



Wellness tourism

market opportunities for Aboriginal
tourism businesses





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Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge and honour the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory and recognise the continuation of culture, connection to lands, water and country. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

More information

For more information and access to other Aboriginal Cultural Tourism Framework resources visit www.tourismnt.com.au/aboriginal-culture-tourism or contact Tourism NT's Aboriginal tourism team today.

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Tools to help you





Introduction



Context of the NT Aboriginal cultural tourism sector:

- Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory are the custodians of the world's oldest continuous culture; they and their ancestors have lived, raised families, held ceremonies, hunted, created and told their stories on country for over 65,000 years. People come from across the world to immerse themselves in this rich cultural tradition.
- With more than half of the Territory's land mass and 85% of the coastline owned by Aboriginal people, the NT is uniquely positioned to provide visitors with exceptional Aboriginal cultural tourism experiences across diverse settings and in ways that reflect both very ancient and contemporary history, and reveal distinct interpretations of culture and grounded perspectives on wellbeing.
- The ongoing and unique spiritual connections Aboriginal people have with their country, their knowledge of land and water, their particular storylines and related language cultures are important to the NT's tourism industry.
- The proportion of visitors to the NT either participating in, or looking for, Aboriginal tourism experiences is significantly larger than elsewhere in Australia and many NT Aboriginal communities are interested in sharing their vibrant culture with others.

Purpose of this booklet:

This guide provides an understanding of wellness tourism and related opportunities. These opportunities are worth thinking about because:

- New experiences can be developed respectfully and legitimately if respecting the 'cultural protocols' described in the booklet "Walking together/working together - Protocols for Aboriginal cultural tourism in the Northern Territory" which complements this resource.
- Tourism Australia recognised the wellness trend as well as opportunities associated with its potential growth.¹
- Many visitors interested in wellness are aware of the existence of other cultural perspectives, and express interest towards Aboriginal peoples' views on wellbeing.
- The wellness sector is also diverse and there is value in understanding what experiences could be developed that would benefit the NT Aboriginal tourism industry and satisfy the expectations of this distinct visitor segment.



SECTION 1:

Understanding
the business of

wellness tourism



Defining wellness tourism



What is wellness?

The Global Wellness Institute defines wellness as the “active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health”².

Wellness is a social and economic trend that refers to people taking care of their own wellbeing. They do so by undertaking ‘wellness activities’ to look after their own body-mind-spirit (holistic) balance.

For Aboriginal people, wellbeing remains of utmost significance and can refer to Aboriginal perspectives on both individual and social healing and the process of reconciliation. Wellness activities connecting visitors to Aboriginal cultures and country can provide mutually beneficial meeting grounds for hosts and visitors.³

What is wellness tourism?

Wellness tourism is about travel that is focused on improving someone’s wellbeing. It has been defined as “voluntary travel to world-wide destinations for the purpose of promoting health and well-being through physical, psychological, or spiritual activities”.



Who are wellness visitors?

There are two main types of wellness visitors:

Primary wellness visitors:

Their main reason to travel is to do a wellness activity in a location of their choice. Their trip is almost all about taking care of their wellbeing. These travellers spend a lot on specialised wellness products⁴, but they are fewer in number.

Secondary wellness visitors:

They undertake a normal trip influenced by many motivations, but also seek and participate in specific wellness activities during their trip. They are less intensely involved in wellness while travelling, but there are many such visitors willing to trial short wellness experiences.

Wellness visitors try to fulfill a variety of personal objectives, with two distinct types of motivations: **Restoration and Transformation**.⁵

Wellness restoration visitors



Why do wellness restoration visitors travel?

These visitors are seeking to rest and regain their wellbeing. They may have faced personal setbacks, experienced declining health, been stressed, and/or want to reset and recover their wellbeing. They hope to rebalance their physical, mental and spiritual health and energise during their visit.



