



WELLNESS IN THE PINK OF HEALTH

The wellness business in India is projected to grow at a CAGR of 30-35 per cent over the next five years with the business of leisure growing in popularity.

Arjan Bharadwaj takes a look at the sunrise sector.

Picture this: a dimly-lit room bathed in the scent of jasmine and lemongrass, soothing music and comfortable recliners. To this image, add ancient wellness therapies practiced in their modern adaptations, and the picture takes the form of a spa in India.

Increasingly, spas and salon treatments offer an oasis of escape, in an age when de-stressing has become a necessity, not just a luxury. Stressed-out and overworked city dwellers can now

select from a spa menu across India – from the high hills to plush resorts in metropolitan cities. They range from the ordinary to the esoteric: Pehlwan Malish (warrior massage, offered by, among others, the Jiva Spa at Udaipur, owned by the Taj Group of luxury hotels), astroveda treatment, aromatic scrubs, tangerine body wraps, aura imaging, foot spas and fish spas. All these therapies offer the promise of holistic healing.

Over the last five years, spas have begun springing up across Indian cities,





coming out of the setting of five-star luxury hotels to street-level, walk-in venues. The trend of resort spas is being replaced by neighbourhood/day spas where one can book oneself for a massage or treatment any day of the week. Today, the range of spas includes day spas, med spas, hotel spas, resort spas and destination spas.

Interestingly, wellness is one industry that appears to be immune to recessions and economic slowdowns. Business executives, bankers, stockbrokers and other professionals feel the need to de-stress and are willing to spend money even during tough times. The spa business has also proved to be austerity-proof.

The spa and wellness industry is estimated to be worth more than US\$ 2.35 billion today, according to international consulting firm Ernst & Young. It is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 30 to 35 per cent over the next five years, and includes segments such as alternative therapies, beauty, fitness and nutrition, among others. Of these, rejuvenation services such as

Spas in India offer high standards of luxury and service with world-class treatments. This has led to a considerable influx of tourists.

Ram Chatterjee,
manager, Club Oasis, Grand Hyatt

spas, alternative therapies, ayurveda treatments and beauty services are expected

to grow at around 30 per cent, while the fitness sector (which includes gyms and slimming centres) is expected to grow by more than 25 per cent.

Bina Patel, vice-president, spa division, Indian Hotels Co Ltd (a Tata Group company that operates the Taj chain of luxury hotels and resorts) points out that its spa business is growing rapidly. "All our centres have been doing exceedingly well," remarks Patel. "Rajasthan, Kerala and Goa continue to supersede expectations."

The spa business is picking up across the country and especially in cities such as Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi. In fact, one can even get a quick spa treatment at some of the international airports in India now.

Many international spa players are joining hands with five-star and other luxury hotels, devising packages to cater to the burgeoning demand for spa services in India.

"Spas in India offer high standards of luxury and service with world-class

GROWING OPPORTUNITIES

THE wellness industry covers several sub-segments, including leisure, fitness, general health, medical tourism and even winding down/get-away tourism. Pegged at around US\$ 2.35 billion, analysts believe the industry is at a take-off stage.

The organised sector accounts for about half the revenues of the wellness business in India. The huge potential for growth is attracting international players, besides private equity funds, who are keen to pick up stakes in some of the

major spa companies in India.

Although metros and major cities account for the bulk of the business, Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities are fast emerging as new growth centres. The two fast-growing segments that are having a positive impact on the spas business include Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) and medical tourism.

In the case of medical tourism, many hospitals that treat patients from abroad are tying up with spas, enabling their guests to recuperate at the spa facilities,

which are located either in the mountains or by the sea.

In a bid to ensure quality levels, the wellness industry recently launched standards for the sector. These are a set of regulations for accreditation for companies offering healthcare and wellness services in India. Girdhar Gyani, secretary-general, Quality Council of India (QCI), notes that these standards cover all aspects of the healthcare and wellness industry. By Annamma Oommen



treatments," says Ram Chatterjee, spa manager, Club Oasis, Grand Hyatt Mumbai. "By synergising the finest proven and effective ingredients with the most advanced delivery systems, superlative results have been experienced by patrons. This has led to a considerable influx of tourists who visit the country, with many spending some time at a spa destination to rejuvenate and refresh."

Interestingly, in order to service the growing sector and to keep pace with demand, an ancillary business is devel-

oping – the training of staff. Academies are being established across India to train youngsters in wellness treatment, massage therapy and spa hospitality.

