

**EXPLORING THE INTERSECTION OF VOLUNTEER TOURISM AND WELLNESS TOURISM: A NOVEL
APPROACH TO ENHANCING INDIVIDUAL WELL-BEING**
(HUBUNGAN ANTARA WISATA RELAWAN DAN WISATA KEBUGARAN: PENDEKATAN BARU
UNTUK MENINGKATKAN KESEJAHTERAAN INDIVIDU)

Bonifasia Yuniar Rifani
Universitas Sebelas Maret, Jawa Tengah, Indonesia

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Corresponding Author:

Bonifasia Yuniar Rifani
[*byrifani@staff.uns.ac.id](mailto:byrifani@staff.uns.ac.id)

Abstract

This study explores the intersection between volunteer tourism and wellness tourism through an examination of the "Traveling and Teaching" programme organized by the 1000 Guru Community in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. While both forms of tourism have shown significant growth independently, limited research has investigated their potential interconnections and mutual benefits. Using a qualitative approach, this study conducted in-depth interviews with 17 participants (12 females, 5 males) aged 20-28 years who participated in the programme. The findings reveal that volunteer tourism activities can significantly contribute to participants' holistic well-being, aligning with the core objectives of wellness tourism. Participants reported experiencing transformative changes in perspective, enhanced gratitude, meaningful social connections, and sustained psychological benefits. The study demonstrates that volunteer tourism can serve as an alternative pathway to achieving wellness tourism objectives through meaningful social engagement and transformative experiences. These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of alternative tourism forms and provide practical implications for destination managers in designing integrated volunteer-wellness tourism programmes. The research suggests a paradigm shift in conceptualizing volunteer tourism as not merely a social activity but as a viable avenue for achieving holistic well-being, opening new possibilities for innovation in tourism product development that combines social impact with personal wellness benefits.

Keywords: *Volunteer Tourism, Wellness Tourism, Traveling and Teaching*

INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry is undergoing significant transformation in response to the increasingly complex preferences and motivations of travellers. Two segments of tourism that have demonstrated notable growth over the past decade are volunteer tourism and wellness tourism. According to the Global Wellness Institute (2023), the global wellness tourism market reached USD 919 billion in 2022 and is projected to continue growing at a CAGR of 12.6% until 2027. Concurrently, volunteer tourism is also experiencing positive trends, with more travellers seeking meaningful travel experiences that positively impact local communities (Wearing et al., 2016).

Volunteer tourism, often referred to as "voluntourism," represents an alternative form of tourism that allows travellers to derive pleasure from activities that directly benefit local communities at their travel destinations (Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2023). In this context, tourists play a crucial role as voluntary contributors of time and intellectual support to community projects and volunteer tourism programmes (Chua et al., 2021). The motivations for engaging in volunteer tourism vary widely, including the desire to create a positive impact on local communities and the environment, personal development, and the pursuit of more authentic experiences (Wearing et al., 2016).

On the other hand, wellness tourism has emerged as a response to the growing awareness of the importance of health and holistic well-being. Dini and Pencarelli (2022) indicate that wellness tourism focuses not only on physical health but also encompasses mental, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions. Wellness tourists seek experiences that enhance their overall well-being through various activities that support a healthy and sustainable lifestyle. Recent studies have highlighted the potential overlap between volunteer tourism and wellness tourism. Lopes et al. (2022) identified that volunteer tourism could be considered a sub-segment of wellness tourism due to similar motivations, such as achieving physical and mental well-being, self-development, and self-appreciation. Coghlan (2015) further noted that well-designed volunteer tourism activities can promote healthy mental states through mechanisms such as intentional activities, goal achievement, and positive experience sharing with others.

Despite this, research specifically examining the relationship between volunteer tourism and wellness tourism remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on the impacts of volunteer tourism on local communities (McGehee & Santos, 2005) or the motivations of tourists engaging in volunteer tourism (Movstafa & Abdulaziz, 2023). However, a deeper understanding of the interconnections between these two tourism segments could provide new perspectives on the development of tourism products that benefit not only local communities but also contribute positively to tourists' well-being. Addressing this research gap, the present study aims to explore the relationship between volunteer tourism and wellness tourism as a novel approach to enhancing individual well-being. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of tourism literature and offer practical implications for destination managers in designing more comprehensive volunteer tourism programmes that consider aspects of wellness tourism.

Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism has emerged as a fascinating phenomenon within the global tourism industry. This phenomenon encompasses various complex aspects related to motivations, impacts, and the transformation of tourists' experiences. Movstafa and Abdulaziz (2023) identified a range of motivations for tourists to participate in volunteer tourism, including personal development, cultural awareness, and contributions to community development. Inspiration to participate often arises from stories shared by close acquaintances or media representations of volunteer tourism experiences (Griffin, 2013).

In the context of well-being, an intriguing correlation exists between volunteer tourism and wellness tourism. Lopes et al. (2022) found that both types of tourism share similar goals in achieving physical and mental well-being. Volunteer tourists report that their involvement in volunteer activities significantly contributes to their personal well-being, particularly through the development of sensitivity to different socio-cultural realities.

Memorable experiences in volunteer tourism have a substantial impact on the psychological aspects of tourists. Sthapit et al. (2023) revealed that factors such as novelty, shared experiences, intensification of experiences, and meaningfulness play crucial roles in

shaping memorable experiences. Furthermore, Coghlan (2015) explained that well-designed tourism experiences can lead to a state of "flourishing," characterised by increased optimism, self-esteem, and the ability to foster positive relationships.

The transformative aspect of volunteer tourism is also reflected in the changes in participants' perceptions and understanding. McDonald and Wilson (2013) emphasised that volunteer tourism provides authentic experiences distinct from mass tourism, where tourists seek not only knowledge about destinations but also transformative experiences through interactions with local communities. Magrizos et al. (2020) outlined this transformation process through three stages: pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal, occurring when experiences are perceived as authentic and involve a high level of engagement.

Wellness Tourism

Wellness tourism has become a rapidly growing segment of tourism in recent years. The Global Wellness Institute (2023) noted an increase in wellness tourism spending from USD 439 billion in 2012 to USD 830 billion in 2023. Wellness tourism refers to travel undertaken by individuals to enhance their physical, mental, and emotional health. Unlike medical tourism, wellness tourism focuses on efforts to improve personal well-being (Global Wellness Institute, 2014) or achieve a balance between body, mind, and spirit (Smith & Kelly, 2006; Modise & Johanes, 2016).

In this context, wellness tourism is not limited to recreational activities but also encompasses a holistic approach to health. A primary driving factor is the lifestyle changes of modern society that have increased stress levels due to work and daily life. A study by Smith and Puczkó (2014) indicated that wellness tourists tend to seek deeper and more meaningful experiences, focusing on recovery and rejuvenation. Wellness tourism consists of various dimensions and is multidimensional in nature (Dini, 2021; Liao, 2023; Dahanayake, 2023), including physical, mental, social, cultural, spiritual, emotional, and environmental aspects. Physically, wellness tourism emphasises physiological fitness and mental well-being, thereby enhancing tourists' quality of life (Liao et al., 2023; Sari, 2022). Tourists prioritise relaxation as a primary reason for wellness tourism (Bockus et al., 2024), in addition to improving physical health and personal well-being.

The experience of being in locations of natural beauty and tranquillity can also provide a sense of refreshment and relaxation (Dahanayake et al., 2023; Saari et al., 2023).

Cultural dimensions also play a significant role, as wellness tourism allows tourists to connect with the cultural and spiritual aspects of destinations (Dini & Pencarelli, 2021). Other dimensions include social and emotional aspects, where tourists engage in social interactions and experience emotional connections through shared activities with communities (Lee et al., 2020). Wellness tourism can foster emotional balance and social interaction, which are crucial for mental health. Additionally, wellness tourism often emphasises sustainability and environmental awareness by promoting practices that preserve natural resources and cultural heritage (Talukder et al., 2024).

METODE

This study employs a qualitative approach to exploring the relatively new phenomenon of wellness tourism within the context of the "Traveling and Teaching" programme. The qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to delve into a deep understanding of tourists' subjective experiences, motivations, and perceived benefits that cannot be measured quantitatively. Through this approach, the researcher can obtain rich data filled with meaning and personal interpretation from participants.

Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling techniques, where the researcher deliberately selected participants who met specific criteria, namely tourists who had participated in the "Traveling and Teaching" wellness tourism programme organised by the 1000 Guru Community in Yogyakarta. This technique was chosen to ensure that informants had direct and relevant experience with the phenomenon under study. A total of 17 informants were selected, comprising 12 females and 5 males, aged between 20 and 28 years.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews lasting 45-60 minutes for each informant. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by open-ended questions, while allowing the researcher to develop questions based on the informants' responses. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy.

