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# Dean Kowarski

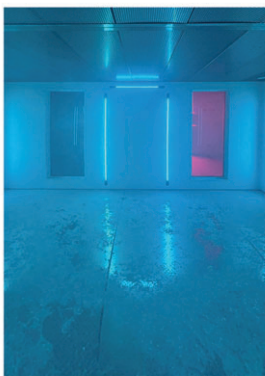
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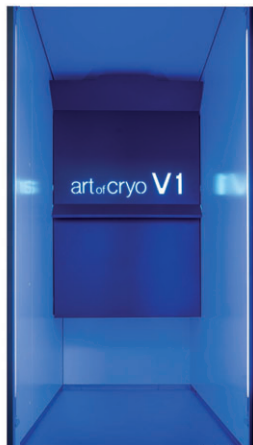
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PHOTO: ANDREW COOPER

# Pleasure time

Why does being healthy feel more like a punishment when the wellness industry offers pleasure in abundance? It's time to make 'pleasure health' the new 'play' to realise the true value of our sector

Just back from this year's Global Wellness Summit, the team at *Spa Business* is brimming with ideas for future content. On p86 we reveal our highlights from the three-day event and on p32 we share the latest industry numbers released there – the global wellness economy is now worth US\$6.3 trillion (€5.99 trillion, £4.98 trillion) and is expected to reach US\$9 trillion (€8.6 trillion, £7.1 trillion) by 2028.

A standout talk delivered by Anna Bjurstam, the wellness pioneer at Six Senses, focused on 'pleasure health'. Pleasure is linked to enhanced immunity, resilience and cognitive function, Bjurstam said, and so many spa and wellness services already boost feel-good hormones such as dopamine, serotonin, endorphins and oxytocin. However, she believes "the wellness industry is selling itself as a Victorian punishment regime".

Instead of pointing out how you suffer in a cold plunge, why not present it as an activity that feels so exhilarating that you'll be on top of your game for the rest of the day, she reasoned. Or, when selling sleep health, rather than homing in on things to give up, such as phones and alcohol, create a programme people will look forward to every night.

The key is to build anticipation, as that's when the spike in feel-good hormones occurs. "So why on earth is it more exciting to track an Amazon package than to get a spa booking confirmation?" asked Bjurstam.

Other industries, such as the food and gaming sectors, have perfected the path to pleasure and there's no reason we can't follow suit. On p47, for example, Dean Kowarski, the CEO of Virgin Active, outlines its successful loyalty programme that rewards wellness behaviours. But can we do more? Can we study people's reactions to

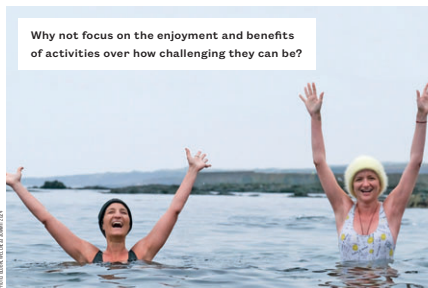


PHOTO: DEAN KOWARSKI

“The future of wellness lies in understanding the science of feeling good”

water to see what temperature is the most enjoyable and what's the optimum duration for a dip? Or what about investigating what makes massage addictive?

In the past, *Spa Business* has highlighted the benefits of incorporating playfulness in operations (see [www.spabusiness.com/play](http://www.spabusiness.com/play)) and it's clear that pleasure health is just as important.

"The future of wellness lies in understanding the science of feeling good," Bjurstam said. By doing that, we might even surpass that US\$9 trillion valuation we're predicted to hit in the next four years. ●

**Katie Barnes, editor, [katiebarnes@spabusiness.com](mailto:katiebarnes@spabusiness.com)**

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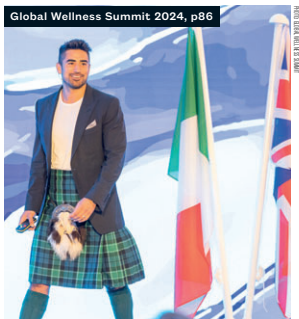
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**Print and distribution** Printed by The Manson Group Ltd. Distributed by Royal Mail Group Ltd and Whistl Ltd in the UK and Total Mail Ltd globally.

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ISSN 1479-912X (print) 2397-236X (online)



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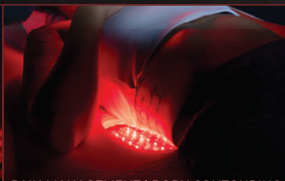
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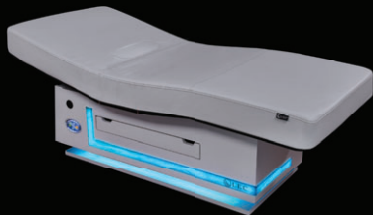


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# spa people



Melisse has created a copywritten framework for Sanctum



## The main goal of Sanctum is emotional release

Luuk Melisse, co-founder, Sanctum

Sanctum is a fitness experience with a cult following. Founded during the pandemic in Amsterdam, it combines elements of HIIT with kundalini yoga, martial arts, animalistic flow, breathwork and primal fitness. It's curated to music inspired by the city's electronic scene, enhanced by spoken word and elevated with orchestral pieces to complement mindful and meditation movements.

As Sanctum's global rollout gains momentum - including partnerships announced with Six Senses and Aubeige - *Spa Business*' Liz Terry catches up with co-founder Luuk Melisse.

### What's the elevator pitch for Sanctum?

It's a cathartic, spiritual mind/body experience where we combine ancient methods and philosophies and mix them with their modern equivalents.

We created a signature workout sequence, which is a combination of high-intensity movement, kundalini yoga, martial arts and the power of the mind and created a multi-sensory immersive experience around it.

Our workouts are delivered in unique locations all over the world, such as churches, ancient ruins and beaches. The spaces are filled with candles and the fragrance of sage smudge sticks,

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Classes take place in unusual venues, such as deconsecrated churches

which are used in shamanic tribes to clean spaces – it smells delicious.

Everybody wears headphones and through those, they're hearing a rollercoaster of motivational music, soundscapes, poetry and wisdom. We also work with binaural beats and healing frequencies.

#### Tell us about your instructors

I have a background in theatre, so we often have dancers and actors on our team.

This is because I can train people how to move, but the magic we seek comes from them being an inspiration and being gifted in storytelling and this makes the role ideal for people who've trained in the creative arts.

**Sanctum has become a safe space where people can laugh and cry and be themselves**

We call our instructors guides because they don't tell people what to do. I've created a signature framework – which we teach in an intensive three-week programme – and they then build on this by sharing their own personal, authentic stories.

People don't remember the number of squats they did, but they remember a personal story or advice about letting go or a dive into spirituality. This is the magic of Sanctum.

#### Music is a key part of Sanctum – tell us more

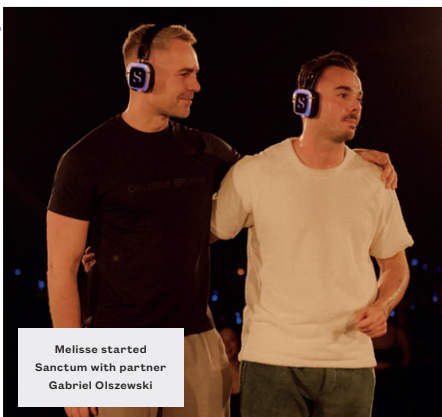
We're the world's first movement class to incorporate sonic branding. This has been created with Myndstream – which is part of the company that does music for *Stranger Things* and *Bridgerton* – and we use it in our classes and online.

We create classes where the storytelling, the music and the movement come together in one experience.

We started Sanctum as a mindful fitness class, but it's grown more communal as it's become clear how important the community aspect is

Large-scale events called Frequency Festivals are rolling out in global cities

PHOTOGRAPH BY: JORDAN



Melisse started Sanctum with partner Gabriel Olszewski

► **What's the science behind the headphones?**

Berkeley University researched why people cry more on a plane when watching a movie with headphones than when they watch it on TV and found that when people listen through headphones, their brain perceives the sound as though it's their own voice and this heightens their emotions.

This means that when people are in my class, I have a conversation with each of them inside their heads. That's what makes it so intimate.

**What's special about Sanctum's approach?**

Our main goal is emotional release and to alter body frequencies. We believe



PHOTO: JESSICA HILL / GETTY IMAGES

Sage smudging adds another dimension to classes

PHOTO: JESSICA HILL / GETTY IMAGES

people experience by doing, so we don't over-explain.

Tomorrow, for example, I'm doing a class around love. It will include an intro talk accompanied by a soundscape at 528 Hz, which is the frequency of love and kundalini heart openings to activate the energy centres in the body – but I don't spell out these steps. Part of the magic is bringing a number of elements together for people to find out things themselves.

**What's your personal story?**

I used to be a dancer, my mum was very spiritual and my dad is a business guy. I brought those elements together and started travelling the world to acquire more knowledge of spirituality and different philosophies.

I enjoyed discovering practices and beliefs that are thousands of years old, such as kundalini yoga and qi gong, that work with body energy and I began to weave these into a new modality.

Doing it, I felt the release that I had as a dancer because we use our body as a vessel to express ourselves.

I started Sanctum as a mindful fitness concept, however, I now realise it's more of a ritual. The community aspect has also emerged as the main pillar.

We live in a world with more than 7 billion people, yet loneliness is one of our biggest diseases. Sanctum has, very organically, become a safe space where people can laugh and cry and be themselves but with each other.

**Where can people experience your classes?**

We started in Amsterdam and host daily classes in the most beautiful churches and other spiritual spaces. Earlier this year, we launched our sessions in London.

The US is very much on our radar for 2025 and the rest of Europe is also in our sights.

**What rates do you charge for your sessions?**

In London, £40 (US\$52, €48) a class and in Amsterdam €25 (US\$27, £21) – it's a different market and very competitive.

We want more people to be able to experience it, so we don't want to make it too expensive. Our private retreats are more high-end.

Classes are delivered through headsets with a soundscape by Myndstream

#### ► Tell us about the retreats

We work with hotels to create three or four-night retreats which have daily Sanctum experiences at their core.

We focus on nature and use the story of the place in the class, so we might do them on a beach in Ibiza or in the ruins of Rome, where we create classes based around the Roman gods.

We partner with holistic experts to deliver wellbeing with an edge – for example, we might do a cacao ceremony or use a DJ who creates music by tapping into the electrical impulses in plants.

We also work with experts in energy and integration, such as breathwork and sound healing. Then there are social elements as well as a focus on stillness – organising things such as journaling workshops.

When we create a retreat, we want to take people through all the spectrums – high energy, low energy, going within themselves and reaching out to others.

#### Who are your retreat partners?

In Europe, we've collaborated with Six Senses in Ibiza and Switzerland

**We want to show that mindfulness can be fun and not always serious and that you can laugh and celebrate your imperfections**

and we also took part in the Soneva Soul Festival in the Maldives in October. In the US, we've collaborated with Auberge and delivered four retreats there in 2024.

#### What do they cost?

It depends on the property, but as a guide, they're priced between €3,500 (US\$3,845, £2,935) to €5,000 (US\$5,492, £4,194) for four days.

#### You're also doing mega events...

Our biggest event concept – called the Frequency Festival – sees 2,000 people taking part over 2.5 hours, so the energy is off the charts. We've just held festivals at the Olympic Stadium in Amsterdam and The Beams in London.

#### What are your dreams for the business?

We want to make Sanctum a global movement to help people get in touch with themselves and others in order to live their best life and make the right choices.

We really need this in the world right now. We need more love and connection.

Often, when I leave a fitness class in a gym, I leave stressed because it's about the 'beach body', it's about 'bigger biceps'. It's very aggressive and that is what we really didn't want to do when we were creating Sanctum.

We're a disrupter and we're always trying to work out how we can create something different. ●



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## Competitive massage events enable therapists to demonstrate their mastery and learn from others in the field

**Slav Marinov & Anna Tsankova**, world massage champions

**I**ntuition, empathy, compassion, technical expertise and relentless practice – these are the pillars of a world-class therapist, say spa trainers and husband-and-wife team, Slav Marinov and Anna Tsankova.

With nearly 25 years of experience, the Bulgarian duo are consistently crowned world champions in body and face massage (see p20 and p22) and are on a mission to inspire therapists to create extraordinary treatments and elevate their craft by participating in global massage competitions.

“Top therapists master a range of techniques and modalities, applying them with precision and skill,” explain

Tsankova and Marinov. “They possess a heightened emotional sensitivity, allowing them to adapt treatments to each client’s unique needs, creating a safe space for relaxation and healing.

“A true top therapist is driven by passion and a commitment to continual improvement.”

### **GOLD STANDARD**

The couple have each developed bespoke treatment techniques and offer a range of training experiences.

In between competing and judging at events, Tsankova runs advanced educational face massage courses in the UK and Europe, while Marinov offers frequent training workshops in the UK and US covering a range of western and eastern techniques.

Their expertise has seen them create signature treatments for brands such as Guerlain, Swissline and Yon-Ka while leading operators such as Cheval Blanc, Farris Bad, IHG and Kempinski have tapped them for training.

Tsankova and Marinov also speak and demonstrate at conferences globally and share their experiences online to help therapists continue developing their skills, even if they can’t afford extra training.

### **CHANGE OF SCENE**

The couples’ wellness journey began in the early 2000s when they moved from Bulgaria to the UK. Tsankova, originally in education, pursued her passion for skincare and facial therapy, while Marinov, drawing on his background in personal training, focused entirely on massage.

“I realised that massage therapy went far beyond mere physical manipulation of the body,” he says. “I discovered the profound potential of human touch, when combined with empathy and presence, to create an emotional connection with clients.”

After founding their mobile spa business, Beautopia Mobile Spa, in 2004, the couple stumbled upon competitive massage in 2017 when they heard about the first-ever World Massage Championship.

### **COMPETITIVE SPIRIT**

“Like most people, my initial reaction was one of surprise: ‘How does that even work?’” says Marinov, now a nine-time gold medalist in massage. “Being naturally competitive, I was eager to measure my skills against the best in the field and receive feedback from the judges.

“Plus, I was drawn to the opportunity to meet and connect with fellow therapists because it can be a solitary profession. It’s rare to meet other practitioners and see how they work.”

Marinov competed in his first championship in 2018, while Tsankova soon followed in 2019, and both became fixtures in the competitive massage world.



Marinov has won nine gold medals in massage competitions globally

There’s an art to distinguishing a good massage from an exceptional one

Slav Marinov and Anna Tsankova  
are on a mission to inspire  
therapists to elevate their craft



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## TSANKOVA'S RECENT AWARDS

- **Gold in Facial Massage** – World Massage Championships (2023)
- **Gold in Facial Massage** – American Massage Championships (2023)
- **Gold in Facial Massage** – Greek Massage Championships (2019)

► Some of the most well-known competitions include the World Massage Championship, organised by the International Massage Association based in Denmark, the USA Massage Championship, the Asian Massage Championship and CIDESCO International Global Awards. At these events, qualified therapists showcase their skills in various massage styles.

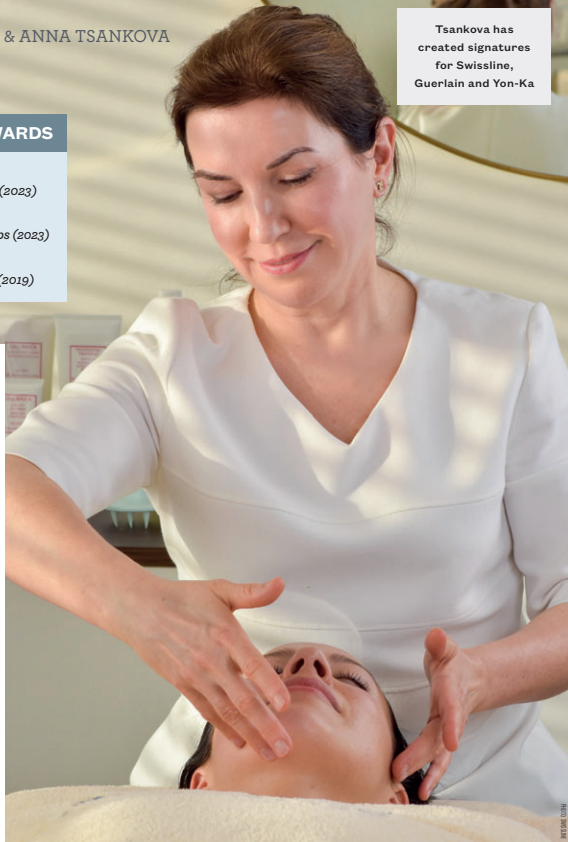
Competitors typically prepare 60-minute routines aligned with their category's rules, refining techniques and adding unique touches to stand out. Each participant performs a massage on a model and is scored by a panel of judges on several criteria:

- **Technique:** precision, fluidity and suitability of the methods used
- **Flow:** how smoothly the therapist transitions between techniques and body areas
- **Ergonomics:** focused on the therapist's posture, body mechanics and energy management
- **Client interaction:** how well the therapist communicates with the client, adjusts to their needs and responds to feedback

"Creativity and innovation – such as unique or novel techniques which enhance the massage – can earn extra points," says Marinov.

Early rounds involve therapists working on each other, while in the final stages, judges both observe and receive treatments themselves.

"These events provide a blend of artistry, skill and professional rigour, offering a platform for therapists to demonstrate their mastery and learn from others in the field."



A true top therapist is driven by passion and a commitment to continual improvement

## JUDGING EXPERTISE

After years of competing, the couple are now frequently invited to judge these events – including the World Massage Championship in Copenhagen this June, where 48 countries were represented.

Tsankova says: "Being a former competitor gives me an advantage, allowing me to distinguish a good

massage from an exceptional one. Judging is more than just evaluating techniques, it's about recognising the artistry, dedication, innovation and passion each therapist brings to their work."

There's also a difference between massages at events and those performed in treatment rooms, says Marinov. "When competing, I pay extra

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## MARINOV'S RECENT AWARDS

- Gold in Sports Massage and Western Style Free Massage – *American Massage Championship (2023)*
- Gold in Sports Massage – *World Massage Championship (2022)*
- Gold in Sports Massage – *Intercontinental Massage Championship (2022)*
- Gold in Sports Massage and Western Style Free Massage – *European Massage Championship (2022)*

## Microbiome-friendly products and face exercises are the biggest trends shaping the future of facials

▶ attention to the clarity and execution of each move ... and creativity. In a spa, the focus is on client comfort, satisfaction and customisation”

### THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE

The takeaway message for spas?

