



SERIOUS LEISURE IN WELLNESS TOURISM: DEVELOPING EVALUATION CRITERIA THROUGH BIBLIOMETRIC EVIDENCE FROM VIETNAM

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Abstract. This study develops evaluation criteria for Serious Leisure (SL) in Wellness Tourism (WT), a rapidly growing yet under-measured sector in Vietnam. Employing a systematic review combined with bibliometric analysis (VOSviewer) on 287 publications retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science, of which 50 were selected for in-depth analysis following the PRISMA protocol, the study identified five major research clusters: (1) measurement and validation of SL scales, (2) effects of SL on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, (3) conceptualization of WT experiences, (4) relationships among SL, satisfaction, and destination loyalty, and (5) integrated theoretical frameworks. Drawing on these clusters and Vietnam's WT development context, the study proposes a 15-item evaluation framework organized into five domains: serious leisure attributes, wellness experiences, well-being outcomes, environmental and service conditions, and post-experience behavioral intentions. Theoretically, the framework extends SL theory into the WT domain and clarifies the reflective–formative measurement distinction. Practically, it offers destination managers in Vietnam actionable criteria for designing and assessing serious leisure-oriented wellness tourism products.

Keywords: serious leisure, wellness tourism, well-being, evaluation criteria, bibliometric analysis, Vietnam

1. Introduction

In recent decades, Serious Leisure (SL) has emerged as a foundational theoretical framework for analysing leisure participation that demands long-term commitment and substantial investment of time, skills, knowledge, and effort while simultaneously shaping personal identity [1]. Stebbins [2] characterises SL by six core attributes: (1) perseverance in the activity; (2) significant personal effort to achieve competence; (3) durable benefits; (4) a strong identity linked to the activity; (5) distinctive meaning; and (6) the development of specialised skills. These attributes distinguish SL from casual leisure, which is short-term, requires minimal effort, and primarily serves immediate relaxation. Critically, SL is not merely a descriptive taxonomy — it carries explanatory power: the degree of seriousness with which individuals engage in leisure activities has been shown to predict subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and the quality of tourism experiences [3], [4] his positions SL as a theoretically robust and

practically relevant lens through which to evaluate health-oriented tourism participation. Within Wellness Tourism (WT), SL has been applied to explain the relationship between sustained tourist participation and positive outcomes in physical health, mental well-being, spiritual life, and social connectedness [5], [6]. WT is defined as tourism aimed at improving or maintaining health and well-being through activities such as therapeutic retreats, hot spring bathing, spa treatments, yoga, meditation, nutrition, and cultural–spiritual experiences [7],[8]. Liao et al. (2023) and Liu et al. (2023) demonstrate that WT generates multidimensional benefits, including physical health, psychological restoration, enhanced quality of life, and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle while simultaneously creating profound and memorable travel experiences [9], [10]. The convergence of SL and WT is therefore theoretically significant: tourists who engage in wellness activities with high levels of perseverance, skill development, and identity investment are more likely to derive deep, eudaimonic benefits and exhibit stronger destination loyalty outcomes that are central to sustainable tourism development.

Vietnam represents a particularly compelling yet understudied context within this global trend. According to the Vietnam National Authority of Tourism, the number of international visitors arriving for health and wellness purposes grew at an average of 12% annually between 2017 and 2024, with the sector recording an overall growth rate of 12–15 per cent per year. The Vietnam wellness tourism market reached USD 5.0 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow to USD 11.7 billion by 2033, at a compound annual growth rate of 8.84%. The country possesses a coastline exceeding 3,200 km, numerous mineral hot spring areas, a climate ranging from tropical to temperate, and a wealth of cultural–spiritual heritage. According to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (2023), notable WT centres include Thanh Thuy (Phu Tho), Kim Boi (Hoa Binh), and My Lam (Tuyen Quang) for hot spring resources; Nha Trang, Phu Quoc, and Da Nang for integrated resort complexes offering spa, yoga, and detox programmes; and Sa Pa (Lao Cai) and Da Lat (Lam Dong) for temperate climates suited to restorative retreats and meditation. Vietnam's national tourism development strategy aims to establish wellness retreats integrating health services by 2025, with a broader vision extending to 2030. These conditions collectively position Vietnam as a high-potential WT destination whose development trajectory warrants rigorous academic attention.

Despite this potential, Vietnam currently lacks a scientifically grounded framework for evaluating SL in WT. Experts note that while wellness tourism exists in Vietnam, offerings remain limited and fragmented, largely confined to standalone experiences such as hot spring baths or mineral soaks, without integrated products addressing both physical and mental well-being needs. Domestic research has mainly addressed general tourist satisfaction[11], the quality of spa and resort services[12], and motivational factors in specific activity forms such as hot spring tourism, yoga retreats, or meditation programmes [13]. Crucially, no study has comprehensively integrated the core attributes of SL perseverance, personal effort, long-term

benefits, identity, and meaning with the distinctive experiential dimensions of WT health restoration, environmental aesthetics, and cultural authenticity into a unified evaluative framework applicable to the Vietnamese context.

