



Research Article

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Yoga as Serious Leisure Activity: Socio-Demographic Differences in Mindfulness Levels Among Yoga Retreat Participants

Aglaia Zafeiroudi¹

Georgia Yfantidou²

Charilaos Kouthouris¹

Aikaterini Zanna²

¹Department of Physical Education and Sport Science,
University of Thessaly, Trikala, Greece

²Department of Physical Education and Sport Science,
Democritus University of Thrace, Komotini, Greece

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Abstract

Yoga retreats are an emerging component of international well-being tourism. This form of tourism focuses on groups with specific demographic characteristics and interests, highlights natural destinations of high tourism value, and supports the development of personal well-being through such practices as mindfulness. This study investigated the demographic characteristics of 203 Greek yoga retreat tourists in relation to their mindfulness levels. The study also investigated the effect of different yoga practices in asana, meditation, and philosophy courses on the formation of mindfulness. The 'Mindful Attention Awareness' scale (Mantzios, Wilson & Giannou, 2015), consisting of 15 items, was used to evaluate mindfulness and psychographics were successfully tested. The results show statistically significant differences in mindfulness between subgroups of participants of different marital status, financial profile, age, and number of years practicing yoga meditation and philosophy. The study concludes that yoga is a serious leisure activity with high personal and work life involvement. The findings enrich data regarding yoga retreats in Greece and establish the profile of yoga retreat participants according to mindfulness, asana, meditation, and philosophical practice participation. Tourism providers can give prominence to the concept of mindfulness as a dominant theme in the wellness tourism industry and, as a consequence, develop and improve the quality of yoga retreat services.

Keywords: wellbeing, recreation, wellness tourism, physical exercise, psychosomatic health, spirituality, yoga philosophy, meditation

1. Introduction

Modern Western high anxiety and high stress lifestyles, together with reactions against the excesses of materialism, have undoubtedly helped to accelerate the popularity of yoga, which is both a physical activity and a tool to enhance general well-being (Bowers, & Cheer, 2017). Yoga practice is

valued as a leisure activity with implications for psychosocial transformation (Dillette, Douglas & Andrzejewski, 2019). Indeed, Stebbins has argued that yoga is a serious rather than a casual leisure activity (Dillette et al., 2019). The main advantage of serious leisure activities is that they require active participation and focus on the body and on the mind and soul. Serious leisure activities require the time, active effort, and self-determination of participants to improve skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins, 1992). Yoga retreat participation has the characteristics of a serious leisure activity requiring awareness of the process and benefits of participation and furthering knowledge through the unique experience offered by each yoga retreat (Dillette et al., 2019). Meditation is an essential part of yoga practice which techniques related to mindfulness. The practice helps to reclaim identity and true value during leisure time and it can play an important role in a modern world mired with work and professional pursuits. Mindfulness teaches coherence of mind, how to exist in the present, to live each moment in the here and now in a dignified way. Engaging in yoga practice is seen as an alternative mindfulness practice that involves calming the mind, practicing meditation, and focusing on the present (Gordon, 2013). However, there is a lack of research evidence to support this theory.

The general purpose of this paper is to restore the essence, quality, and dynamics of leisure time, to help people to choose serious activities, such as yoga, that liberate them from anxiety and the stress of fast-paced modern lifestyles, and to help them to live with dignity in the present.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Yoga and mindfulness*

Originating in India, yoga is an ancient contemplative practice dating back over 3,500 years. It aims to relieve pain and promote physical and mental well-being (Zafeiroudi, 2021; Zafeiroudi, 2018a) and demands high levels of involvement and commitment. The word "yoga" means "unity" and is derived from the Sanskrit word "yuj", which means "to unite, to connect". This unity is described in spiritual terms as the union of individual and universal consciousness. On a practical level, yoga is a way to balance and harmonize the body, the mind, and the emotions. This is done through the techniques of asanas, pranayama, bandhas, shatkarmas, and meditation (Zafeiroudi, 2018b). In Western society, yoga tends to be synonymous with postures and is less associated with meditative practice (Ivtzan & Jegatheeswaran, 2014). Historically, however, the practice of yoga involved more than exercise; it encompassed a broader range of techniques to promote well-being and balance between mind-body functions (Zafeiroudi, 2018b). These techniques, still practiced today, are oriented towards performance, dedication, spiritual discernment, and meditation, with the aim of reducing pain and generating higher levels of environmental consciousness (Griera, 2017; Zafeiroudi et al., 2021). More than 300 million people worldwide practice yoga. These are people not content with physical exercise alone, but who seek a more holistic system of practice that engages with all aspects of human nature, while improving strength, vitality, spirituality, and well-being (Zafeiroudi, & Kouthouris, 2022; Zafeiroudi, 2021; Zafeiroudi, 2018a). Mindfulness interventions applied in yoga, through conscious practice, breathing, and meditation, aim to promote greater attention and awareness of experience in the present moment (Creswell, 2017).

