

# Wellbeing as Destination Architecture

➤ Can wellness reshape  
the way we design  
hospitality and the  
travel experience?

# ↗ Wellness is a destination, not an amenity

For centuries, every culture has had its own way of relating to the body, to time, and to the need for regeneration. The Romans had their thermal baths, the Japanese their *onsen*, Nordic cultures their saunas, and the ancient Egyptians their purification rituals along the Nile. Each, in its own way, understood that **wellbeing is not a luxury, but a fundamental human need**. Then came modernity, and that understanding became fragmented. Body and mind were separated. Self-care became a service, and that service became a department within the hotel - confined to a basement floor and available by appointment.

Today, something has come back together. **Wellbeing has returned to the center** - not as a trend, but as a deep-seated priority for millions of people who have stopped postponing self-care until a more convenient time. These people travel, and when they do, they are looking for something specific: **places that can support that practice**, rather than simply showcase it. Travel has become a privileged context in which wellbeing can be intensified, deepened, and transformed.

This shift has profound implications for those who design the destinations these travelers seek out. It means **rethinking the very logic** through which a place is conceived and built, **rather than simply adding a spa to the program**. This paper is written from that perspective.

## Written by:

Veronica Dossi, Strategist & Experience Designer - Il Prisma



## ➤ A transformation on a global scale. The numbers behind a growing desire

A few figures help illustrate the scale of what is happening. The global wellness economy is now worth \$6.8 trillion - more than IT, tourism, and sports combined - and is growing at nearly twice the rate of global GDP. Wellness tourism surpassed \$900 billion in 2025, with more than 1.2 billion wellness-driven trips taken in a single year. Wellness real estate is growing at nearly 20% annually, making it the most dynamic sector within the broader wellness economy. Further confirming this trajectory, recent research among luxury consumers in France, the UK, and the US shows that 60% intend to increase their spending on wellness over the next twelve months: not a vague aspiration, but a clear spending priority already shaping how budgets are allocated.

But numbers alone reveal little about what is driving this growth. Behind it lies something more profound: a shift in how people think about time, health, and experience. Travel has become a privileged context for

investing in one's life, rather than taking a break from it. The latest research shows that younger generations - those between the ages of twenty and forty - account for more than 40% of global wellness spending, despite representing less than a third of the adult population. They see wellbeing as an everyday practice, not an occasional luxury.

Destinations that can respond to this desire - with credible experiences, rooted in place and designed with depth - are redefining competition in global tourism. Those that fail to do so, or simply add wellness as a decorative layer to an otherwise unchanged offering, are rapidly losing relevance.

# ➤ The new traveler: from tourist to traveler on a journey

Who is today's wellness traveler? Someone who has integrated wellbeing into their way of life and chooses destinations partly for their ability to support and deepen that practice - not someone who visits a spa for the weekend, or simply adds a massage at the end of a beach holiday. They arrive informed. They have already researched the programs, assessed the expertise, and reviewed the protocols. They can spot generic wellness from a distance - and dismiss it.

What they are looking for is something they rarely find: an experience with its own internal coherence, its own language, and genuine roots in the place. They seek experiences led by qualified professionals, capable of creating benefits that last well beyond the journey itself. For this traveler, the journey does not begin at check-in, nor does it end at check-out.



Beach Club Egypt - Il Prisma.



# ➤ Four emerging traveler profiles

The **Longevity Seeker** measures quality of life in terms of healthspan, not chronological age. They are not simply interested in ageing well: they want to live fully for as long as possible, and they know this requires active investment rather than luck. They seek **diagnostic programs, preventive protocols, and biohacking experiences**. What is most striking is that this is no longer the preserve of people over fifty: younger generations are among the first to embrace it, with a sense of urgency and awareness that previous generations did not have at the same age.

