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**MEMORABLE WELLNESS TOURISM EXPERIENCES,  
SATISFACTION, AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING  
AMONG ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAVELER: A  
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH AGENDA**

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**Abstract:**

Wellness tourism has gained increasing scholarly attention for its potential to enhance travelers' satisfaction and subjective well-being. Nevertheless, limited research has examined how memorable wellness tourism experiences (MWTE) influence these outcomes among entrepreneurial travelers, particularly within emerging wellness tourism contexts such as Malaysia. This paper proposes a conceptual framework that integrates MWTE, satisfaction, and subjective well-being, focusing on Traditional Malay Medicine (TMM), including massage therapies, postnatal care, and herbal treatments. In addition, a research agenda is outlined to guide future empirical investigations, including methodological considerations and potential measurement approaches such as Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). By synthesizing existing literature and contextualizing wellness tourism within Malaysia, this paper contributes to theory development and offers strategic insights for policymakers, wellness tourism providers, and destination managers aiming to strengthen Malaysia's position as a competitive and sustainable wellness tourism destination.

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Entrepreneurial Traveler, Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTE), Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience, Traditional Malay Medicine, Well-Being



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## Introduction

In the fast-paced world of today, entrepreneurs who struggle with heavy workloads frequently become vulnerable to burnout and associated mental health problems (He et al., 2021). This reality has led many entrepreneurs to turn to wellness tourism as a method to get some much-needed relaxation. They believe it is crucial to deal with the stresses of daily work and life by fully relaxing the body and mind in order to get a positive emotional experience and personal development (Liu et al., 2023). In this context, wellness tourism gives travelers a variety of physical, psychological, and intellectual benefits in addition to a change of scenery (Damijanić, 2019).

Wellness tourism has evolved into a fashionable trend, appealing to those keen on maintaining health and preventing illness (Dahanayake et al., 2023). According to the Global Wellness Institute (GWI) data, wellness tourism generated US\$650.7 billion in revenue globally in 2022. From 2020-2022, wellness trips have grown by 30.2% annually, and expenditures have grown by 36.2% annually (significantly higher than the growth rates for overall tourism trips and expenditures, at 23.8% and 28.4%, respectively) (GWI, 2023). The GWI anticipates that the wellness economy will grow by 60% from 2020 to 2025 globally. According to GWI (2024), the five largest wellness markets are the US (\$1.8 trillion), China (\$790 billion), Germany (\$269 billion), Japan (\$241 billion) and the UK (\$224 billion). Wellness tourism growth is expected to accelerate in the coming years with the post-pandemic resurgence of tourism activities, and it will fully recover and surpass its pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

The growth of wellness tourism can also be seen in Malaysia. There is a noticeable increase in the popularity of wellness vacations and packages, particularly in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2019). The Malaysian Industrial Development Finance (MIDF) has observed that the long-term prospects for health and wellness tourism in Malaysia are promising due to the growing demand from an aging population, both locally and globally (Sopha et al., 2020). To date, Malaysia is ranked among Asia Pacific's Top 10 wellness tourism markets, with expenditures totalling US\$5 billion (RM20.5 billion) and 8.3 million trips (Idrus et al., 2020).

Despite the rapid growth and global expansion of wellness tourism, the wellness industry in Malaysia faces significant challenges in creating and sustaining MWTE that contribute to tourists' satisfaction and SWB. Furthermore, research on memorable tourism experiences within this niche remains limited, especially in relation to entrepreneurial travelers' well-being

(Dahanayake et al., 2023; Majeed & Kim, 2022; Sthapit et al., 2022). Compared to other contexts such as heritage, culture, rural, volunteer, and culinary tourism, wellness tourism has received relatively little attention (Huang & Bu, 2022; Jiang et al., 2022; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Seyfi et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2021). While interest in MWTE and their impact on subjective well-being is increasing, the mediating role of entrepreneurial travelers' satisfaction in this relationship remains underexplored (Liu et al., 2023), highlighting a key gap in current research. Hence, this study is designed to fill the gap by unravelling the previously under-explored role of MWTE in influencing the SWB of traditional Malay medicine within the specific context of wellness tourism. Exploring how memorable wellness tourism experiences in Malaysia impact entrepreneurial travelers's satisfaction and subjective well-being can provide valuable insights into the development of strategies to enhance all type of tourist's experiences and promote Malaysia as a wellness destination that meets tourists' needs.

