

ROLE OF PUBLIC PARKS IN HOLISTIC WELLNESS TOURISM DESTINATION

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ABSTRACT

While global wellness tourism is booming, local urban public parks remain vital destinations for generating social and economic value. This study aims to analyze the role of public parks as destinations for holistic wellness tourism. This study employed a systematic review of Thai and international academic sources retrieved from the Thai-Journal Citation Index and ScienceDirect. The analysis, which covered publications from 2015 to 2025, synthesized the roles of public parks as destinations for holistic wellness tourism across five principal dimensions: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. On the basis of 22 selected articles, these dimensions constitute important pull factors for wellness tourists. Findings indicate that public parks perform roles across all five dimensions of holistic wellness tourism, although the intensity varies by dimension. The social dimension appeared most frequently in the reviewed literature, reflecting the prominent role of public parks as spaces that foster attachment and social interaction. This suggests that public parks simultaneously function as areas of well-being, public spaces, and venues for building social relationships. These findings can reframe public parks from urban green infrastructure to potential holistic wellness tourism resources through a five-dimensional synthesis.

Research Article

Article History:

Received: April 13, 2026

Revised: July 15, 2026

Accepted: July 16, 2026

Published: July 20, 2026

Keywords:

Holistic Wellness Tourism, Public Park, Role of Public Park, Destination

INTRODUCTION

Following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease in 2019 (COVID-19), travel patterns and tourist motivations changed significantly. Tourists increasingly emphasize physical recovery, mental well-being, and long-term quality of life. As a result, wellness tourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry. Reports by the Global Wellness Institute indicate that the Thai and global wellness economies expanded during the post-pandemic period. Wellness tourism serves as a vital mechanism for driving the tourism economy alongside sustainable development goals. Recent data indicate that the global wellness tourism industry is valued at approximately USD 651 billion annually and is projected to expand at an average annual growth rate of 16.6% through 2027 (Global Wellness Institute, 2024). Likewise, Thailand's tourism development strategy emphasizes sustainable tourism development by balancing economic, social, and environmental dimensions and by promoting valuable tourism experiences (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2023).

Within large cities, particularly Bangkok, public parks have evolved beyond their traditional role as recreational spaces despite limited quantity and distribution. These areas now function as urban health infrastructure that supports multidimensional well-being activities, including physical exercise, mental relaxation, learning, and social interaction. Currently, Bangkok provides more than 50 public parks across the city (Bangkok Environmental Office, 2024). The World Health Organization highlighted that urban green spaces significantly influence public health through mechanisms such as physical activity, stress reduction, and improvements in quality of life (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2017). Furthermore, high-quality green space development, such as Benjakitti Forest Park, reflect the potential of public parks to function as urban well-being spaces and new forms of tourism resources. This role aligns with the concept of holistic wellness tourism, which seeks to foster balance across five health dimensions—physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual—through restoration and healing experiences (Global Wellness Institute, 2024).

However, a review of prior studies indicates that most research has focused on wellness tourism in specialized establishments, such as spas, resorts, or natural attractions. By contrast, studies examining public parks as destinations for holistic wellness tourism remain limited, and systematic empirical evidence explaining their role in this dimension is lacking. This knowledge gap underscores the need to investigate the potential of public parks as urban wellness tourism resources; such research supports evidence-based planning for healthy city development and sustainable tourism while concretely connecting holistic wellness tourism with urban public space development (Global Wellness Institute, 2024).

Accordingly, this article examines public parks as urban wellness spaces and health-promoting public infrastructure with potential to serve as resources for holistic wellness tourism. It does not treat all parks as established tourism attractions or formal wellness tourism routes but analyzes how they support well-being-related experiences among park users—residents, urban visitors, and tourists—across a five-dimensional synthesis.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aims to analyze the role of public parks as urban wellness spaces and potential resources for holistic wellness tourism through a five-dimensional synthesis of physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Public Parks

Definition of Public Parks

According to the Royal Institute Dictionary, B.E. 2554, the term “park” refers to an area planted with numerous trees, whereas “public” denotes availability for the general population, such as a public telephone or public well (Office of the Royal Society, 2013). Consequently, a “public park” identifies a tree-planted area designated for community use. Geographic and environmental agencies, alongside relevant scholars, provide further definitions. A public park functions as a green space that offers recreational benefits and enhances urban environmental quality by improving air conditions, absorbing pollutants, reducing the urban heat island effect, and supporting urban ecosystems. Local government agencies or authorized organizations manage these spaces and remain responsible for their design, maintenance, and public service provision (Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, 2017). Furthermore, a public park represents an open space designated for recreation, exercise, and various public activities to promote quality of life and the physical and mental well-being of its users. It serves as a venue that reduces stress, encourages physical activity, facilitates social interaction, and acts as a natural learning space for the community (Bangkok Environmental Office, 2024).

International studies have defined public parks through their functional roles and utilization. A public park constitutes a green space established to serve the public for recreation, exercise, and social gathering on a nonprofit basis; these spaces also facilitate physical and mental restoration, social equity, and the enhancement of urban quality of life (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2016).