The **Elemental Nomad** wants to get outside. They want fewer screens, a slower pace, and something physical and real to reconnect with. Contact with the elements - sun, water, earth, wind - is not a romantic extra, but a **physiological need that urban life has constrained**. Forest bathing, desert wellness, sunrise movement sessions, open-water immersion: this traveler seeks experiences in which nature is not simply a backdrop, but **an active agent of healing**.

The **Connected Traveller** carries a form of hunger that the pandemic made more visible, but which was already there: the need for meaningful connection has become a **health priority**, not merely a social desire. What this traveler seeks is not the generic socializing of a cocktail party, but **shared ritual**. A communal sauna, a collective ceremony, a group workshop, a nighttime gathering around the fire. It is worth noting that this profile is currently found predominantly among Millennials and Gen X. The latest research suggests that Gen Z, by contrast, tends to integrate wellness into everyday life closer to home rather than seeking it through travel, favoring regular local rituals over destination experiences. For hospitality operators and designers, the core target for wellness travel remains **people in their thirties to fifties**.

The **Inner Pilgrim** is perhaps the profile that best reflects our time. **Sleep** has become the **number-one priority** across all age groups, while younger generations report significantly higher levels of stress than the overall average. This traveler seeks experiences that address needs that pharmacology and psychotherapy alone may not fully resolve: **meditation, breathwork, sound healing, grounding practices**, and connection with natural cycles. They are looking for tools to help them navigate the world - not a way to escape it.



## ↗ Five trends reshaping demand

Five key trends are shaping the expectations of today's wellness traveler. The first is the rediscovery of **social connection as a health practice**. After years of isolation, loneliness has become one of the most widely documented threats to longevity. The answer is not generic social interaction, but shared ritual: communal saunas, collective ceremonies, group workshops, nighttime gatherings around the fire. Wellness becomes a collective rather than solitary experience.

The second is a return to **spiritual and ritual practices**. After years of technology-driven wellness, travelers are turning back to what technology cannot replicate: **lunar cycles** as a guide for treatments, solstice ceremonies, **sound healing**, nighttime forest bathing, and a sense of cosmic connection through astronomy. This is not nostalgia, but a search for meaning that purely functional solutions cannot fulfill.

The third is immersion in nature as an intentional therapeutic practice. Nature is no longer simply the backdrop to a holiday, but an active agent of healing. Thirty-five percent of American travelers planned nature-immersion experiences for 2026: forest bathing, desert wellness, seawater therapies, and sunrise movement sessions. Nature is no longer the setting: it is the protocol.

The fourth concerns mental health and sleep, which have become leading priorities across all age groups. Demand for experiences designed to address these needs - meditation, breathwork, sound healing, and grounding practices - is growing at double-digit rates each year. Sleep, in particular, is no longer seen simply as a biological necessity: it has become something to nurture, study, and design for.

The fifth is personalization as a baseline expectation. Today's wellness traveler no longer accepts a standardized experience: they expect the experience to understand who they are, what they are looking for, and how they feel. Artificial intelligence has made this expectation technically achievable through pre-arrival assessments, smart tracking, and adaptive systems. Yet the deepest form of personalization remains human: the therapist who listens, the program that adapts, the relationship that continues beyond the stay.



Beach Club Egypt - Il Prisma.

# ➤ Impact on hospitality

## From trend to design principle

Wellness has evolved through three distinct phases in the hospitality industry. **First**, it was an amenity: the spa as an additional service, present but not central to the overall experience. **Then**, it became a differentiator: a positioning tool used to stand out from competitors. **Today**, it has become a paradigm: the underlying logic through which the entire experience is conceived. For those designing hospitality environments today, wellness must be integrated as a generative principle from the very beginning. The following sections interpret major shifts in demand as **direct design implications**: every transformation in the way people pursue wellbeing has a specific consequence for how places should be conceived.



