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# Holistic Approach to Wellness—A Case Study of Himalayas

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## Introduction

The case study aims to provide an overview to regular tourists and travelers from all over the globe and gives a brief about the wellness tourism (a form of tourism that satisfies the person's main motive for maintaining and strengthening the physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological health in high quality) opportunities that can be availed in contrast with natural resources available in the Himalayan region. This type of tourism helps in boosting natural healing procedures and foster physical and psychic well-being of the tourists. Himalayas are also the center for the spirituality as they can cater to the tourists in many ways. They provide a natural environment for relaxing away from the congested day to day hustle and bustle of modern cities. It is also a point of consideration that Himalayas are abode of all unique natural features and attractions such as minerals, healing waters, serene atmosphere and various sacred sites that are proficient in attracting the tourist's for wellness even at no extra costs. Although previous researchers have supported the natural approach towards wellness or well being of humans but such concepts are still undefined in terms of Himalayas. This case study aims to analyze the scope of wellness tourism in Himalayas and also find out various alternatives to boost such concept in Himalayan region. Another important question discussed is why wellness tourism only and not any other form of tourism has great scope in Himalayas. How it is effective for mental and body relaxation? How it should be planned so as to access its benefits? Why Himalayas should be taken for such execution? And what are the problems faced by stake holders for its marketing?

## Objectives of the Case Study

1. The aim of the study is to focus on the wellness tourism opportunities offered by Himalayas.
2. To discuss the various negative aspects that have made the concept an unprivileged part in Himalayan region.
3. To explore the potentiality of wellness tourism in Himalayas.
4. To recommend the possible ways of developing natural wellness concept in Himalayan region.

## Background

Wellness tourism is a form of tourism that satisfies the person's main motive for maintaining and strengthening the physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological health in high quality tourism establishments that offer diverse and individually prepared services in four basic components of wellness, stimulating the tourists' well being and adding the medical wellness, beauty and body care (Gojčič, 2005). However, at the global level India enjoys less than two percent share of the wellness market. According to survey conducted by ASSOCHAM (The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India) and NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization) the inflow of medical tourists that stood at 3 lakhs in 2009 rose to 8.5 lakhs in 2011 and is likely to touch 32 lakhs by 2015.

Narratives dating back centuries describe gardens, pastoral landscapes and natural settings with miniature lakes and meadows, as places where people can take refuge, find shelter and comfort during moments of sadness and pain; as places where the body and mind can both heal (Ottooson and Grahn, 2008). In terms of wellness, Himalayas offers a best retreat to the tourists in every aspect. Our historians have been telling us time and again that Himalayas consist of unique natural features and attractions such as minerals, healing waters and various sacred sites which are bestowed with the bounty beauty of nature and reflect India's proficiency in attracting the tourist's not only with its natural attractions but also with the services of providing the best retreat to many lifestyle problems. It can also be reviewed from the earlier literature and religious scriptures that the ancient people or saints preferred to move to Himalayas to attain enlightenment and spiritual well-being away from home.

Researchers over the last twenty years have gradually started identifying the benefits to human health and wellness and attributed them to re-connect with physical activity in the natural environment (Brymer, 2009; Brymer & Oades, 2009; Burls, 2007; Maller, C. et.al. 2006). Moreover in Eco-psychology or nature-guided therapy the various aspects of the human-nature relationship have been considered very important. Under such circumstances of fast pace urbanization, Himalayas are the only option to get the nature's therapy and to enjoy the close relationship with it. Also the theory of wellness in Himalayas is supported with the fact that the indulgence with nature affects numerous facets of a person's physical, mental and social life such as:

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- reducing anger, frustration and aggression (Groeneweggen et al. 2006)
- increasing a sense of belonging and acceptance
- a range of other aspects including socialization, mobility, mental stimulation, touch, physiological benefits, and the fulfillment of basic needs such as love, respect, usefulness, trust, self-worth and nurturing (O'Brien, 2005).

According to Smith and Puczko (2009), wellness elements comprise the elements of lifestyle, physical, mental and spiritual well being and one's relationship to oneself, and others, and the environment. In support to this definition many faiths right across the religious spectrum have designated the Himalayan Mountains to be an epicenter of spirituality, and by visiting their glorious peaks one can find spiritual guidance and divine inspiration.

