Building bridges to the future

European Spa magazine’s Sarah Ward and guest contributor Spa Finder’s Susie Ellis report back from the 4th Global Spa Summit which took place in Europe’s 2010 Capital of Culture, Istanbul.

Who could resist the exotic allure of Istanbul? Seated where the continents of Asia and Europe meet on shores of the Bosphorus strait, the city’s heart beats to a distinctly different pulse to London, Paris or Rome. Yet today the cosmopolitan city, steeped in the trappings of the formidable Ottoman Empire, is proud to be selected as Europe’s Capital of Culture for 2010. This fact, coupled with the unique conjunction of East and West, made Istanbul the perfect setting for the long-anticipated 4th Global Spa Summit (GSS), the spa industry’s growing ‘must-attend’ event for top-level executives.

The glorious month of May saw the Global Spa Summit board welcome industry leaders from far and wide, who came to Istanbul now in economic downturn, to explore the theme ‘Bridges Worth Building’ over three intensive days. Attacting over 250 delegates representing more than 40 nations, GSS 2010 proved a welcome opportunity for business leaders from spa and beyond to share information on the future leisure habits of spa guests, he painted a vivid picture of changes in spending, consumer habits and life stages as the age of equality for women made its full impact. Besides the formation of societies, he invoked the dawn of the ‘Age of Singles, Cities and Knowledge’ that will impact on our quest for a new era of responsive and personalised health and leisure services.

Bourguignon also cited the explosion of the population to 1.5 billion people as another trend that cannot be ignored. He predicted that successful spas in this future will play a key role in responsive and personalised health and leisure services.

Bourguignon also cited the explosion of the population to 1.5 billion people as another trend that cannot be ignored. He predicted that successful spas in this future will play a key role in responsive and personalised health and leisure services.

Design for the future
Other highlights included the Architecture & Design for Future round table discussion featuring three internationally renowned spa designers and architects: Richard Corson, Principal, Corson Architects; Heinz Schletterer, CEO Schletterer Wellness; and Anthony DiGuiseppe, President & CEO, DiGuiseppe.

companies and governments on trends and strategic approaches to the future, focused on the speed of change every industry needs to embrace.

Citing the latest developments in social media, virtual currencies and the impact of new distribution channels shaping the world around us, she asked every delegate to consider the robustness of their business vision and how ready they are to adapt to embrace a new era and new customers. She also encouraged them to reconsider how tomorrow’s consumers will engage with spa and wellness providers as spa moves into an era in which it is an integral part of the provision of authentic services that promote personal and spiritual growth.

Providing spaces dedicated to the enjoyment of time, together with the provision of authentic services that promote personal and spiritual growth.

EDIE WEINER’S FASCINATING KEYNOTE PRESENTATION ON TRENDS THAT WILL DEFINE SPA AND WELLNESS SERVICES IN 30 YEARS’ TIME

Weiner concluded with a closer look at how sociological changes will create opportunities for spas and wellness providers in future years, touching on spa trends to watch including: spa authenticity; lasting customer loyalty; the current green trend moving into a new era of ‘blue’; as well as the development of multisensory spa treatments that engage both body and mind.

She also pointed out a raft of interesting counter trends, including the redination of luxury due to the short supply of time as opposed to wealth. Weiner concluded with a closer look at how sociological changes will create opportunities for spas and wellness providers as spa moves into an era in which it is an integral part of life, not an exception.

Age of woman
In a rare public appearance, keynote speaker Philippe Bourguignon, CEO of Miraval and formerly chairman of Club Meditterannée, EVP of Disney Europe and CEO of Euro Disney, time-travelled to the future in a fun presentation using his own newspaper headlines. Touching on the mega-trends he believed would shape the future leisure habits of spa guests, he painted a vivid picture of changes in spending, consumer habits and life stages as the age of equality for women made its full impact. Besides the formation of societies, he invoked the dawn of the ‘Age of Singles, Cities and Knowledge’ that will impact on our quest for a new era of responsive and personalised health and leisure services.

Touring Europe also cited the explosion of the population to 1.5 billion people as another trend that cannot be ignored. He predicted that successful spas in this future will play a key role in responsive and personalised health and leisure services.

Bourguignon also cited the explosion of the population to 1.5 billion people as another trend that cannot be ignored. He predicted that successful spas in this future will play a key role in responsive and personalised health and leisure services.

Design for the future
Other highlights included the Architecture & Design for Future round table discussion featuring three internationally renowned spa designers and architects: Richard Corson, Principal, Corson Architects; Heinz Schletterer, CEO Schletterer Wellness; and Anthony DiGuiseppe, President & CEO, DiGuiseppe.
Delegates brainstorm new ideas to contribute to GSS 2010 intelligence.

Numerous breakout sessions during the Summit attempted to drill down to a raft of spa business topics. As ever there was not enough time to do all of them justice, but a session titled ‘Bridge to a Huge Opportunity: Spa Retail’ – featuring Davide Bollati of comfort zone, Megan Larsan of Sodashi and Ghislain Waeyart of Clarins – prompted a colourful discussion with the audience which could have lasted all afternoon. This session demonstrated, above all, how important it is for spas to work with knowledgeable product houses and suppliers who can help to revolutionise spa retail.

