



ASIA: INDIA

What is making news in your country when it comes to spa and wellness?

The Global Spa & Wellness Summit 2013, with a host of eminent speakers, thought leaders and delegates on board, is taking place in India. This is indeed 'making news' because it reiterates the fact that in the global context of spas, wellness and wellbeing, Indian roots and our commitment to wellness play a significant role. Our role in this rapidly burgeoning industry is important, both as discerning, growing, potential consumers and also as one of the founders. The inherent roots of ayurveda, yoga, meditation and natural healing lie in the rich heritage and history of Indian civilization and have continued to be the founding principles of 'holistic wellness' globally.

What is happening in your country when it comes to wellness tourism and/or medical tourism?

Let us perceive tourism in two contexts, domestic and international.

The spa and wellness Industry in India is a growing sector. Our deep rooted knowledge of the ancient sciences has not completely evolved into its contemporary avatar of 'spas, wellness and wellbeing', as the term is understood globally.

The Indian mindset still associates wellness with healing or a treatment, whether in a medical, health or emotional context. It still has a physical rather than an experiential context to it. Visits to day spa's usually mean 'beauty and relaxation' only. Another factor that slows down wellness tourism domestically is that wellness centers in India are predominantly located in South India, and appear only sparsely in other parts of the country. Hence access has been a concern. Though the market base of discerning consumers who truly understand, appreciate and invest in wellness is still small, statistics reveal that, owing to growing consciousness and increasing incomes to complement this need, this is fast changing.

The 'organized' Spa & Wellness industry in India is opening its doors to wellness tourists from across the globe who understand wellness and are willing to travel and pay for an authentic, holistic experience. Wellness destinations based on sound principles of hospitality, hygiene, world class service standards, commitment to ecology and sustainability, and authentic treatments by renowned experts are now gradually beginning to take shape to offer an unprecedented, integrated wellness experience. The high potential sector of wellness tourism is poised to grow. This development, especially in the last decade, will give way to iconic destinations that seamlessly dovetail ancient sciences with a hint of luxury, together with world class hospitality and ethics.

The Government of India and visionary wellness brands like Vana Retreats are supporting the GSWS and this is indeed a sign of acknowledging the role that Wellness Tourism will play in our country.

Still where medical tourism in India is concerned, the industry has been on the fast track for a while and is on a constant growth path. Indian medical capabilities, state of the art hospitals, R&D facilities and expertise are globally renowned and acknowledged. Medical tourism has grown in India especially in the last decade.

Please give us one sentence to describe the latest developments in your country for each of these spa categories:

What is happening with hotel spas?

Hotel Spas continue to be the most desired getaway for a few hours or a day for the affluent consumer seeking beauty and relaxation, in a safe, private, comfortable, hygienic, international environment.

What is happening with destination spas?

The current offering of destination spas is very limited, both in terms of the number of destinations, and in terms of their credibility and commitment to the core ethos of wellness. The future holds promise for iconic destinations like Vana, Malsi Estate that are founded on trust, authenticity, commitment, vision and global standards of service and quality.

What is happening with hot springs spas?

The offerings are extremely limited, for geographical reasons.

What has been the general attitude about investing in the spa/wellness arena in 2013?

Investment in day spas, wellness products (more perceived as beauty products) and wellness centers has most certainly grown, as these centers are mushrooming all over the country. However serious, credible, holistic wellness destinations are few. Vana Retreats has been one of the first to make such a serious commitment, with a wellness destination like Vana, Malsi Estate.

Generally speaking, investment in this niche sector has not been very high because of two factors. Firstly, since not many world class wellness destinations exist as of today in India, there isn't a significant inflow of discerning, high investing, serious international wellness seekers yet. This market has to grow. The target wellness consumer base within India is niche and not very large in terms of market size. Other factors like extremely high cost of real estate acquisition, high cost of quality construction and maintenance, alongside challenges of limited resources in terms of expertise and talent, also affect the investment scenario. Nonetheless the future looks bright for a cautious, quality-conscious investor who is prepared to develop a niche 'product' for a discerning consumer who will willingly invest in it and stay loyal.

Looking back at the past four decades of spa and wellness, what would you consider "a defining moment?"

When ancient Indian traditions of ayurveda, yoga, meditation and natural healing gained international acclaim, acknowledgement and patronage - these were defining moments for India. These are sound principles that formed the foundation of the spa and wellness industry globally. Indian economic and infrastructural growth over the last few decades were also factors that highlighted India's presence on the global map. The Government of India's partnering in this Summit (Incredible India campaign) is a good sign of support, acknowledging Wellness as a major tourism driver. We appreciate their support, which will give a significant boost to this industry This is indeed a defining moment.

SUBMITTED BY:

Dr. Deepika Gunawant

Head – Integrative Health & Wellbeing, Vana Retreats