This gap is further compounded by limitations in the existing international literature. Systematic reviews by Lee et al. (2023) and Dahanayake et al. (2025) confirm that no standardised, scientifically validated set of criteria currently exists for evaluating SL within WT, particularly in non-Western cultural contexts [14],[15]. Existing instruments such as the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM) or WT experience scales [16],[17] were largely developed within specific cultural settings or activity domains, restricting their cross-contextual applicability. Furthermore, prior studies have predominantly focused on isolated constructs such as participation motivation, satisfaction, or destination loyalty, without capturing the full causal chain from serious leisure engagement to experiential quality and well-being outcomes. The absence of such an integrated framework not only limits theoretical advancement but also constrains the ability of destination managers and policymakers to design, monitor, and evaluate wellness tourism products in a systematic and evidence-based manner.

Against this background, this study addresses two research objectives: (1) to map the intellectual structure of SL and WT research through systematic review and bibliometric analysis; and (2) to propose a set of evidence-based evaluation criteria for SL in WT tailored to the Vietnamese context. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical framework; Section 3 describes the research methodology; Section 4 presents the findings; Section 5 discusses the results and proposed criteria; and Section 6 concludes with theoretical and practical implications.

2. Theoretical Framework and Concepts

2.1. Serious Leisure: Conceptualisation and Measurement

Research on Serious Leisure (SL) demonstrates that its six core attributes, perseverance, effort and skill development, durable benefits, personal identity, meaning, and professional ethos, have been consistently operationalised through validated measurement scales, most notably the Serious Leisure Inventory and Measure (SLIM) and its derivative, the Serious and Casual Leisure Measure (SCLM)[16],[18]. Psychometric evidence across diverse contexts and languages confirms the cross-cultural validity of SLIM, including its Spanish adaptation in the sporting domain [19], thereby reinforcing the premise for extending its application to new domains such as wellness tourism. The systematic review by Lee, Gould, and Hsu (2023) of studies employing SLIM between 2008 and 2019 further demonstrates that the conceptual structure of SL has remained stable and progressively elaborated over time, providing a solid foundation for developing transferable evaluation criteria across research settings [14].

At the level of individual outcomes, significant links have been established between the degree of serious leisure participation and subjective well-being [20], as well as between intrinsic motivation grounded in self-determination theory and the depth of serious engagement [21]. These findings illuminate the mechanisms through which sustained investments in time, skill, and identity-related meaning are converted into durable psychological and social benefits for participants. Importantly, these mechanisms are not domain-specific: evidence from outdoor sport contexts confirms that SL predicts both event satisfaction and perceived health outcomes [22], while research in niche tourism settings such as motorcycle touring shows that SL predicts flow states and future travel intentions [23]. This generalisability strengthens the case for applying SL as an evaluative lens within wellness tourism.

2.2. Wellness Tourism: Conceptualisation and Experience Dimensions

Research on Wellness Tourism (WT) conceptualises it not merely as a collection of fragmented services but as an integrated supply system encompassing environment, space, culture, therapeutic and restorative facilities, service processes, and human resources, all designed to create value for health-oriented travellers [5],[6]. This holistic perspective was elaborated by Dini and Pencarelli (2022) and empirically validated at the destination-attribute level in the Thai context [5],[6]. The authors emphasise that a multidimensional definition of WT provides practical guidance for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) in developing product portfolios that combine physical, psychological, cultural, and spiritual components, thereby maximising value for tourists.

With respect to experiences and outcomes, empirical evidence indicates that WT experiences predict well-being through the mediating role of satisfaction [10], while specialised reviews have systematised the multidimensional health benefits of WT physical, psychological, social, and spiritual calling for further empirical verification[9]. Models of wellness destination loyalty further highlight the central role of mental health and eudaimonic well-being as critical psychological drivers [12]. Building on this, Dahanayake and colleagues have clarified the structure of Memorable Wellness Tourism Experiences (MWTE) and developed a validated scale, providing a robust mediating construct with strong predictive power for post-visit behavioural outcomes [15], [24]. These converging findings underscore that WT value creation is fundamentally experiential and multidimensional qualities that align closely with the depth and durability characteristic of serious leisure engagement.

2.3. The Intersection of Serious Leisure and Wellness Tourism

The convergence of SL and WT scholarship reveals a coherent causal chain that has been empirically supported across multiple contexts. At the level of everyday experience, evidence from experience sampling method (ESM) designs confirms that leisure simultaneously relates to

hedonic and eudaimonic well-being [25] implying that evaluation criteria should capture both dimensions. Welfare analysis further suggests that the benefits of leisure extend beyond short-term pleasure to encompass health and meaning with significant policy implications [26]. These findings collectively reinforce the argument that the quality of serious engagement, not merely the act of participation, is the critical determinant of sustainable well-being outcomes in tourism.

At the knowledge-system level, recent bibliometric syntheses have mapped the thematic structure and emerging trends of WT research, highlighting the rise of topics such as well-being, experience design, destination products, and the spatial contexts of WT. This intellectual trajectory not only anchors SL-based criteria in practical destination management concerns but also identifies key pathways for empirical validation in future research.

2.4. Integrated Conceptual Framework

Synthesising the evidence reviewed above, this study proposes an integrated conceptual framework structured along the following logic: (i) Serious leisure attributes perseverance, effort and skill, identity and meaning, and durable benefits function as antecedents driving deep and memorable WT experiences (MWTE); (ii) these experiences are subsequently transformed into well-being outcomes, both hedonic and eudaimonic, with mental health playing a particularly critical mediating role, ultimately shaping destination loyalty; (iii) the WT supply system encompassing environment, services, processes, and human resources acts as a contextual condition that activates and amplifies the effects of serious engagement on experience quality and outcomes; and (iv) validated measurement instruments, including the WT Experience Scale [17] and the MWTE scale [15] provide the methodological foundation for empirically testing this causal chain in the Vietnamese context.