Data analysis employed qualitative content analysis conducted in several stages. First, the researcher thoroughly read the interview transcripts to gain an overall understanding. Second, open coding was performed to identify key words and important phrases emerging from the data. Third, these codes were grouped into broader categories based on thematic similarities. Finally, the researcher interpreted these categories to identify emerging patterns related to motivations and perceived benefits of the volunteer tourism programme in relation to wellness tourism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The "Traveling and Teaching" programme under the 1000 Guru Community aims to invite young individuals who enjoy travelling not only to explore new places and share photos on social media but also to provide voluntary benefits to the communities they visit. Promotion of the "Traveling and Teaching" activities is conducted through social media. The 1000 Guru Community in Yogyakarta implements a recruitment selection process for participants in the "Traveling and Teaching" programme. This selection process consists of two stages: filling out a form and an interview or video submission by participants detailing their motivations and plans for implementing their knowledge in this activity. The number of selected participants varies according to the needs at each location, such as the number of students. Participants' backgrounds are also chosen according to the programme's material to be implemented.

A. Motivation

Participants exhibit a variety of motivations for joining the "Traveling and Teaching" activities. Respondents tend to have more than one motivation. These motivations are further reinforced by their observations of the activities conducted by the central and regional 1000 Guru Community, which are shared on social media. The following are the motivations expressed by participants in "Traveling and Teaching."

Several respondents mentioned that their initial motivation for participating in "Traveling and Teaching" was to engage in alternative travel to new places, followed by other motivations. Travelling or "jalan-jalan" is an activity enjoyed by all respondents. Most of them travel regularly, both out of town and within the region. One respondent stated that in the

past year, they had travelled out of town three times. Another respondent indicated that they always travel within Yogyakarta, such as to the beach, every month. "Traveling and Teaching" is considered an interesting activity as it offers travel to less popular destinations. Participants gained this impression from the photos and stories shared on social media during each "Traveling and Teaching" activity. Consequently, several respondents expressed their interest in participating in this programme.

"Usually, when I travel, I go to mainstream places. But seeing the photos from 1000 Guru, they always travel to faraway, lesser-known places. I want to join trips like that because I've never been to places like that, and it seems fun." (T)

All respondents generally included social motivations in their choice to participate in "Traveling and Teaching." They had a clear understanding of the social activities conducted through this programme. Much information was obtained via social media regarding previous activities. Based on this information, participants were motivated to volunteer in social activities related to children. Some respondents expressed a particular interest in children through this programme. One respondent mentioned the desire to motivate children in remote areas to continue their education after learning about educational issues in those regions. It can be concluded that respondents have a desire to engage in activities they deem meaningful by helping those in need. They view this programme as an appropriate platform due to its well-structured activities. Additionally, some respondents stated that their interest in participating in social activities was driven by the involvement of peers their age.

Another motivation is to establish friendships with new people. Some participants are from out of town and are studying in Yogyakarta. Therefore, they view "Traveling and Teaching" to build a new community of friends. One respondent indicated that they found it challenging to form new friendships in Yogyakarta, a city they recently moved to. Hence, they are motivated to seek new friendships through the community. Another respondent shared that they are somewhat introverted, making it difficult for them to communicate and find new friends. Therefore, they intend to seek a community through this programme. Some participants already had a prior understanding that those

involved in this programme come from various regions, creating expectations for more diverse friendships. Two respondents mentioned their desire to befriend individuals from different areas to facilitate travel to those regions through their connections.

Some respondents also hold jobs with daily office routines. They mentioned that one of their motivations for participating in "Traveling and Teaching" was to take a break from their daily work routine and seek different experiences. Another respondent, who is a student, shared similar sentiments. They added that if they don't have a long holiday, meeting and interacting with children serves as a form of entertainment for them. They had previously participated in similar social activities to "Traveling and Teaching," which left a positive impression. Another respondent indicated their intention to take a break from their academic activities through travel, but with the additional motivation of engaging in meaningful activities.

Although not a primary motivation, some respondents indicated that their participation in "Traveling and Teaching" was also to fill their free time. For instance, three respondents are in their final semester of study and do not have a packed class schedule. During their free time, they seek activities to engage in for several days. One respondent from out of town also mentioned having sufficient free time to travel to Yogyakarta and participate in this programme.