Also according to Lee (2004), European health and wellness model comprises of four natural aspects i.e. fire, water, earth and air. All these elements are stated for the therapies that include soothing the body with water, therapeutic treatment for sweating and increasing blood circulation, earth that offers the various natural herbs for various health treatments and fresh air that is the base of life. The health promoting benefits of Shinrin-yoku, the Japanese therapeutic method of bathing in the forest air and walking, were examined in a study by Yamaguchi et al. (2006) that creates a proposed effects on individuals well being. This concept can be viewed through the Himalayan region as Kashmir, Uttarakhand, etc. are home of the natural pine forests and various waterfalls present there promote psychological as well as physical well being. Himalayas have always been known for their rich heritage of 'Wellness' traditions and have enormous possibilities to offer to 'Wellness' seekers as wellness tourists frequently seek locations and activities that are inspirational. They are "attracted to 'sublime' landscapes that benefit their soul by making them feel young, yet part of an infinite and universal cycle." (De Botton 2002 cited in Smith and Kelly, 2006) However, this appears to be at hand as various natural psychotherapies, complementary treatments that can be achieved by the acquaintance of various natural sources of Himalayas.

### ***Supporting Factors and Resources for Wellness Tourism in Himalayas***

Looking into the prospects of natural wellness considerations, Himalayas and its endowed destinations could be served as alternatives to the luxurious concept of wellness approaches like morning and evening walk in lush green forests, sun bath in fresh and purified atmosphere, spending evenings in emanating waterfalls, consuming fruits without chemical treatment, bonfire woods in late evening hours, rocks, natural herbs and nature bestowed soil etc. that act as a medicine having lot of minerals in it. Consequently the wellness opportunities in Himalayan region can be viewed through the related terminologies that have been discussed by various experts and re-

searchers towards complete wellness. They are:

### ***Physical wellbeing and Himalayas***

The emergence of sedentary life style and less physical activities have made a huge gap between human and nature's contact which has resulted in major skin and other health problems. The use of mineral springs and thermal mud that soothe and heal various ailments are easily available in Himalayan destinations like Uttarakhand, Sikkim, etc. Spa has now become one of the most important activities especially among the urban population. It has also been considered as luxurious concept and is not affordable to low budgeted tourists. But Himalayan region have abundance of such springs that meet such requirement of an individual. The best example is the Gasa hot springs which is one of the most popular hot springs of Bhutan. These hot springs offer healing properties for all kind of ailments such as body aches and various skin diseases. Also, Hine et al. (2008), in a study on the effects of green exercise in the countryside, found four principles upon which these principles are based:

1. Sensory stimulation
2. Activity
3. Escape
4. Nature and social connections

The beautiful rushing rivers and gushing waterfalls, the rustling of leaves and the passing calls of wildlife add to the sounds of natural environment of Himalayan region. As sensory stimulation refers to the physical involvement in landscapes and nature, and all these features of Himalayan region help in enhancing the sensory stimulation that individuals feel and value. Further all the pilgrimage places that lie in the foothills of Himalayas such as Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, Amarnath ji shrine, etc. add on to such prospects of wellbeing. Also Pretty et al. (2005), in his study that involves simulated green exercise (exercise on a treadmill while exposed to photographs of green spaces compared with other spaces), found that green exercise appears to have benefits both for cardiovascular health and mental health. In context to Himalayas' contribution towards such concept lies again with visitation of various places by foot like trekking to various shrines the best examples are Mata Vaishno Devi shrine and Hemkunt Shrine (Uttarakhand), thus enhancing the natures and individuals' relationship. In other words it can be stated that such kind of green exercise and activity enhances wellbeing in terms of making individuals more energetic, giving them fresh air and feeling more physically fit along with creating the positive influence on their mental wellbeing.

Escape is the concept of being away from the various social and other daily activities that make individual's mentally or psychologically sick. This has been attributed to escaping the pressures of modern living and gaining a connection to the plants and earth in the form of multi-sensory stimulation and a very embodied interaction with

the natural surroundings (Parr, H., 2007). The various escape and relaxation activities include adventure, mountaineering, or being close to the nature finding calm and fresh environment. Himalayas are enriched with such natural qualities offering tourists the variety of aspects of escapism as per their needs. The various regions in India as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir are blessed with such aspects naturally where there is no need to rethink in terms of monetary aspects as they are renowned for their tranquil living atmosphere, natural environment, beautiful flora and fauna and organically validated traditional healing procedures for the mind and body.

