

Soul searching

Know your warrior from your downward-facing dog? Laura French finds out why yoga and meditation retreats can sell a stay

@laurafrench121



If there were a buzzword of the moment, it might just be wellness. According to Kuoni's Worldwide Trends Report, it's one of the fastest-growing sectors in the travel industry today, which means if it's not already on your radar, it should be.

"There is a real rise in individuals looking to proactively take charge of their health and to address issues such as stress and burnout with expert advice," says Stella Photi, founder and managing director at Wellbeing Escapes.

It's so big that Belmond's *Road to Mandalay* has even

introduced mindfulness cruises to its roster of trips, featuring the likes of Tibetan yoga and daily meditation sessions on Burma's Ayeyarwady River.

It's also no longer a niche sector. From mainstream resorts offering one-off programmes to full-blown meditation retreats whose raison d'être is Zen, there is now something to suit every wellness-driven client you could come across – whether experienced yogi master or never-stretched-an-inch beginner.

That's good news for you – not only are they often high-value packages, wellness breaks also

encourage repeat business, according to Photi. "It's a very loyal client base," she says. "Once individuals start their 'wellness journey' they are eager to continue it, and will come back to book other programmes."

▶ JUST A TASTE

Not every client wants to dedicate themselves to a week of intense yogic flexing, so for those who would prefer just a little bit of wellness, suggest a resort with optional classes rather than a full-on retreat – and capitalise on commissionable packages in the process.

Six Senses, for example, has various optional packages across its resorts, including a yogic sleep programme where meditation and stretching are combined with optimal conditions in the villas, such as sleep-boosting snacks and pillow mists to help guests get some shut-eye.

It doesn't even have to be a set package: countless resorts offer yoga classes, so use their facilities as an extra selling point for those at the luxury end of the market.

Coco Bodu Hithi in the Maldives is a good option; there is an idyllic yoga platform set [▶](#)

right over the ocean, where a resident teacher offers technical sessions (\$35 for an hour), from 'pranayama' to 'yoga nidra'. However, nothing is enforced, so it's a good suggestion for couples and groups with a mixture of keen yogis and rather-have-a-cocktail types.

NOVELTY FACTOR

There are plenty of quirkier classes for clients swayed by the novelty factor, so use it to your advantage for those wanting something a little different.

Alila Villas Uluwatu in Bali, for example, offers stand-up paddleboard and aerial yoga, which involves hanging from a hammock overlooking the Indian Ocean while bending in yogic shapes. Alila Manggis, also in Bali, offers underwater yoga, using breathing techniques, massages and underwater 'Zentsu' to relax the mind and muscles (a three-night package costs from \$900 including transfers, accommodation and breakfast).

Elsewhere there are resorts that combine wellness with more active options such as hiking. Among them is remote hideaway resort Nihiwatu in Sumba, Indonesia, which has a 'spa safari' where a 90-minute trek is interspersed with outdoor yoga sessions and local spa treatments in private bales overlooking the beach (\$450 per couple for a day).

In the Italian Dolomites, luxury chalet Rosa Alpina has a similar idea, offering



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a two-hour sunrise hike where guests stop for Hatha yoga as they climb up the 2,200m Piz Sorega, before a 15-minute meditation session at the top. If clients aren't sold on the idea of traditional wellness resorts, they might well be by the prospect of basking in stunning mountain scenery - so you can hook in new customers and have them coming back for more.

SPA STAYS

For those keen on trying something a little more intense, suggest a multi-day retreat. Various resorts offer these on selected dates throughout the year, and they can be a good way of encouraging clients to book during the shoulder seasons.

Among them is Kenyan camp Segera at the foot of Mount Kenya, which is holding a 'Sacred Safari' from May 22-27 with artists Jodina Carey and Andrew Clark. It's a wise alternative at a time when wildlife



LEFT:
One&Only
Reethi Rah,
Maldives

RIGHT:
Sen Wellness,
Sri Lanka

BELOW:
Ananda,
Himalayas



Caribtours offers seven nights at The BodyHoliday in Saint Lucia from £2,199 based on two sharing a double room on an all-inclusive basis, with flights, lounge passes and private transfers. caribtours.co.uk

Elegant Resorts can book the Jameson Retreat at One&Only Reethi Rah in the Maldives for £13,690 staying full board with flights, group boat transfers and airport lounge passes, departing May 13. elegantresorts.co.uk

Seven nights at Sri Lanka's Sen Wellness Sanctuary costs from £1,161 with Wellbeing Escapes, on a full-board basis with transfers, treatments, yoga, meditation and group excursions included. wellbeingescapes.com



LEFT:
Nihiwatu,
Indonesia

opportunities aren't as prevalent as at other times of the year, with yoga, meditation and live crystal sound baths taking place amid 20,000 hectares of wilderness.

One&Only Reethi Rah in the Maldives has launched the Jameson Retreat, a six-night package on dates in May and October. The programme, designed with fitness expert Harry Jameson, is adapted to each individual, with personal training, yoga, meditation, tailored cuisine and a five-week after-care plan all part of the package.

MarBella Corfu has a similar offering with its new five-day Mastermind2.0 programme, created with psychotherapist Dirk Stikker to beat stress and 'reboot the brain' via cognitive behavioural therapy, spa treatments, an assessment interview and more.

Use that expert element to reel in clients wanting to learn from those in the know. Shangri-La's Villingili Resort & Spa in the Maldives has a Masters in Residence programme, with motivational talks and yoga sessions from the likes of healing expert Jody Shield and former world number-one tennis player Jim Courier, so emphasise that to advanced yogis wanting to rub shoulders with wellness celebrities.



Queen of all this is Saint Lucia's BodyHoliday, renowned for its 'Octoba Yoga' (October 1 to 29). Specialist classes such as Vinyasa Flow, Ashtanga Yoga, Body Balance and Restorative Yin Yoga are all on the agenda - and open to every level - with guidance from visiting experts. This year it's master yogi and philosopher Doug Swenson.

The resort offers other yoga and fitness weeks throughout the year as well, and when all that's not happening there are ongoing classes led by resident yogi Natascha Zeller. "There is

a comprehensive activity and exercise schedule available at the hotel, perfect for those wishing to relax, rejuvenate and recharge," says Ashley Pilkington, assistant product manager for US and the Caribbean at Gold Medal, who recommends highlighting inclusions, such as free daily spa treatments, to give it a further push.

WELLNESS RETREATS

All-inclusive retreats are an excellent option for those wanting to embrace all things wellness, and they mean everything is paid for at the start -

so highlight that as a selling point and reap the rewards of a high-value booking in the process.

Photi of Wellbeing Escapes lists Sen Wellness Sanctuary in Sri Lanka among her top recommendations. Home to world-class osteopaths, yoga teachers, local therapists and Ayurvedic food and doctors, it takes expert guidance to a whole new level. There is also a range of programmes available, from the one-day 'Take a Deep Breath' package - including meditation with a Buddhist monk, yoga, an Ayurvedic consultation and a head or foot massage - to the 14-day 'New Radiant You', featuring acupuncture, herbal medicine, tailored dietary advice and more.

Over in India - the second-most popular destination for long-haul wellness breaks, according to Kuoni - there's the renowned Ananda in the Himalayas, where Hatha yoga is combined with breathing techniques, a nutritional plan and meditation.

Set close to the city of Rishikesh - the birthplace of yoga - it's built on a 100-acre Maharaja's Palace Estate surrounded by verdant forest, the iconic Ganges valley and rising mountains, so if the programme isn't enough to get clients booking in a heartbeat, the setting surely will be. TW