From a measurement perspective, cross-cultural validation of SLIM and its variants indicates the feasibility of adapting and localising SL criteria for Vietnam. Serious leisure attributes are appropriately modelled as reflective constructs, whereas WT supply attributes such as facility quality, aesthetic environment, and cultural authenticity warrant formative specification in order to capture the configural nature of service and environmental design signals for health-oriented experiences.

Finally, the proposed framework carries implications beyond individual well-being. Research on happiness and quality of life in WT [27], alongside evidence on wellness tourism preferences in rural areas and their role in reversing depopulation [28], underscores that developing evaluation criteria also carries socio-spatial implications for local communities and destination ecosystems. This dual relevance theoretical and managerial provides the rationale for positioning the proposed criteria set within both academic research and destination management practice.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a systematic review combined with bibliometric analysis in order to identify and develop evaluation criteria for Serious Leisure (SL) within the context of Wellness Tourism (WT). The research design was structured in four stages: (i) defining the research question and selection criteria; (ii) searching, screening, and synthesising the literature; (iii) conducting bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer; and (iv) extracting and systematising the proposed criteria.

3.1. Research Question and Selection Criteria

The central research question guiding this study is: "What criteria can be used to evaluate the degree of serious leisure in wellness tourism experiences, and what scientific evidence supports their development?" To ensure relevance and rigour, the following inclusion criteria were applied: (1) studies directly addressing serious leisure or related measurement scales (SLIM, SCLM, or serious leisure qualities); (2) studies on wellness tourism, particularly those related to experiences, well-being, destination loyalty, or product design; (3) research developing or validating measurement scales in tourism or leisure contexts; and (4) peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2025, written in or translated into English. Studies were excluded if they: (1) addressed leisure or tourism in a general sense without specific reference to either SL constructs or WT experiences; (2) were non-peer-reviewed sources such as conference abstracts, book chapters, or grey literature; or (3) lacked sufficient methodological detail to assess reliability or validity.

3.2. Literature Search and Screening

The literature search was conducted in two major international scientific databases, Scopus and Web of Science, selected for their broad disciplinary coverage and citation export functionality. The search strategy employed the following keyword combinations: ("*measurement*" OR "*evaluation*" OR "*assessment*" OR "*framework*") AND ("*serious leisure*" OR "*leisure*" OR "*recreation*" OR "*hobby*") AND ("*wellness*" OR "*health*" OR "*well-being*" OR "*fitness*") AND ("*tourism*" OR "*travel*" OR "*hospitality*" OR "*vacation*"). The initial search yielded a total of 412 records. After removing duplicates ($n = 58$), titles and abstracts of the remaining 354 records were screened for relevance, resulting in the exclusion of 67 records. Full-text assessment was then conducted on the remaining 287 articles, of which 50 were classified as highly relevant and selected for in-depth analysis. The screening procedure followed the PRISMA protocol to ensure transparency and reproducibility of the selection process.

3.3. Bibliometric Analysis with VOSviewer

Following the screening stage, the eligible corpus of 287 articles was exported from Scopus in .csv format for bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer (version 1.6.20). The analysis

proceeded through four sequential steps. First, co-occurrence analysis was performed on author keywords and index keywords, with a minimum occurrence threshold of ≥ 5 to ensure representativeness and exclude peripheral terms. Second, a keyword co-occurrence network was constructed using VOSviewer's modularity optimisation algorithm, which grouped keywords into thematic clusters, each representing a distinct research stream within the SL–WT literature. Third, each cluster was interpreted and labelled according to its highest-weight keywords and thematic coherence. Five clusters were identified: (1) SL measurement and scale validation; (2) wellness experiences and well-being outcomes; (3) destination loyalty and post-visit behaviour; (4) mental health and eudaimonia; and (5) WT product design and destination management. Fourth, linkage strength and density mapping were conducted to identify the most central and frequently co-occurring concepts within the network. These central keywords were subsequently treated as primary candidates for the development of evaluation criteria.

3.4. Extraction and Systematisation of Criteria

Building on the clusters and central keywords identified in the bibliometric analysis, criteria extraction proceeded in three steps. First, each keyword cluster was mapped to the theoretical constructs of SL attributes [1] and WT experience components[5],[17] to establish conceptual grounding and relevance. Second, potential criteria were classified into three categories: (1) personal attributes (e.g., perseverance, skills, and identity); (2) experience attributes (e.g., memorability, satisfaction, and well-being); and (3) contextual attributes (e.g., facility quality, cultural authenticity, and environmental aesthetics). Third, the proposed criteria were cross-validated against existing validated scales, including SLIM [16], the MWTE scale [15] and the WT Experience Scale [17], to ensure content validity and avoid redundancy.