### ***Psychological Wellbeing and Himalaya's Relationship***

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 (e.g., Mullholland 2005). So, Psychological development has become the demand in this contemporary and hectic world. Himalayas offer a best place for such development with its exotic nature and environmental existence, inspiring the individual to understand his/her existence and enjoying the closeness to nature. Visiting the places like Dharamshala, Sikkim, Kashmir that are part of exotic Himalayas and exploring the nature itself without spending much, not only helps an individual to be away from all the worldly affairs, but to regain his/her inner self along with new perceptions towards life, nature, and himself. Also, silence of the mountains is impenetrable that absorbs the man made sounds of the city. Indeed, for many people, when they visit the Himalayas, what they find is a physical embodiment of their spiritual faith- able to walk over the mountains and experience their solidarity, their beauty, and their fine detail. Even various monasteries and centers that offer the Vedic and scripture's knowledge and the traditional yoga styles eventually at no costs are located in the Himalayan region like Ladakh, Dharamshala, etc. As a whole, having a nature walk is the one of the best example of psychological retreat.

### ***Himalayas and Spiritual Tourism***

Himalayas are considered as home for the spiritual attainments. Nature has blessed the Himalayas and they offer spiritual healing elements in such a way that the individual's psychologically attain balance in their lives. The Great Himalayas on northern side of Indian subcontinent are considered as the home of spirituality and are fast catching the imagination of the people and as a result more and more people are flocking to these places for their salvation in lush green meadows, pastures and aloof forests away from the busy life of the congested cities. The best example of such techniques are Vipassana (to see things as they really are) that is being practiced in India for about 2,500 years ago as a purpose of meditation and spiritual well being. Such teachings are offered in Gyuto Monastery. Not only this various religious monasteries, temples and shrines located in Hima-

layan region of Tibet, Ladakh, Kashmir, and Uttarakhand are blessed with the spirituality of god and goddesses. Hence they are the best parts of the spiritual well being making the individual feel close to the nature and god as well. On the whole taking the pilgrimage to the places like Vaishno Devi shrine, Amarnath shrine, Kedarnath, Mansarovar, Badrinath, etc which lie in the lap of Himalayas, completes the thought of individuals' spiritual contemplations with the enjoyment of nature's beauty and sightseeing that it offers.

### ***Himalayas and Spa/ Yoga Tourism***

Concept of spa and Himalayan tourism is interrelated to each other. The various therapies are provided in the spa as body massage using natural herbs and various other treatments including the aroma therapies etc. The use of mineral springs and thermal mud that soothe and heal various ailments are easily available in Himalayan destinations like Uttarakhand, Sikkim, etc. Moreover, spa has now become one of the most important activities especially among the urban population. It has also been considered as the luxurious concept and is not affordable to low budgeted tourists. But Himalayan region have abundance of such springs that could complete the said requirement of an individual. The best example is Sahastradhara, or the 'thousand springs' is situated at a distance of 16 kilometers from Dehradun. Sulphur here is reputed to cure skin infections and contain other medicinal properties as well. Also the Gasa hot springs which is one of the most popular hot springs of Bhutan offer healing properties for all kind of ailments such as body aches and skin diseases.

Scientific researches have proven that yoga cures and prevents common as well as rare diseases. With its lofty peaks and green and serene mountains and hills, Himalayan region as Nepal, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand are the perfect destinations for yoga and meditation lovers. Introduction of yoga into the trekking experience makes up for a richer experience as the physical and mental landscape of the body and mind are opened through daily meditation, yoga and trekking. Thus, to rediscover oneself through yoga there shall be no other place more tranquil and peaceful than the Himalayas. The prominently discussed part is that these destinations have still not been highlighted and with the result the tourists prefer to move other places like Kerala, for spas and yoga.

### ***Discussion Point***

The wellness industry is pre-meditated by the Indian government. Even Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (2011) has reportedly analyzed that by 2015, wellness services in India have the potential to generate over three million jobs. Recognizing the importance of this industry, the government has already initiated measures to stimulate growth. But the major focus relies on the medical treatments or advanced wellness supporting avenues in cities and other urban areas but no special consideration is given to the Himala-

yan tourism. Himalayas are enriched with all such natural resources of well being that are available at no cost consideration and even have long term effects on health. It is also quite considerable that the wellness tourism is surrounded by the natural benefits in all the aspects like herbal treatments of ayurveda, nature walk, and natural site seeing in the Himalayan region, thus it can also be one of the points of promotion for eco tourism and sustainable tourism which is the major focus in these days.

