



## Eco-Art Therapy Retreats: A New Venue for Enriching Wellness Tourism Experiences in Egypt

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### Abstract

The current study presents an overview of eco-art therapy, the significance of incorporating it in Egyptian retreats and its potential for enriching wellness tourism experiences. In this context, the study outlines the importance of diversifying wellness experiences to cater to the post-pandemic tourists' needs and preferences. Additionally, it highlights the crucial role of both tourism service providers and art therapists in creating innovative wellness tourism offerings. The study findings show that though standalone eco-art therapy retreats are still not prominent in the Egyptian wellness tourism market, they represent untapped niche tourism experiences that have the potential to achieve overall wellbeing for post-pandemic tourists' who seek creative, environmentally focused, transformative wellness tourism experiences, especially middle-aged working females. The study also acknowledges some limitations and calls for future research to investigate tourists' perceptions of eco-art therapy wellness experiences and evaluate tourists' satisfaction with the Egyptian retreat tourism offerings for a better understanding of retreats' future demand.

### 1. Introduction

The global tourism industry went through a transformative shift in the past few years, with the COVID-19 pandemic sparking increased interest in health, wellbeing and holistic wellness experiences (Adnan, 2024; Balcioglu, 2024; Choudhary and Qadir, 2022; Sharma *et al.*, 2021).

Wellness tourism is one of the fastest-growing niche segments within the broader tourism market (Dillette *et al.*, 2021; GWI, 2018). Prior to COVID-19, wellness tourism was already experiencing significant growth (Dillette *et al.*, 2021; Diwyarthi, 2023) with a global market size accounting for \$720 billion in 2019 at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.3 % (GWI, 2023a). The wellness tourism market size was projected to grow to \$808 billion in 2020 (GWI,

2018), however, it dropped to \$351 billion during the pandemic before gradually recovering in 2021 and 2022 due to easing travel restrictions (GWI, 2023a; McGroarty, 2024).

The global wellness tourism market was valued at \$868 billion in 2023 (GWI, 2023b) exceeding pre-pandemic market value and is projected to reach \$1.4 trillion by the year 2027 at a CAGR of 16.6 % (McGroarty, 2024).

Overall, the emergence of COVID-19 has increased the demand for wellness tourism offerings (Choudhary and Qadir, 2022) as individuals sought to recover from the stress endured during the pandemic (Jasrotia and Kour, 2023).

According to the Global Wellness Institute (2021), more than 50% of post-pandemic travellers prioritize their physical health and mental wellbeing and therefore, they mainly seek out wellness travel options. In other words, tourists are now more into relaxation, physical rejuvenation and self-connection experiences (Adnan, 2024).

Additionally, Hilton's most recent travel report stated that travellers lately seek authentic wellness travel experiences rather than traditional ones (Hilton, 2023) meaning that they prefer remote holistic retreats to traditional fitness centers and spas (Sands, 2024) which reflects the shift in post-pandemic tourists' preferences towards transformative wellness travel experiences that offer both physical and psychological benefits (Balcioglu, 2024).

As post-pandemic tourists increasingly seek transformative experiences, one of the emerging wellness trends embraced lately by many tourist destinations to cater to their needs is **art therapy retreats** that integrate artistic workshops and art-therapy sessions within their traditional wellness offerings such as yoga and meditation. Art therapy integration into wellness tourism experiences allows tourists to tap into their inner creativity, and rediscover themselves and their surroundings while encouraging relaxation and rejuvenation (GWI, 2024).

According to Expedia's 2023 travel trends report, along with the new surge of interest in holistic wellness retreats, there is a rising demand for mindful outdoor experiences as well (Expedia, 2023). Therefore, **eco-art therapy** retreats that provide nature-based healing art experiences can be a very promising new offering in wellness tourism that addresses the post-pandemic tourist needs for wellbeing, self-connection, and sustainability by merging art creativity with the healing power of engaging with nature to encourage both personal growth and environmental responsibility. Accordingly, the research question is formulated as follows:

***How can incorporating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats affect the wellness tourism experience in the Egyptian tourism market?***

## **1.1 Importance of Research**

Despite the recent rapid growth of retreat tourism in Egypt, research in this arena remains in its infant stage. Moreover, the significance of eco-art therapy retreats has been poorly tackled in literature to date. Although there has been a plethora of research on the therapeutic benefits and healing effects of both art therapy and engaging in nature, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no research has been conducted combining both disciplines within the context of wellness tourism despite the latest global wellness market trend of organizing art therapy retreats offering outdoor therapeutic experiences.

Hence, none of the existing research studies on wellness tourism identified art therapy retreats as a significant component of the wellness offerings currently available in the tourism market. Accordingly, the study at hand tries to fill in this gap by addressing eco-art therapy as a new aspect to be integrated into wellness tourism experiences in Egypt to be able to meet the diversified needs of the current tourism demand.

## 2. Literature Review

The secondary research data is driven from four different related areas, namely art therapy, nature-based therapy, retreat tourism and transformative travel studies.

### 2.1 Eco-Art Therapy: The Intersection of Art, Nature and Wellbeing

#### 2.1.1 Art Therapy

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy where certified therapists use various art media to help individuals explore their thoughts and feelings through a ‘creative therapeutic process’ (McGarry, 2018, p.10). The main concept of this kind of therapy is to utilize art as a key mode of non-verbal communication, which can be beneficial for individuals who struggle to verbalise their emotions (McGarry, 2018; Ustymenko, 2018) as art helps them express tough life situations through symbols and themes without having to use actual words (Chopra, 2020).

Therefore, art therapy is a ‘non-verbal psychotherapy method’ (Hu et al., 2021, p.7) that is used as a valuable alternative to traditional counselling treatments as it allows individuals to communicate in ways that traditional therapy cannot, making it a popular choice for mental healthcare professionals (Sharma, 2017).

The American Art Therapy Association (AATA) defines art therapy as a **“mental health profession that enriches the lives of individuals ... and communities through [integrating] active artmaking, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience [in a] psychotherapeutic relationship.”** (AATA, 2023). In other words, art therapy integrates the artmaking process with psychological foundations to gain a deeper comprehension of its participants (Chopra, 2020).

According to McGarry (2018), the process of artmaking allows individuals to better understand their emotions, and behaviours to finally achieve self-awareness. Also, Sharma (2017) contended that using art materials such as pencil, paper, colours, clay, canvas ... etc. can help individuals release their negative emotions. Similarly, Ustymenko (2018) argued that using tangible tools like paintbrushes and paper can enhance a person's sense of connection to his/her surroundings, highlighting the importance of physical interaction with art materials.

For this reason, art therapy is currently used to address a number of treatment needs, such as developing social skills, promoting emotional resilience, improving self-esteem and managing distress (AATA, 2023; Chopra, 2020). In that respect, the main goal of art therapy is to enhance individuals’ overall wellbeing (Petruzzi, 2023) by improving mood, reducing anxiety, and alleviating exhaustion (Galbraith *et al.*, 2008; Hu *et al.*, 2021; Kaimal *et al.*, 2016; Killick and Craig, 2011; Sonker and Sharma, 2024).

Several empirical studies have shown that art therapy can be effective in treating a wide range of mental disorders including anxiety, depression, addiction, post-traumatic stress,

dementia, psychosis, schizophrenia, and grief (Aletraris *et al.*, 2014; Beaumont, 2013; Deshmukh *et al.*, 2018; Gussak, 2007; Holttum *et al.*, 2021; Hu *et al.*, 2021; McMaster, 2013; Ugurlu *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, recent research suggests that participating in creative art activities significantly reduces the burden of chronic diseases (Shukla *et al.*, 2022; Stuckey and Nobel, 2010) and helps in dealing with relationship issues, abuse, eating disorders and other life challenges (Petruzzi, 2023; Rochford, 2017).

Art therapy sessions can be provided indoors in clinical settings such as hospitals, psychiatric clinics, and rehabilitation centers to treat diagnosed mental disorders (Petruzzi, 2023; Rubin, 1999), or in non-clinical settings such as art studios, community centers, museums or retreats and wellness centers to address participants overall wellbeing.

Sessions can also be held outdoors to offer its participants an opportunity to be immersed in nature's vibrant colours, sounds, aromas and textures and fully experience it through their senses like feeling the warmth of the sunlight on their faces or the texture of the ground through their bare feet (Speert, 2016). As, in contrast to indoor art therapy, being outdoors creating art in nature combines physical activity and sensory stimulation which encourages creativity and gives individuals a chance for introspection, self-expression, and self-discovery (Corazon *et al.*, 2011; Whitaker, 2010). That is why, several scholars contended the importance of integrating art therapy with nature to enhance art therapy sessions and help participants reconnect with their natural environment as well (Berger, 2016; Kopytin, 2021; Zweifel, 2022).

### **2.1.2 Nature-based Therapy**

'Nature-based Therapy' (NBT) is a therapeutic approach that uses nature as a dynamic, living setting for therapy sessions to enrich participants' therapeutic experiences (McGarry, 2018). It is founded on the notion that spending time in nature is necessary for healing and recovery (Berger and Lahad, 2013). In other words, NBT is all about engaging with one's natural environment by simply exercising outdoors or just spending time in nature (Kopytin and Rugh, 2016).

Recent studies have shown that physically engaging with nature positively impacts mental health (Jimenez *et al.*, 2021; Ningtyas *et al.*, 2023) and overall wellbeing (Koltz, 2023; McCormick, 2017; Tillmann *et al.*, 2018; Vanaken and Danckaerts, 2018) and those who spend more time in nature exhibit lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression (Bressane *et al.*, 2022; Jones *et al.*, 2016; Paredes-Céspedes *et al.*, 2024). It was also found that utilising the resources present in nature can effectively help in dealing with grief and improving concentration problems as well (Kamitsis and Simmonds, 2017; Kopytin, 2021; Laszloffy and Twist, 2019).

Accordingly, several scholars asserted the efficacy of nature-based therapy in dealing with mental health especially that utilizing natural environment in wellness interventions is a cost-effective approach (Van Heezik *et al.*, 2020).

