

Mapping Wellness Tourism Opportunities in Indonesia: A Scoping Overview of Nutrition, Culinary, Nature, and Spa

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ABSTRACT

Background: The 23.3% increase in tourist arrivals to Indonesia in 2024 presents significant opportunities for the development of wellness tourism focused on health and fitness. Currently, health tourism in Indonesia has mainly emphasized curative aspects, while the potential of wellness tourism remains underdeveloped.

Objective: This study aims to map existing academic discussions and identify development opportunities for wellness tourism in Indonesia through a scoping overview of selected literature.

Materials and Methods: An exploratory search was conducted using Google Scholar to identify English-language publications from 2018–2024 relevant to wellness, culinary, nutrition, and health-related tourism in Indonesia. Fifteen studies were included and thematically mapped according to geographic focus, methodological approach, and core wellness dimensions.

Results: The mapped literature highlights three dominant opportunity areas: cultural spiritual wellness (notably in Bali and Ubud), nature-based wellness (e.g., Gunung Mas, Bogor), and culinary based wellness rooted in local food traditions (e.g., Padang, Medan, and Peraan). However, nutrition specific indicators, evaluative study designs, and integrated destination frameworks remain limited.

Conclusion: This scoping overview identifies key gaps and proposes a focused research and development agenda to support more coherent, nutrition-sensitive, and community-based wellness tourism in Indonesia.

Keywords: wellness tourism; nutrition; spa; traditional culinary; Indonesia; scoping review

BACKGROUND

Wellness tourism has emerged as a global phenomenon, with significant growth over the past decade. This trend is driven by growing public awareness of the importance of balancing physical, mental, and spiritual health, not only in daily life but also while traveling, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic¹. The global wellness tourism market reached USD 814.6 billion in 2022 and is projected to grow to USD 2.1 trillion by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 12.42%². This data reflects a shift in global tourist consumption patterns, with increasing preference for healthy and meaningful travel experiences.

Indonesia has strong potential to become a leading player in wellness tourism, with its diverse nature, rich culture, and traditional practices such as jamu (herbal medicine), Balinese spa, and spice-based cuisine³. The Global Wellness Institute (2023) ranked Indonesia 19th globally with a wellness economy valued at USD 36.4 billion in 2020, making it Southeast Asia's fastest-growing country in this sector⁴. However, compared to its neighbors, Indonesia still lags in establishing an integrated, globally competitive wellness ecosystem.

Despite abundant resources, wellness tourism development in Indonesia remains fragmented across culinary, spa, nature, and nutrition sectors, hindered by limited data, research, and integrated strategies. No comprehensive scientific studies have explored how nutrition, culinary, nature, and spa can synergize to support wellness tourism. This research gap forms the basis of this study. Previous studies have tended to focus on individual aspects, such as spa treatments or herbal medicine, in isolation, without addressing their interconnections in the context of tourism as a whole.

However, an integrative approach is crucial for designing a holistic wellness tourism experience that aligns with the demands of today's market. Some literatures also emphasize the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to combine the sectors of health, gastronomy, and tourism in order to create added value in tourism products⁵.

This study presents a novelty approach by integrating various aspects of wellness tourism, including nutritious food based on local ingredients, traditional cuisine that promotes health, the use of nature for relaxation and healing, as well as traditional spa practices. This study analyzes relevant scientific literature through a scoping review to build a conceptual and practical foundation for developing Indonesia's distinctive wellness tourism. Existing studies on wellness tourism in Indonesia tend to focus on individual components (such as spa tourism, gastronomy, or herbal practices) rather than examining how these elements interact within a holistic wellness tourism ecosystem. Furthermore, empirical evaluations of nutrition integration and health related outcomes remain scarce. To address this gap, this Research Note provides a scoping overview of academic literature related to wellness tourism in Indonesia, with a particular focus on how nutrition, culinary heritage, nature, and spa practices are currently represented, and where future research and development efforts may be directed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was designed as a scoping and mapping overview, rather than a scoping review. The objective was to identify dominant themes, geographic patterns, and research gaps within the existing literature, not to produce an exhaustive or reproducible synthesis. An exploratory literature search was conducted using Google Scholar. The search targeted English language, full text publications published between 2018 and 2024. Search terms included combinations of wellness tourism, culinary tourism, nutrition tourism, traditional food, health tourism, and Indonesia. Studies were included articles that explicitly addressed wellness, culinary, nutrition, or health related tourism, were situated in the Indonesian context and provided sufficient descriptive or analytical content relevant to tourism development.

