



# Future Trend of Wellness Experiences in Resort Hotels in Japan

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### Abstract

As Wellness is a part of wellbeing, having a strategy related to Wellness will most likely increase its importance. In addition, since COVID-19 pandemic has changed the overview of hospitality services and increased the public awareness in Wellness, the importance of Wellness may dramatically increase in the next few years. As some professionals claim the need of overhaul in the hospitality strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to survive in the current environment, introducing an effective wellness service would be one of them. Therefore, this research aims at the following points: 1) investigating the current wellness practices in the resorts in Japan; 2) discussing challenges and opportunities in offering wellness programs; 3) providing a strategic framework for implementing wellness services.

**Keywords:** Resort; Guests; Wellness

### Introduction

Since the value that hotel guests seek changes over time, it is crucial that resort hotels keep adapting to the trend and introducing new services for their survival [1]. One way of integrating this into their strategy is to focus on intangible assets and enhance the connection to tangible assets [2,3]. Tangible assets include a brand name, design, and symbol, whereas intangible assets include value or experience that hospitality services create [2]. When these assets work together perfectly, they create an attractive value 'that largely affects guests' behavior and emotional responses and creates competitive advantages [1,2].

Previous researches describe how attachment to a place can be created through satisfactory experiences [1,2]. This experience is one of the most important intangible assets as it creates a strong memory, and it created values for customers. Among many kinds of experiences that hotels can offer, wellbeing is considered to be one of the keys services [2]. As Wellness is a part of wellbeing, having a strategy related to Wellness will most likely increase its importance.

Wellness industry has been expanding rapidly as it is estimated to grow \$808 billion by 2020 [4]. Resort hotels also have introduced wellness services [5]. Despite this trend, Japan is often considered to be behind in Wellness [6]. Japan has been considering international tourism seriously since 2003 to improve the Japanese economy

[7]. The number of inbound tourists had been increasing until the COVID-19 pandemic [8]. As this trend will most likely come back after COVID-19 pandemic gets settled, the hospitality industry in Japan needs to consider how to implement wellness strategies and meet global standards.

In addition, since COVID-19 pandemic has changed the overview of hospitality services and increased the public awareness in Wellness, the importance of Wellness may dramatically increase in the next few years [9]. As some professionals claim the need of overhaul in the hospitality strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic [10], in order to survive in the current environment, introducing an effective wellness service would be one of them.

Therefore, this research aims at the following points: 1) investigating the current wellness practices in the resorts in Japan; 2) discussing challenges and opportunities in offering wellness programs; 3) providing a strategic framework for implementing wellness services.

### Literature Review

#### Wellness Tourism

Dr. Halbert Dunn was the first to introduce the idea of holistic Wellness, which he was involved in promoting the importance of the physical, the mind, the spirit, and the environment to achieve "high-level wellness" [11]. As the idea of Wellness has developed, Global Wellness Institute in 2013 defines that "wellness tourism is travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing 'one's personal wellbeing'" [12].

Wellness and wellbeing are often used interchangeably in the existing literature, but in this paper, Wellness is considered part of wellbeing. Taking the definition of wellbeing by modifying WHO's definition of health, this paper defines wellbeing as a state that an individual recognize that he or she is physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially healthy regardless of subjective feeling of happiness [13]. This definition of wellbeing gives a static impression, but Wellness is more active and states that an individual is inspired to change his or her life to a healthier one [14]. Based on these definitions, connecting tourism with Wellness is considered more appropriate than with wellbeing, and this paper follows this idea.

Wellness tourism is a new concept in the hospitality industry and meets the need of modern cultures as health has been considered one of the new attractions for travelers [12,15-17]. In fact, the wellness tourism market is expanding rapidly, as it is estimated to grow \$808 billion by 2020, and its annual growth rate is 7.5%, which is faster than that of global tourism [11]. Additionally, wellness trips are 6.5% of all tourism trips but is 15.6% by expenditures. These facts imply that wellness tourism has a great potential to create economic opportunities.

A better understanding of wellness tourism to provide practical application in the services is crucial to attracting future guests. Wellness tourism belongs in the category of health tourism. In health tourism, Wellness, and cure are similar but needs to be considered differently from the marketing perspective [15]. Wellness needs to

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be related to prevention rather than treatment [12,15]. This allows a marketer to create specific and effective marketing strategies in health tourism. Separating the marketing strategies does not mean that a hotel cannot provide services to both, but it just allows attracting more guests to the resorts. The definition of the resort has been becoming more and more complex as they need to value individual services more than ever. Taking the resort's current definition, resort facilities must find a way to provide the right value for their guests in their services [15]. In developed countries, as the economy has been enriching, travelers' patterns are shifting from going to ordinary resorts to seeking new experiences.

Taking this idea, health tourism can be divided into medical tourism and wellness tourism. More specifically, medical tourism includes actual medical treatment, and wellness tourism includes a spa, yoga, meditation, and beauty cures [12,16]. Therefore, marketing of medical tourism includes patients and hospitals, whereas that of wellness tourism is those who are free from disease. Thus marketing approaches would be different in these two [12]. This research focuses just on wellness tourism thus does not discuss medical tourism any further.

