

Research on the Development of Health and Wellness Tourism Brands -A Case Study on Qingjiang (Yichang) Ecological Health and Wellness Experimental Area

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Abstract: Under the background of supply-side reform, health and wellness tourism is a new industry concerned by the whole people. The development of health tourism brands is an issue worthy of discussion. Taking the ecological health and wellness experimental area of Qingjiang (Yichang) as an example, this paper analyses the characteristics of health and wellness tourism brand. Through field investigation, the favorable conditions for the establishment of health and wellness tourism brand in Qingjiang (Yichang) are put forward from three aspects: the material form, the institutional form and the spiritual form. Corresponding suggestions on brand development are made based on the current situation and the development trend of brand construction.

1. Introduction

Research on the Health and Wellness Tourism Brand in China. In January 2016, China National Tourism Administration promulgated the National Standards for Demonstration Bases of Health and Wellness Tourism, which defines health and wellness tourism as the sum of all kinds of tourism activities that help people to achieve the harmony between the nature and human beings physically and mentally through various means such as keeping fit, nutritional diet, cultivation of mind and caring for the environment. In China, the health and wellness tourism is still in its primary stage of development.

Compared with some countries with mature health and wellness tourism destinations, studies on health and wellness tourism brand in China are scarce. In 2007, Jing Wu and her colleagues proposed to the use religious culture to create "vegetarian well-being" in Xinji Village, so as to match the tourism brand of Xinji Village with its unique culture. It is the earliest paper related to the development of health and wellness tourism brand. In 2009, Ying-hua Ma summed up the categories of local health tourism products. Han-hua Du discussed how to promote health tourism brand in 2011. Now people begin to attach importance to the values and roles of health tourism, and start to deepen its connotation. In 2012, Min-yan Zhao put forward four modes: the mode for senior citizens, the mode of health management, the recreation mode as well as the popularization of science and health preservation mode. Taking Changning County of Sichuan Province as an example, his paper expounded the mode of "building a famous health preservation city with bamboo ecology in China". In the same year, Ma Rui proposed that local folk culture, food and landscape resources could be well integrated with traditional Chinese medicine.

It should be pointed out that there is still a lot of room for the research and development of health tourism brand in China. The issue should be further researched through combining case studies with theoretical analysis.

2. The Characteristics of Health and Wellness Tourism Brands

In reality, the meaning of health and wellness tourism has been generalized. It is no longer limited in tourism for senior citizens; sports tourism, cultural tourism and agricultural experience are also included. Health and wellness tourism brand has following four characteristics.

2.1 Specialized brands with local features

The brand itself is exclusive. An example is hot springs. In recent years, some artificial hot springs are created; but compared with natural hot springs, the artificial products are unsatisfactory. There are a variety of questions which need to be considered. For example, different altitudes and different contents of negative oxygen ions are suitable for different kinds of tourists; medicinal herbs grown in different regions can cure different diseases. Many countries have a tourism product system that mainly focuses on one perspective of health care. For example, Switzerland is characterized by anti-aging; Singapore and Japan are mainly focusing on physical examination and treatment; Hungary is characterized by old-age care and health care. Therefore, we should make full use of local features and accurately grasp the exclusive rights of brands.

2.2 Invisible resources of local health and wellness tourism industry

Brand has the identification function, representing a product (service) and a place. Health tourism attaches great importance to tourists' physical and psychological feelings, as well as product and service qualities and costs. Tourism consumption has the characteristics of long residence time in one place and high proportion of repeated consumption. The brands play a very important role in market development, image promotion and capital accumulation. It can rapidly increase local intangible assets and promote local tourism. Meanwhile, the value of brand can also be quantified tangibly.

2.3 Brand transformation is uncertain and has risks

In the whole life cycle of brands, with the change of market demands, there are three possibilities of brand capital development, namely growth, reduction and elimination. The growth of brands is risky. Problems in product quality and service quality, the blind expansion of brand capital and poor brand operation can increase risks in brand maintenance. These effects are difficult to evaluate, which injects uncertain factors into the evaluation of brand effectiveness.

