=4.60) and then the facilities, equipment and decoration (Mean=4.40).

**Table 5: Evaluation of the spa experience**

	Much worse		About the same		Much better	Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Did your spa experience meet your expectations?	0,0	0,0	32,5	22,5	45,0	4,13	0,875
Compared to similarly priced spas how would you rate this spa?	0,0	0,0	50,0	27,5	22,5	3,72	0,809

On the one hand most of the guests declared that the specific spa experience met their expectations (Mean=4.13) but on the other hand compared to similarly priced spas they would rate it about the same (Mean=3.72).

## Conclusion

Global tourism is growing, and tourists increasingly incorporate wellness into travel. Tourism has been growing faster, and is projected to continue growing faster, than global economic output. Travelers increasingly seek to incorporate wellness into their trips, choosing hotels that offer healthy rooms, healthy menus, spas, fitness facilities, and other wellness offerings. The spa industry will continue to benefit from ongoing growth in tourism and the wellness tourism niche (Global Wellness Institute, 2014). Apart from the business interest aroused by the global growth of the spa and wellness market, an academic interest has also been occurred, although this topic has been largely overlooked in hospitality literature. This study contributes to the spa and wellness literature by providing insights into spa-goers and wellness travelers' characteristics, motivations, preferences and expectations. The results of the study revealed a number of important factors that influence them when choosing a spa, namely the cleanliness and the maintenance of a spa, the staff knowledge and hygiene, the personnel behavior and courtesy, and the quality of services. Moreover, it seems that the word "spa" in the name of a Resort influences tourists positively in order to choose the specific hotel for their holidays. In addition, the main reason for visiting the spa is for stress relief/relaxation, followed by physical health improvement and beauty treatments. With a growing number of travellers enjoying spa experiences and wellness activities, it is vital that resorts, hotels and spa centres understand their preferences. As Elounda is a rising wellness destination, an examination of the selection criteria used by inbound travellers when choosing spas should provide hoteliers with the information needed to further develop and promote their spa facilities.

## Limitations

There are some limitations to this study. As mentioned before in the Methodology Section, the survey conducted in a specific Resort & Spa in Elounda. The resort is a premium all inclusive, adults only resort. This means that its customers have specific characteristics that might

differentiate them from customers of other resorts and spas in the area, i.e. age, nationality - 45% of resorts' clientele are British, followed by French (15%) and Germans (14%) - marital status (mainly couples), etc. Moreover, a convenience sampling method was used in the data collection stage, while the sample size is relatively small. Therefore, the results might not reflect the market as a whole. Future studies should focus more on spa and wellness market segmentation to better understand this type of tourists and the underlying dimensions of their preferences.

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