### ***Memorable Wellness Tourism Experiences (MWTE)***

Memorable tourism experiences can be defined as tourism-related occurrences that are positively retained and recollected subsequent to their occurrence (Kim et al., 2012). In the context of wellness tourism, memorable tourism experiences are especially pertinent as wellness activities are frequently selected for their emotional and personal importance (Dahanayake et al., 2023; Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Sthapit et al. (2022) define MWTEs as experiences in wellness environments that include visitors both physically and emotionally. These experiences are defined by relaxation, education, novelty, and revitalisation. The author further asserted that memorable wellness experiences are generated when tourists participate in significant interactions with local customs, practitioners, and settings.

In the Malaysian environment, Traditional Malay Medicine (TMM) offers a distinctive possibility for the establishment of MWTEs. TMM is grounded in indigenous knowledge systems and encompasses methods such as herbal remedies, massage therapies, and spiritual healing. When executed proficiently, these services provide tourists with genuine and immersive experiences that foster pleasant emotional states and enduring memories.

Investigations into memorable tourism experiences have delineated several critical dimensions: hedonism, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, engagement, and knowledge (Kim et al., 2012; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). These qualities closely correspond with the wellness experience, especially in traditional treatment situations, where personalisation, cultural involvement, and emotional significance are paramount. Hedonism and novelty reflect the pursuit of pleasure, relaxation, and new restorative experiences that underpin wellness tourism consumption (Kim et al., 2012). Local culture and knowledge are central to wellness tourism, especially in traditional healing contexts where indigenous practices and cultural authenticity shape the experience (Damijanić, 2019; Sthapit et al., 2022). Meaningfulness and engagement capture the deeper emotional involvement, self-reflection, and personal growth associated with wellness travel, which are closely linked to subjective well-being outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Hence, this study defines MWTE as a multidimensional construct that encapsulates the depth of visitors' experiences in the wellness tourism context, particularly those rooted in cultural and traditional healing techniques such as TMM.

## ***Satisfaction***

Satisfaction is a result of purchasing and utilizing a product, deriving from the buyer's evaluation of the rewards and costs associated with the purchase in comparison to the expected outcomes (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982). In other words, tourist satisfaction extends the concept of customer satisfaction into the tourism domain, focusing on the overall contentment of tourists with their travel (Chen & Tsai, 2007). According to Piramanayagam et al. (2021), when the actual experiences of tourists meet or exceed their expectations, it leads to an increase in tourist satisfaction.

Satisfaction clarifies how a tourist's experience at a destination influences their behavior and emotional responses. Recent studies have explored the mediating role of satisfaction in various contexts. According to the expectation-confirmation model, satisfaction occurs when the perceived achievement meets or exceeds the expected performance (Kim, 2018). Essentially, a tourist needs to be satisfied with their trip to experience a significant positive impact on their subjective well-being. This allows researchers to understand how specific aspects of the travel experience contribute to the overall positive feelings and life satisfaction a tourist gains from their journey. Scholars have documented a significant association between tourist satisfaction and subjective well-being (He et al., 2020; Saayman et al., 2018; Su et al., 2021).

## ***Subjective Well-being (SWB)***

The concept of subjective well-being, also known as subjective happiness, was initially introduced by Campbell (1976) in his study of personal experiences and their subjective components. In 1984, Diener's article "Subjective Well-Being" presented a model of SWB that is widely regarded as a foundational contribution to the field of positive psychology. According to (Diener, 1984) model, subjective happiness is influenced by positive factors, negative factors, and life satisfaction.

Given that well-being is a primary goal of wellness tourism, examining memorable tourism experiences within this context is particularly significant (Sthapit et al., 2022). Sthapit et al. (2024) similarly discovered that memorable tourism experiences produce subjective well-being. To reinforce the assertion, Filep et al. (2024) claimed that the perception of well-being is essential for tourist satisfaction. Notwithstanding, multiple dimensions of well-being should be evaluated when determining satisfaction in tourism (Bagheri et al., 2023). Consequently, they assert that examining the correlation among experience, well-being, and tourist satisfaction represents a novel opportunity for research.

## ***S-O-R Model***

The framework of the current study is based on the SOR theory. Stimulus–organism–response theory (SOR) is a three-stage theory that was developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The SOR model proposes that external inputs, such as the social and physical environment (Stimulus), can influence individuals' immediate internal emotional states (Organism), leading to a sequence of behavioral responses (Response) (Sthapit et al., 2022). Generally, the "organism" in the S-O-R model is seen as the mediating components or internal structures that come between external stimuli and the resulting actions or responses (Ng et al., 2022). For instance, various specific relationships exist between human organisms and their similar environments that can serve as the foundation for synesthetic and metaphorical translations

(Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The S-O-R model provides a strong theoretical foundation for constructing an integrated model (Chen et al., 2020).