Screening was conducted through title and abstract review using a PEOS-based framework (Population, Exposure, Outcome, Study design) to ensure thematic relevance. Duplicate records were removed manually. Fifteen studies met the inclusion criteria and were mapped according to location, methodological approach, and primary thematic focus. No protocol registration, risk of bias assessment, or quantitative synthesis was undertaken, consistent with the exploratory nature of a scoping overview. The identified articles were checked for duplication using Mendeley and through screening titles and abstracts using PEOS formula. Data extraction forms were used to gather information such as publication details (journal name, publication year, volume, issue, and pages). Methodological data included study location, data collection methods, research design, year of data collection, and variables according to keyword criteria. The information related the study results collected includes potential variables found from the study results.

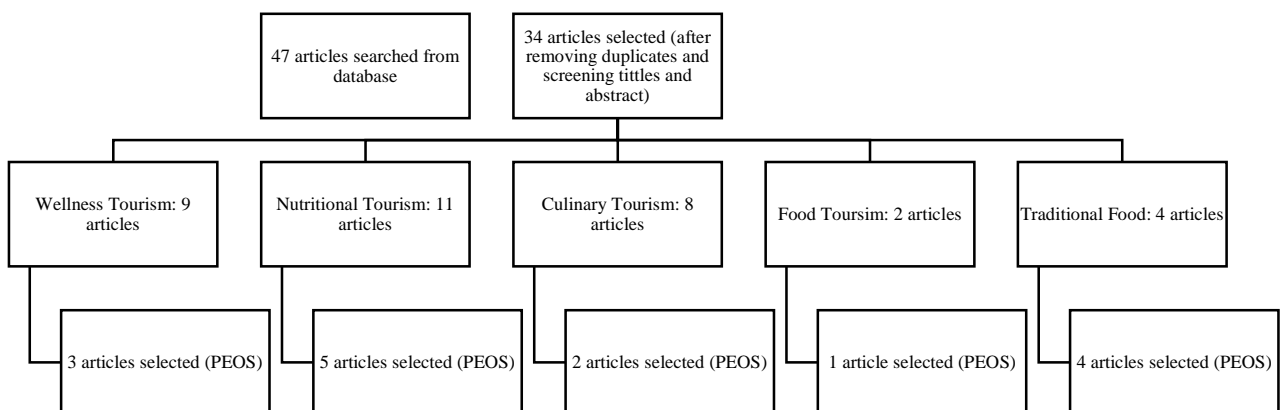


Figure. 1 Diagram process of study selection

DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the characteristics of 15 articles that serve as sources in the scoping review on wellness tourism in Indonesia. The publications span from 2018 to 2024, covering locations from the village level (such as Ubud and Peraan in Bali), to cities (such as Medan, Padang, and Bogor), provinces (Bali, Central Java, Aceh), and even national scope. The research methodologies employed were diverse, ranging from desk research, scoping reviews, qualitative approaches (in-depth interviews, documentation), quantitative methods, and mixed methods.