Mindfulness can be defined as "an approach to increasing awareness of and skillfully responding to mental processes that contribute to emotional distress and maladaptive behavior" (Bishop et al., 2006). Kabat-Zinn (2015) refers to mindfulness as awareness of each moment, cultivated mindfully and specifically in the present moment, without reaction, without judgment. Mindfulness is valued as a capacity that we already possess to know what is actually happening while it is happening (Kabat-Zinn, 2015) and to perceived what is happening in various ways. Furthermore, it is a lifestyle choice that is present within schools, universities, and across social structures (Kabat-Zinn, 2014). Mindfulness gives a certain quality of attention to experiences in the present moment and has become an important means for individuals to cope with the problems of modern life. It is even seen

as a major driver of lifestyle change in Western societies, resulting in a growing number of more mindful consumers, and in products and services based on mindfulness. Langer (1992) defines mindfulness as a state of conscious awareness in which an individual is implicitly aware of the context and content of information. It is a state of openness to novelty in which the individual actively constructs categories and distinctions. Socio-cognitive awareness is a state of consciousness in which cognitive distinctions are constantly being made about objects of awareness, and the environment and the self are seen as emergent and new. Buddhist mindfulness is a popular means of cultivating positive mental health through formal practices such as meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, body scanning, and meditative walks.

Yoga offers great potential for mindfulness practice, especially when it combines regulated breathing, imagery, meditation practice, and asana sequences (Salmon et al., 2009). More specifically mindful yoga practice includes: i) sitting meditation, a predominantly cognitive practice derived from Buddhist meditation practices; ii) body scan, a physically static practice that brings attention to the body, noticing different sensations as the practitioner mentally scans downward from head to toe; iii) asana movement sequences practiced slowly and gently and without making overly physical demands on the body.

Yogic breathing is a unique method for balancing the autonomic nervous system and for influencing psychological and stress-related disorders (Cramer et al., 2018). Yoga classes can also incorporate discussion of yoga philosophy and lifestyle tips, and practitioners report reduced stress levels and greater relaxation. Therefore, treating stress is a primary reason for choosing yoga as a mind-body therapy practice (Cramer et al., 2018). In addition, slow rhythmic breathing, meditation, and relaxation techniques are designed to introduce a sense of calm, well-being, stress resistance, mental focus, and mindfulness which, in turn, reduce symptoms of depression (Witkiewitz, & Bowen, 2010).

Brunner et al. (2017) found that a six-session yoga program enhanced mindfulness scores. More specifically, the intervention program they used included: i) asanas connected with pranayama, ii) a 10-minute guided mindfulness meditation in supine rest with attention focused on the breath, iii) proper body alignment while performing asanas, and iv) traditional yogic philosophy of yamas and niyamas on and off the mat.

Several important studies have analyzed the socio-demographic characteristics of yoga and mindfulness participants. Most have failed to find significant gender differences in mindfulness-based yoga interventions (Katz et al., 2013; Witkiewitz, & Bowen 2010). Researchers suggest that more specific studies in smaller sample groups are needed to detect potential differences. Research has found that older adults report significantly more positive affect and mindfulness than younger adults (Mahlo, & Windsor, 2021). Olano et al. (2015) found that education beyond high school is significantly associated with increased engagement in mindfulness-based practices. Data related to income is scarce. A study conducted with students that assessed family income found that higher income was related to higher levels of mindfulness (Cheung, Xie, & Huang, 2020). Lower educational attainment and income appear to be associated with poor patterns and conditions of health and well-being. Data on marital status are also scarce, although Burpee and Langer (2005) report a correlation between mindfulness and marital satisfaction.