In summary, a public park is a green or open space allocated and maintained for nonprofit public use, including recreation, exercise, and social interaction. It promotes physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being while improving environmental quality, supporting urban ecosystems, and enhancing the quality of life of the community.

Types of Public Parks

The classification of public parks can be based on the guidelines proposed by Mertes and Hall (1996) and published by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), public parks consist of eight main categories. (1) **Mini Parks**, which cover no more than 2.5 rai (0.004 km²), serve limited local needs and accommodate short-duration wellness activities such as sitting, light walking, and relaxation. (2) **Neighborhood Parks**, range from 2.5 to 39 rai (0.004–0.0624 km²) and serve nearby residential communities by accommodating active and passive recreation, including exercise, leisure, and daily social interaction. (3) **Community Parks**, spanning 40–250 rai (0.064–0.40 km²), and (4) **Metropolitan Parks**, ranging

from 253 to 1,262 rai (0.4048–2.0192 km²), associate closely with holistic wellness tourism because they provide large and diverse environments for physical activity, mental restoration, leisure, and social engagement. (5) **Regional Parks** cover 1,265 rai (2.024 km²) or more and have the greatest potential to support holistic wellness tourism by integrating recreation, nature appreciation, conservation, and restorative experiences. (6) **Special Use Areas** have no fixed size requirement and serve specialized purposes, such as historical, cultural, educational, or nature-based recreation, which support specific wellness experiences. (7) **Linear Park/Linkages** also lack a fixed size standard but facilitate movement-based wellness activities such as walking and cycling while connecting urban green spaces. (8) **Conservancy Areas**, which also have no fixed size requirement, focus on the protection and management of natural or cultural environments, and support low-impact, contemplative wellness experiences.

In the context of Bangkok, the Environment Department of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration manages public parks and classifies them into seven types (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 2024). (1) **Pocket/Mini Parks**, which are no larger than 2 rai (0.0032 km²), support brief wellness activities such as sitting, strolling, and brief relaxation, as seen at the Nong Khaem Waste to Energy Plant. (2) **Neighborhood Parks** are established within residential projects, range from 2 to 25 rai (0.0032–0.04 km²), and foster community-based exercise and social well-being, such as Prachaniwet Forest Park. (3) **Community Parks**, range from 25 to 125 rai (0.04–0.20 km²) and offer integrated recreation and social gathering spaces, exemplified by Rommaninat Garden, Benjasiri Park, and Saranrom Park. (4) **District Parks**, with an area of 125–500 rai (0.20–0.80 km²), support diverse wellness experiences, including picnicking, outdoor recreation, sports, and cycling, with examples such as Wachirabenchatat Park (Rotfai Park), Benjakitti Park, and Lumpini Park. (5) **City Parks** cover more than 500 rai (0.80 km²) and serve as principal urban parks that accommodate daily well-being and large-scale tourism events, such as Nong Bon Lake Sports Center Public Park and Suan Luang Rama IX. (6) **Street Parks**, although not primarily designed for recreation, enhance thermal comfort and urban visual quality, as illustrated by Chao Phraya Sky Park and Ratchadaphisek-Vibhavadi Rangsit. (7) **Special Purpose Parks** serve cultural, historical, educational, or commemorative purposes and support reflective wellness experiences, as exemplified by the Victory Monument and Maha Chetsadabodin Royal Pavilion.

Concept of Holistic Wellness Tourism

The Global Wellness Institute (2024) defines wellness tourism as travel undertaken to seek experiences or interventions aimed at maintaining and improving well-being. This form of tourism emphasizes activities or experiences that enhance physical and mental health alongside overall quality of life. Recent data indicate that the global wellness tourism industry is valued at approximately USD 651 billion annually and is projected to expand at an average annual growth rate of 16.6% through 2027. The Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (2024) defines wellness tourism as travel for the purpose of holistic health care for body and mind. This definition emphasizes disease prevention and lifestyle modification supported by modern medical technology to achieve holistic health outcomes. Such tourism involves multiple dimensions—including physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, and environmental—which help reduce the occurrence of noncommunicable diseases. In addition, wellness tourism represents travel for health promotion by generally healthy individuals seeking to enhance their well-being through therapeutic or relaxation-oriented activities, such as spa treatments, yoga, meditation, Thai massage, relaxation in natural environments, hiking, and holistic healing activities. In summary, wellness tourism constitutes travel that emphasizes holistic health care without requiring a pre-existing illness. Its main purposes include disease prevention, the promotion of balance, and the enhancement of quality of life through relaxation and health restoration.

Components of Holistic Wellness Tourism

A review of the literature indicates that scholarly perspectives on the components of holistic wellness tourism form a coherent framework. Many sources emphasize five dimensions of well-being—physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual—which reflect a holistic perspective that views human beings as an interconnected system (Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, 2024; Modernform Health & Care, 2025; Quintela et al., 2016). Although some studies have emphasized only certain principal dimensions, such as the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions (Voigt et al., 2011), the components of holistic wellness tourism generally encompass five key areas:

1. Physical

This dimension relates to activities that promote physical health and bodily care, such as exercise, healthy eating, therapeutic massage, spa treatments, and restorative health activities. These constitute fundamental components of the wellness tourism experience (Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, 2024; Modernform Health & Care, 2025; Quintela et al., 2016; Voigt et al., 2011). In this study, the physical dimension refers to tourism experiences or park-related activities that primarily aim to improve bodily health, physical fitness, mobility, relaxation, or recovery from fatigue.