“Never stop learning,” says Tsankova. Marinov elaborates: “Continuous [therapist] training and development are crucial for consistent quality. When therapists feel supported, it leads to

happier clients, stronger word-of-mouth and a thriving business.”

They acknowledge that advanced training isn't always affordable but encourage therapists to stay curious. By keeping up with industry trends, research, emerging techniques and technology, therapists can stay at the top of their game.

The duo recommend industry magazines, webinars, professional organisations, social media and trade shows as valuable resources. Alongside this, they stress the importance of self-care, including proper nutrition and a balanced lifestyle, so therapists can consistently deliver their best work.

### HOT TOPICS


Looking ahead, Tsankova predicts microbiome-friendly products and treatments, self-massage and facial exercises are the biggest trends set to shape the future of facials.

“With advancements in technology and a shift towards at-home skincare routines, virtual facials and digital consultations are becoming the norm. It's vitally important what clients do for their skin health in the period between facials and I frequently give my clients homework!”

Clients and colleagues often ask Tsankova to create a digital course with at-home care massage and facial exercises, which she hints will be on the way soon.

For Marinov, the advent of AI and its effects on massage is a key discussion point: “In a world increasingly driven by AI and technology, the simplicity and profound impact of human touch offers a much-needed counterbalance.

“AI can enhance a therapist's ability to deliver effective, personalised care, streamline operations and provide deeper insights into treatment efficacy. However, human connection, which is the true essence of massage therapy, is irreplaceable.” ●



Marinov has a unique treatment style and offers a range of training courses

# swiss line

BY DERMALAB



After debuting in June at Six Senses Spa Marbella, Swissline's innovative Signature Face Sculpt treatment, designed by 2023 World Face Massage Champion, Anna Tsankova, has been rolled-out in select locations around the world, including Dublin's landmark hotel, The Shelbourne.

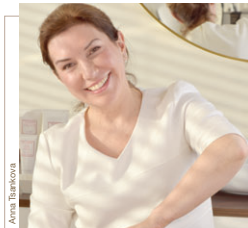
The extremely innovative, original and technical facial massage, offered at The Shelbourne as part of the Swiss Ultimate Collagen Facial, is a rhythmic, deep flow, yet relaxing, treatment that incorporates breath work, MLD, muscle release and facia manipulation, together with Tsankova's signature advanced massage sculpting techniques. It stimulates lymphatic drainage & circulation, relieves muscle tension, shapes facial contours and reactivates collagen.

## THE SHELBOURNE

*Ireland*



Dublin's largest 5-star luxury hotel



Anna Tsankova



The Shelbourne's Spa Relaxation Room

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## I was blown away by research showing the mental and physical benefits of curiosity

**Lauren Henkin**, founder & CEO, The Humane Space

**L**auren Henkin spent nearly 20 years as a creative director and VP of strategy for WTS International, the spa and leisure contract management firm founded by her father, Gary Henkin. But as a practising artist since childhood, she always felt something was missing from the wellness conversation - curiosity.

"The times in my life when I've felt the most nourished, the most well, were when I was involved in a deeply personal, passionate pursuit of lifelong learning or curiosity," she says. "When I left WTS, I delved into the research behind lifelong learning and was blown away by the mental and physical benefits of curiosity - one study even tied it directly to longevity."

### REKINDLING ADULT CURIOSITY

This discovery prompted Henkin to launch The Humane Space - an app to help people live more curiously for greater wellbeing, much in the same way as they might become more adept at meditating or pursuing physical health.

Content is curated by 15 in-house creatives, from writers and designers to a cognitive psychologist, voice-over artists and sound composers. It includes Mind Journeys, which guide listeners through specific locations in their mind, such as the Grand Canyon, a relaxing trip to the moon or visualising Paris in the 1920s. A new destination is introduced every week.

App users are also invited to explore a thought-provoking topic each week, like our relationship with the sky, for example, which touches on astrology, drone technology and the psychology behind the colour blue. "It's all about getting you to reconnect with your sense of curiosity," she says.

Another aspect includes Awe Walks, 10-minute sessions to listen to while getting in your steps. These narratives focus on mindful engagement with nature,

like learning about the types of clouds, the history of the word tree or how to look more closely at the world around them. "We initially created these for cancer patients to encourage people to stay mobile during treatment," says Henkin. "But it's also a way for employees to take healthier work breaks, rather than looking at social media."

#### INTENDED USE

The Humane Space app launched to US consumers last year and is now available in the UK, with Canada and Australia potentially next. It's had more than 20,000 downloads and 5,000 active users pay US\$15.99 (€15.21, £12.69) a quarter or US\$29.99 (€28.53, £23.80) a year.

While subscribers are intended as the main revenue generators, Henkin sees partnerships forming with organisations, too. Mind Journey sessions are already helping oncology patients get through chemotherapy in hospitals in Ireland and California and research is being conducted on how they can help students deal with burnout and stress.

There are obvious applications for hospitality and wellness businesses as well. "We're talking

to luxury hotels about creating web-based libraries with exclusive content, as well as health clubs and senior living communities," says Henkin, revealing that they've just forged a partnership with Volo Solutions for guestroom tablets.

She feels spas might be interested in guided visualisations before, during or after treatments, or even in receptions or relaxation areas. One wellness property, she says, is particularly interested in having the team create sleep-focused experiences, while another surrounded by hiking trails feels the Awe Walk sessions would be a good fit.

She concludes: "It's really about looking at each property and seeing where we can fit in, in a unique and positive way – to ultimately benefit the health and wellness of people." ●



The Humane Space app includes guided Mind Journey sessions

## Awe Walks encourage cancer patients to stay mobile during treatment



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## Kenneth Ryan departs Marriott after 15 years of leadership

Seasoned spa veteran Kenneth Ryan has announced he's leaving his role as Marriott International's VP of global operations for spa, fitness and retail.

"After 15 incredible years with Marriott, I'm stepping into a new season," Ryan revealed. "The journey has been filled with growth, success and most importantly, amazing people – teams, partners and friends who made every moment memorable.

"As I pause to reflect and recharge, I'm reminded that change is not just inevitable; it's essential. Here's to the next chapter, with gratitude for the past and excitement for what's ahead."

With nearly 30 years of global experience in the wellness and hospitality sectors, Ryan's career has been defined by his passion for hotel spa operations.



Ryan says his journey with Marriott has been full of "growth, success and most importantly, amazing people"

He began his journey with Marriott 17 years ago, later spending nine years at Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, where he worked alongside well-known industry figure Anne McCall Wilson.

In 2011, Ryan returned to Marriott as senior director of global spa operations, overseeing the design and development of spa programmes for over 131 multi-branded spas, which generated more than US\$170

million (€162 million, £134 million) in annual revenue. By 2016, he had risen to VP of global operations for spa, fitness and retail, where he managed more than 650 facilities and drove revenues exceeding US\$500 million (€475 million, £395 million) annually.

Marriott has yet to announce Ryan's successor and Ryan himself has not revealed his next move.

**More:** [http://lei.sr/t9K8w\\_B](http://lei.sr/t9K8w_B)

## Kamalaya owners announce exit after earn-out

John and Karina Stewart, founders of Kamalaya in Koh Samui, Thailand, have exited the business citing 'incompatibility' with owner Christopher Harborne.

The Stewarts began to divest the business in 2021, firstly going into partnership with Harborne and then

selling out completely and working as advisors during an earn-out period.

"It's with a heavy heart that we have said goodbye to Kamalaya," John Stewart told *Spa Business*.

"After three years – during which time we've honoured our duties and responsibilities under

the new ownership, we've come to the conclusion that our business and wellness philosophies vis a vis those of the controlling shareholders are simply divergent and incompatible," he explained.

"Although we will no longer be part of Kamalaya, we hope that what we created will live on," Stewart said.

John and Karina Stewart founded Kamalaya nearly 25 years ago and have grown the property's reputation, winning 70 international awards.

Harborne, a former management consultant at McKinsey, is CEO of global trading, procurement and supply chain management company Sherriff Global Group and an investor in blockchain and aviation fuel operations in Asia.

He goes by the name of Chakrit Sakunkrit in Thailand.

**More:** [http://lei.sr/J9u4X\\_B](http://lei.sr/J9u4X_B)



John and Karina Stewart (left) sold to investor Christopher Harborne in 2021

## Cheval Blanc Seychelles marks 29th spa for Guerlain

Luxury fragrance and beauty brand Guerlain has opened its first spa in Africa at Cheval Blanc's new 52-key beachfront retreat in the Seychelles.

The facility marks Guerlain's 29th spa worldwide and sees it continue its partnership with ultra-premium hotel brand Cheval Blanc. Both Guerlain and Cheval Blanc are owned by Louis Vuitton Môt Hennessy (LVMH), a European conglomerate specialising in luxury goods.

Guerlain already powers wellness offerings in Cheval Blanc properties in St Tropez, St Barts, the Maldives and Courchevel. In Paris, Cheval Blanc has a spa by Dior, another LVMH brand.

The spa at Cheval Blanc Seychelles offers a comprehensive suite of wellness treatments and experiences designed to complement the resort's extensive leisure facilities, including a pool, fitness centre, surf simulator, five distinctive dining options and tennis and padel courts.

Located on the southwest coast of Mahé Island at Anse Intendance



The tropical spa is Guerlain's first property in Africa

Beach, the new retreat has been conceived by architect Jean-Michel Gathy to celebrate Creole traditions and the surrounding lush landscapes. Villas, each featuring a private pool, boast striking views of the beach, hillside or tropical jungle.

Cheval Blanc Seychelles also gives pride of place to artists, with pieces

made specifically for this location by Prune Nourry and Madagascan artist Joël Andrianomearisoa.

The hotel's location was formerly home to Banyan Tree Seychelles, but the destination has been completely redeveloped for the new Cheval Blanc outpost.

More: [http://lei.sr/P5n3E\\_B](http://lei.sr/P5n3E_B)

## Australia's Soak Bathhouse accelerates national rollout

The global momentum behind communal bathing and social wellness shows no signs of slowing down as urban Australian brand Soak Bathhouse announces plans for its fifth location, opening in Alexandria, Sydney, in April 2025.

Soak was co-founded in 2020 by husband-and-wife duo Alexis and Niki Dean to create a portfolio of city oases to make wellness easy, accessible and affordable.

The couple launched their flagship location in November 2020 on the Gold Coast in Queensland, which was later joined by a rooftop day spa in Brisbane's West End in 2022.

The announcement of Soak Alexandria marks the third property in the business' pipeline. It already has facilities under development in South Yarra, Melbourne and a



Sydney flagship in Bondi Junction, which are both due to open by 2025.

Located only 4km from Sydney's central business district, Soak Alexandria will cover 700sq m and become part of the Bourke & Bowden mixed-use development, a AUS\$230

million (US\$154.4 million, €142.3 million, £118.3 million) project.

Alexis commented: "We're thrilled to offer Sydneysiders the chance to escape, unwind and recharge in one of the most vibrant locations in the city."

More: [http://lei.sr/4y5Q9\\_B](http://lei.sr/4y5Q9_B)

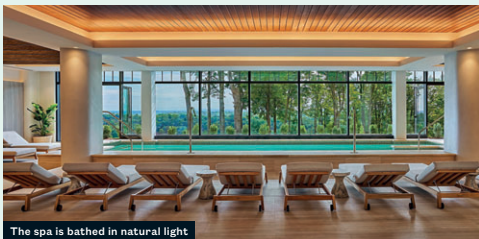
## Pendry unveils spa at New Jersey's bucolic Natirar estate

Somerset County, New Jersey, is now home to a 12,000sq ft nature-inspired spa, following the debut of Pendry Hotels & Resorts' latest venture, Pendry Natirar, set on a historic countryside estate.

Pendry sits within the Montage International portfolio and this is its ninth hotel worldwide.

The 66-key resort, which has been in development for more than five years, was previously earmarked to be transformed into a Miraval destination.

Pendry Natirar is anchored by a restored 1912 Tudor-style brick mansion once owned by the King of Morocco. The sprawling 500-acre estate was purchased by Somerset County from the Moroccan monarchy for US\$22 million (€20.9 million, £17.3 million) in 2003, with 90 acres leased to local developer Robert Wojtowicz.



Working in collaboration with Pendry, Wojtowicz has sought to transform the property into a world-class destination.

Spa Pendry at Pendry Natirar is a two-floor wellness retreat designed to immerse guests in nature, with 12 treatment rooms, some offering private

terraces overlooking the countryside. Guests enjoy separate locker rooms with rainfall showers, eucalyptus steamrooms and cedarwood saunas. The co-ed facilities include an indoor tranquility pool, a 24/7 fitness centre and a Himalayan salt room. **More:** [http://lei.sr/Z9r8n\\_B](http://lei.sr/Z9r8n_B)

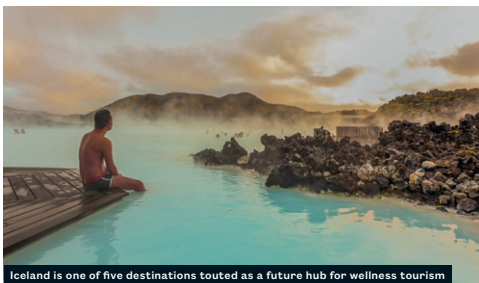
## Finn Partners banks on 'golden age' of wellness tourism"

Finn Partners has released a report called *The Future of Wellness Tourism 2025*, forecasting the top trends set to shape the future of global wellness tourism.

Those include new generational cohorts that are changing how wellness products will be made and marketed; wellness tech that is radically reshaping guest experiences at hotels and destinations; and emerging hot spots where wellness is taking centre stage in placemaking strategies for providers of hospitality.

Specifically, it identified Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iceland and Italy as future hubs of wellness tourism.

According to Finn Partners, wellness tourism is entering a 'golden age', with global travellers



Cathy Feliciano-Chon

increasingly seeking experiences that enhance personal wellbeing.

The report was unveiled by Finn Partners' managing partner Cathy Feliciano-Chon at the 2024 Global Wellness Summit (see p86).

"Today, wellness is everywhere, as travellers seek inventive ways to enhance their personal wellbeing," said Feliciano-Chon. **More:** [http://lei.sr/9G5X8\\_B](http://lei.sr/9G5X8_B)

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## DIARY DATES

3-4 February 2025

**Well-Tech World Summit**

**Victory Services Club, London, UK**

A b2b conference designed for founders, influencers and business owners from the fields of wellness tech, health tech and femtech.

[www.welltechworldsummit.com](http://www.welltechworldsummit.com)

11-13 February 2025

**Beyond Activ EMEA Festival**

**Fairmont Riyadh, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**

A leadership, investment and business development event for owners, managers and investors of health, wellness, fitness, hospitality and sports brands.

[www.beyondactiv.com](http://www.beyondactiv.com)

2-3 March 2025

**World Spa & Wellness Conference**

**ExCeL, London, UK**

Spa stakeholders convene for talks, networking, a trade show and the World Spa & Wellness Awards. Runs alongside Professional Beauty London expo.

[www.worldspawellness.com](http://www.worldspawellness.com)

11-13 March 2025

**ISPA Conference 2025**

**The Broadmoor, Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA**

This key industry gathering organised by ISPA includes an expo and speaker schedule covering topics such as business strategy and management.

[www.attendISPA.com](http://www.attendISPA.com)

10-13 April 2025

**FIBO Global Fitness**

**Exhibition Centre Cologne, Cologne, Germany**

One of the world's largest trade fairs for the fitness, wellness and health sectors.

[www.fibo.com](http://www.fibo.com)

## Tributes flow in for Lisa Henry Jacobs

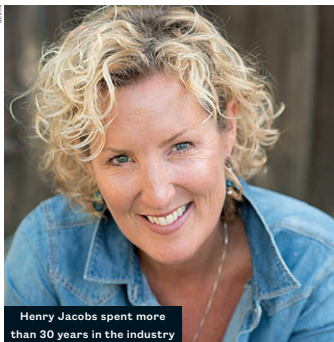
The spa and wellness industry is mourning the loss of Lisa Henry Jacobs, a beloved industry leader and international consultant, who passed away following a battle with cancer.

Henry Jacobs was a vibrant, well-respected figure in the luxury spa, wellness and hospitality sectors for over three decades. After overcoming metastatic breast cancer in 2010, she lived cancer-free for over a decade.

However, in 2021, Henry Jacobs was diagnosed with an aggressive form of bone and brain cancer.

Throughout her treatment, the wellness community rallied around her, launching multiple initiatives to help ease the financial burden of her care.

Henry Jacobs was a senior management and development



Henry Jacobs spent more than 30 years in the industry

consulting professional. She worked at Blu Spas for more than 18 years and went on to launch her own consultancy called The Well Collective in 2000.

In accordance with Henry Jacobs' wishes, three events will be held in the US to honour her life and legacy.

More: [http://lei.sr/z2q6R\\_B](http://lei.sr/z2q6R_B)



Saudi Arabia's wellness tourism market is poised for robust growth

## Saudi wellness economy worth US\$19.8bn

Saudi Arabia's wellness economy has been valued at US\$19.8 billion (€18.84 billion, £15.59 billion) in a new report by the Global Wellness Institute (GWI) – making it the second-largest wellness market in the Middle East and North Africa region.

*The Global Wellness Economy:*

*Saudi Arabia* says the market's robust growth between 2019-2022 has been largely driven by the Kingdom's ambitious *Vision 2030* strategy, which prioritises health, wellbeing and tourism.

Globally, Saudi Arabia ranks 34th in wellness economy size. The US, China and Germany lead the 218 countries surveyed by the GWI.

The report also includes dedicated summaries of each of Saudi Arabia's wellness sectors, including valuations, percentage annual growth rates (2020-2022) and each sector's global ranking in comparison to 218 countries.

