



HEALTH TOURISM IN A VALUE-LED ERA

Understanding what motivates
health-conscious travelers

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Travel has always promised escape and discovery. Today, trips are increasingly judged by the value they deliver in return. Health and wellness are shaping travel priorities, as audiences seek experiences that leave them feeling healthier, restored and recharged.

As tourism becomes more outcome-led, audiences are weighing what an experience promises. In turn, trust and credibility become key considerations in decision-making. The result is a category shaped as much by confidence as aspiration.

WHEN TRAVEL IS MORE THAN A VACATION

Global travel demand remains resilient under economic pressure. Among CNN audiences, 97% say they continue to travel, but their reasons for doing so are becoming more intentional: 34% now describe their approach as purpose-driven, while 20% say they are taking fewer trips and assessing whether each one is worth the spend¹.

Traditional motivation still matters to them, with quality time, culture and new experiences remaining central to why many travel. But as travelers become more selective about where they spend, health and wellness are emerging as one of the clearest ways travel earns a place in the budget:



73%

say wellness-related benefits make higher travel costs feel more justified¹.

Health and wellness spans a spectrum of needs, from rest and recovery to prevention. Across that spectrum, it can make travel feel less like discretionary spending and more like an investment in their wellbeing one that audiences need to trust will be worth the spend.



TRUST AND CREDIBILITY INFLUENCE HOW HEALTH TOURISTS TRAVEL

In ordinary leisure travel, inspiration may be enough to create intent. In health tourism, the decision carries more weight. The category is shaped by physical, emotional, and financial risk, which places greater importance on evidence and reassurance.

While restoration dominates one end of the health and wellness spectrum, proactive and clinical treatment sits at the other, popular despite a higher barrier to entry. CNN audience data illustrates this: 65% seek preventive healthcare or medical check-ups when traveling. Crucially, Ipsos Global Influentials data shows that 55% of CNN audiences agree they would be willing to travel to another city or country for healthcare or medical procedures^{1,3}.

Motivated by rising domestic healthcare costs, long wait lists, or regional specialists and expertise, there is a real – and informed – need to travel. But before the commitment to cross-borders, another factor is considered: trust. The more a trip is connected to health, the more audiences appear to look for evidence that the offer can be trusted.

In fact, when choosing destinations that include health or wellness elements, 95% of CNN audiences say trust and credibility factors are important². Transparency and availability of information (79%), certified or accredited wellness facilities (74%), credible media or editorial coverage (73%) and aftercare or follow-up support (73%) are also influential¹.



81%

of CNN audiences say trust is an important factor when choosing a destination with health or wellness elements¹.



80%

of CNN audiences prioritise reputation when choosing a health or wellness destination.



72%

say they are willing to invest more in travel if it includes trusted medical treatment¹.

Health travel promises restoration, improvement or access, but those promises carry more risk than ordinary leisure travel. As a result, confidence becomes an increasingly important part of the value equation.

In this category, the question goes beyond whether the trip feels desirable. It also has to feel reliable enough to consider, making trust, clarity, evidence and reassurance central to the message.

FROM WELL-BEING OUTCOMES
TO HEALTH OUTCOMES

The value is not limited to obvious wellness formats. The strongest health-related travel signals are not attached only to traditional spas, retreats, and specific wellness formats. They are attached to outcomes.

It’s an interesting distinction, because while many may not describe themselves as wellness tourists, they are already traveling for wellness outcomes. So while formal wellness retreats remain relevant, they don’t necessarily overlap with the broader needs of health-conscious travelers.

Part of the appeal is they believe it can help them achieve their individual goals, so clear and credible positioning matters in showing them what is being offered, why it matters, and how it delivers value.



CNN Audience Motivations:



Rest and relaxation



Improving physical health and wellbeing



Mental rejuvenation



Recovery from stress or burnout

REACHING TRAVELERS WHEN CONFIDENCE MATTERS MOST

For health tourism, why people choose the care they do is much more telling. Among CNN audiences, wellness travel is already being viewed as investment: 77% see health and wellness-focused travel as a long-term investment in wellbeing¹.

That places greater importance on the environment in which health tourism is explained, evidenced and understood. When audiences are assessing value, they also seek confidence that the information guiding their decisions is credible. CNN audiences show strong confidence in CNN's health, wellness and beauty coverage:



81%

say they trust this information on CNN more than other news or media platforms, and the same proportion say CNN covers topics that feel relevant to their lives today¹.

For destinations, healthcare providers, and wellness brands, this points to a simple challenge: in a category where audiences are looking for value, reassurance and proof, visibility alone is not enough. It's important to show up in trusted media environments that help audiences understand the evidence behind the offer and feel more confident in the decision.

The importance of placing the right message in the right place at the right time can't be understated for this consumer demographic¹



80%

say brands advertising alongside CNN's health, wellness and beauty content increase their trust and positive perception of those brands.



76%

say they are more likely to consider a health, wellness, and beauty brand if they see it advertised on CNN.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR HEALTH TOURISM BRANDS AND DESTINATIONS

As health tourism becomes more value-led and trust-dependent, every organization working in the category should be asking:

1. Are you clearly communicating the measurable value of health and wellness travel?
2. Are your standards, accreditation, aftercare and expert validation visible before consumers make a decision?
3. Are you building credibility in the environments audiences already trust for health, wellness and travel context?

WHAT'S NEXT?

Want to reach audiences on a deeper level through award-winning global journalism and storytelling? Get in touch to explore how CNN can connect your brand to motivated travelers, all over the world.

For further information about this report please contact:

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Sources:

- [1] CNN Audience Insight Tracker (2026). Economic realities in health tourism. June 2026. Base: CNN regular consumers who viewed CNN TV 2+ times in a week and are also CNN.com visitors; total sample 850 across 12 markets. Internal CNN/WBD research.
- [2] CNN Audience Insights (2026). Data for Economic realities in health tourism (InsightTracker, IGI, GWI). June 2026. Internal CNN/WBD workbook.
- [3] Ipsos (2026). Ipsos Global Influentials 2026 H1. Cited in CNN Audience Insights (2026), Data for Economic realities in health tourism (InsightTracker, IGI, GWI).
- [4] GWI Core (2026). GWI Q1 2026. Cited in CNN Audience Insights (2026), Data for Economic realities in health tourism (InsightTracker, IGI, GWI).
- [5] McKinsey & Company (2025). The Future of Wellness trends survey 2025.
- [6] Grand View Research (2026). Wellness Tourism Market Size & Share Report, 2026–2035.

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