



EUROPE: *Bulgaria*

ECONOMIC CLIMATE

The economic crisis has had an unfavorable effect for the Spa and Wellness industry in Bulgaria. Most of the spa hotels reported lower revenues compared with the same period the previous year. The negative aspects are that the guests have become budget-oriented and have limited financial resources to spend for luxury.

The mineral spring spa resorts in the countryside are preferred mostly by the local and neighboring country's travelers. These hotels are fully booked during weekends and public holidays while midweek days are marked with very low occupancy levels. Of course there are rare occasions of organized events like seminars and conferences but they do not bring sufficient figures.

The Black Sea Coast and the Mountain Ski resorts are mainly seasonal. To attract tourists some hotels did interesting promotions which led to a domino effect. Due to the decreasing percentage of incoming tourists from the Russian Market some of the hotel chains became creative and started to offer bonuses like a cash re-payment of the Bulgarian entry visa upon arrival or free spa procedures. Regretfully the mechanisms to tackle the situation are not that many and it is hard to make a profit in the spa business these days.

STATISTICS

The most important event of 2009 was the nomination of the town of Velingrad for SPA Capital of the Balkans. This nomination was announced by Dr. Ghassan Aidi, President of IH&RA (International Hotel and Restaurant Association). Apart from the natural gift of the region which has 80 of the 500 mineral springs in Bulgaria, Velingrad has a tradition of hosting guests specifically attracted to water treatments.

Last year also marked the opening of 15 – 20 new four & five star hotels and complexes with a range of relevant services apart from property luxuries. Regardless of the crisis, the Spa and Wellness industry in Bulgaria achieved growth of approximately 3 - 4% in revenue.

INNOVATION

During the last 2-3 decades, the idea of Spa has developed greatly in the entire world. The countries of Western Europe, together with countries from East Asia and North America implemented these principles mostly in day spas, paying attention to anti-aging and cosmetic care for the face and body. The Medi Spa Centers in the Eastern European countries and especially in Bulgaria differ greatly from the Medi Spas in Western Europe and in the U.S. Here combinations of classical therapeutic and medicinal methods are used as well as wellness methods – both are applied simultaneously. Body, soul and spirit are subject to this treatment and to a great extent this represents the holistic medicine idea, which is becoming a leading idea here in the last several years.



SPA INDUSTRY BRIEFING: *Bulgaria*

We see a very strong medical presence, represented by medical doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and kinesiotherapists who are becoming the backbone of the newly organized system. Electrotherapy, active and passive kinesiotherapy, many different kinds of water treatments using special tubs with the natural treasure of the country - mineral (thermal) and sea water, adding salts, herbal extracts, sea weeds and natural sea mud applications as warm or cold packs are the basic way in which these treatments are performed under medical control. This is a perfect way of utilizing everything that nature gives to fight painful chronic diseases of the bones, muscles and joints - using scientific and indigenous ways. Tradition and modern science are combining their efforts to eliminate the harmful effect of these diseases.

This development emphasizes our strongest points – from history and tradition – since Greek and Roman times, showing the popularity of various treatment methods due to our unique natural resources – climate, curative mud (peloids) and an abundance of mineral and thermal water as well as a strong scientific presence. These are the prerequisites for a successful spa development.

Being a relatively inexpensive and hospitable country, these treatments are becoming more and more widespread in Bulgaria. Together with many countries from South Eastern Europe, associations are being formed with a sole purpose – to use and develop these classical treatment methods in the best possible way for the benefit of humankind.

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