2. Mental

This dimension concerns cognitive and psychological processes related to thinking, concentration, learning, and stress management. It includes meditation, mindfulness practice, reflective learning, and experiences that support mental clarity, focus, and resilience (Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, 2024; Modernform Health & Care, 2025; Quintela et al., 2016; Voigt et al., 2011). In this study, the mental dimension refers to experiences that enhance concentration, calmness, cognitive restoration, self-reflection, or the ability to manage stress and maintain psychological balance.

3. Emotional

This dimension refers to the awareness, expression, and regulation of feelings, as well as the cultivation of positive affective states such as happiness, enjoyment, relaxation, and satisfaction. It includes nature-based healing, leisure, and restorative activities that improve mood and emotional well-being (Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, 2024; Modernform Health & Care, 2025; Quintela et al., 2016). In this study, the emotional dimension refers to experiences that produce positive feelings, reduce distress, and create enjoyment, comfort, and emotional restoration.

4. Social

This dimension emphasizes interaction with others, such as group travel, engagement with local communities, and cultural activities, which help build social bonds and enrich the tourism experience (Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, 2024; Modernform Health & Care, 2025; Quintela et al., 2016). In this study, the social dimension refers to activities that foster interpersonal interaction, social connectedness, a sense of belonging, community participation, and relationship building.

5. Spiritual

This dimension relates to the search for meaning, purpose, inner peace, and deeper connection with oneself, nature, culture, or beliefs. It includes practices such as meditation, yoga, religious or contemplative activities, and engagement with nature and local wisdom that support existential reflection and life balance (Huachiew Chalermprakiet University, 2024; Modernform Health & Care, 2025; Quintela et al., 2016; Voigt et al., 2011). In this study, the spiritual dimension refers to experiences that foster meaning-making, inner peace, transcendence, self-awareness, or a connection with nature, culture, religion, or a higher value system.

In summary, holistic wellness tourism aims to create life balance by developing well-being across physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. It encompasses life balance and connection with the environment and community rather than focusing solely on physical recovery. These interrelated elements produce a comprehensive well-being experience for travelers.

Holistic Wellness Tourism Activities

Holistic wellness tourism enhances tourists' quality of life across multiple dimensions. Rather than focusing solely on physical health care, this travel style encompasses mental, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. Consequently, activities within this sector are diverse. Based on the literature review, the researchers synthesized holistic wellness tourism activities across all five dimensions. These are presented in Table 1, which provides a framework for explaining health-

related activities within a tourism context, particularly in public parks or green spaces conducive to multidimensional well-being.

Table 1: Holistic wellness tourism activities

Dimensions/Activities	Huachiew Chalermprakiet University (2024)	Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2023)	Modernform Health & Care (2025)	Quintela et al. (2016)	Thanarajthamrongkul and Kieanwatana (2023)	Thojampa et al. (2023)	Voigt et al. (2011)
1. Physical							
1.1 Exercise	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
1.2 Healthy nutrition	✓		✓	✓			
1.3 Massage		✓		✓	✓		
1.4 Hydrotherapy				✓			
1.5 Spa		✓		✓			
1.6 Others	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
2. Mental							
2.1 Meditation/mindfulness practice	✓			✓		✓	✓
2.2 Life goal setting	✓						
2.3 Positive thinking development	✓			✓			
2.4 Use of local wisdom for mental healing						✓	
2.5 Nature-based therapy							
3. Emotional							
3.1 Reflective journaling	✓						
3.2 Mindfulness for stress reduction	✓		✓				
3.3 Relaxation activities, such as art therapy	✓		✓				
3.4 Open conversation and experience sharing					✓	✓	
3.5 Sound-based therapeutic activities using musical instruments			✓	✓			
4. Social							
4.1 Participation in/interaction with the community	✓	✓		✓	✓		
4.2 Face-to-face conversation	✓						
4.3 Building positive social networks	✓				✓	✓	
4.4 Group travel				✓			
4.5 Engaging in activities with others				✓	✓		
5. Spiritual Wellness							
5.1 Dharma practice/meditation	✓			✓			✓
5.2 Spiritual yoga			✓	✓			
5.3 Spending time in nature, such as resting in natural settings						✓	✓
5.4 Participation in rituals/faith-based healing, such as nature gratitude rituals, merit-making, or ceremonial dance offerings		✓				✓	

The synthesized table of holistic wellness tourism activities reveals that the reviewed documents reflect the greatest number of sub-activities in the physical dimension. These appear across multiple sources; particularly, exercise emerged as the most consistently shared activity. The mental and emotional dimensions followed, emphasizing meditation, mindfulness, relaxation, and psychological healing. The social dimension reflects the importance of participation and interpersonal interaction. Although the spiritual dimension contains fewer sub-activities than the other dimensions, it clearly demonstrates the significance of natural connections, inner peace, and faith. Accordingly, this table confirms that the concept of holistic wellness tourism involves comprehensive well-being and serves as an appropriate framework for analyzing activities in public parks or other wellness tourism destinations.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do public parks function as urban wellness spaces and potential resources for holistic wellness tourism across physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review with qualitative content analysis to synthesize the roles of public parks as urban wellness spaces and potential resources for holistic wellness tourism across five dimensions: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. No direct field data were collected. Instead, the study relied on the collection, analysis, and synthesis of relevant research studies and academic articles. This approach followed the principles of a systematic literature review to ensure transparency, verifiability, and reduced bias in document selection.

