

Australia's MDF and Thema Collection convene the industry to explore the way forward for wellness tourism

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Posted on



L-R: Ranuka Karunarathne, CEO, Adhitya Ayurveda; Asoka Hettigoda, Chairman and Managing Director of Hettigoda Group; Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe, Deputy Minister of Tourism; Prof. Sajeewa Herapathdeniya, Professor - Faculty of Indigenous Medicine, University of Colombo; Chandra Wickramasinghe, Chairman/Managing Director, Thema Collection and Nimesha Palliyaguru, Country Team Coordinator, Market Development Facility (MDF).

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Australia's Market Development Facility (MDF) partnered with the hotel chain Thema Collection to host the "Positioning Sri Lanka as a Sustainable Wellness Destination" forum, which explored strategies to strengthen Sri Lanka's wellness tourism offering and expand into new source markets. Deputy Minister of Tourism (Prof.) Ruwan Ranasinghe and Australia's Deputy High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, Ruth Baird, joined government representatives, industry leaders, and academia to discuss how Sri Lanka could best leverage wellness tourism to enhance competitiveness. MDF also shared insights from its study on Japan's outbound wellness tourism market.



Maxime Wickramasinghe, Director - Marketing and Business Development, Thema Collection.

Global trends indicate that travelers are increasingly seeking destinations that offer authentic experiences centered on well-being, nature, culture, and sustainability. Ayurvedic practices have been part of Sri Lanka's indigenous wellbeing and medical heritage for over 2,000 years. Travelers are increasingly drawn to this, with Sri Lanka coming in first in the 2026 BookRetreats Wellness Destination Index.

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Delivering the keynote address at the event, (Prof.) Ruwan Ranasinghe, Deputy Minister of Tourism, emphasized the government's commitment: "Sri Lanka has all the elements to become a globally recognized wellness destination, from our Ayurvedic heritage to our culture and hospitality. Our focus is on creating the right policy environment and strengthening collaboration between government and industry so that wellness tourism becomes an important driver of investment, market diversification, and sustainable economic growth."

Thema Collection, which currently has 17 properties in its chain, including two Ayurvedic properties, shared insights from its sustainability journey, focusing on how responsible business practices can enhance guest experience and contribute to long-term business resilience and destination competitiveness.



Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe, Deputy Minister of Tourism; and Ruth Baird, Deputy High Commissioner of

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Australia (center) together with the teams from Thema Collection and Market Development Facility (MDF).

At Thema Collection, we believe wellness and sustainability are inseparable. Authentic wellness experiences begin with healthy ecosystems, thriving communities, and respect for local heritage.

Chandra Wickramasinghe, Chairman, Thema Collection, noted, "At Thema Collection, we believe wellness and sustainability are inseparable. Authentic wellness experiences begin with healthy ecosystems, thriving communities, and respect for local heritage. By embedding sustainability into every aspect of our operations, we are not only creating meaningful experiences for our guests but also contributing to Sri Lanka's position as a world-class wellness destination."

MDF launched the findings from its recent assessment of Japan's outbound wellness tourism market, highlighting traveler motivations and emerging opportunities to tap into the growing wellness-conscious segment. Participants also heard from industry experts on how sustainability shapes wellness tourism experiences and then joined a high-level panel discussion on the role of collaboration – among government, industry, and development partners – in unlocking opportunities.

Australia, through MDF, has been working with tourism partners to strengthen sustainable tourism as a pathway to competitiveness and resilience. MDF has identified wellness tourism as an avenue to diversify beyond traditional source markets and attract higher-value visitors, shifting Sri Lanka from a seasonal destination to a year-round one. This has included supporting partners to target wellness travelers from new source markets such as Japan, Australia, and the Middle East. MDF has invested with Thema Collection to assess its carbon footprint, and Thema is now one of the first hotel chains in Sri Lanka to complete independently verified, portfolio-wide carbon calculations. Thema also operates sustainability programs focused on environmental protection, community support, and responsible tourism. It is now looking at new ways to develop wellness experiences that build on Sri Lanka's natural and cultural strengths.

Speaking at the event, Australian Deputy High Commissioner Ruth Baird shared that, "Global travelers are increasingly choosing destinations that combine

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authenticity, wellbeing, and sustainability. Australia has been a steadfast partner in supporting Sri Lanka's economic development, particularly in the tourism sector. Through MDF, we are working with businesses to build on their sustainable practices, improve competitiveness, and respond to changing global demand. Wellness tourism offers an opportunity to attract visitors to Sri Lanka, generating economic opportunities while still protecting the natural and cultural assets that make Sri Lanka truly unique. Forums such as today provide an important platform to exchange ideas, build partnerships, and identify practical actions that will help create solutions that are locally driven and sustainable over the long term."

As Sri Lanka seeks to diversify its tourism offerings and compete in an evolving global marketplace, the dialogue reinforced the idea that wellness tourism is more than a niche market. It is an opportunity to showcase Sri Lanka's unique identity, attract high-value visitors, and create sustainable economic growth that benefits businesses and communities.

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L-R: Nimesha Palliyaguru, Country Team Coordinator, Market Development Facility (MDF); Zoe Kidd, First Secretary, Head of Development Cooperation, Australian High Commission; Mariyam Piracha, Country Director, Market Development Facility; Prof. Ruwan Ranasinghe, Deputy Minister of Tourism; Ruth Baird, Deputy High Commissioner of Australia; Chandra Wickramasinghe, Chairman/Managing Director, Thema Collection; and Maxime Wickramasinghe, Director Marketing and Business Development, Thema Collection.