Wellness tourism in Himalayan region would also help in increasing the value of traditional sources of treatments like ayurveda and hence maintaining its authenticity and ethnicity side by side, that can be best described and attained by the natural environment. The undisturbed and calm nature creates a silent and enthusiastic effect on the individual's health and spirit thus, appreciating him/her to be a part of nature and helping him/her rediscover self along with attaining spiritual enlightenment and mental relaxation. The foremost point is that the wellness resources offered by the Himalayan destinations are not only exotic but also easily affordable and approachable to the tourists, but the basic need is to discover, highlight and promote them with other tourism components and resources.

Nevertheless, Himalayan wellness tourism is also having scope in other countries as China, Nepal, Bhutan etc, as these are also aligned with Himalayas and can contribute their share to the wellness tourism in varied forms. It would be in the interest of all these countries to collaborate with each other and jointly promote Himalayas. If all these countries collaborate with India and form the promotion of Himalayas along with Indian tourism policy it would be a big boost for wellness tourism. They can form a special treaty, and develop the Himalayan wellness tourism as a global phenomenon and also adds toward maintaining its integrity among these countries.

Above all these given statements, there is also a need to understand the relation of Himalayas and wellness concept altogether. This case study would enable the various authorities and concerned organizations to establish the wellness concept along with the Himalayan tourism terminology which is naturally available and hence also consider those constraints that ail the concept of Himalayan wellness.

## Discussion Questions

1. What factors contribute to the wellness concept development in Himalayan region?
2. Discuss how nature could be an effective source of wellness and wellness tourism development?
3. Analyze the wellness tourism development approach in Himalayas through SWOT analysis.
4. How the wellness tourism could be an additional source of measurement for sustainability?
5. Find out the possible threats that could arise during the devel-

opment of wellness tourism on Himalayas' environment.

6. Design the promotional strategies for the nature based wellness in Himalayan region.
7. Define the various strategies to make the tourists aware of natural ways of attaining wellness.
8. Discuss how the commercialization of wellness components has affected the traditional ways or practices of wellbeing

## Constraints of the Himalayas Wellness Concept

An increase in competition level and the quest for the survival with the fast pace of development has increased the stress and even the frustration level among people this has resulted in various diseases and health complications. Especially under the today's emerging work trends, society is experiencing constant changes that create overworked people and hence stress, anxiety, identity, crises, and depression is accompanying the way of life. Such health obligations, complications and the process of tourists for physical and psychological treatments made the tourism industry to focus on the concept of wellness tourism. Considerable part of such aspect is that the people become ready to spend a lot on spa and medicinal treatments for complete wellbeing without giving a thought towards the natural availability of such facilities and properties of wellbeing that are easily and naturally available in Himalayan region. Enriched with the entire natural clones of wellness, Himalayas offers a tremendous opportunity to the tourists visiting far off places for various medical, ayurvedic or spa treatments for complete well being. Although the advancement in the travelling concept for wellness has approached in India but there are certain barriers that has been identified in regard to Himalayan wellness:

- Lack of economic approach
- Acknowledgement by authorities (local/government)
- Lack of knowledge about such prospects
- Insufficient infrastructure.

In the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) report of wellness (2011), it has been estimated that in India By 2020, over 65% of all mortality will be linked to chronic diseases. Projected foregone national income due to heart disease, stroke and diabetes between 2005-2015 is estimated to be around INR 9000 bn. In India, it has been observed that people prefer to visit places as Kerala and other commercialized places and resorts for health treatments like spa and ayurveda, spending a lot of money but these facilities are not easily available to middle class and low budgeted tourists. On the another behalf, Himalayas that itself is enriched with such natural treatments in the form of fresh air, hot springs and natural herbs as well as they are the base of ayurveda and other therapeutic treatments are at the negligible stage in the terminology of wellness tourism.

## Critical Approach of Himalayan Wellness Concept

Various criteria and components discussed in this study make

Himalayas one of the most attractive destination as far as well being tourism is concerned but the concept of wellness tourism is at the lingering stage especially in India where the Himalayan region are consecrated with such qualities. It is also worth to discuss that wellness has to do a lot with nature in fulfilling psychological, spiritual, or physiological needs (spa) of an individual and Himalayas are the one of the best places to attain such refreshments and complete wellness. Blue skies, green mountains, calm environment, fresh air, lakes, rivers, waterfalls and breathtaking and unusual sites of nature all these are the only things that could make the individual relax, comfortable and align his/ her mind and soul in this competitive and rush full world and these are available only in the Himalayan region.