### **2.1.3 Eco-Art Therapy**

According to McGarry (2018), integrating art therapy with nature-based therapy results in increased psychological healing which can be achieved through **eco-art therapy** an extension of traditional art therapy (Lopez-Curtis, 2024).

Eco-art therapy - also known as nature-based art therapy - is a new approach to art therapy that integrates arts and nature to benefit both humans and the environment (Pike, 2021). This innovative therapeutic method aims to accomplish wellbeing and treatment objectives for individuals, families, and communities while also promoting more sustainable lifestyles by

engaging people in expressive and creative activities related to their surroundings (Kopytin and Rugh, 2017).

According to (Pike, 2021, p.107; Selby, 2021, p.10), eco-art therapy can offer ‘high-quality therapy’ while supporting ‘sustainable practices’ and reducing both ‘financial and environmental costs’ of traditional art therapy sessions.

Eco-art therapy includes painting in nature, nature photography, land art, or creating art crafts using natural materials (Koltz, 2023; Kopytin and Rugh, 2016). In eco-art therapy sessions, participants interact with nature by finding and using natural sensory materials obtained from the surrounding environment in the artmaking process (Or and Megides, 2016; Selby, 2021) such as sand, soil, seeds, seashells, sticks, stones, leaves, twigs, clay, flowers, rocks, pinecones, ... etc. (Whitaker, 2010). Hence, eco-art therapy uses art therapy techniques within a natural setting, making use of locally available natural resources (Hughes, 2017) to create expressive, creative artwork.

Eco-art therapy sessions offer participants tangible experiences that engage all their five senses, help them explore their emotions, and strengthen their connection with nature (Speert, 2016) to instil a sense of environmental responsibility and appreciation for one's natural habitat (Scheirich, 2020; Speert, 2016).

Overall, eco-art therapy aims to increase individuals’ physical, mental and emotional wellness via the use of raw art materials, natural settings, and creative artwork processes (Pike, 2021). According to A’Court (2016), eco-art therapy participants often report positive personal healing experiences during and after the art therapy sessions held outdoors, as using sensory elements found in nature can help participants feel less stressed and anxious (Hinz, 2009).

In conclusion, eco-art therapy is an effective therapeutic approach which entails creating symbolic artworks from natural raw materials in outdoor settings (Scheirich, 2020) combining the therapeutic benefits of artmaking and nature altogether (Selby, 2021).

## **2.2 Wellness Tourism: Overview of Latest Trends**

Generally, wellness tourism includes two different types of wellness facilities which are spas and retreats. Spas mainly offer water-based relaxation and beauty treatments, while retreats focus on psychological and creative therapies (Smith, 2021). The current study is only concerned with the latter type. In other words, this study mainly focuses on wellness tourism experiences based on relaxation, stress relief and self-development in non-spa settings.

### ***2.2.1 Holistic Retreat-based Tourism***

People have a natural desire to be well, and lately, they are becoming more willing to invest in their wellbeing regardless of their age, gender or cultural background (Smith, 2021). More specifically, there has been a shift from traditional tourism experiences to more holistic wellness-focused travel (Dini and Pencarelli, 2022). Thus, creating innovative wellness tourism experiences is becoming a social need in the contemporary world and a lucrative business opportunity as well (GWI, 2018).



Accordingly, holistic retreat tourism gained wide popularity over the last decade, offering holidays for individuals not only looking to unwind from daily stress but also seeking to engage in self-development programs and activities (Smith, 2021).

Nevertheless, there is no precise definition for retreat up till now, as its meaning continues to change depending on its purpose and the societal needs it reflects (Cloutier, 2015). The term '**retreat**' is commonly understood nowadays as a period of time spent apart from one's daily routine and activities, usually for the purpose of relaxation, self-reflection or personal development (Cohen *et al.*, 2017). In other words, a retreat is taking a temporary break from everyday life to contemplate, obtain a better perspective, and develop inner strength and resilience (Cloutier, 2015).

Retreats are usually located in serene natural settings with various categories, including yoga, meditation, spiritual pilgrimage, nature/outdoor activities, art., etc. and recently, eco-retreats are becoming increasingly popular (Smith, 2021).

Retreat tourism is a subsector of wellness tourism where retreats are **centers** or **venues** with the established purpose of providing a variety of activities, practices, and therapies that balance body, mind, and spirit in tranquil, supportive environments (Kelly, 2015; Kelly and Smith, 2017).

Retreat tourism differs from traditional tourism in that it focuses on improving both physical and mental health in a calm, relaxed setting, whereas traditional tourism is mostly focused on leisure and entertainment (Piuchan, 2021). Accordingly, retreat tourism offerings usually include themed packages for several days with customized activities which can be related to creative development, relationship counselling, life coaching, stress management etc. (Smith, 2021).

According to Ashton (2018), tourists are motivated to visit retreats by a number of push factors including relaxation, escapism, improving self-esteem and enhancing physical appearance, as well as pull factors such as authentic experiences, novel environments away from home, natural settings, and calm ambience. Furthermore, the author explained that retreat visitors seek new experiences to escape their everyday routine and let go of their stress and anxiety which can be achieved through reconnecting with nature to rejuvenate and enhance overall wellbeing.

Retreat experiences tend to last beyond the holiday itself and benefit the whole body and mind with retreat organizers being professional in areas such as bodywork, nutrition, meditation, psychotherapy, and expressive creative arts (Smith, 2021).

Overall, there is no clear categorization for retreat types. However, according to Kelly and Smith (2017), retreat experiences can be categorized as follows:

- **Spiritual and religious retreats:** such as those held in monasteries, meditation centers, or temple stays.
- **Yoga retreats:** these are getaways that combine yoga with other activities like dance, pilates, meditation, or sports.
- **Health retreats:** concerned with the improvement of general health and lifestyle, including stress management, physical exercise, and nutrition.
- **Fitness retreats:** focus on sports and physical activities.
- **Mind-based retreats:** offering mindfulness, meditation, counselling, or coaching.

- **Body-Mind-Spirit retreats:** offering workshops and programs to achieve balance of psychological, mental, spiritual, and physical wellbeing altogether.
- **Miscellaneous retreats:** these retreats are located in natural settings, such as eco-retreats and desert retreats.

Whereas Cloutier (2015) classified retreat types as follows:

- **Spirituality/Religious retreats:** which provide group prayers, rituals or meditation, such as Buddhist and Hindu retreats.
- **Health/Wellness retreats:** these retreats provide wellness activities such as fitness exercises, weight-loss, detox, and yoga.
- **Outdoor/Adventure retreats:** these retreats are designed to reconnect with nature and wilderness offering activities such as fishing and hiking.
- **Personal Creativity retreats:** these retreats offer workshops for personal development, stress management, learning new skills or artistic activities such as poetry, writing, photography, pottery, music etc.
- **Leadership/Business Executives retreats:** offering workshops for career development.
- **Holistic retreats:** a type of retreats that cover all the physical, mental, emotional, social and environmental aspects of wellbeing by offering an array of wellness activities that address all these various dimensions (i.e. it does not have a special focus).

In addition to being categorized according to activities, retreats can be further classified by location (e.g., rural resorts, mountain resorts, etc.) or duration (e.g., weekend retreats, week-long retreats) (The Business Research Company, 2025).

According to the Business Research Company (2025), the global wellness retreat market has expanded considerably in recent years accounting for \$226 billion in 2024 and is expected to continue witnessing significant growth to reach \$367 billion by 2029 at a CAGR of 10%.

Generally, the current demand for retreats is mainly focused on yoga vacations, trips to remote natural locations and detoxification programs (The Retreat Company, 2024). Furthermore, women are currently dominating the wellness travel market, making up around 70% of bookings (WeTravel, 2023) and generating 79.6 % of the revenue in yoga retreats (SkyQuest, 2025) in 2023.

To further enhance retreat experiences, major global retreat market players are recently focusing on providing holistic approaches to retreats that combine all aspects of wellbeing rather than focusing on a single aspect of wellness (The Business Research Company, 2025) as holistic retreat experiences allow people to step aside from their everyday routines and traditional lifestyles and engage in activities that encourage relaxation, introspection, and personal development where yoga, meditation, creative art, culinary and healthy diets classes as well as personal development seminars are all part of holistic retreats' activities (Fu *et al.*, 2015).

Accordingly, holistic retreats are a form of personal development holiday tailored to individual needs and specifically designed to promote relaxation, creative thinking, inner transformation, and overall wellbeing (Cloutier, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2023; Smith, 2021).

To sum up, retreats provide physical and mental escape from daily routine by offering wellness experiences that focus on personal development through meditation, yoga, art, nature-based activities and special dietary programs (Heintzman, 2013). Holistic retreats provide a blend of therapies and counselling approaches to promote body, mind, and spirit harmony (Kelly

& Smith, 2017) and can positively impact those seeking to enhance their overall wellbeing (Fu et al., 2015).

### **2.2.2 Transformative Travel Experiences**

According to Ross (2010), connecting with nature, engaging in sustainable practices, and self-exploration through creative arts, yoga or group activities are all considered transformative travel experiences.

Lately, retreats are being marketed as transformational wellness tourism experiences that encourage lifestyle change and overall wellbeing (Adnan, 2024; Choudhary and Qadir, 2022; Driscoll, 2024; Jasrotia and Kour, 2023; Ongevalle, 2021; Thaker, 2023) as retreats often offer educational programs, healthy lifestyle practices, and treatments to promote personal development, reduce stress, and improve sleep quality (Cohen *et al.*, 2017).

The main motivation for attending retreats is to relax, reduce stress and improve general health (Kelly, 2015). Nevertheless, the key focus of retreat-based tourism is achieving self-development and longer-term transformation (Kelly and Smith, 2017).

Accordingly, retreats promote personal transformation through mind and body rejuvenation, relaxation, enhancing clear thinking, acquiring new skills, and improving self-identity (Heintzman, 2013; Tomljenović and Ateljevic, 2015) whereas retreat visitors seek transformation through experiencing new things (Tomljenović and Ateljevic, 2015).