Sources of Data

Because this study functioned as a systematic literature review, the sample did not consist of human participants. Instead, it comprised research documents and academic articles selected through predefined inclusion criteria from academic sources relevant to public parks, urban green spaces, and holistic wellness tourism. The units of analysis consisted of credible journal articles addressing holistic health outcomes, well-being, or quality of life associated with public parks or urban green spaces. For clarity, the systematic review included empirical research articles and academic articles with clearly cited sources as the principal units of analysis. Government reports and official websites were used only as contextual, definitional, or policy-related background sources and were not included among the 22 studies synthesized in the results. In selecting documents, the researchers emphasized studies that evaluated health-related components or experiential outcomes arising from park use, especially those addressing spatially grounded outcomes, as the conceptual framework was intended for application within the wellness tourism context in Thailand. Accordingly, the review considered studies related to the Thai context or the Asia-Pacific region alongside international research to ensure cultural relevance. Most synthesized studies were research-based publications reflecting concepts and theoretical frameworks applicable across diverse contexts. The timeframe for the included documents was set from 2015 to 2025 to obtain evidence reflecting contemporary trends. This approach helped reduce potential bias arising from a narrowly defined participant group and ensured that the resulting conceptual framework was grounded in diverse empirical evidence. Consequently, the framework is comprehensive and academically objective, as its development relied on a broad body of research evidence rather than the experiences of park users in a single specific location.

Research Instruments

This study did not employ questionnaires, experimental instruments, or field data collection devices, as the researchers collected no primary data from participants. The principal research instrument was a document extraction form designed to record key information from the selected studies systematically. This form included the author(s), year of publication, study area, research methodology, principal findings, and dimensions related to the role of public parks in holistic wellness tourism.

Data Collection Procedure

The analysis of public parks as destinations for holistic wellness tourism followed the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparent, systematic, and verifiable search, screening, and selection procedures. The process consisted of the following steps:

Step 1: The researchers formulated the principal research question: What role do public parks perform as destinations for holistic wellness tourism? This question established the framework for the literature search. The PICO framework delimited the search scope, comprising population (public parks/urban green spaces), interest (roles, activities, or outcomes related to holistic wellness tourism), and context (urban tourism and wellness promotion).

Step 2: The researchers conducted the literature search and collected data from standard academic databases, including international and Thai sources. The search utilized two principal databases: the Thai-Journal Citation Index and ScienceDirect. The search covered publications from 2015 to 2025 and used keywords in Thai and English, such as “public park” and “wellness tourism” or “holistic wellness” and related terms.

Step 3: The researchers established inclusion criteria and article screening procedures. The retrieved records were screened according to the following predefined criteria. The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- (1) The study addressed public parks and holistic wellness tourism in at least one dimension, including studies on roles, activities, or health outcomes.
- (2) The study was an empirical research article or academic article with clearly cited sources.
- (3) The study was written in either Thai or English.
- (4) The study was published or publicly disseminated between 2015 and 2025.

The exclusion criteria were as follows:

- (1) Studies not directly related to the research topic or mentioning public parks only in the context of botany or civil engineering.
- (2) Studies lacking clearly identifiable source references.
- (3) Articles published in languages other than Thai or English.
- (4) Studies published before 2015.

Article selection followed standard systematic review procedures under the PRISMA framework, which comprises four major phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, as illustrated in Figure 1.

