



**Dr Polly Mathew**, Chairman and Managing Director, Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort, Kovalam, is in an upbeat mood. And he has every reason to be a happy person. He dared to venture into wellness tourism in India, with the country's first ayurvedic resort and has emerged successful, fighting odds. Now, his baby has won the National Tourism Award for the second consecutive time and is the country's best wellness centre. In an interview to Asian Traveller, he shared what the award means to him and his company, his initial struggle and where his venture stands now. Edited Excerpts:

## A wellness visionary

**At the National Tourism Awards you have emerged successful, bagging the best wellness centre award. How does it feel like owning the best wellness centre in India?**

This is the second time Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort wins the National Tourism Award. We look at it as a token of appreciation from the Government of India, for the efforts we are taking to promote ayurveda and the Indian tourism (destination) among the international travel fraternity. It gives us motivation and the energy to do more and more creative actions to draw more travellers to the country. **Don't you think the recognition has brought in more responsibilities? How do you plan to take your product forward and retain the top ranking?**

After getting consecutive National Tourism Awards, yes, we do realise that we have given more

responsibilities, especially in the ayurvedic tourism field. When we started our initiative in 1989 as the first ayurvedic resort in India, we struggled a lot to give our clients the much needed comfort, security, authentic treatments and above all a nice experience that will lure them back to this wonderful land year again. Now, we have established our brand in the industry and today, at Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort, we enjoy a good volume of repeat clients from all over the world. This is the best reward we have for what we are doing.

**What was in your mind, when you launched Somatheeram Ayurvedic Hospital and Yoga Centre, Kovalam?**

When I was in Germany with my family, all my friends and neighbours were asking about India and Sri Lanka for their vacation as well as ayurvedic treatments. As I have lived in Germany, I

was well aware of what their needs were and how they could be satisfied. Also, I always had a great passion to my land. This made me to think about Somatheeram, where the sun, sea and sandy beaches merge with the soul. Immediately, I started working on Somatheeram. It all happened in 1985.

**What makes this venture of yours a desired destination among wellness tourists?**

At Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort, we give our clients a best chance to experience the genuine

ayurvedic treatments, while enjoying the sandy beaches. The entire set-up is more like an ayurvedic hospital, in a resort ambience. The doctors and other staff will ensure to give each and every client a personalised service wherever possible. As such, the clients will get a more personal feel to the land and our hospitality. This makes them to plan again and again a visit to Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort, to relax their body, mind and soul.

**How far has Somatheeram Ayurvedic Hospital and Yoga**



**Centre boosted the growth of Kovalam, as a tourist hot spot?**

When we started our initiative, Kovalam was the only tourist destination in all over Kerala. We were aware of the various attractions available here and we developed a scheme of promotion through which we could promote not just Somatheeram Ayurvedic Health Resort, but the Kerala destination (tourism) as a whole, by projecting its hill stations, sanctuaries, sandy beaches, etc.

**Do you owe its success to somebody or something?**

First of all, I owe its success to my family and to all my staff at Somatheeram. Also, we know the guests have a major role in the success, especially repeat guests. I take this wonderful opportunity



to express my thankfulness to all who contribute their best in bringing success to the company.

**How far has wellness centric tourism gained ground in India? How do you see the road ahead?**

The wellness centric tourism has gained a good ground in India, especially because of its cost effectiveness, accurate and precise analysis methods

and the expertise available in the country. If we can concentrate on to give our visitors an authentic and a much personalised service, and definitely the results, we can have a bright future in the wellness as well as medical centric tourism field.

**Do wellness players like you get enough support from the state and central governments? If not, what else you need from**

**them to propel the wellness tourism segment?**

We do get support from various officials, whenever we approach them for support. However, we feel that we should have clear policies to boost the segment.

**How do you see Kerala as a hot destination in India, for wellness tourism products and services?**

We know Kerala has established itself as a prominent destination among leisure travellers, thanks to its natural beauty, cultural assets and rigorous marketing efforts by the state's tourism department. The flow of wellness and medical tourists were limited till the recent past, however, with the growing awareness on health and wellness tourism, Kerala, with world-class facilities and infrastructure, now gets its fair share of the lime light.