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Spa and Hot Spring Development and Management

This chapter discusses spa and hot spring development and management. The chapter first introduces the case study of Hévíz, Hungary. Next, it explains the concepts of spas and hot springs and discusses key issues when developing these facilities. The chapter also explains the economic impact of spas and hot springs. Then, it discusses the determinants of customers' satisfaction with these amenities, and finally offers information about managing spas and hot springs.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to do the following:

1. Explain the Thermal Lake of Hévíz in terms of its offerings and economic impact.
2. Explain the difference between a spa and a hot spring.
3. Discuss key issues when developing spas and hot springs.
4. Highlight the economic impact of spas and hot springs.
5. Discuss the determinants of customer satisfaction with spas and hot springs.
6. Discuss the management of spas and hot springs.

Case study: Hévíz, Hungary

Hévíz, Hungary is home to the second-largest biologically active natural thermal lake in the world, and the largest in Europe, known as the Thermal Lake of Hévíz. The lake was formed through volcanic activity 22,000 years ago (Tourism Observatory, 2014). Its healing powers are said to be most beneficial for those who have musculoskeletal disorders. The lake water supports the prevention of illness as well as offers recreation

and leisure opportunities. Spanning 4.4 hectares, the 38-meter deep lake is fed by both hot and cold mineral-rich springs, and the water is completely replaced every three days. This constant evaporation clears the air, water lilies blanket the surface, and the surrounding forest provides a natural shelter from the wind (Hotel Spa Hévíz, 2018a). The lake offers the beneficial properties of carbonated, sulfuric, calcium, magnesium, and bicarbonate medicinal waters, and its temperatures average 23–25°C (73–77°F) in winter and 33–36°C (91–97°F) in summer (Hévíz City Council, 2019).

Two extensive facilities are available to help visitors maximize the healing powers of the lake. Spa Hévíz and its accompanying hotel dates back to the 18th century and offers nine indoor pools and very modern amenities (Fuller, 2018). The full portfolio of wellness-oriented services available includes saunas, a salt cave, steam and ice baths, cosmetics, massages, and hand and foot treatments, in addition to healthy meals and recreational activities. Therapy treatments include Ayurvedic massages, wave massage therapy, vibration training, shockwave therapy, deep oscillation therapy, mudpacks, ultrasounds, and thermal water cream massage, among others (Hotel Spa Hévíz, 2018b). For those looking toward the medical tourism end of the spectrum, Szent András (Saint Andrew's) Hospital specializes in healing chronic musculoskeletal and rheumatic disorders and disease (Hotel Spa Hévíz, 2018c). The Spa and Hospital partner together to give guests the advantages of advanced medical healing, spa treatments, and the curative powers of the thermal waters, all in one location.

The city of Hévíz was one of the top 20 nominees for the European Commission's European Best Destination 2020 award, among esteemed competitors like Paris, Rome, Amsterdam, Athens, Milan, London, and Prague. The CEO of European Best Destinations, Maximilien Lejeune, stated "the beauty of the city center of Hévíz combined with a great offer of wellness care around the thermal water, therapeutic massage, sauna, sports, without forgetting our taste buds with the delicious wines and the Hungarian gastronomy, the specialties of Zala County, Egregy wines. Hévíz offers a complete experience to travelers. After a day at the spa, they can relax in Hévíz's restaurants, listen to live music, taste local products." (Municipality of Hévíz, 2019) In 2012, the number of annual visitors to Hévíz reached 224,645 (113,802 of which were international visitors). These guests brought in revenues to the local area of approximately \$50 million per year, and in 2012 the tourism industry in the city employed 2,459 people, out of a population of only 4,663 (53% of the population was employed in tourism) (Tourism Observatory, 2014).

Discussion questions

1. What makes the Thermal Lake of Hévíz unique for visitors?
2. What do Spa Hévíz and its accompanying facilities offer wellness travelers?
3. What is the economic impact of the Thermal Lake of Hévíz?
4. Do you know of similar thermal lakes?

Spa and hot spring resort development

Spas and hot springs differ in one key area. A spa can be built virtually anywhere, whereas the location of a hot spring is dependent on the natural phenomena that cause them to occur. Tourist interest in hot springs is expected to continue to grow due to an increased interest in experiencing cultural traditions, connecting with nature, and seeking alternative wellness treatments (Yeung & Johnston, 2018). Tourism surrounding spas and hot springs affects not only these facilities, but also accommodation and foodservice providers, retailers, transportation businesses, and other operators of activities and attraction facilities. Destination management organizations (DMOs), local governments, and residents benefit through tax revenues, increased employment, and more. There are four primary types of spas (Mill, 2011):

1. **Resort spa** – Located on the property of a hotel, usually as part of a resort that also offers other activities as well. Hotel and spa guests intermingle, and the resort spa is generally an important profit center for the property.
2. **Amenity spa** – Also typically located on the property of a hotel, the amenity spa is treated as an added facility and is not an important profit center.
3. **Destination spa** – The spa is the main focus of the property, which offers specific health and fitness programs, and additional activities, to guests only.
4. **Medical spa** – Offers a variety of health practices and treatments, and is supervised full-time by a licensed medical professional.

As discussed in a previous chapter, the International Spa Association also recognizes the below as other types of spas (Vukovic et al., 2015):

1. **Club Spa** – “The primary use is fitness, but it also offers a wide array of professionally-led spa services on a daily basis.”
2. **Cruise Ship Spa** – “A spa center on a cruise ship that offers professionally led spa services, fitness services and wellness components, as well as a spa menu with carefully chosen meals.”
3. **Day Spa** – “A spa center that offers professional spa services on a daily basis. This kind of spa is best developed in western Europe.”
4. **Mineral Springs Spa** – “A spa that offers natural minerals, thermal or other springs used for hydrotherapeutic treatments. This kind of spa center is the more typical of the European spa/wellness sector.”

An on-site spa also often provides additional revenue to a resort; it has been shown to increase revenue per available room (RevPAR) and average daily room rate (ADR) (Tabacchi, 2010). Resort general managers also indicate that having a spa enhances their occupancy, perceived value for money, length of stay, and marketing advantage (Tabacchi, 2010). A spa can also be useful in the following ways (Mill, 2011):

- Attracting more visitors in the off and shoulder (season between peak and non-peak seasons) seasons.
- Lengthening the shoulder season, thereby shortening the off-season.