B. Benefits

Respondents noted several benefits they gained from participating in "Traveling and Teaching." The following are some perceived benefits they reported through this activity:

Through "Traveling and Teaching," respondents feel they have gained a new perspective on life. They compare the living conditions of the communities they visit, especially concerning children and education, with their own lives. They perceive a significant difference between life in urban areas and rural areas. All respondents stated that they felt more fortunate about having easier lives, which encourages them to adopt a more grateful attitude. Some respondents specifically mentioned that they feel grateful for receiving a better education compared to the children they teach in "Traveling and Teaching." They elaborated on the conditions of school buildings, the number of students and teachers, and the distance from

school to home. One common observation among several respondents was that the long-distance children must walk to school over rocky paths.

"I've especially learned to be very grateful for my own life. I used to go to school with ease; everything was available, and I had transportation. They must walk a long way there. And their school is small. That reminds me to be grateful and not to complain too much. The kids there can do it." (B)

In addition to developing a more grateful attitude, some respondents realised they often complain about their daily lives, which is insignificant compared to what the children in the places they visit experience. They have adopted a new perspective to avoid complaining about their daily lives. This perception indicates that through "Traveling and Teaching," participants compare their living conditions with those of the children and communities they visit, leading to new insights in their lives.

In the areas where "Traveling and Teaching" is conducted, there is poor communication signal availability. Consequently, participants are unable to use communication devices such as mobile phones. One respondent stated that this situation allowed them to communicate better with others. They spent more time interacting in person with fellow participants, the 1000 Guru team, and local people. Additionally, one respondent shared that they gained new insights from other volunteers who provided transportation to the programme's destination, particularly from the Double Cabin Jogja Community. They were impressed by this volunteer's story during the journey, noting that despite their good economic condition, they chose to help voluntarily and remained committed to their intentions.

For most respondents, visiting remote areas in Java was their first experience. This activity provided them with new knowledge about the conditions of primary education in relatively isolated areas. Several conditions mentioned by respondents included the low number of students attending school and continuing to higher levels, delayed teacher salaries, inadequate school buildings, and the limited outlook of children regarding their futures. Two respondents recounted instances where teachers did not always receive timely salaries but continued to teach. Some respondents also shared how impressed teachers were with the presence of participants and the 1000 Guru team. From this

activity, one respondent also attempted to observe why educational facilities at the school were still lacking, prompting them to investigate whether access to funding was a common issue for rural schools.

Moreover, some respondents highlighted the conditions of primary school-aged children living with their grandparents because their parents work in the city. Consequently, these children do not receive the necessary academic support at home. In "Traveling and Teaching," participants were also tasked with escorting students' home after school activities. From this experience, most respondents described the long distances these children must travel to school, including rocky paths and walking on foot.

One respondent had the opportunity to meet and converse with the parents of students. They gained insights into the families' conditions, particularly how parents view their children's futures. Initially, they believed it was essential to encourage children to continue their education to higher levels. However, after experiencing visits to students' families and the overall experience, they realised that children in these areas are often expected to work rather than attend school. They felt that as outsiders coming to help, they should not be patronising but rather strive to understand the conditions in the area better. Through meetings with students' families, the respondent also learned about a common condition in the area where girls tend to marry at a young age. One respondent also noted how impressed they were with the hospitality of the students' families, who offered them many souvenirs. They felt a strong sense of warmth from the local community and reflected on the importance of learning about proper etiquette and manners in Javanese culture.

All respondents mentioned one of the benefits they gained from participating in "Traveling and Teaching" was the formation of new friendships. This new friendship refers to connections with fellow volunteers or participants and the team itself. They were impressed by how quickly bonds formed during the three days of the programme. Two respondents expressed initial concerns about participating in activities with new people for several days. They were worried about difficulties in interacting and collaborating with individuals they did not know. One respondent mentioned their introverted nature, which made forming new friendships challenging. However, during this programme, they felt accepted by the group

and gained new friendships. One activity that fostered camaraderie among participants and the 1000 Guru team was camping at the beach, which involved teamwork to set up tents, cook, eat together, and share experiences, particularly about teaching. Respondents felt this was one of the most memorable experiences that helped build rapport among fellow volunteers and the team.

