

EUROPE: GERMANY

1. What is making news in your country when it comes to spa and wellness?

Spa and wellness travel is still on the rise; the wellness market in Germany continues to grow, and most wellness hotels can boast an increase in revenue. On the other hand, there are multiple challenges: a shortage of qualified staff, especially therapists; an increase in costs, from food to energy; and last but not least, more competition in the market. In the last four years, about 200 new properties have opened in Germany and Austria, adding to a total of 2,400 hotel and resorts now offering spa and wellness, and all battling for the customer's attention. No new studies have been conducted to provide detailed figures on the market in Germany.

For the first time in 2014, we have been able to publish reliable and detailed benchmark figures on wellness hotels in Germany. It took more than three years to build up the structure and relevant sources, but we have taken the first important steps in this direction and are proud of the results.

2. With the buzz about wellness technologies, how do you see spa and wellness establishments using wellness technologies in your country? And in the future?

The sharp rise in hotel ratings shows that it is increasingly common for holiday-makers to express their opinion on the internet, and thus relate their experiences to prospective hotel guests. Researches show that 61 percent of all wellness customers check hotel reviews before making a booking decision, with a priority for the younger age range: 73 percent under 29 and 69 percent between 30 and 39. The percentage decreased by age, from 63 percent between 40 and 49, 58 percent between 50 and 59, to 47 percent aged 60 years and older.

There have been wide discussions about the use of internet and wifi in spas, and some hotels shy away from these techniques. But the customer is speaking another language and does not want to be restricted. Social media as a marketing tool for spas will be an important theme for the future.

3. When it comes to wellness tourism, what is happening in your country?

The move from straightforward pampering to a holistic wellness mindset has been widely noted over the last decade. “Wellness as an alternative to doctors, drugs and diseases,” as wellness pioneer Don Ardell expressed it years ago. What he calls “REAL” wellness is a concept to promote healthier, more enjoyable lifestyles. The option is not “yes we can” but “we will do something for ourselves, now or never!” (We really appreciated meeting Don Ardell when he visited Germany.)

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

Hotel spas: The trend now is “go local.” Regional USPs can easily be communicated and go along with the increasing demand on domestic spa travel. Whether using wild herbs, goat’s milk or wine, Germany offers a treasure trove of spa treatments. Successful providers make it clear: the focus should be on a core competence to provide a clear profile.

Destination spas: A new project development sets the pace for the future: Villa Stéphanie, our destination spa in Baden-Baden. The new spa, housed in the historic Villa Stéphanie, adjacent to the Brenners Park Hotel and Spa, will offer an integrated approach to health, covering beauty, wellbeing and medical needs. Covering an area of 5000 square meters, an entire house has been dedicated to the world of spa. Spread over five floors, it offers a 500-square-meter sauna, a plunge pool, a private gym, a hamam and a ladies’ sauna. There are also inspiringly designed treatment rooms overlooking the gardens, a lounge with an extensive library, 12 spacious double rooms and three impressive suites — all surrounded by nature in a lush green private park. Directly connected to the new destination spa is Haus Julius, a 1700-square-meter mansion designed to offer unique and exclusive medical care to Brenners’ guests.

Hot springs spas: German has a long tradition of cures and healing springs going back to the 16th century. By 1900, Wiesbaden was a world spa with around 136,000 visitors a year, followed by Baden-Baden, with about 72,000 guests. Today, many spa destinations mourn those glory days, but they can still be proud of their resources and effective remedies. They show high potential for attracting a new and younger clientele.

5. Fast-forward five years and tell us what you think the spa and wellness industry in your country will look like.

As mentioned earlier, in Germany we are transitioning from mere pampering to a holistic wellness mindset over the last decade. But there are two sides to this coin: on the one hand, hotels that lack an understanding of what to offer or how to attract future customers with new concepts; on the other hand, guests, who fall into the next spa resort with the intention of just doing nothing. Everybody organizing activities or educational programs is absolutely frustrated if nobody participates.

But let us not lose hope for the future — we are definitely optimistic about the spa and wellness market in Germany and German-speaking countries. Nobel Prize-winner Hermann Hesse once said, “You must find your dream, then the way becomes easy”. Our dream is “fast forward,” but with a well-considered approach to successful business in the spa, wellness and hospitality industry in Germany.

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