Mainly retreat experience design revolves around work-life balance or stress management themes, where participants receive workshops and sessions from professional life coaches and therapists. However, sometimes transformation can occur through dealing with negative experiences or even trauma (Taylor, 2017). Therefore, some tourists attend retreats to process difficult life events including chronic/terminal illness, grief, or relationship breakups, which makes regaining joy in participants' life another goal of retreats (Heintzman, 2013; Smith, 2021).

Generally, most retreat visitors often report feeling healthier and happier than before, which suggests that retreat experiences seem to improve health issues and enhance overall wellbeing (Naidoo *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, Fu et al. (2015) highlighted the transformative potential of retreat wellness experiences in fostering long-lasting positive changes in participants' lifestyles and attitudes.

Hence, retreat visitors' transformative wellness experiences are influenced by the activities provided, the social interactions as well as the physical setting of the retreat (Fu et al., 2015). That is why, it is crucial when organizing wellness activities to consider the current lifestyle trends (Smith, 2021) such as wellbeing, mindfulness, fitness, sustainability, art therapy ... etc.

According to Tomljenović and Ateljevic (2015), participating in art therapy sessions or workshops in tourist destinations stimulates travellers' creativity, which in turn leads to self-exploration and self-reflection, improving mental health and general wellbeing. This is why; art can function as a transformational force in the context of wellness tourism used to regain life balance (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006).



### **2.2.3 Post-Pandemic Tourist Preferences**

The COVID-19 pandemic marks a new era in tourism; the 'Post-COVID Tourism era' (Skryl and Gregoric, 2022) which is characterised by a profound transformation in tourism trends due to the undeniable shift in the tourists' priorities and preferences (Thaker, 2023) which promoted tourism authorities and tourism businesses to revive the tourism industry by creating new tourist products and leisure activities depending on the evolving needs of post-pandemic tourists (Sitek, 2022).

Generally, the pandemic has brought about a new generation of tourists who seek authentic, transformative experiences (Aschauer and Egger, 2023). In other words, post-pandemic tourists are no longer interested in mere escapism, they are more into sustainable experiences, meaningful engagement and personal growth (Musich, 2023). They demand more of their travel journeys and are ever more mindful of every aspect of their travel experiences. Post-pandemic tourists prioritize safety, sustainability, rejuvenation and social responsibility (Musich, 2023; Thaker, 2023).

Moreover, post-pandemic tourists can be labelled as 'health-conscious travellers' for COVID-19 pandemic improved their self-care awareness and deepened their focus not only on their physical health but their mental and emotional wellbeing as well (Driscoll, 2024; Ongevalle, 2021) which increased their demand for retreats that offer holistic wellness experiences (Leisure Show, 2024). Accordingly, post-pandemic travellers attend retreats to unwind and restore their overall wellbeing (Naidoo *et al.*, 2023).

Retreats are niche tourism experiences that are becoming increasingly popular in the wellness business due to their tailored experiences that cater to specific preferences meaning that retreat types and themes are mainly dependent on the participants' needs (Cloutier, 2015) as retreat wellness experiences can be customized to participant's personality, or current state of mind (Smith, 2021).

Therefore, it can be concluded that creating innovative, diversified wellness tourism packages is indispensable for survival in the post-pandemic tourism market. More importantly, it is crucial to carefully consider recent lifestyle trends and post-pandemic travellers' preferences when planning wellness tourism experiences to capitalize on this niche segment's growing prospects.

## **3. Research Methodology**

This descriptive-exploratory research adopted a qualitative methodology to investigate the integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreat programs to enhance the tourist experience in the Egyptian destination.

### **3.1 Data Collection**

The primary data was derived using two qualitative methods: a) content analysis, and b) interviews.

#### **3.1.1 Content Analysis**

The qualitative content analysis was employed to explore retreat offerings in Egypt in general, and the availability of standalone eco-art therapy retreats in particular. Content from retreat websites (e.g. The Retreat Company and BookRetreats.com), social media (namely, Facebook and Instagram) and travel review sites (e.g. Trip Advisor) were analyzed.

### 3.1.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with tour operators and art therapists, to explore their perspectives, as service providers, regarding the opportunities and challenges of incorporating eco-art therapy into wellness retreat tour packages in Egypt.

The data was collected via telephone interviews that were recorded after obtaining the consent of interviewees who were involved voluntarily. Then these audio recordings were transformed into word transcripts for thematic analysis. Initially, for the purpose of assuring the semi-structured interviews' validity, a pilot study was employed with experts who provide tourist services in Egypt along with Egyptian art therapists before conducting the interviews.

### 3.2 Sampling Design

The target population for interviews was eco-art therapy service providers including, a) tour operators, who create and organise tour packages in the tourist market, and b) art therapists, the professional instructors needed for offering eco-art therapy sessions. Generally, interviewing key stakeholders of eco-art therapy retreats should provide a deeper insight into the current state and latest trends of wellness retreats in the Egyptian tourist market, addressing the perceived tourist market gaps and barriers to integrating eco-art therapy into wellness retreat programs in Egypt.

Hence, this qualitative research employed non-probability sampling, a purposive sampling technique, in which the sample of participants is selected purposively, not randomly, in relevance to the question of research. This sampling technique relies on involving professional and well-informed participants who have the expertise and can assist with the investigated phenomenon (Bekele and Ago, 2022; Etikan, 2016). In this regard, semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone with twelve tourism service providers in October and November 2024, including nine tour operators who work in the Egyptian tourism market and three Egyptian art therapists, as shown in the table below:

**Table 1: List of Interviewees**

Interviewees ID	Occupation	Participating in offering eco-art therapy activities	Participating in offering wellness retreat programs
Interviewee 1	Tour operator	No	Yes
Interviewee 2	Tour operator	No	No
Interviewee 3	Tour operator	No	No
Interviewee 4	Tour operator	No	Yes
Interviewee 5	Tour operator	No	Yes
Interviewee 6	Tour operator	No	No
Interviewee 7	Tour operator	No	No
Interviewee 8	Tour operator	No	Yes
Interviewee 9	Tour operator	Yes	Yes
Interviewee 10	Art therapist	Yes	No
Interviewee 11	Art therapist	No	No
Interviewee 12	Art therapist	Yes	No

Source: Designed by researchers.

Generally, there is no unified guiding rule for the determination of the minimum and maximum sample size in the context of adopting a qualitative research methodology via interviews (Bekele and Ago, 2022). However, many authors argued that the sample size in qualitative research is determined according to various factors including the research purpose and sample characteristics of being heterogeneous or homogeneous. For example, a large sample size is required when the sample population in qualitative research is heterogeneous, in which the research purpose, for instance, revolves around making geographical or demographic comparisons (Bryman, 2012; Kindsiko and Poltimäe, 2019).

Nevertheless, Guest et al. (2006) discussed, as cited in (Bekele & Ago, 2022, p.48), that the required sample size for qualitative research with a homogeneous sample is 6-12 interviewees, in which the research purpose is to investigate the participants' common experiences and perceptions. In the same context, they recommended a sample size of 12-20 participants for achieving variation maximization. Accordingly, the sample size of this exploratory qualitative research that adopts a purposive sampling technique with a homogeneous sample population of tourism service providers is within the acceptable range.

### **3.3 Interview Design**

The interview questions consisted of four main sections and twelve questions. First, the interview started by exploring general market insights from the perspective of tourism service providers in Egypt regarding their knowledge of wellness retreats and eco-art therapy through three questions. Then, the second dimension involved two questions about integrating eco-art therapy into wellness retreat packages in Egypt, whether it is offered in Egypt as a wellness retreat program, investigating their opinions about the effectiveness of eco-art therapy in enhancing the overall experience of wellness retreats in the Egyptian tourist destination. Afterwards, the third section of the interview focused on the requirements for offering the experience of eco-art therapy retreats in Egypt by highlighting three questions about their perspectives on the successful implementation in the Egyptian tourist market, the potential target segment, along the effective ways for incorporating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in Egypt.

Meanwhile, the interview was wrapped up by the last four questions of the fourth interview section that shed light on the tourism service providers' opinions regarding the supply side including key opportunities and challenges of integrating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in Egypt, along with addressing how to overcome challenges and exploit the Egyptian tourist destination's potentials at the aim of creating a significant tourist demand on eco-art therapy retreats in the future. Adding to that, the last question of the questionnaire was concerned with the demand side in the context of exploring the participants' perspectives, questioning the driving factors affecting the future tourist demand for eco-art therapy as a part of wellness retreat programs in Egypt.

The following table shows the interview semi-structured questions:

**Table 2: Interview Questions**

<b>1. Market insights regarding wellness retreats and eco-art therapy</b>	
<b>Q1</b>	What do you know about wellness retreats?
<b>Q2</b>	What is the effectiveness of linking the wellness tourism experience with nature?
<b>Q3</b>	What do you know about eco-art therapy?
<b>2. Integrating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats' packages in Egypt</b>	
<b>Q4</b>	Do you think eco-art therapy is integrated into wellness retreat packages in Egypt?
<b>Q5</b>	Do you think eco-art therapy would enhance the overall experience of wellness retreats?
<b>3. Requirements for offering the experience of eco-art therapy retreats in Egypt</b>	
<b>Q6</b>	How can the integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats be implemented successfully in the Egyptian tourist market?
<b>Q7</b>	What do you think about the characteristics of the target segment for eco-art therapy?
<b>Q8</b>	How can the integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats be promoted in Egypt?
Continued	
<b>4. Key opportunities and challenges of integrating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in Egypt</b>	
<b>Q9</b>	What are the potentials of Egypt as a tourist destination for integrating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats?
<b>Q10</b>	What are the key challenges facing the integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in Egypt?
<b>Q11</b>	How can stakeholders overcome these challenges?
<b>Q12</b>	What are the driving factors that would affect the future tourist demand for eco-art therapy as a part of wellness retreat programs in Egypt?

Source: Designed by researchers.