In a broad sense, Wellness includes aspects of culture, society, economy, demography, and individual differences [12]. When looking specifically from the service level, wellness services often include healthy nutrition, massage, supervised sport, culture, and relaxation [18]. Although the definitions of Wellness already the nuance of what services should be included in wellness tourism, how guests will perceive them is important [19]. When thinking about experience from 'guest's point of view, a guest first gets motivated and then visits the wellness facility. Regarding motivation, previous studies reveal that relaxation and educational services are necessary for this motivation.

In a study focusing on evaluating wellness travelers motivations, Chen, described 16 motivation attributes, which they constructed from field interviews and observations at resort hotels [17]. Among these variables, "embodying relaxation, pursuing multiple activities, recreation, and experiencing nature" resulted high in motivation for Wellness, and relaxation resulted in creating the best motivation [17].

Another study demonstrated how people are interested in Wellness related educational services. Luo, discusses the experience economy framework to assess QOL of wellness travelers [19]. This experience economy framework consists of esthetic, educational, entertainment and escapist and is often used to assess guest experiences. The researchers demonstrate that among the experience economy framework, escapism, education and esthetic showed the correlation with improving QOL but not entertainment. Specifically, in terms of education, the guests tend to be interested in learning about Wellness and health [19].

As the concept of Wellness is broad, knowing guest segmentation helps on deciding what wellness services to provide. A study demonstrates that the wellness travelers can be categorized "primary purpose wellness traveler" and "secondary purpose wellness traveler" [12]. Primary wellness travelers see wellness travel as the sole purpose, and secondary wellness travelers care about both Wellness and other purposes on the trip [12].

Additionally, current studies often research baby boomers, but much less on Generation Y [20]. However, Hritz demonstrates how Generation Y is more interested in health and Wellness, and thus,

it would be the next target segment for the tourism industry [20]. Their study divided wellness travelers in Generation Y into five groups: Escapers, After Hours, Amenity Seekers, Most Unwell, and Most Well. From the study, they found that the approach to these groups should be different as follows: for Escapers and After Hours, marketers should focus on how guests in those groups can release their everyday stress through alcohol or relaxation; for Amenity Seekers and Most Well groups, it is crucial to provide services that they can connect with new people; and physical and outdoor activities are found to be attractive for Most Unwell groups and Amenity Seekers. Additionally, Generation Y often finds the information through Google, Facebook, and Twitter, although they feel these provide excess information, confusing, and unreliable. These studies demonstrate that consideration of segmentation plays a vital role in deciding what wellness services to provide.

## Wellness in Japan

How wellness services being offered are slightly different by region. For example, Australian wellness tourism emphasizes the preventive medicine aspects [21]. North America has a different meaning of Spa as to Europe. The European spa focuses on medical baths, whereas the North American spa focuses on physical, intellectual, and spiritual wellness perspectives [21]. Asian wellness tourism is similar to the US in a way that its focus includes day-spa services. Additionally, most Asian countries have their own traditional resources that they have been utilizing historically, such as hot springs, specific massage techniques, and other treatments. One of such examples in Japan is hot springs or onsen that are abundant in Japan and hot spring has been a widespread practice for those interested in good health and longevity [22].

In Japan, popular wellness services would be related to relaxation, maintenance of health, and preventive medicine [6]. Onsen has been considered to fulfill all three aspects, and therefore, it has been popular among Japanese citizens for thousands of years [6]. Japanese onsen is actually a little different from what hot spring is in other countries as each hot spring in Japan has different mineral contents known to have different effects on users' health conditions [6]. This is one reason that onsen has spread as tourism in Japan, and these facts imply how Japan has a strong historical background of Wellness in their culture. Many onsen facilities practice integrated wellness resorts somehow, as they combine different services such as other spas, weddings, and sports clubs with onsen facilities [6]. However, Japan is often considered behind Western countries in the field [23]. One of the reasons is the problem with inbound tourism. McKinsey & Company presents data that 48% of inbound tourists stay in major cities in Japan such as Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka [24]. Since most onsen resorts located outside of these cities, this indicates how inbound tourists do not see Japan for wellness travel [25]. Another reason is that people in Japan has been recognizing Wellness related matter to be more of beauty related, and therefore, current idea of Wellness has not been recognized among the Japanese people [23].

## Method

### Delphi method

Delphi method is a technique that a researcher conducts a series of surveys to professionals of a field of interest when collecting opinions on various topics [26]. Focus groups or interviews are alternatives of Delphi, but one of these interviews' concerns is that physical contact may sometimes create an undesirable effect, such as social pressure

[27]. Delphi method is considered fair in this aspect, as this does not include unfavorable interactions, but a researcher can still obtain and analyze information through series of surveys, in addition to the workload required in gathering information [27].

Delphi method has six variants: classical, modified, decision, policy, real-time, and online [28]. The surveys in the Delphi method are often conducted at least two rounds. Each round contains either quantitative and/or qualitative questions, and the questions get narrowed as the round goes on [26].

This research utilized online Delphi method with two rounds surveys. As the online Delphi method usually includes the open-ended qualitative questions in the first round of survey and quantitative analysis in the following rounds, this research follows this rule [28].

