

ASIA: SAUDI ARABIA

1. What is the latest spa and wellness news in your country?

The business environment in our region remains difficult because of its unconventionality, but we are pushing the industry forward nonetheless. Throughout the last year, the country has been going through tremendous changes in a positive direction under the leadership of King Abdullah. By the instructions of the king, the country has been pushing forward an agenda that supports the following:

Female empowerment on all fronts, which could be seen clearly through the appointment of enough women to the House of Counsel to fill 25 percent of the chairs, which should have an influence on pushing forward all women's issues, including spa and wellness regulation laws.

The appointment of a new Minister of Labor, highly educated and from a business background, who has applied professionalism and sound judgment to fast-forward the Ministry of Labor into the digital age, thus making a positive impact in reducing unemployment levels, especially among the female population.

Our country's stability, strength, and maturity in the midst of a region that is currently being roiled by revolutions ("the Arab Spring") in addition to its being a member of G20, led to its becoming a center of investment and thereafter a thriving economy, which is reflected in citizens' lives and prosperity.

The focus of our country's leaders on youth: By sending more than 250,000 of our young people on scholarships to all parts of the world, a program that was started by King Abdullah five years ago began to bear fruit with the first wave of exchange students returning home from overseas having acquired the highest standards of knowledge and education. Recently King Abdullah appointed a new Minister of Youth and Sports, a young prince with solid experience in this field who was charged with constructing 12 holistic sport cities, the first of which was completed in one year.

All of this will help Enaya to pioneer the revision of outdated legislation and make a positive impact on the wellness and spa industry. We aspire to lead, pioneer and achieve more synergy with government facilities and, with the support of the GSWS officials, to fast-track Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region into the forefront of the spa and wellness industry.

2. What is happening in your country in terms of wellness tourism?

The Ministry of Tourism started to gain importance with the appointment of a young prince (who was also the first Saudi astronaut) who is noticeably improving tourism, which in our country is mostly of the religious variety. Regarding medical tourism, our Ministry of Health recently welcomed a new minister known for his commitment to practical solutions. The minister has already made well thought-out plans that should improve the standards of health in the country through medical and non-medical actions targeted to reduce common chronic diseases in Saudi Arabia, such as obesity and diabetes. Within three to five years these aggressive plans could help medical tourism see the light.

3. Please provide one sentence that best describes the latest developments in your country for each of these categories:

Hotel spas: More investors and major hotel chain owners are eyeing Saudi Arabia for future investments and expansions.

Destination spas: Still under development, with a few plans and investors, both local and foreign, looking at the new economic cities to utilize some of them as the right spots for these kind of activities and investments.

Hot springs spas: Since Saudi Arabia is mostly desert, hot water springs are rare. But if active efforts were made to locate hot water springs, it might have potential in the future, especially in the mountain areas of Saudi Arabia.

4. What has been the general attitude about investing in the spa/wellness arena in 2014?

Investment is mainly done by owners themselves. Enaya Care Co. is one of first salon and spa businesses to secure bank financing in Saudi Arabia. Enaya Care has paved the way for members of our industry to secure bank financing, and now is looking to evangelize the concept of franchising within the industry. Enaya Care Co. has actively progressed from salon into spa, and has active plans to eventually build a chain of wellness centers. The clear vision of its founder, partners and board members is to become a public company by 2020 within the GCC region.

5. Looking back at the past four decades of spa and wellness, what would you consider “a defining moment?”

As a company, we believe that our country’s leaders are currently making history in Saudi Arabia, the GCC and our industry; there is an openness and transparency in action today that has never been seen before. For Enaya Care, the future looks bright. We still believe that if the GSWS team supports us by holding its summit in our region – either in one of Saudi Arabia’s new cities like King Abdullah Economic City (KAEC) or in a nearby location like Dubai – it would definitely fast-forward our industry.

(Note: The Expo 2020 will take place in Dubai, which could become a real hub for spa and wellness tourism in the region. It could quite conceivably host GSWS 2020. I highly recommend that the GSWS boards works with Enaya in making this a reality by that date.)

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