



Immersion Initiative Briefing Paper 2017

What is the aim of your initiative?

To promote the value of immersion wellness experiences to the international consumer and marketplace.

What or who are the current “news makers” or trends in the initiative’s industry/sector?

The news of Hyatt’s acquisition of Miraval Group in the United States has brought focus to how big brands are getting into delivering “immersive wellness experiences.” Other trends include the addition and expansion of “wellness programming” that is more comprehensive and experiential outside the four walls of spa. Also, content-driven, highly-curated and “guru”-led wellness retreats are on the rise.

Name some (high level) challenges facing your industry/sector?

Creating sustainable immersion experiences has historically been a challenge for the industry. Several hard and soft factors need to synergistically come together to be authentic in this offering – design, programming, staff, logistics, vision, passion, conviction and orchestration. Successful execution is a blend of art and science and will be illusive to operators who treat their businesses as simply transactional, rather than transformational.

Where do you see the opportunities for industry/sector?

There are many opportunities in this sector as our population becomes more ill and highly stressed. Operators who can balance the delivery of authentic and deeply meaningful immersive experiences with the need for profitability will be successful. A lot of research has been written on the Baby Boomers and Millennials desire for these experiences so operators have a big audience.

Overuse of technology will likely spawn a new breed of “wellness immersion experiences” where we learn (or re-learn) how to untether ourselves from our devices – not just for a few hours, but for a few days or even weeks. As consumers begin to truly reconnect with themselves, the impact of this “wellness immersion” may be profound.

Are there any “heroes” (either companies or individuals) who stand out in your industry/sector?

Larger-than-life visionaries and operators who have been committed to executing these environments include Deborah Szekely and Sarah-Livia Brightwood of Rancho La Puerta, Mel Zuckerman and Jerry Cohen of Canyon Ranch, John and Karina Stewart from Kamalaya Koh Samui, and Dietmar Müller-Elmau of Schloss Elmau. Their operations, along with Chiva-Som and Gwinganna, stand out within our industry and serve as models worthy of emulation.

Newer “heroes” include people like Wyatt and Melissa Chapman, who have created the bespoke wellness immersion program Vera Via in California, and Alicide and Lilanna Leali, who own the bio-/eco-certified wellness resort, LeFay in Lake Garda, Italy.

Is there noteworthy investment happening in your industry/sector?

Yes. Established brands are expanding, with aspirational brands trying to enter the immersion category. Likewise, investors and developers are recognizing the strong profit profile of such properties and are consequently seeking opportunities to enter the market.

Name any key accomplishments (milestones) made by your initiative?

As our initiative has just begun, we will have reportable achievements over the next several months. Two worth noting, however, are A) a collaboration with the Green Spa Network on co-hosting a roundtable session during their next Congress event in March 2018, and B) an immersion roundtable retreat at Kamalaya, Thailand, targeted for August 2018.

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