3.5. Rationale for Methodological Choice

The combination of systematic review and bibliometric analysis was selected for its complementary strengths: systematic review ensures depth and rigour in evidence synthesis, while bibliometric mapping provides breadth and objectivity in identifying the intellectual structure of a research field. Together, these methods enable comprehensive coverage of the SL–WT literature while revealing knowledge nodes, thematic clusters, and empirical linkages that would be difficult to detect through narrative review alone. The use of VOSviewer further facilitates visual representation of the field's intellectual architecture, supporting criterion selection based on scientific evidence rather than subjective judgement. This approach is particularly appropriate for an emerging research intersection such as SL in WT, where no established framework yet exists and where the boundaries of relevant literature must be mapped systematically before criteria can be proposed.

4. Research Findings

The literature search and screening process yielded a total of 287 scientific articles covering diverse areas related to Serious Leisure (SL), Wellness Tourism (WT), and experience measurement. Following full-text assessment, 50 articles were classified as highly relevant and selected for in-depth analysis, while the remaining 237 were retained as contextually relevant for broader synthesis. Combining the full dataset of 287 studies with concentrated analysis of the 50 highly relevant ones ensured both comprehensiveness and analytical depth in the findings.

4.1. Countries, Authors, and Research Trends

The bibliometric analysis reveals a clear concentration of SL and WT scholarship among a small group of prolific authors and a handful of leading countries. At the author level, Babak Taheri emerges as the most prolific contributor with six publications, followed by Ross Curran and Martin Joseph Gannon, each with four publications and a strong collaborative focus on wellness tourism and tourist experience research. Other influential contributors, including Erose Sthapit, Carla Barbieri, Donald Getz, and Sandra Sotomayor, each account for three publications, with research themes spanning serious leisure, agritourism, and sustainable tourism. At the country level, the United Kingdom is the dominant research hub with 36 publications, while China (23) and Australia (22) closely follow, reflecting the increasing diversification of global scholarship. The United States (18), Portugal (14), Thailand (12), Taiwan (12), and South Korea (12) also contribute significantly. The notable presence of Asian countries, particularly Thailand, Taiwan, and South Korea, signals the growing importance of non-Western contexts in SL and WT research and underscores the relevance of developing evaluation frameworks that are sensitive to Asian cultural settings, including Vietnam. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of publications by country.

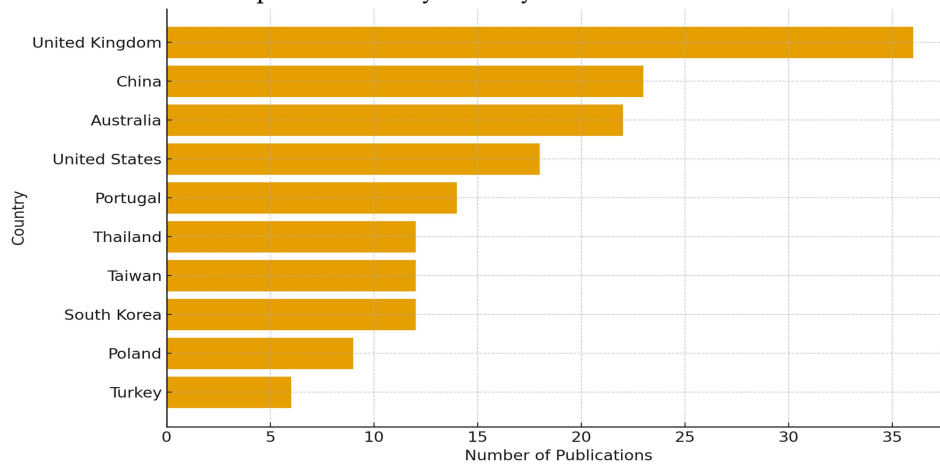


Figure 1. Major publishing countries

4.2. Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

Keyword co-occurrence and thematic clustering conducted via VOSviewer revealed that the current body of knowledge can be organised into five major research clusters, with representation frequencies of 13/50, 12/50, 11/50, 7/50, and 7/50, respectively, among the highly relevant studies. Each cluster represents a coherent and distinct research stream within the SL–WT literature, as detailed below. Figure 2 presents the keyword co-occurrence network.

