

TRAVEL • REST STOP • HEALTHY TRAVEL

Welcome to the New Era of Wellness Travel

By Samantha Leal

Published on Jan 28, 2025 at 4:40 PM



Surrounded by the sounds of streams and birds, hearing the rustle of wind through the trees, smelling fragrant flowers, and being cocooned in warm water — it's a feast for the senses at Sensei Lanai, where I find myself on a sojourn to relaxation.

After spending the day surrounded by lush gardens and relaxing in their on-site onsens (outdoor baths), I head to my coaching session, Sleep 1:1, where a Sensei Guide takes me through my routines and wellness bio tracking (I don't have any, but the resort sends one to you if you're signed up for it) to get to the heart of any sleep troubles and optimize my rest.

It's the kind of offering that those coming to Sensei Lanai expect, as wellness tourism establishes new meaning beyond detox programs and unplugged moments. "Through a data-driven, evidence-based approach to wellness, Sensei utilizes science and technology to help guests better understand their own wellbeing," says Michelle Whipple, the retreat director at Sensei Lanai, a Four Seasons Resort. "At Sensei, we like to say that we are a wellness brand first, followed by a hospitality brand — wellbeing is at the core of everything we do. Sensei offers highly personalized wellbeing retreats that help people align their intentions with their actions."

This wellbeing push is the core progression of wellness tourism. Wellness hotels and resorts have evolved significantly in recent years, redefining what it means to offer guests a holistic escape. Once dominated by detox programs and regimented schedules, wellness resorts are now embracing a broader definition of wellbeing.

According to the Global Wellness Institute, the global wellness tourism industry is predicted to be worth nearly \$9 trillion US dollars in 2028 — nearly double its size in 2019. "Wellness isn't going anywhere," says Fora CEO Henley Vazquez. "Wellness travel is a spectrum. For some, it may mean adding a new spa treatment to their trip itinerary; for others, it could mean cosmic yoga in the desert." These changes reflect the growing demand for personalized, balanced, and inclusive wellness experiences where relaxation and indulgence meet scientific innovation.

From Detox to Rest Programs (and Beyond)

While "traditional" wellness elements, like fresh-squeezed juices and yoga, remain popular, the new wave of wellness properties is redefining the landscape by offering what Vazquez calls "flexibility and meeting the traveler where they're at."

To cater to this trend, properties like Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain, a Gurney's Resort, offer activities such as guided mountain hikes and mindfulness practices, which blend rejuvenation with adventure. "The concept of wellness has evolved beyond physical health to encompass mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. Sanctuary has adapted to this evolution by offering programs that cater to all facets of wellness, from immersive spa treatments to restorative outdoor experiences and mindfulness practices," says the resort's spa director, Constance McCarthy. "We combine these elements with an unparalleled luxury experience, appealing to guests who seek both indulgence and holistic health."

Personalized Wellness Journeys

"Visitors have the freedom to tailor their wellness journey to fit their lifestyle and preferences," says McCarthy, of Sanctuary's offerings. "From private yoga classes to curated spa treatments, like our Watsu aquatic therapy, we cater to individual goals and needs, whether they are seeking relaxation, physical rejuvenation, or mental clarity. Our team works closely with guests to cultivate custom itineraries that align with their wellness vision."