**Incredible Wellness Destinations: Candace Badgett from *The Raj* Ayurveda Health Center On Why & How Traveling Can Help Us Heal**

**An Interview With Wanda Malhotra**

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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

*The pandemic has shaped the way we travel and live, with a growing trend leaning towards health, wellness, and a holistic lifestyle. More than ever, individuals are seeking not just getaways, but immersive wellness retreats that help rejuvenate the body, mind, and soul. Destinations that provide a serene environment, unique wellness offerings, and an unparalleled experience are in great demand. In this interview series, we are talking to property owners and hospitality companies who are at the helm of these wellness havens. As a part of this series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Candace Bedgett.*

In 1991, Candace and her husband, Rogers Badgett, built a 36,000 sq ft health campus, The Raj, in Fairfield, Iowa –pioneering the use of Ayurvedic medicine in North America. Ayurveda is recognized by the World Health Organization as the oldest, continuously practiced system of medicine in the world – a system in which all other systems of medicine have their roots. The Badgetts are the owners and operators of this facility, as well as international consultants in field of Maharishi Ayurveda that presents authentic Ayurveda in is purity.

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**Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dive into the main focus of our interview, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your childhood backstory?**

My story no doubt mirrors many of those of us who came of age in the early seventies. We were looking for profound answers to the existential questions of life. We wanted depth and meaning in life–not just a job that paid well. We wanted to venture on to a path that would ultimately lead to an understanding of life’s deepest questions in regard to life’s purpose and life’s spiritual dimensions. We were on a mission to get life figured out! And while a bit naïve, this impulse to find the Truth (with a capital ‘T’) led me on a glorious journey for which I am grateful every day.

**What or who inspired you to pursue your career? We’d love to hear the story.**

In my journey to find what it was that I wanted to do with my life—I came across the *Transcendental Meditation program*. I learned it in 4 days, and it literally changed my life. I was stunned to find that so many answers to all of my questions were just opening up within myself. It was thrilling– the sense of possibilities that opened up for me. Learning the TM program truly informed every step I took in my life from that point onward

**None of us can achieve success without some help along the way. Was there a particular person who you feel gave you the most help or encouragement to be who you are today? Can you share a story about that?**

There were so many who mentored me and guided me along the way. I must give credit to my father who gave me some very good advice. He told me to do something in life that I felt passionate about. That gave me the courage to do something that was bit ahead of the times, thirty three years ago, when alternative medicine and ‘wellness’ were definitely not trending!

**It has been said that sometimes our mistakes can be our greatest teachers. Can you share the funniest or most interesting mistake that occurred to you in the course of your career? What lesson or takeaway did you learn from that?**

Yes! I think a lot of what we have learned has been by way of mistakes. My husband and I had no idea what we were doing when we began building The Raj campus in the middle of rural Iowa. We had to learn how to run a hotel, an in-residence clinic, an out patient clinic, and a restaurant –all of which we knew nothing about. And on top of that, the service we offered was the ancient system of medicine, Ayurveda, that- at that time- no one had ever heard of and no one could even pronounce! We were literally pioneering the use of Ayurvedic medicine in the West, back in 1991 when we began. So yes, we made many mistakes. It was like learning how to swim by being thrown into the lake. We went way over budget, and then had to face a marketing challenge that involved inspiring people to come to the cornfields of Iowa for some kind of treatment no one had ever heard of. Clearly we should have figured out how to market *before* we opened our doors! But back in the days before digital marketing, it wasn’t so easy to figure out. Then there was the process of hiring. At first we hired too many people. But necessity is the mother of invention. Finances were tight in the beginning so we had to learn to function with less staff. That forced us to learn every aspect of the business. And that was the blessing in disguise!

Back in 1991, had we understood the overwhelming nature of the business, and how hard it was going to be to introduce a new (ancient) form of alternative medicine, we probably would have talked ourselves out of doing it. But when we look back at the journey we have traveled—we are so glad we did do it, so glad we took that huge leap of faith, thirty three years ago.