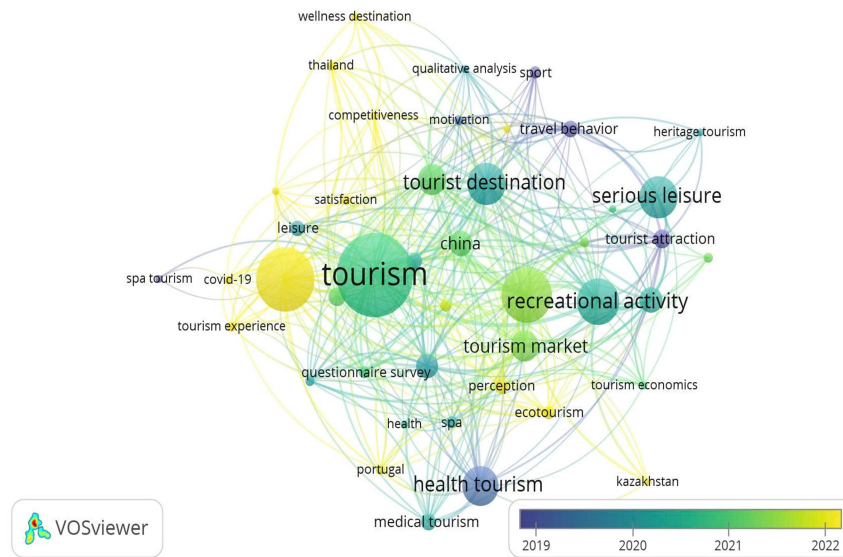


Figure 2. Keyword co-occurrence analysis

4.2.1. Cluster 1: Measurement and Validation of Serious Leisure Scales

This cluster focuses on the development, adaptation, and validation of SL measurement instruments, particularly SLIM and its shortened versions. Representative studies include Akgül et al. (2016), Munusturlar and Argan (2016), Li and Kao (2014), Lee et al. (2023), Doğan et al. (2023), and Cruz et al. (2017), which collectively tested the reliability, construct validity, and cross-contextual applicability of SLIM across settings such as sports, the arts, and wellness tourism[14],[16],[18],[22],[29]. Akgül et al. (2016) reported consistent CFA results with a test–retest reliability of 0.93, while Cruz et al. (2017) found composite reliability ranging from 0.71 to 0.86 and strong convergent validity[16],[19]. Lee et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of 34 SLIM-based studies, using correlation and clustering analyses to confirm structural stability over time [9]. Munusturlar and Argan (2016) extended SLIM to community health contexts [18] while Doğan et al. (2023) applied it to community sports, confirming the SL → health outcomes pathway[22]. Collectively, these findings affirm the psychometric robustness of SLIM as a measurement foundation for the present study.

4.2.2. Cluster 2: Outcomes of Serious Leisure and Well-being

Studies in this cluster examine the relationship between SL participation and diverse well-being outcomes, hedonic and eudaimonic, as well as life satisfaction and mental health. Downward and Dawson (2016) highlighted the public health benefits of SL participation; Lee and Hwang (2018) demonstrated positive effects of SL on subjective happiness; and Kono et al. (2022) focused on eudaimonic well-being and self-development [3],[4],[30]. Armbrecht et al. (2023) and Tian et al. (2020) employed SEM to show that leisure satisfaction and intrinsic motivation mediate the path from SL to happiness [31], while Doğan et al. (2023) provided additional evidence from community sports that SL enhances both physical and mental health [22]. Further studies from the broader set of 287 articles, including Son et al. (2021), Blackshaw (2017), and Chang et al. (2018), confirmed SL's contribution to quality of life and social connectedness [32],[33],[34]. The consistent direction of evidence across these diverse contexts strengthens the case for treating SL as a reliable antecedent of well-being in the WT domain.

4.2.3. Cluster 3: Conceptualisation and Dimensions of Wellness Tourism Experiences

This cluster conceptualises WT as a multidimensional experience encompassing physical, psychological, spiritual, and environmental dimensions. Dahanayake et al. (2023; 2025) developed a 29-item WT experience scale incorporating dimensions such as meaning, professionalism, environmental aesthetics, tranquillity, novelty, value, authenticity, and hospitality; CFA results demonstrated stable structure and high reliability [15],[24]. Li et al. (2025) proposed a three-dimensional model incorporating restoration, escape from stress, and self-discovery, while Kongtaveesawas et al. (2022) validated the roles of destination, environmental, and cultural attributes in shaping WT experiences [6],[17]. Smith and Puczko (2014), Voigt et al. (2011), and Chen and Petrick (2013), drawn from the broader set of 287 articles, reinforce the view that WT is a complex construct requiring sophisticated measurement approaches to capture the full range of tourist experiences[7],[8],[34]. This cluster provides the experiential vocabulary from which the proposed evaluation criteria are partly derived.

4.2.4. Cluster 4: Impacts of SL on Satisfaction and Loyalty

This cluster clarifies the causal chain linking SL to post-visit behaviour: SL → positive emotions and intrinsic motivation → tourist satisfaction → behavioural loyalty (revisit intention and word-of-mouth). In the WT context specifically, Liu et al. (2023) demonstrated that satisfaction mediates the link between WT experiences and well-being [10], while Chua et al. (2025) confirmed that mental health and eudaimonic well-being are pivotal psychological drivers of destination loyalty [12]. Singh et al. (2022) and Murad et al. (2025) provided cross-cultural evidence supporting the universality of these relationships across diverse national settings [13]. The convergence of these findings positions SL-driven satisfaction and well-being as central mechanisms through which WT destinations can build long-term visitor loyalty.

4.2.5. Cluster 5: Theoretical Foundations and Integrative Frameworks

This cluster consolidates the theoretical foundations of SL as developed by Stebbins and integrates them with WT conceptual models. Akgül et al. (2016), Cruz et al. (2017), and Kongtaveesawas et al. (2022) consistently point to the need for SL evaluation frameworks tailored to the characteristics of WT and sensitive to cultural context [6],[16],[19]. Studies in this cluster also propose integrative models linking SL attributes, WT experiences, and long-term outcomes, well-being and destination loyalty, providing both a conceptual basis and practical direction for the development of evaluation criteria in destination management contexts.

4.3. Synthesis: Towards an Evaluation Framework

The synthesis of findings across the five clusters points to a coherent and internally consistent structure for evaluating SL in WT. Taken together, the clusters suggest that a comprehensive evaluation framework should encompass three primary domains: (1) personal serious leisure attributes of participants including perseverance, effort and skill development, personal identity, and life meaning; (2) experience and outcome attributes including memorability, flow, authenticity, satisfaction, and both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being; and (3) environmental and service conditions including infrastructure quality, environmental aesthetics, cultural authenticity, and therapeutic competence. Structuring evaluation criteria along these three domains ensures both conceptual comprehensiveness and fidelity to the empirically established relationships between serious commitment, experiential quality, and sustainable outcomes in wellness tourism. These domains form the basis for the 15-item evaluation framework proposed in Section 5.