2.2 Mindfulness and yoga tourism

Mindfulness positively affect both mental and physical health, and consequently the overall quality of life and the sense of wellbeing (Fernández-Rodríguez et al., 2019; Zafeiroudi & Kouthouris, 2022). Mindfulness is a central concept of holistic wellness. Wellness tourists associate it with the concepts of rejuvenation, escape, and growth. Yoga tourism focuses on the union of body, mind, and spirit through the practice of asana techniques, meditation, and breathing techniques to strengthen the body and calm the mind, leading to spiritual awakening (Ali-Knight, & Ensor, 2017). Yoga tourism is an emerging niche market that is a subset of wellness or holistic tourism. When choosing a

destination for such holidays, participants desire self-improvement and interest through active participation in social values related to improving their quality of life (Ali-Knight, & Ensor, 2017). Kunwar and Sharma (2020) state that yoga tourism is traveling to a destination to practice yoga and other related activities that will enhance physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. It differs from mass tourism as it requires tourists to engage in intensive dedication to yoga practice (Lehto et al., 2006).

Yoga tourism is a serious leisure activity, focused on acquiring and expressing specific skills, knowledge, and experience. It supports the desires and attitudes of specific tourists who choose to engage in yoga practice on their travels for the purpose of personal growth and to enhance well-being (Bowers, & Cheer, 2017). Yoga-related travel, such as yoga retreats, incorporates opportunities for growth and transcendence, receiving spiritual knowledge and guidance, and offers career and personal benefits to the participants (Bowers, & Cheer, 2017).

In the tourism sector, mindfulness contributes to the well-being of tourists and transforms tourism experiences. The tourism industry is gradually realizing the potential of mindfulness and is attempting to harness the benefits of its impact on tourism experiences (Stankov, Filimonau, & Vujičić, 2020). According to Loureiro, Stylos, and Miranda (2020), conscious tourists are those who pay attention to the present moment (not the past or the future) and attend to the actual bodily sensations experienced in the destination in open, non-reactive, and non-judgmental ways. They are aware of their inner self, such as thoughts and feelings, and of their external experiences such as actions and environment.

Stankov et al. (2020) argue that the transformative power of awareness can be beneficial for the socio-economic and environmental problems of our global society. They also emphasize that more mindful and aware tourists can act as a web that connects, supports and nurtures the entire tourism ecosystem for the benefit of all. Murray-Swank et al.'s (2020) quantitative and qualitative data suggest that services based on three-day mindfulness-oriented yoga retreat interventions offer a promising way to address post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. They increase mindfulness skills and coping tools, and facilitate supportive connections and personal transformation between vulnerable and isolated groups.

Lehto et al. (2006) analyzed the profile and characteristics of people who chose to travel and participate in yoga retreats. Their investigation of socio-demographic characteristics adds important insights to the field of leisure and tourism organizations. Based on previous research by Ali-Knight and Ensor (2017), the following conclusion can be made regarding yoga retreats: (i) women participants outnumber men; (ii) most participants are close to middle age, with high levels of educational attainment and above average incomes, (iii) most yoga tourists practice yoga in daily life and have attended classes for more than four years; (iv) both married and single people choose yoga tourism, with small differences in participation rates; and (v) yoga retreats were combined with other leisure and sports activities, such as cycling and horse riding. In addition, a large percentage of those who choose yoga tourism do so to expand their knowledge of and experience in yoga practice and some do so to become yoga teachers (Ali-Knight, & Ensor, 2017; Lehto et al., 2006).

The provision of mindfulness services by tourism organizations can be seen as a genuine gesture of sincere care for the well-being of participants. These services also enhance consumer loyalty (Stankov et al., 2020). The process leads to tourists taking a more positive approach towards yoga retreats as serious leisure destinations (Loureiro et al., 2020).

The overall objective of this study was to strengthen understanding that yoga can be used as a mindfulness enhancement technique provided at yoga retreats, which belong in the category of serious leisure services. More specifically, this research aimed to provide data on Greek yoga retreat participants and analyze differences in mindfulness levels according to different demographic characteristics. This is a dominant issue in the wellness tourism industry and our findings may improve tailor-made yoga retreat services. The research hypotheses were:

H₁: Women have higher mindfulness scores than men.