**Can you share your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Why does that resonate with you so much?** There is a saying that I always keep in mind. It is from the tradition of Ayurveda. It says: “*Progress is the basis of maintenance. Maintenance is not the basis of progress,”*

In other words, if you are not progressing and growing, you are not even maintaining. Whether this is on a personal level or on the level of one’s business, I think we all sometimes wish that things would just stay put when they are stable and comfortable. But change is the nature of life. So we need to be alert to make sure that we are proactive– to the best of our ability– to keep the inevitability of change moving in a progressive manner. For us, that means being alert to all opportunities to expand our ability to offer Ayurveda in its authenticity.

**What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now? How do you think that might help people?**

Yes, we do have some exciting projects developing right now.

And yes, our feeling is that anything that makes Ayurveda more widely and easily accessible is naturally going to help more people to regain their health and well-being, Here are two major initiatives, in that regard, that we are working on right now:

1) There is major hospital that we are working with that delivers 5000 babies a year. They are interested in working with us on a research project using Ayurveda approaches for the prevention of post partum depression. For many years, our Raj Ayurveda experts have developed a very successful natural fertility program at The Raj, and, more recently, our *Healthy Happy Mother/Baby Program*. As a result we have many ‘Raj babies.’ ☺ It is so fulfilling when we can help a couple to conceive! And we are now looking forward to helping new mom’s have a happy and fulfilling experience after giving birth.

2) Many of our entrepreneurial and business savvy guests have been encouraging us to build more facilities in other locations across the US and Canada. So, with their help, we are looking into how we might structure that process.

**OK, thank you for all of that. Let’s now shift to the core focus of our interview about wellness destinations. Let’s dive deeper into these together. Based on your research or personal experience, why do you think travel can lead to better wellness? Can you share a story?**

To really make a change in your life it often requires stepping out of your usual environment, your usual routine and patterns of living. It is helpful to move out of what is familiar, and step into a new world that is there to support you in making the changes you need to make in order to live the fuller, healthier, more vital life that you intuitively know is a possibility for you. This is what wellness destination travel is all about. Just this week we had a guest who commented on the importance of traveling to a wellnes destination in order to make the changes she needed to make in her life: *“I never before was able to keep regular habits. At home, I would always try to instill some sort of habit or routine, but I'd fall out of it. But being here, it really helped to establish the healthy routines that I have always wanted to adopt, and also learn new healthy life-style choices I had never heard of before, but that made so much sense and produced results in a matter of days. Especially being able to be here for two weeks... it just solidified a whole new routine for me. So now it just feels very organic –waking up early, doing a meditation practice, having the right kind of food, the right amount of food at the right time throughout the day, and then going to sleep at the right time. All of that, combined with the treatments, contributed to such a rapid healing experience for me and gave me a foundation for creating a new, healthier lifestyle when I get home. I definitely want to keep on feeling as good as I feel now! And I know I never could have done this at home. It only could have happened by coming here.”*

**What are a few things which distinguish your property from thousands of wellness properties around the world?**

Naturally all of us who have developed a wellness property feel that what we have created is a uniquely special place! So to give you a more objective perspective I will share three comments from recent guests in which they expressed what it is, for them, that distinguishes The Raj from other wellness properties:

*“What I love about the Raj is that I felt completely safe. I have felt completely taken care of, in every possible way. Having everything that you need in one building is just immensely powerful. I never once had to think about anything for myself. I was just fully and completely taken care of at any point throughout the day. From knowing that my meals were fully taken care of so that they addressed my specific needs, to even the administrative things when it came to billing or questions that you might have –that was all very clearly taken care of for me. I was just able to fully let go. I was given my space when I needed it, I was supported when I needed it. So I was able to just fully let go and embrace the treatments. My experience at The Raj was just so powerful and effective because of that. I had done Ayurveda treatments before– but it was nothing like this total experience at The Raj.” Renee, London, UK*

*“The treatments that I've had at The Raj have been, honestly, life changing for me. They have been the most profound experience of nurturing that I have ever had. I feel like it's really changed who I am at a deep level because I've never experienced anything like it.* *I mean, it's… ‘Profound’ is really the only word that I can come up with. I literally feel reborn from being here.”*  *Kimberly. Indiana*

*“The people who work here are so kind. Its just part of The Raj culture. It is really a safe place to heal. And even if you're not sick, it's a safe place to come and just bring something deeper and richer into your life. I feel like there's such a deep level of knowledge here. There's a much more holistic approach to it. Here, it’s your mind, body and spirit. And even though other places say they offer that, I have never experienced such a holistic transformation as I have here. So I do think it's different. Other places do feel more like a business. The Raj is like a sanctuary. Coming here unquestionably changed my life.” Elizabeth, Colorado*