"I'm an introvert. I was initially worried about whether I could fit in with them, especially since we were staying overnight and travelling quite a distance. But it turned out that everyone was very nice. It was so much fun. I didn't find it hard at all. Even now, we're still friends, and some still invite me to hang out." (V)

Three respondents mentioned that through "Traveling and Teaching," they gained friends from various cities. They expressed intentions to visit those cities and connect with their new friends from the community. One respondent from outside Yogyakarta also shared their happiness about having a new community of friends in Yogyakarta. All respondents stated they continued to maintain friendships with the "Traveling and Teaching #14" community even after the programme ended and up until the time of the research interviews. They still interact through WhatsApp group chats, meet periodically at cafes, and plan to travel together to tourist destinations.

The "Traveling and Teaching" programme inspired six respondents to design social activities. After participating in "Traveling and Teaching," one respondent organised a similar event in Blitar, East Java. Together with nine friends, they initiated a social service and teaching programme for children in mountainous areas of Blitar during Ramadan. The social service activities included health services, assistance for the community and children, and a communal breaking of fast. The funds for this initiative came from the sale of items from a friend who runs an online business on Instagram. They also received donations of money and used clothing. The respondent invited several health faculty graduates, such as doctors and nurses, to provide health services. They leveraged their friendships and encouraged peers to contribute to this initiative.

Another respondent expressed a desire to organise a similar event in their hometown, Aceh. They were not only impressed by the team during this programme but

also inspired by the children's high motivation to learn compared to those in Aceh. They mentioned that in this programme, they not only taught but also learned from the children they encountered. Another respondent also expressed a similar desire to create a similar programme in their hometown, Batang Regency, Central Java.

Two other respondents stated that after participating in several social activities, including "Traveling and Teaching," they wished to establish an informal school to assist children in need, although they did not have a detailed plan. Another respondent reinforced their desire to design social activities that focus not only on children but also on young people in general. They intend to offer free self-development classes based on their skills, such as public speaking, which they believe is necessary in today's world.

Most respondents reported having a positive travel experience through the "Traveling and Teaching" programme. Pantai Butuh, which they visited, is not a famous beach, is relatively small, and tends to be quiet. All respondents stated they had never visited this beach before. One respondent mentioned that this experience marked their first visit to a non-popular beach. They commented that the quiet atmosphere made them happy as they could enjoy nature. Another respondent stated that the 1000 Guru Jogja team provided unusual travel options, offering them new experiences. The distance from the city and the winding roads did not leave them with a negative impression of the overall journey. Additionally, the activities they engaged at the beach further enhanced their positive impressions among participants. They camped, shared meals, performed arts, and exchanged experiences during the evening gathering. Most respondents expressed a desire to return to Yogyakarta and explore other beaches they had yet to visit.

C. The Intersection

The research findings regarding the "Traveling and Teaching" programme reveal a close relationship between volunteer tourism and wellness tourism, particularly in terms of the motivations and impacts experienced by participants. These findings strengthen the argument presented by Lopes et al. (2022) that volunteer tourism can be considered a sub-segment of wellness tourism due to shared motivations aimed at achieving physical and mental well-being.

The motivation to take a break from routines and seek different experiences, as identified in this study, also reflects a primary motivation for wellness tourism. As explained by Kim et al. (2017), wellness tourists often seek activities related to relaxation and escape from their routines. This indicates that volunteer tourism can serve as an alternative means to achieve wellness goals through engagement in meaningful social activities.

In terms of impact, this research found that participants experienced shifts in perspective and increased gratitude after participating in the programme. These findings align with the positive psychology perspective in volunteer tourism proposed by Coghlan (2015), where well-designed volunteer tourism activities can foster healthy mental states through transformative experiences. Participants reported feeling more grateful and gaining new insights into life, which are indicators of mental well-being as described in wellness tourism literature (Liao et al., 2023).

The experience of building meaningful social connections, both with fellow volunteers and local communities, also emerged as an important finding in this study. This reinforces the concept of emotional solidarity in volunteer tourism as articulated by Jiang et al. (2022), where feelings of welcome and emotional closeness contribute to the formation of memorable travel experiences. This social aspect is also a vital component of wellness tourism, as explained by Saari (2023).