- H2: Married people have higher mindfulness scores than single people.
 H3: People with higher income have higher mindfulness scores than people with lower income.
 H4: Older people have higher mindfulness scores than younger people.
 H5: People who participate more often in asanas have higher mindfulness scores.
 H6: People who participate more often in mediation have higher mindfulness scores.
 H7: People who participate more often in yoga philosophy have higher mindfulness scores.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Participants

The research included 203 Greek yoga retreat participants. Of these, 17.2 % were male and 82.8% were female. Slightly more than half of the participants were married (50.2%), and held a bachelor (42.8%) or a post graduate degree (36.1%). The majority were private or public sector employees (52.7%) and 29.6% earned low incomes. Among the participants, 56.2% had been practicing yoga asanas for more than four years, while only 13.8% had more than four years' experience practicing yoga meditation and 88.2% had almost no previous experience of participation in yoga philosophy practices. Furthermore, 19% of participants were certified yoga teachers, and 68% intended to become certified yoga teachers in the future. The demographic characteristics of participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

	n	%		n	%
Gender			Age		
Male	35	17.2	18-29	43	21.2
Female	168	82.8	30-39	42	20.7
Family			40-49	63	31.0
Married	102	50.2	>50	55	27.1
Single	101	49.8	History of Asana		
Education			< 1 year	54	26.6
Secondary	43	21.1	1-4 years	35	17.2
Higher	87	42.8	>4 years	114	56.2
Post Graduate	73	36.1	History of Meditation		
Occupation			< 1 year	115	56.7
Employees	107	52.7	1-4 years	60	29.6
Own business	47	23.2	>4 years	28	13.8
Unemployed	30	14.8	History of Philosophy		
Retired	19	9.3	< 1 year	179	88.2
Income			1-4 years	15	7.4
Low	60	29.6	>4 years	9	4.4
High	143	70.4			

3.2 Procedure

Researchers distributed 212 questionnaires in the Cyclades islands and on mainland Greece. Of these, 203 were returned, with a response rate of 96%. Participants completed their questionnaires using a pencil and paper in the presence of the researchers. Written permission was requested from the organizers of twelve yoga retreats from June to October 2021. Four retreats did not wish to participate.

3.3 Research instrument

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale consists of 15 items used to evaluate mindfulness. According to Brown and Ryan (2003), the scale measures dispositional mindfulness (e.g., “I rush through activities without being really attentive to them” and “I drive places on ‘automatic pilot’ and then wonder why I went there”). A Greek translation of the Mantzios, Wilson and Giannou scale (2015) was used and psychometrics were successfully tested. Participants reported how often they believed they experienced each of the 15 items according to a 4-point Likert scale from “almost always” to “almost never”. Higher average total scores reflected greater levels of mindfulness. The internal consistency reliability of the entire scale was .86, which was satisfactory. In addition, as the scale was expressed by a single-factor, the 15 items were computed into a single variable representing total mindfulness which was used in statistical analysis ($M=2,36$, $SD=.62$, $min=1,07$, $max=3,80$). Data were also collected regarding: i) history of participation in asanas, ii) history of participation in meditation, and iii) history of participation in yoga philosophy courses. Number of years participation in asanas, meditation, and philosophy were evaluated on a three-level scale ($1 = < 1$ year, $2 = 1-4$ years, $3 = >4$ years). Scores are represented in Table 1.

4. Results

4.1 Sex, marital status, income and differences in levels of mindfulness

The first hypothesis was not supported as no significant statistical differences in mindfulness were found between male and female participants. According to the second hypothesis, an independent sample *t*-test was conducted to investigate differences in mindfulness between single and married participants and statistically significant differences were found ($t_{(197)} = 2.66$, $p < .01$). Married participants scored significantly higher on mindfulness than single participants. According to the third hypothesis, an additional independent sample *t*-test was conducted to investigate differences in mindfulness between low- and high-income participants. Statistically significant differences were found ($t_{(197)} = -2.29$, $p < .05$), as high-income participants scored significantly higher for mindfulness than low-income participants (Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic differences and mindfulness

Mindfulness	Sex		Marital status		Income	
	Men M/SD	Women M/SD	Married M/SD	Single M/SD	Low- M/SD	High M/SD
	2.46 / .63	2.34 / .62	2.48 / .66	2.25 / .55	2.21 / .58	2.43 / .62
t = .956, p = n.s		t = 2.66, p < 0.01		t = -2.29, p < 0.05		

4.2 Age subgroup differences in levels of mindfulness

The fourth hypothesis was tested by analyzing the variation in mindfulness between the four age subgroups (18–29, 30–39, 40–49, & >50). The analysis revealed significant effects for mindfulness ($F_{(3,195)} = 5.05$, $p < .01$). A post-hoc analysis (Sheffe’s) revealed that the 40–49-year subgroup scored significantly higher than the other subgroups. ANOVA analysis scores are presented in Table 3.

