

# DESTINATION KERALA : A VOYAGE TO WELLNESS

By

RAMESH U \*

KURIAN JOSEPH \*\*

RENGANATHAN R \*\*\*

\* Assistant Professor, College of Engineering, Munnar, Kerala, India.

\*\* Reader, St. Dominics College, Kanjirappally.

\*\*\* Professor, School of Management Studies, SASTRA University.

## ABSTRACT

*Wellness, in general, is used to mean a healthy balance of the mind-body and spirit that results in an overall feeling of well-being. It is a multidimensional state of being, describing the existence of positive health in an individual as exemplified by quality of life. Health/Wellness tourism refers to trips that are taken by tourists with the principal purpose being to improve their health and/or wellbeing. Life style diseases have emerged from the demanding and hectic pace of life led by people today. Hence there is a need to de-stress and increase involvement in leisure activities. What attracts medical tourists the most to India is its low cost treatment compared to that in western countries, along with the diverse tourism opportunities. Here, tourists can enjoy the vivacious culture, amazing contradictions, diverse geography, the most unique attribute – unity in diversity and are able to receive an orientation that will help them improve their life in terms of health and general wellness. Kerala's equable climate, natural abundance of forests (with a wealth of herbs and medicinal plants) and the cool monsoon season (June - November) are best suited for curative and restorative packages. The concept of health holiday, now better known as Wellness holiday, is based on the principles of Ayurveda, meditation, yoga, physical exercises and a balanced diet. It is like rejuvenation and clean up process on all levels - physical, mental and emotional. The main objective of this paper is to define and delimit the term Wellness and to explore the paradigm shift of Health Tourism concept to Wellness Tourism in Kerala, along with a study on the current opportunities and facilities.*

*Key words: Well being, Health Holiday, Ayurveda, Rejuvenation.*

## INTRODUCTION

More than 50 years ago the World Health Organization defined health as more than freedom from illness, disease, and debilitating conditions (WHO, 1947). The suggestion by World Health Organization that health had a positive component led to the use of the term wellness—now widely used to describe the state of being representing that positive component (Corbin, Pangrazi, & Franks, 2000). The state of wellness corresponds more to happiness than to health. The common existential problems relating to emotions, passions, personal values, and questions on the meaning of life do not make one happier, but they are equally not strictly reducible to health problems (Saracci, 1997). There is a general agreement among experts that wellness is multidimensional. The most commonly described sub-dimensions are: physical, social, intellectual, emotional

(mental) and spiritual. Other commonly proposed sub-dimensions include vocational and environmental, though these dimensions are not personal in nature. Wellness Tourism is a concept that is attractive to visitors who love combining wellbeing and lifestyle healthcare services with the strong desire to travel overseas. India positioned itself as a Medical tourism destination and it touted as the best destination among world countries for Medical Tourism. India's National Health Policy declares that treatment of foreign patients is legally an "export" and deemed "eligible for all fiscal incentives extended to export earnings." Government and private sector studies in India estimate that medical tourism could bring between \$1 billion and \$2 billion US into the country by 2012. The reports estimate that medical tourism to India is growing by 30 per cent a year.

In order to qualify as a contemporary wellness tourism

experience, we would contend that some deliberate contribution has to be made to psychological, spiritual or emotional well-being in addition to physical. This takes Wellness tourism from the realm of being merely a passive form of tourism with a focus on escapism to one where tourists are purposefully driven by the desire to actively seek enhanced wellness. The recent trend, however, is for western tourists to seek solace in Eastern philosophies and therapies (e.g., Chinese medicine, Buddhist meditation, Indian Ayurveda, Thai massage). Such alternatives already pervade many Western societies, but tourists are often just as keen to visit the origin of the practice. With more people in the west realizing the effectiveness of traditional and natural medicines in treating chronic diseases over modern medicines using chemical drugs, the scopes provided by Kerala is getting an upper hand in the Modern world. Arguably, however, there had been an unprecedented intensification in the pursuit of wellness in the history of Tourism in the recent years (Smith & Kelly, 2006). The most effective plan to achieve wellness or to grant wellness to others is a unique method of therapy which combines Ayurveda, Yoga, Physical exercise, food comprising of balanced diet and meditation, combined with the joy and pleasant mind set imparted through vivacious tourism opportunities. Wellness related tourism services provided by Kerala are now the most debated topic among the tourists and health care tourism providers' world wide. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the concept of Wellness Tourism and the diversity offered to its seekers visiting Kerala.