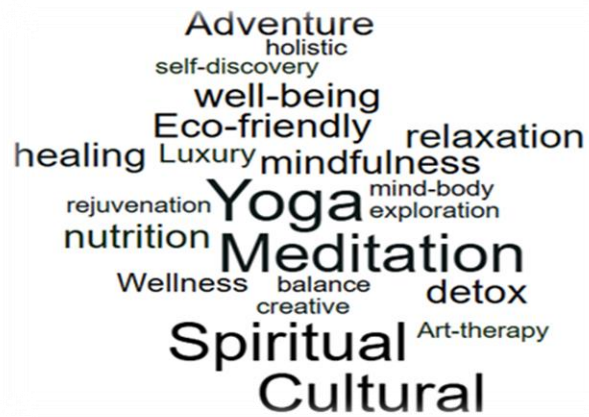
## 4. Research Findings

### 4.1 Content Analysis

First, the content analysis of retreat offerings revealed that Egypt offers a wide variety of retreats, with several types and themes designed to cater to wellness travellers' various needs. These include:

- **Yoga/Meditation Retreats:** These retreats combine yoga, and meditation with local cultural or natural experiences, such as desert settings or diving. They are often held in Nuweiba in Red Sea, South Sinai or Luxor and typically last for 6-8 days.
- **Spiritual/Cultural Retreats:** These retreats focus on ancient Egyptian spirituality and mythology by providing guided meditations in sacred sites such as the Giza Pyramids or Luxor where they combine mediation with ancient temple exploration.
- **Adventure Wellness Retreats:** These retreats combine physical activities like hiking, camel trekking, or diving with wellness practices like yoga and mindfulness. They are held in South Sinai (e.g. Mount Sinai hiking retreats), and Red Sea (e.g. Dahab diving retreats).
- **Eco-Friendly and Nature-Based Retreats:** These retreats combine wellness activities like yoga with eco-conscious activities such as marine conservation. These retreats are located in the Red Sea or Sinai Peninsula.

- **Luxury Wellness Retreats:** These retreats are tailored programs for mental health, detox, or general wellness held in luxurious settings, often with personalized services. (e.g. El Gouna wellness villas, Hurghada detox retreats or private yacht retreats in the Red Sea). These retreats target high-income individuals seeking personalized wellness experiences.



**Figure 1.1: World Cloud of Retreat Types in Egypt**

Source: Designed by researchers.

The word cloud above (**Figure 1.1**) illustrates retreat types in Egypt and their associated marketing themes (e.g. relaxation, healing, wellbeing, detox, mind-body, rejuvenation, balance ... etc.). The larger words, such as meditation, yoga, spiritual and cultural represent the most popular retreat types in the Egyptian market, whereas eco-friendly and adventure, which are written in smaller sizes, indicate that these offerings are less common, and the smallest are more niche offerings such as art therapy and luxury wellness retreats.

Generally speaking, most Egyptian retreats are set in serene natural locations such as Dahab, Nuweiba, and Luxor and frequently combine yoga and meditation with adventure activities, or cultural exploration, aiming to foster a deep connection with both nature and one-self. These retreats may also include detox programs or nutritional guidance to support physical wellness at the same time.

Second, based on insights gathered from analyzing the content of several online retreat platforms, no *eco-art therapy retreats* are currently available in Egypt, although few holistic retreats include creative activities such as artmaking or journaling as part of their wellness programs, often along with practicing yoga and meditation in natural settings, but they are not clearly marketed or branded as standalone eco-art-therapy retreats. In other words, no retreat programs focused solely on eco-art therapy were recognized which suggests that eco-art-therapy retreats are still a niche offering within the Egyptian wellness tourism sector.

Third, most of the content found regarding art-therapy in Egypt was more related to workshops (2-4 hours sessions) and services offered by local art-therapists who engage with their audience through social media - mainly Instagram and Facebook - and the term 'retreat' is rarely used and when used it is often 'one-day' or 'half-day' retreats that involve creating arts in natural settings (e.g. workshops offered by Expressive Arts Egypt Organization).



However, most recently art therapy is being integrated into Yoga retreat experiences. For example, by scanning the content of “Yoga & Retreats Egypt” a public Facebook group of more than 16500 members, a few posts appeared featuring (1-day or 2-day) yoga retreats integrating art therapy sessions within their programs in Al-'Ain al-Sokhna, Sahl Hasheesh, Ras Sedr, Fayoum, Siwa and Bahariya Oases (**Figure 2.1**). Art activities included clay modelling, sketching, painting, and photography. However, it was noticed that these are recent posts, the oldest dating back to November 2022 which means it is a relatively new trend. Also, it is worth mentioning that most retreats incorporating expressive art therapy in their programs are often ladies-only retreats.



**Figure (2.2): An example of Yoga Retreats integrating Art Therapy**

Source: “Yoga & Retreats Egypt” Facebook Public Group.

Nevertheless, the analysis resulted in only one Facebook group “Heartful-Art Retreats” - recently created in August 2024 - that is dedicated to hosting art-therapy retreat programs which makes them one of the first local organizers specialized in art-therapy wellness tourism experiences in Egypt. They have organised standalone art therapy retreats in Ismailia and Nuweiba.

Also, the analysis of Instagram content resulted in 4-day art therapy retreats being held in Nuweiba, Sinai (Figure 3) but they were organised by a psychotherapy counselling centre. By reviewing posts, the centre started hosting these standalone art therapy retreats 8 weeks earlier, however, it has been organizing in-door art therapy workshops for almost three years.



**Figure (3): Example of Standalone Art-therapy Retreat**

Source: Serenity psychotherapy centre Instagram profile.

## 4.2 Interviews Analysis

The research findings were generated based on thematic content analysis as follows:

### 4.2.1 Theme 1 – Tourist Market Insights

Wellness retreats: Generally, all participants had a general background on wellness retreats, especially when mentioning yoga retreats as a popular example, “*Yes, I have heard of yoga retreats without knowing that this type of trips is called wellness retreats*” interviewee 7 said. In the same context, interviewee 5 linked the rising popularity of wellness retreats with the need for maintaining mental health after COVID-19, “*I think it is very trendy nowadays, especially after COVID-19, the need for being in nature and turning to self is increasing by time*”. Also, interviewee 2 stated, “*Yes, I have heard of this kind of trips, it is becoming very popular*”. Moreover, all participants agreed that yoga and meditation retreats are currently the most popular retreats in Egypt. However, the unfamiliarity of the academic term “wellness retreats” among tourism service providers may lead to the need to mention a specific kind of retreat. Interviewees 4 and 8 highlighted the role of the increased awareness in Egypt regarding maintaining mental health along with the work-life pressure as being reasons behind making wellness retreats trendy and more popular. Similarly, interviewee 9 highlighted the raising awareness regarding the importance of maintaining mental health, “*Awareness of mental health is rising which makes wellness tourism activities more popular*” interviewee 9 said.

Additionally, interviewee 9 shed light on mental health, trauma healing, and work-life balance when clarifying her knowledge about wellness retreats, “*I think wellness retreats aim to work on mental health and healing traumas, helping participants to express themselves and achieving work-life balance, making them feeling good after turning to their daily routine with a different positive mindset which achieves personal transformation*”. Interviewees agreed that wellness retreats approximately last three or four days, involving sessions with life, grieving, or relationship coaches to achieve self-development and transformation which is becoming crucial

for a work-life balance. Interviewee 3 discussed that this kind of trips is organised through a few travel agencies and tour operators by setting official contracts with Gyms to arrange the three-day yoga retreats, being organizers of accommodation transportation, and any other related services.

**Tourist motivations:** All interviewees agreed that expressing feelings, stress releasing, self-development, and self-transformation are the key tourist motivations for participating in wellness retreats, emphasizing the positive role of sessions such as life coaching and grieving sessions on mental health as a part of wellness retreats. Interviewee 1 confirmed the same tourist motivation, highlighting the quietness and simplicity of the retreats' accommodations, *"Retreat participants usually prefer quiet and eco-friendly accommodations to match the retreat objectives of stress releasing along with self-discovery and development"*. On the other hand, all interviewees agreed that wellness retreats are still considered a niche market with a special interest tourist demand.

**Organizing wellness retreat programs:** It was revealed that not all the participating tour operators organise wellness retreats. They explained that they organise accommodation and transportation upon the yoga instructors' request, as interviewee 5 clarified, *"Well, we organise retreats upon the request of yoga coaches through arranging the transportation and accommodation at the destination determined by the coach"*. Confirming the same point interviewees 4 and 8, who agreed that the end-user in wellness retreats is the instructor, e.g., the yoga instructor, who predetermined the required location and accommodation of the retreat; meanwhile, the role of tour operators is arranging these packages accordingly as a group package. Similarly, interviewee 3 illustrated, *"Coaches and instructors are the clients who need a booking for a certain number of rooms at a given hotel and an arrangement of the other related services. Hence, it is an organizing of a tour package for a tourist group regardless of the activities included in this package"*. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that interviewee 9 declared that she already organises art therapy retreats along with organizing other wellness retreats, e.g., yoga retreats.

**Linking wellness tourism experience with nature:** When asking participants about their opinion towards linking nature with different activities related to the wellness tourism experience, they all confirmed its effectiveness, mentioning nature's roles in relaxing, releasing stress, activating a sense of freedom, and clearing thoughts. In this context, interviewee 9 stated, *"Definitely, nature can do a lot in releasing stress and healing traumas along with the relaxing atmosphere that can make wellness tourism activities way more effective"*. Furthermore, interviewee 3 added the effectiveness of nature in terms of escaping the daily life routine, *"Nature makes people feel comfortable and free of any responsibilities"*. Additionally, interviewee 2 stated that nature has the same effects as wellness tourism activities, *"... nature is the best healer generally, so it matches with the same goals of wellness tourism"*.