The transformative impacts experienced by participants, such as shifts in perspective and inspiration to design similar social programmes, reflect the concept of transformation in volunteer tourism as described by Magrizos et al. (2020). This transformation process aligns with wellness tourism's goals of achieving positive change in mental and spiritual dimensions (Smith & Puczkó, 2009). These findings support the argument that volunteer tourism can serve as a pathway to achieving wellness tourism objectives. Through engagement in meaningful volunteer activities, tourists can reap well-being benefits like those offered by conventional wellness tourism. This broadens our understanding of how wellness can be attained through various forms of travel experience, including volunteer tourism.

This research also reveals that the experiences gained through volunteer tourism provide sustainable well-being impacts for participants, as evidenced by the formation of lasting friendships that endure beyond the programme's conclusion. This aligns with findings from Sthapit et al. (2023), which emphasise the importance of creating shared experiences and intensifying experiences in shaping memorable volunteer tourism. The sustainability of these social relationships is a significant indicator of social well-being, which is also a focus of wellness tourism (Dini & Pencarelli, 2022).

The learning and self-development aspects identified in this research, such as gaining new insights into educational conditions in remote areas and inspiration to develop similar social programmes, reflect the self-exploration motivation commonly found in wellness tourism (Lopes et al., 2022). This experience provides participants with opportunities to reflect on personal values and develop a deeper understanding of their roles in society, which is a crucial aspect of mental and spiritual well-being (Coghlan, 2015).

Another intriguing finding is how the lack of internet access at the programme location positively contributed to participants' well-being by fostering more meaningful direct interactions. This aligns with the concept of digital detox in wellness tourism (Saari, 2023) and illustrates how volunteer tourism can indirectly support wellness objectives by fostering mindful presence in experiences.

The authentic experiences gained through volunteer tourism, such as direct interactions with local communities and deep understanding of social conditions, provide more meaningful satisfaction compared to conventional tourism experiences. This reinforces McDonald and Wilson's (2013) argument regarding the existential value of volunteer tourism and how it contributes to participants' psychological well-being.

Overall, these findings reinforce the understanding that volunteer tourism can be an effective means of achieving wellness tourism objectives. Through a combination of meaningful social activities, transformative experiences, and the formation of sustainable social relationships, volunteer tourism offers an alternative pathway to holistic well-being, which is the primary aim of

wellness tourism. This opens new perspectives for the development of volunteer tourism programmes that are consciously designed to maximise well-being benefits for participants.

The implications of these findings highlight the need for broader recognition of the interconnections between volunteer tourism and wellness tourism, as well as the development of volunteer tourism programmes that intentionally integrate wellness elements. This could involve designing activities that facilitate self-reflection, sustainable community building, and creating spaces for transformative experiences that support participants' holistic well-being.

CONCLUSION

This research explores the relationship between volunteer tourism and wellness tourism through a case study of the "Traveling and Teaching" programme organised by the 1000 Guru Community in Yogyakarta. The findings indicate a significant connection between these two forms of tourism, particularly regarding the motivations and impacts experienced by participants. Participants' motivations for engaging in volunteer tourism extend beyond the desire for social engagement to include aspects closely related to wellness tourism, such as the pursuit of meaningful experiences, the need for social interaction, and the desire to take a break from their routines.

The impacts experienced by participants demonstrate the achievement of various dimensions of well-being that are central to wellness tourism. Mentally and emotionally, participants underwent transformative shifts in perspective and increased gratitude. Socially, they successfully built lasting friendships and developed their ability to interact with diverse communities. Spiritually, participants gained meaningful experiences that encouraged self-reflection and a deeper understanding of life values. These findings address the research question regarding how volunteer tourism can contribute to achieving the holistic well-being objectives of wellness tourism.

This study holds significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, these findings enrich the understanding of the intersection between

volunteer tourism and wellness tourism, demonstrating that meaningful voluntary activities can serve as effective means of achieving holistic well-being. This opens new perspectives for developing alternative tourism theories that integrate social and personal well-being aspects. Practically, the results of this research can guide destination managers and volunteer tourism organisations in designing programmes that consciously integrate wellness elements. Programme development can focus on creating experiences that facilitate personal transformation, sustainable community building, and providing spaces for reflection and personal growth.

The broader implications of this research suggest a need for a paradigm shift in viewing volunteer tourism, from merely a social activity to a pathway for achieving holistic well-being. This could encourage innovation in developing tourism products that integrate social and wellness aspects, as well as open new opportunities in an increasingly experience-oriented tourism industry that prioritises meaningful experiences and positive impacts for all stakeholders.

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