2.4 The best form of good ecological resources allocation

Brand is not an entity, nor does it occupy space. Its significance lies in the fact that through a brand, a kind of product (service) or place can be remembered more easily. Therefore, in order to make brand "tangible", material carriers should be used. The biggest carriers of health and wellness tourism brand are the good ecological basis and the reasonable tourism resources allocation.

3. The Case Study: Brand Development of Ecological Health and Wellness Tourism in Qingjiang (Yichang)

From May 15 to 17, 2018, we investigated the Qingjiang (Yichang) ecological health and wellness experimental area. Through on-site sampling questionnaires (213 valid questionnaires collected), tourism statistics, as well as visits to scenic spots, hotels (hotels), restaurants and shops, detailed first-hand information is obtained.

3.1 Analysis of the favorable conditions for establishing health and wellness tourism brand in Qingjiang (Yichang)

1) The material form. The Qingjiang River Basin in Yichang is located at 30 degrees north latitude, with a typical monsoon climate in the mountains of Central Asia. The average temperature is 15-16 °C; the lowest temperature in January is 2-5 °C; the average frost period is 4 months; the average temperature in July is 23-28 °C. The area is abundant with fog and rainfall, with the average humidity of 80%-84%, the average precipitation of 1217.3 mm, and the average evaporation of water surface of 600 mm - 800 mm. This place is suitable for old people to live in. In the 22 years from 1997 to 2018, there were no hot days with the highest daily temperature > 35 °C in July. Spring and autumn here are moderate and comfortable.

Qingjiang River Basin is the second largest forest cover area in Hubei Province after ShenNongJia; it enjoys a variety of rare and endangered animals and plants, as well as a sparse

population and fresh air. From the aspects of geomorphology, meteorological climate, rivers and lakes, springs and waterfalls, scenic spots and historic sites, biological medicinal materials, water conservancy projects and traffic conditions, it can be said that the Qingjiang River Basin has unique advantages in convalescent environment.

The results of water quality monitoring in main tributaries, reservoirs and water sources of Qingjiang River (Yichang) show that quality of 100% water in this river is in category II; the water quality is excellent. Quality of water in 90% of the reservoir is better than category III; the water quality is good. The water quality of the sources reaches the standard rate of 100%.

2) The institutional form. Over the years, Qingjiang (Yichang) has built a national demonstration base for old-age service, two national experimental areas to protect the culture and ecology of Tujia and Miao nationalities in Wuling Mountain of southwestern Hubei Province, one famous tourist town with Chinese characteristics, two national model villages of rural tourism, seven types of old-age service institutions, five major fitness and old-age service bases, several strong tourism counties (villages) in Hubei Province, 15 demonstration sites of leisure agriculture and 36 happy farmhouses. The institutional support has formed in the area from the perspectives of old people service, tourism, culture and medicine.

3) The spiritual form. Qingjiang (Yichang) region has long historical and cultural background and rich accumulation of humanistic spirit, which is a strong spiritual support for the development of health and wellness tourism brand. There are famous myths and legends such as the Goddess of Salt Water and the King of Lin, as well as various forms of leisure and recreation, unique gourmet specialties and rich intangible cultural heritages.

3.2 Overview on the construction of health and wellness tourism brand in Qingjiang (Yichang)

Qingjiang tourism has been included in the "four major" international tourism areas recommended by Hubei Province. The Qingjiang River Basin is an important national ecological treasury and one of the three tourism economic belts in Yichang. The construction of "Qingjiang Ecological Health and Wellness Experimental Area" is a brand-new path for the green development of Qingjiang. In 2015, Yidu City published the Plan for the National Qingjiang Ecological Health and Wellness Experimental Area. It is estimated that by 2020, the experimental zones, including 192 square kilometers of expansion zone, 150 square kilometers of controlling zone and 45.5 square kilometers of core zone, will be built around the "five plates" of Dasongshan International Health City.