Hammams from heaven

This year’s Summit would not have been complete without an opportunity to dip a toe into Turkey’s rich spa waters – we were, after all, in the home of the hammam. Many delegates took time pre- and post-Summit to explore Istanbul’s numerous traditional hammams, as well as several leading spas – notably Les Ottomans’ beautiful Caudalie Vinothérapie Spa, where delegates enjoyed a memorable dinner sponsored by Clarins.

For those with less time, Aysegul Sungur, PhD and Managing Director of Promet Spa & Wellness, gave a detailed presentation of hammam bathing culture, traditions and construction, giving context to the real heritage behind the hammam rituals enjoying a resurgence in popularity in modern spas across the world.

Sungur’s knowledgeable tribute and exploration – in the year billed as The Year of the Hammam by SpaFinder – made my very own hammam experience at Circigran Palace Kempinski’s Sanitas Spa even more enjoyable.

Sanitas Spa’s expertly delivered hammam rituals are an authentic taste of the Orient with a modern twist. These popular treatments, developed by Sanitas’ Chairman Abdurrahman Balta and this team, were memorable and appreciated. Mr Balta: thank you for making my Turkish hammam experience – and that of my companions from Aromatherapy Associates – so enjoyable. We left Istanbul feeling reborn and re-energised.

GSS Board Member and Summit Chair Susie Ellis recalls some of her many highlights and takeaways to emerge from Global Spa Summit 2010

As a founding Board Member I’ve attended each Summit since its inception in 2007, and I can report that the recent Summit held in Istanbul was the most successfully exciting and productive conference to date. The 2010 Summit was sold out, attracting more top-level executives (250-plus) from more diverse industries (medicine, finance and investment, tourism organisations, education, fitness and manufacturing) than ever before. And it was also the most globally diverse delegation to date, attracting executives from over 40 countries.

Spa connections

With the overarching theme ‘Bridges Worth Building,’ delegates were immersed in three days of keynotes, panels and breakout sessions specifically exploring the future of the spa and wellness industries – looking not inward, but outward to identify diverse new opportunities emerging on the horizon.

I think this is a uniquely momentous time for the global spa industry, not only because the recession is receding and things are slowly starting to turn around but, more crucially and of longer-term import, because the traditional healthcare model is under severe worldwide scrutiny and there’s such a powerful, growing demand for more preventative and integrative health models. There are unprecedented new connections being made between spas and medicine, the wider wellness market, tourism, fitness and beauty.

This momentousness was reflected at the 2010 Summit in a palpable sense of energy and optimism. Lots of creative, ‘big picture’ discussions took place, and the collective awareness was that we need to break this industry ‘out of its box’ and take a very clear look at emerging opportunities. We have to embrace new business models, new customer bases, new partnerships and new technologies.

Show the evidence

There were so many takeaways and resonant themes at the 2010 Summit, but one recurring issue really resonated for me: how crucial it is for our industry to jumpstart the campaign to gather the evidence...
ever-mounting medical-based evidence that proves that so many core spa and wellness approaches really work.

We really need to communicate the evidence-based data aggressively to the many stakeholders in healthcare: corporate health decision-makers, consumers, the official medical establishment, governments and public health officials. Research like the landmark SRI report Spas and the Global Wellness Market (released at the 2010 Summit) not only provide fresh evidence that the global healthcare system really is broken, and that the traditional ‘sickness’ medical model isn’t working, but that the world is inevitably shifting to a more prevention-based, cost-efficient health model.

As such, the spa and wellness industries are poised to become a much larger player in official health markets, as well as a natural leader in the $2 trillion consumer wellness revolution. But we can’t just vaguely assert that our approaches work. We have to gather and present the fact-based evidence.

Shift to wellness
Dr Ken Pelletier’s keynote encapsulated this discussion at the Summit, and it really galvanised me. He analysed how there is already so much authoritative medical evidence out there that core spa offerings not only work, but often work better than many traditional medical approaches for chronic diseases. He argued our industry has been far too conservative in gathering the evidence and broadcasting our rightful claims.

These ‘think-tank’ discussions – this forging of initiatives for the greater good of the industry – are the core mission of the Summit, and they were in full force in 2010. I’m personally excited to get started on the evidence-based medicine project for the Global Spa Summit. It can be huge for our industry. It will ignite a new wave of consumers, and it’s the key to institutions like corporate health and insurance companies writing us into their plans.

The bigger picture
Some other hot issues on the table included:

- Intensify the industry focus on emerging new technologies, internet platforms, and social media
- Embrace greater industry differentiation and strive for less homogeneity. Focus businesses on authenticity, indigenous and local uniqueness, and also start moving towards a far more personalised and relationship-based customer experience model
- Overhaul and rethink the spa retail model from the ground up
- Explore new opportunities in both medical and wellness tourism

My takeaways for SpaFinder
And finally a few of my personal thoughts on how the Summit is impacting our SpaFinder companies… We are definitely going to:

- put more emphasis on engaging our consumers with each other
- begin communicating some of the evidence basis for spa modalities
- grow our partnership with corporations emphasizing health and wellness for our gifting programmes
- encourage spa differentiation
- do some ‘thinking like an alien’ on how we can help spas with their retail programmes, move even more rapidly with SpaBooker… and a few other exciting initiatives that everyone will have to wait to see.

European Spa magazine would like to thank the Turkish Culture & Tourism Office UK and Turkish Airlines for their help in the making of this report. For more information please visit www.gototurkey.co.uk and www.thy.com.

Save the date: Global Spa Summit 2011 will take place May 15-19 2011 in Asia (location to be confirmed soon). For more information visit: www.globalspasummit.org