Wellness tourism is a sector pitched for significant future growth. ●

More: [http://lei.sr/y5f8z\\_B](http://lei.sr/y5f8z_B)

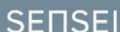


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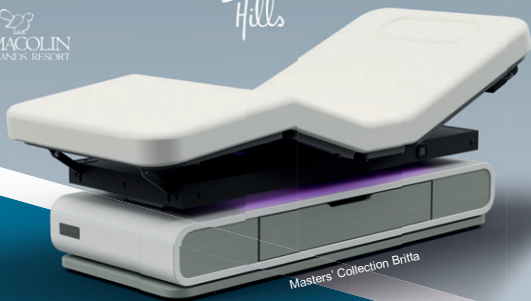
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# From STRENGTH to STRENGTH

New GWI research indicates the global wellness economy has smashed previous records to reach US\$6.3 trillion at the peak of the 'wellness decade'

The global wellness economy soared to a valuation of US\$6.3 trillion (€5.99 trillion, £4.98 trillion) in 2023, marking its third consecutive year of remarkably strong post-pandemic growth, according to the latest *Global Wellness Economy Monitor* from the Global Wellness Institute (GWI).

The report projects continued robust expansion, with the wellness economy expected to reach US\$9 trillion (€8.6 trillion, £7.1 trillion) by 2028, nearly doubling its 2019 size.

This equates to a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.3 per cent from 2023 to 2028, significantly outpacing the global GDP growth forecast of 4.8 per cent annually. At this point, the wellness economy will account for 6.8 per cent of global GDP.

Nine of the 11 wellness sectors – including the spa industry – have already surpassed their 2019 market sizes and wellness markets across every global region experienced strong growth between 2019 and 2023.

## ONES TO WATCH

These markets will grow the fastest by 2028, GWI says:

- ◆ **Wellness real estate:** +15.8 per cent annually
- ◆ **Mental wellness:** +12.2 per cent annually
- ◆ **Wellness tourism:** +10.2 per cent annually
- ◆ **Thermal & mineral springs:** +9.2 per cent annually
- ◆ **Healthy eating, nutrition & weight loss:** +6.4 per cent annually

The spa sector is also expected to increase 6.1 per cent a year by 2028, reaching US\$184.3 billion (€175.09 billion, £145.73 billion). By then the personal care & beauty, healthy eating, physical activity, wellness tourism and public health & personalised medicine markets will each surpass US\$1 trillion (€950 billion, £790.7 billion).

## DRIVING FORCES

Senior GWI researchers Katherine Johnston and Ophelia Yeung presented the new findings at the recent 2024 Global Wellness Summit in Scotland

## Global Wellness Economy – US\$6.3 trillion in 2023\*



\*Note: Numbers don't add to total due to overlap in sectors  
Source: The Global Wellness Institute



The research was revealed at the Global Wellness Summit in November



(see p86). They noted that several enduring trends – including an ageing population, rising rates of chronic disease and widespread mental health challenges – are propelling the wellness economy forward.

“Despite declines in global wellbeing on several fronts, the wellness economy continues to thrive, demonstrating the growing consumer focus on health and self-care,” they said.

To underscore the industry’s scale, GWI compared it to other major sectors, revealing that the wellness economy is now larger than the pharmaceutical, sports, IT, tourism and green economy industries.

#### TOP-PERFORMING SECTORS: 2022-2023

All 11 wellness sectors saw positive growth from 2022 to 2023, with the following leading the way – wellness tourism: +30.3 per cent; spas: +29.3 per cent; and thermal/mineral springs: +28.7 per cent.

This rise reflects a post-pandemic surge in wellness travel, as these sectors had suffered significant setbacks during the pandemic.

#### LONG-TERM LEADERS: 2019-2023

Between 2019 and 2023, the sectors with the highest average annual growth rates were:

- ◆ **Wellness real estate:** +18.1 per cent
- ◆ **Public health, prevention & personalised medicine:** +15.2 per cent
- ◆ **Mental wellness:** +11.6 per cent
- ◆ **Healthy eating, nutrition & weight loss:** +4.7 per cent
- ◆ **Wellness tourism:** +4.5 per cent

Wellness real estate emerged as the standout, driven by an increasing awareness of how physical environments influence mental and physical health.



*The wellness economy is now larger than the IT, pharmaceutical and sports industries*

#### REGIONAL MARKET INSIGHTS

Since the pandemic, all global regions have experienced wellness market growth, with the top performers being:

- ◆ **North America:** 137 per cent of its 2019 size
- ◆ **Middle East-North Africa:** 130 per cent of 2019 levels
- ◆ **Europe:** 125 per cent of 2019 levels

The largest regional wellness markets are North America at US\$2.2 trillion (€2.09 trillion, £1.74 trillion), Asia-Pacific at US\$1.9 trillion (€1.81 trillion, £1.5 trillion) and Europe at US\$1.7 trillion (€1.62 trillion, £1.34 trillion). Together, these account for more than 90 per cent of the global wellness economy.

#### A ‘WELLNESS DECADE’ IN RETROSPECT

Between 2013 and 2023, the wellness economy grew at a CAGR of 6.5 per cent, a period GWI researchers dub “the wellness decade”. Consumer interest in wellness has shifted from a trend to a permanent, explosive global movement, with significant growth anticipated well into the future. ●

# Riverside wellness retreat inspired by Vietnamese herbology opening on private Hoi An island

**N**amia River Retreat, a five-star riverside resort and spa, is set to debut in the heart of Hoi An, Vietnam, this December. The 60-key destination, nestled on an islet overlooking the Thu Bon River, will offer wellness-infused customer journeys.

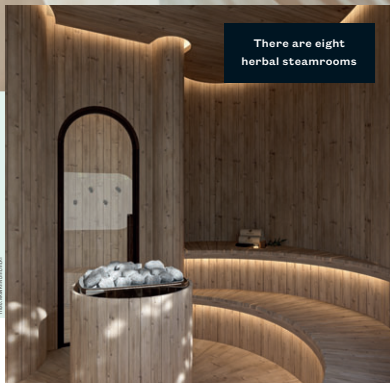
Its healing concept is centred around traditional Vietnamese medicine from the south known as *thuoc nam*, plant-based nutrition, signature therapies and movement practices.

"The spa journey has a distinct Vietnamese story and is inspired by *thuoc nam* (southern herbology)," says Michelle Ford, CEO of Lumina Wellbeing, the resort's wellness and hotel operator and the consultancy which has overseen the project from concept creation to opening.

"As part of this, we've incorporated *duong sinh* (a harmonising Vietnamese morning movement practice); *xông hơi* (a folk remedy steam prescription) and *dien chan* (oriental facial reflexology) into the guest experience."

Namia's Lumina Spa will feature two traditional apothecaries, eight herbal steamrooms, a river-view terrace with a sauna and cold plunge, two relaxation lounges, a retail boutique and a movement studio.

Treatments will be conducted in one of Namia's six double and four single treatment rooms.



The 60-key destination overlooks the Thu Bon River



“*Namia’s spa journey has a distinct Vietnamese story*”



Lumina Wellbeing's Michelle Ford

“ Room rates include a daily 90-minute Wellbeing Journey every evening

► **INCLUSIVE TREATMENTS**

As part of room rates, guests will enjoy a daily 90-minute Wellbeing Journey every evening. This will consist of a 30-minute herbal hammam experience using locally sourced herbs and a 60-minute traditional therapy.

They'll also be invited to participate in daily mindful rituals such as a silent meditation walk, visits to the retreat's wishing tree or a lantern lighting ceremony to foster a deeper connection to their inner self and the serene surroundings of Namia River Retreat.

The resort's centrepiece will be a riverside saltwater pool with water jets and foot reflexology, accompanied by a serene waterfall, a bio pond with fish and cosy lounge areas.

**FOREST INSPIRED VILLAS**

Property owner HG Holdings tapped Saigon's T3 Architects to lead the design due to its expertise in sustainability.

Pool villas have been inspired by the Nipa palm forest that envelops the destination. Each includes an open-plan living room flowing into an outdoor terrace with forest

Saigon's T3 Architects, which specialises in sustainability, led the design



Lumina Wellbeing conceptualised the resort and now operates it



or river views, while sunken bathtubs in the bedrooms overlook the pool.

A restaurant specialises in locally sourced seafood dishes, while mini-tours to connect people, cultures and souls are also available.

"My vision is to create a resort that reflects our cultural essence in a modern way," says CEO Nam Tran Thanh. "I've shared my stories and childhood memories from the village with the team, which are now infused into design details and cultural experiences."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HUY

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STEFANO

Mindful rituals include a lantern lighting ceremony



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STEFANO



Every evening, hotel guests receive a free traditional treatment

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STEFANO

Namia, he says, is a legacy that he's passing on to his two sons, adding that the resort will integrate essential lifestyle practices into its operations, aligning systems, procedures and team training to contribute to the local ecosystem and Hoi An community.

He aims to also lead the way in responsible tourism by reducing its environmental footprint through localised sourcing, waste management programmes and community collaboration projects. ●



## Amrit Wellness & Spa launches in Florida following seven-year journey

**A**mrit Ocean Resort, a beachfront wellness destination on the Singer Island peninsula in South Florida, has officially opened its long-awaited four-storey, 103,000sq ft wellness sanctuary after nearly seven years of development. Home to 25 treatment rooms, Amrit Wellness & Spa has been conceived as a transformative retreat blending European, Chinese and Indian wellness traditions.

### ELIXIR OF LIFE

Amrit means 'elixir of life' in Sanskrit and its spa was founded on the belief that wellbeing and longevity are achieved by integrating mindfulness, nutrition, fitness, relaxation and sleep.

The resort, managed by hospitality and management company Highgate, opened in

The spa was conceived by Under a Tree and ESPA, which will also manage it



May with 155 wellness-inspired guestrooms. Launching five months later, the spa was created in partnership with Bilkey Llinas Design, wellness consultancy Under a Tree and global spa brand ESPA, which will also operate the facility.

"Amrit is the only place in South Florida where the five pillars of wellness culminate into one transformative centre," says Akram Alkawasmeh, Amrit's executive director of wellness and spa.

"It's a true sanctuary where guests can discover inner peace and be guided toward a higher sense of wellbeing."

#### HYDRO HIGHLIGHTS

At the heart of the spa is the 17,000sq ft Aayush Hydrothermal Experience – a sequence of hot and cold pools, a hydro-reflexology path, an Arctic chill fountain, an effusion shower, a salt inhalation chamber, saunas and steamrooms and a lap pool.

The facility is also home to a 1,200sq ft hammam, a retail area, an IV lounge and oceanfront relaxation spaces.

A modern fitness and mindfulness centre provides access to a 3,500sq ft Matrix-equipped cardio studio, along with six studios for classes such as cardio circuit, group cycling, functional training, yoga, pilates and sound

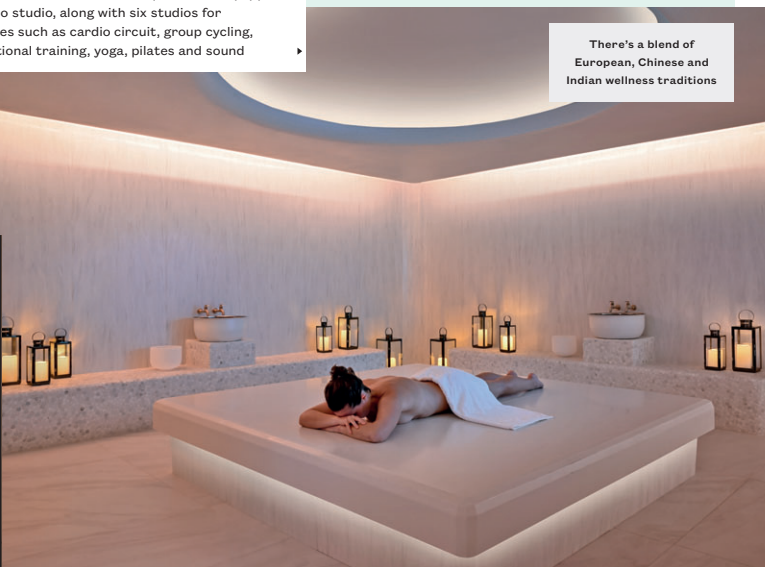
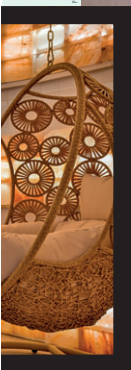
One of 25 treatment rooms

PHOTO: SPASOCIETY.COM

*Amrit is a true sanctuary  
where guests can be  
guided toward a higher  
sense of wellbeing*

There's a blend of  
European, Chinese and  
Indian wellness traditions

PHOTO: SPASOCIETY.COM



Extensive hydrothermal facilities lie at the heart of the spa

## TREATMENT & EQUIPMENT SUPPLIERS

- Biologique Recherche
- Codage Paris
- EmerginC
- Icoone
- Lemi
- MarocMaroc
- MediSpa
- Scandia
- Seed To Skin

PHOTO: EMERGINC

► baths. Access to the centre and classes is free for hotel guests and a wellness membership is available to locals.

A full-service salon completes the offering, with a standout feature being non-surgical scalp and hair rejuvenation treatments.

### INTEGRATED HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

The facility's comprehensive menu comprises both holistic and tech-forward treatments. Think Tibetan sound bowl chakra balancing and Thai massage (in a dedicated room) alongside hyperbaric oxygen, IV therapy and MediSpa's Facial Rejuvenation Device.

Solidifying its integrated health approach, Amrit has collaborated with board-certified physicians and medical practitioners to offer a range of diagnostics and services.

Experiences include the 360-degree Personal Wellness Guide Assessment, homing in on its five pillars and other evaluations focusing on nutrition, body composition and ayurveda.

There's also the Personal Wellness Support System (PWSS) – a web-based platform designed to further customise guests' wellbeing journeys before, during and after their stay. ●

*The facility collaborates with board-certified physicians and medical practitioners*

PHOTO: EMERGINC

Tech-forward offerings include rejuvenating facials



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Kowarski has a background in investment banking



You could hear a pin drop at the inaugural HCM Summit as Dean Kowarski, global CEO of Virgin Active, told health, fitness and wellness leaders from around the world about his plans for the company. The stellar event was hosted by *HCM* and *Spa Business* magazines in October.

To watch his keynote scan this code



To read even more, visit [www.HCMmag.com/kowarski](http://www.HCMmag.com/kowarski)

PHOTO: JEFFREY MAYER



*We're obsessed with empowering people to change their lives*

# DEAN KOWARSKI

The global CEO of Virgin Active tells Liz Terry about how he's transforming the gym business into a social wellness brand with 230 sites in nine countries and more than 1 million members

In 2022, Virgin Active merged with The Real Foods Group in a ZAR581 million (US\$32 million, €30.3 million, £25.3 million) deal. The move combined Virgin's fitness business with Real Foods' nutrition assets, including the Kauai and Nu Health Café brands.

Dean Kowarski, the founder of Real Foods, became the CEO of the new company. Kowarski, who's built his career in both corporate finance and operational roles worldwide, has spent the last two years re-engineering the gym business, steering it into the wellness realm with a high-value offering.

Today, there are 230 Virgin Active clubs in nine countries – in major cities from Sydney and Bangkok to Rome and London. In addition, there are 238 Kauai Juice outlets in service stations, shopping centres, offices and Virgin Active clubs and Nu Health Cafés on high streets and flagship Virgin Active Collection sites. Between the two entities, they boast 1.2 million members and serve 50,000 smoothies and meals a day.

The ever-innovative Kowarski talks to *Spa Business*' Liz Terry about his personal route into wellness and plans for market disruption.

## How did it all start for you?

I'm incredibly passionate about wellness. It resonates very powerfully with me and has made a huge difference in my life.

I come from an investment banking background – an accountant by qualification. I worked at KPMG and then in New York in corporate finance and while working there I was eating unhealthily and not exercising and eventually, although my career was going well, I got Crohn's disease, which I believe was caused by stress.

Doctors wanted to operate, but instead of going down that road, I changed my diet, began exercising again and eventually, I was able to take myself off all medication and totally recovered.

I'm the kind of person who has to see, touch and feel things to believe them and having gone on that journey, I understood the power of nutrition and exercise and how it can change lives.

## How has that shaped your life?

I was fortunate in my financial businesses and out of pure passion opened a little healthy food restaurant about 12 years ago in my home country of South Africa, so I had a place to go and eat. ▶

- ▶ At the time, in the fast-casual food space in South Africa, there were burger, chicken and pizza brands, but nothing healthy. We started opening restaurants, then bought a health food group and expanded that to include 238 stores globally under the Kauai and Nu brands.

However, the major foundations of wellness for me are health and fitness as well as nutrition and that's when the Virgin Active business came onto my radar.

### So you made a deal?

Yes. We merged and now Virgin Active and the two food brands are absolutely aligned – commercially, financially and philosophically.

### You integrated them very quickly...

The food business is 100 per cent owned by Virgin Active. I sit across both and they have the same objective – an obsession with empowering people to change their lives.

The old Virgin Active structure was very territorial. We had businesses around the world that hardly spoke to each other, never mind aligning food with fitness. There was no sharing of best practice and a huge duplication of costs.

We've totally rebuilt the company, overhauling structures, simplifying head office and reorganising the territories. We've appointed a new group CTO, group CMO, group COO, head of legal and chief of customer value and created a raft of other positions. They sit in different countries, but work across the business.

### What's the impact of these changes?

The new centralised structure gives us the ability to expand fast. We can go into new markets just by launching flagship clubs without needing to set up a head office in that country or opening multiple sites to sustain that overhead.

### What's the plan for growth?

We're looking at territories beyond our existing footprint – Qatar will be the first in collaboration with a local partner.

Our goal is to have flagship premium clubs in major cities. We see Europe as one 'country' and we think there are between 28 and 32 cities for expansion

We aim to build out our global operations everywhere but the US and then look for a merger with a major US player to complete the portfolio.

Virgin Active is one of the biggest swimming pool operators in the sector



The Kauai healthy food business is being embedded in clubs

*We no longer see ourselves as a gym business. We see ourselves as a global wellness brand*

### How are you repositioning Virgin Active?

We no longer see ourselves as a gym business.

Today, we see ourselves as a global wellness brand and those two words, global and wellness, are key to how we've evolved and changed.

We're clear on our position in the market. We play in the premium space and our new-builds are more like five-star hotels. We see ourselves as wellness clubs and this is our priority with future openings and upgrades.

We have everything a gym offers and have spent a lot of time redeveloping our gym-floor concept, adding more free weights and strength and plate-loaded equipment. Most of our programmes are bespoke – from yoga to boxing to strength & conditioning and cycling. We also have in excess of 2,000 reformer pilates beds and 260 pools across our estate and are currently rolling out padel and pickleball courts.