### Research samples

In this research, Trip Advisor was used to find suitable hotels. First, “Resort hotels Japan” was typed in the search engine of Trip Advisor and resulted in finding 994 hotels. Among the 994 hotels, the hotels that match the criteria of resort hotels and wellness criteria are chosen by looking through each hotel’s website.

Criteria for resort hotel must satisfy either category 1 or 2 in Table 1 [15,29]. Hotels that fall into category 1 must satisfy at least one of the A-D criteria (Table 1).

Criteria for wellness services follow the Scale of Wellness Hotel Amenities, or SWHA [14]. Table 2 shows SWHA criteria and the definitions (Table 2).

In this study, of all the resort hotels chosen satisfied environmental Wellness of SWHA, physical and mind wellness are specifically considered. In addition, a hotel is considered to be providing wellness services when the hotel clearly states the word “wellness” in the homepage.

### First survey

As it is important to collect professional information for the first survey, the hotels contacted are those that fulfill all three SWHA criteria and/or hotels that clearly states “wellness” in their homepages. Either email or phone call has been utilized to contact the hotels, and Google Forms is used to collect the surveys. Following the concept of Online Delphi method, the survey consists of three open-ended questions as followings.

- Value and importance of wellness services
- The most difficult aspect of providing wellness services in your experience.
- Wellness services in 10 years or 20 years later.

### Second survey

As the purpose of the second survey is to analyze how Wellness is considered in resort hotels in Japan statistically, hotels that satisfy either or both physical and mental Wellness can be considered on the list to obtain more responses. In this regard, there are 225 hotels in total, including those who answered the first survey.

To formulate questions for the second survey, answers from the first survey are categorized and questions are constructed (Table 6). Each question is in the form of a five-point Likert scale, with five being the most important or most difficult and one being the least important or least difficult [30].

The obtained data is statistically analyzed, including mean, median, 25th percentile, 75th percentile, interquartile range (IQR), standard deviation, maximum and minimum value.

## Results

### Results of the first survey

Table 1: Criteria of resort hotels in this research.

Category	Definition
1	Offers services on recreation, relaxation, entertainment, and vacation. A. Recreation: snow activities, water activities, golf, amusement park B. Relaxation: spa, massage, hot springs or related facilities C. Entertainment: a movie theater, library, show, concert D. Vacation: surrounded by sightseeing spot or within the sightseeing area
2	Clearly states itself that the hotel is a resort hotel.

Table 2: SWHA scale.

Criteria	Definitions	Examples
Environmental Wellness	Clean and Healthy Environment	Air and water, thermal comfort
Physical Wellness	Fitness facilities, work out opportunities	Any kind of work out
Mind Wellness	Mind wellness activity	Psychological consultation, meditation
	Education program	Book club, library, workshop, etc.

A total number of 97 contacts have been made, and 20 of them responded. Among those 20 responses, 16 of them replied; 15 via Google Forms and 1 via word document (Table 3). 4 of the 20 respondents refused to answering the surveys, and the reasons for refusal are either due to an operational problem caused by COVID-19 or not considering their services as Wellness.

Table 3 shows the characteristics of the statistical data of respondents. The majority of respondents, are positioned in

**Table 3:** Statistical data on characteristics of respondents for the first survey.

Respondents	#	%
# Contacts	97	100%
# Total Response	20	21%
# Survey on Google Forms	15	15%
# Survey on Word Document	1	1%
# Rejected	4	4%
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	10	67%
Female	5	33%
<b>Age Group</b>		
31-40	1	7%
41-50	9	60%
51-60	5	33%
<b>Position</b>		
Director	5	33%
General Manager	2	13%
Assistant General Manager	1	7%
Manager	7	47%
<b>Experience</b>		
-5 Years	1	10%
6-10 Years	3	30%
11-20 Years	3	30%
>21 Years	3	30%
<b>Region</b>		
Tohoku	1	7%
Kanto	4	27%
Chubu	1	7%
Kinki	1	7%
Chugoku/Shikoku	1	7%
Kyusyu/Okinawa	6	40%
Multiple Locations	1	7%

managerial positions. There is one respondent from a hotel chain group that owns several hotels in Japan, and it is described as “multiple location” in Table 4.

Answers from the first survey were categorized into 3 sections: reasons for providing wellness services, challenges in the execution of Wellness, and future prospects of wellness services (Table 4). For each category, subtopics are derived according to the answers (Table 4).

The first question in the first survey asked about the value and importance of Wellness. The majority answered how they see the importance of Wellness in the services as well as how and why Wellness is important to them. Among the answers, two respondents described Wellness from a strategic perspective, which was about differentiation from other competitors. Therefore, the first section of the second survey included questions related to providing wellness services, and respondents scored high on these sections.

The next section of the second survey relates to execution issues from operation and customer point of view. Regarding the operational issues, in the first survey, more than seven respondents described problems related to introducing and maintaining wellness services. This includes the preparation of staff, food, equipment, etc.

Some mentioned in the first survey how it has been difficult to introduce an idea of wellness to staff and let them understand and practice wellness services. In Japan, the idea of Wellness is not popular yet as mentioned earlier, and this is the same for the hotel staff [23]. Without the correct understanding, no service can be served in the right way. In fact, a respondent of the second survey also commented on this problem in the free comment section.