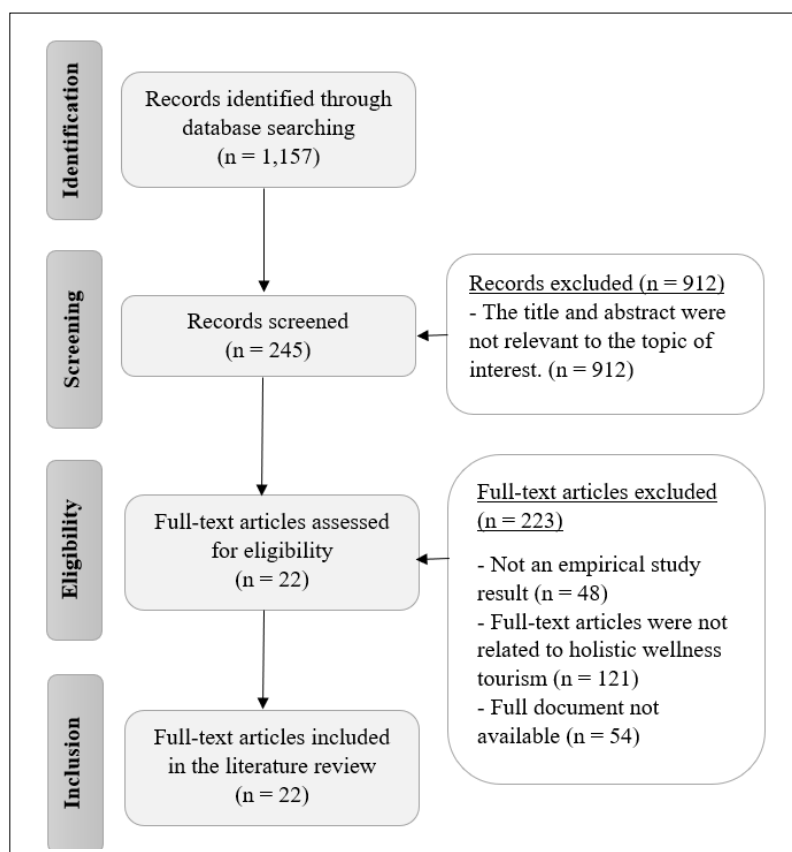


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram showing the number of studies screened at each stage of the systematic review process

Step 4: In the final stage, the researchers compiled the findings from all 22 selected articles into a summary table. This table presented the author(s), year of publication, study area, and principal findings of each study. The studies were then grouped according to the five dimensions of holistic wellness tourism: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual.

Data Analysis

This study employed content analysis to examine data derived from the selected documents and research studies. This qualitative analysis emphasized the interpretation of substantive content and the synthesis of findings across studies to examine the role of public parks as wellness tourism destinations systematically.

Subsequently, the extracted issues were categorized according to the five dimensions of holistic health: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. The coding process began with repeated reading of the selected studies to identify key activities, outcomes, and experiential meanings related to public park use. These codes were then grouped according to the five predefined dimensions of holistic wellness tourism. For example, exercise, walking, jogging, and the use of fitness equipment were coded under the physical dimension; stress reduction, calmness, and cognitive restoration were coded under the mental dimension; happiness, satisfaction, relaxation, and enjoyment were coded under the emotional dimension; interpersonal interaction, community participation, and relationship building were coded under the social dimension; and self-reflection, connection with nature, cultural meaning, and inner peace were coded under the spiritual dimension. This process enabled the researchers to map diverse sub-activities and findings from the reviewed studies into the five-dimensional analytical framework. After categorizing the data, the researchers synthesized and interpreted the findings descriptively in accordance with the research objectives.

To enhance the credibility of the qualitative analysis and reduce researcher bias, the content categorization was independently reviewed by a second researcher. Any discrepancies in the classification of findings across the five dimensions were discussed and resolved through consensus before finalizing the synthesis.

RESULTS

The PRISMA-based selection process identified 22 studies published between 2015 and 2025 that met the inclusion criteria, covering both Thai and international contexts. Research on this topic was generally fragmented. Some studies have focused on the health outcomes of green spaces, whereas others have examined tourism behavior; however, several studies have not explicitly addressed public parks as destinations. Accordingly, this literature review systematically synthesizes knowledge linking activities in public parks with their roles as holistic wellness tourism destinations. The researchers prepared a synthesis table that presents the research findings, analyzes the contextual characteristics of the study areas, and classifies the roles of public parks according to the holistic wellness framework, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of study findings classified by research results and dimensions of holistic wellness

Author(s) (Year)	Study Area Context	Key Research Findings	P	M	E	S	Sp
Somphong and Khong-uan (2016)	Lumphini Park, Bangkok, Thailand	Lumphini Park serves as a major urban space for exercise and relaxation.	✓		✓	✓	
Nath et al. (2018)	Malaysia	Park users perceived that parks helped reduce stress and enhance well-being.		✓	✓	✓	
Karuhadej et al. (2019)	Public parks in Bangkok, Thailand	Most park users jogged for 60 minutes per day and demonstrated appropriate exercise behavior.	✓		✓		
Enssle and Kabisch (2020)	Europe/North America	Public parks help foster social interaction, particularly among older adults.				✓	
Li (2020)	Jakarta, Seoul, and Taipei	Park use is associated with health, quality of life, life satisfaction, and happiness among residents.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Sangyuan and Arifwidodo (2020)	Chom Bueng Subdistrict, Ratchaburi Province, Thailand	Park users most frequently engaged in light- to moderate-intensity physical activity, and overall satisfaction was at a high level.	✓		✓	✓	
Huanli et al. (2021)	Zheng He Park, China	Zheng He Park was a green space characterized by collective historical and cultural significance.				✓	✓
Kaewkerd et al. (2021)	Public parks, Bangkok, Thailand	Different generations demonstrate different exercise behaviors and attitudes toward physical activity.	✓	✓		✓	
Kongwirot (2021)	Bang Khae Phirom Park, Bangkok, Thailand	The dog park helped reduce stress and increase user satisfaction.		✓	✓	✓	
Wang et al. (2022)	China	Green spaces promoted healthy behaviors through ecosystem service mechanisms, such as physical activity and stress reduction.	✓	✓	✓		
Duangpakdee and Chairatananon (2023)	Benchasiri Park, Bangkok, Thailand	Public space significantly contributes to stress management.		✓	✓		
Jamsuwan and Bejrananda (2023)	Khon Kaen City, Thailand	Younger generations use parks in combination with co-working spaces to respond to emotional needs and the search for meaning in life.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Wang and Chang (2023)	Beijing, China	Public parks had a significantly positive effect on health. Access to public parks was associated with better health conditions, social ties, and stronger social relationships.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Camtawee and Pothong (2024)	Chanthaburi Province, Thailand	Sculptures within the park enhance the landscape and contribute to its development as a tourist attraction.			✓	✓	✓