Causes:

Experts believe that pandemic-induced stress and anxiety have made people feel they need to reset, to re-equilibrate and re-centre. They go on holidays to restore, heal and de-stress.



Keywords utilised by the industry:

Wellness visitors need to feel secure and comfortable, they seek to indulge and pamper themselves (physically and mentally), to have fun and enjoy relaxing.



What types of attractions (or destinations) match those restorative wellness aspirations:

Settings featuring luxury resorts, spa lodges, offering wide array of treatments, fine food and alcohol, etc – or specialised retreats where they can intensely practice a single wellness activity (yoga, reiki, spiritual healing, etc).

For example, visit:

<https://www.traveldailymedia.com/jw-marriott-khao-lak-unveils-the-jw-garden-full-farm-model-and-wilderness-park/>





Wellness transformation visitors

Why do wellness transformation visitors travel?

These visitors are different because they seek unusual and transformative activities. They hope to increase their wellbeing through new travel experiences taking them outside their comfort zones.



Causes:

They want to evade the routines and predictability of their daily lives and perhaps fill a spiritual void. They might engage in unusual physical, mental, social and spiritual activities and seek journeys that allow them to challenge themselves.



Keywords utilised by the industry:

These visitors seek wellness through personal transformation and welcome 'intimate personal interactions', 'inter-cultural exploration', and look for 'spiritual awakening' (sometimes including mystical occurrences). They hope to experience meaningful interchanges with people different from themselves.



What types of attractions (or destinations) match those wellness-transformative aspirations:

Activities set in inspiring settings or/and with engaging communities that facilitate finding mindful cultural or educational interactions. These visitors are interested in places rich in natural attractiveness, outstanding landscapes/country and featuring customary sacredness respectfully communicated.

Wellness tourism map

Examples of wellness tourism including First Nations cultural experiences from around the world.

Canada

[Unamen Shipu Ltd. Quebec](#), consists of summer and winter packages in canoe/or sea zodiac adventures with Indigenous guides and activities (or snowshoe forest walks).

Focus is on Indigenous fishing, foraging, travelling, food preparing and cooking according to local culture.

Tanzania

Visitors stay in isolated (non-commercialised) habitations provided by the organisation [VisitNatives, Ltd.](#) It consists of cultural immersion in pastoralist village life, incorporating bush medicines workshops and food practices.

Sri Lanka

[Amuna Ayurveda & Wellness Retreat](#) have a wellness focus, but operate in Indigenous Sri Lankan cultural precincts. The retreats incorporate massages and herbal baths, encouraged cultural connections through yoga, meditation, and authentic Sri Lankan cuisine.

Northern Territory Australia

[Taste of Kakadu \(KarrimanjbeKKan An-me\)](#) Experience with distinct Aboriginal culture focus. Includes main meal activities, festival hub, cooking with the Hunter family, spear making, traditional painting, dance workshops, cooking presentations, music displays, guided walks, women's weaving, cruises, Aboriginal food experiences.

Northern Territory Australia

[Kungkas Can Cook – Bushfoods Experience](#) (Larapinta Trail and Standley Chasm Tourism /Bushfood experiences).

Aboriginal culture-focused tours and hospitality where visitors learn about native seeds, insects, grasses, fruits and medicine, and how knowledge is passed from generation to generation through stories and protocols.

New Zealand

[Wai Ariki Hot Springs and Spa Stays](#) (near Lake Rotorua) focuses on bathing and spa activities and treatment incorporating Maori products and cultural approaches. The resort is owned and operated by Iwi (tribe) and blends wellness and Maori themes.





SECTION 2:

A spotlight on the wellness transformation visitor opportunity



What aspects of Aboriginal cultural tourism experiences are wellness transformation visitors looking for?



What makes tourism experiences desirable to any traveller is often intangible and varies across visitors. Market research has identified numerous aspects of tourism products that contribute to visitor satisfaction.

Some wellness transformation travellers indicate that they want to expand their horizons and find new meaning in their lives by interacting with different cultures and being exposed to new knowledge, beliefs and worldviews.