5. Discussion

5.1. Research Trends

Thematic trends identified in the literature reveal three key directions in the evolution of SL and WT scholarship. First, recent studies have increasingly focused on the development and validation of measurement frameworks notably SLIM, the WT Experience Scale, and the Memorable Wellness Tourism Experiences (MWTE) scale centred on constructs such as flow, well-being, place attachment, and destination loyalty [15],[17],[12]. Second, a robust and consistent linkage has been established between serious leisure participation and well-being outcomes, encompassing both hedonic well-being (relaxation, enjoyment) and eudaimonic well-being (meaning, personal growth)[10],[30]. Third, research published between 2022 and 2025 demonstrates a clear geographic expansion into Asian wellness tourism destinations including Thailand, China, South Korea, and Vietnam with growing emphasis on sustainability, cultural authenticity, and memorable experiences[15].

Overall, the transition from foundational, measurement-driven studies (2015–2020) to applied and context-sensitive research (2021–2025) reflects how serious leisure has become progressively relevant to destination management and wellness tourism product development. This trend underscores the importance of cross-national collaboration and positions Asia as a rising hub for empirical inquiry in the field a trajectory that directly motivates the present study's focus on Vietnam.

5.2. Positioning the Findings within Prior Research

The five clusters distilled from the 50 highly relevant studies form a coherent causal chain: seriousness antecedents → wellness experiences → well-being outcomes → post-visit behaviours, with the destination's environment service system functioning as an activating and moderating condition. This chain is consistent with and extends prior reviews on the measurement of SL and WT across four levels of analysis.

At the measurement level, numerous studies have validated SLIM and its variants for operationalising the six core SL attributes across diverse contexts [14],[16],[18],[19]. The present findings concur, while adding that in the WT domain, SL attributes should be anchored to wellness-specific experiential components [5],[17] rather than applied in isolation as in sport or community settings a critical distinction for cross-domain transferability.

At the experience–outcome level, prior work demonstrates that MWTE and satisfaction reliably mediate the relationship between product and service attributes and well-being, encompassing both hedonic and eudaimonic facets [15],[10],[24]. The present results corroborate and extend this mediating chain by showing that the degree of seriousness perseverance, effort and skill, identity and meaning functions as a precondition that enables individuals to transform equivalent WT services into deeper and more memorable experiences.

At the behavioural level, existing evidence indicates that mental health and eudaimonic well-being are pivotal drivers of destination loyalty [12], while flow and positive affect predict revisit and word-of-mouth intentions [34]. The present study adds that the environment–service context encompassing facilities, staff competence, environmental aesthetics, and cultural authenticity not only directly shapes experiences but also amplifies the effect of serious engagement on MWTE and well-being outcomes [3], [4], [12].

At the welfare and policy level, prior research highlights the long-term health and meaning benefits of leisure participation [23], the synergistic relationship between hedonia and eudaimonia [27], and the positive effects of wellness engagement on individual and community quality of life [24], [25]. The present findings align with this direction and further position serious leisure as a capability-building mechanism that enables tourists to sustain healthy

lifestyles beyond the travel experience, an argument of particular policy relevance for integrating WT with public health strategies in Vietnam.

5.3. Novelty and Scholarly Contributions

The present study makes four interrelated contributions to the SL and WT literature. First, it proposes an integrated seriousness experience outcome model that explicitly identifies SL attributes as antecedents of MWTE and well-being, addressing the limitations of product and service-centred approaches that have dominated prior WT research. This implies incorporating SL constructs into WT models as core independent variables rather than peripheral controls.

Second, the study clarifies a hedonic–eudaimonic synergy mechanism: the two facets of well-being operate jointly and reinforcingly, but this synergy is conditioned on tourists exhibiting sufficient levels of serious engagement. This finding integrates previously fragmented evidence on the pleasure–meaning relationship [23], [27] into a seriousness-conditioned theoretical mechanism with direct implications for scale development.

Third, the study reconceptualises the role of environmental and service conditions, facility quality, staff competence, aesthetic environment, and cultural authenticity not as peripheral hygiene factors but as active moderators that strengthen the pathway from seriousness to MWTE to well-being to loyalty [3], [4], [12]. This has important implications for destination design and service quality management in WT contexts.

Fourth, the study advances measurement practice by recommending a hybrid specification approach: SL attributes are best modelled as reflective constructs, capturing the coherent psychological disposition underlying serious engagement, whereas WT supply attributes warrant formative specification in order to represent the configural design signals of services and environments. This recommendation helps reconcile scattered CFA and PLS-SEM results in prior studies and provides methodological guidance for future empirical validation.

5.4. Practical Implications for Vietnam

The findings carry concrete managerial implications for WT destination development in Vietnam. To enhance post-visit well-being and destination loyalty, three complementary strategies are recommended.