## Discussion

Health is God given and a natural phenomenon. It is a law of the nature to protect the human beings from diseases. To live in tune with the nature is the basic principle of natural living. Diseases are the products of unnatural living and should be viewed as the punishment for the violation of the natural law. If humans abide by the rules of natural law, good health can be achieved (Jayamani, 1999). Modern man has become an expert of economic theory and consumerism had made him greedy and crazy. Concentrating more on social status and luxury, modern man remains least bothered about his health and has

now become the most endangered species in the World. The fast paced lifestyle and stressful job coupled with lack of exercise and excessive eating habits have made the modern executive human to a variety of ailments. Depression is commonly cited as being one of the greatest disease burdens of the 21st century and suicide rates are rising, especially amongst young men (Mullholland 2005). Highly paid and socially accepted executives, who clutch their chest and crumple to the floor is a common scene in the corporate world. Even though the technological advancement of modern medicine is tremendous, its capacity for controlling and preventing diseases has gone down considerably. People are taking a lot more of drugs than they used to, and drug costs are inflating at a higher rate than any other component of health care (Angel, 2004). Medical tourism can be broadly defined as provision of 'cost effective' private medical care in collaboration with the tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialized treatment. This process is being facilitated by the corporate sector involved in medical care as well as the tourism industry - both private and public. Tourism in its initial stages was directly aimed at increasing health and well being of people. In the present decade, the attempt to achieve better health while on a holiday through relaxation, exercise or visits to spas has been taken into a new level, with the emergence of a distinct niche in the tourism industry, "Wellness Tourism", where tourism is deliberately linked to direct health interventions and the outcomes are expected to be substantial. A new horizon has opened in the present decade in the name of advanced psychotherapies, complementary treatments and an ever charming Wellness leisure and tourism. Wellness is a term that is widely used by the general public and qualified health professionals, as well as those who pose as "experts" but who lack credentials, because many programs described as "fitness" programs are now being called "wellness" programs, and because the words fitness and wellness are often used interchangeably. Consistent with this definition, there is no doubt that a strong relationship exists between physical fitness and many components of

wellness. But physical fitness is neither health, nor wellness. There is considerable evidence that physical fitness, and the behaviors that build it, can reduce risk of illness and early death (USDHHS, 2000). However, both health and wellness are much broader terms than physical fitness. Physical fitness relates closely with physical wellness, but the later has more dimensions than the physical alone. This should not detract from the message of the early proponents of wellness who professed that "healthy lifestyles are critical." Indeed, healthy lifestyles are important because they promote good health and wellness. There have been some attempts to classify specific measures of wellness, such factors as personal energy, ability to enjoy leisure, better self-image and self-confidence, to name but a few (Cooper, 1982).

Wellness tourism is regarded as a subcategory of health tourism. Health tourism is "the sum of all the relationships and phenomena resulting from a change of location and residence by people in order to promote, stabilize and, as appropriate, restore physical, mental and social well-being while using health services and for whom the place where they are staying is neither their principle nor permanent place of residence or work (Kaspar, 1996). Tourists frequently seek locations and activities that are transcendent. Factors describe how travelers are attracted to 'sublime' landscapes that benefit their soul by making them feel small, yet part of an infinite and universal cycle (De Botton 2002). Tourists need to be in good enough physical health to embark on a journey, as well as being materially affluent. The growing world wide focus on health and well being has led to an enormous increase in the wellness facilities in India. The country's National Health Policy declares that treatment of foreign patients is legally an "export" and deemed "eligible for all fiscal incentives extended to export earnings." Government and private sector studies in India estimate that medical tourism could bring between \$1 billion and \$2 billion US into the country by 2012. The reports estimate that medical tourism to India is growing by 30 per cent a year. The increasing attractiveness and economic significance of health and Wellness tourism is further apparent in the growth of both domestic and

international visitors since the beginning of this decade. India is the most touted healthcare destination for countries like South-East Asia, Middle East, Africa, Mauritius, Tanzania, Bangladesh and Yemen with 12 per cent patient inflow from developing countries. The top 10 countries, which contributed maximum number of visitors during the years 2005 & 2006 is illustrated in Table 1.