However, we're way more than that. The deal with Real Foods means we now find Kauai and Nu brands in all clubs. This isn't just a gym business doing food; it's an experienced food business with an incredible amount of knowledge, fantastic product, innovation, two menu releases a year and people constantly checking the quality.

### Where do spas fit?

They're integral to our positioning as a premium lifestyle provider and differentiating us from standard gyms.

Typical facilities include hydrotherapy pools and heat experiences to support recovery, relaxation and overall wellbeing. We also have sound bath and mindfulness sessions. Hands-on services such as physiotherapy, biokinetics and massage are available in some properties, but the core strategy is to offer self-guided options for scalability.

*We're purposefully creating  
'second spaces' – spaces where  
you can do multiple things outside  
the home between 8am to 5pm*

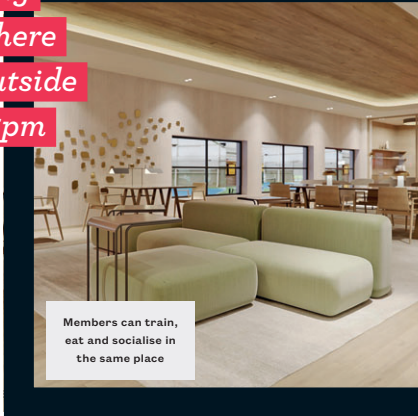
► Contrast therapy is becoming popular so we're adding in quite a few cold plunges, as well as new technologies such as infrared saunas, cryotherapy, light therapy and specialised heated slabs for stretching and relaxation.

We're also rolling out dedicated recovery zones offering compression and massage technology to decrease inflammation, improve muscle elasticity and treat/prevent injuries.

**What's your 'second space' approach?**

You've heard of the term 'third space', well, this is what we're not. We see ourselves as a 'second space'. We're purposefully creating social wellness areas with restaurants and a big work component offering co-working spaces and the ability to book board rooms. There are also lounges to encourage people to engage, socialise and get to know new people, not just their own community.

Where we've got the mix right, we see a very different behaviour from that of a typical gym, where there's a morning peak, a lunchtime peak and an evening peak. These are all-day spaces where you can do multiple things outside the home between 8am and 5pm. People may train in the morning, but they don't leave – they have their breakfast, do some work, have meetings, they meet friends and socialise.



Members can train, eat and socialise in the same place

**What's the rationale behind this?**

The World Health Organization has said that loneliness is one of the most significant global health concerns and it exceeds the risk associated with obesity. The US surgeon general has warned that the heightened risk of mortality from loneliness equals that of smoking 15 cigarettes a day or being an alcoholic.

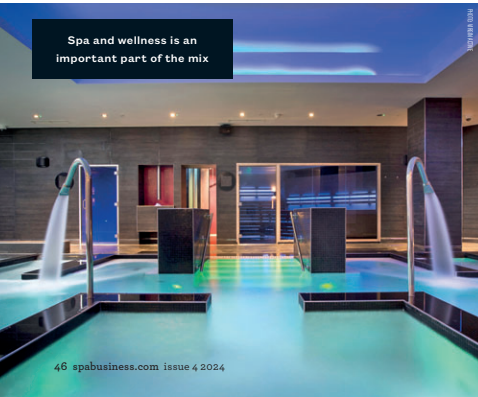
What we've also seen post-COVID-19 is people looking for real-life experiences. We're in a digital age and I see it with my teenage daughters living on their phones. But we see people looking for more than that, wanting to go to places where they feel they belong for real.

Younger generations are looking for non-toxic spaces to come together and connect with like-minded people – whether that's with their tribes from yoga and reformer pilates or members of staff. They're tired of going to bars and clubs where the relationships they form are shallow. Midlifers and older people are looking for ways to be more active and be part of a community and, ultimately, to live longer. But not only live longer but live better.

**What's the commercial value of a social wellness club?**

Ultimately, it's around engagement and usage and how you keep members for life.

I don't come from the gym industry, so I was shocked to find that even though it's subscription-based, it's like a leaky



Spa and wellness is an important part of the mix



Virgin Active is firmly positioning itself in the premium space

bucket and can have up to 40-50 per cent churn each year – even if operators are selling, selling, selling, it just flows out of the bucket.

This approach makes no sense and doesn't work for anyone and we're moving to a better business model. I remember my parents joined a country club and felt part of a community and that's the environment we want to create.

There's been a very significant impact on churn in the facilities where we now have a strong food offering and work and social spaces. People join and they don't want to leave. It makes sense to expand this model, as it delivers results a gym business alone can't.

### Tell us about the Virgin Active app and rewards programme.

Since the merger, we've launched this in South Africa and the UK and Italy will be next.

Around 72 per cent of our members are on the Virgin Active app and it's based on rewarding wellness behaviours. Use the club twice a week and on your second visit, you get a free smoothie and those goals are dynamic, visit three times a week and you'll get something like a PT session or different classes.

More than just rewarding good behaviour, however, it's about engagement. The longer we get members to interact with us, the bigger share of wallet we get and we see a big reduction in churn.

In addition to this, we get incredibly rich data. There's obviously the first-party data – which clubs members train at, at what time of day, what classes they book and how long they stay.

But we're also getting zero-party data, giving us insights into why they come to our gyms, what their goals are and which instructors they like.

When we pull all of this information together, we can understand our members better, provide more tailored, personal solutions and create strong, emotional connections.

### What's your take on how consumers view wellness as a sector?

There are many obstacles when it comes to people exercising or eating healthily. Some financial. Some around accessibility or education or just life getting in the way.

Unfortunately, it can also be very intimidating. Consumers are bombarded with information about what wellness means and some of this is a load of BS and some is just self-serving, so they don't know what to believe and don't engage.

We've got to simplify wellness and make it more accessible. That's the journey our businesses are on. We're always asking ourselves how we can make our services approachable, simple and meaningful.

### What are your long-term plans – will you list or go for a trade sale?

It's too soon to say. We want to show we've got a model where churn is at Netflix-type levels. If we can show the investment community we've changed the typical gym model and adopted a more hospitality-focused model that's much more sticky, we believe we'll get the valuations we're looking for. ●

Everyone's talking about...

# Longevity clinics

Spanning wellness and fitness, longevity clinics sit at the premium end of the market, but are they here to stay? Kath Hudson reports

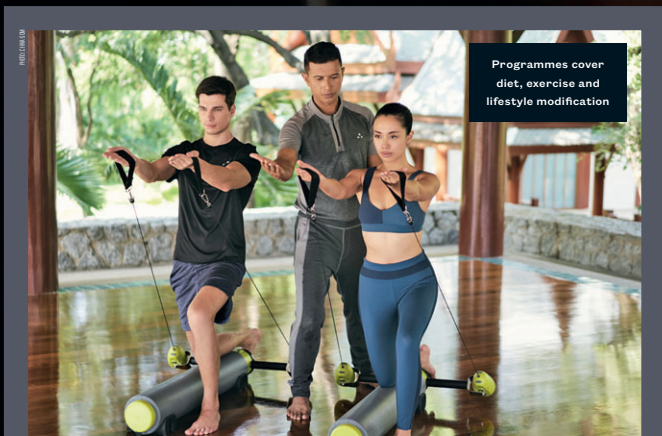
Reports from McKinsey have shown that demand for healthy ageing and longevity services is increasing, with 70 per cent of consumers in the US and UK and 85 per cent in China purchasing a product in this category in the preceding year.

Older people are fuelling this trend – McKinsey says that by 2030, one in six people in the world will be over 60 – but younger people are also increasingly looking for preventative solutions.

Equinox made a spectacular leap into the longevity arena earlier this year with its US\$40k (€36.6k, £30.6k) Optimize by Equinox membership, in partnership with Dr Mark Hyman's company, Function Health (see [www.spabusiness.com/equinoxoptimize](http://www.spabusiness.com/equinoxoptimize)). It offers an extensive battery of health tests to inform personalised programmes to boost longevity and healthspan.

In November, destination wellness brand Canyon Ranch, launched its Longevity8 retreat and has 10 more dates lined up next year (see [www.spabusiness.com/crlongevity8](http://www.spabusiness.com/crlongevity8)). The US\$20k (€18.3k, £15.3k) four-day programme focuses on eight principles: integrative medicine, flexibility and fitness, nutrition, sleep, spiritual wellness, mental and emotional health, outdoor activity and strength and endurance. Attendees will undergo 15 diagnostic tests assessing more than 200 biomarkers, including blood work, cancer screening and genetic testing, as well as scientific evaluations, such as VO2 Max and DEXA Body, at the resort's medical centre.

At the moment, these services are only at the top end of the market, but will they filter down to the mainstream? If so, when and how? We ask some of the operators who are creating facilities and services focused on longevity what their offering looks like and where this trend could take us...



Programmes cover diet, exercise and lifestyle modification

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**Dr Jason Culp**, director of R&D, Chiva-Som

We currently offer 16 specialised retreats at Chiva-Som which aid longevity and create a path to a healthy lifestyle. These customisable programmes home in on six areas - spa, holistic health, fitness, physiotherapy, aesthetic beauty and nutrition. The retreats include ageing well, immune resilience, natural renewal and cell vitality, which supports guests who've recovered from or are in remission from cancer.

We also offer cutting-edge epigenetics testing designed to provide personalised insights into how lifestyle and environmental factors influence gene expression. Epigenetic testing looks at a person's biological age rather than chronological age and can give insight into how to slow the ageing process through sustainable exercise, nutritional habits and lifestyle modifications tailored to the individual.

In addition, we've just launched hyperbaric oxygen treatments which support blood-oxygen levels, recovery and overall longevity, as well as genomic testing and bone density analysis.

We've seen a rise in interest in biohacking as a longevity strategy from younger generations eager to explore services such as functional nutrition and physiological data analysis, so this is another area we'll be enhancing.

As research backs up how adopting healthy habits by midlife can significantly increase one's



lifespan and approaches such as personalised nutrition, biohacking, sleep quality enhancement and stress management techniques gain traction, the demand for longevity strategies in wellness resorts is increasing.

As consumer awareness of the importance of healthy ageing continues to grow and technological advances make services



Chiva-Som offers 16 retreats which aid longevity

As consumer awareness of the importance of healthy ageing continues to grow, we'll see wider adoption of longevity services beyond exclusive resorts

more accessible and affordable, we'll see wider adoption of services beyond exclusive resorts. They'll filter down to the

mainstream, where similar approaches will be available in everyday public settings, such as health clubs and workplace environments. ▶

The Neurac Medical Sling helps restore functional movement



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01. detox



02. power



03. treat

\*Independent laboratory in vitro test of the ingredient on fibroblasts. B-phenothiazine quantification.  
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Integrative doctor Mark Hyman is partnering with Six Senses to create longevity programmes



Rose Bar is Dr Hyman's club at Six Senses Ibiza



## Anna Bjurstam, wellness pioneer, Six Senses

Six Senses understands longevity to be about the future, as opposed to wellness, which is about what we're doing right now.

We worked with several experts to design our longevity offering and teamed up with Dr Mark Hyman and the Rose Bar longevity club at Six Senses Ibiza and Only Health in Kaplankaya, Turkey, to introduce our first-ever third-party, longevity-focused clinics in 2021 (see [www.spabusiness.com/youngforever](http://www.spabusiness.com/youngforever)).

We're now in the process of rolling out longevity offerings to other spas: we'll have a clinic in London when we open there and several others are underway. These are all third-party clinics, as we don't want to operate medical facilities.

Six Senses is also launching a longevity programme. It begins with



biomarker screening and uses a continuous glucose monitor to track baseline glucose levels. Stabilising glucose is essential for longevity and overall health. The retreat then focuses on autophagy, a process that involves a three- to four-day intermittent fast with vegan meals to limit protein intake and suppress mTOR signalling. This is supported by senolytic supplements like quercetin and fisetin to clear out senescent cells, which are old cells that accumulate and contribute to ageing and disease. This

## We're in the process of rolling out longevity offerings

can delay the onset of illness by up to seven years.

Fasting promotes the production of nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD), a crucial coenzyme for metabolism, energy production and DNA maintenance. As NAD levels decline significantly after age 50, the retreat employs strategies such as high-intensity interval training, hot/cold therapy and fasting to boost NAD and activate sirtuins - proteins involved in cell survival and inflammation control.

After several days of fasting, the focus shifts to mTOR stimulation through increased protein intake to encourage muscle growth, which is vital as people age, particularly for menopausal women.

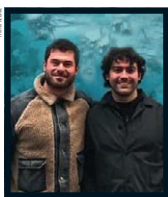
Most people are tired, overstimulated and producing too much cortisol, so we also do a lot to calm the nervous system and stimulate the vagus nerve, such as breathwork, meditation, somatic experience, hikes and connecting with nature.

## Alex Rebeiz & Waldo Ramsay, co-founders, Rebase

The journey to Rebase began six years ago when I faced a severe health crisis that required emergency surgery and a long, gruelling recovery. Supported by my best friend and Rebase co-founder, Waldo Ramsay, I realised the value of a healthy social life in healing. This inspired us to create a social wellness space focused on de-stressing and recovering from hectic, metropolitan life - enabling members to live and perform at their highest level without getting burned out, injured or over-stressed.

The offering centres on hot and cold therapy and other services include saunas, ice baths, yoga, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, vitamin infusions and red light therapy. Additionally, there's an adaptogenic apothecary of health-enhancing beverages such as bone broths, nootropic smoothies and mushroom teas.

Monthly membership starts at £320 (US\$418, €382)



and we'll cap it at 250 people. It includes access to our members' suite - which has eight ice baths ranging from 5-12°C and a large sauna - as well as two cryotherapy sessions and one hyperbaric oxygen session a month and six guest passes a year, in addition to discounts on other services such as manual therapies and osteopathy in the two treatment rooms.

Our most popular class, Urban Oasis, comprises breathwork, sauna, yoga, ice bath and movement, while there are sound healing and sleep optimisation sessions in the evening.

Non-members can book three classes for £60 (US\$78,



The club has eight ice baths ranging from 5-12°C

## We're noticing a trend for more people wanting to take control of their health with wellness practices

€72) or rent the four-person hyperbaric oxygen chamber for £160 (US\$209, €191) per hour. The private contrast suites can be rented for 45 or 90 minutes and give a new spin on socialising: they include an ice bath and infrared or traditional sauna and have a sofa, speaker

system and intercom to order drinks. Yoga, massage and stretching can be added on.

We're noticing a global trend for more people wanting to take control of their health with wellness practices and we plan to open further sites across the UK. ▶

REBEIZ



Rebase focuses on fusing ancient practices with modern therapies

PHOTO: LUCAS/DAVID JAMES WELLS



Rebalance Impulse therapy at Grey Wolfe uses acoustic and vibration tech

Duncan Parker & Mark Ball, MD & marketing manager, Grey Wolfe

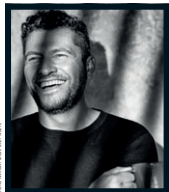


PHOTO: KEVIN MAZUR FOR WELLS



PHOTO: KEVIN MAZUR FOR WELLS

At Grey Wolfe, we're putting the private into private members' club. Post-pandemic, there's been a big focus on community, but this is a space where people can come in solitude and receive one-to-one treatments.

Our USP is individual care, allowing people to open up in a way they wouldn't if others were around. Our members are people who value this privacy. Some are famous. We also have a lot of C-suite people, as well as successful middle-aged women who've

reduced their working hours to prioritise their health.

Many clients find us because they're searching for biotechnology, such as infrared saunas and hyperbaric oxygen chambers or poultice quartz massage (a massage with quartz crystals in poultices performed on a heated quartz bed). However, we go deeper and help them find the root cause of their back pain or sleep issues based on lots of feedback from our digital machines and addressing their mental, emotional and spiritual state.

Our approach is around healing from within. We create an environment for people to recover and to learn how to look after themselves

Our approach is around healing from within. We create an environment for people to recover and learn how to look after themselves. We teach them how to switch off, for example, using the Rebalance Impulse – a zero gravity bed with light therapy on which people can meditate.

It's a gentle space. There's no workout equipment. It's very minimalist with natural materials, such as stone and wood and no TV screens or artwork. It's a blank canvas to encourage people to connect with their inner-self.

Each quarter, we go through our client's goals

and progress and design a 4-hour Recharge Journey involving biotech and one-to-one therapy. This is included in the monthly membership, which costs £488 (US\$638, €583), along with one hands-on treatment and eight biotech sessions a month. Talking and nutrition advice from therapists comes as standard.

We're already looking at launching Grey Wolfe two, three and four and see them working as concessions in hotels, workplaces (we've designed a corporate package), luxury accommodations and even airport lounges.

## Jonathan Leary, founder, Remedy Place

Since the launch of Remedy Place in 2019, we've noticed a significant increase in people's interest in longevity. More individuals are proactively prioritising their health, not just for extending lifespan but for enhancing their quality of life. We've particularly noticed an interest in active ageing.

At Remedy Place, we emphasise self-care, preventive measures and giving people a healthy way to socialise. This shift reflects a broader awareness that true longevity isn't just about adding years to life but having a direct correlation to a successful and happy life.

This interest in longevity is here to stay. People will increasingly focus on tailored self-care strategies rather than just reactive treatments. Additionally, the holistic approach to longevity will gain prominence and will be the first line of intervention for all things that are not an emergency.

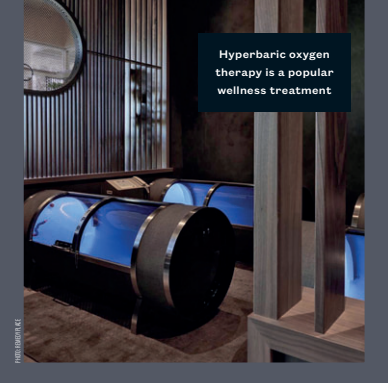
Longevity/self-care/health, whatever you want to call it, will be blended into every



aspect of our life and I truly mean every single thing we interact with. Lastly, people will start to understand that success rises out of whoever is the most healthy.

As awareness changes, accessibility will also change. Longevity doesn't have to be expensive. People just need to learn how their body works and how to take care of it: movement, nutrition, taking care of mental health, improving sleep, breathwork and self-care.

Although Remedy Place will always be a luxury offering, earlier this year, we



Hyperbaric oxygen therapy is a popular wellness treatment

## People will start to understand that success rises out of whoever is the most healthy

introduced The Framework - a complimentary educational platform providing a roadmap for life across seven pillars of holistic wellness - to teach people how to establish their own health independence in the most cost-effective way possible.

