



EUROPE: UNITED KINGDOM

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

Responsibility: The fact that consumers are now assuming a greater degree of responsibility for their own health - one of the factors driving the growing importance of the wellness side of the industry – is a key topic. The consensus appears to be that this development is largely driven by the economic recession and an awareness of the potential cost implications of not looking after your health. A growing health-consciousness is also a factor.

Prevention: This ties in with the responsibility aspect: taking greater responsibility for your health includes focusing on prevention in order to try to stop health problems from arising – rather than just treating the symptoms once they have already manifested themselves. The UK is still some way behind the markets in continental Europe, such as Austria, Germany and Eastern Europe – where there is a stronger wellness tradition – but prevention is nevertheless a growing trend in the UK as well.

Stress: The damaging physical and psychological implications of stress and the role the spa and wellness industry can play in providing stress management solutions is a key industry topic in the UK at the moment. In the media, the topic is often approached from the point of view of what the effects of stress cost employers, and consequently in the long run, the economy as a whole.

Results-driven customers: One popular topic of conversation within the industry is the fact that customers are now increasingly focused on results when it comes to the products they purchase and the treatments they opt for. Customers are to an increasing extent no longer content with products that simply smell great or treatments that are merely relaxing; they want tangible results.

Evidence-based: Going hand in with the emergence of an increasingly results-driven clientele is the emphasis on scientific evidence. Consumers no longer simply want to be told that a product/treatment will deliver certain results, they want to know what the evidence behind these claims are and to be able to verify them.

Education: Within the industry (and in the trade press, but not in the consumer press), education remains a pressing issue. Therapists who are not spa ready and who lack the necessary professional skills when they graduate from college is a recurring topic and concern, as is the problem of finding spa managers and directors who possess both spa industry knowledge and experience, and the right business skills.

What is happening in your country when it comes to wellness tourism and/or medical tourism?

The UK is still not a wellness or medical tourism destination in the way that Asia or continental Europe are. However, a growing number of hotels in the UK are now developing wellness programmes and regimes, which means that clients no longer necessarily have to leave the country for wellness, fitness or detox breaks. This development shows that there is a growing awareness of wellness in the UK and a rising demand for wellness solutions. Eastern Europe, offering a winning combination of affordable treatments and high quality care, is a popular medical tourism destination for British travellers.

Please give us one sentence to describe the latest developments in your country for each of these spa categories:

What is happening with hotel spas?

Hotel spas appear to be increasingly raising their game, renovating, expanding, and adding standout features, facilities and equipment in order to remain competitive and attract customers.

What is happening with destination spas?

The UK remains a market in which genuine destination spas are few and far between and there are currently no significant developments indicating a change on that front.

What is happening with hot springs spas?

Offering the only true hot springs in the UK, Bath, popular for 'taking the waters' in the 18th and 19th centuries in particular, is still the only real hot springs destinations in the country.

What has been the general attitude about investing in the spa/wellness arena in 2013?

While the economy has yet to fully recover from the recession, there seems to be a consensus that any new spa projects that are undertaken must be ambitious, well-funded and able to offer impressive facilities in order to stand a chance in today's competitive market. Owners and developers are increasingly aware that today's spa-goer is likely to be spa-savvy and well travelled and, as a result, in a position to compare their spas to the many other spas they have visited around the world. The view seems to be that if spa and wellness projects are not well funded, they will struggle to measure up.

Looking back at the past four decades of spa and wellness, what would you consider "a defining moment?"

The emergence of wellness as a key part of what the industry offers, and the increasing focus – both from consumers and from the industry itself – on providing wellbeing experiences that go beyond pampering and relaxation. Delivering long-term health solutions has been a defining development.

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