



## Do short and more frequent spa vacations show health effects?

### *Short Keynote*

#### **Presenter:**

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In the last decade, international health tourism has developed impressively. However, from a medical and scientific point of view, medical oriented wellness/spa products must be „evidence-based“ – a request taken seriously by the ISAG by performing research projects with focus on health tourism for twenty years.

Under the title „AMAS – Austrian Moderate Altitude Studies“, a series of studies were performed in order to get evidence-based answers to health-tourism related research questions – important not only for science but also for the tourism economy. Starting with the typical duration of a cure (3 weeks), we could demonstrate that an active wellness vacation (hiking tours, active and passive regeneration programs in Austrian Wellness Hotels) at moderate and low altitude regions had a series of beneficial effects in overweight tourists: Improvement in elevated blood pressure, improvement in metabolism, reduction in body fat and ameliorations in psychological parameters (mood, negative emotions etc.). Most of these effects were sustained over several weeks after the vacation. In a subsequent study, we could demonstrate that an active vacation of managers for only one week, combining hiking with active and passive regeneration elements, effectuates a series of positive consequences of bio-psychological parameters. However, the average duration of vacation significantly dropped over the last years, and vacationers suffer from limited time resources.

One burning key question that needs to be answered focuses on the minimal requirement in terms of duration of health vacations necessary to actually achieve health improvements. Therefore, our most recent project aimed at evaluating physiological and psychological effects of one and three consecutive short-term vacations (each 4 nights) on stressed, middle management employees. Subjects spent the vacation either at home or at an excellent wellness hotel where a vacation program including physical activity and active recovery was performed. Additionally, we evaluated the sustainability of potential positive health effects, as most research has shown that effects of long-term vacations fade away quickly (< 30 days).

Preliminary results show that already one short-term vacation, no matter if spent at home or at a wellness hotel, has positive effects on perceived levels of well-being and stress that are detectable even after 45 days. In view of physiological parameters indicating sleep quality, results suggest that one short-term trip is rather stressful, whereas three consecutive short-term vacations show significant

improvements of sleep quality, an indicator for good health. Given the actual trend of decreasing length of vacations, the results are promising that already a time-off of 4 nights, lead to an increase in perceived level of well-being and a decrease in perceived stress level.

These results could offer a new health-tourism product for the industry but could also be an idea to integrate short vacations in corporate health care programs.

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