

SPIRITED GETAWAYS

As stress takes over day-to-day life, wellness vacations catch on in India



TRAVEL

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Here's a healthy way to holiday. On March 1, the International Yoga Week commenced in Rishikesh. Going on for seven days, the programme includes nearly 70 hours of yoga with interactive sessions with experts from the field. It isn't the first initiative that seeks to relax the mind and rejuvenate spirits. As stress levels rise, a number of travellers are looking for holidays that provide a more holistic well-being.

"Yoga and vipassana are part of our culture, but Indians are beginning to include them in their holidays. We also have travellers looking for ayurveda options," says Anusuf Poonawala, VP-Bharat Leko, Cox & Kings, adding



Participants at the International Yoga Week

ALL IN THE MIND

The International Yoga Week (IYW) takes place on the banks of the river Ganga annually and offers nearly 70 hours of meditation. Hosted by Ganga Kinare, a riverside boutique hotel in Rishikesh, it features a host of special sessions by experts on Hatha

Yoga, Pranayam, Baptiste Yoga Ashtanga Yoga and meditation among others. These are followed by interactive sessions and talks. In the evenings, guests can head to a private ghat and participate in the daily aarti. Classical performances are also held. This year IYW is on from March 1-7.

that wellness cuisine at these vacations is catching on, too. "Patrons are served healthier, lighter preparations created from natural ingredients," he

says. According to the SRI International Study released at the 2013 Global Wellness Tourism Congress, this industry is estimated to grow

HEADING ABROAD?

Dershah Maheshwari, country manager, Trafalgar India, recommends the following options: **DEAD SEA, JORDAN:** Its mineral-rich waters have soothing properties. Soaking there is considered a

natural spa treatment. Travellers can enjoy in the warm, stimulating black mud and later float in the calming waters of the Dead Sea. **PAMUKKALE, TURKEY:** It holds the ancient ruins of Hierapolis, and is famous for white cotton castles

formed by limestone-laden thermal springs. Resorts often have thermal pools for guests to relax in. **BUDAPEST, HUNGARY:** With an astounding array of baths and hundreds of springs, it is definitely a destination to head to for those looking for a wellness vacation.

Dead Sea, Jordan

nearly 50% faster than global tourism by 2017. It also forecasts that India is going to be the global leader in this field over the next five years, clocking over 20% gains annually. The market for such breaks is a large one, with travel operators claiming that they receive requests from people in the age group of 30-70.

While cities like Pune and Panaji are gaining popularity for wellness tourism, destinations such as Bekal,

Neelleshwar and Kasargod (all in Kerala) as well as spots in the Nilgiri biosphere are also seeing a growing interest. "We have witnessed a spike in interest not just from the youth and senior citizens but also from our high-profile luxury travellers," says Rajeev Kale, COO - MICF, domestic, sports holidays and cruises, Thomas Cook (India).

Most see these short-duration getaways as detox vacations. "To cater to this demand, holistic wellness

centres have mushroomed across India. We are seeing a trend of people combining their wellness vacation with fitness activities. They are opting for the Himalayas, Goa's shores or Kerala to enjoy a rejuvenating experience," says Mohit Gupta, chief business officer, holidays, MakeMyTrip, adding that visits to Ayurvedic spas in Kerala, yoga ashrams in Rishikesh and community living in Pondicherry are fast becoming popular