Author(s) (Year)	Study Area Context	Key Research Findings	P	M	E	S	Sp
Kasetkriengkrai and Thumwimol (2024)	Saranrom Park, Bangkok, Thailand	The park holds value as a historic park, and its cultural elements and interpretive features should be conserved.				✓	✓
Pintobtang (2024)	Benchasiri Park, Bangkok, Thailand	After COVID-19, park users tended to engage in individual activities such as sitting, walking, jogging, and using exercise equipment, as well as relaxing in a shaded atmosphere.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Royamphang et al. (2024)	Bang Khae Phirom Park, Bangkok, Thailand	Walking and cycling were the principal activities, and park users expressed satisfaction with the park landscape.	✓		✓	✓	
Thongsrikate (2024)	Chiang Mai Province, Thailand	Older adults use parks to promote physical, mental, and social well-being.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Yaemkwanyuen et al. (2024)	Bueng Nong Bon Park, Bangkok, Thailand	Persons with hearing impairments required appropriate accessibility, activities, and facilities.	✓	✓		✓	
Chukan et al. (2025)	Nawamin Phirom Park, Bangkok, Thailand	Differences in park-use behavior were found across demographic groups. Users showed interest in recreational activities, leisure, and engaging in activities together with family members.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Taichompoo et al. (2025)	Samut Prakan Province, Thailand	The principal activities among park users were walking, exercising, and participating in leisure activities according to their preferences.	✓		✓	✓	
Thammajit et al. (2025)	Pocket parks, Bangkok, Thailand	Small parks promote physical, mental, and social activities.	✓	✓		✓	

Note: P = Physical; M = Mental; E = Emotional; S = Social; Sp = Spiritual

The synthesis indicates that public parks perform a multidimensional role as spaces supporting health-promoting activities. Their function extends beyond serving as sites for recreation or physical exercise. Within the framework of holistic wellness tourism, public parks constitute destinations that contribute to multiple dimensions of well-being. These roles are systematically organized in accordance with the holistic wellness tourism concept, as detailed below.

Physical Wellness Role

The findings show that 14 studies emphasized the role of public parks as spaces that support physical activity, reflecting their function as settings for health promotion. Activities most frequently reported included exercise, walking, jogging, and the use of public exercise facilities. Studies conducted in Thailand (such as in Samut Prakan Province and Bangkok) and internationally (including China, Malaysia, and other Southeast Asian cities) found that access to green spaces associates with regular exercise behavior and improved health outcomes. Public parks represent a vital component of urban health infrastructure that contributes to the physical well-being of residents and visitors.

Mental Wellness Role

The mental dimension appeared in 13 studies, indicating that public parks help reduce stress, promote calmness, and support mental restoration through nature-based immersion and quiet activities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, park users utilized these spaces as venues for relaxation and escape from confinement. Several studies reflected the role of public parks as spaces that restore mental balance, which aligns with stress reduction and the enhancement of quality of life.

Emotional Wellness Role

The emotional dimension appeared in 16 studies—more frequently than some other dimensions—and relates primarily to stress reduction and satisfaction. Research found that park use associates with happiness, contentment, and relaxation.

Green spaces enable users to feel refreshed, joyful, and more satisfied with their lives. Some studies also emphasized the role of public parks in fostering positive emotional experiences, which are important components of wellness tourism. These findings indicate that public parks perform as spaces for emotional well-being and restoration, supporting meaningful experiences for wellness-oriented visitors.

Social Wellness Role

The social dimension emerged as the most frequently represented dimension, appearing in 19 studies. The findings suggest that public parks facilitate social interaction, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and support a sense of community belonging. In large urban areas, public parks serve as venues where people of diverse age groups and social backgrounds spend time together and create bonds through shared participation, particularly among older adults. In addition, parks respond to new urban needs, such as shared working areas or creative activities. This reflects the role of public parks as public spaces that link individuals formally and informally, supporting well-being through social connectedness.

Spiritual Wellness Role

Although the spiritual dimension appeared in only four studies, the synthesis indicates that public parks contribute to connecting with nature, life values, and cultural meaning. Historic parks, areas containing cultural or artistic elements, and spaces offering solitude facilitate self-reflection and existential connection. Although urban contexts do not always explicitly promote these aspects, the findings suggest that the spiritual dimension holds significant potential for the future design of urban green spaces to support more profound forms of holistic well-being.

In summary, public parks perform roles across all five dimensions of holistic wellness tourism, although the intensity varies by dimension. The social dimension received the greatest support in the literature, reflecting the role of public parks as spaces that foster social bonds. By contrast, the spiritual dimension is the least discussed, suggesting it is underexplored in current academic literature. Nevertheless, collectively, these findings indicate that public parks function as more than sites for physical activity; they hold clear potential for development into destinations for holistic wellness tourism in urban settings, as illustrated in Figure 2.