Another comment from the first survey described the problem with food services related to Wellness. When imagining Wellness, people usually think of healthy food. However, there are two problems with this, according to the respondents. One problem mentioned is how to prepare and practice a healthy menu within a budget. Healthy food ingredients are usually more expensive and difficult to constantly maintain a necessary stock for hotel services. Another problem mentioned is that many guests usually come to resorts for luxurious meals, and thus, healthy food menu may not be accepted by most guests. At the same time, several comments on the second survey described that they would still try to find the right balance between these aspects and provide a food menu related to Wellness despite these difficulties.

**Table 4:** Question categories and topics of the second survey according to the first survey.

Category	Question Topics
Reasons for providing Wellness services	Current importance of Wellness
	Differentiation from competitors
Challenges in execution of Wellness	Preparation of staffs and their understandings
	Preparation of food materials and menu
	Preparation cost
	Maintenance cost
	How to define Wellness
	Method to introduce the services to the guests
	How to make customers feel the change through the services
	Recognition of Wellness in Japan
Future prospects of Wellness services	Rate future importance of Wellness
	Wellness services will be seen to support the customers' everyday life
	Importance in personalization (Wellness)
	Wellness will become one major category of the hotel concept
	Wellness services will develop with regional services



From the first survey, 14 answers are related to the difficulty of wellness services from ‘guests’ perspectives. Since the wellness concept has not spread throughout Japan yet. Even though hotels introduce wellness services, respondents mention that those services are only popular in a minority of the guests. Some also mentioned that the definition of Wellness is vague. It needs to be clarified for more effective services, and this is one of the causes for low recognition of Wellness in Japan.

The last two questions in this section are derived from a few answers from the first survey. These questions are based on the respondents mentioned on difficulties to introduce the wellness services and to feel physical or biological changes within a short period of time through the wellness services. In terms of introducing the wellness service here, it specifically means an effective method to introduce and attract the guests through the services due to low recognition of Wellness in Japan.

Final section is a set of questions about future of Wellness in Japan. This section includes all answers from the first survey and is categorized into one of each question. The first two questions are on how the respondents feel the recognition of Wellness and the importance of Wellness in the future. Eight respondents mentioned the increase of importance in Wellness in the future, while few are concerned about the recognition of Wellness in Japan. Regarding this importance, more specifically, from the first survey, three respondents answered their opinions on future wellness services, and those key services are diet, beauty, health, spiritual, and environmental aspects. For the other topics from the first survey, four respondents mentioned how Wellness would be a standalone concept in the hotel industry, 2 mentioned the importance of personalization, 6 mentioned how Wellness will be a part of normal services so that it becomes a part of ‘guest’s life, and 1 mentioned that Wellness will be included within a regional development. Specifically, some respondents described the importance of involving services considering outside of the hotels, which maintains a continuous relationship to guest’s everyday life, including regional services and social relationships. Respondents explained that as Wellness, in general, will be an important part of the future lifestyle of a guest, and resort hotels should be a place where guests can continue their wellness practice during their stays and learn and introduce new aspects of wellness practices to their lifestyles.

Additionally, one respondent from the first survey answered that in order to maximize wellness services to guests, regional involvement in providing wellness services will be an important key. This respondent mentioned that this would help revitalize regional tourism, as well as spreading the idea of Wellness.

### Results of the second survey

Below is what we used for the statistical formula below.

$$n = \frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2} \div 1 + \left( \frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2 N} \right)$$

In the statistical analysis, the number of answers obtained is 35, Z score is set to be 90%, and e to be 12.8%. This results that whatever calculated value has a +/-12.8% error range while its probability of obtaining a value within the range is 90% (Table 5).

Within 35 respondents, 25 respondents satisfy wellness criteria of

**Table 5:** Statistical data on characteristics of respondents for second survey.

Respondents	#	%
# Contacts	224	100%
# Total Response	36	16.1%
# Answers	35	15.6%
# Rejected	1	0.4%
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	25	71.4%
Female	8	22.9%
No Answer	2	5.7%
<b>Age Group</b>		
31-40	9	25.7%
41-50	17	48.6%
51-60	7	20.0%
61-70	2	5.7%
<b>Position</b>		
CEO	1	2.9%
Vice President	2	5.7%
Board of Director	3	8.6%
Director	10	28.6%
General Manager	4	11.4%
Manager	7	20.0%
Assistant General Manager	2	5.7%
Chief	2	5.7%
Group Leader	2	5.7%
PR	1	2.9%
Reservation	1	2.9%
<b>Experience</b>		
-5 Years	4	11%
6-10 Years	4	11%
11-20 Years	12	34%
>21 Years	15	43%
<b>Region</b>		
Tohoku	1	3%
Kanto	6	17%
Chubu	6	17%
Kinki	2	6%
Chugoku/Shikoku	2	6%
Kyusyu/Okinawa	13	37%
Hokkaido	1	3%
Multiple Locations	4	11%

the first survey and 19 respondents satisfy either one of wellness criteria from the ‘‘Method’’ section above. The position of respondents varies in the second survey from CEO to staff in a certain department. Among these, 77.1% of respondents are in a managerial position or higher. The second survey included four hotel chain groups which are stated as ‘‘multiple locations’’ on Table 5 (Figure 1).