Table 1. Characteristics of selected studies

No.	Year of Publication	Location	Stage	Method	Main Aspect	Article ref.
1.	2021	Bali	Province	Desk research method	Health and Wellness	Utama (2021)
2.	2022	Indonesia	Country	Scoping review	Wellness	Koerniawaty (2022)
3.	2019	Bogor	City	Descriptive qualitative approach (in-depth interviews, documentation, and scoping review)	Wellness	Pujiastuti (2019)
4.	2019	Indonesia	Country	Scoping review	Culinary	Wijaya (2019)
5.	2021	Jawa Tengah	Province	Quantitative research (Importance-Performance Analysis)	Culinary	Nurwitasari (2021)
6.	2020	Indonesia	Country	Scoping review	Culinary	Palupi (2020)
7.	2021	Indonesia	Country	Scoping review	Culinary	Anak Agung (2021)
8.	2020	Ubud, Bali	Village	Qualitative (scoping review & In-depth Interview)	Wellness	Meikassandra (2020)
9.	2019	Medan	City	Cross sectional	Culinary	Harahap (2019)
10.	2021	Padang	City	Cross sectional	Culinary	Fitrizal (2021)
11.	2024	Indonesia	Country	Qualitative	Nutrition	Riswandi (2024)
12.	2018	Indonesia	Country	Scoping review	Nutrition	Purnomo (2018)
13.	2021	Bangka Belitung	Province	Cross sectional	Nutrition	Levyda (2021)
14.	2021	Peraan, Bali	Village	Qualitative	Culinary	Damayanti (2021)
15.	2019	Aceh (only 3 region, Banda Sakti, Muara Satu, and Muara Dua)	Province	Mix method (qualitative & quantitative)	Nutrition	Zainal (2019)

Table 2 presents the map of findings and development potential of wellness tourism based on a scoping review of various locations across Indonesia. Each study identifies local strengths and opportunities that can support a tourism sector focused on health and wellbeing. The locations analyzed range from the national level to village contexts, indicating that the potential for wellness tourism is widely distributed throughout the country.

Table 2. Mapping findings and development potential of wellness tourism

No.	Wellness Theme	Representative Locations	Key Features Identified in the Literature	Nutrition & Wellness Relevance	Development Opportunities / Gaps
1.	Culture and Spirituality Based Wellness	Bali, Ubud	Integration of spiritual rituals, meditation, traditional healing practices, spa services, and cultural activities within tourism experiences	Strong contribution to mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being; supports holistic wellness experiences grounded in local wisdom	Nutrition components often implicit rather than structured; opportunity to integrate wellness menu standards, herbal nutrition, and food literacy within spiritual wellness packages
2.	Nature Based Wellness	Gunung Mas (Bogor), rural and highland areas	Utilization of natural landscapes, tea plantations, fresh air, trekking, and outdoor relaxation activities	Supports physical activity, stress reduction, and mental restoration through eco-therapy and nature immersion	Limited program standardization and outcome evaluation; opportunity to develop guided eco-wellness trails and measurable wellness experiences
3.	Culinary and Nutrition Based Wellness	Padang, Medan, Central Java (Borobudur), Bangka Belitung, Aceh, Peraan (Bali)	Emphasis on traditional cuisine, local ingredients, taste authenticity, and food-based cultural identity	High potential for healthy eating due to use of natural ingredients and traditional processing methods	Nutritional quality rarely assessed; need for nutrition guidelines, recipe reformulation, vendor training, and nutrition labelling in culinary tourism

The main focus of the studies is divided into three aspects: wellness in general, local cuisine, and nutrition as part of the support for the health tourism sector. Table 1 shows that research on wellness tourism in Indonesia has increased in terms of volume over the past five years, with a peak in publications occurring in 2021. In terms of location, the studies were conducted at various regional scales: national, province, city, and the village level. This distribution shows that the potential and study of wellness tourism are not limited to major destinations such as Bali, but are also beginning to extend to local areas such as Peraan and Ubud. This indicates a strategic opportunity to develop community-based wellness tourism, where local communities provide wellness services and products rooted in tradition and local resources. This is supported by findings from 4, who emphasize the importance of community participation in ensuring the sustainability and authenticity of health-based tourism experiences. The main aspects studied are divided into three categories: wellness in general, local cuisine, and nutrition. These are key elements in developing a holistic wellness tourism framework. However, the studies that have integrated all the three aspects into a single framework is still limited, even though tourists do not separate physical experience, food, and mental well-being in practice. This is in line with multidimensional wellness approach, which stated that optimal well-being is achieved through harmony between physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions⁶. Therefore, future studies need to adopt an integrative approach to offer comprehensive wellness tourism solutions.