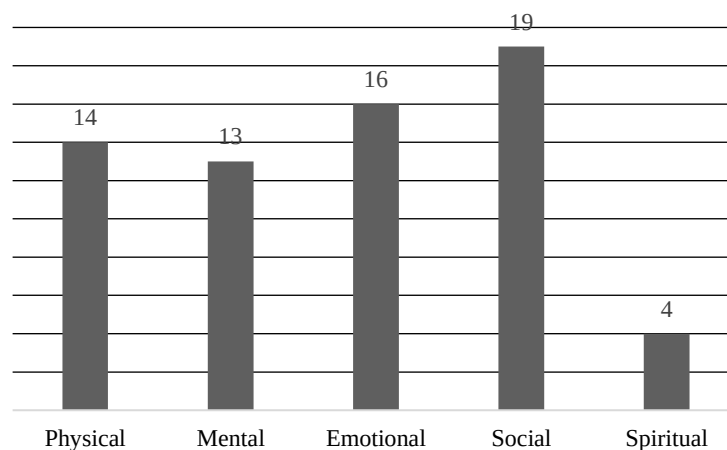


Figure 2: Frequency distribution of reviewed studies across the five dimensions of holistic wellness

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The systematic synthesis of 22 studies suggests that public parks perform roles across all five dimensions of holistic wellness tourism. The social dimension emerges most prominently, followed by the emotional, physical, and mental dimensions, whereas the spiritual dimension appears comparatively limited. These findings align with the concept that urban green spaces serve as important public areas for fostering social relationships and reducing stress (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2017). They also mirror research by Li (2020), which emphasized the role of public parks in enhancing quality of life and social connectedness. At the same time, the present study extends this

perspective by demonstrating that public parks function as urban wellness spaces, public areas, and venues for social relationship-building. This role is particularly salient in urban contexts, where daily life is characterized by urgency and spatial fragmentation, and populations increasingly face social isolation. Public parks, therefore, become spaces where people spend time together, engage in shared activities, and develop interpersonal ties. Wilson et al. (2024) supported this interpretation, finding that access to urban green spaces and park use associate with social capital, trust, and a sense of belonging. Such findings suggest that social well-being represents a particularly important component, especially in the post-pandemic context where open spaces have gained renewed significance as settings for safe social interaction. Taken together, these findings suggest that public parks primarily function as urban spaces that support well-being, contributing to both individual and social restoration. Therefore, their relevance to holistic wellness tourism should be understood as a form of potential that can be further developed into tourism destinations.

Another notable finding concerns the spiritual dimension. Although it appears in a limited number of empirical studies, this dimension exists; however, the pursuit of spiritual well-being is often not the primary motivation for visiting a park. Instead, it may emerge unexpectedly as a secondary outcome of nature-based immersion. Although individuals may not intentionally visit parks to engage in spiritual practice or seek meaning, being immersed in a natural environment can foster calmness, self-reflection, and a deeper sense of connection (Irvine et al., 2013). Furthermore, the emergence of spiritual experiences in parks depends on spatial conditions and the surrounding environment. Chen and Tang (2024) noted that meditation and mindfulness do not arise solely from activity but require supportive environmental conditions, such as tranquility, low noise levels, safety, and naturalness. Therefore, if a public park sits within a densely built urban context characterized by high noise levels or a design oriented toward busy uses, the spiritual dimension may be more difficult to cultivate. Nevertheless, although this dimension is not prominent in everyday use, specific programming can stimulate it. In Thailand, the “Dhamma in the Park” program in Benjakitti Park provides a clear example by linking physical and mental health care to Dhamma listening and life reflection. This case suggests that parks function as spaces for contemplation and respite from urban life when activities and atmospheres are appropriately designed. More broadly, this finding supports the proposition that public parks serve as holistic wellness tourism destinations when their spatial and programmatic qualities align with multidimensional well-being outcomes.

Regarding limitations, this study confined its search scope to research published in Thai and English between 2015 and 2025. Consequently, it may not have captured relevant scholarship published in other languages or disseminated through gray literature. Second, most studies included in the synthesis were conducted in Thailand and other Asian contexts, meaning the evidence base reflects a specific geographical scope that may not represent diverse social, cultural, and physical settings in other regions. Third, the majority of the parks examined were large urban parks, which differ from small community-level green spaces in spatial characteristics, patterns of use, and activity capacity. Fourth, the reviewed studies covered different park types, including pocket parks, district parks, and city parks, whose spatial scale, facilities, and activity capacity may affect their ability to support holistic well-being activities. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted according to park type, functional capacity, and user context rather than generalized across all public parks. These features may affect the transferability of findings to areas with different contextual conditions. Future research should, therefore, broaden the review scope by incorporating studies in other languages and extending investigations to other regional contexts. Comparative research on the roles of different park types, including large parks and pocket parks, would generate a more comprehensive understanding of space use in relation to holistic well-being. Theoretically, these findings extend the holistic wellness tourism framework by proposing that public parks function as wellness destinations in urban contexts rather than being limited to commercial settings. The findings also indicate that the social dimension should serve as a core component in explaining the role of urban well-being spaces, thereby shifting the focus from individual health toward community well-being.