Each box shows the IQR a vertical line within each box is the median of each score, x demonstrates an average rating for each question, horizontal lines above and below each box represent upper and lower adjacent value (1.5 times IQR range), and each dot demonstrates outlier (Table 6).

Statistical analyses are shown in Figure 2 and Table 6. Figure 2 demonstrates a box plot of answered ratings in the second survey. A box plot is often used when visually demonstrate statistical distribution of a certain topic [31]. Table 6 demonstrates the category of questions, questions with question numbers that correlate with Figure 2, as well as mean, median, 25th and 75th percentile,

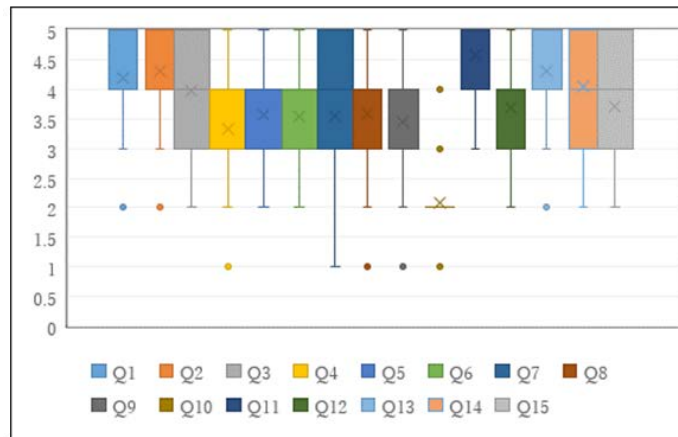


Figure 1: Box plot of ratings for each question in the second survey.

Table 6: Statistical data for each question on the second survey.

Question Topics	Mean	Median	25th Percentile	75th Percentile	Inerquartile range	S.D.	Max	Min
Current importance of wellness	4.2	4	4	5	1	0.80	5	2
Differentiation from competitors	4.3	4	4	5	1	0.80	5	2
Preparation of staffs and their understandings	4.0	4	3.5	4.5	1	0.79	5	2
Preparation of food materials and menu	3.3	4	3	4	1	1.19	5	1
Preparation cost	3.6	4	3	4	1	0.95	5	2
Maintenance cost	3.5	4	3	4	1	0.89	5	2
How to define wellness	3.5	4	3	4.5	1.5	1.24	5	1
Method to introduce the services to the guests	3.6	4	3	4	1	1.09	5	1
How to make the customers feel the change through the services	3.5	4	3	4	1	1.07	5	1
Recognition of wellness in japan	2.1	2	2	2	0	0.74	4	1
Rate future importance of wellness	4.6	5	4	5	1	0.65	5	3
Wellness services will be seen to support the customer's everyday life	3.7	4	3	4	1	1.02	5	2
Importance in Personalization (wellness)	4.3	4	4	5	1	0.80	5	2
Wellness will become one major category of the hotel concept	4.1	4	3.5	5	1.5	1.07	5	2
Wellness services will develop with regional services	3.7	4	3	5	2	1.20	5	2

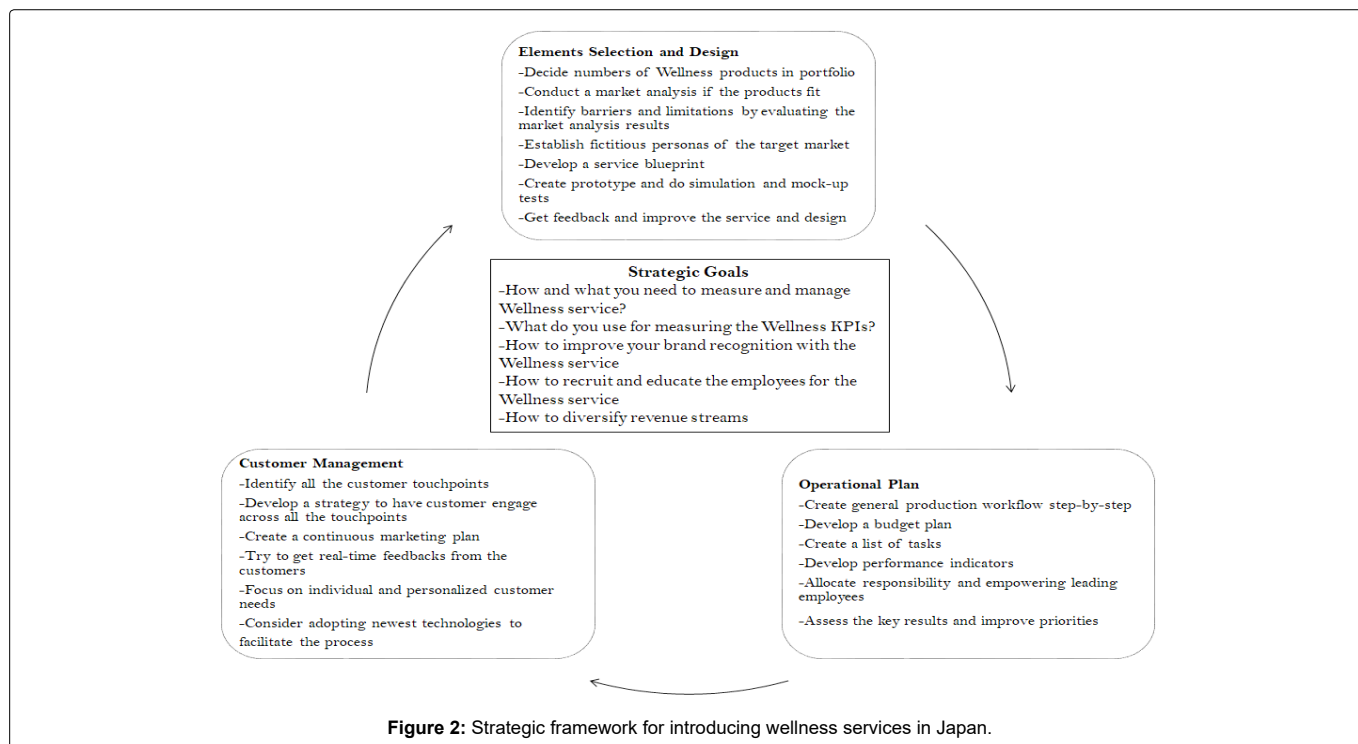
interquartile range (IQR), standard deviation, and maximum and minimum values of each question.