First, destination managers should actively cultivate tourist seriousness by designing structured learning–practice–progression pathways within wellness programmes. Practical examples include tiered yoga and meditation curricula that allow participants to advance in skill and commitment across visits, masterclasses in herbal medicine and therapeutic gastronomy grounded in Vietnamese indigenous knowledge, and guided self-practice routines

that extend engagement beyond the formal programme. These interventions directly stimulate perseverance, skill development, and personal identity, the core SL attributes most strongly associated with deep experiential and well-being outcomes.

Second, destinations should invest in creating conditions that enable deep and memorable wellness experiences. This involves preserving and enhancing tranquil natural environments, ensuring the cultural authenticity of wellness practices, including indigenous healing traditions, traditional cuisine, and spiritual rituals, and facilitating meaningful interaction between tourists and local communities. Vietnam's distinctive assets, mineral hot springs, indigenous medicinal resources, eco-cultural village landscapes, and established meditation and yoga traditions represent strong and differentiated levers for realising these objectives.

Third, the standardisation and professionalisation of service contexts are essential to activate and amplify the effect of tourist seriousness on experience quality. This encompasses upgrading physical infrastructure and hygiene standards, ensuring therapeutic competence among service providers through certification and training, and enhancing multilingual communication to serve both domestic and international wellness tourists. These service conditions function as the enabling platform without which serious leisure engagement cannot be converted into memorable experiences and sustainable well-being outcomes.

5.5. Evaluation Criteria and Framework for Serious Leisure in Wellness Tourism in Vietnam

Drawing on the five clusters identified in Section 4, the evidence synthesised from 50 highly relevant studies, and the specific characteristics of Vietnam's WT development context, this study proposes a 15-item evaluation framework for assessing serious leisure in wellness tourism. The criteria are organised into five domains, each grounded in published scales and constructs: SLIM/SCLM [11], [17]; the WT Experience Scale [12]; the MWTE scale [10]; validated well-being measures [19], [27]; and destination loyalty structures [15], [34].

The first domain, Serious Leisure Attributes, captures the dispositional qualities of tourists that drive deep engagement, comprising five criteria: perseverance, personal effort, skill development, personal identity, and life meaning. These criteria directly operationalise Stebbins' [1], [2] six core SL attributes within a WT context and are appropriately modelled as reflective constructs, given that they represent coherent manifestations of an underlying serious engagement disposition.

The second domain, Wellness Experience, addresses the phenomenological quality of the tourism encounter itself through three criteria: memorability, flow, and immersive wellness environment. The third criterion consolidates the tranquillity and cultural authenticity

dimensions of prior scales [10], [12] into a single construct capturing the degree to which the physical and cultural setting enables deep mental restoration and meaningful engagement with local wellness traditions. Together, these three criteria draw on the MWTE scale [10], [21] and the WT Experience Scale [12] to capture the distinctive experiential features that differentiate serious wellness participation from generic leisure consumption.

The third domain, Well-being Outcomes, encompasses three criteria reflecting the psychological benefits generated by serious wellness engagement: subjective well-being, mental health, and healthy lifestyle maintenance. Subjective well-being integrates both hedonic (relaxation, enjoyment, satisfaction) and eudaimonic (meaning, self-realisation, life orientation) facets into a single criterion, consistent with evidence that the two dimensions operate synergistically under conditions of high serious engagement [23], [27]. The inclusion of healthy lifestyle maintenance extends the evaluation horizon beyond the immediate travel experience, reflecting the capability-building dimension of SL and its role in sustaining post-trip health behaviour [19], [20].

The fourth domain, Environmental and Service Conditions, captures the contextual enablers that activate and amplify the effects of serious engagement through three criteria: physical environment quality, therapeutic staff competence, and cultural and natural resource integrity. Physical environment quality consolidates facility standards, infrastructure, hygiene, safety, and environmental aesthetics into a single formative indicator, reflecting the configural nature of the physical wellness setting [3], [4]. Therapeutic staff competence addresses the professional knowledge, certification, and interpersonal qualities of wellness practitioners, while cultural and natural resource integrity captures the authenticity and preservation of indigenous healing traditions and natural assets that are central to Vietnam's competitive positioning as a WT destination [12]. These three criteria are modelled as formative constructs, as they represent distinct design signals rather than interchangeable reflections of a single underlying factor.

The fifth domain, Post-experience Behavioural Intentions, is represented by a single composite criterion: destination loyalty. This criterion integrates revisit intention and place attachment into a unified behavioural outcome construct, reflecting the affective bonding tourists develop with a wellness destination and their propensity to return and recommend it to others [15], [34]. The consolidation is supported by evidence that place attachment and revisit intention load consistently on the same higher-order loyalty factor in WT contexts and that both are driven by the same upstream well-being and experience quality antecedents. Table 1 presents the full 15-item framework.

Table 1. Components of Serious Leisure in Wellness Tourism in Vietnam

No.	Domain	Criteria	Brief description
1	Serious Leisure Attributes	Perseverance	Long-term commitment to wellness tourism activities.
		Personal effort	Level of investment in time, effort, and cost; self-practice beyond the program.
		Skill development	Cognitive and technical progress (e.g., yoga, meditation, qigong, nutrition).
		Personal identity	Degree of self-identification with wellness activities; recognition as a "wellness practitioner".
		Life meaning	Sense of profound value, life orientation, and long-term spiritual engagement.
2	Wellness Experience	Memorability	Intensity and durability of memories from wellness experiences.
		Flow	Optimal concentration and immersion; losing track of time during experiences.
		Immersive wellness environment	Degree of mental restoration, tranquillity, and cultural authenticity experienced within the wellness setting.
3	Wellbeing Outcomes	Subjective well-being	Combined hedonic (relaxation, enjoyment) and eudaimonic (meaning, self-realisation) well-being outcomes.
		Mental health	Reduction of stress and anxiety; achievement of inner peace.
		Healthy lifestyle maintenance	Degree of continuing wellness practices after the trip.
4	Environmental and Service Conditions	Physical environment quality	Standard of physical facilities, infrastructure, hygiene, safety, and environmental aesthetics of the wellness setting.
		Therapeutic staff competence	Professional knowledge, certification, and interpersonal skills of wellness practitioners.

