

LEISURE MANAGER

Business insights for attractions, fitness, sports and spa professionals

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Maximum markets

Schletterer Wellness and Spa Design regional director Gerald Huber on great opportunities

SM: What needs to be understood when talking about 'spa' as a concept?

Everyone can use the term 'spa' and put it on a gym with a jacuzzi, or a beauty salon, but a proper spa deals with health. What is very important when we create a spa is that it is not just a side effect of a larger project project, it's a destination factor.

We don't just fill some space with some lease-out spa facility to create a little turnover and profit in that subset. We create a motor which works with the facility that gives it a new identity. This increases the occupancy of the hotel by providing more reasons to stay there.

SM: How strong is the market here compared to elsewhere?

I'm very proud to say this part of the world brings a serious, disproportionately high contribution to our full portfolio at the moment. I would say in central Europe we're doing quite well but had to rest a little bit for the first 2-3 months.

Now we've recovered and there are big projects but some are still on hold. We could do even better but there are still very interesting projects coming in from day to day and we're working on them.

SM: Why is this region doing so well?

First, due to the development of the region there are a lot of people come to here to work. Those people need something on top of their central part of the life, the business.

At the moment the spa segment is not that established here. There is a beauty segment around but a real proper health and lifestyle segment doesn't exist.

In Europe there's a very high density of proper health resorts and destinations. There the demand to increase comes from direct competition at a very high level.

Here there is hundreds of so-called spas around but it's beauty salons and massage studios. People strive for something different and the people due to globalisation, they know what would be available and that's a reason why demand is so high. This segment of health resorts and proper holistic spas hasn't even been developed. It's very rare here.

SM: What exactly do you mean by a 'proper holistic spa'?

We're try to create 'positive shopping'. You spend your money for something to increase your health and improve your lifestyle. This shouldn't be delivered in a clinical or medical way. It has to come in an ambience of luxury and hospitality. We've collected together health experiences from all over the world on a sophisticated level. There's no gimmicks, no show effects. It's collecting the knowledge of life from Ayurveda, the knowledge of health from the central European cultures, the knowledge of hospitality and treatments from the Asian cultures – it's all of that collected together, creating health and experiences.

SM: How do these kinds of spas boost profits for a hotel?

We don't focus solely on treatments. We add experiences around that, meaning that you have some entertainment. In the facility the guest will enjoy themselves for a longer time. It's common to have a pool to enjoy some longer time in the leisure facility. With meditation, relaxation, nutrition facilities and sports facilities combined together, this helps the guest stay indoors for a long time. This is exactly the same situation we have in Austria where we started, there is this unbeneficial effect of the weather, it's probably too cold and rainy. Here the problem is it's too hot outside and you have to create facilities to entertain people inside and entice people during the low season.

SM: What economic trends are you seeing within the spa industry?

Now we are exactly where we want to be, because in all economic studies, it's proven that combination between health and hospitality is the success factor for today. When you analyse the normal hospitality segment revenues, they dropped drastically during the crisis. People are more conscious and selective where they spend their money. In terms of pure vacation they try to reduce their overall spend. But they can't stop investing in health. In crisis times, stress increases. Now people have to work

“ The team is the first thing the client feels. It's crazy to see how much money is invested in a spa without thinking about the human resources ”

twice as hard to come to the same results. They have to cope with their stress and find sources of energy. Investing into facilities which are combining health and hospitality makes good sense. What is astonishing and relieving is that health destinations are increasing in occupancy, turnover and profit. ■



Huber: "People can't stop investing in health"