IQRs are between 0 and 2 (Table 6). As IQR shows where the majority of the distribution falls in, narrow IQR means the consensus of respondents to the particular question. The Likert scale used in the research is a 5-point scale. Thus most of IQRs being 1 means those respondents mostly have similar impressions or opinions on all the questions [32]. In the second survey, based on the IQR, the question that has received the most consensus is on the “recognition of wellness in Japan” (IQR 0, Table 6). On the other hand, the question that has received the least consensus is about the “possible inclusion of region as wellness services in the future” (IQR 2, Table 6).

The first two questions, which relate to providing wellness services, show high means while showing narrow IQRs. This implies that the respondents see Wellness an important factor in differentiating from others (Table 6).

Regarding the execution section, some respondents from both the first and second survey mentioned the issue of cost. When trying to diversify or introduce wellness services, a hotel needs to consider reconstructing or newly constructing spaces dedicated for those services, such as gym or library [14]. Few comments described that these services are usually provided for free; therefore, by not knowing how these positively influence the income, it is difficult to decide how much to spend on these services and decide the cost for maintaining the services. Overall in the preparation section, Table 6 demonstrates the mean and median of the question on the preparation of staffs to be 4 out of 5 with IQR being 1 and standard deviation being less than 1, while the mean of the others and the value for 25th percentile are lower with IQR and standard deviation being similar values (Table 6).

The last section is on the future of Wellness in Japan. Figure 2 and Table 6 reveal that the recognition of wellness shows the most consensus among all the survey questions, and respondents consider



it very low in Japan (Mean 2.1; Median 2; 25th and 75th Percentile 2; IQR 0; SD 0.74). In terms of the importance of Wellness in the future, respondents assume that the importance will increase in the future (Mean 4.6; Median 5, 25th percentile 4, 75th percentile 5, IQR 1, SD 0.65). Respondents rated high for a question about personalization (Mean 4.3; Median 4). Simultaneously, some respondents both from the first and the second survey mentioned the difficulty in coming up with a personalization strategy in Wellness in the future. Questions that involve an idea of spreading wellness services outward (wellness services will be seen to support the ‘customer’s everyday life, and wellness services will develop with regional services) are a little less popular in this section; their means are lower than the other questions (Means 3.7; Medians 4 for both). In fact, a question on regional services yielded the IQR of 2 and is the largest among all questions on the second survey, 75th percentile of 5, the mean of 3.7, and the median of 4. Looking at the distribution on this question specifically, respondents’ ratings are as follows: 13 respondents for 5, 7 respondents for 3, 7 respondents for 4, and 8 respondents for 2.

## Discussion

This research exemplified how Japanese hospitality professionals consider the importance of Wellness positively, but they also concern problems in execution and recognition. In order to effectively introduce wellness services, having a strategic framework would be helpful. This research demonstrated that all the second survey topics are moderate to highly important when executing wellness services (Table 6). To create a strategic framework, 15 questions in the second survey and topics from the free comment section in both surveys are first integrated and divided into 9 issues: main strategy related issues, recognition of wellness-related issues, wellness service selection and execution issues, daily operations related issues, employee-related issues, budget-related issues, technology-related issues, customer experience management issues, and personalization of service-related

issues (Table 7). These nine issues are then applied to a strategic framework (Table 7).

The four themes are aligned in strategic goal, elements selection, design, operational management, and customer management (Figure 2). Topics on importance are excluded, as these are experience-based personal opinions. By constantly reviewing this framework in the order with the strategic goal always in the center, one should be able to continue improving and provide more effective services to their guests.

### Strategic Goal

If a resort hotel decides to introduce wellness services, it must decide how Wellness can be integrated into the primary strategy. The research result demonstrates that what level of importance each hotel perceives Wellness is different. For example, some hotels already consider Wellness a major strategy while some clearly mentioned how they are not interested in providing wellness services (first survey, Table 6). Depending on what level a hotel considers wellness, the level of effort the hotel must put varies, and this would influence a future cost that the hotel will spend on wellness and its future brand image.

