

## HVS Monday Musings: Wellness Tourism will Flourish in the Post-COVID Era

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Wellness tourism, one of the fastest growing tourism segments globally in the pre-COVID era, is expected to reach greater heights post-COVID as the pandemic has been a wake-up call for people – never before has health & wellness been more important than it is today. As a result, an increasing number of people are expected to embrace wellness-focused holidays in the post-COVID world.

India, home to several ancient wellness practices such as Yoga and Ayurveda that focus on holistic health and well-being, was one of the most sought-after wellness tourism destinations in the world before the pandemic and is well-positioned to leverage this growing demand going forward.

In the past few years, the government has implemented various initiatives to promote this segment, including setting up the Ministry of AYUSH\* and providing accreditations to maintain the authenticity and quality of treatments at the wellness centres across the country. Several key destinations in Kerala, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and the north-east India are being developed and promoted as wellness tourist destinations to attract both domestic and international tourists.



**However, despite the advantages, India has still not achieved the full potential of wellness tourism.**

India competes with a number of other Southeast Asian countries offering similar wellness products and has not been able to create its own distinguished brand. The sector is still highly unorganized with the presence of several boutique and standalone wellness centres, some of which are in remote locations that lack adequate infrastructure and last-mile connectivity. Though most hotels & resorts across the country boast of having a spa and fitness centre at their premises, only a few truly focus on 'wellness' as a product. Additionally, these specialized wellness resorts are often focused on international guests and their pricing structure and packages tend to dissuade domestic tourists.

The current pandemic has given the country an opportunity to press the reset button and re-strategize to improve its competitive strengths vis-à-vis its Southeast Asian counterparts. For a start, India needs to develop marketing campaigns that showcase the country as a global wellness tourism destination in the post-COVID world.

Secondly, the fact that the Indian wellness tourism players have primarily focused on luxury and international

### Summary

The Indian wellness tourism segment has high-growth potential as an increasing number of people are adopting a healthier lifestyle and seeking personalized travel experiences in the post-COVID era. Read on to know more.

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travellers has restricted the segment's growth in the past. The sector needs a larger distribution across midscale and upscale developments targeted at the urban, domestic clientele, who are showing a renewed interest towards wellness. This is a significant market, which, with some targeted marketing promises to be a rewarding foray for companies.



Hoteliers need to redesign their wellness programs to cater to the evolving demands of the guest, while ensuring adherence to the pandemic-related safety and sanitization protocols. As most wellness treatments require close interaction, hotel management will have to implement stricter protocols to protect their guests and employees. In fact, some of the wellness resorts globally have mandated a negative COVID-19 test result taken no longer than 48 hours before arrival, while others are providing complimentary COVID anti-body testing on arrival.

Last but not the least, hotel management can leverage technology to provide personalized wellness services to in-house and potential guests, especially those who are not able to physically visit the premises in the current scenario. A few wellness-focused resorts are also providing virtual well-being sessions on meditation, fitness, immunity-boosting techniques, self-care practices etc through their social media platforms.

The Indian wellness tourism segment has high-growth potential as an increasing number of people are adopting a healthier lifestyle and seeking personalized travel experiences in the post-COVID era, but is the sector ready to leverage the huge opportunity that is up for grabs?

\*AYUSH - Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy

## About **Mandeep S Lamba**



Mandeep S. Lamba, President – South Asia, oversees the HVS global hospitality practice for South Asia. He has spent over 30 years in the hospitality industry of which the last 19 have been in CEO positions. Having worked with leading International and domestic Hotel Companies such as IHG, Radisson & ITC Hotels, he also set up joint venture companies with Dawnay Day Group UK and Onyx Hospitality, Thailand to own and operate hotels in India giving him a broader exposure to the hospitality business.

An established industry leader, Mandeep has won several awards and recognitions in India and abroad for his accomplishments and contribution to the hospitality industry. He is a Certified Hospitality Administrator from the American Hotels Association (CHA), a member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, UK (MRICS) and a member of the Tourism Council of CII (Northern India). His views are often solicited for television and print media as a spokesperson for the hospitality & tourism sector.

Prior to joining HVS in 2018, Mandeep was the Managing Director, Hotels & Hospitality Group for JLL.

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