They value learning from people unlike themselves and aim to understand how the latter see and interpret the world. Many seek cultural tourism experiences as part of an intangible spiritual journey (one of the key elements of wellness) as they mindfully pursue a quest to better understand themselves and the nature of human existence.⁶

These two dimensions are well worth highlighting when developing new experiences, as they appeal to the more sophisticated cultural visitors often associated with the wellness-transformation market in particular.



Although they are interrelated, two key concepts that mainly contribute to the appeal of Aboriginal tourism experiences based in the NT are sought after by wellness transformation travellers. These two concepts are discussed in both international academic and industry research investigating successful Aboriginal tourism product design. They are:

- The unique and genuine nature of the experience.⁷
- The nature and spread of connections between the components of the experience that reinforce each other.

Why do wellness transformation visitors seek unique Aboriginal cultural experiences and how can their genuine nature quality be communicated to those travellers?



What makes a visitor experience unique or genuine is a tricky topic because it can mean different things to different people. All people involved in providing those experiences (Aboriginal hosts, guides, businesses, experts, destinations, etc.) and the visitors themselves have their own perspectives regarding what is 'real' or genuine. Yet, this dimension is recognised as very important to wellness transformation visitors and impacts the reputation of cultural tourism products.

The wellness tourism sector has increasingly stated that many international wellness visitors were dissatisfied with many so-called 'First Nations experiences' around the world. They claim that several wellness international visitors find such experiences contrived, unnatural or obviously staged (not genuine nor spontaneous or sincere).

They concluded that wellness transformation visitors increasingly seek genuine Aboriginal experiences where they can share genuine living culture linked to place, country and spirituality.



Experiences on offer in destinations such as the NT are increasingly recognised and sought by wellness transformation travellers because visitors recognise the genuine nature of the connections between culture, place, landscape and tradition.

Aboriginal tourism businesses must strive to show and communicate to wellness transformation visitor markets what makes their product unique and genuine.





What types of 'connections' between the components of the cultural experience contribute to the satisfaction of wellness transformation visitors?



Wellness visitors seek holistic experiences (which means they combine physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing aspects) that are unusual to them and will challenge their everyday worldviews as well as confront their senses and their values.

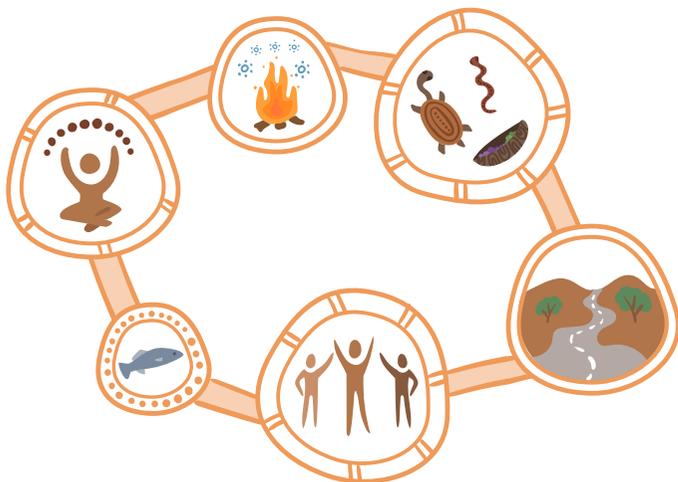
Their quest for transformation is more likely to occur if they are exposed simultaneously to multiple and connected experiences as well as overlapping sensations. Typically, this means experiencing at once new cultures, new landscapes, new food or cuisines capable of affecting many of their senses.

Similarly, participating in experiences facilitating social healing stemming from sharing and understanding other cultures' stories, art forms, beliefs, aspirations, lifestyles and realities can contribute to the types of transformative outcomes they seek. The NT already holds the ingredients that can be connected to inspire visitors and create outstanding and unique experiences for those seeking to broaden their horizons. Aboriginal tourism products targeting wellness transformation visitors must cater for visitors intangible (inspiration, genuine connections, cultural sharing, spiritual wellbeing) and tangible needs (service components⁸).