The Indian tradition, culture, heritage, delicious menu and spices have always attracted tourists from every corner of the world. Along with the tremendous opportunities for tourism and leisure, India offers the best treatments in conventional medicine: Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, Yoga and Modern medicine such as cardiology, orthopedic surgery, eye care, gynecology, cosmetic surgery and dental surgery. Southern states of India, especially, Kerala has developed Wellness Tourism as one of the products for the promotion of tourism in the state.

#### Wellness Tourism in Kerala

Kerala – the mesmerizing land located in the south of India enjoys geographical features that are unique and rich. Kerala is one of the few blessed lands in the world that is networked by forty four rivers. These rivers are also known as the 'backwaters of Kerala' and it stretches up to almost 1900 kilometers. Kerala has some of the amazing, most charming beaches of the world. The colorful beaches always remain bathed in the golden rays of the sun and the tourists who spent their time here gets captivated by the ever glowing beauty of this picturesque land. It has 600 km long shoreline dotted with coconut groves, natural

2005			2006		
Rank	Country	Tourist Arrivals	Rank	Country	Tourist Arrivals
1	UK	651083	1	UK	734240
2	USA	611165	2	USA	696739
3	Canada	157643	3	Canada	176567
4	France	152258	4	France	175345
5	Sri Lanka	136400	5	Germany	156808
6	Germany	120243	6	Sri Lanka	154813
7	Japan	103082	7	Japan	119292
8	Malaysia	96276	8	Australia	109867
9	Australia	96258	9	Malaysia	107286
10	Nepal	77024	10	Nepal	91552

Source : Bureau of Immigration, India Tourism Statistics

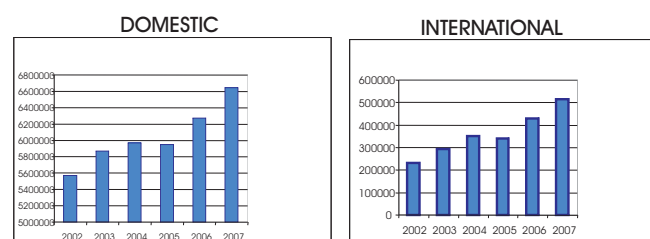
Table 1. Top 10 Source Countries for Foreign Tourist Arrivals 2005-06

harbors, lagoons and sheltered coves. Kerala has some of the finest hill stations in India with the entire Western Ghats studded with evergreens, rolling grasslands, shoals and stretches of rejuvenating fragrance of tea and coffee plantations. This state is also the only place in India which practices Ayurveda in its purest form.

Being in this geographical wonder; heals the mind, body and soul with the magical touch of Ayurveda. Ayurveda is the oldest surviving complete medical system in the world. Derived from its ancient Sanskrit roots - 'ayus' (life) and 'ved' (knowledge) - and offering a rich, comprehensive outlook to a healthy life, its origin goes back to nearly 5000 years (Dash,1999). Many Government owned organizations and private resorts are coming up with the Spas and Ayurveda Centers as an integral part in Kerala. Majority of the foreign nationals visiting India as Medical Tourists visit Kerala to experience the upgrading and rejuvenation promised through the pure and original therapies of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy. Wellness therapies comprising of panchakarma, rejuvenation, detoxification, body purification, stress & strain management, holistic wellness, weight loss, yoga and meditation helps its seekers to organize the fundamentals of life into a properly structured system. Ayurveda believes in the treatment of not just the affected part, but the individual as a whole, making the natural way to refresh one, eliminate all toxic imbalances from the body and thus regain resistance and good health (Jalukar 2003). These are among the best alternative processes used in the healing of various diseases, be it physical or mental. Yoga is regarded as the oldest therapy that can cure many complicated diseases. It has been proved by history that through the regular practice of yoga and meditation, any volatile and restless mind can undergo a welcome transition with wonderful results. Meditation is the state of abstinence from actions. The following are the main derives of meditation:- a) improved mental functioning b) larger perspectives and increased clarity of thought c) realization of spiritual growth d) destructive habits are dropped away with minimal conscious effort. It is being proved that a unique combination of therapy comprising

of Ayurveda, yoga, balanced natural diet, physical exercise and meditation shall deliver the phenomenon of Wellness to its aspirants which in turn ensures the purity of body, mind and soul. The domestic and International tourist's arrival statistics to Kerala from 2002 to 2007 is illustrated in Table 2. The position of Kerala, among the other states/UT of India, regarding foreign tourist arrivals is illustrated in Table 3.