Beach Club Egypt - Il Prisma



## The desire for wholeness: from offering to system

Travelers are no longer looking for an isolated treatment: they seek an **experience with its own internal coherence**, a recognizable philosophy that runs through every moment of their stay. The design implication is radical: **the spa as a standalone department is already becoming obsolete**. What replaces it is an **integrated ecosystem** in which every element of the property - spaces, food, programming, and connections with the local area - contributes to a unified wellbeing experience. Properties such as Six Senses, SIRO Hotels, and Aman Resorts have already redefined their models in this direction, building identities around wellness that cannot be replicated through superficial additions.

## The need for connection: designing for shared rituals

Loneliness is now recognized as one of the most widely documented **negative predictors of long-term health**. Recent research shows that **community is the third-highest priority for luxury travelers** when it comes to wellness experiences. For designers, this translates into a concrete question: **which spaces within a property make genuine connection possible?** The social sauna, communal table, collective ritual, or program designed around a group: these are not optional extras, but infrastructure. The resort model that isolates guests within private bubbles is giving way to one that **creates the conditions for shared experiences** - without sacrificing privacy, but with an understanding of when and where to encourage connection.

## The search for an authentic sense of place: local resources as design

The more global the wellness industry becomes, the more informed travelers reject experiences that could exist anywhere. Medicinal plants native to a particular region, water from a local spring, techniques passed down through a specific culture, the natural cycles of a particular latitude: **geographical and cultural context is not the backdrop to the experience - it is the experience itself.** For designers, this means that **researching the resources of a place becomes the first act of design**, rather than a storytelling exercise added later. The **Blue Zones** framework is one example of this principle in practice: destinations build their wellness identity around documented local characteristics and translate them into a hospitality offering. Hyatt has already opened what is described as the world's first official Blue Zones retreat in Costa Rica, putting this principle into practice at destination scale.

## Personalization as an expectation: balancing technology and human connection

Today's wellness traveler expects the experience to understand who they are, what they are looking for, and how they feel. Technology has made this expectation achievable. Yet this is where an important tension emerges: **the demand for personalization coexists with growing distrust of systems that handle personal data.** The answer is not to abandon technology, but to use it as a tool in the hands of professionals: **data informs; people interpret and decide.** Six Senses London places this principle at the heart of its model: medical-grade assessments on arrival, a biohacking lounge, and circadian playlists, always supported by a professional who translates data into a personalized relationship. SIRO Hotels builds its entire experience around qualified trainers, recovery specialists, and nutritionists who use technology as a support rather than a substitute. **The most enduring form of personalization is still the one built through human connection.**



Spa in Egypt - Il Prisma.



Spa in Egypt - Il Prisma.

## Architecture as care: every design choice has an impact

Research into **salutogenic environments** has produced a substantial body of evidence in recent years: spaces have physically measurable effects on the people who inhabit them. **Biophilic materials, circadian lighting, carefully designed acoustics, and visual connections with nature** - every choice can generate real physiological effects. Morning light entering a room, the texture of the floor beneath bare feet, the sound of water in a courtyard, the contrast between raw materials and smooth surfaces: none of this is simply scenography. It is therapeutic. **The designer's work is, quite literally, an act of care.** A space designed with this awareness does not need to declare itself therapeutic. It already is.

## Wellness as a long-term asset: value beyond the stay

Wellness is no longer simply a driver of tourism demand: it has become a **structural factor in real estate value creation**. **Branded residences** integrated with longevity programs, preventive healthcare facilities, and environments designed around health are emerging as one of the most dynamic asset classes in global real estate. In less than a decade, the number of branded residential projects has nearly tripled. For destination developers, this opens up a more ambitious design model: not simply temporary hospitality, but **permanent communities built around wellbeing**, where hospitality and residential components share infrastructure, philosophy, and a common sense of place.

# ➤ A framework for design

## Four foundational principles

The trends explored so far describe what people are looking for and how the industry is responding. **But for those designing destinations** - not just hospitality properties - the question is different: how can all of this be translated into concrete design choices? We identify four principles, not as rules to be followed in sequence, but as **simultaneous areas of focus** that work together to create a coherent outcome.