Deciding on strategic goal is also essential in deciding what aspect of Wellness a hotel wants to introduce as services. According to SWHA, environmental, mental, and physical Wellness are important factors in wellness services [14]. A hotel must decide which area they want to strengthen in addition to the current services they provide. For example, the respondents assume that diet, beauty, health, spiritual and environmental aspects will be important fields to focus on in the future (first survey).

Five components are suggested for the consideration of strategic goals, and they are listed in Figure 3.

**Table 7:** Free comments from the second survey are categorized into 9 issues.

Comments	Category
Though important, it will take more than 10 years for the wellness services directly influence customer's everyday life.	Customers' expectation and recognition of Wellness
Making physically and mentally happy through wellness services is one of the strategies.	Wellness service selection and execution issues/ Aligned with company-wide strategic perspectives
Wellness becoming normal for everyone is quite difficult.	Customers' expectation and recognition of Wellness
Wellness will be popular among those who highly cares about their healths.	Customers' expectation and recognition of Wellness
As technology has been rapidly developing especially through COVID- 19 crisis, it is important to be always alert to those technologies and consider how to integrate those into services.	Technology related issues
When implementing professional wellness services such as medical tourism, it is impossible to provide those services within a single hotel.	Daily operations related issues/ Budget related issues
Our hotel started with a restaurant, thus relationship between food and wellness is very important.	Aligned with company-wide strategic perspectives
It would be a help if there is an organization that spreads the definition of wellness.	Customers' expectation and recognition of Wellness
In our facility, wellness component is run by Spa department which our subcontractor operates. We believe that we need to operate in our own, but how to operate is a concern.	Daily operations related issues/ Aligned with company-wide strategic perspectives
Definition of wellness is comprehensible, but knowing the meaning does not directly connect to the practice.	All issues
We own a sports facility, thus including dietary aspect will be huge and will become important in our business.	Aligned with company-wide strategic perspectives
As COVID-19 affected negatively to MICE segment and business traveler segment, we need to change our strategy focusing on obtaining guests whose main purpose is to stay in our hotel.	Aligned with company-wide strategic perspectives
It is important to create an wellness program that is unique to Japanese culture.	Wellness service selection and execution issues/ Aligned with company-wide strategic perspectives
Wellness will be more important due to the COVID- 19 crisis.	Aligned with company-wide strategic perspectives
When practicing wellness, we need to decide where to focus in our guest's lifestyle. Will it be a wellness services focusing on a stay, or the services that provide opportunities to look over their everyday lives.	Wellness service selection and execution issues/ Customer experience management issues/ Personalization of service related issues

### Elements Selection and Design

Once a resort hotel decides the overall wellness strategy and what services they need to introduce, they would first need to decide a cost that they spend on preparation. According to the respondents, making a consensus among the group beforehand is important as the cost is one of the issues according to the respondents (Table 6). After the decision, they need to decide specific services they introduce.

What services to offer should be considered from the perspective of how to maximize experiential purchase. In order to satisfy this experiential purchase, focusing on wellbeing is important, especially in the autonomy, competence, and relatedness of individuals [2]. Among these, previous research demonstrates how autonomy and relatedness are especially important in creating effective guest satisfaction to improve 'guest's perception of the brand [2].

A moment that a guest feels autonomy is when he or she recognizes the self-independence and enjoys the environment [33], and recognition of self-independence is created through a supportive environment that a resort provides [2]. Taking this one step further, resort hotels must offer their guests something enjoyable to stimulate this autonomy [34]. Self-guided and/or some kind of education programs would be some examples of recreation in this concept [1,2]. Therefore, any Wellness related services should include some kind of autonomy in the recreations.

Chi presents that mental Wellness includes psychological consultation, learning opportunities such as library and workshops, and religious and spiritual services. They also present that physical Wellness include services related to fitness activities [14]. Installing

services related to these may require additional construction or renovation of spaces as well as equipment or amenities related to these services. However, in Japan, some hotels started providing information on recreational activities around the facilities, such as providing an originally made map describing the recommended running course in the region. Other examples would be how some hotels collaborate with regional fitness gyms or regional services for learning opportunities. As some respondents in the study see the inclusion of regional services as future development of Wellness, this may be an alternative strategy of providing wellness opportunities. In fact, this can satisfy the autonomy of the guests' autonomy as the guests can choose among many recreational options the relatedness of those guests to the region they are visiting. Additionally, as one of the respondents mentioned in the comment, this may help revitalize regional tourism; however, regional tourism is much less popular among international tourists than urban tourism [24].

A resort facility is considered to be providing environmental wellness when they satisfy a comfortable environment for the stay [14]. Since Japan is abundant in onsen in most areas, if a hotel is located in onsen, providing onsen services will add more value to this component [6,14].

After deciding what services to provide, a resort hotel must conduct a market analysis to see if the products fit and identify barriers and limitations. Creating fictitious personas of the target market may also help. Before moving on to the actual practice, a resort hotel should run a simulation and mock-up tests and get feedback for improvement.



