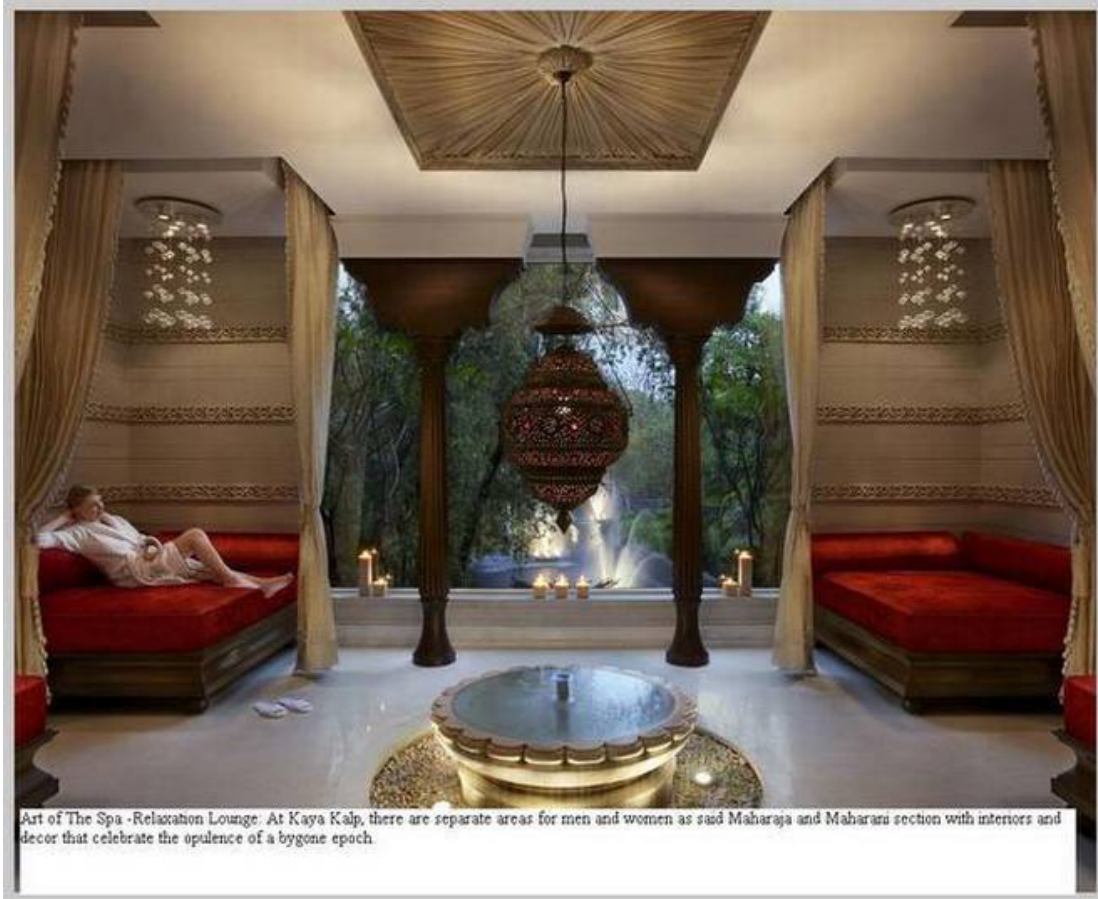


When wellness meets wanderlust



In the age of the smartphone detox, more people are going on wellness trips than ever before

Last year, as I toured through the palatial ITC Grand Bharat at Manesar and found an entire floor set aside for Kaya Kalp, I wondered if it made business sense for a luxury resort to dedicate such a large space for its royal spa. There were nine treatment suites, hamams, a Jacuzzi area, and an Ayurveda zone spread over 3,200 sq km of scented, flower-bedecked expanse.

A chance meeting with Ingo Schweder, the man who co-founded the spell-bindingly scenic Ananda in the Himalayas, one of India's best wellness retreats, was an eye-opener. According to Schweder, wellness

is a \$3 trillion economy globally, of which the tourism component alone generates \$562 billion.

In the age of increasing lifestyle diseases and the smartphone detox, more people are taking wellness trips instead of conventional holidays, he says. And a wellness traveller spends 59% more than an ordinary tourist. While spa properties in scenic locales are ideal for healing holidays, most people end up looking for quick detox breaks at driving distance from cities.

Scouting the opportunity, the slenderly-built German, who supervised the development of The Oberoi Rajvillas, Amarvillas and Udaivillas during the late 90s, and later set up 15 resort spas for the Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, became a wellness entrepreneur with Bangkok as his base.

The ardent yoga practitioner is not only creating a spa empire of his own through a chain of destination wellness resorts branded GOCO Retreats, but is also a consultant with hotel chains. “We do 35-40 projects every year with the likes of Marriott, Conrad, Bulgari, Ritz-Carlton and Emaar,” he says, adding he has another project coming up in Goa.

After Goa, Schweder says he would like to do something at Mulshi Lake, near Pune. Certainly, Mulshi is becoming the new go-to place for rejuvenation for stressed-out Mumbaikars, with healing retreats like Atmantan created by Pune-based Nikhil Kapur proving a big draw.

With India’s wellness tourism market projected to be one of the fastest growing in the world (50% faster than global tourism), it’s in Schweder’s interest to come here soon.

The spa of tomorrow

GOCO Retreats are in Bali, Thailand and Germany, but it’s when he talks about the Glen Ivy Hot Springs development in California that Schweder’s eyes gleam. Spread over 20 acres, with 19 indoor and outdoor pools, 72 treatment rooms, pulling in 170,000 visitors every year, it’s altogether on another scale. Schweder describes how GOCO plans to develop a wellness community on the adjacent land, which is

surrounded by organic orchards, a golf course, mountains and a Nature preserve. Wellness communities, he forecasts, will soon become a big thing, with cities built and branded around concepts of health and sustainability. The other trend, he says, is democratisation of wellness holidays. Baby boomers generate 74% of global traffic in wellness trips. But a shift is happening, as the millennials are focused on fitness.

As for the spa of tomorrow, that's still evolving. Online booking site Hotels.com worked with futurists to see what the world of hospitality would look like in 2060, and it forecasts that spas will no longer be about mud baths and massages. Instead, the hotel spa of the future could be a longevity clinic based on DNA analysis.

So once you check into Spa 2.0, you will receive personalised prevention treatments, prediction and health enhancement programmes designed to refresh your health, and understand your future health risks. "These will use the latest genetic medicine treatment," it predicts.

Are you feeling all Spa-ced out?

(The writer is an editorial consultant with BusinessLine who writes on consumer behaviour but keeps an interested gaze at the travel and hospitality sector)