The critical approach of such concept cannot deny that the various factors that have made tourism industry a thoughtful process are sustainability, climate change, infrastructure, economic development as well as community involvement.

### ***Threat/Barriers to Himalayan Environment***

Since the wellness is focused as a complete interaction with nature especially along the Himalayan region, threat to the environment is also a serious matter. According to Mountain Agenda (1999), a report on the Everest region, it is estimated that there are 17 metric tons of garbage per kilometer of tourist trail – for this reason, the Everest region is sometimes labeled as “the world’s highest junkyard” and the trail to the Everest Base Camp as “the garbage trail”. Every year in the Indian Himalaya, more than 250,000 Hindu pilgrims, 25,000 trekkers, and 75 mountaineering expeditions climb the sacred source of the Ganges River, the Gangotri Glacier. They deplete local forests for firewood, trample riparian vegetation, and strew litter. Even worse, this tourism frequently induces poorly planned, land-intensive development. So the point of discussion related to wellness in context to Himalayan region also needs the sustainable approach of tourism so as to maintain a protective side of the fragility and ethnicity of nature.

### ***Commercialization of Assets of Wellness***

Concept of wellness is linked with the luxurious spas and ayurveda centers and hence the services are even supplied by the various hotels and resorts, charging a huge amount of money. In addition, travelers’ desire to spend time at smaller-scale, more intimate, wellness-centered accommodations has been noted as a growing trend (Mintel Consumer Research Report, 2007). But unfortunately, these experiences are often not endorsed by, or are even subtly discouraged by some large hotels and resorts. As patients are frustrated with the inability to hold the services or such luxurious spa and other health treatments, other providers enter the less regulated market for out-of-the-patient’s pocket services. Whilst some providers offer valuable, needed services, others take advantage of less regulation and desperate situations to provide ineffective spa and other health treatments

at more than fair prices. It is estimated that 20 million people in India fall below the poverty line each year because of indebtedness due to healthcare needs (Emerging market report, 2007).

### ***Approaches to Wellness Tourism Development in Contrast to Barriers***

#### ***Sustainable Approach***

Awareness regarding sustainability concept to the pilgrims visiting the sacred places and holy sites along Himalayas is also necessary. Use of holy waters for the sacred purposes like holy baths, etc. needs to be assumed in terms of sustainability and purity. For example, Uttarakhand has recently issued guidelines restricting the numbers of pilgrims to the Gangotri glacier (Gaumukh) to 150 daily. The traditional buoyancy of wellness and related treatments is being rapidly breached leading to growing dependence on external inputs and over exploitation of selective resources threatening their sustainability.

The best effort to the sustainable development can be observed through the concept of Green Road Constructions that are considered as the life line of various remote and inaccessible regions especially in Himalayas. However, environmental fragility is a prime concern for the construction of roads which must be fully taken into consideration. More importantly environment appraisal has been an important part of Green roads (Abhiman Das Mulmi, 2009). So such infrastructure will be a sophisticated approach to both wellness as well as sustainable tourism development.

#### ***Promotional Approach***

Promotion and development of wellness tourism and its contemporary approach in the Himalayan region could also be a foreword step. Coordinated responses are required between the Central and State Governments and this aspect needs to be covered through various research, development and policy studies. Promotional efforts can also be geared up through the cooperative efforts of stake holders as well as community by acknowledging the concept with green image of tourism, sustainable tourism, ecotourism, volunteer tourism or nature based tourism.

### ***Conclusion***

Commercialization and luxurious aspects of wellness treatments has made the tourists solicitous especially budgeted tourists. Himalayas that has been endowed with the availability of various natural resources of wellness has not yet been focused by authorities and even the tourists are unaware of such beautiful aspect of Himalayas. Development of wellness tourism in the Himalayan region will not only help in promoting the destinations and traditional aspects of wellness but also support in developing a harmony among nature and human being. It could also prove to be one of the sustainable approaches to tourism development especially in Himalayas where

sustainability is a prime concern. Also the need for the understanding the natural ways of attaining wellness is also very much important for the tourists and the development authorities. So, in contrast to this various promotional, economical approaches are need of the hour. Development of wellness tourism in continual effort to the other forms of tourism as sustainable tourism could be an additional advantage. Also, if given due consideration, Himalayan wellness tourism could absorb maximum part of the tourist arrival in India and hence, expanding the dimensions of Indian tourism industry.

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