I would like to add that, these days, lots of places now offer Ayurveda treatments—but very few offer *authentic* Ayurveda and all the knowledge of maintaining health that comes along with it. Our programs are overseen by a council of skilled, traditional Ayurveda doctors who come from families that have handed down this knowledge in its purity for countless generations. This is what gives us the status of *America’s Premier Ayurveda Health Center.*

**What type of experience do you want your visitors to have when they visit?**

I want our guests to be able to take their health and happiness back into their own hands. I want them to reconnect with the deepest aspect of themselves where an abiding happiness is always accessible. Our bodies are actually hardwired to be naturally healthy—we just need to remove those obstacles and imbalances that are blocking the flow of intelligence in the body, and we need to understand the right lifestyle choices that will support our inner healing intelligence. To find your way to natural health you have become educated about all of your options and you need to jump-start your journey to vibrant health with an in-residence experience that allows you to step out of your unhealthy habits, reset your physiology, and learn the proper choices for your particular, individual needs. That is the knowledge and experience we want to give to every guest.

**What makes your property a beautiful escape for a body and mind recharge?**

One contributing factor is the uniquely tranquil environment. Guests comment on it the minute they walk in the door. And in this deeply nourishing atmosphere, the treatments can be extraordinarily effective. As the stress and fatigue are gently removed with each treatment, guests start to settle into a sense of peace and calm that they have either never felt before, or have not felt in a long time. As the journalist from *Town & Country Magazine* commented, after her first treatment*,“I entered the uncharted territory beyond relaxation.”*

We are a boutique wellness center, meaning that we only have a maximum of 18 guests at a time. The environment is like being in a lovely home –nothing sleek or modern—just cozy and warm and comfortably elegant. The grounds are 100 acres of rolling meadows and woodlands. Located in rural Iowa, The Raj is all about slowing down, enjoying the beauty all around you, and benefiting from the most powerful rejuvenating and healing treatments you can find anywhere. As one guest commented, *“The Raj is this beautiful space where we wake up and we see deer grazing, and a beautiful pond and the greenery and the trees. That alone… when you wake up and you look out your window and you see that, that automatically just puts you at ease. I really do think The Raj is a magical place.”*

(“Magical place” is a common phrase that our guests use!)

**Can you share any transformative stories or testimonials from guests that visited your property?**

Yes, I’m happy to share two transformative experiences that guests shared with us last week. These are typical of what we hear from our guests.

*“I recall a moment here at The Raj – it was towards the end of my first week. And it was after I had a combination of treatments– one of them was where you are kind of bathed in oil from head to toe. It was at the end of the day, and I had this moment where I realized, my God, this is the first time in as long as I can remember where I actually have no anxiety. I was able to just be so calm and relaxed and without a care in the world.*

*“It was like for the first time in my adult life, I felt like I could breathe and I could just be still –and I've never, ever experienced that for as long as I can remember. That was a really profound moment when I realized the power of these treatments. I have been struggling with Lyme’s disease, which has this mental component, this crippling anxiety– I mean, really crippling*

*moments where I couldn't leave the house. I was anxious about anything and everything. It is that kind of anxiousness where your mind is constantly spinning nonstop, and won't be quiet for even a second. And to experience, for the first time in I don't know how long, just silence where I just felt safe and everything was fine and I knew everything would be okay. I mean, that right there– that moment– was the greatest gift for me. Because then I realized: it's possible, I can be like this every day!”*

*Renee*

*“It literally changed my life to come to The Raj. When I came, I had lost enormous amounts of weight. I couldn't sleep. I was just in a very, very painful place. I was broken. And even the day I left The Raj I still felt fragile, I felt nurtured, but still a bit fragile. And I thought, how is this going to make the kind of difference I need in my life? I went back home and I was absolutely vigilant about following all the protocols that had been prescribed for me at The Raj. Because really, it's not just the treatments while you are here at The Raj, it's also afterwards– when you go home and you integrate everything you have been recommended to do– that is so important. And within two or three days after I returned home, I felt this strength came up inside of me and this power that allowed me to face for many months this really difficult situation in my life, in such a courageous way. And by living in the rhythm that was asked of me from the Raj, I actually felt like I was in a sacred place. So rather than being in a place of despair, it was this sacred, magical place. The Raj totally changed my life.”*

