

# Chapter 15

## Tourism for Welfare, Transformation, and Spiritual Development

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### ABSTRACT

*Awareness practices like yoga-spirituality-meditation-wellness and alternative lifestyles have the power to influence the course of tourism in today's world. The Global Vipassana Pagoda (GVP) in Mumbai attracts health and wellness tourists. This chapter looks at the Pagoda's non-commercial spiritual orientation, and the fact that it could be the first consciousness based approach of tourism management in the World. The operations are worth studying in the context of medical tourism as they involve social welfare, travel, conservation, eco-friendliness, voluntourism, and living harmoniously within the laws of nature (dharma). GVP is a living example of how tourists on one hand "WOW" their senses, and on the other, learn life transforming meditation techniques that have potential not only to make them happier, but also to lead them on the path of greatest health and wellness realization, in conjunction with their medical treatment in adjacent hospitals.*

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

This chapter discusses medical tourism research in the context of the incorporation of spiritual or awareness training through tourism activities (Nandedkar, 2013). This consciousness and awareness based approach is recommended as a method of bringing a positive change in the medical tourism sector that could help solve the current problems of personal health and wellness. Writers like Theobald (2004) and Wilson (2011) have revealed many problems of tourism, such as overcrowding of tourist attractions, overuse and destruction of natural resources, resident–host conflicts, loss of cultural heritage, increased crime and prostitution, inflation and escalating land costs, excessive materialism, work stress, global warming, poverty, terrorism, a lack of personal time and purpose in life, isolation, rising fuel prices, and a host of other political, socio-cultural, economic and environmental problems. These contributions

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also indicated a path as to where and how to question and bring about the required transformations to solve existing tourism problems. Wilson (2011) further noted that unwholesome emotions like greed, miserliness, and jealousy can also be detrimental and can lead to human suffering. And conceptions of the world and life established on these disadvantaging traits can lead individuals and societies to a *failed* state of mind because they cannot satisfy their mental health requirements in a holistic manner.

The above mentioned problems can be summarized as being the result of consumerism-based *partial* gains for the tourist within the tourism sector, due to the absence of a holistic view in relation to development of the industry based on wellness. This also happens due to a lack of emphasis on ethics and the right psychological frame in the conventional tourism system. The industry appears to cater more to greed than to needs based harmony. This situation calls for an approach to the creation of an personal and industry educational setup through tourism activities; one that will influence the minds of the tourists/visitors and transform the current scenario to reach a point of global peace, happiness, mutual benefit and harmony. This is nowhere more evident than in the needs of medical tourists for rest, relaxation and rehabilitation *as well as* specific medical treatments (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Smith & Puckzo, 2013).

### **IN SUPPORT OF THE NEED**

Francesco Frangialli, a Former-Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organization emphasized that there is a great need to plan for tourism more carefully where human (society) and environment impacts should be taken into consideration for the overall (holistic) development of that sector (Frangialli, 2008). The Secretary-General at time of writing, Taleb Rifai (2012), in the tradition of his predecessor believes that tourism can be a most effective tool to promote mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. Similarly, the Minister of Industry, Energy and Tourism of Spain, José Manuel Soria López, has expressed hope for the recognition of the tourism sector's crucial economic and social contributions, and the importance of social, economic and environmental sustainability in the industry (Lopez, n.d.; L'Etang, Falkheimer, & Lugo, 2006) emphasized better utilization of tourism phenomena to meet greater goals based on the fact that tourism has a massive social, political and environmental impact on Global, national and local arenas. This immediately raises the relevance of the tourism industry in relation to community and social responsibility.

The combination of medical treatment and socially and environmentally conscious tourism seems to be a promising and relatively new type of niche tourism. This requires attention to awareness practices like Yoga, spirituality, meditation, wellness, and alternative lifestyles as a component of a transformational approach to health and wellness holding hope for the best utilization of human opportunity and potential through universal codes of ethics, morality and sustainability (Nandedkar, 2013). In other words, the globalization of health care has given rise to a new form of tourism that is commonly known as medical tourism, but within this health care area spirituality may hold out benefits for many patients. Spirituality enables patients to come to terms with the medical services they will receive and/or their post-operative recovery. While this realization has been a core of traditional medicine for thousands of years (in Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and so on), only now is it being seen as an important addition to the lower prices and better quality of *technical* medicine that medical tourists are seeking from destinations outside their native villages or countries (see, for example, Chapters 1 and 3, this volume).

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