Remedy Place was the world's first social wellness club, launched in Los Angeles, followed by New York. There are plans to take the brand global and we're on track to open two more clubs each year. **Read more:** [www.spabusiness.com/leary](http://www.spabusiness.com/leary)



The original Remedy Place in Los Angeles trailblazed in 2019

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Surrenne is open to hotel guests and there's also a £10k annual membership



**Inge Theron, creative director of spa & wellness, Maybourne Hotel Group**

**H**eralded as London's next-generation longevity space, Surrenne is a four-floor private members wellness enclave at The Emory all-suite hotel in Knightsbridge.

Developed by Maybourne Hotel Group, Surrenne has been created as a longevity brand to roll out and Maybourne is already working on five more Surrennes at properties in Europe and the US.

Every detail was considered to ensure Surrenne is at the forefront of science, diagnostics, functional medicine, fitness, holistic wellness and preventative medicine. At the same time, neuroscientists developed soundscapes, lighting and fragrances for the luxurious setting to calm the nervous system.



Maybourne partnered with welltech specialist Virtusan to benefit from its advisory board, which includes mindfulness and self-compassion specialist Dr Shauna Shapiro; professor of neurobiology and podcaster Dr Andrew Huberman; and Harvard professor of genetics Dr David Sinclair.

Annual membership for the London club costs £10,000 (US\$12,662, €11,752), with a £5,000 (US\$6,331, €5,876) joining fee - and 100 were

**Our head of medical collaborates with members' specialists to complement their existing health journey**

quickly sold. Membership provides access to almost £60,000 (US\$76,500, €70,100) worth of treatments and diagnostics. Guests from The Emory and neighbouring hotel, The Berkeley, also have access to the facilities that include a thermal pool, sauna, aromatherapy steamroom, snow shower, gym, group exercise studio and the UK's first Tracy Anderson studio, as well as eight treatment rooms.

Surrenne is brand-agnostic, so our head of medical collaborates with members' doctors and specialists to complement their existing health journey.

The journey begins with a clinical check-up by 3 Peaks Health, providing insights for bespoke wellness plans created by a team of fitness specialists, nutritionists and physicians. Members have access to an extensive menu of services, including GP consultations, MRIs, blood tests, microbiome analysis, chiropractic and epigenetic testing. Advanced interventions, such as brain scans, AI mole mapping and liver function tests, are also available through a OneWelbeck partnership. **Read more:** [www.spabusiness.com/surrenne\\_inge](http://www.spabusiness.com/surrenne_inge) ●

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Berghult comes from a family of hoteliers and has grown up in the industry



PHOTO: JONAS JONAS


# Henrik Berghult

The COO of Nordic Hotels & Resorts, one of the region's largest and fastest-growing hospitality companies, shares his insights into spa and wellness with Lisa Starr



Coming from a family of hoteliers, Henrik Berghult spent his life growing up in hotels in the Nordic countries of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark. So, it could be argued that becoming COO of one of the region's largest and fastest-growing collection of independent hotels has always been a part of his destiny.

He took on the top role at Nordic Hotels & Resorts in 2022, following years in operational management positions at Norlandia and Scandic, as well as working as chief buyer for Rezidor. Nordic, a division of the privately owned Strawberry Group (see p61), has 52 hotels and resorts in its portfolio, 17 of which feature spas. Some of its most notable wellness properties include Farris Bad near Oslo and Yasuragj near Stockholm. It's proud to include Selma, one of Sweden's oldest spa resorts, in its collection, while one of the newest is Sommerro, comprising one of Norway's last remaining – and now refurbished – public baths.



Selma is one of Sweden's oldest spa resorts



## Spas generate 30 per cent of revenue in our hotels – that's a lot

“Our portfolio has sprung from the spa and resort culture and some of these properties have been with us from the start [of the company in 1990],” he says.

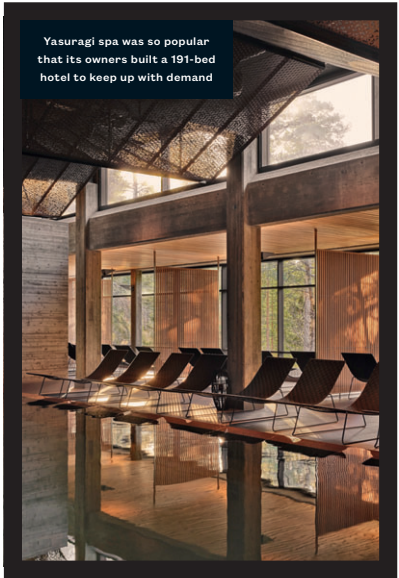
But what makes a spa successful and how does he see Nordic developing its wellbeing experiences? He shares his vision with *Spa Business*' contributing editor, Lisa Starr.

### How important is wellness within Nordic's portfolio?

Our operations are mainly divided into three categories: luxury, five-star properties, resorts (typically spa or ski sites) and boutique hotels. Wellness is super important in the first two categories and spas are particularly crucial.

### What value do spas add from a business point of view?

In our properties that have spas, 30 per cent of revenue comes from that side of the business – that's a big amount!



Yasuragi spa was so popular that its owners built a 191-bed hotel to keep up with demand



▶ Alternatively, those properties that don't have spas (especially in the luxury bracket) are at a disadvantage. At Six Hotel in Stockholm, for example, we're in heavy competition with the Grand Hotel and struggling because it has a spa and we don't. We're looking to add one because guests staying in five-star properties demand spa facilities and they're key to driving leisure and weekend business.

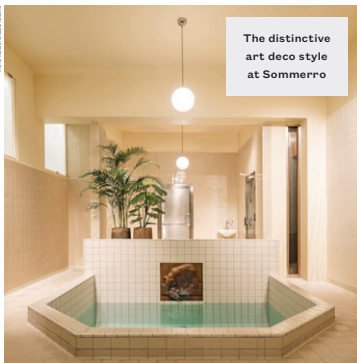
### How do you measure the performance of your spas?

We track many KPIs on the use of sq m, treatment rooms, saunas and so on. All of our spas are profitable, but the most successful ones are the bigger operations – where wellness is the core focus.

At Sommerro, our newest hotel that opened in Oslo in 2022, the spa and bathhouse are on the smaller side (see [www.spabusiness.com/sommerro](http://www.spabusiness.com/sommerro)) and we're still trying to find the right level of service and kinds of treatments to increase yield. But, what I will say is that this has

been a special project from A to Z. No expense was spared on its investment and stepping into this art deco hotel is like stepping into *The Great Gatsby* movie and it would be well placed in any major gateway city from New York to London.

Meanwhile, Yasuragi, which is just outside of Stockholm, is excelling in all areas (see [www.spabusiness.com/yasuragi](http://www.spabusiness.com/yasuragi)). Its Japanese-inspired bathing area covers 2,200sq m and is the key attraction of the 191-bed hotel – in fact, the spa came first and was so popular the owners then added accommodation. Even taking into account operational costs, which are extensive considering its myriad pools and heat experiences, it's a hugely successful model. It offers multiple packages and is not super-exclusive – a spa weekend starts at around €500 (US\$546, £418) – but you won't leave the property without spending at least that again because of the different experiences on offer and retail add-ons. It's so unique and that's something we really strive for.



The distinctive art deco style at Sommerro

### How would you describe Nordic's customers?

There are different demands in different markets – whether you're in Finland, Norway, Sweden or Denmark. However, they all embrace the outdoors and want to get out hiking and biking in the woods and mountains ... and then happily head back to the spa in the afternoon for a treatment and nice dinner and glass of red wine. They expect the full wellness offering and it's a balancing act for general managers to get that right. It's especially important they understand the nuances of a spa business, what treatments are more profitable and which product houses to work with. ▶

## ABOUT THE STRAWBERRY GROUP

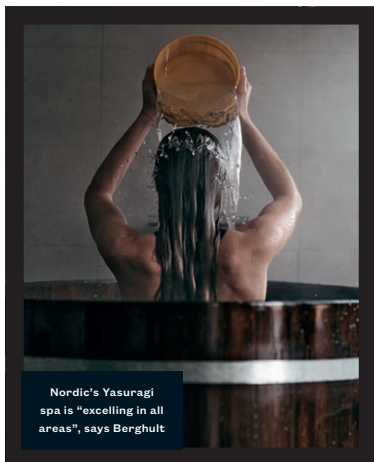
Strawberry Group, known as Nordic Choice Hotels until May 2023, was established by Norwegian businessman Petter Stordalen in 1990. The name change was inspired by Stordalen's budding entrepreneurship as a teenager when he was reported as being one of Norway's best strawberry sellers.



Petter Stordalen

The conglomerate consists of 10 companies spanning the hospitality, retail, real estate, art and finance sectors. According to its latest annual report, Strawberry's portfolio included 215 hotels at the end of 2022, with another 22 projects in the pipeline. It reached sales of NOK14.3 billion (US\$1.33 billion, €1.22 billion, £1.02 billion) and EBITDA sat at NOK1,5 billion (US\$143.3 million, €131.5 million, £109.8 million) - both the highest in its history, which Stordalen puts down to strong demand following COVID-19. RevPAR was NOK704 (US\$65, €60, £50) and TRevPAR was NOK1,140 (US\$106, €97, £81), just above its 2019 recordings.

Sustainability is a key focus and it's aiming to be carbon-neutral in operations in the next six years.



Nordic's Yasuragi spa is "excelling in all areas", says Berghult



*Customers expect the full wellness offering and that's a balancing act for GMs*



Aufguss sessions, such as those at Farris Bad, are particularly popular

PHOTO: MICHAELA S. BORG



Resorts with bigger spas are more profitable, says Berghult

#### HENRIK BERGHULT: FAVOURITES

**TREATMENT:** a classic massage – it's the best

**SPA:** Outside of our group it's The Well in Norway. It's an awesome place that sets a high standard

**PLACE:** My summer house in south Sweden. I was born there. It's 'home'

**BOOK:** *Steve Jobs: The Exclusive Biography* by Walter Isaacson

**ADVICE:** The best thing about money, is that you can always earn more

#### ► How are their needs changing?

Since the pandemic, there's a higher demand for wellness experiences that are more than just a treatment. This is why *aufguss* sessions are working out particularly well for us and Lasse Eriksen [development manager at Farris Bad] has been instrumental in this.

*Aufguss* is a relatively new and unusual experience in the Nordics, but it's something that appeals to people who are interested in sport and can be enjoyed by groups and it's a talking point when you post on Instagram or tell your friends about it.

Since Eriksen introduced the 64sq m event sauna at Farris Bad five years ago, it's had a big impact on both the guest experience and profits (see [www.spabusiness.com/farrisbad](http://www.spabusiness.com/farrisbad)). It was built with state-of-the-art lighting and sound systems for entertaining and can fit at least 50 people at a time – some of our larger resorts have 600-700 hotel guests, but we don't have enough treatment rooms to cater to demand, so a bigger-scale experience is ideal.

We're expecting to add more unique experiences like this in the future. ●

• To read more about the business dynamics of *aufguss* saunas, see p66.

PHOTO: MICHAELA S. BORG



Lasse Eriksen has been instrumental in developing wellness offerings

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# THE YEAR of wellness

Although the wellness trend in hospitality has been steadily rising for three decades, it shot through the ceiling in 2024, says Jeremy McCarthy

I'll look at 2024 as the year that wellness truly broke into the core of hospitality, reshaping how we think about the travel business. While wellness has been a simmering macro trend for over a decade, I've never felt such a tangible leap forward in a single year. It's as if the hospitality industry is reinventing itself in a virtual explosion of new wellness concepts and innovations.

### 30 YEARS IN THE MAKING

The industry has come a long way in three decades. When I began in hospitality, most managers had ashtrays on their desks, chain-smoking as they worked. The majority of hotels didn't have spas. When the

GM of my first hotel, a Four Seasons in California, said we were opening one, my initial response was, "What's a spa?" Wellness wasn't even on the radar.

Spas started popping up, yet it took much longer for the industry to fully engage in wellness. I spent the early years of my career trying to convince owners, developers and hoteliers that spas were important. The ROI was hard to pin down. Spas were expensive to build and operate. While many hospitality companies debated whether wellness was a worthwhile investment, Mandarin Oriental was one of the first to put spa and wellness at the heart of its brand more than two decades ago.

Over the years, through some Darwinian process of evolution, the hotels with spas seemed to do better than those without. Owners begrudgingly began to agree they were necessary and now they've become essential to any high-end hotel, increasingly commanding prominent positions on-site. Today, it's virtually impossible to find a luxury hospitality company that doesn't include wellness as a core part of its brand.

Then came COVID-19. Mortality-awareness rose to an all-time high, we experienced unprecedented stress and our relationship with technology went from being extreme to obscene. Participants in



THE SPASOURCE.COM

### READ MORE ABOUT LEADING LONGEVITY PLAYERS

- Chiva-Som, Grey Wolfe, Rebase, Remedy Place, Six Senses and Surrenne: p48
- Clinique La Prairie: [www.spabusiness.com/simonegiberton1](http://www.spabusiness.com/simonegiberton1)
- The Estate: [www.spabusiness.com/theestate](http://www.spabusiness.com/theestate)
- SIRO: [www.spabusiness.com/sirozaabeel](http://www.spabusiness.com/sirozaabeel)



## *Hospitality is reinventing itself in an explosion of new wellness concepts and innovations*

Zoom video conference calls, for example, grew by a staggering 30-fold – from 10 million to 300 million. People came out of the pandemic craving wellness.

The hospitality industry, struggling to bounce back, eagerly embraced it as a fundamental component of a more experiential leisure offering to meet the needs of modern travellers. And that brings us to the current day.

### **METEOR SHOWER OF WELLNESS**

In 2024, we saw innovations appearing in the marketplace like a meteor shower of wellness cascading down on luxury travellers. These new offerings promise to not only make people feel more energised and transformed from their stay but to help them live longer as well.

In the past year, longevity forerunners Clinique La Prairie opened outposts in Dubai and China and said it's planning 50 sites in total. Kerzner launched its SIRO fitness and recovery hotel brand and revealed ambitions for 100 more properties. Canyon Ranch

introduced Longevity8, a four-day US\$20k retreat designed to give you "a road map for the entire journey to live longer". Sbe unveiled The Estate, its luxury hotel concept based on longevity. Behind the scenes, Mandarin Oriental is working on Wellness 2.0, its own-branded guest-centric vision for the future, which combines physical, emotional, spiritual and even medical aspects of health and wellbeing.

Although the wellness trend in hospitality has been on a steady rise, it feels like we broke through some atmospheric ceiling in 2024. We're soaring into a new space where the rules of gravity no longer apply. How fast will we accelerate? How far will we go? Nobody knows. But in 2024, the year of wellness, the possibilities have expanded exponentially. ●

*Jeremy McCarthy has worked in the wellness industry for over 30 years. As group director of leisure, spa and wellness for Mandarin Oriental, he oversees facilities at 40 luxury hotels globally. Contact him with your views on Twitter @jeremymcc*



Up to 160 competitors take part in the Aufguss World Championships

# Steamy situation



Cassandra Cavanah is moved to tears (and also a little nervous) as she joins hundreds of near-naked heat enthusiasts attending this year's Aufguss World Championships in The Netherlands



Michael Niedermair from Italy was crowned this year's aufguss world champion

Attending your first-ever Aufguss World Championships (Aufguss WM) can be intimidating, especially coming from the US, where sauna culture is only just taking off. Very recently, new bathhouses featuring large-format event saunas for aufguss rituals have opened in New York (Othership and Bathhouse) and Las Vegas (Resorts World and Fontainebleau), with more to come.

Yet here I am at Thermen Bussloo, a stunning wellness and sauna centre close to Amsterdam, in The Netherlands (see p74). I'm surrounded by hundreds of partially clothed bathing enthusiasts who've paid €100 (US\$109, £84) for a daily ticket to be taken on an emotion-driven journey of artistry and heat.

## BARE NECESSITIES

The word 'aufguss' is the first thing a newbie must get their head around. This German word translates as "steam infusion", but the word



PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable]

Over five days,  
16 sessions are  
performed daily

“

*I can confirm that a  
15-minute stint in an  
80°C sauna has never  
been so engaging*



PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable]

Finalists come from 16  
countries around the world



PHOTOGRAPH BY [unreadable]

'Show aufguss' sessions are an  
emotion-driven journey of pure-  
performance art, says Cavanah

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## FIRST PERSON: AUFGUSS WM

► has become an umbrella term to describe the 15 to 20-minute experience that an aufguss or sauna master leads you through.

Aufguss comes in many different forms. Classic sessions, that've been practised for decades across Europe, see a sauna master's role as raising the temperature and controlling the wafting of the steam, heat and aromas via creative towel waving. Ritual (or zen) aufguss sessions take guests on an inward journey, including meditation, yoga, sound bathing or breathwork. While full-on theatrical or show aufguss sessions – the focus of Aufguss WM – are best described as an emotion-driven journey of pure-performance art.

The 'stage' for the shows is Thermen Bussloo's new €2 million (US\$2.2 million, £1.7 million) Sauna Theatre that's been purpose-built to stimulate the senses with state-of-the-art lighting and sound systems and an LED screen over 4.5m wide. With 160 participants, the championships attract the best aufguss masters worldwide and I can confirm that a 15-minute stint in an 80°C sauna has never been so engaging.

The next thing to get my head around is the near-total co-ed nudity in the sauna, save for the actual performer and those of us with judiciously placed towels. Nudity makes sense when you're in the moment



Competitors are judged on their towel wafting techniques



Performances are engaging and entertaining



Show aufguss sessions include acting, lighting and sound effects

“

*It's a chance to celebrate cultural differences and embrace body positivity*



Hundreds of bathing enthusiasts come to watch the competition



Thermen Bussloo's new Sauna Theatre cost €2 million

(sweat and clothing don't go well together), but this (mostly European) practice is initially off-putting. However, I take it as an opportunity to celebrate cultural differences and embrace body positivity.

#### COMPETITION TIME

Over the five days of Aufguss WM, 16 sessions are performed daily, featuring qualifiers from the 16 participating countries in the singles and teams competition. A jury meticulously marks each round, whittling qualifiers down to 16 finalists to compete for the world championship title on the last day.