In recent years, researchers in the fields of marketing and tourism management have utilized the S-O-R model to investigate the impact of emotional experiences on the development of consumer behavior in different tourism (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2023; Ng et al., 2022; Qiu et al., 2023). They posited that external stimuli (Stimuli) affect internal emotional states (Organism), which in turn lead to specific behavioral responses (Response). In the context of this research, the MWTE is conceptualized as stimuli, satisfaction is the dominant organism, and SWB is the response. On the other hand, the SOR model allows researchers to analyze how emotions influence people's decision-making and behaviors. The model is justified as the appropriate framework for testing cause-and-effect relationships or variable integration within a research framework.

## **Research Hypotheses and Framework**

### ***MWTE and SWB***

The tourism experience is characterized by pleasure, relaxation, and enjoyment, which represent forms of spiritual fulfilment and satisfaction derived from engaging in tourism activities (Dekhili & Hallem, 2020; Su et al., 2022). As a conscious activity, wellness tourism serves as a context for well-being (Vada et al., 2019). Researchers in tourism have established a relationship between memorable tourism experiences and subjective well-being. For instance, Sie et al. (2021) discovered that the psychological advantages gained from memorable experiences could improve the subjective well-being of senior tourists. Su et al. (2022) regard tourism experience as a unique dimension and examine the relationship between destination tourism experience and tourists' subjective well-being. This emphasizes studies suggesting that MWTE enhances an individual's subjective well-being (Sthapit et al., 2022; Sthapit et al., 2024; Vada et al., 2019). Therefore, based on the discussion above, the researcher proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience (MWTE) positively influences subjective Well-being

H1a: Novelty associates positively with subjective well-being

H1b: Hedonism associates positively with subjective well-being

H1c: Involvement associates positively with subjective well-being

H1d: Knowledge associates positively with subjective well-being

H1e: Local culture associates positively with subjective well-being

H1f: Meaningfulness associates positively with subjective well-being

H1g: Refreshment associates positively with subjective well-being

### ***MWTE and Satisfaction***

The tourism experience is essential for assessing tourist satisfaction (Liu et al., 2023). Research in tourism has established an extensive causal relationship between tourism experience and satisfaction (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oh et al., 2007). Tourists who perceive their wellness tourism experience as memorable are more likely to report higher satisfaction because the experience aligns with their intrinsic desire for relaxation, mental rejuvenation, and self-care (Chen & Chen, 2010).

As discussed above, it was determined that a crucial element of tourism is guaranteeing that visitors obtain uncontrolled satisfaction. Ansari et al. (2022) and Guleria et al. (2024) found that satisfaction was significantly affected by tourism experiences while examining the psychological factors influencing tourists' MTEs. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed to measure the wellness tourism setting:

H2: Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience (MWTE) positively influences satisfaction

H2a: Novelty associates positively with satisfaction

H2b: Hedonism associates positively with satisfaction

H2c: Involvement associates positively with satisfaction

H2d: Knowledge associates positively with satisfaction

H2e: Local culture associates positively with satisfaction

H2f: Meaningfulness associates positively with satisfaction

H2g: Refreshment associates positively with satisfaction

### ***Satisfaction and SWB***

A substantial body of tourism literature has established satisfaction as a key determinant of subjective well-being (Nugraha et al., 2021). Empirical studies across diverse tourism contexts consistently show that higher satisfaction with travel experiences leads to improved SWB (Liu et al., 2023; Saayman et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2023). For instance, Kim et al. (2016) and Park and Ahn (2022) demonstrate that positive experiential and well-being perceptions significantly enhance satisfaction, while satisfaction subsequently contributes to higher levels of SWB. These findings suggest that when tourism experiences meet or exceed expectations, tourists experience greater satisfaction, which in turn enhances their overall well-being (Su et al., 2021). Moreover, satisfaction has been shown to play a mediating role, whereby positive emotional experiences influence SWB both directly and indirectly through satisfaction (Liu et al., 2023). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Satisfaction positively influences tourist subjective well-being