		Cultural and natural resource integrity	Authenticity and preservation of indigenous healing traditions and natural assets.
5	Post experience Behavior	Destination loyalty	Affective bonding with and intention to return to the wellness destination; propensity to recommend to others.

Source: Compiled and proposed by the authors.

6. Conclusions and Implications

6.1. Summary of Findings

This study reviewed 287 scholarly works on Serious Leisure (SL) and Wellness Tourism (WT), with 50 highly relevant studies analysed in depth through bibliometric techniques using VOSviewer. Five major research clusters were identified: (1) measurement and validation of SL scales; (2) outcomes of SL and well-being; (3) conceptualisation and dimensions of WT experiences; (4) impacts of SL on satisfaction and destination loyalty; and (5) theoretical foundations and integrative frameworks. Collectively, these clusters reveal that SL functions as both an antecedent and a sustaining mechanism for high-quality WT experiences, which in turn generate hedonic and eudaimonic well-being as well as positive post-visit behavioural intentions. Environmental and service conditions were found to act as contextual moderators that activate and amplify these effects.

6.2. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three principal contributions to the SL and WT literature. First, it extends the application of SL theory, originally developed in sport and community leisure contexts, into the domain of wellness tourism, demonstrating the theoretical coherence and empirical relevance of this cross-domain transfer. The proposed framework positions SL attributes not as peripheral variables but as core antecedents of experiential quality and well-being outcomes in WT, thereby enriching existing models that have predominantly centred on service quality and destination attributes.

Second, the study clarifies the measurement architecture of the SL-WT relationship by recommending a hybrid reflective-formative specification: SL attributes are best operationalised as reflective constructs capturing a coherent underlying disposition, whereas WT supply attributes, physical environment quality, staff competence, and resource integrity are more appropriately modelled as formative constructs representing distinct and non-interchangeable

design signals. This distinction provides methodological guidance for future empirical studies employing PLS-SEM or CFA approaches.

Third, by proposing a 15-item evaluation framework organised into five domains, serious leisure attributes, wellness experiences, well-being outcomes, environmental and service conditions, and post-experience behavioural intentions, the study provides the first integrated and evidence-based measurement structure for assessing SL in WT tailored to a non-Western, emerging market context. This framework bridges the gap between SL measurement traditions (SLIM/SCLM) and WT experience scholarship (MWTE, WT Experience Scale), offering a transferable foundation for future cross-cultural validation.

6.3. Practical Implications

For destination managers and policymakers in Vietnam, the proposed framework offers actionable guidance across three levels. At the product design level, wellness programmes should be structured to cultivate tourist seriousness through tiered skill-building pathways, progressive engagement opportunities, and identity-affirming experiences that foster long-term commitment to wellness practices. At the destination level, investment in tranquil, culturally authentic, and aesthetically distinctive environments leveraging Vietnam's mineral hot springs, indigenous medicinal traditions, and eco-cultural landscapes is essential for enabling the deep and memorable experiences that translate serious engagement into lasting well-being. At the service delivery level, professionalisation of therapeutic staff through certification, training, and cultural competence development is critical for ensuring that the enabling conditions for serious leisure engagement are consistently met. Beyond individual destinations, the framework also supports Vietnam's national tourism development strategy by providing a standardised basis for monitoring, evaluating, and benchmarking wellness tourism product quality across regions.

6.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the literature search was restricted to English-language publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, which may have introduced a language bias and excluded relevant studies published in Vietnamese or other Asian languages. Second, the proposed framework has not yet been empirically validated through primary data collection in Vietnam; the 15 criteria represent evidence-based propositions derived from bibliometric synthesis rather than confirmed measurement items. Third, while the post-COVID-19 recovery period represents a significant structural shift in wellness tourism demand, the study's bibliometric corpus does not fully capture the most recent dynamics of this transition.

Future research should address these limitations through several directions. Empirical validation of the proposed framework using survey data from both domestic and international

wellness tourists at key Vietnamese destinations is the most immediate priority, with PLS-SEM recommended as the analytical approach given the hybrid reflective-formative structure of the model. Comparative studies examining differences between tourist segments by nationality, age cohort, type of wellness activity, and level of prior experience would further refine the framework's applicability. Longitudinal designs tracking changes in serious leisure engagement, well-being outcomes, and destination loyalty over multiple visits would capture the dynamic, capability-building dimension of SL that cross-sectional studies cannot address. Finally, qualitative investigations exploring the lived experience of serious wellness tourists in Vietnam through in-depth interviews or ethnographic approaches would complement the quantitative framework with contextually rich insights into the meaning-making processes that underpin serious leisure engagement in this culturally distinctive setting.

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