Aufguss masters are judged on multiple fronts - from professionalism to the ability to increase and distribute the heat, towel-waving techniques (complete with deductions for dropping a towel), theme and implementation



Winner Niedermaier (centre) gave a moving performance on depression in adolescents



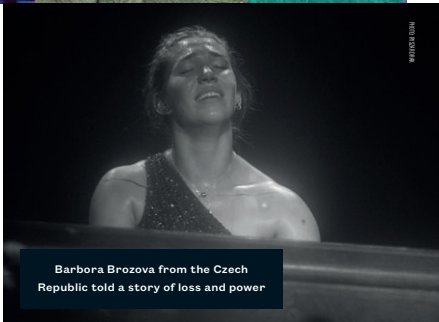
*I was blown away by the level of detail and performances*

► (does the theme make sense? Is the audience engaged?), atmosphere and overall feeling and team coordination (including performance set up, which is kept to a strict 15 minutes).

The championships have been held since 2015 and next year, there will be even more competitors as three new countries – Canada, Iceland and the US – launch national qualifying events.

Attending the final sessions as sauna masters vied for the top spot, I was blown away by the level of detail and performance. A newcomer from Team Japan, Itsuki Minotani, brought us into his VR world as he fell in love with a virtual girlfriend, taking us on a journey of first dates and kisses with exceptional towel waving. Barbora Brozova, a trained dancer from The Czech Republic, swept beautifully around the sauna as she told the story of loss and the power of following her dream.

This year's winner, Italy's Michael Niedermaier, moved me nearly to tears as he beautifully explored the struggle many of today's youth are experiencing with depression and mental illness. It was his fourth time in the finals, but his first win. "My aim with an aufguss is always to send a message," he exclaims. "When you fall down, accept this, accept yourself and move forward." ●



Barbora Brozova from the Czech Republic told a story of loss and power



Japan's Itsuki Minotani used VR in his show

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# IN TOUCH

Sara Brenninger talks to wellness expert Alina Hernandez about the power of real snow to create immersive touchless wellness experiences

TechnoAlpin snowrooms are a powerful contributor to a touchless wellness offering

**T**he advent of touchless wellness experiences is enabling operators to deliver benefits without direct practitioner involvement, reshaping how people experience relaxation and making wellness services scalable, efficient and accessible.

Snowrooms are part of this shift, providing cooling that can be used to deliver contrast therapy in a touchless setting.

Cold therapy with snow offers a gentle, immersive cool-down option that combines the restorative effects of cold with the benefits of a biophilic experience.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

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## *What sauna does with heat, the snowroom does with the cold*

**Alina Hernandez, innovation director,  
The Touchless Wellness Association**

### **WHY DO WE NEED SNOW-BASED COOLING?**

Touchless Wellness is about leveraging technology to provide effective treatments without touch, making services more accessible and adapted to today's needs.

Snow-based cooling solutions, such as snowrooms, provide a way for clients to cool down after a heat experience without the need for an attendant.

They also offer a gentler, more prolonged cooling experience when compared to more intense cold-water immersion, allowing clients to connect with nature while controlling their comfort level.

As more people seek personalised experiences, snow becomes a crucial element in offering an effective and autonomous contrast therapy option.

### **HOW DO TOUCHLESS SOLUTIONS ADDRESS INDUSTRY CHALLENGES...?**

The wellness industry faces labour shortages and a demand for technology-driven services and touchless wellness is designed to respond to these shifts by allowing facilities to offer consistent experiences without relying on practitioners.

For owners, this model can be a game-changer, it decreases operational costs, maximises revenue by providing uninterrupted service and reduces risks associated with labour shortages.

### **...AND HELP THE MIND-BODY CONNECTION?**

In addition to being rituals, these experiences are fun, meaningful and plain good for your health and wellness.

A strong body of scientific evidence tells us contrast therapy, thermal circuit cycles, or sauna and cool-down are beneficial to human health. This means there's a mind-body-connection that provides multiple wins for the wellness consumer while also delivering a joyful experience filled with connection that just feels good.



TechnoAlpin at the  
Tritone Luxury Hotel  
Thermae & Spa

### **HOW IS COOLING WITH SNOW DIFFERENT?**

I've come to love the gentle cool-down that's provided by snowrooms and would even say that what sauna does with heat, the snowroom does with the cold. This means it's fun, it makes you feel good and provides many opportunities to be social or just go inward and be reflective.

Unlike cold water immersion (which I also like), snowroom cool-downs provide just as many benefits, but they also allow people to take their time and be fully immersive and biophilic.

### **HOW DOES THE USE OF SNOW ALIGN WITH THE PHILOSOPHY OF TOUCHLESS WELLNESS?**

The fundamental premise of touchless is that we're able to provide high benefits without some of the potential pitfalls in service provider-led treatments.

The experience of a snowroom becomes a self-directed journey – as with saunas, guest take themselves there.

The philosophy embodied in the work we're doing at the Touchless Wellness Association is a direct reflection of this shift and is why its founder, Erin Lee, and myself, together with Nigel Franklyn – who is on its advisory board – are excited and convinced this new way of thinking about service delivery is one of the key emerging iterations of wellness. ●

**More: [indoor.technoalpin.com](https://indoor.technoalpin.com)**

**Sara Brenninger** is executive manager at TechnoAlpin Indoor

**Alina Hernandez** is advisory board member and innovation director of the Touchless Wellness Association, a wellness programme designer and industry thought leader

# FABIAN DOLMAN

How can aufguss sessions benefit a spa's business? What sort of experiences appeal most to customers and at what price point? Cassandra Cavanah talks to the CEO of Thermen Resorts to find out



Dolman's resorts employ 60 sauna masters across six sites

**T**hermen Resorts, a family-run business, has six spa resorts across The Netherlands. It started offering aufguss sessions in 2006, but in 2013, it launched a training programme for sauna masters to take this offering to the next level.

Today, the group has 60 members of staff dedicated to this entertaining heat experience and recently its site in Bussloo hosted the 2024 Aufguss World Championships (Aufguss WM) in a newly built €2 million (US\$2.2 million, £1.7 million) state-of-the-art event sauna which can fit up to 200 people.

On p66 we reveal more about the championships, while in this article, Thermen Resorts CEO, Fabian Dolman, tells Cassandra Cavanah how other operators could introduce a successful aufguss programme.

## What sort of aufguss sessions do you offer?

At Thermen Bussloo, we have more than 20 saunas with aufguss masters leading 36 rituals a day.

We offer three types of aufguss sessions lasting up to 15 minutes. Traditional offerings incorporate towel wafting, aromas and temperatures of up to 100°C and ritual (zen) experiences that include

Up to 70 per cent of our customers try an aufguss session – some even come primarily for them



Thermen Bussloo has 20 saunas and offers 36 aufguss rituals a day

mindful practices such as meditation, sound baths and breathwork. The third type of session is a show aufguss that's based on performing arts.

#### What makes aufguss so appealing?

Sometimes guests don't sit in a sauna for long because they aren't engaged, but in an aufguss experience, you're thoroughly entertained and likely to stay for the full 15 minutes. We find older people are drawn to the more traditional sessions and those seeking health benefits of personal development prefer the zen rituals. The third type of customer, who we call the 'experience guest', seeks out the show aufguss sessions.

#### What do the sessions bring to the table from a business point of view?

In 2006, we had just seven saunas at Thermen Bussloo, but today, we have over 20 as we saw the demand for aufguss grow. We have the capacity for 500-600 guests a day and up to 70 per cent of our customers try an aufguss session – some even come primarily for them.

These unique emotional and spiritual experiences are great for creating loyal customers.



The group has been running a specialist aufguss training programme for 11 years

The quality of the sauna is more important than size for aufguss sessions



► **Do you charge for aufguss experiences?**

Initially, we offered them for free to create value-added, memorable experiences to drive repeat business. Today, we still offer complimentary, shorter taster sessions but charge for longer experiences such as a 60-minute ritual in our Latvian pirt, which costs €14.95 (US\$16.23, £12.58).

We charge €50 (US\$54, £42) for a spa day pass at Bussloo. Many of our competitors offer lower entry fees but then charge for each ritual. That's not our model.

For special events like Aufguss WM, we charge €100 (US\$109, £83) for the day and give guests access to five out of 16 sessions. The competition drew in approximately 500 people per day to our property.

**Can any spa with a sauna introduce aufguss sessions?**

Yes - our smallest sauna fits 18 people. However, you must ensure you have the right equipment.

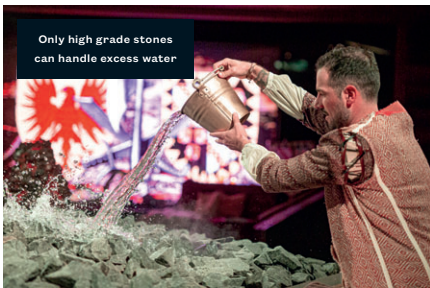
**What basic equipment do you need?**

The sauna stones and stove must be of a high enough quality to handle the excess water, ice and aromas in aufguss sessions. Poor quality stones won't hold the heat well and will need replacing often. If the stove's heating elements aren't protected from water, you'll have problems. If the essential oils aren't 100 per cent natural, they may burn off harmful chemicals.

Basic equipment includes a bucket for water, a spoon and towels to wave. ►



*Our tickets for Aufguss WM were €100 and we hosted 500 people a day*





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The new event sauna was the arena for this year's Aufguss World Championships



*Training is essential, but we try not to mould our aufguss masters as they need space to be creative*

► **What nice-have features might you add?**

If you're ready to operate a true show aufguss, you might think about embedding theatrical lighting into the ceiling or adding a digital multiplex system for controlling sounds, music and lighting. All of which will need to be protected from the heat.

**What staff training is required?**

In 2013, we introduced a three-day programme for our sauna masters and we've grown our aufguss team to 60 members of staff across six sites.

The programme is based on training outlined by the Sauna Federation of The Netherlands. It covers the basics: how to use the stove, oils, ice balls and water. And, importantly, how to gauge guests' comfort levels (ensuring it's not too hot, etc).

We've created a buddy system for those new to the profession, while waving techniques are a skill that's perfected over years of practice.

**How do you sustain people's interest in aufguss?**

Aufguss performers are naturally very innovative. One mistake I've seen a spa director make is to try to control the shows to ensure standards are



met and it's a fine balance. We have a team that maintains the quality of aufguss covered in the training as this is essential for repeat business, but at the same time, we don't try to mould our aufguss masters because they need space to be creative – to develop something new each year to delight our guests and keep them coming back for more. ●

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# Into the WILDERNESS

Jane Kitchen travels to Scotland to learn about an ambitious project to rewild the land – and help people find wellness through nature in the process

**T**he 90-minute drive from Inverness airport to Alladale Wilderness Reserve winds through rolling hills and valleys, taking us through the Scottish Highlands, before a gravel road leads us to the 23,000-acre property. This is a breathtakingly beautiful place – rugged and wild, with deep glens where Highland cattle graze, majestic mountains that erupt with shades of purple as heather blooms and rushing rivers filled with Atlantic salmon.

Paul Lister bought the former hunting lodge more than 20 years ago. His vision was to reforest, rewild and return the land to its natural state, planting millions of trees, repairing damaged peatlands and reintroducing the native red squirrel and a captive breeding programme for Scottish wildcats. Lister has also hosted thousands of teenagers on week-long digital-detox school trips that focus on education and outreach, helping them connect with nature and with themselves as they learn about climate change and conservation.

“Our vision at Alladale is to see the restoration of as much flora and fauna as possible, which will help create a healthier and more balanced environment,” says Lister. “We depend on nature – nature doesn’t depend on us and getting out into it brings that home.”

## GROWING RETREAT BUSINESS

The original building sits perched in an enviable position at the top of a hill, with views all around and not another property or road in sight. Traditionally,



Jane Kitchen taking in Alladale's rugged, wild landscape

guests at Alladale have included families, friends or corporate companies that hired out the lodge, but for the past few years, the reserve has opened up the bookings to retreat leaders, with much success. I'm here for a Rewilding Escape – a new programme that includes guided walks on the vast property with a ranger, birdwatching, wild swimming, 4X4 excursions, forest bathing, foraging and wild lunches.

“We're digging deep into the marketplace and trying to get 40 per cent of our business through retreats and we're close to that now,” says Lister. “It's a big chunk of what we do – and it's repeat business.”

Alladale runs between six to 12 retreats every year with the approximate cost for renting the entire reserve and accommodations starting at £34,750 (US\$44,000, €41,860) a week. Lister says the capacity of a retreat is 18 people and the average number of participants is 14. Peak season is between May and October and prices are 25 per cent lower outside of those months.

## MOST POPULAR RETREAT

Yoga retreats in the Scottish wilderness have been growing in popularity, particularly with American clientele and the experience is augmented

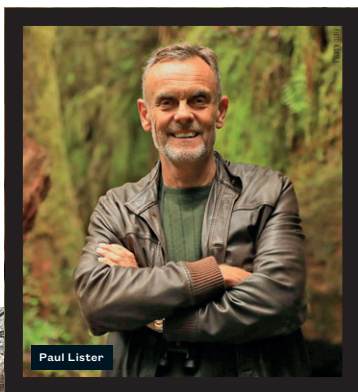
“

*After just three days, I can't help but feel completely transformed*

PHIL LUCKIE



Wellness retreats now make up 40 per cent of business



Paul Lister

with local specialists for other wellness activities, including guided walks, sound therapy or foraging.

The newly built Willow Centre serves as an ideal location for yoga and meditation and the main lodge features a sauna and massage room where an in-house therapist works on muscles sore from hiking as part of the package.

The rest of the backdrop for the retreats, however, is the rugged landscape of Alladale itself. This is wellness in its purest form: fresh air, quiet, and a sense of pure awe at the beauty of the natural world.

#### HIKING HIGHLIGHTS

I stay in one of the six bedrooms in the main lodge, where meals are served family-style and feature produce grown in Alladale's onsite aquaponic gardens. When I arrive at lunchtime, it's a simple red pepper soup with sourdough rolls, but dinner is venison from the local deer population, which has to be culled each year to avoid starvation and suffering.

PHIL LUCKIE

Long daily guided walks are a staple activity



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Innes MacNeil



People connect with nature and learn about conservation

► Our hikes with Innes MacNeil are the retreat highlight and we're accompanied most days by Baxter, his faithful Labrador, whose enthusiastic romps over the grounds are infectious. MacNeil was originally trained as a deerstalker on the property long before Lister bought it but has shifted his view from hunter to conservationist. With his thick Highlands accent, walking stick and peaked hat, his knowledge of the landscape runs deep and over the course of several days, it seeps out of him and into us like a slow, steady rain. He takes us to see salmon leaping heroically



Wildlife includes highland cows, Atlantic salmon and golden eagles

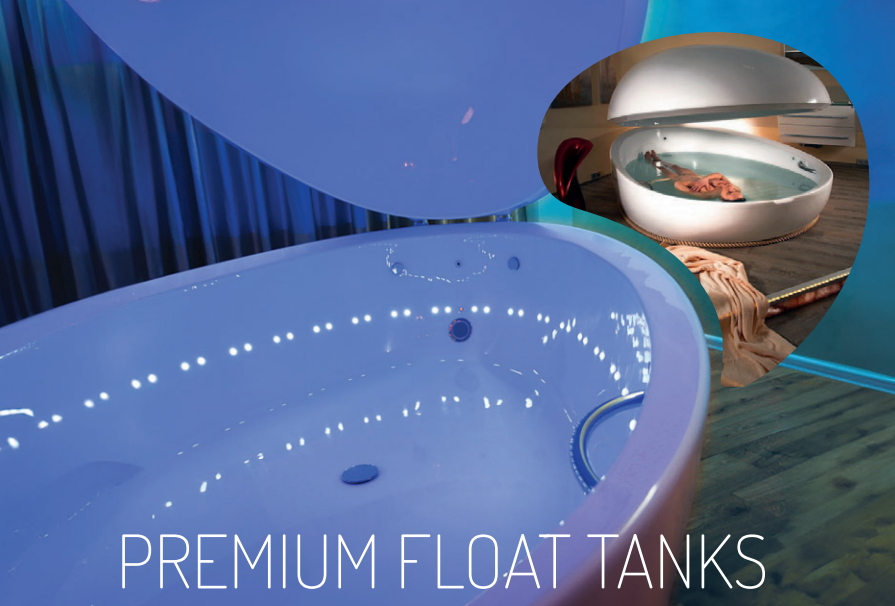
INNES MACNEIL



*Over the course of several days, his deep knowledge of the landscape seeps out of him and into us like a slow, steady rain*

up Glenalvie Falls, combs the skies with binoculars in a quest to help us spot golden eagles and points out tiny rare orchids and tiger beetles as we follow him eagerly for hours across the sprawling estate.

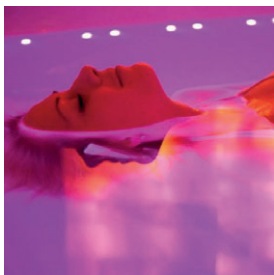
After just three days at Alladale, I can't help but feel completely transformed. It's what Lister hopes to impart to all his guests. "The stress of being in a city with concrete - we lose all connection with nature and sense of a place," he says. "We're trying to go a little bit deeper and get people to get out of their normal rhythm and breathe. And people are impacted - it changes them; they have time to think, they have time to stop. The connection between physical wellbeing and being out in nature is clear." ●



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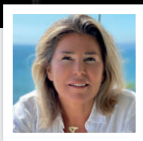
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# BEST of both

Metawell is bridging the gap between cutting-edge science and timeless relaxation

Alina Hernandez, Gharieni Group advisory board member, explains how Metawell - its portfolio of tech-forward mind/body technologies - is right on time for the next era of wellness



For more than three decades, spas have focused on relaxation and treatments delivered by therapists. Now, however, we're in the age of evidence-based wellness, where technology is blending with all things digital and this will have an inevitable impact on the traditional spa environment. This is more than just a trend. It's a major shift and our industry is ripe for disruption.

Gharieni is leading the charge in this arena with Metawell - a collection of mind/body wellness technology beds, loungers and equipment. The products incorporate innovations such as haptic and augmented technologies, far infrared light, binaural vibro-acoustics, intermittent vacuum therapy and more. As a 'gold standard' brand, Gharieni is also delivering real value and quality. But how can spas tap into all of this to differentiate themselves?

## BOTTOM-LINE IMPACT

The mix of advanced technology and mind/body experiences is so new that understanding intended uses and benefits - and how it fits within traditional spas - is a challenge that both operators and consumers face.

