

# Towards recreational wellness - a framework for thermal spring health tourism product development in the Western Cape province, South Africa

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## Introduction

There are eight thermal spring resorts in the Western Cape province of South Africa, together with a number of undeveloped thermal springs. The hot mineral-rich water at these resorts has, in the past, been utilised for medicinal purposes, but today only one of these resorts offers a range of health and beauty treatments, the others functioning primarily as family leisure resorts, catering almost exclusively to the domestic market.

## Methodology

The principal aim of the research was to evaluate thermal spring resorts in the Western Cape according to their water quality (for health purposes), and facilities and services offered, and to use this information to create a framework to guide the development of thermal springs in the province, with an emphasis on health tourism. The research process included a supply-side analysis of all thermal water-based and treatment-based (medical and wellness) facilities and services, the mineral and radon contents of the water, potential medicinal uses, sporting and exercise opportunities, recreation and entertainment, and links to the tourism industry. This was followed by a demand-side analysis, consisting of a questionnaire based empirical survey at the six largest thermal spring resorts in the province, after which activity-based market segmentation was carried out to create a set of visitor typologies, providing insight into visitors' attitudes towards health-related and other activities, benefits sought, and general tourism motivations.

A framework was then constructed, which integrates relevant aspects of international demand for thermal spring health tourism with the perceived medicinal properties of the different thermal waters in the province, visitor activity preferences, and location-based natural resources, such as medicinal and herbal plants. In an attempt to attract international health tourism markets, but without losing current domestic leisure markets, the focus of the recommendations is to create new products, as

well as to add value to existing products, and, where possible, to involve and benefit local communities.

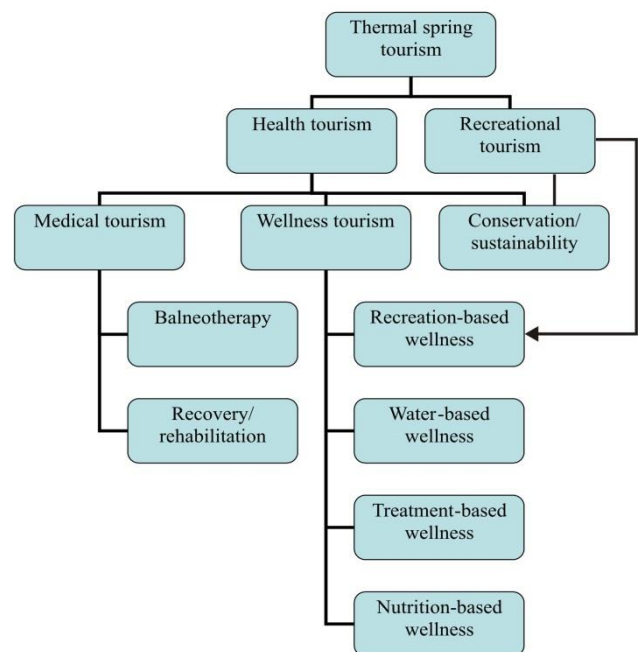


Figure 1: A framework for thermal spring health tourism product development

## Conclusions

There appears to be considerable potential for the development of certain thermal spring health (medical and wellness) tourism products in the Western Cape, although the types of products that appeal to international health tourism markets will only appeal to a small segment of domestic visitors, who tend to support recreation-based wellness activities. Offerings need to be location-specific, focusing on unique natural resources. This type of tourism has the potential to encourage local community involvement, particularly if medicinal plants, traditional remedies and indigenous knowledge, as well as locally produced healthy foodstuffs, are incorporated into the thermal spring tourism product.