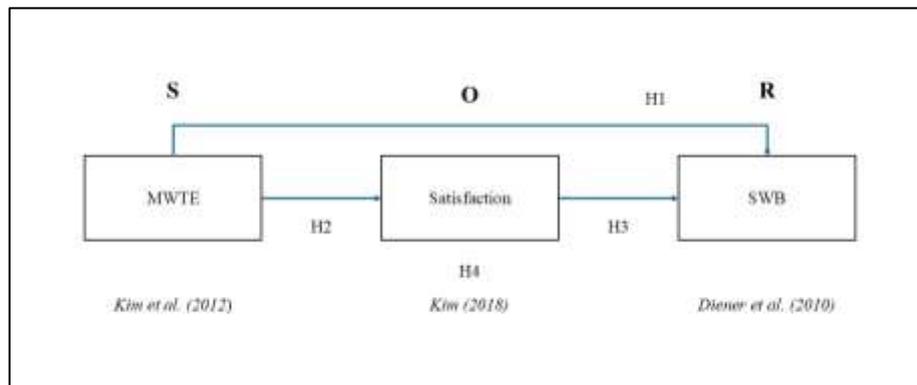
### ***Satisfaction Mediates the Relationship Between MWTE and Subjective Well-being***

This study investigates the mediating effect of satisfaction on the relationship between the dimensions of MWTE (i.e., hedonism, involvement, knowledge, local culture, meaningfulness, novelty, and refreshment) and subjective well-being. Satisfaction represents a critical evaluative response through which tourists cognitively and emotionally assess their overall experience (Melón et al., 2021). In the context of wellness tourism, MWTE dimensions generate immediate affective and experiential responses. However, these experiences translate into sustained subjective well-being only when tourists positively evaluate them as satisfying.

Although limited attention has been given to satisfaction as a mediator between wellness tourism experiences and well-being (Lee & Jeong, 2021; Wiese et al., 2018). Liu et al. (2023) demonstrate that satisfaction functions as a psychological mechanism that strengthens and channels the positive effects of wellness tourism experiences into enhanced well-being outcomes. By confirming that expectations are met or exceeded, satisfaction reinforces the emotional and restorative benefits derived from MWTE, thereby transforming momentary experiences into longer-term improvements in subjective well-being (Saayman et al., 2018). As such, it is proposed:

H4: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between Memorable Wellness Tourism Experience (MWTE) and subjective well-being

The following Figure 1 depicts the relationship between MWTE, satisfaction, and SWB.



**Figure 1. The Conceptual Model**

Source: Author

### Significance of Study

This study will be significant as it addresses a critical gap in wellness tourism research by examining how memorable wellness tourism experiences (MWTE) influence entrepreneurial travelers' satisfaction and subjective well-being, with a specific focus on Malaysia's Traditional Malay Medicine. By targeting entrepreneurial travelers, a growing but understudied segment, this paper will provide nuanced insights into experiential factors that drive positive psychological outcomes in wellness tourism. The findings will offer theoretical contributions to tourism and well-being literature and provide practical guidance for policymakers and industry stakeholders seeking to enhance visitor experiences, promote cultural wellness practices, and strengthen Malaysia's position as a competitive wellness destination.

### Proposed Methodology

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional survey to examine the relationships between the variables. Data will be collected from 129 purposively selected entrepreneurial travelers, using a structured questionnaire based on established tourism and well-being measures. The survey will include items adapted from previous research for MWTE dimensions (Kim et al., 2012), satisfaction (Kim, 2018), and SWB (Diener et al., 2010), rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The selected sample size is considered adequate, as Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is suitable for studies with relatively small samples and complex models involving mediation effects (Hair, 2014).

Data will be analyzed using PLS-SEM through SmartPLS 4, as this technique is appropriate for predictive research and theory development while allowing simultaneous assessment of measurement and structural models (Hair, 2014). This approach enables a robust examination of both direct and indirect relationships among the study variables.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to both theory and practice by examining the relationship between memorable wellness tourism experiences (MWTE) and entrepreneurial travelers' subjective well-being. From a theoretical perspective, the research addresses an important gap in wellness tourism literature by focusing on entrepreneurial travelers, an understudied yet increasingly relevant segment. By extending the application of memorable tourism experience dimensions to the wellness context, the study advances understanding of how experiential attributes shape tourist satisfaction and subjective well-being, thereby enriching existing tourism and well-being frameworks.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for wellness tourism providers and policymakers seeking to enhance service design and experience delivery. Understanding how MWTE influences satisfaction, and well-being enables practitioners to develop more meaningful, culturally grounded, and emotionally engaging wellness offerings that meet tourists' expectations. These insights support strategic efforts to strengthen tourist satisfaction, encourage repeat visitation, and position wellness destinations more competitively in the growing wellness tourism market.

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