Nevertheless, interviewees 6 and 8 mentioned the tendency of many tourists nowadays towards visiting natural places that are kind of isolated or places that make them feel isolated away from work-life stress. In this respect, interviewees 4 and 8 also discussed that the natural location is the key for wellness retreats to be more effective due to nature's positive effects on mental health, which contribute eventually to self-transformation and a positive mindset, *"I think the key to wellness retreats' effectiveness is their locations that tend to be more natural and calming"* interviewee 8 claimed. In the same context, interviewee 4 said, *"People feel peace with nature,*

*and they can find their real purpose in life by focusing deeply on the simplicity of nature and its details, which would contribute to transforming their mindset and reformulating their vision towards life, coming back to their daily routine with more positivity and less stress level”.*

Eco-art therapy: When asking interviewees about eco-art therapy, it was found that all tour operators in the sample, except for interviewee 9 had no idea about eco-art therapy, “*No, I have not heard of this kind of therapy*” interviewee 6 said. In addition, interviewee 1 stated, “*... I have heard of indoor art workshops, and I think they are being offered out of the tourism context*”. The same point was confirmed by interviewee 7, “*..., no I have no idea about eco-art therapy. I know that there are workspaces for making artwork, e.g., painting, or making handmade products, for one or two hours. However, I don’t think it is included in tour packages or wellness retreats*”. Similarly, interviewees 4 and 8 had no idea about the term ‘eco-art therapy’ but they agreed on the effectiveness of traditional art therapy as a therapeutic approach in maintaining mental health, stress releasing, and achieving work-life balance, empowering people to be more expressive through artmaking. Nevertheless, interviewees 9, 10, 11, and 12, explained that natural materials and outdoor settings are the key differences between the therapeutic approach of traditional art therapy and eco-art therapy which involves a connection to nature with artmaking. Generally, they illustrated that eco-art therapy helps participants express their feelings through their artworks by using natural materials, e.g., plant fibres, clay, sand, etc.

Regarding offering eco-art therapy retreats, interviewee 9 discussed, “*We provide tour packages of art therapy three-day retreats with a group of 10 to 12 participants, collaborating with experienced art therapists to be instructors*”. She clarified that participants are encouraged in eco-art therapy retreats to make unique artwork that reflects their feelings, making a memorable wellness experience that contributes to healing from traumas, dealing with burnout, and achieving work-life balance. On the other hand, interviewee 12 highlighted her emotional experience with ‘Baheya’ Breast Cancer survivals when she provided them with an eco-art therapy session, emphasizing the effectiveness of making a memorable artwork along with nature on their emotional wellbeing, she said, “*..., they were from several categories and educational backgrounds, used colours to express their feelings through painting. It is worth mentioning that nature played a key role in the effectiveness of outdoor sessions compared to traditional indoor art therapy sessions. Participants were truly happy, and I got very emotional, I felt nature helped them along with art therapy to release their true feelings. Moreover, making artwork and going back home having their artwork is a very thoughtful memory*”.

#### **4.2.2 Theme 2 - Eco-art Therapy Wellness Retreats**

Enhancing wellness retreats’ experience: All participants agreed on the exclusion of eco-art therapy from wellness retreats’ packages in Egypt, explaining that it is still not well-known, especially in the context of the Egyptian tourism market. However, interviewees 3, 4, 7, and 8 throw light on yoga retreats to be the most popular wellness retreats in Egypt nowadays, e.g., “*No, I think it is still not integrated. I think yoga retreats are currently the most popular retreats in Egypt*” interviewee 3 claimed. Nonetheless, interviewee 9 who already organises eco-art therapy retreats claimed that they have no direct competitors, hoping that eco-art therapy retreats get more attention in the future describing it as an “*effective, creative and expressive therapy*”.

Emotional and mental wellbeing: All interviewees confirmed the positive impact of eco-art therapy in enriching the wellness retreat experience, highlighting that eco-art therapy matches

the goals of wellness retreats in terms of enhancing emotional and mental wellbeing, *“It is a very effective integration, especially that this kind of therapy has the same effect of releasing stress, self-development and personal transformation along with healing”* interviewee 2 said.

**Creativity:** The majority of interviewees emphasized the effect of integrating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in providing an innovative tourist product and encouraging creativity, which results in diversifying wellness retreats’ activities and creating tourist demand, *“I think tourist products need to be innovated regularly, integrating this type of therapy into wellness retreats would integrate the element of creativity into tour packages”* interviewee 6 said.

**Personal growth and transformation:** From the perspective of art therapists, eco-art therapy contributes to supporting personal growth through achieving self-development, encouraging creative expression with group activities, and promoting social connection among participants. Accordingly, interviewee 12 said, *“Based on my work with many participants as an art therapist, their feelings of transformation and self-development would encourage more future demand on eco-art therapy, since creating memories during eco-art therapy sessions would raise the feeling of productivity and results in making artwork that reflects their thoughts and feelings”*.

#### **4.2.3 Theme 3 - Requirements for Integration**

**Successful eco-art therapy integration:** When asking interviewees about their opinions about the successful integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats, tour operators provided different perspectives compared to art therapists in the interview sample. In this regard, tour operators highlighted the need for making official agreements with art therapists for a successful collaboration, since wellness retreats need experienced instructors and coaches to conduct sessions. For example, interviewee 5 said, *“I think cooperation with art therapists through official contracts would be beneficial for a successful integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats”*. Similarly, interviewee 9 stated, *“Wellness retreats, in general, cannot be successfully conducted without the existence of specialists or instructors. Hence, art therapists must be included, and professional contracts should be done to implement eco-art therapy retreat programs successfully”*. In the same context, interviewee 3 discussed, *“As I said before, a few numbers of tour operators started to set contracts with Gyms to reach yoga instructors for the purpose of arranging yoga retreats, so for a successful implementation of eco-art therapy retreats, I think an effective partnership should be done with art therapists themselves”*.

Furthermore, tour operators suggested integrating eco-art therapy sessions as a part of holistic wellness retreat programs at the first stage. Afterwards, when the eco-art therapy becomes more popular and participants become more motivated due to the positive effect on their mental health and self-development, their desire to attend more eco-art therapy sessions, along with their word of mouth would create a higher tourist demand for this therapeutic approach, which enables tourism service providers to arrange eco-art therapy retreats as the main theme for the retreat programs.

In this respect, interviewee 8 suggested integrating eco-art therapy into yoga retreats sessions as a part of the retreat program as an initial stage, *“Since the instructors, up till now, are the end users for tour operators to set wellness retreats, collaboration with yoga instructors should be done through agreements as a first step, integrating eco-art therapy as a part of yoga retreat*



sessions, then later on, setting partnerships with art therapists in order to provide standalone eco-art therapy wellness retreats, giving a space for this kind of therapy to gain more popularity before making it the main wellness retreat theme". Confirming the same point of view, interviewee 6 who added, *"Art therapists' clients would create a word of mouth which would eventually create tourist demand on eco-art therapy retreats"*.

Regarding the perspective of art therapists, interviewees 10 and 11 agreed on the importance of collaboration with tour operators for the successful integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats, highlighting tour operators' experience in suggesting suitable natural tourist locations that inspire relaxation and creativity, as well as, their marketing proficiency to reach the appropriate audience seeking meaningful experiences and managing other related logistics including accommodation and transportation. However, they discussed the significance of the operational requirements for a successful eco-art therapy experience in terms of the availability of local natural materials to be used in the artmaking sessions, along with flexible schedules, as well as providing opportunities for participants to express themselves freely in the context of a deeper emotional processing and group sharing.

On the contrary, interviewee 12 disagreed with the need for collaboration with tour operators or depending on travel agencies to arrange eco-art therapy retreats, mentioning the cost associated that could be excluded if art therapists arrange the wellness retreat with the tourist suppliers directly in order to avoid paying commissions, *"I think it's more beneficial to collaborate with other instructors (e.g., yoga) if it is a holistic retreat. However, I think it is more profitable to book the accommodation and transportation for the group of participants directly from the service supplier without the need to pay for a commission"* interviewee 12 explained.

On the other hand, art therapists highlighted the practical side of a successful implementation of eco-art therapy and its integration into wellness retreats, interviewee 10 and 11 shed the light on a number of practical elements to be considered for an effective eco-art therapy session on individuals' wellbeing including: a) observation of participants' emotional responses and social connections through their interactions during the session with the art materials and group members; b) evaluation of participants artwork by analyzing emotions expressed that reflects their therapeutic progress and emotional processing, *"The role of art therapists in the retreat is not merely guiding the participants to make creative and expressive art work, art therapists also need to observe the participants' emotional progress through analyzing their artworks and encouraging them to interact with the other group members for achieving social benefits and personal growth by sharing their experiences together"* interviewee 11 said; and c) collection of participants' feedback post-retreat to understand their perceived benefits and measure changes in their stress levels, *"Art therapists should gather participants' expectations pre-retreat and their feedback post-retreat for measuring the therapeutic and social outcomes"* interviewee 10 added.

The target segment: Gender, all interviewees confirmed that females would have more interest in participating in eco-art therapy retreats compared to males, justifying their opinions by the emotionally expressive nature of women and her need to release stress, *"The nature of females would need this kind of therapy due to their resilience for stress for a long period before their need for healing arises"* interviewee 2 explained. Additionally, interviewee 9 clarified how eco-art therapy retreats would contribute to women's empowerment and transformation, *"I think the target audience would be dominated by females due to their desire to express themselves,*

*through eco-art therapy they could release their thoughts and express their emotions, which would release the stress and help to empower women generally after being encouraged to be a different version of themselves through transformation process*". On the contrary, all interviewees discussed that the majority of men do not prefer to admit or acknowledge their need to release stress and enhance their mental health through wellness retreats or new kinds of therapy such as eco-art therapy. However, respondents highlighted that eco-art therapy retreats may attract men but with a low proportion relatively, *"Some males would participate in eco-art therapy retreats, but with a fewer number compared to women"* interviewee 5 said.