3.3 Development trend of health and wellness tourism in Qingjiang (Yichang)

1) Judging from the number of visitors received by the recreational tourism destination in Qingjiang (Yichang), there were only 1.1436 million tourists in 2004. Then the figure jumped to more than 3.0463 million in 2010, 4.2769 million in 2011, 12.227 million in 2016 and 14.0322 million in 2017. As it can be seen from Figure 1, the number of tourists in Qingjiang (Yichang) keeps rising.

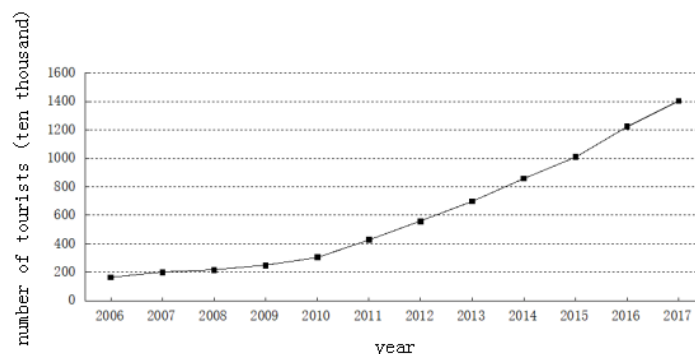


Figure 1. Diagram of tourists in Qingjiang (Yichang) (2004-2017)

2) From the perspective of tourists' psychology features, due to urbanization, industrialization,

the accelerated pace of work, the mounting work pressure and the aggravated degree of aging, problems such as sub-health, chronic diseases and mental illness are becoming more and more serious. Tourism and leisure vacation can help citizens to solve these problems, which lead to the growing demand for health keeping and recreation. The share of health and recreation tourism in the market will become larger and larger.

3) From the perspective of impacts of tourism on economy, recreational tourism involves tourism, health, pension, green agriculture, culture, science and technology, sports, information, insurance and other fields. At present, the recreational tourism in Qingjiang (Yichang) has produced radiation effects. Industries like food, beverage, accommodation, souvenirs, RV, as well as tourist tools such as battery cars and mountaineering tools, need to be expanded. According to the survey, the development of tourism can directly solve the employment of 60,000 people. In 2004, tourism income was only 337 million yuan. After 2011, the figure keeps above 2 billion yuan and increases year by year. The tourism income is considerable. (See Figure 2)

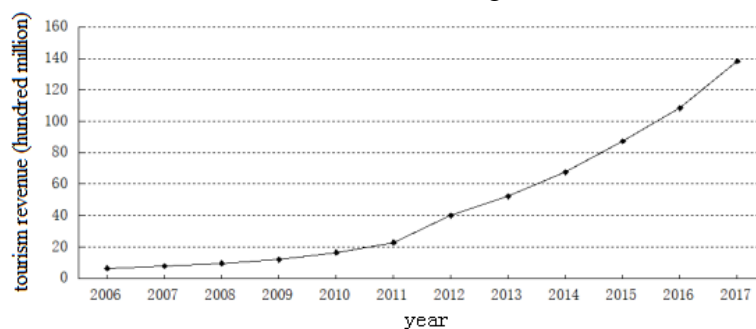


Figure 2. Diagram of tourism revenue in Qingjiang (Yichang) (2004-2017)

4) From the perspective of tourism supply side, health tourism, as a new organizational form which integrates tourism, health preservation and many other industries, is a concrete manifestation of the comprehensiveness, radiation and driving force of tourism industry; it has broad prospects. Since 2013, the State Council has issued guiding documents such as Several Opinions on Speeding up the Development of Old-age Service Industry, Several Opinions on Promoting the Development of the Health Service Industry and Opinions on Promoting the Reform and Development of Tourism. The top-level design of the health care industry has been gradually formed, which brings a significant strategic opportunity for this industry. Establishing health tourism brand is an objective need to cope with the aging population and promote the economic transformation and development.