The studies conducted by Utama & Nyandra, 2021 and Meikassandra et al., 2020 emphasize the importance of integrating local culture into wellness tourism development. Bali is not merely a tourist destination but also a source of spiritual and emotional experiences that strengthen its identity^{7,8}. This perspective in line with the concept of transformative tourism, where travel

experiences bring about personal transformation, particularly in areas such as self-awareness and lifestyle changes. Similar findings are evident in the context of India, where locally rooted spiritual practices like yoga and meditation serve as major attractions in wellness tourism^{9,10}. The culinary-focused studies by Wijaya, 2019, Palupi & Abdillah, 2019, and Damayanti et al., 2022 further emphasize that local cuisine not only satisfies tourists' consumption needs but also holds educational value and promotes healthy lifestyles¹¹⁻¹³. However, the limited attention to nutritional aspects in culinary tourism management—highlighted by Nurwitasari et al., 2021 underscores the need for stronger interdisciplinary collaboration between tourism, nutrition, and public health¹⁴. This is consistent with research which found that integrating nutrition education into culinary tourism can enhance tourist satisfaction and strengthen destination branding¹⁵.

The nutrition-related studies emerging between 2018 and 2024, such as those conducted by Purnomo, 2018 and Riswandi, 2024, indicate a growing trend that health tourism also needs to be supported by the provision of healthy and educational food^{16,17}. This concept aligns with the emerging idea of nutrition tourism, particularly in Europe, where tourists not only enjoy local cuisine but also learn about nutritional content and healthy diets. This type of tourism holds significant potential in Indonesia, given its rich diversity of local food ingredients and traditional healing practices, which can be leveraged as both educational and preventive tourism attractions¹⁸⁻²⁰. The mixed method studies offer a comprehensive approach to data collection, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to address the complexity of wellness tourism involving cultural, social, and health aspects together. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) suggest that mixed methods enhance the validity of findings and provide deeper insights into tourist behavior, especially in multidimensional issues such as health and lifestyle²¹.

The methodological diversity and varied locations strengthen the argument that wellness tourism in Indonesia should be developed contextually and participatively. Approaches used in Bali, for instance, can not be directly applied to regions like Aceh or Medan due to differences in culture, cuisine, and local beliefs. Therefore, development strategies must be locally based and involve local communities as key actors. This strategy aligns with the place-based tourism development approach, which emphasizes the importance of understanding local characteristics in designing tourism products²². Based on the findings in Table 1, it can be concluded that wellness tourism research in Indonesia has established a relatively strong descriptive foundation, but still requires further development through evaluative, collaborative, and interdisciplinary studies. Future research is needed to examine wellness tourism models that are applicable and have an impact on public health and local economic development. The collaboration between academics, tourism practitioners, nutrition experts, and policymakers is important for designing a strategic and sustainable direction for the development of wellness tourism in Indonesia.

The locations analyzed range from the national level to village contexts, indicating that the potential for wellness tourism is widely distributed throughout the country. This distribution suggests that wellness tourism is not exclusive to urban or elite areas but is also highly relevant in rural and local community settings. These findings align with the concept of inclusive tourism development, which emphasizes the equitable distribution of tourism's economic and social benefits across broader regions²³. In general, the key findings in Table 2 indicate that the potential of wellness tourism in Indonesia can be categorized into three main areas: (1) culture- and spirituality-based wellness (as seen in Bali and Ubud), (2) nature-based wellness (such as in the Gunung Mas area of Bogor), and (3) culinary- and nutrition-based wellness (as found in Padang, Medan, and Central Java). Therefore, the development strategy for wellness tourism in Indonesia has the opportunity to adopt an integrative approach that addresses the holistic needs of tourists. Several studies also emphasize the importance of promoting healthy and nutritious traditional foods as part of the wellness tourism development strategy²⁴. This is supported by similar findings from research in Thailand which found that health-oriented culinary tourism based on traditional foods enhances tourist satisfaction and strengthens the destination's image as a natural health center²⁵. Thus, the integration of culinary elements in wellness tourism should not be seen as supplementary, but as an essential part of the healthy tourism experience.

Table 2 presents that various location across Indonesia vae unique characteristics that can serve as foundation for the development of wellness tourism. Bali, Ubud, and Peraan stand out as successful examples of destinations that integrate elements of culture, spirituality, and health into a

comprehensive tourism experience. This strengthens Bali's position as a leading wellness tourism destination in Southeast Asia, comparable to global destinations such as Kerala in India or Chiang Mai in Thailand, which also emphasize a cultural and spiritual based approach to health tourism²⁶.