Age Group: participants agreed that the target audience of eco-art therapy retreats would be primarily dominated by adults above 25 years old, more specifically, the middle-aged group, ranging from 30 to 60. They mentioned some reasons behind expecting this age group, *"The relatively heavier responsibilities would make the targeted segment the middle-aged group"*, interviewee 6 claimed. Similarly, interviewee 12 added, *"Work-life pressure raises their need to escape and reconnect with themselves more wisely"*. Nevertheless, the majority of interviewees mentioned the probability of having a low proportion of younger age of participants in eco-art therapy retreats, highlighting their curiosity, need to explore new experiences, and being accompanied by their relatives to be the reasons why this younger age may participate, *"I think younger females may participate for the purpose of joining a new experience"* interviewee 4 said.

Educational background and awareness of mental health: all interviewees agreed that participants of eco-art therapy retreats have a relatively high awareness regarding the importance of maintaining good mental health and work-life balance through self-transformation. Moreover, they discussed that participants have a niche tourist demand and a special interest in wellness activities, knowing their positive impact on wellbeing. Furthermore, the majority of interviewees confirmed the positive relationship between being highly educated and having awareness regarding the significance of enhancing mental health and emotional wellbeing through wellness retreats, *"I think the target audience would be highly educated since this kind of therapy requires awareness regarding the way of healing traumas, releasing stress. Also, they have a relatively higher willingness to pay for these retreats to achieve their positive wellbeing"*, interviewee 2 clarified. Nonetheless, interviewee 12 disagreed with linking high education to the raised awareness regarding maintaining mental health and releasing stress due to the exposure of social media and its role in raising public awareness everywhere, *"Out of my practical experience as an art therapist, there is no need for participants to be well-educated since people are exposed to public and social media that contributes to raising the public awareness regarding the importance of enhancing mental health"* interviewee 12 claimed.

Social background: interviewees highlighted that a high proportion of the target segment for eco-art therapy retreats would be located in urban crowded cities, working in highly stressful jobs, with middle/high-income levels. Consequently, their need for escaping daily life stress and achieving self-transformation with a positive clear mindset is relatively higher.

Promoting the integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in the Egyptian tourist market: Marketing channels, all interviewees agreed that social media is the most effective marketing channel for promoting the integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in the Egyptian tourist destination, highlighting the huge coverage of social media and its capability to

reach different tourist market segments, which eventually would create tourist demand on this kind of therapy. For example, interviewee 7 said, *“Currently, social media is the most effective channel for marketing and promoting any new kind of tourist product or tour packages, which would help promote eco-art therapy retreats”*. Additionally, interviewee 9 noted that Instagram and Tiktok are currently more effective social media channels compared to Facebook, *“Social media, namely, Instagram and TikTok, is my key platform to promote my eco-art therapy retreats”* interviewee 9 said.

**Raising awareness:** more practically, interviewees discussed the importance of raising public awareness regarding the significance of eco-art therapy on personal wellbeing through publishing an effective marketing message via social media channels, highlighting the perceived benefits and value gained from the eco-art therapy retreats through promoting this experience as a creative, meaningful experience that contributes to maintaining mental health and achieving work-life balance, along with personal growth and self-transformation, shedding the light on the individuals’ need for stress releasing for a healthy peaceful life. In this regard, interviewee 6 said, *“Social media has the power to pave the path for promoting eco-art therapy through raising awareness and promoting this creative therapeutic approach to be integrated into wellness retreats”*. Moreover, interviewee 8 added, *“I think the key for promoting eco-art therapy to be integrated into wellness retreats is not only promoting this kind of therapy as a relaxing stress-releasing method but also to publish its various benefits on personal emotional wellbeing via social media channels, which would raise the awareness of its importance on the personal transformation and changing mindset”*.

**Motivation through real-life eco-art therapy retreats’ experiences:** interviewee 9 discussed that it is vital for promoting eco-art therapy retreats to publish motivating real-life videos about the previous participants’ experiences, highlighting past participants’ expressive artworks, positive emotions and interactions among the social group, *“I depend on including videos from previous eco-art therapy retreats with the purpose of raising awareness of the eco-art therapy effects and increasing the tourist demand on these retreats in an enjoyable attractive way regarding the vital of art therapy and how can these wellness retreats change the person’s perspective towards his purpose in life”*.

**Credibility:** The interviewees confirmed that credibility has a very effective role in the successful promotion of eco-art therapy retreats. In this respect, they shed light on the e-word of mouth and its power to provide this credibility by highlighting participants’ feedback and their positive feelings after the experience, and how far these feelings could change their mindset. Moreover, the majority of interviewees mentioned the importance of collaboration with art therapists in promotional efforts since they have their clients who would form the initial demand for eco-art therapy retreats before getting more popular. Adding to that, they are accountable which would emphasize the credibility of the tour packages, *“The collaboration between service providers to post the advertisement of eco-art therapy retreat tour package at the same time is very important as an initial stage”* interviewee 12 said. Furthermore, interviewee 9 highlighted the importance of acknowledging the expertise of art therapists and their role in offering a successful eco-art therapy retreat, *“Throwing the light on efforts of art therapists as partners is significant, highlighting their expertise would raise credibility of eco-art therapy retreats and would create more demand. This helped me a lot in gaining more market share and contributed*

to healing participants' various disorders such as anxiety and ADHD, besides achieving relaxation and stress-releasing".

#### 4.2.4 Theme 4 - Key opportunities and challenges

The Egyptian tourist destination's potential: All interviewees emphasized that Egypt has a great potential for incorporating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats, mentioning the unique inspiring nature of several Egyptian locations that suitably fit the natural requirements of eco-art therapy retreats and encourage self-expression through making creative artworks. Generally, all respondents agreed that Nuweiba and Siwa are the most suitable locations for conducting eco-art therapy sessions due to their calmness and nature, encouraging the sense of escapism from the stressful daily routine, *"I think Siwa and Nuweiba are the most suitable places for this kind of retreats since they are calm and full of natural themes"* interviewee 2 mentioned.

Additionally, they added Fayoum due to its artistic quiet environment that would encourage more creativity and expressive artworks, *"In my opinion, simplicity is the most crucial element in eco-art therapy, which could be found in Siwa, Nuweiba, and Fayoum"* interviewee 12 confirmed. Furthermore, interviewee 1 claimed that eco-art therapy would be integrated into yoga retreats at the same locations, *"We usually arrange Yoga retreats in Fayoum, Nuweiba, and Siwa. So, I think integrating eco-art therapy in wellness retreats as a part of the Yoga retreat program at the same destination would be a good start"*.

Nevertheless, six of the interviewees added Nuba for its artistic authenticity to be one of Egypt's potential locations for eco-art therapy retreats. Meanwhile, four of the interviewees added Ras Sedr due to its calmness and unpopularity, which suits the niche demand for eco-art therapy retreats, *"I think Ras Sedr can be one for Egypt's potentials since it is getting more popular nowadays, and tourists are eager to visit and know more about this destination"* interviewee 3 said. Moreover, interviewee 8 added, *"Egypt has a high potential for offering eco-art therapy retreats due to its varied natural locations. These retreats can be best-taken place in natural quiet locations such as Nuweiba, Siwa, Ras Sedr and Fayoum"*. Nonetheless, interviewee 9 stated that the current focus is on Nuweiba as the main location for eco-art therapy retreats, noting that the upcoming location would be Siwa Oasis.

Key challenges: Lack of awareness regarding maintaining mental health, all interviewees, except interviewee 12 who claimed earlier that social media raised public awareness regarding maintaining mental health, discussed that the lack of awareness regarding the significance of achieving work-life balance and releasing stress on the individual's mental health and productivity is one of the key challenges facing the integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in the Egyptian tourist destination, *"The real challenge is the awareness of eco-art therapy effectiveness on mental health and the benefits people would gain from participating in these kinds of wellness retreats"* interviewee 2 said. In the same context, interviewee 6 claimed, *"Generally, the majority of people do not take the need for maintaining their mental health seriously through following a specific therapeutic approach or having a high willingness to pay for participating in therapeutic activities"*.

The unpopularity of eco-art therapy: On the other hand, interviewees 1, 4, 5, and 8 argued that eco-art therapy is not very well-known in Egypt as a therapeutic approach that has significant impacts on self-transformation and self-development, claiming that a high proportion of people in Egypt perceive participating in art sessions as a hobby; which is consequently reflected on the



tour packages arranged by tour operators in the Egyptian tourist destination that exclude eco-art therapy from wellness retreats. In this regard, interviewee 1 stated, *“I think eco-art therapy takes place in the context of art workshops away from the tourism context”*. Confirming the same point, interviewee 8 explained, *“I think this kind of retreat is not well-known among tour operators and travel agents in Egypt, which formulates a core challenge”*.

Creating tourist demand for eco-art therapy: Interviewees 3 and 7 highlighted that eco-art therapy retreats attract special interest tourists, which makes creating a considerable tourist demand for eco-art therapy one of the challenges facing its integration into wellness retreats. At the same time, interviewees 1 and 5 argued that another challenge is that instructors have the power to create tourist demand for wellness retreats, e.g., yoga retreats, due to the dependency on instructors as the end users who in turn offer wellness retreats to their clients, while the tour operators' role is only limited to arranging the bookings of accommodation and transportations in the tourist locations that were predetermined by these instructors, *“Relying on yoga and meditation instructors for offering wellness retreats would form another challenge, meaning that they control the demand and tourist product offering”* interviewee 5 said.

Practical issues: However, from the practical perspective, interviewee 9 mentioned the weather conditions to be one of the challenges for outdoor activities to take place, such as eco-art therapy, along with the need for considering sustainability in eco-art therapy sessions. Additionally, interviewee 11 threw light on the way of measuring the effectiveness of eco-art therapy on the individual's transformation and development, *“Personal growth and healing are subjective, which requires accurate analysis of feedback”* interviewee 11 said. Furthermore, interviewee 10 noted that arranging accommodation, transportation and other related services would be challenging in the Egyptian remote areas.

Overcoming challenges: Setting targeted marketing strategies, interviewees emphasized the importance of setting targeted marketing strategies, relying primarily on social media channels, to raise awareness for both tourists and tour operators regarding the significance of maintaining mental health as well as the crucial role of eco-art therapy as a wellness activity for achieving self-transformation and personal growth, *“Challenges facing eco-art therapy integration into wellness retreats raise the need for more marketing efforts that shed light on the benefits of participating in wellness retreats on mental health”* interviewee 8 noted.