Within these limitations, the review found that the **social dimension** was the most prominent across the synthesized studies, followed by the emotional, physical, and mental dimensions, whereas the **spiritual dimension** appeared comparatively less frequently. This pattern suggests that existing literature consistently emphasizes the role of public parks as settings for social interaction, attachment, and shared use rather than their relevance to spiritual well-being. On the evidence, public parks can support multiple dimensions of holistic well-being in urban contexts. Specifically, the reviewed studies suggest that public parks contribute not only to physical activity and mental restoration but also to emotional relief and social connectedness. The prominence of the social dimension further supports the proposition that public parks represent urban

spaces with broad relevance to multidimensional well-being. However, this interpretation should remain cautious. The evidence does not warrant a uniform conclusion that all public parks perform similar roles, nor does it justify a categorical claim that they should be regarded as wellness tourism destinations universally. Rather, the findings indicate that certain types of public parks, under particular spatial, social, and programmatic conditions, possess potential for alignment with holistic wellness tourism principles.

From a policy and planning perspective, the review suggests that future public park development in large cities should prioritize the social dimension. Planners and administrators should consider how park design and management can effectively support social encounters and shared participation among diverse user groups. Relevant measures include providing community activity areas, multifunctional spaces, creative programming, cultural activities, and health-related events for residents and visitors. These implications serve as planning considerations rather than prescriptive conclusions, as the evidence does not demonstrate that such interventions necessarily generate specific tourism outcomes. Instead, strengthening the social qualities of public parks enhances their broader significance as urban well-being spaces and may increase their relevance to wellness-oriented urban tourism. Similarly, although the spiritual dimension appeared least frequently in the reviewed studies, it merits more deliberate attention in future urban park design. Public parks can support spiritual well-being through contemplative settings, solitude zones, shaded quiet areas, meditation lawns, slow-walking paths, and cultural or interpretive landscape elements that encourage reflection, inner peace, and connection with nature. These design considerations may broaden the range of well-being experiences offered by public parks while reinforcing their potential relevance to holistic wellness tourism.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review examined the role of public parks as wellness-supportive urban spaces with potential relevance to holistic wellness tourism. On the basis of the synthesis of 22 studies, the findings indicate that public parks can promote well-being across five dimensions: physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual. The most significant finding reveals that the social dimension emerged as the most prominent, surpassing the physical dimension. This shift in prominence differs from the common understanding that public parks primarily serve as sites for exercise or relaxation.

The synthesis further demonstrates that the distinctive value of public parks lies in their function as public areas that facilitate social encounters, interpersonal bonding, and community belonging. The emotional, physical, and mental dimensions followed in prominence, whereas the spiritual dimension appeared comparatively limited. This finding implies that stakeholders should reconceptualize public parks as urban social well-being spaces alongside their role as health infrastructure. Public parks do not merely support recreational activities; they also connect people, foster social networks, reduce isolation, and enhance the overall quality of life of residents and tourists. Therefore, to develop public parks into genuine destinations for holistic wellness tourism, design and management must place the social dimension at the core rather than focusing exclusively on physical benefits.

Based on these findings, government agencies and local administrative organizations should integrate the concept of public parks for holistic well-being into urban development plans and tourism strategies. Strengthening the role of public parks as spaces for social interaction and bonding is essential. This integration may include designing communal activity areas, multifunctional spaces, and creative programs that accommodate local residents and tourists simultaneously. Simultaneously, developers should promote less developed dimensions, particularly the spiritual dimension, by providing quiet spaces and nature-based activities that enhance inner experiences. In practical terms, park administrators should prioritize the development of spaces that respond to individual needs and social participation. This approach uses the social dimension as the principal guideline to elevate public parks from “spaces for relaxation” to “spaces of shared urban experience.” Academically, this study broadens the understanding of public parks beyond physical health promotion and highlights the need for further investigation into the spiritual dimension and the development of assessment tools capable of evaluating all five dimensions.

In conclusion, this study indicates that public parks can support holistic well-being in urban contexts and may hold potential to contribute to holistic wellness tourism when appropriate spatial, social, and programmatic conditions are present. Their strength in urban contexts lies in a social role that enables them to serve simultaneously as areas of well-being, public

spaces, and venues for relationship-building. These findings provide a foundation for policy formulation, spatial design, and the sustainable development of wellness tourism that prioritizes human connection and social networks.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE

Artificial intelligence tools were utilized exclusively for translation, language refinement, and grammatical review. All substantive content, analysis, interpretation, and final decisions regarding the manuscript remain the responsibility of the authors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article constitutes part of the research project entitled “The Relationship between Demographic Characteristics and Holistic Wellness Tourism Behaviors in Public Parks of Bangkok Area.” The project received support through the “The Royal Coronation Ceremony of King Rama X Scholarship” for master’s degree study in the Master of Arts Program in Health, Nature, and Cultural Tourism Management, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Mahidol University, Thailand.

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