The various elements of wellness could be imparted to a human through the following means:- Physical Wellness through Ayurveda therapies, balanced diet and exercise, Emotional Wellness through yoga and traditional psychotherapy, Environmental Wellness through the trips to naturally inbound tourist destinations comprising serene and beautiful surroundings and Spiritual Wellness through meditation. The tradition of natural healing system has been a part of tradition and daily life in Kerala. Its equable climate, natural abundance of forests (with a wealth of herbs and medicinal plants), and the cool monsoon season (June - November) are best suited for any curative and restorative packages. The Table 4 shows the district wise distribution of Government approved



Source: Kerala Tourism Statistics

Table 2. Tourist Arrivals to Kerala

Sl No	State	2005	2006
1	Delhi	1511893	1974836
2	Maharashtra	1449875	1712302
3	TamilNadu	1179316	1319501
4	UttarPradesh	1174597	1328974
5	Rajasthan	1131164	1220164
6	West Bengal	895639	998029
7	Andhra Pradesh	560024	669617
8	Karnataka	545225	505524
9	Kerala	346499	428534
10	Goa	336803	380414

Source: India Tourism Statistics - 2006

Table 3. Foreign Tourist Arrivals - Top 10 States/UT

District	Govt. Approved Ayurvedic Centers
Thiruvananthapuram	23
Kollam	9
Pathanamthitta	2
Allapuzha	6
Kottayam	11
Idukki	6
Ernakulam	19
Thrissur	12
Palakkad	3
Kozhikod	6
Wayanad	2
Kannur	2
Total	101

Source : Kerala Tourism Statistics

Table 4. Distribution of Classified Ayurvedic Health Centers in Kerala

Ayurvedic health centers in Kerala.

Traditional texts like "Charakam Chikitsa" and "Susrutha Chikitsa" reveal that monsoon is the best season for rejuvenation programmes. The atmosphere remains dust-free and cool, opening the pores of the body to the maximum, making it most receptive to herbal oils and therapy. In fact, today, Kerala is the only State in India which practice these traditional therapies and system of medicines with absolute dedication.

### Conclusion

India is one of the countries that have deliberately set out to be a dominant medical tourism destination. A recent trend has shown that people from developed countries are seeking treatment from the health professionals of developing countries. The Indian medical tourism industry is growing at an annual rate of 30 percent and it caters to patients mostly from the US, Europe, West Asia and Africa. Also, with international traveling becoming easier and affordable and with improvements in healthcare technology and infrastructure across the world, medical tourism is fast becoming a preferable way to mingle leisure with health and wellness. The destination in wellness tourism is often an alternative space in which one can engage in self analysis without the stresses and distractions of home as well as work place. In the long run, Wellness tourism can become the niche for foreign revenue generation as there is an increasing trend in the

number of visitors to Kerala as wellness seekers. Varsity of the Wellness phenomenon coupled with the mind blowing tourism potential offers a well set choice for international tourists to visit this land better known to the world as 'God's Own Country'.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

*Ramesh. U is currently working as Assistant Professor at College of Engineering, Munnar, a Government of Kerala establishment. With around 14 years of experience in teaching, he has 4 Journal publications in credit. He is a member in the Editorial board of Contemporary Management Research (ISSN -1813-5498) and has published a text book on Industrial Organization and Management. His areas of interest are Tourism Management, HRM, Operations research and Public relations.*



*Kurian Joseph is currently working as Reader in St Dominic's College, Kanjirappally, Kerala. He obtained his Masters in Commerce and then his PhD from Mahatma Gandhi University and has over 32 years of teaching experience. He has published 4 text books in subjects related to Commerce and Management and has over 12 publications in various Journals. He is a Councilor of the Institute of Company Secretaries of India. His areas of interest are Consumer Protection, Company law and Tourism Management.*



*R. Renganathan is working as Professor in the School of Management Studies at SASTRA University, Tanjore, Tamil Nadu. He has 25 years of experience out of which for 15 years he served Govt. of India in various public sector organizations. He has around 8 Journal publications in his credit. His areas of interest are Marketing Management with specializations in Services Marketing, Advertising Management, Retail Marketing and Tourism & Hospitality Management.*