An example of product for wellness transformation visitors:

The NT offers unique traditional Aboriginal food experiences.

- These convey the rich traditions and cultural protocols passed down through generations.
- They reflect the cultural heritage and deep connections to the land.
- They demonstrate the enduring significance of "local Bush food", including land and aquatic animals or plants in those distinct Aboriginal people's diets and cultural lives. Furthermore, they take place in settings where the connections between culture, tradition, landscape/country and food can be experienced by wellness transformation visitors.⁹



References



References

1. Page 5 - Tourism Australia (2022). *Future of global tourism demand: Global tourism research into the experiences that will drive Australia's tourism demand now and into the future* (November 2022)
2. Page 7 - <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/what-is-wellness/>
3. Page 7 - Dimon, Anne (24 October 2013). "Wellness Travel: 10 Trends for 2014 and Beyond". Travelmarketreport.com. Retrieved 1 December 2013.
4. Page 7 - The Global Wellness Institute claims that wellness visitors spend more than other types of travellers, so they constitute an appealing market segment for Northern Territory Aboriginal businesses as they can afford to visit faraway attractions and access remote experiences ([GWI's 2023 Global Wellness Economy Monitor report, p.57.](#))
5. Page 7 - Although this distinction is mainly articulated in academic writings, it parallels Tourism Australia's research insights regarding travellers' motivations which they match to a variety of experiences on offer across Australia, including 'Indigenous tourism experiences'. <https://www.tourism.australia.com/content/dam/digital/corporate/documents/future-of-demand/tourism-australia-future-of-demand-experience-fact-sheets-v2.pdf>
6. Page 12 - See: <https://www.spirituallyhealthy.com/definespiritualhealth/>
7. Page 12 - This is also referred to as 'authenticity' in the literature.
8. Page 14 - Holder, A. & L. Ruhanen (2017) Identifying the relative importance of culture in Indigenous tourism experiences: Netnographic evidence from Australia, *Tourism Recreation Research*, 42:3, 316-326.
9. Page 14 - A broader range of 'Australian bush food experiences' are offered by Australian hospitality and tourism businesses without Aboriginal ancestry. These can make use of flora and fauna identified as 'native to Australia' because they originate from Australia. But those are not necessarily connected to the places, regions, environments and/or culture found where they are served – nor prepared by the people connected to these places.

Photo credits

Front Cover - Bird's eye view of Bitter Springs - Tourism NT/Jason Charles Hill

Page 2 - Taste of Kakadu Bush Food - Tourism NT/Charlie Bliss

Page 4 - Tjanpi Desert Weavers - Tourism NT/Shanaa McNaught

Page 6 - Bush Balm demonstration - Tourism NT/Oliver Eclipse

Page 7 - Restorative yoga at Uluru - Tourism NT/Tourism Australia

Page 8 - Tiwi Island Retreat - Tourism NT/Elise Cook

Page 9 - Traditional Ceremony at Wide Open Space Festival - Tourism NT/Helen Orr

Page 11 - Bush Medicine Workshop at Bush Balm - Tourism NT/Charlie Bliss

Page 12 - (Bottom left) Ayal Aboriginal Tours - Tourism NT

Page 12 - (Top right) Cultural experience at Bawaka - Tourism NT/Shanaa McNaught

Page 13 - (Bottom Left) Tropical paradise at Banubanu - Tourism NT/James Fisher

Page 13 - (Top right) Banubanu Beach Retreat - Tourism NT/Tourism Australia

Page 14 - (Top left) Learning about bush tucker - Tourism NT/Shanaa McNaught

Page 14 - (Top right) Tali Wiru dining experience - Tourism NT/Tourism Australia

Back cover - Couple at the Animal Tracks Safari in Kakadu - Tourism NT/Helen Orr