For one thing, Metawell products can be used to provide evidence-based solutions as well as to amplify hands-on services in exciting new ways.

They can also be useful tools in navigating operational issues such as staff shortages, absenteeism and presenteeism.

Think about the accelerated benefits of red light or vibro-acoustics and the fact that they can be delivered in protocols lasting 30 minutes or less with minimal staff intervention. Or think about stacking therapist-led services with technologies in the same time slot and charging a premium. We can then see the vast impact this can have on the bottom-line.

Hybrid spa journeys designed to inspire and heal, keep guests coming back for more



Sammy Gharieni, founder and CEO of Gharieni Group, says: "Thanks to Metawell, guests get exponential value for their wellness spend, business owners get higher yields for equipment spend and the industry gets supercharged with continued innovation and evolution."

#### NEW HYBRID GUEST JOURNEYS

All of this means adopting a new way of thinking in how we design spa services, using mind/body technologies to seamlessly create a journey that is meaningful, engaging and provides high-value spend.

In imagining these new experiences, consider:

- ✓ What's the total effect I want to achieve with the journey?
- ✓ What pain points or problems am I helping the consumer alleviate?
- ✓ What's the USP/concept and how will it integrate with my selection of technologies?
- ✓ How can I be efficient while combining the best of what service providers offer (human touch) with technologies?
- ✓ Can I cross-pollinate from other industries to get ideas for unique features or innovative approaches?

Operators will be able to "re-imagine the spa experience while creating more relevance, inspiration and delight," adds Gharieni, "while simultaneously offering megawatt benefits and creating lasting memories for consumers that will have them coming back for more".

As the spa industry takes a huge leap forward, how we execute mind/body wellness technology experiences will make all the difference to business models and points of differentiation. It will propel businesses into the next iteration of spa and wellness and Gharieni will be there every step of the way. ●

More: [www.metawell.io](http://www.metawell.io) and [gharienigroup.com](http://gharienigroup.com)

*Thanks to Metawell, guests get exponential value for their wellness spend and operators get higher yields for equipment spend*



Sammy Gharieni, founder & CEO, Gharieni Group



Metawell technology enables operators to re-imagine the traditional spa experience

# Turning point

Jane Kitchen reports from the 18th annual Global Wellness Summit in Scotland as it declares 2024 a watershed moment for the industry



Water was everywhere during the 2024 Global Wellness Summit (GWS) – in the chilly waters of the North Sea, where delegates donned woolly hats for early-morning wild swimming; in the ice baths from Kohler and Remedy Place that attendees could test their stamina in; and in the presentations, which took on topics from water conservation to a resurgence of bathhouse culture. The GWS took place at Kohler's Old Course Hotel in St Andrews and focused on the theme of A Watershed Moment for Wellness. As GWS executive director and chief creative officer **Nancy Davis** said in her opening remarks, "The word 'watershed' has a number of meanings: it's a dividing ridge between drainage areas – it's a crucial turning point."

Our industry may be at a pivotal juncture in many ways. The sold-out summit, attracting more than 500 delegates from 43 countries, attested to just how many people are paying attention to the business of wellness. On p64, *Spa Business'* contributing editor Jeremy McCarthy argues that 2024 is the year that wellness broke through the ceiling in hospitality. The latest research by sister organisation the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), which was revealed at the



Industry collaboration is crucial, says GWS chair Susie Ellis



“*Young people are wasting their life scrolling on social media*”

Lewis Swire



Isaac Jones and Sue Harmsworth spoke about longevity and optimal living



The event took place at the Old Course Hotel in St Andrews, Scotland

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Social media guru, influencer and travel specialist Jeremy Jauncey

GWS by senior research fellows **Katherine Johnston** and **Ophelia Yeung**, shows the wellness economy has reached a record peak of US\$6.3 trillion (€5.99 trillion, £4.98 trillion) and is forecast to hit US\$9 trillion (€8.6 trillion, £7.1 trillion) by 2028 (see p32). But we're also seeing something of a split within the industry, where things are increasingly shifting into two sides of the wellness coin - the high-tech world of medical wellness and longevity and a desire for the simpler side of wellness: a walk in the woods or wild swimming. **Amy Eisinger**, head of content for Well+Good, captured this brilliantly in a trends panel. "We're seeing the wellness world become a place of extremes," she said. "We have biohacking but we also have JOLO - the joy of logging off."

### WATER, WATER

The summit began by addressing the most basic necessity for wellness: access to clean water. **J Carl Ganter**, Circle of Blue founder, urged attendees to lead the movement in creating a new narrative to advance the conversation around water and safeguard its future. Ganter reflected on the growing global water crisis and urged delegates to think about how they can help. "What we do when we leave the summit will define our water history," he said. "Most of the solutions are there - we just need to realign perception and reality."

It was no accident that Ganter kicked off the summit with his call to action. The GWS has a long history of efforts to tackle some of the most basic impediments to wellness, including the launch of the Wellness Moonshot: A World Free of Preventable Disease in 2017 (see [www.spabusiness.com/moonshot17](http://www.spabusiness.com/moonshot17)). "I've always asked this question of the industry: What can we accomplish together that we can't accomplish alone?" said **Susie Ellis**, GWS chair, in her welcome speech. "This pressing issue of water usage and water shortage will



*Rich video content sells products and services better than any other form of media*

Jeremy Jauncey

take all of us working together and modelling a new collaboration towards the greater good."

Part of that collaboration starts with sharing and **Sarah Livia Brightwood**, president of destination wellness resort Rancho la Puerta in Tecate, Mexico, gave a presentation on how its new wastewater plant will be able to process 430 gallons of water per minute. "This process is like a miracle, turning domestic sewage into potable water in a place that's beautiful, quiet and odour-free," she said.



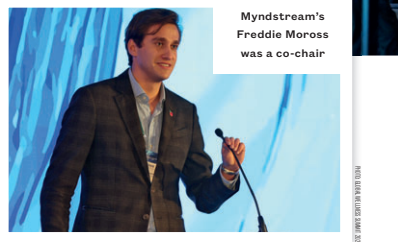
PAUL HARRIS/GETTY IMAGES

Out in force: the Spa Business team reported live from the summit and shared their key insights

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Keynotes were interspersed with mindfulness moments



Myndstream's Freddie Moross was a co-chair



“*Social self-care will make us healthier*”  
Jonathan Leary

One of the reasons we, as an industry, should care about water is that it is central to spas. **Robert Hammond**, president and chief strategy officer for Therme US, spoke to design consultant and author **Jane Withers** about the idea of water being central to gathering and the new wave of bathhouses popping up worldwide. In Dallas, Texas, **Christopher Barrett**, CEO of Worldsprings, has the lofty aim of bringing the international cultures of water-based wellness to everyone. The first site, opened this year, has 46 mineral-enhanced pools that are recreations of locations like The Blue Lagoon or the Dead Sea and Barrett told attendees he plans multiple sites across the US.

An even simpler, more egalitarian form of water wellness exists in the rising popularity of wild swimming. Author **Vicky Allan** and photographer **Anna Deacon**, who have collaborated on books such as *The Ripple Effect*, spoke about its growing appeal. “People were coming to the water with grief or chronic pain and the water lets them release that,” said Allan. Importantly, many community groups have been formed and today, things such as men’s mental health swim groups are gaining much traction.

Community is something that many followers of the Wim Hof Method have found and the man himself, **Wim Hof**, joined the summit for the second time, leading delegates in a breathwork exercise set to live music. To read more about how to implement cold water immersion safely in spas, visit [www.spabusiness.com/cwi](http://www.spabusiness.com/cwi).

## CONNECTION & COLLABORATION

The importance of collaboration, community and connection was a theme that ran throughout the summit. “Our industry’s greatest achievements have always come from collaboration, not competition,” said **Neil Jacobs**, CEO of Six Senses. “The industry’s future is about weaving together heritage and progress, creating environments where like-minded people can come together and connect,” he said.

**Jonathan Leary**, founder & CEO of Remedy Place, spoke in detail about creating a community as part of his business plan for a social wellness club (see [www.spabusiness.com/remedyplace](http://www.spabusiness.com/remedyplace)). Leary’s aim was to find a way for people to socialise, but without the alcohol that



GWI researchers with 17th US Surgeon General, Dr Richard Carmona



*We live in a time that cries out for belonging. If wellness is the goal, then connection is the key*

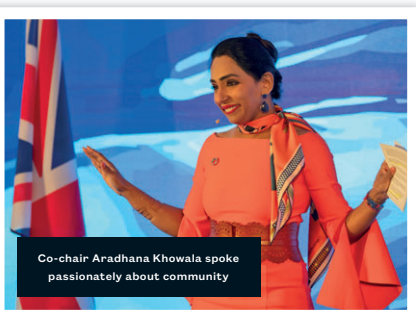
Aradhana Khowala

normally accompanies a night out. Remedy Place has locations in Los Angeles and New York City and offers vitamin IV drip, ice bath and cryotherapy services. "The future of self-care is actually a form of entertainment," said Leary. "Social self-care will make us healthier." Turn to p42 and p48 to read more about the rapid rise of social wellness clubs and visit [www.spabusiness.com/leary](http://www.spabusiness.com/leary) for *Spa Business'* interview with Leary earlier this year.

**Aradhana Khowala**, CEO of Aptamind Partners, gave an entire keynote on working together. "So far, our industry has focused on self-care, but wellness isn't isolated - self-care is community care - it's global," she said. "We live in a time that cries out for belonging. If wellness is the goal, then connection is the key." In a previous issue of *Spa Business*, Khowala, who's working on the world's biggest resort projects in Saudi Arabia, has also highlighted her drive and passion for regenerative tourism (see [www.spabusiness.com/khowala](http://www.spabusiness.com/khowala)). She was a co-chair of this year's summit along with **Freddie Moross** of Myndstream and **Nina Kohler** from Kohler Company, which partnered with the GWS on the event.

### SOCIAL MEDIA & TECHNOLOGY

One of the ways people are increasingly connecting, of course, is through social media. **Jeremy Jauncey**, founder of social media content company Beautiful Destinations, reported that a third of consumers have bought something on social media and the market is projected to be US\$1 trillion (€949.2 billion, £793.7 billion) by 2028. Importantly, he explained: "Rich video content sells products and services better than any other form of media. It's where consumer attention is." ▶



Co-chair Aradhana Khowala spoke passionately about community

PHOTO: GUY LAWRENCE



Ice plunges courtesy of Remedy Place and Kohler

PHOTO: GUY LAWRENCE



Delegates braving the chilly waters of the North Sea

PHOTO: GUY LAWRENCE



MICHELLE WELLS FOR SPA BUSINESS



*The future of wellness lies in understanding the science of feeling good*

Anna Bjurstam

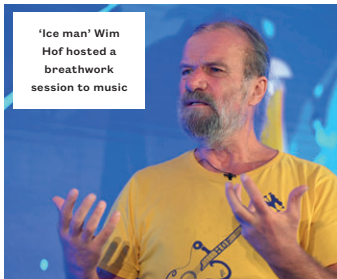
► It's that attention, however, that has 17-year-old **Lewis Swire** concerned. Swire has started a youth-led campaign to end social media addiction and reported that the average 17-year-old spends almost six hours a day on social media. "Young people are wasting their passion - their life - scrolling on social media," he said.

But that phone technology has also put wellness in the palm of many people's hands and **Michael Acton Smith**, founder of the Calm, spoke about his quest to bring mindfulness to people through his app. "I wondered: could we take this ancient practice and make it simpler, more accessible?" he told the audience. He also hinted at a Calm-branded spa, resort or wellness community in the future. Smith was later honoured with the Debra Simon Award for Furthering Mental Wellness for his work in transforming wellbeing in the digital age.

Meanwhile, **Amy McDonald** of Under a Tree consulting was moved to tears when she was presented with the coveted annual Leading Woman in Wellness Award.

### THE PLEASURE OF WELLNESS

Perhaps the answer is to make wellness practices as appealing - or even addictive - as social media scrolling or other dopamine-inducing activities. **Anna Bjurstam**, wellness pioneer for Six Senses, spoke about 'pleasure health' and asked the audience: "Why does getting healthy feel like punishment?" The key, she said, is to engineer anticipation. "The future of wellness lies in understanding the science of feeling good," she explained.



'Ice man' Wim Hof hosted a breathwork session to music

GUY LAWRENCE FOR SPA BUSINESS



Leadership in Action panel (L to R): Lindsay Madden-Nadeau, Vanessa Fuss, Lina Almaena and Michael Acton Smith



Spa Business is a proud GWS media partner

OUTER WORLD FOR SPA BUSINESS

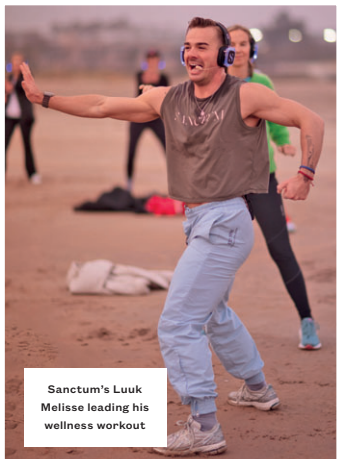
Moving our bodies and engaging in sport is one way to feel good. **Lina Almaena**, co-founder of Jeddah United Sports Company, detailed her personal story of the transformative effects that discovering basketball had on her life and how she's on a mission to bring that feeling to other Saudi women and girls. Part of the goal of the country's *Vision 2030* plan is to increase physical activity from 13 per cent to 40 per cent. "*Vision 2030* has opened up so much for women in Saudi," she said. **Gundeep Anand**, founder and creative director of The Last Stand, charmed the audience with his glimpse into the world of street football in London and his mission of bringing at-risk youth together and uniting communities through sport.

### LONGEVITY

**Bjurstam** also led a live Zoom conversation with **Dave Asprey**, CEO of Upgrade Labs, where they discussed the future of longevity. Asprey has spent US\$2.5 million (£2.73 million, £1.98 million) in the last 25 years on reversing his age. He told the audience that health and longevity doesn't have to be expensive. Things like sleeping in darkness has the best ROI, he said, because it costs nothing.

**Simone Gibertoni**, CEO of Clinique La Prairie and **Isaac Jones**, founder of Health Experts Alliance, spoke with **Sue Harmsworth**, founder of SATCC and ESPA, about wellness, longevity and optimal living. "The future is educating the consumer about everything - we want to be more preventative," said Gibertoni. And he sees hyper-personalisation as the future of longevity treatments. This will be a key focus as CLP grows from one to 50 sites, as he's revealed to *Spa Business*

PHOTO: LORNA WELLS/STAMP12.COM



Sanctum's Luuk Melisse leading his wellness workout

PHOTO: LORNA WELLS/STAMP12.COM



Six Senses' Neil Jacobs with Spa Business' Liz Terry

PHOTO: LORNA WELLS/STAMP12.COM



An authentic Scottish barn was decked to impress for the gala evening

PHOTO: LORNA WELLS/STAMP12.COM



“*The most powerful lever in wellness is not knowledge, it's mindset*”

Dave Stewart

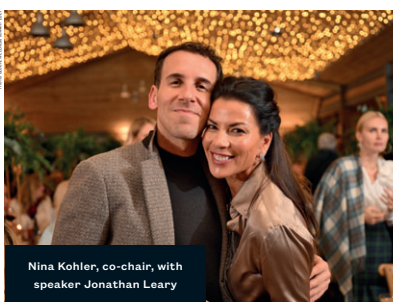
previously (see [www.spabusiness.com/gibertoni](http://www.spabusiness.com/gibertoni)). “At the moment, we say superficially that we’re all the same, but we’re not,” he said. For Jones, longevity will be fuelled by early diagnosis. “People can have cancer 10-15 years before it’s diagnosed – Alzheimer’s 30-50 years before – and there are things you can do to reverse it,” he said.

In another viewpoint, **Dave Stewart**, founder & CEO of Ageist, made a case for optimism being the key to longevity. “The most powerful lever in wellness is not knowledge, it’s mindset,” he said. “Longevity is increased by positive self-perceptions of ageing.” Stewart pointed to a Harvard study that found optimists have a longer lifespan than pessimists and drilling down, optimists are better at all sorts of behaviour that helps longevity, such as making an effort to stay connected.

### FUTURE OF WELLNESS

GWV VP of research and forecasting **Beth McGroarty** shared her insights into wellness trends alongside Well+Good’s Eisinger, as well as **Vanessa Fuss** of VML Intelligence and **Olivia Houghton** from LSN

PHOTO: LORNA WELLS/STAMP12.COM



Nina Kohler, co-chair, with speaker Jonathan Leary

PHOTO: LORNA WELLS/STAMP12.COM



Delegates getting their Highland fling on

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Ellis and the GWS board in a much-deserved closing toast

PHOTO: JAMES COOPER / ANDREW HALL



PHOTO: BEATRIZ RAMOS / SHANE ZEN

“*We’re moving from ‘well-washing’ to ‘science-washing’ – it’s a much more confusing landscape*”  
Beth McGroarty

► Global. Much like the rest of the summit, the panel focused on two sides of wellness: the high-tech and the low-tech. “There’s a hunger to restore the human by disconnecting,” said McGroarty. “Analog living will soon become a pillar of lifestyle.” All panellists also noted how a new wave of celebrity scientists and doctors is helping companies to sell products and expressed concern about how that might impact trust in the



Amy McDonald was crowned this year’s Leading Woman in Wellness

PHOTO: BEATRIZ RAMOS / SHANE ZEN

industry. “We’re moving from ‘well-washing’ to ‘science-washing’ – it’s a much more confusing landscape,” said McGroarty. Fuss concurred: “Real science is getting mixed up with pseudo-science,” she said.

**Cathy Feliciano-Chon**, managing partner at Finn Partners, together with **Jauncey**, unveiled details from Finn’s new report, *The Future of Wellness Tourism 2025*. Feliciano-Chon highlighted Japan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iceland and Italy as emerging wellness tourism destinations. Feliciano-Chon and Jauncey both agreed on the importance of the wellness tourism sector adopting a regenerative approach. “You will not be able to call yourself a wellness destination if you do not follow regenerative practices,” said Jauncey. “The wellness [tourism] industry is going to be called upon to be the gold standard.”