4.3 Differences in levels of mindfulness between history of asanas, meditation and philosophy subgroups

With regard to the fifth hypothesis, an analysis of variance showed no statistically significant differences in levels of mindfulness between asana subgroups ($F = .986$, $p = ns$). According to the sixth

and seventh hypothesis, analysis of variance revealed significant effects for mindfulness between meditation ($F_{(3,195)} = 5.17, p < .01$) and philosophy ($F_{(3,198)} = 4.47, p < .05$) subgroups. Post-hoc analysis (Sheffe's) revealed that those who had a meditation and philosophy history of greater than four years scored significantly higher than the other meditation subgroups. ANOVA analysis scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Mindfulness differences within age, historic asana and meditation years

Age groups	M/SD	Meditation	M/SD	Philosophy	M/SD
i) 18-29 (n 43)	2.15/.48	i) <1 year (n 112)	2.33/.59	i) <1 year (n 15)	2.36/.60
ii) 30-39 (n 42)	2.20/.56	ii) 1-4 years (n 59)	2.26/.64	ii) 1-4 years (n 175)	2.12/.79
iii) 40-49 (n 61)	2.53/.55	iii) >4 years (n 28)	2.70/.62	iii) >4 years (n 9)	2.88/.37
iv) 50+ (n 53)	2.48/.76				
F= 5.05, p< 0.01 *1-3 & *3-4, p< 0.1		F= 5.17, p< 0.01 *1-3 & *2-3, p< 0.1		F= 4.47, p< 0.05 *1-3 & *2-3, p< 0.5	

5. Discussion

The global economic situation has put additional pressure on the psychosomatic health of people who seek new ways to relax and rejuvenate. Inspired by the above factors, the tourism sector offers the model of yoga tourism as part of the general model of wellness and wellbeing tourism. People seek remarkable experiences in their leisure time, and yoga retreat tourists constructively utilize their free time through the practice of yoga, and organize their overall travel experience around this. Through yoga, the mind is trained to reach a state of deep awareness of all of existence, thus enhancing the practitioner's consciousness. Tourists seek products, services, and experiences that help them to achieve desired states while on holiday and develop healthy habits and wellness by balancing body, mind, and spirit. Wellness is associated with prevention and health, while well-being is associated with the concept of happiness. Mindfulness plays an important role in improving wellbeing and mental wellness, as it is the ability to know what is actually happening while it is happening. Yoga retreats provide a means for participants to practice mindfulness that brings them closer to well-being. The data analysis partially supports the study's hypotheses.

With regard to the first hypothesis, no significant differences in mindfulness were found between the two genders. However, it is interesting to note that, according to the descriptive characteristics of the survey, and in line with the findings of many other studies (Ali-Knight, & Ensor, 2017; Bowers, & Cheer, 2017; Lehto et al., 2006), the majority of participants were female.

The second hypothesis was supported by results that showed that married participants had significantly higher mindfulness levels than single participants. The results confirm the findings of other research that suggests that couples tend to marry people with similar interests and habits (Burpee, & Langer, 2005). This tends to reduce conflict and differences between couples which, in turn, increases levels of calmness and mindfulness. In contrast, single participants may still be in the process of searching for a suitable mate, which creates more stress and anxiety.

The third hypothesis was also supported, showing that people with higher-than-average income choose to participate in yoga retreats, as evidenced in previous research. People with higher incomes seem to have the financial ability to seek the leisure time pleasure and satisfaction that yoga retreats provide. Furthermore, although research in recent years has examined well-being as a form of personal growth in multiple areas of an individual's life (Adler, & Seligman, 2016), the results of this study on increased awareness is consistent with earlier research that focused on the influence of income on well-being. This study also found no differences related to educational attainment. This may be due to the relatively small sample size or to education in general, which has increased awareness and interest in physical health, mental health, and wellbeing. More extensive research is needed to further explore the role of marital status and income. This research also confirmed results

of previous studies with regard to age, thus confirming the fourth hypothesis. Most participants belonged to the middle-aged subgroup and above. Focusing on the present moment seems to be an important priority for those in middle age who tend to set more personal goals centered on peace and relaxation, confirming the findings of previous research (Mahlo, & Windsor, 2021).

Finally, the fifth, sixth and seventh hypotheses presented statistical results that can be applied to the design of future yoga retreats. The results also show that individuals who have practiced yoga, including meditative and philosophical practices, for a period of more than four years, expressed higher levels of consciousness than those who only engaged in physical practices (asana). However, as already stated in the literature review, in order to enhance mindfulness, slow-flow asanas should be combined with breathing- and philosophy-based practices. This can be explained by the manner in which yoga is taught. In Greece, yoga is regarded more as a means of physical exercise (a physical process) that incorporates elements of fitness training. This changes the essence and purpose of traditional yoga practice. In addition, the combination of breathing techniques and philosophy are often lacking (Zafeiroudi, 2018b). This is confirmed by an analysis of the descriptive and demographic data which found that, although most participants were engaged in yoga practice in their daily lives, their experiences of meditative practice were lower and their experiences of philosophical practice were almost non-existent.