3.4 Several suggestions

3.4.1 Creative management of brand development

Internal identification value, differentiated value, market demand, comparative advantage and feasibility value are the originality of brand. Qingjiang (Yichang) Ecological Health and Wellness Experimental Area should highlight the regional features of "ecological leisure and healthy keeping" and carry out rational and scientific allocation of resources. For example, Yidu is the first county-level city after the Yangtze River leaves the Three Gorges, and the only "100 Strong Counties and Cities of China" in the Qingjiang River Valley. The city is located in the north latitude of 30 degrees. Changyang tourism is famous all over the world. It is a county with one dam and two reservoirs, which is unique in Hubei and rare in China. It is also the best outdoor sports venue, "the hometown of Chinese folk culture and art", "the advanced counties of Chinese culture", the base of Chinese medicine, and "China's advanced counties of new rural cooperative medical care". The creative management of Qingjiang (Yichang) Health and Wellness Tourism Brand can start from here.

3.4.2 Conceptual management of brand development

The key of concept management of brand development lies in introducing bright spots and making business cards, which requires efforts in the category positioning of brand value. The

category orientation of the brand value of health and wellness tourism in Qingjiang (Yichang) mainly considers four aspects: target market, value appeal, unique value and image features. (See Table 1)

Table 1 Categories of brand value of health and wellness tourism in Qingjiang (Yichang)

Influence factor Category	Target Market	Value Appeal	Unique Value	Image Feature
Areas	Inner market of Hubei province, peripheral market of Hubei province, other domestic markets and overseas markets	health-keeping nearby, make up for the lack of resources in residence	Convenient and flexible	Back-garden of the city
Terrain	Mountainous areas, rivers and valleys, countryside, mountains, traffic lines	health keeping; strengthening physical function; travelling and entertainment	Recuperation of specific disease; Relieve fatigue; physical exercise; group meeting or gathering	Play in the Qingjiang; Have fun in Qingjiang; Keep health in Qingjiang
Age	Young man between 15-44; middle-aged between 45-59; senior citizens above 60	Sports and entertainment; Leisure; health keeping	Favorable ecology; convenient facility; good accommodation	Prolong life
Gender	Male market and female market	Healthy and pretty	Environment friendly; no pollution	body building; ; health keeping
Product Type	Nutrition diet, health care, leisure vacation, sports and entertainment	Green ecology, special food, precious medicinal materials, high medical level, safe fitness	"Slow" fashion Calm down and saving energy; do physical exercise to dredge collaterals	keeping health in natural environment

As a result, three brand concepts will be formed in Qingjiang (Yichang) Ecological Health and Wellness Experimental Area.

Concept 1: Health tourism destination in central China

Concept 2: Qingjiang Mountain and Water Resort

Concept 3: Qingjiang (Yichang) Natural Oxygen Bar and Lung-Clearing Place

Then, these conceptual values are transmitted to the audience through brand marketing, so that the tourists can correctly grasp the experiential values of brand concepts.

3.4.3 Quality management of brand development

Quality is the vitality of Qingjiang (Yichang) health and wellness tourism brand, and is the basis for the development and sustainability of brand. The key point of quality management is to create higher added value in the research and development, the design and production, as well as the marketing and circulation of brand products. For example, whether the farming experience brought by tea gardens and manors has played a role in cultivating the body and mind, returning to nature and filtering bad mood; whether the sanatorium base can provide unique services, and medicinal materials or food with health-preserving and restoring functions; whether it can build tourist corridors and carry out international bicycle competitions with low-carbon environmental protection themes and other festival activities.

4. Conclusions

Health care promotes tourism, while tourism promotes the further development of the health care industry. The development of health care industry provides important resources for tourism. This is the basis for the establishment of health and wellness tourism brand. In view of the characteristics of health and wellness tourism, the brand building should be carried out from multiple levels on the basis of the tourist market, the local conditions as well as potentials. We need to give full play to the geographical and ecological advantages, so as to increase attractiveness, strengthen standardized management and promote the effective establishment of brands. Thus, a virtuous circle pattern can be formed, in which health care and tourism can promote each other and stimulate industrial economic activities.

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