

Source markets

Due to the lack of focussed and directed publicity of wellness tourism, the major source market for India still remains the domestic market. In the last five years, the Government has taken keen interest in promoting this segment. The Tourism Ministry has offered 50:50 financial assistance to parties to up to Rs 10 lakh for participating in fairs and events approved by the tourism ministry in overseas markets under the Marketing Development Assistance (MDA) scheme. The ministry has also offered financial assistance of up to Rs 25 lakh for stakeholders participating in tourism promotion shows. It additionally also offers financial support for training courses on skill providing.

Speaking about the major source market for wellness tourism, Nikhil Kapur, Founder

and Managing Director at Atmatnan Wellness Centre said, "The domestic market is our largest client base. It has always been considered that Westerners travel for health but things have changed. Indians are mindful about where they spend their holidays and look at holidays as opportunities to rejuvenate, heal and come back stronger to their regular lives. We have many guests who come to us more than two times in a year and this includes guests from Tier II & III cities. Health Holidays are becoming mainstems for Indians. Some of the other markets which have mature wellness travellers include Americas, UK, Germany and now CIS and China is added to this list. At a property level, our share of overseas business is going up and in three years from now will be 40 per cent of the top line."

The Indian wellness tourism players are now looking to develop novel source markets. Similar to the Indian outbound growth story, today many Asian countries are witnessing similar trends. This can create more wellness source markets from within Asia-Pacific region.

"The traditional source markets are still stable and growing which are mainly German speaking markets Russia along with CIS and North America. What we are seeing changing is the growth from South East Asia and China and expect them to surpass some traditional markets by 2025," Ramesh added.

In terms of the traveller's profile, millennial travellers are the one who have always broken the norms and explored newer experiences. "The Millennials constitute the major travelling population in the world. Millennials have

We have many guests who come to us more than two times in a year and this includes guests from Tier II & III cities.

Nikhil Kapur

incredible spending power, and they seek for cultural vibrancy and authentic experiences. They like to indulge themselves in many holistic programs with spa gateway, detoxing cleansing with food, and fostering emotional, life-changing wellness journey. They like to share their experiences of wellness moments on social media," Purakkal said.

Popular experiences

It's a no brainer that being the birthplace of Ayurveda, it has to be the major driver for wellness tourism. But interesting to be noted, today travellers are opting wellness tourism for various serious health complications.

Speaking about the popular therapies, Hemanth Bagga, CEO, Fazlani Natures Nest stated, "We have found that ayurveda treatments like shirodhara, pizhichil and navarakizhi have been very popular among the weekend guests while the naturopathy therapies like deep tissue massage, acupressure and hydrotherapy have been very successful. However, we are witnessing a growing trend of patients seeking solutions and treatments for spondylitis, obesity, diabetes, Parkinson's

disease and ulcers."

Today one of the major challenges globally has been the rapid increase in lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, obesity, infertility, etc. Indian wellness players are catering to these issues successfully and are curating customised treatments. "Our guests come to us for many reasons such as detox, weight management, medicinal reversal (diabetes, hypertension), illness-management, rehabilitation, emotional healing, fitness, ayurvedic panchakarma. Our expertise lies in our multi-dimensional approach where we integrate various sciences and modalities to give the maximum result to our guests. So besides treatments, the components of nutrition, mental health, improve sleep quality and a positive

We are witnessing a growing trend of patients seeking solutions and treatments for spondylitis, obesity, diabetes, Parkinson's disease and ulcers.

Hemanth Bagga

environment is a must for a successful wellness destination. Pranic healing (energy healing), Chi Nei Tsang (tao school of healing), and amongst ayurvedic treatments - udwartanam (using medicated powder, improves blood circulation and mobilisation of fat) and navarakizhi (with medicated rice from Kerala,

fantastic for rejuvenation) are some of the popular therapies," Kapur added.