*Elizabeth*

**Why do you think the experience you offer is so needed nowadays?**

There are so many reasons! Stress levels are so high as to literally be toxic. Too many people are living in a state referred to as the ‘ fight or flight response’. This keeps cortisol levels high continuously. The body is not made to sustain this. It is also the case that environmental toxins are nowinescapable for *everyone.* The very worst of them—the PCBs– are in our food packaging, in our water and in the air. You cannot avoid them. They are known as ‘hormone disrupters’, and they interfere with the communication within in the body that is essential for maintaining health. And then there is the overstimulation and the distraction caused by cell phones, social media, the Internet, TV, etc. All of this has disconnected us from each other and from ourselves. Loneliness and anxiety are at an all time high. Statistics now reveal that 25% of all women are on an anti-depressant medication. That is one in every 4 women!

Our body needs purification, our mind needs to rest and relax, and our spirit needs connection– connection to something deep and silent and full that resides within each of us, as our true nature. This is the program that The Raj offers. We address health from all of these angles. We are committed to helping everyone find their way back to health and happiness.

**Do you think travel enhances our mindfulness, optimism, or sense of gratitude? How? Can you please explain with an example or story?**

As mentioned earlier about the advantage of wellness travel, we certainly can appreciate how it will naturally enhance these feelings and attitudes: *Optimism:* Yes, because in just a few days guests remember what is it like to feel like themselves again. They see that it is possible to regain their sense of well-being, and quickly! That is very encouraging! *Mindfulness:* Mindfulness– in the form of more alertness to what your body needs to stay healthy– is an inevitable outcome from going to a destination wellness facility. By removing the stress and the fatigue, one can once again be in touch with the promptings of the body’s inner healing intelligence. When you become mindful of these promptings, then you make the right choices to support your well-being. *Gratitude:* One would naturally feel grateful having found health solutions that are more than just another prescription drug with side effects. There is nothing to be more grateful for than the ability able to take back your health and happiness, which is the very goal of wellness travel.

**Thank you for that. Now for our main question; What are your “5 Habits You Should Develop In Order Make Travel Into An Opportunity For Wellness & Personal Growth?” (Please share a story or example for each.)**

I’m going to speak specifcally to *wellness desitantion* travel and how one can maximizes the positive results from their wellness travel experience.

**1. Be open / Let go**

As one of our guests described: *“If you are looking for transformation in your life, I would say it can happen on every level at a place like The Raj. if you come with an open mind and an open heart and are willing to experience something that may be different than anything you've ever tried, you will not be disappointed in how it can change you in a wonderful way that will ripple into the future. I set a powerful intention before I came here, to let go of a lot of things physically and emotionally. I have, like many people, come through a hard time during the pandemic, and so I'm in a place of transformation. So I set my intention to let go on every level. And that has happened for me. I literally feel reborn from being here at The Raj.”*

**2. Don’t Strain / Relax and Enjoy!**

Straining never accomplishes anything for any extended period of time. Here is a great experience from one of our guests that explains this important approach to the wellness destination experience:*“There is this attitude here at The Raj where it's just like: “do your best, here are the tools, do your best, but don't be hard on yourself. Relax and enjoy.” I didn't realize how much I needed to hear that because I'm a very type-A person. I'm very extreme. And for me, it's like “you go bigger, you go hard, and that's the only way you're going to get results.” When I took a step back and I relaxed, I got it! I didn't need to take it so seriously that I made life difficult for myself! That was a great realization that was given to me at The Raj– that life is about health, and health must include being relaxed, happy and enjoying life! Also, the treatments weren't anything extreme, none of the “beating your body back into health” kind of thing.The powerful treatments were actually luxurious and heavenly! There were times when I felt like every cell in my body was happy. I ended up healing a lot faster from the gentleness of the treatments and the routine. It sounds obvious when I say it, but I never saw it that way before, I was always just an extreme person, a ‘no pain no gain’ kind of person. But I think this very gentle approach is something that's very powerful and effective, and very unique to the Raj.”*

**3. Don’t bring your workload with you!**

Again, this sounds so obvious – why would you go to a wellness destination and bring with you all the work that made you exhausted and stressed-out to begin with? But for so many it is really a challenge (and often for good reasons) to walk away from obligations. Therefore it is important to do the best you can to schedule your wellness travels during potential downtime in regard to your workload, and at a time when your family, friends and co-workers/employees will support you in disconnecting from any and all pressures. This is without a doubt one of the most important things that anyone can do to really enhance their opportunity for personal growth and well-being in the context of wellness travel.