Spa in Egypt - Il Prisma.



### **The first principle is uniqueness**

A strong wellness destination builds on what exists only in that particular place, rather than replicating models that have worked elsewhere. The morphology of the landscape, hydrothermal resources, local biodiversity, healing practices rooted in local culture, the natural cycles of that latitude: these are not elements to be added to the experience; they are the foundation from which the experience should emerge. When a place succeeds in expressing this authenticity, its competitive value becomes, by definition, impossible to replicate.

### **The third principle is credibility**

As the market matures, superficial wellness is rapidly losing its appeal. Informed travelers can tell the difference between an experience designed with depth and one designed primarily to look good. They seek verifiable protocols, genuinely qualified professionals, and consistency between what is promised and what is actually experienced. Credibility cannot simply be claimed: it is built over time through alignment between intention, design, and lived experience.

### **The second principle is porosity**

A wellness destination does not end at the resort gates. The most discerning travelers seek a connection with the territory in which the property is rooted: local producers, ancestral practices, landscapes to explore, and communities to engage with. Properties conceived as ecosystems open to their surroundings build a relationship with place that no competitor can copy, because that relationship is rooted in connections that take years to develop and cannot simply be imported.

### **The fourth principle is scale**

Wellness has become a strategic priority for governments, local authorities, and destination management organizations around the world. Anyone developing a project operates within a broader ecosystem that can either support or hinder its ambitions. Understanding that context - its resources, narratives, and stakeholders - and knowing how to position a project within it is an integral part of the design process.

# ➤ Implications for designers: concept, design, programming

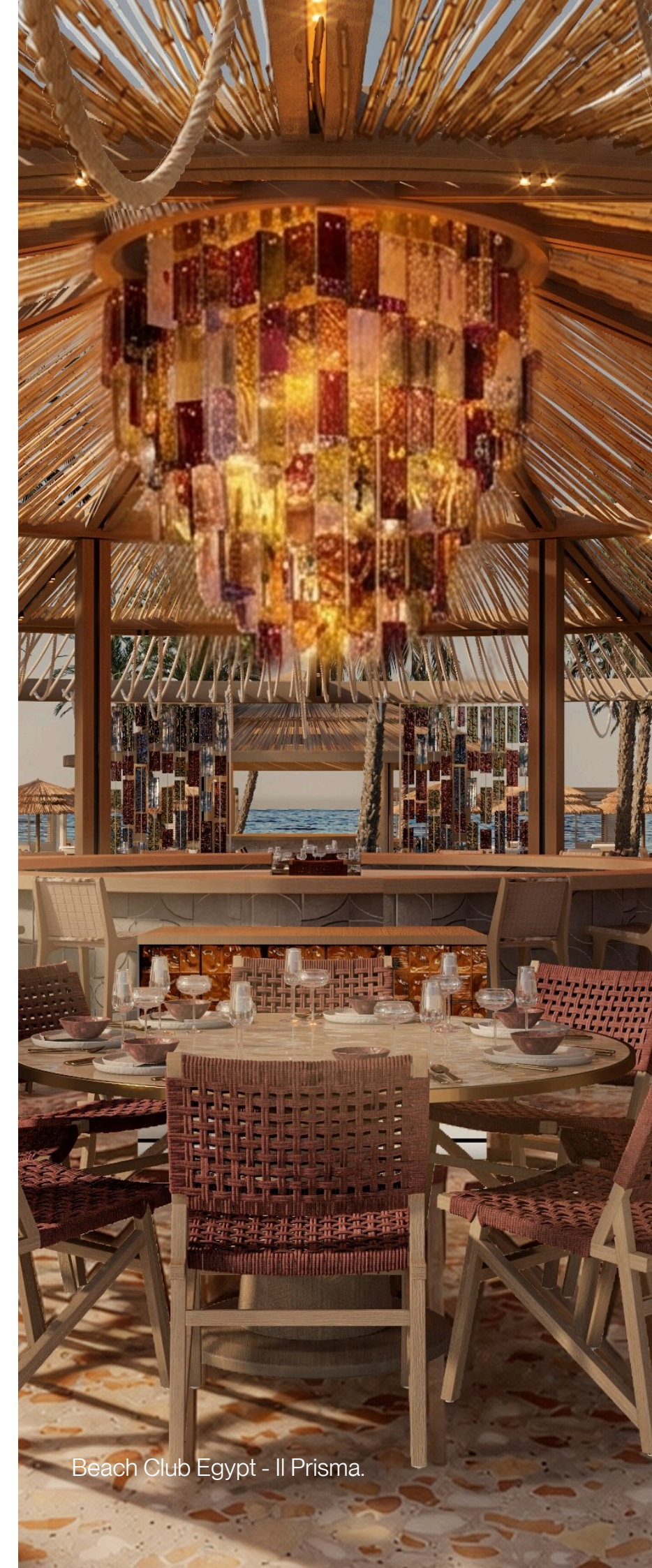
But how do we create a destination that embodies these four principles? The answer lies in an integrated approach from the very beginning of the process, even before a floor plan is drawn or a budget is discussed. **Wellness is conceived, built, and lived.**