Collaboration with certified professional art therapists: interviewees agreed on the need to set partnerships between tour operators and experienced art therapists for the purpose of creating tourist demand in the niche tourism market of eco-art therapy retreats, having their clients participate, along with providing a unique, effective experience in the Egyptian tourist destination. For instance, interviewee 4 stated, *“Tour operators should start making collaborations with instructors to be the starting point and the upper hand in setting wellness retreats”*. Meanwhile, interviewee 9 added, *“Once there is a collaboration between tour operators and professional art therapists through official contracts, eco-art therapy retreats will be well-organised and highly promoted”*.

Accordingly, interviewee 7 explained, *“I think it will be challenging to create high demand for eco-art therapy, considering this type of tourism as niche tourism, unless the collaboration with art therapists is well conducted. Consequently, art therapists would raise the number of participants, having their clients participating in these retreats”*. Nevertheless, interviewee 3



highlighted the competitive advantage that would be gained out of this partnership in terms of diversifying tourist products and developing a niche tourism market in the Egyptian tourist destination from one side, and from the other side, broadening the activities of art therapists to be more creative and inspiring, transforming to the outdoor activities of eco-art therapy retreats.

Integrating eco-art therapy into holistic retreats: all interviewees agreed that eco-art therapy could gain popularity through integrating eco-art therapy sessions into the programs of holistic retreats, or more specifically yoga retreats, as the initial step before promoting eco-art therapy as the main theme for wellness retreats in the Egyptian tourist destination, *“I think tour operators need to incorporate eco-art therapy sessions as a part of yoga retreat programs first, then when it gets more popularity, eco-art therapy retreats can be offered as a separate theme”* interviewee 12 suggested. Similarly, interviewee 5 said, *“Initially, it is preferred to integrate eco-art therapy sessions as a part of yoga retreats”*.

Practical considerations for eco-art therapy integration into wellness retreats: the majority of interviewees recommended that service providers should adopt sustainable practices during eco-art therapy sessions and use eco-friendly materials in the context of considering sustainability. Additionally, interviewees emphasized the importance of flexibility when setting schedules for wellness retreat programs based on weather conditions. Moreover, for an effective eco-art therapy experience, interviewees 10, 11, and 12 highlighted the significance of ensuring that the wellness retreat meets the expectations of participants and affects their mental health positively through collecting real-time feedback.

The future tourist demand for eco-art therapy as a niche tourism: All interviewees agreed that eco-art therapy would gain more popularity in Egypt in the future which would be reflected in a higher tourist demand for eco-art therapy retreats, discussing several driving factors for creating tourist demand on eco-art therapy retreats in the Egyptian tourist destination. Nevertheless, the majority of interviewees, more specifically, tour operators, claimed that eco-art therapy retreats would have a specific market segment with a high level of education and awareness regarding enhancing mental health, making the tourist demand a special demand for niche tourism.

In this context, interviewee 7 discussed, *“Eco-art therapy retreats would be better known in the future, but I think would not have a high demand since it can be categorised as special interest tourism”*. Moreover, interviewee 2 stated, *“I think eco-art therapy retreats have a special-interest demand, its market segment has to be highly educated and aware of the effects of this therapy on their mental health, that’s why even in the future it would not gain popularity and will be considered niche tourism”*.

Raising awareness regarding mental health enhancement: interviewees discussed that the increasing individuals’ need to escape their daily routine which is full of stress, has resulted in their need for relaxation and self-development. Consequently, there is a relatively higher awareness of mental health nowadays. In this regard, interviewees 9 and 12 added that social media has contributed to raising people’s awareness of mental health enhancement. On the other hand, interviewees 10, 11, and 12 focused on mentioning the increasing awareness of the therapeutic effects of art and nature on mental health, which would encourage the future demand for eco-art therapy retreats. For example, interviewee 12 said, *“Participants’ sense of transformation and their positive feelings after expressing themselves, through painting, for example, would cause a higher future demand on eco-art therapy retreats through word-of-*

mouth”. Furthermore, interviewee 1 confirmed, *“Of course, there will be a future demand on eco-art therapy retreats in Egypt, the current needs of tourists for self-transformation, being in nature and releasing stress, would match the goal of eco-art therapy”*.

The need for meaningful unique tourist experiences: the majority of interviewees emphasized the significance of delivering unique authentic tourist experiences for tourists that positively affect their emotional wellbeing and sense of transformation, *“Currently, tourists seek experiences that enhance their mental health”* interviewee 11 stated. Moreover, interviewee 10 added, *“The increasing popularity of wellness tourism reflects the increasing need for holistic experiences that enhance mental health and encourage personal growth”*. However, interviewee 9 shed light on the exploration element and its effect on making tourists eager to join unique experiences that involve creative self-expression with the aim of exploring different kinds of activities and destinations. Nevertheless, interviewees 5 and 8 highlighted the sustainability of eco-art therapy retreats as one of the elements that would make the tourist experience meaningful and attractive to eco-conscious tourists.

The need for gaining a competitive advantage in the Egyptian tourist market: Interviewees 1, 5, 10, and 11 mentioned the rich tourist potential of Egypt as a tourist destination that appeals to eco-art therapy retreats, confirming the competitive advantage that would be gained by the service providers when arranging these wellness retreats that differentiate their offered tour packages to be more creative and meaningful. In this respect, interviewees 9 and 11 argued that it is vital to set effective marketing strategies by service providers for the purpose of creating a significant tourist demand for eco-art therapy retreats in the context of promoting those retreats in the Egyptian tourist destination.

## 5. Discussion

This section aims to answer the research question regarding incorporating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats for the purpose of enhancing the wellness tourism experience in the Egyptian tourism market.

In general, the research findings revealed that art therapy retreats are a still emerging segment within the broader Egyptian wellness retreat market. While some retreat offerings incorporate creative arts within their wellness programs, these are often integrated into broader retreat themes, such as yoga, rather than being standalone art therapy retreats which indicates a still growing interest in the therapeutic potential of creative art activities as part of holistic wellness experiences in Egypt.

Based on the research findings, standalone eco-art therapy retreats appear to be absent from the wellness retreat offerings currently available which highlights an untapped potential in the Egyptian wellness tourism market, and provides opportunities for enhancing the wellness experience in Egypt along with achieving sustainability by introducing innovative tour packages that maintain mental health and achieve self-transformation through involving natural environmentally friendly materials in all outdoor activities to cater to those who seek both creative and environmentally focused wellness experiences.

Furthermore, there is no clear categorisation for retreat types in Egypt as online retreat platforms list retreats under broad general terms such as “wellness” or “holistic” without

providing detailed distinctions between retreat types. Also, the description of available retreat offerings is often vague, and activities usually overlap making it difficult to classify them precisely. For instance, some retreats combine yoga with adventure or cultural travel, while others focus on yoga, personal development and eco-friendly activities. This implies that, while Egypt offers diverse retreat options, a clearer categorisation and more specific retreat program descriptions are needed to attract potential retreat visitors.

The research findings also revealed that wellness retreat is not well-known as a concept among tour operators in Egypt unless it is explained by giving an example of a current popular kind of retreats in Egypt, yoga retreats, which can be due to its special interest tourist demand. This is supported by the online data available by the Retreat Company (2024) that throws light on yoga vacations as the core focus of demand on retreats, with 70% of bookings being made by women according to the latest travel trends report issued by WeTravel in 2023.

The unfamiliarity of the academic term, “wellness retreats”, among tourism service providers may be because wellness retreats are being organised in Egypt by a limited number of tour operators through conducting agreements with wellness activities’ instructors, e.g., yoga coaches. Also, some travel agencies indirectly participate in arranging wellness retreats as group tour packages upon a request from instructors as end-users, making arrangements for accommodation, transportation, and any other related services in the locations that are predetermined by yoga instructors. This can form another reason behind not recognising the term “wellness retreats”

On the other hand, tourism service providers confirmed the same findings of Ongevalle (2021), Choudhary and Qadir (2022), Jasrotia and Kour (2023), Thaker (2023), Adnan (2024), and Driscoll (2024), emphasizing the COVID-19 effect on the increasing need of new tourists - the health-conscious travellers - to release stress and maintain their mental health through being in nature and participating in wellness retreats that aim to help participants express themselves, escape daily-life routine, achieve work-life balance and sense of relaxation, which leads eventually to self-transformation and self-development as discussed by Ross (2010), Cohen et al. (2017), Kelly and Smith (2017), Aschauer and Egger (2023), Musich (2023), Naidoo et al. (2023), Sands (2024) and Balcioglu (2024).

In the same context, similar to the findings of Heintzman (2013), Fu et al. (2015) and Kelly and Smith (2017), it is concluded that eco-art therapy that links nature to artmaking using natural materials can be included as a wellness activity and integrated into holistic wellness retreat programs since it achieves a positive effect on mental health through the deeper connection with nature that not only fosters creativity but also promotes emotional healing and wellbeing through the enhanced therapeutic experience. Additionally, was revealed that utilizing local natural materials in eco-art therapy sessions could contribute to achieving sustainability in the Egyptian tourist destination; which is consistent with the findings of Speert (2016), Kopytin and Rugh (2017), Scheirich (2020), Kopytin (2021), Pike (2021), Selby (2021) and Zweifel (2022) that highlighted the effectiveness of combining arts and nature through eco-art therapy on encouraging sustainable practices and creativity.

Eco-art therapy can enrich the wellness retreat experience due to its positive effects on personal growth, and emotional and mental wellbeing in the context of encouraging creative self-expression and social connection, which was confirmed by several studies including, Ashton

(2018), Kopytin (2021), Smith (2021) and Lopez-Curtis (2024). At the same time, offering eco-art therapy retreats would diversify innovative tour packages in the Egyptian tourism market with meaningful experiences. Nonetheless, eco-art therapy retreats are not recognized among tourism service providers in Egypt, which paves the path for tourism service providers in Egypt towards offering innovative trendy tour packages.