At the national level, findings from Koerniawaty (2022) and Palupi (2019) highlight the importance of a holistic approach that goes beyond tourist attractions and includes raising public awareness about healthy lifestyles^{12,27}. This finding opens up opportunities for integrating wellness tourism with public health initiatives, such as healthy eating campaigns, the revitalization of local foods, and educational tourism. This approach aligns with the framework of health-oriented tourism proposed by Dryglas and Salamaga (2018), where tourism destinations play an active role in promoting public health²⁸.

The other area such as Gunung Mas in Bogor (Pujiastuti, 2019) demonstrate how natural assets—such as tea plantations and natural springs—can be developed into tourism offerings centered on natural therapy²⁹. This concept in line with ecotherapy and nature-based healing, both of which are emerging global trends in response to increasing urban stress and the need for environmental detoxification³⁰. The implementation of nature-based wellness tourism also contributes to environmental conservation, as tourists engaged in nature-focused activities tend to higher ecological awareness. On the culinary aspects, various location such as Padang, Medan, and Bangka Belitung show that local food can be a tool to support tourist loyalty. However, a limited number of research have investigated food from a nutrition or health perspective. This highlights the collaboration need between culinary practitioners and nutrition experts in developing healthy culinary tourism. Health-oriented culinary tourism is especially attractive to the millennial generation, which is health-conscious yet desiring authentic cuisines³¹.

The study on Borobudur temple reveals a gap between tourists' expectations for nutritious food and the reality on the ground³². This is emphasizing that improving the quality of culinary tourism must be supported by nutrition education for food vendors and destination management. This finding is consistent with research which emphasizes that the success of healthy culinary tourism largely depends on food literacy among culinary officer³³. Findings from Aceh, such as the high consumption of traditional foods like Kue Bhoi and Seupet, indicate that these items remain an important part of local daily life. When it modernized in presentation and examined from a nutritional perspective, these traditional foods have strong potential to enter the wellness tourism market particularly as locally based healthy snack products. This aligns with heritage food revitalization strategies implemented in South Korea and Japan, which aim to enhance the value of traditional cuisine in the global market³⁴.

Perean, a small village in Bali, demonstrates how a simple snack like *es rujak* can be developed into a wellness culinary icon. With natural ingredients and high health value, this product has the potential to become a unique and competitive dish, demonstrating that innovation does not always originate in major cities. This supports the theory of glocalization in tourism, which refers to the integration of local strengths with global adaptation to create tourism products that are both relevant and appealing on an international scale^{35,36}. A consistent finding across various locations is the strong presence of cultural values and local wisdom in tourism products. This finding suggests that wellness tourism in Indonesia should adopt a cultural-based wellness approach, where spiritual experiences, healthy food, and physical activities such as meditation and trekking complement each other³⁷.

Conceptually, wellness tourism does not only focus on physical health, but also on mental and spiritual well-being. Therefore, tourism products must integrate dimensions of relaxation, reflection, and education. Ubud has demonstrated the success of such an approach, and similar models can be replicated in other regions with appropriate local adaptation. Based on the analysis in Table 2, the development of wellness tourism in Indonesia holds significant potential if grounded in a local resource-based approach, cross-sectoral integration (tourism, health, and culture), and a strong commitment to product and service quality.

CONCLUSIONS

The scoping review of 15 articles indicates substantial potential for wellness tourism in Indonesia, involving three main aspects: local cuisine, nutrition, and physical well-being. The studies analyzed were dominated by exploratory and qualitative approach, with research locations spread

from the national level to village level. Bali and Ubud stand out for their integration of culture and spirituality, while other regions such as Bogor, Padang, and Medan offer nature-based and traditional cuisine that support a healthy lifestyle. To optimize this potential, it is suggested that the development of wellness tourism in Indonesia should focus on cross-sectoral integration between tourism, health, nutrition, and culture. Future research using quantitative and evaluative approaches is needed to measure the real impact on tourist well-being and local economies. Additionally, strengthening the capacity of tourism actors, promoting nutrition education, and preserving healthy traditional foods need to be prioritized in sustainable wellness-based tourism policies.

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