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Future Directions

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Introduction

Business growth and profitability worldwide in spa continues to outstrip other areas of the service sector, with more people using spas year on year. This exponential growth has not been affected by the global economic turndown, the real and perceived threat of terrorism or the instability in the Middle East. The growth does, however, mask some of the fundamental changes that are happening within the industry and which have been introduced in the chapters of this book. These include the increase in wellness/health tourism spa brands, spa destinations that reflect the changing consumer needs, and the on-going search for qualified staff. The complexity of the product mix, and difficulty of defining the brand identity would seem to be an attempt by the industry to attain competitive advantage and get away from the heritage and history of spas. What it seems to be doing is merging tourism with hospitality, and creating the sense of an event or series of events in a chosen 'unique' location. The description of 'spa' is no longer the key selling point, but by defining the product/brand as hedonistic addresses all the features of the postmodern client. How do we define spa in 2017 and how do we identify our clients?

The current environment

This chapter considers the potential future directions of the spa industry largely through the lens of the recent growth in Dubai, a city with a reputation for luxury that is currently going through a period of exponential growth. The conclusions drawn here serve only to reaffirm many of the views presented across the chapters in this book and which are considered reflective of an industry which, according to the Global Wellness Institute, grew by 25% across Europe and Asia between 2013 and 2015, with an additional 16,000 new spa locations worldwide (now 121,595 spas) during the same time period (Global Wellness Institute, 2014).

Examples, from around the world:

- A quote from a customer at an exclusive spa in the Duoro Valley, Portugal indicates how diverse this client base has become. “A good bottle of Portuguese red, plus a day by the pool and a bit of yoga, equals my kind of spa”.
- An exclusive wellness clinic in Spain describes itself as a “medi-spa destination”, and brands itself as exclusive and as using “natural therapies alongside preventative and aesthetic medicine”. It offers Shamadi menus that draw upon “expertise in macrobiotics and Mediterranean cuisine” and that offer a “unique Bio-Light concept in nutrition” and “gastronomic and healthy”. The emphasis is on medical and wellness expertise, with “cognitive development programmes and neuro-feedback” and finally it uses products that are anti-aging and based upon “internal medicine”.
- An exclusive spa in Bodrum emphasises the most important feature as being its location and “the attractiveness of the property”, with the product offer being a mix of contemporary wellness experiences from the “Art Nouveau to traditional Latvian pirts sauna rituals”, but alongside Turkish Hammam rituals and therapies.
- A resort and spa on Lake Garda emphasises the views, natural sustainable design, wooded hillsides and that it is eco-friendly. It supplies a modern Mediterranean diet, with locally sourced products, but is not focused on losing weight. The offer is rooted in the principles of Classical Chinese Medicine, but offers “an intriguing selection of international spa modalities and complementary disciplines”. These use “locally sourced herbs” and their own olive oil, grown in the region. There is no Botox, but face-lifting treatments based upon acupuncture and massage, “designed to stimulate energy points and reduce the signs of ageing”. They have a large range of medically supervised complementary disciplines including naturopathy, thalassotherapy, acupuncture, moxibustion, osteopathy, physiotherapy and medical check-ups, to evaluate stress and dietary intolerance.

These exclusive spas/destinations/resorts/wellness centres seem to emphasise, the panoramic views before treatments, wellness before therapies, gastronomy before medicines, and all note the fusion of East/West or traditional/contemporary and are holistic and sustainable.

In this complex and dynamic environment, we have attempted to address a number of critical concerns that will potentially impact on the successful management of spa facilities in the future. These are best considered in terms of the following questions:

- What does the workforce look like for these evolving and fusion driven businesses, and how are they different to the majority of day spas worldwide?
- Can we consider these scenarios to reflect a view of the future or will this simply remain as a model for the ‘exclusive spa’?
- Is it time to re-evaluate the strategic direction of the whole industry?