Concept is the stage at which the project's very identity is defined. It means asking a fundamental question from the outset: **what makes this place unique**, and how can that uniqueness become the foundation of a wellbeing experience that could not exist anywhere else? Answering this requires time, research, and a willingness to be guided - and sometimes surprised - by the place itself. But it is the only way to create a distinctive positioning and, therefore, a project with a reason to endure over time. The wellness that emerges at this stage is not a communication theme: it is the underlying logic that shapes everything that follows.

Design is the stage at which that logic takes physical form. Architecture, interiors, landscape, infrastructure: everything must be conceived as an **active therapeutic system**, rather than a neutral container in which services are placed. **Recognizing this distinction is what separates architecture that generates wellbeing from architecture that merely represents it.**

Programming is the stage at which the project comes to life. A well-designed space alone is not enough: a wellness experience requires **skilled professionals, coherent rhythms, an offering that evolves over time**, and a relationship with guests that extends beyond their stay. The properties developing the most compelling models do more than offer high-quality treatments: they build a **community, a philosophy, and a distinctive way of understanding wellbeing**. This requires investment and consistency. But it creates something the market has always recognized and rewarded: authenticity.

Wellbeing is the architecture of a destination – not a marketing promise.



Beach Club Egypt - Il Prisma.



## ↗ Sources

Global Wellness Institute - Global Wellness Economy Monitor 2025. Nov. 2025

Global Wellness Institute - Country Rankings Report 2026. Jan. 2026

Global Wellness Institute - Wellness Tourism Initiative Trends for 2026. Mar. 2026

Global Wellness Institute - Wellness Communities & Real Estate Trends 2026. Apr. 2026

McKinsey & Company - Future of Wellness 2025. May 2025

WATG Advisory - Hospitality Trends 2026. Dec. 2025

EDSA / Scott LaMont - Top 10 Luxury Hospitality Design Trends 2026. Hotel Year Book, Feb. 2026

DLR Group - What's Shaping Hospitality Design Trends in 2026. Dec. 2025

Knight Frank - Branded Residence Report 2025 - 2026. 2025

Savills - Branded Residential Market Report 2025 - 2026. 2025

Research and Markets - Longevity Hotel Market Report 2026. 2026

Karla Otto x Phronesis Partners - The New Wellness Ecosystem. Feb. 2026

Grand View Research - Wellness Tourism Market Size 2025. 2025

Brittain Resorts & Hotels - Hospitality Design Trends 2026 and Beyond. Feb. 2026

## ↗ Contacts

For more information please contact:

Viola Salvetti, Business Developer - Il Prisma

[vsalvetti@ilprisma.com](mailto:vsalvetti@ilprisma.com)