

# THE HINDU

## Ayurveda and wellness tourism takes a hit

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## Ayurveda and wellness tourism takes a hit

Most resorts, hospitals offering services have pulled down shutters temporarily

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Rejuvenation therapy and wellness-based Ayurveda that outlived the setbacks Kerala Tourism faced during the worst times of Nipah, Ockhi and two consecutive floods in the State has been dealt a crippling blow by COVID-19.

This is the first time the deadly virus, which had earlier affected the key conventional source markets of Germany, Italy, France and Austria, the travel and Visa restrictions of several countries and a ban on international flights into the country, has hit wellness-based Ayurveda, the USP of Kerala Tourism.

The majority of the 100-odd Ayurvedic resorts that cater to the tourists, NABH-accredited Ayurvedic hospitals and other centres offering the rejuvenation therapy and Ayurveda treatment have pulled down their shut-



A file photo of a person undergoing Ayurvedic treatment in Kerala.

ters temporarily as there are no guests. Entrepreneurs had invested heavily in the units, even taking huge loans.

Besides lay-offs as is happening in hotels and restaurants across in the State, selected staff have been asked to proceed on leave, some put on job rotation in batches and others put on multi-skill jobs to avoid retrenchment.

"There were 250-odd guests from Germany, Switzerland, Russia, Italy, Poland, U.S. and Canada before things began to get out of hand, sixty per cent of them repeat guests. None of them wanted to leave as the situation in Kerala was better than in other countries. It took a great deal of diplomacy and some kind words to send them back," says Baby Mathew, CMD, Somatheeram and Manaltheeram Ayurvedic Beach Resorts at Chowara, South of Kovalam.

It is the first time after Kerala Tourism forayed into the European source markets to promote Ayurveda in 1997 that such a situation has cropped up, says Sajeev Kurup, MD, Ayurveda Mana, Guruvayur. It has come when the stake holders were trying to promote Ayurveda in CIS countries, he said.

Ayurveda and Wellness therapy is a money spinner for Kerala Tourism. Unlike

the other holidayers, Mr. Kurup says those who come for Ayurveda and Rejuvenation therapy stay here for 21 days.

The Confederation of Kerala Tourism Industry has put the loss to the tourism sector due to COVID-19 at ₹20,000 crore for 6 months. "Around 40 per cent of the revenue generated by the sector comes from Ayurveda and Wellness tourism and the loss for us is ₹8,000 crore", says Mr. Mathew, who is also the President of the Kerala Travel Mart Society.

Both Mr. Mathew and Mr. Kurup say it will take a year for the sector to overcome the crisis. The impact will be felt till October and leisure will be the last option for people during the crisis, adds Mr. Kurup, who is also President of Ayurveda Promotion Society. Ayurveda needs to be promoted in a big way in source markets once things settle down, says Mr. Mathew.