## Operation Management

The results demonstrate that staff and food preparation and maintenance are the necessary consideration from the operational perspective. As Table 6 demonstrates, respondents see staff preparation is more difficult than the other topics in preparation (Table 6). The comments regarding this aspect mentioned that the difficulty here is to have the staff understand the importance of wellness services to provide meaningful services to the guests. Other comments also mentioned the difficulty in finding instructors.

From the operation perspective, a resort hotel needs to consider the food service aspect. They need to decide whether they would provide a healthy menu, or provide luxurious meals, disregarding wellness. This decision depends on what brand image the hotel wants. Following the idea of preserving the autonomy of the guests, the best approach is to have multiple menus that the guests can decide what to eat. However, as one of the respondents mentioned, this is not an easy task to execute in a small scale resort hotel due to the cost issue. In such cases, a resort hotel must consider the best way to approach their guests while keeping the guests' satisfaction, and the easiest way is to choose which service to provide according to the brand image that the hotel wants to preserve.

A resort hotel must also consider how much maintenance cost they can spend. Any additional services always mean an additional labor cost and operation cost. Additionally, if a hotel decides to introduce a fitness gym or swimming pool, they must also consider the maintenance fee for the equipment.

When finally operating, a resort hotel must have a precise workflow and list of precise operation tasks. Also, the development of performance indicators, as well as the assessment, are essential for the better services.

## Customer Management

How to manage customer wellness experience is vital to satisfy customers through the wellness services. In this aspect, first of all, a resort hotel must clearly understand what wellness means [14]. However, some consider it difficult as the definition of Wellness is broad and is often mixed with the word "wellbeing" [12]. In fact, some respondents in the surveys mentioned the difficulty in defining Wellness when trying to execute the Wellness related services. Wellness's definition is certainly broad, but taking the idea of previous research, what a resort hotel can do is create a place where their guests can enjoy physically and mentally healthy state [14]. Without the understanding, the service staff cannot provide wellness services that satisfy customer experiences. Therefore, staff understanding the clear definition is the first step in managing the wellness experiences of customers.

The next step would be how to communicate with customers in terms of Wellness. In this case, a hotel must identify all the customer touch points and decide what channels they would use to engage across those touch points. Social media marketing is a key channel to consider as it often increases hotel reservations [35]. Use of those social media in advertising the 'hotels' wellness services is not only fast, cost-effective, and easy way to communicate with customers, but it also can create the electronic word of mouth effect [36]; thus, it would be an attractive option. Using social media also provides insights for the hotel to review their guests' perceived specific services through what they post on the social media platform [36].

Aside from reaching out to customers, customer management also includes how to address the changes through wellness services. As some respondents mentioned, it is difficult for guests to feel physical or biological changes through the wellness services during the stay. Due to human biology's nature, one cannot feel physical change, such as huge weight loss, in one night stay. As one night stay is the most popular among Japanese guests, the respondents think it is difficult to let guests feel the change via their services [24] of course, services focusing on mental Wellness, such as providing on seen services, library spaces, yoga, or meditation, can support relaxation. However, although a research suggests that a psychological effect and wellbeing have positive correlations, and this does not mean that everyone feels in the same way [37].

This issue may be solved by an idea from the respondents of the surveys. Some respondents explained that as Wellness, in general, will be an important part a guest's future lifestyle. Resort hotels should be a place where guests can continue their wellness practice during their stays and learn and introduce new aspects of wellness practices to their lifestyles. Practicing this idea releases resort hotels from the problem above, as they just need to either introduce or be a part of their 'guests' lifestyles.

Additionally, another service to consider for better customer management would be personalization. Personalization is becoming more and more popular nowadays, and how this trend will play an important role in Wellness is easy to forecast [38]. Respondents also rated high on this question in the survey (Table 6). At the same time, some respondents mentioned the difficulty in coming up with a personalization strategy in Wellness in the future. Additionally, as the COVID-19 pandemic has been accelerating AI technologies, installing the technologies may become a key to success in the personalization of Wellness [9,38].

## Limitations

While this study successfully illustrates the current wellness situation and presents a strategic framework to practice wellness in Japan, further research is needed to integrate wellness. First, this study revealed the low level of recognition is the main problem in installing wellness services in resort hotels in Japan. No matter how great the wellness services are, the project fails if no one uses the services. Some respondents mentioned that the difficulty in introducing Wellness comes from this low recognition in Japan.

Although overcoming this issue is not discussed and requires further research on this topic, this study implies that solving the problem of recognition will make easier marketing of wellness services to the public. Improving the recognition of Wellness is critical for its popularity in Japan. This would eventually lead to obtaining international tourists, especially at suburban regions, and provide positive effects on resort hotels' overall performance, especially at suburban regions, and provide positive effects on resort hotels' overall performance at those places.

Another limitation is that the surveys performed in the study only included hotels that provide Wellness related services according to the previous studies, and thus, hotels that do not practice wellness exist a lot more than those selected this time. It may mean that results on questions such as the importance of Wellness may be biased. Future research may include all the resort hotels in Japan, and this may bring up other issues to be solved for the implementation of wellness services in future hotel management in Japan.

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