



Destination Spas/Wellness Retreats – Invitation Only

Hosted Boardroom Discussion with Lunch

Facilitator

Jared Weiner, Executive Vice President & Chief Strategy Officer, The Future Hunters, U.S.

Conversation Participants

Owners and operators of destination spas and wellness retreats

Overview

This session was structured as an invitation-only lunch among the owners and operators of destination spas and wellness retreats. It was the first of its kind session at GWS. Because it was an open dialogue, some ideas below will be presented generally. Others, where applicable, will be attributed to specific participants.

Question: How is the definition of “wellness” retreat shifting across generations?

- Overreliance on technology has led to a decrease in empathy among Millennials. Many of them realize this, and will be looking for “relationship” in their lives.
- In many cases, this begins with their relationship to *themselves*. This is where destination spas have the opportunity to step in, serve this market and make a real difference. How can wellness retreats enhance younger customers’ introspectiveness?

Question: Should the focus in programming turn towards “switching off” as we inundate ourselves more and more into technology?

We’re increasingly seeing that Millennials need technology at the spa level. As a result, many destination spas are integrating “hot spots” in their facilities – specially-designated areas for connectivity. The rest of the facilities, however, are to be almost completely tech-free “off” areas.

Tony De Leede - Gwinganna

Destination spas are becoming more high-touch/high-tech (versus traditionally high-touch/low-tech). Typically, high-touch leads...and high-tech follows. There are mostly solitary travelers at Gwinganna, and they have to tailor the experience accordingly.

Joshua Luckow - Canyon Ranch

There are some companies that serve as models for how to integrate high-touch/high-tech well (e.g., Disney) through data analytics. In general, how do we better mine information of guests?

Alex Glasscock - The Ranch at Live Oak Malibu

There is currently no real tech interconnectedness at the ranch.

Alfredo Bataller Pineda - SHA Wellness Clinic

Technology is more actively embedded into the “after” experiences - when people leave the spa. There’s an app with nutrition, fitness, medicine applications - designed for maximum benefit and utility as much as 6 months after the spa experience.

Sharon Kolkka - Gwinganna

She shared the case study of a woman who suffered negative health consequences at the spa from exposure to Wi-Fi. Is this the beginning of the crest of a wave of wi-fi “sensitivity” (similar to various food sensitivities)? And will spas have to design their facilities to cater to tech-sensitivities?

Roberto Arjona - Rancho La Puerta

Tech must be implemented pre- and post-retreat, but should be limited on property. They are addressing this through customer education. They utilize a technology “sleeping bag” - designed for customers to put their personal tech away at the ranch. Ultimately, how can destination spas help change customers’ habits for the better, long after they leave the spa?

Question (from Sharon Kolkka at Gwinganna): Are others were seeing an increase in guests with serious emotional or physical issues that you are not set up to deal with? Are you sometimes having to refuse guests who are best accommodated in medical detoxification or mental health facilities?

- Gwinganna has started to vet people (almost a de facto application) before they arrive. The spa is not equipped for dealing with people who have certain mental issues, detox/rehab needs, etc.
- Several other spas owners/operators share this experience of needing to properly vet guests with regard to mental health, special dietary needs, etc.

Question: How can evidence-based research help legitimize the health and medical benefits of destination spas/wellness retreats, and consequently push the industry forward?

Marianne Brepohl - Lapinha SPA

They have collected and analyzed longitudinal customer data over a 20-year period. The best results emerged with regard to weight loss among repeat customers, because they’re better incentivized to follow-through long-term. This type of data is highly encouraging, but only the beginning...

Alex Glasscok - The Ranch at Live Oak Malibu

It would be extremely beneficial for the industry as a whole to form an alliance with one or more research groups to monitor long-term medical and psychological results of customers. There is currently no singular industry-wide resource that can help everyone. Could data help build a case to have insurance companies fund wellness experiences? This would ideally involve not just one institution (e.g., Cleveland Clinic) - but *multiple* institutions of high standing and integrity.

Fast Forward: What This Will Mean in the Future?

In the future, destination spas and wellness retreats will be some of the only true escapes that people have from the rigors of daily life - including technology. And while some will opt in for this escape, it will be a much harder sell for those who seemingly cannot break away from the technology they find so indispensable. This will be a major marketing challenge for destination spas - especially when appealing to the next generation/s of consumers. How do we make them feel welcome, especially for an extended period of time, while discouraging some of the behaviors they find most familiar? Destination spas are also in a position to be at the leading edge of medicine in the future. As more consumers look for alternatives to basic Western medical approaches, evidence-based research can help substantiate the role of wellness retreats in the treatment of chronic conditions like stress, obesity and hypertension. Will the future consist of more destination "spa-spitals" as a complement to traditional hospitals?

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