Generally, as stated by McGarry (2018), it is concluded that wellness retreats need guidance from certified instructors and coaches for conducting wellness programs, e.g., yoga coaches have to participate in yoga retreats. This collaboration contributes to guaranteeing a specific tourist demand on retreats by attracting the appropriate audience who seeks to participate in meaningful tourist experiences and would generate future tourist demand through word-of-mouth. Consequently, for the successful integration of eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in Egypt, collaborations between tour operators and art therapists in Egypt should be done via official contracts and professional deals. In this context, tour operators should offer attractive deals to wellness instructors, making them partners, not end-users.

On the other hand, it is suggested that eco-art therapy retreats can be integrated into the Egyptian tourism market as a part of holistic wellness retreat sessions as a first stage. Afterwards, eco-art therapy retreats can be arranged as the retreat's main theme (i.e., standalone wellness retreat), after gaining popularity for its positive effect on mental health and self-transformation in the context of encouraging participants to express themselves through making artwork in natural locations that inspire creativity.

Practically, some considerations should be taken into account for an effective experience of eco-art therapy retreats including, observing emotional responses of participants' interactions with the art materials and group members, analyzing participants' emotional processing through their artwork, and obtaining their feedback post-retreat regarding their stress level and sense of transformation.

In consistence with the study of WeTravel (2023), it was found that Eco-art therapy retreats generally would attract female participants with a lower proportion of male participants due to their expressive nature compared to males who tend to deny or neglect their needs for expressing their feelings and achieving work-life balance, especially with the help of a therapeutic approach. Additionally, the participants would belong to millennials (Generation Y) and Generation X; the reason why can be that both generations have more responsibilities and are exposed to work pressure compared to other generations, which raises their need to escape from daily life pressure and achieve work-life balance. Meanwhile, the curiosity of Generation Z who is eager for living new experiences can be the reason why a relatively small proportion of this generation would participate in eco-art therapy retreats in the context of accompanying their parents and relatives. Consequently, the majority of participants would be working in stressful jobs, coming from urban crowded cities, with middle and high-income levels.

Additionally, these wellness retreats would attract participants who have a relatively higher awareness regarding the significance of enhancing mental health through stress release and self-transformation, which makes this tourist segment a special-interest segment with a niche tourist demand for unique meaningful wellness experiences as discussed by Cloutier (2015). Accordingly, in the context of promoting participating in eco-art therapy retreat as a meaningful experience in the Egyptian tourist destination, marketing campaigns with an effective marketing

message should go viral through social media channels and be launched in a collaboration between tour operators and art therapists with the purpose of reaching the appropriate target audience and raising awareness of the importance of maintaining mental health through highlighting the perceived benefits of participation in such kind of retreats.

In this respect, it was found that it would be more effective to support these marketing campaigns with real-life experiences regarding participating in eco-art therapy retreats, highlighting the positive atmosphere and self-expression among group members, adding to that, displaying the feedback of participants and their post-feelings after this experience, and how their perspectives towards life have been changed. However, this finding aligns with the study of A'Court (2016), who observed the positive healing experiences reported by the majority of eco-art therapy participants during and after sessions. Additionally, the study of Fu et al. (2015) and Naidoo et al., (2023) confirmed the same result through highlighting self-transformation and positive changes in retreat participants' attitudes and perspectives through the social interactions and the retreat setting. Moreover, spotting light on the art therapists' expertise in the marketing campaigns would support the credibility of eco-art therapy retreats along with the previous marketing efforts.

Eco-art therapy retreats can be successfully introduced in the Egyptian tourism destination due to the several calming natural locations in Egypt that suit the requirements of eco-art therapy retreats. Holistic wellness retreats that include artmaking are currently offered in Nuweiba. However, they can be also held in various locations such as Siwa, encouraging a sense of escapism from daily-life pressure, Fayoum and Nuba with their inspiring artistic authenticity, along with Ras Sedr with its calmness and potential as being an emerging tourist destination that is appropriate for the niche special-interest demand on eco-art therapy retreats.

Nevertheless, there are key challenges facing the integration of eco-art therapy retreats into wellness retreats in Egypt. The exclusion of eco-art therapy from tour packages and wellness retreats offered in Egypt is because of the lack of public awareness regarding the significance of maintaining an individual's mental health and the role of art therapy sessions, as a therapeutic approach, in stress-releasing and self-expression that would lead eventually to self-transformation and individual's productivity enhancement.

Furthermore, generating a tourist demand for eco-art therapy retreats with its niche special-interest nature makes navigating the appropriate target audience challenging, especially, in the context of controlling the offered wellness retreats in Egypt by the wellness instructors, while tour operators' role is most often limited to make arrangements of accommodation, transportation, and other-related services upon a request from wellness instructors as being the end-users who require offers for group packages with predetermined locations. Additionally, some practical issues would negatively affect the wellness experience of eco-art therapy retreats, including weather conditions that can prevent outdoor activities from taking place and the accuracy of measuring tools for evaluating the effectiveness of the tourist's wellness experience post-retreats.

To overcome these challenges facing incorporating eco-art therapy into wellness retreats in Egypt, here are several managerial implications to be adopted by service providers.



First, launching marketing campaigns through social media channels including Instagram, Facebook and TikTok for the purpose of raising public awareness among tourists and tour operators regarding the significance of maintaining mental health and the role of eco-art therapy in achieving this goal in the form of wellness retreats, while throwing light on the impact of eco-art therapy retreats on achieving self-transformation and releasing stress in the context of self-expression via artmaking in nature.

Second, setting partnerships between tour operators and certified art therapists through official contracts with the aim of delivering the wellness experience effectively, along with having both parties gain a competitive advantage by offering innovative and differentiated service. Adding to that, this partnership would guarantee a specific demand in this niche tourism market, relying on the demand of art therapists' clients. Third, including eco-art therapy in holistic wellness retreat programs would contribute to eco-art therapy's popularity, so that it could be promoted as a main theme later on. However, all activities of eco-art therapy should be flexible and be subjected to change according to weather conditions. Also, these activities should depend on sustainable practices and eco-friendly materials. Furthermore, collecting participants' feedback pre- and post-the wellness experience is very crucial in evaluating the effectiveness and progress of the eco-art therapy retreat.

Eventually, it can be said that eco-art therapy retreat has the potential for future integration into wellness retreats in Egypt, specifically for the niche segment with special interests in participating in wellness experiences and maintaining mental health. This can be effectively achieved through launching awareness campaigns via social media channels regarding the significance of mental health and achieving work-life balance.

## **6. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Research**

To conclude, the study at hand aimed to investigate the significance of eco-art therapy retreats in enriching wellness tourism experiences in Egypt, especially for post-pandemic tourists who are increasingly seeking unique, creative and environmentally conscious ways to achieve overall wellbeing.

The study results revealed that eco-art therapy retreats are still not prominent in Egypt, however, they represent a promising niche within the wellness tourism market. Consequently, eco-art therapy retreats would add value to the tour packages offered in the Egyptian tourist market by diversifying the Egyptian tourist product through introducing meaningful wellness experiences that fit (a) the needs of new tourists; (b) the requirements for a sustainable tourist development; and (c) the aim of tourism service providers of gaining a competitive advantage via collaboration with art therapists in order to provide effective professional wellness retreat programs.

Overall, the current study is one of the first to acknowledge the significance of eco-art therapy retreats as a new innovative post-pandemic wellness tourism product in Egypt, nevertheless, the study has some limitations. First, the findings' generalisability is limited by the small size of the sample. In this regard, further investigation needs to be conducted with a larger sample of service providers and art therapists via focus groups to exchange experiences and gain deeper insights into their perspectives regarding the potential of introducing eco-art therapy retreats in Egypt and

the possible channels for collaboration which could contribute to the further validation of the current study results.

Second, eco-art therapy wellness experiences need to be investigated from the tourist's perspective with the purpose of capturing perceptions of wellness tourists towards eco-art therapy retreats for a deeper understanding of the target segment characteristics and the tourist motivations that would generate a tourist demand for eco-art therapy retreats in the future and devise an informed sustainable wellness tourism strategy.

Furthermore, an in-depth investigation of retreat experiences in general is still needed. Accordingly, future research can analyse retreat websites' testimonials and social media discussions to evaluate wellness tourists' satisfaction with the Egyptian retreat tourism offerings.

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## ملاذات العلاج بالفن البيئي: سبيلاً جديداً لإثراء تجارب السياحة الاستشفائية في مصر

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### ملخص البحث:

تقدم الدراسة الحالية لمحة عامة عن العلاج بالفن البيئي وأهمية دمجها في الملاذات المصرية وإمكاناته في إثراء تجارب السياحة الاستشفائية. كما توضح أهمية تنويع التجارب الاستشفائية لتلبية احتياجات وتفضيلات سائحي ما بعد جائحة كورونا. وتسلط الدراسة الضوء على الدور الحيوي لكل من مقدمي الخدمات السياحية والمعالجين بالفن في خلق عروض مبتكرة للسياحة الاستشفائية. وتُظهر نتائج الدراسة أنه على الرغم من أن ملاذات العلاج بالفن البيئي المستقلة لا تزال غير بارزة في سوق السياحة الاستشفائية المصري، إلا أنها تمثل تجارب سياحية متخصصة غير مستغلة، لديها القدرة على تحقيق الرفاهية الشاملة لسائحي ما بعد الجائحة الذين يسعون إلى الحصول على تجارب سياحية استشفائية إبداعية، تحويلية والتي تركز على البيئة في الوقت نفسه، خاصة النساء العاملات في منتصف العمر. كذلك تعترف الدراسة ببعض القيود وتدعو إلى إجراء أبحاث مستقبلية لدراسة تصورات السائحين حول تجارب العلاج بالفن البيئي وتقييم رضاهم عن عروض السياحة الاستشفائية المصرية من أجل فهم أفضل للطلب المستقبلي على الملاذات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العلاج بالفن البيئي، الملاذات، السياحة الاستشفائية، سائح ما بعد الجائحة، التجارب التحويلية.