The results of the study show that participation in yoga practice increases mindfulness; this is evident from the high proportion of participants who practice yoga in their daily lives. Yoga is an activity that affects cognitive, emotional, and experiential processes, as well as mindfulness. That it is chosen by older people in their leisure time and in their daily lives is evidence that this demographic chooses it not just for fun but for deeper reasons related to personal development. Furthermore, yoga teachers participate in yoga retreats with the desire to expand their knowledge and experience. Participants' intentions to attend educational yoga retreats in the future suggests that they connect the benefits of the yoga retreat experience with professionalism. In other words, yoga is an activity that can be classified as a serious leisure activity with deep involvement and multi-level long-term benefits. Participation for at least three years indicates a high level of commitment to yoga. This indicates that long-term yoga participants seek spiritual quality and mental peace. Similarly, serious recreationists eager to continually challenge themselves in their favorite recreational activities seek to enhance their self-worth and self-actualization. As yoga tourism has grown all over the world in recent years, it is becoming the tourism activity of choice for many. Participating in yoga retreats is a journey of the self with the ability to transform physical, psychological, spiritual, and social awareness and is a catalyst for the development of the individual and society.

In addition, meditative mindfulness provides a framework for understanding deeper engagement and positive psychological and physical outcomes in nature-based tourism contexts such as yoga retreats. Most yoga retreats are situated in areas of natural beauty, often located close to green places and the sea. Such locations provide opportunities for participants to develop mindfulness while connecting with the destination and with nature, and developing an interest in green sustainability (Zafeiroudi et al, 2021; Zafeiroudi, 2020). In addition, contact with natural landscapes during yoga retreats creates strong memories and images that may encourage participants to return to those same locations in the future. This is an important and high-value element for the development of wellness tourism in countries such as Greece which have an abundance of idyllic and beautiful natural landscapes.

Active living offers a major contribution to the physical and mental health of individuals, as well as to community wellbeing (Kouthouris et al., 2021). For tourists, yoga retreats create a meditative mindfulness experience that calms the mind and provides intrinsic satisfaction. Yoga tourism participants report emotional benefits associated with spontaneous feelings of peace and emotional balance. This form of tourism is associated with calmness, joy, relaxation, and stress release and has been described as mental ease (Lynn et al., 2017). For tourism operators, meditative mindfulness services provide opportunities for the provision of the mental and spiritual experiences that customers seek, signaling the competitive advantage of yoga retreats in Greece. Customers'

experiences influence their motivation and need to participate in leisure activities and centers (Zafeiroudi, & Kouthouris, 2020).

Mindfulness-driven tourism has the potential to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry. Adopting the practice of mindfulness in the tourism sector can help to overcome the problems created for the tourism industry by the COVID-19 pandemic. In times of crisis, solidarity, altruism, and compassion emerge as superior collective values. In line with this, and given that wellness tourism is associated with disease prevention, quality of life enhancement, and well-being with happiness (Dillette et al., 2021), mindfulness-driven tourism and yoga can improve the well-being and sustainability of tourists as the COVID-19 pandemic recedes.

6. Conclusion

This study provides important insights for understanding the profile of yoga retreat participants in Greece. Yoga retreat and wellness tourism organizers can focus on the different benefits of somatic practices and meditation to successfully segment and target their audience and develop niche travel markets by positioning themselves in the growing special interest tourism market. Yoga tourism managers are advised to select lower priced hotels to reduce participation costs and thus increase participation among lower income tourists. In addition, yoga retreats could be included in social tourism programs so that all citizens can enjoy the benefits of mindfulness and yoga.

Mindfulness can be learned and, therefore, become part of one's life, integrated into daily activities and even into vacation time. Yoga is considered a unique and personal journey that can become a complete lifestyle involving continuous learning and self-exploration. It is a journey that offers numerous social and spiritual benefits to those who choose to become heavily involved in the social world of yoga tourism. In conclusion, yoga is a serious leisure activity and mindfulness-driven yoga tourism can provide similar services to improve the well-being and sustainability of tourists, which is essential, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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