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## Wellness Tourism on the Rise

A growing number of destinations devoted to holistic wellness experiences are appearing on the map of the tourism industry as travellers become increasingly health-conscious



The pursuit of wellness across countries, as a foundation for good health, is a concept that has been part of the human ambition for a sound body and pure mind for centuries. In ancient Greece, the physician and Father of Medicine, Hippocrates, preached that disease prevention should be pursued over disease treatment, thus paving the foundation for a wellness tradition that would be picked up again with fervour in the mid 19th century in Europe and the 20th century in the United States. Wellness pursuits like specific dietary habits, hydrotherapy, exercise, spirituality and various types of manual and herbal therapies were touted in health resorts and sanatoriums, the precursors to today's modern spas. Later in the 1950s, Physician Halbert Dunn became known in the West as the Father of Wellness

through his publications, where he laid down the premise that health and wellness were inclusive of the mental, spiritual and emotional domains and not just the physical body. But it was not until the 1970s that Dr John Travis founded the first wellness centre in California, where he developed a landmark 12-dimension holistic wellness assessment, which is still used today.

Today, the term wellness has gone utterly mainstream and we barely blink an eye when it is referred to when discussing stress reduction strategies or disease prevention. But as both affluent and increasingly, developing nations indulge in the benefits of modern life (excessive auto transport, fast food meals and sedentary modes of digital work and entertainment), the rates of obesity and chronic disease resulting from ill health have risen dramatically. Global

obesity, according to the World Health Organization, has doubled since 1980, and 60 per cent of all deaths are caused by chronic diseases. It is no surprise then, that as people attempt to recover a wellness-oriented lifestyle, they should direct their valuable vacation and holiday time to encompass a holistic wellness experience that includes and even focuses exclusively on benefits for positive health maintenance.

Enter the rising tide of the wellness tourist in the global tourism industry. According to the *2013 Global Wellness Tourism Economy Report*, commissioned by the Global Spa & Wellness Summit (GSWS), the industry's leading education and research organisation, in conjunction with SRI International, a global research institution, wellness tourism is now projected to grow faster than ever. It is predicted to increase, on average, 9.9 per cent annually over the next five years, nearly twice the growth rate of global tourism overall, reaching US\$678.5 billion by 2017. Jean-Claude Baumgarten, GSWS keynote speaker and former president and CEO of the World Travel & Tourism Council states this swell succinctly. "Wellness tourism is poised to reshape tourism as we know it. So many 21st century forces are fuelling it, including the rise of chronic diseases and the unprecedented stress of modern life. What people want to achieve during their ever diminished time off is undergoing a sea change, with millions more every year demanding destinations that deliver physical, emotional, spiritual and environmental health – along with enjoyment."

According to the report, wellness tourism can be defined as "travel associated with the pursuit of maintaining or enhancing

one's personal well-being and health and is motivated by a desire for disease prevention, stress reduction and better management of lifestyle choices, including an increase in life/work balance, connection rejuvenation and relaxation. As such, activities pursued are noninvasive and non-medical." Many destinations and wellness options are at one's fingertips, which include a destination spa within a geologically natural hot springs area, such as The Banjaran Hotsprings Retreat in Malaysia; a historic thermal bath spa resort as found at the Bagni di Pisa Palace & Spa in Italy; a meditation retreat at a Buddhist monastery in Nepal where Himalayan Footsteps can take you to the Kopan Monastery for a truly authentic inner experience; a yoga retreat on pristine Southeast Asian beaches or within forests with retreat provider Soul Sanctuaries; a life balancing surf camp in Bali with Escape Haven; and an individualised cleanse, such as the Ayurvedic Panchakarma regime at Ananda in the Himalayas in India.

Although the US and Europe have led the global wellness tourist rates, their growth rates are expected to be superseded by Asia and the Middle East. The 2013 SRI study also determined that the US, Europe (specifically Germany, France, Austria and Switzerland) and Japan lead in the numbers of inbound wellness tourists and likewise lead (63 per cent of the global market) in the number of outbound wellness travellers. But emerging destinations for wellness tourism, according to the study, will be in Asia, particularly China, India, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea. In the Middle East, Turkey, UAE and Israel are expected to see rises in wellness tourism rates. For now, ageing and affluent Western baby boomers are leading the charge, but

**"People demand destinations that deliver physical, emotional, spiritual and environmental health"**

~ Jean-Claude Baumgarten

increasingly younger people from countries with a growing middle class, such as China will also be joining the wellness tourist ranks, as their education, income, holistic health awareness and desire for a sophisticated global lifestyle increase. Ophelia Yeung, lead author of the study and co-director at the Center for Science, Technology & Economic Development at SRI, notes, "This new research clearly reveals that more people are now choosing

destinations that help them keep or get healthy while travelling, while a smaller (and also growing) segment are also now taking trips with the specific, sole purpose of improving their personal well-being."

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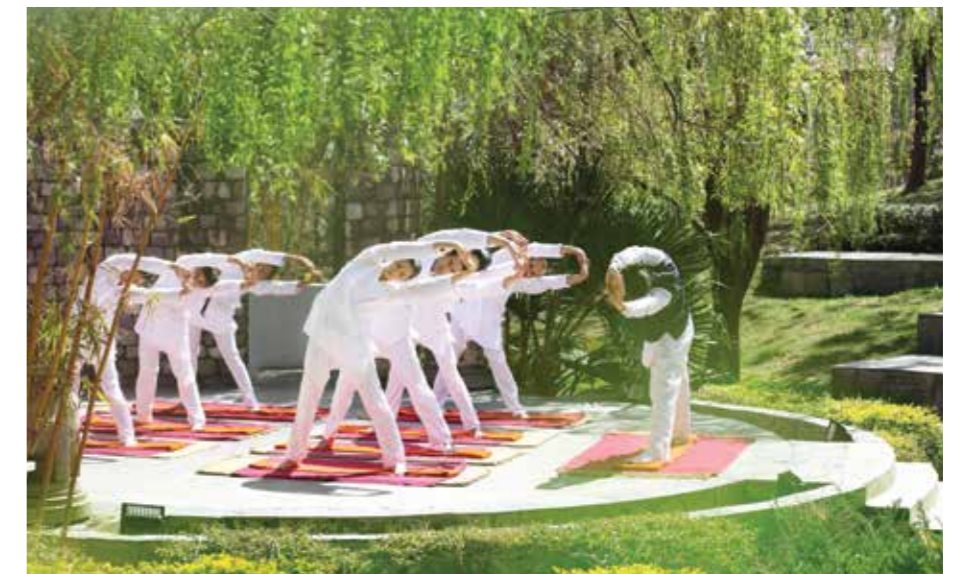
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