**4.** **At The Raj we ask guests to prepare for their visit** by doing a simple and easy home cleanse, and by adhering to a modified diet before they arrive, in order to facilitate the purification process provided by the treatments received once they are at The Raj. We encourage everyone to follow the home preparation guidelines as much as possible for best results. Here is a story, in this regard, from one of our guests: *“The miraculous thing is, even before I came, when I did the preparation diet that you’re asked to do at home before arriving at The Raj, (which I took very much to heart and really tried to follow) I stopped having to use my inhalers or take my nasal spray,* *which is something I have to do every single day. So already, before I came, it had a profound health impact.”*

**5. At The Raj we provide each guest with individualized recommendations to follow once they return home.** These recommendations include daily routines, foods to favor and avoid, meditation practice, etc, in order that our guests may continue their wellness progress once they return home. Those who do follow the recommendations overcome long standing chronic disorder symptoms, as well as stress-related anxiety and depression. We already shared one story in this regard. But we have so many reports from our guests about the continued benefits and progress that comes from really embracing the lifestyle changes that are recommended for them once they return home from their wellness travel. This is one of the most important ways that guests can really make the most of their visit to The Raj- and no doubt to any wellness destination.

**Based on your experience, where do you see the future of wellness travel heading in the next 5-10 years?**

I can only see wellness travel increasing dramatically in the next 5-10 years. As chronic disorders skyrocket, and anxiety skyrockets, people are really looking for a solution beyond pharmaceutical drugs that can only manage symptoms rather than address the root cause of the problem. Health is the greatest asset we have. Without it, quality of life is compromised. People will seek out ways to regain their health. They will hear by word of mouth from friends, colleagues and family, that there are solutions out there. Wellness travel will take you to those solutions. Wellness travel, more and more, will become an essential aspect of our commitment to our health, as we move away from a *disease* care system and into a *real* prevention-oriented *health* care system

**We are very blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US, whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we both tag them :-)**

I really enjoyed thinking about this great *what-if* question!But funnily enough, I landed on the fact that it is our guests who inspire us, and alert us and encourage us in a way I don’t think anyone else could. Every week we have the opportunity to meet amazing people – an enormous *range* of amazing people. We are extraordinarily lucky because of the extraordinary people who find their way to our door, who expand our horizons and our sense of possibilities of what more we can do to provide this service to the world. Having lunch with our guests is an enlightening experience, every time!

**How can our readers further follow your work online?**

By way of our website:[**https://www.TheRaj.com**](https://www.TheRaj.com)

**Thank you for these really excellent insights, and we greatly appreciate the time you spent on this. We wish you continued success.**

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[Here](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Xd_-cuHAGewERNh0SN_cjB4QSupOQR7Y?usp=sharing) are animated intros you can add to the beginning of the ‘5 Things’ video.

If you’d like us to embed your ‘Five Things’ video, just make the video, and upload it to your own YouTube channel. After it is uploaded, include the video URL in the interview, in the section that talks about your “Five Things” as well as in the upload portal. Interviews that include a ‘Five Things” video will be flagged for expedited publication. We will periodically create roundup articles [like these](https://medium.com/authority-magazine/search?q=Editor%27s%20List) that feature the most interesting “Five Things” Videos.

*About the Interviewer: Wanda Malhotra is a wellness entrepreneur, lifestyle journalist, and the CEO of Crunchy Mama Box, a mission-driven platform promoting conscious living. CMB empowers individuals with educational resources and vetted products to help them make informed choices. Passionate about social causes like environmental preservation and animal welfare, Wanda writes about clean beauty, wellness, nutrition, social impact and sustainability, simplifying wellness with curated resources. Join Wanda and the Crunchy Mama Box community in embracing a healthier, more sustainable lifestyle at* [*CrunchyMamaBox.com*](https://crunchymamabox.com/) *.*