

Tourism & Mental Health: Prospects & Challenges

Mehwish Ashraf, Shehroz Saleem

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Author Information

Ms. Mehwish Ashraf

Research Officer

Department of Medical

Research, Rehman Medical

College, Peshawar, Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

(Corresponding Author)

Email:

mehwish.ashraf@rmi.edu.pk

Mr. Shehroz Saleem

Coordinator Research &

Innovation, Rehman Medical

Institute, Peshawar, Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Global tourism is a multi-trillion dollar industry with vast infrastructure and resources generated through travel. In 2022, tourism contributed about 7.7 trillion dollars to the global GDP, amounting to 7.6% of the global GDP. This fact alone indicates that people undertake tourism not just for trips to see other parts of the world, but also for a myriad of other unexplored benefits. It is well known that people will invest in ventures that are psychologically appealing and which improve the quality of their lives. Hence, this editorial explores the mental health benefits of travel and also details some of the challenges faced by tourists.

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INTRODUCTION

This editorial explores the complex relationship between tourism and the mental health of tourists in general as well as that of working professionals. Incorporating the benefits and challenges which an individual experiences, this study tends to highlight the impact which tourism can create on mental health of individuals. There have been a number of publications indicating that stepping outside of routine and daily activities can help with personal growth, expands repertoire of life skills, and helps to discover what we are really capable of.¹

Taking a trip or experiencing new areas can greatly improve the mental health of people in general. It is like pausing everyday tension and allowing yourself to recharge in an exotic atmosphere. Meeting individuals with different cultural backgrounds not exclusively helps you establish connections, but also enhances your perspective on life.² Trying new things and going on adventures provides an enjoyable and engaging factor. Taking some time off from your routine allows your mind to refuel.³ Additionally, participating in fun physical activities while on vacation can improve your mood and reduce stress. So, when you mix in some leisure time, learning other cultures, and simply chilling out on your trips, it adds up.

Positive impacts on mental health

Travelling usually gives one a fresh environment and provides a different insight to any situation. It diverts the brain from daily regular life and allows one to concentrate on new things. It also triggers

happy hormones such as Serotonin, Dopamine, and Endorphins. It provides the tourist with time and knowledge.⁴ When new people are met, new places explored, and new experiences gained, learning occurs, and knowledge grows. Travel helps a lot to free the brain of any unnecessary tensions or reasons for depression. While traveling, individuals gets the experience of different cultural traditions, customs, norms and languages. This ensures the connectivity among people with cross-cultural backgrounds and enables them to develop tolerance and empathy.

Beyond its recreational appeal, travel serves as a powerful stress-reliever, providing individuals with an escape from routine, thus reducing stress levels and promoting relaxation.⁵ Engaging in traveling experiences not only fosters personal growth, but also enriches one's perspective, enhancing cognitive flexibility, & stimulating intellectual curiosity.⁶ Exposure to diverse cultures, landscapes, and new experiences positively influences mental health, fostering emotional well-being and reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression.⁷ Furthermore, the physical benefits of travel, such as increased physical activity through exploration, hiking, and recreational activities, contribute to improved physical health and fitness.⁸ Engaging in outdoor activities while traveling also promotes better sleep patterns and rejuvenates the body.⁹ Additionally, the sheer joy derived from exploring new destinations and partaking in memorable experiences cultivates happiness, contributing significantly to enhanced life satisfaction and overall psychological well-being.¹⁰

Challenges and adverse effects

Traveling is marvelous but it can also cause problems that everyone should be aware of. Too many tourists damage the environment, crowd the area, and disrupt local life. It can raise costs for residents and even cause cultural clashes.

Tourist spots may experience excessive waste and strain on their resources. Furthermore, safety concerns exist, as evidenced by the spread of health issues such as COVID-19.¹¹ Mass tourism can sometimes lead to the loss of unique cultural traditions and practices, as destinations become more commercialized and geared towards tourists.¹²

Environmental impacts may include pollution, habitat destruction, and strain on natural resources such as water and energy. Additionally, tourism can contribute to cultural and social disruptions, increased cost of living for locals, and exploitation of local labor. Tourism should be conducted in ways that are environmentally friendly and respectful of local customs.

Strategies to Promote healthy tourism

1. Planning and coordination must be done before setting out on any venture. This can mitigate half of the issues even before their occurrence.
2. Educating visitors about the natural and cultural resources, and encourage them to respect and protect these resources.
3. Keeping health and safety a priority, following hygienic practices and keeping necessary medications.
4. Supporting local businesses that follow sustainable practices, and encourage other businesses to adopt sustainable practices.
5. Promoting alternative transports which are eco-friendly and cost effective.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a thorough and positive association between tourism and mental health, giving strong theoretical support for the tourist industry's reform and innovation initiatives. Tourism has a good impact on mental health and has the ability to improve it further. Recognizing, evaluating, and marketing these contributions can increase overall well-being. By personalizing travel experiences and promoting mental health advantages, the tourist industry may increase its business prospects, particularly in the health sector. Different sorts of tourism, from nature to adventure, have varying mental health advantages, as evidenced by studies. The precise data on tourist research can help guide therapeutic techniques that require behavioral modification. Overall, recognizing and utilizing the psychological aspects of travel can benefit both personal well-being and growth of the tourism industry.

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