This is, in fact, one of the unique selling propositions of the spa business. Indian spas excel in, and focus on, being service-oriented. India has always been proud of its tradition of hospitality; it is no wonder then that Ananda in the Himalayas was ranked third in the *Conde Nast Traveller* Readers' Travel Awards published in October 2009. The Serena Spa at Devi

Garh near Udaipur in Rajasthan was also ranked among the top 25 spas in the world by the magazine.

Keeping the needs of the busy executive and business traveller in mind, many resort spas have devised express packages. The Jiva Spa offers shorter treatments (30 to 45 minutes) for the time-starved, including packages for meetings and conferences.

"We provide signature treatments, Indian therapies, Indian aromatherapies, beauty treatments, ayurveda and yoga

SPAS TO GET YOU STARTED

Some of the most prominent health spas in India include:

- Ananda in the Himalayas, Tehri-Garhwal, Uttarakhand
- The Oberoi Spa, Wildflower Hall, Shimla
- Ranjit's SVAASA Heritage Boutique Wellness Resort & Spa, Amritsar
- Amanbagh, Udaipur
- Devi Garh, Udaipur
- Oberoi Rajvilas, Jaipur
- Oberoi Amarvilas, Agra
- The Grand Hyatt Mumbai
- AromaThai, Mumbai
- Taj Exotica, Goa
- Ayurvedic Natural Health Centre, Saligao, Goa
- The Leela, Goa
- Park Hyatt Goa Resort and Spa
- Soukya, Bengaluru
- Angsana Bengaluru
- Hotel Grand Ashok's Spa Rejuve, Bengaluru
- Coconut Lagoon, Kumarakom, Kerala
- Spice Village, Periyar, Kerala
- Somatheeram, Kovalam, Kerala
- Shin Shiva Ayurvedic Resort, Kovalam, Kerala



at our spa," points out Patel of Jiva. "The facilities include treatment rooms, relaxation lounges, wet areas, which encompass steam, sauna and swimming pool, and wellness cuisine."

Adding to the allure of spa holidays is their setting – many of them are located in royal palaces such as the Oberoi Spa at The Oberoi Rajvilas, Jaipur, which is located in a fort setting on 32 acres of landscaped gardens. Devi Garh Resort is a restored 18th century palace, while Ananda in the Himalayas and Wildflower Hall in Shimla are also housed in former royal residences.

So what is so special about these spas? Ananda, in the hills above Rishikesh along the Ganges, occupies more than 24,000 sq ft of land, with over 70 different body and beauty treatments, such as therapeutic treatments based on traditional ayurveda, yoga and meditation, along with the latest European and Thai treatments.

The Oberoi Amarvilas in Agra offers its signature 'Noor-e-Taj' – a luxurious three-hour experience, which includes an almond cleansing scrub, honey citrus wrap, Balinese massage and lavender milk bath. The spa has trained Thai therapists offering holistic treatments based on the ayurveda and ancient Thai techniques.

The Oberoi Rajvilas offers a turmeric skin purifier with rose sandalwood wrap or 'Spirit of Ayurveda' treatment. At the Thai

Spa in Mumbai, one can opt for the fish spa that involves immersing one's feet in a tank filled with live *garra rufa* or doctor fish, which exfoliate the dead skin.

At the Taj Exotica in Goa, one can opt to have a head, neck and shoulder massage at the edge of the property's lawns that overlook the sea, while enjoying a breathtaking sunset. At the Kabini River Lodge in the Nagarhole game reserve of Karnataka, a Kerala ayurvedic massage is the best antidote to a day spent in rattling jeeps, driving through the jungle on the trail of wild life. Aching bones are best set to rest with soothing oils.

The Oasis Spa at the Grand Hyatt, Mumbai, offers a 'Jetlag Revival' massage and a 'Recess from Stress' package. "We launched this when clients and guests at Club Oasis requested for a package with a focus on stress relief," explains Ram Chatterjee, club manager. "The three-and-a-half hour de-stressing journey begins with yoga and pranayam, continues with steam and sauna, followed by a relaxing back, shoulder, neck and head massage, foot reflexology, a dry back and face massage, and ends with a rejuvenating cup of organic tea."

This dose of tranquility comes for a price – US\$ 215, inclusive of taxes. But how can one put a price tag on peace of mind? That is perhaps the reason why the business of wellness continues to be in the pink of health. 🌸