Echoing similar opinion, Ramesh said, "Ayurveda has always been focused on preventive care as well as treatments, and with the last five years data what we have noticed is that the most sought or prescribed programme was the panchakarma programme by our in house doctors. Second to that were the customised solutions as each person is an individual and all the treatment plans are based on the patient's body type. The maximum ailments we treatment were for obesity, infertility, psoriasis and eczema and bone disorders such as arthritis etc. and in the preventive aspect it has been rejuvenation and distress programme."

Role of 'AYUSH' Ministry

The year 2014 has been a milestone year for the wellness industry as the Government of India set up the Ministry of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH). This has been a major step in not only increasing the awareness about the various practices, but also to bring regulation in these sectors.

Lauding the work done by the Ministry of AYUSH, Ramesh stated, "The Ministry of Ayush has definitely been a great support for the industry and will continue to do so, with a more pragmatic and targeted approach towards marketing and promoting AYUSH industry, we will definitely see a growth and we estimate a growth of at least 15 per cent to 25 per cent."

Immediately after the introduction of the Ministry, the next major step was the introduction of 'World Yoga Day', which has again helped in promoting the ancient form of wellbeing.

"The government is promoting AYUSH and with the initiative taken on International Yoga Day that turned into global event recognised

With a more pragmatic and targeted approach towards marketing and promotion, we will definitely see a growth of at least 15 per cent to 25 per cent.

Abhilash K Ramesh

by United Nations, which helped creating awareness at the international platform about yoga and wellness in India. Yoga has been promoted as a therapy for physical and mental ailments, and this is what the customers look for during their vacations," Purakkal added.

With such commendable steps by the Ministry, the industry now expects further introduction of incentives and relaxations.

Kapur stated, "I am hoping that they announce certain incentives or schemes which make it for feasible and attractive for entrepreneurs to develop wellness centres in India. However, in the meanwhile, AYUSH has been creating a lot of awareness about benefits of a good lifestyle



and has been promoting Indian sciences like Ayurveda, Yoga etc"

Another major challenge is there is no proper focused promotion for the wellness tourism in the international markets. This segment has been usually promoted as an add-on to the normal vacations.

Ghosh added, "We as a nation have failed to leverage on our advantage of being

the home of Ayurveda and Yoga. There are very few destinations in India that has been sold purely as a wellness destination and most others have been marketed as tourist destinations with wellness thrown in. The need of the hour is to market some destinations as pure wellness centres which could cater to tourists who seek rejuvenation and not a regular vacation."

Challenges

Initially, one of the major challenges in this sector was to maintain the quality and authenticity of service providers. The

Government has taken a very crucial leap of introducing quality management with the help of Quality Council of India to extend the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Wellness Centres (NABH) certification for spa and wellness centres. Despite this initiative, the government needs to look at various other challenges to further boost this segment.

"Safety and security which is a challenge, tourism is a fragile dedicated industry and

wellness tourist will only come to visit our destinations for peace, calm, meditation, yoga, health, well being therefore the first foremost issue will be safety and security of the tourist because of presents of the fear because which we cannot promote," Ghosh opined.

Lack of infrastructure remains another challenge which affects this segment. Kapur also feels that improving the brand image of India will help them promote the segment tremendously. "Our travel partners in Europe frequently tell us that their lady clients don't want to travel to India because it's highly

Safety and security is a challenge, and tourist will only come to visit our destinations for peace, calm, meditation, yoga, health, well being

Sunirmol Ghosh

unsafe. Wellness destinations don't belong in the big cities but in tranquil and calm natural surroundings. But who is working towards improving the commute to these

destinations. Unfortunately, the ground situation is quite pathetic."

Another noteworthy challenge which the industry is facing is the lack of talent. Today, the supply of qualified personnel is depleting. "The supply of doctors and qualified personnel in the field of ayurveda and naturopathy has been dropping over the years. Moreover, there are segment of medical practitioners that are currently adamant to only converse in the local medium. Presently there is a lot of awareness to build up the language base to include international languages as well," Bagga said.