As for the future of the summit... the location for GWS 2025 was unveiled as Abu Dhabi and will be held in collaboration with Shura Global Consultancy. Shura’s **Mohamed Yousef Almadfaei**, who joined Ellis and Davis on stage for the announcement, said: “Our partnership with the GWS is essential in achieving our goals of not only advancing the wellness economy but also influencing the global wellness narrative.” ●

## NEXT STOP: ABU DHABI

Next year’s Global Wellness Summit will take place in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in collaboration with Shura Global Consultancy.



PHOTO: BEATRIZ RAMOS / SHANE ZEN



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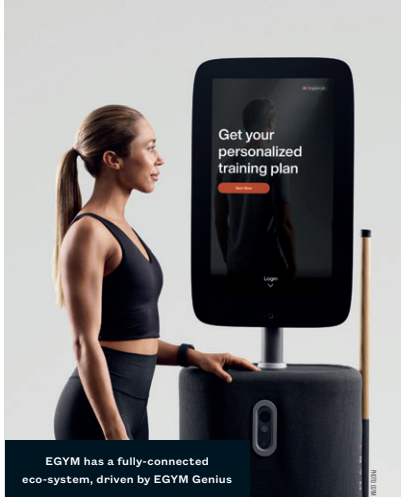
Solutions are individually crafted for each wellness business and are designed to help streamline efficiency, increase turnover and improve the customer experience - all powered by the largest open fitness platform in the world.

And with the launch of EGYM Genius, EGYM is ushering in a new era of fully connected fitness and kickstarting the digital fitness transformation. Its cutting-edge AI seamlessly connects hundreds of leading fitness equipment brands into a single training experience and generates hyper-personalised workout plans for customers that help them smash their goals, while also boosting wellness businesses. It's a training experience like no other.

After successfully implementing an EGYM solution at Blackpool Sports Centre, the council has rolled it out across two more facilities and today, 95 per cent of new members sign a contract on-site.

Leisure manager, Danny Ogden, says, "The decision to sign up for EGYM was a no-brainer for us because we've seen how customers engage, the ease-of-use for trainers and the level of recovery possible."

Powered by cutting-edge software, interactive apps and the largest open ecosystem of smart equipment in the world, EGYM develops personalised solutions that streamline wellness business efficiency, increase turnover and improve the customer experience. ●



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The system has been designed to deliver custom programmes



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# TO THE EXTREME

From catastrophic weather-related events, fuelled by climate change, to political unrest or public safety scares – how can software systems help spas navigate extenuating circumstances?

## Sal Capizzi

*Book4Time*

Book4Time's direct message and yield management functionalities are the most useful when facing extreme events, as one high-end coastal spa resort in the US can attest to. It was in the direct path of a hurricane and faced many operational and communication challenges when it suddenly needed to evacuate.

Using Book4Time's integrated messaging feature, the management team quickly sent real-time updates to clients with upcoming appointments – informing them about the evacuation and rescheduling and cancellation policies through personalised texts and emails. Guests appreciated the

proactive communication as it avoided confusion and reduced stress.

Post-hurricane, the spa used the same feature to notify clients when services resumed and to reveal limited-time deals to lessen the impact on the business.

It created the deals using Book4Time's yield management functionality. Via this feature, it was able to analyse historical booking data to identify the most popular services among local clients still able to visit (when it was safe), as well as apply targeted discounts and offer exclusive loyalty points to encourage these last-minute bookings.



Sal Capizzi

Book4Time's real-time updates informed clients about evacuation and rescheduling and cancellation policies

## Ricky Daniels

Trybe

At one of our resort spas on the Isle of Arran, Scotland, adverse weather means boats are regularly cancelled, so any number of customers can miss treatments. Yet the flexibility of Trybe allows for last-minute changes – it's designed to easily cancel appointments and rebook them. Other

systems, where payments are required, might not be so accommodating.

Additionally, SMS and email communications can be automated and sent out to keep guests informed. Trybe's ability to instantly contact clients helps with reputation management and facilitates quick resolutions, saving businesses from potential disasters.

On the other hand, our capacity management function enables spas to plan and quickly adjust team rotas and to handle a surge in clients – turning a hectic event into a growth opportunity. Essential to this is the fact that Trybe is cloud-native, meaning all information on the platform is remotely accessible and in real-time.



Ricky Daniels

Trybe's flexibility allows for last-minute cancellations and rebookings without payment issues

## Luke Doolin

Phorest

We've seen first-hand how challenging severe weather situations can be for owners. Having access to the right software, via an app or the web, when they can't access the premises makes all the difference.

For example, a busy day spa in Ireland affected by flooding used Phorest to suspend online bookings, enabling the manager to reach out to clients and reschedule treatments affected. Similarly, an Australian business relied on the PhorestGo app when a storm damaged its building, making it unsafe and leaving its systems and electrics offline. It was able to manage and reschedule bookings remotely and communicate with clients, so no one attempted to travel in hazardous conditions.

Phorest's platform has been designed to quickly pause new bookings and streamline communications – from sending a 'back open for business' message to reactivating social media ads. This integrated approach minimises business downtime and administrative burdens, boosts recovery and fosters client loyalty by maintaining a positive customer experience during difficult times.



*Having access to the right software, via an app or the web, when owners can't access the premises makes all the difference*



Luke Doolin

## Sudheer Koneru

Zenoti

When COVID-19 disrupted business, a facial bar in Ohio relied on the Zenoti Advanced Marketing tool to revive its customer base. Rather than bombarding all customers with a generic promotion, the software's personalised campaigns targeted different segments based on buying history and interests, but in a largely automated way. The campaign brought 211 clients back, with 41 per cent booking follow-ups. The impact: a 20 per cent increase in total revenue. The business credits Zenoti with playing a key role in helping it bounce back.

Our dynamic pricing helps spas navigate financial challenges after unforeseen events. A spa in a town recovering from a wildfire, for example, can amend prices when normalcy returns to draw locals eager to de-stress who might otherwise be hesitant to spend.

Zenoti also offers a suite of features to mitigate the impact of mass cancellations. Its intelligent segmentation of clients allows a spa to send out targeted notifications about service availability



Sudheer Koneru

Personalised yet largely automated campaigns boosted return clients, increasing total revenue by 20 per cent

and alternatives. Its AI-powered HyperConnect is a phone system that flags up customer details so conversations can be deeply personalised. HyperConnect integrates with an AI-powered chatbot that handles missed calls to answer questions and complete bookings. Additionally, integrated smart features such as ezConnect with two-way messaging allows for real-time communication with customers in the event of a sudden closure. ●

# OUTSTANDING IN ITS FIELD

*RKF Luxury Linen has had a stellar year in 2024, hitting new standards of excellence with a raft of certifications*

**R**KF Luxury Linen creates and manufactures bespoke linen for leading hotels and spas and has worked on 50,000 luxury hospitality and spa contracts globally. In a world where refinement and expertise make excellence, RKF Luxury Linen influences the art of linen and spa as a symbol of luxury.

The company aims to satisfy every client's dream when it comes to developing bespoke projects, thanks to its in-house design team and extensive choice of textiles. Among these, the three key fabrics developed and patented are DreamSoft, Timeless and Microfeel.

This year, parent company RKF Group strengthened its position in the textile industry by obtaining key certifications that highlight its dedication to excellence, sustainability and environmental responsibility following an external audit conducted by the French Certification Organization (OFC). The new credentials include:

- ISO 9001, which certifies commitment to customer satisfaction
- ISO 45001, highlighting the priority of health and safety at work
- ISO 14001, which confirms compliance with environmental standards
- Oeko-Tex, a certification for textile safety for human health and the environment
- Ecovadis, which recognises ethical and responsible practices throughout the supply chain

RKF Group, along with its entities RKF Luxury Linen, RKF Home, RKF I&D and Manufactures By RKF, is extremely proud of these new



The labels reaffirm RKF's unparalleled quality



*RKF Luxury Linen fosters a culture of technological excellence*



Riadh Bouaziz, CEO, RKF Luxury Linen

certifications, which reflect a continuous commitment to improving processes and services to ensure optimal customer satisfaction.

The company has maintained its Oeko-Tex certification for over 15 years, despite the increasing stringency of the standard. Very few companies manage to retain this credential for such a long period, given these increasing demands.

In addition, RKF Group's Ecovadis' score is in the top 8 per cent worldwide, demonstrating the company's dedication to sustainable and responsible practices throughout its supply chain.



RKF has worked on 50,000 luxury hotel and spa contracts globally

RKF Luxury Linen has an innovative and eco-friendly approach. Its collection is varied and personalised



With all these certifications widely recognised by professionals, RKF Group is reaffirming its commitment to providing its customers with products of unparalleled quality.

"RKF Luxury Linen fosters a culture of technological excellence," says CEO Riadh Bouaziz. "The brand's all-encompassing textile expertise provides partners with cost-effective, eco-friendly operational solutions by developing patented and sustainable textile materials."

RKF is a visionary company that deals with current global challenges through continuous innovation, including the eco-friendly development of its patented, organic textiles, which has cut energy use by 50 per cent. The company is on target to operate on a net-zero carbon basis by 2026.

#### **Main products and services**


The company designs and produces a full range of bathrobes, towels, bath sheets, slippers, duvets and duvet covers, as well as massage table covers, oshiboris, gloves, relaxing eye masks and waterproof pillows.

"The collection is varied and personalised to best meet your customer's expectations and ensure your clients have an unforgettable experience," says Bouaziz. "Our company values are proximity, responsiveness and flexibility." ●

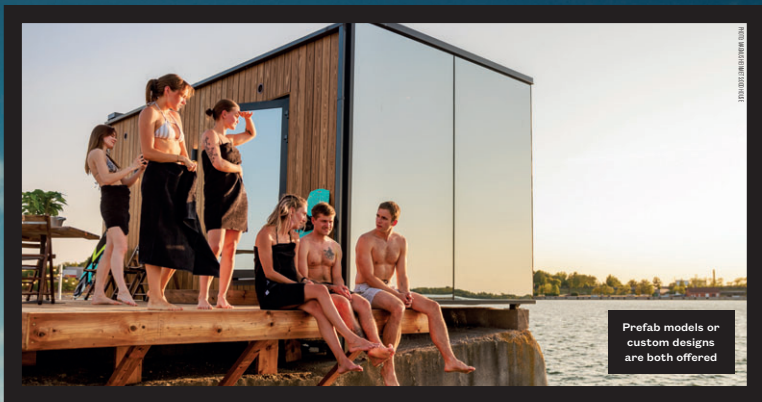
**More: [www.rkf.fr](http://www.rkf.fr)**

# Product innovation

Spa and wellness industry suppliers tell us about their latest product, treatment and equipment launches



The Estonian-style saunas with reflective glass exteriors make a design statement



Prefab models or custom designs are both offered

## Matthew Parkinson reflects on ÖÖD's mirror sauna pods

ÖÖD House is collaborating with spas to introduce its prefabricated Mirror Saunas, featuring reflective glass exteriors and Estonian-style saunas.

Founded in 2016 by Jaak and Andreas Tiik, ÖÖD aims to deliver luxury, nature-connected experiences, drawing on Estonia's deep sauna culture.

The saunas are powered by Harvia wood-burning stoves or electric heaters

and come in three sizes, the largest of which can fit up to seven people and includes a toilet, shower and space for treatments or a plunge pool.

Custom designs are offered and the saunas can be installed turnkey or built on-site.

According to UK & Ireland sales manager Matthew Parkinson: "Our reflective glass houses merge beautifully with nature, meaning no two locations are ever the same." ▶



“They merge beautifully with nature and no two locations are ever the same”

Matthew Parkinson

spa-kit.net keywords:  
ÖÖD House



PHOTO BY ISHAK

Tea sticks can be white-labelled for any spa, wellness centre or hotel brand

Yejoon Kim



The brand is known for its flower tea sticks

### Yejoon Kim on adding kombucha to Kkokdam flower tea collection

South Korean tea supplier Kkokdam has bolstered its offering with a duo of flower-based kombucha infused with citrus fruits.

The brand is known for its signature flower tea sticks packaged in delicate glass vials. Kkokdam offers five caffeine-free flavours – Korean mint, chrysanthemum,

wormwort, Siberian chrysanthemum and bridal wreath spiraea – each with their own distinct wellbeing benefits, taste and aroma.

“Our tea sticks offer an immersive sensory journey that engages the nose, eyes and palate,” says global director Yejoon Kim. According to Kim, the vials make an ideal

visual and aromatic addition to spa relaxation areas and can be white-labelled for any spa, wellness centre or hotel brand.

Kkokdam also produces flower tea gift sets for retail.

spa-kit.net keyword: Kkokdam

### Waterhaptic pool creates womb-like experience, says Wavess’ Arny B Arnold

Wellness tech firm Wavess has revealed a futuristic zero-gravity bathing experience in the UK.

The Wavess Origin Pool is a star feature of Damu, a playful spa that’s just opened at London hotel The Mandrake.

The circular, multi-sensory pool has been designed to let guests “float in music and sacred vibrations”. Using waterhaptic technology, the pool vibrates with sound at low frequencies. The experience is enhanced with soundscapes, chromotherapy and visuals.

Claimed to be a wellness industry first, the pool has been created by Wavess, Damu and immersive design studio Metaspheric.



PHOTO BY ISHAK

Water in the pool will vibrate with sound at low frequencies

Arny B Arnold

Wavess founder and CEO Arny B Arnold says the experience mimics how a baby experiences the world in the womb. Read more about Damu at [www.spabusiness.com/damu](http://www.spabusiness.com/damu)

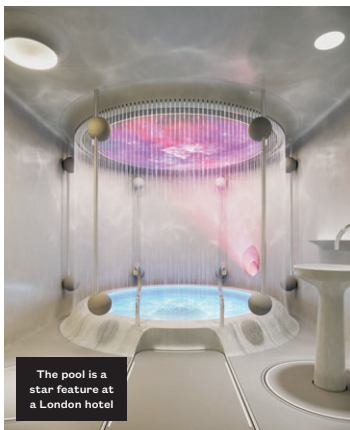


PHOTO BY ISHAK

The pool is a star feature at a London hotel

spa-kit.net keyword: Wavess

## LaFlöre's Shelby Isaacson outlines new skin microbiome test

LaFlöre has launched a Skin Health Testing Kit so users can analyse their skin microbiome and receive personalised skincare recommendations.

"The kit offers a data-driven, individualised approach to skincare, simplifying impactful treatment planning," says Shelby Isaacson, LaFlöre's director of marketing and brand development.

Users press a test strip on their forehead for 10 seconds in the morning before cleansing and send the sample to LaFlöre's partner lab. They then receive a detailed Skin Health Report, which includes insights into skin age, hydration, sensitivity, firmness,



PHOTO: P. J. BIRN

sun protection and antioxidant levels. The report also suggests skincare ingredients that are most compatible with the user's skin and what key visible signs to monitor.

"This kit empowers individuals to understand their skin's microbiome and enhance its resilience and overall health through tailored home care and treatments," adds Isaacson. "With this in-depth insight, spa professionals can develop the most effective treatment plans."



A test strip is sent off to a lab for a Skin Health Report

PHOTO: J. J. BIRN

With this in-depth insight, spas can develop the most effective treatment plans

Shelby Isaacson

spa-kit.net keyword:  
LaFlöre

## James Blower introduces JK Group's hydromassage and infrared heat loungers

JK Group has unveiled a HydroSpa lounger combining a top-to-toe hydromassage with infrared heat therapy to enhance circulation, relaxation and wellbeing.

James Blower, MD of JK Wellness, describes it as "a highly versatile and luxurious addition to our range," adding that it's "intuitively designed, visually appealing and highly effective."

The lounger features a 300-litre water tank, filled only once and chemical-free, allowing both full and targeted massages. It can be programmed via a smartphone app, enabling users to adjust the intensity, direction, style and duration of the hydromassage while floating weightlessly and dry over a bed of water. A 'hold' feature also allows guests to focus on specific pain points.



HydroSpa is visually appealing, says Blower

PHOTO: J. J. BIRN

Sessions range from 15-30 minutes. There are four standard programmes, as well as a sleep mode offering infrared therapy without hydrojets.

Available in cream or grey and black, JK Group also offers custom finishes for clients.

spa-kit.net keywords:  
JK Group

PHOTO: J. J. BIRN



An app can adjust the intensity, direction, style and duration of the hydromassage

James Blower

## Laetitia Tetedoux

announces Ocean Secrets to celebrate Thalion's 30th anniversary

After five years of research, Thalion has launched Ocean Secrets, a premium marine skincare line powered by the patented Everlasting Seaweed extract, which promises anti-ageing, healing and cell-regenerating benefits.

The collection, with a refined floral scent devised by a master perfumer, includes a serum, a night moisturiser, rich and light face creams and an eye cream, each accompanied by a self-massage technique accessible via a QR code on the packaging.

"The Everlasting Seaweed, sustainably harvested in Brittany, is infused into every product," says Laetitia



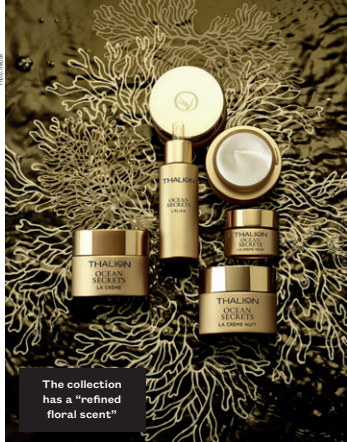
PHOTO: THALION

**Patented Everlasting Seaweed is infused into every product**

Laetitia Tetedoux

Tetedoux, Thalion's director of marketing and communication.

To elevate the line, Thalion has developed the 90-minute Everlasting Youth Sculptor facial, inspired by kobido techniques and featuring four professional products. The five-step ritual combines an exfoliator, massage balm, caviar emulsion and two sheet



The collection has a "refined floral scent"

masks, enhanced by sculpting movements using a sea glass stone, all set to a soothing piano and sea soundscape.

spa-kit.net keyword: Thalion

## CBD-infused formula elevates Halotherapy Solutions' experience, says Steve Spiro

Halotherapy Solutions, a US-based provider of salt therapy equipment, has introduced a CBD-infused halotherapy formula.

CEO Steve Spiro says HaloCBD blends 100 per cent organic, USDA-certified, THC-free CBD granules with pharmaceutical-grade salt to form a crystallised solution.

He says the formula represents the next generation of halotherapy, which he's dubbed ACT (aerobic cannabinoid therapy).

Over the past six to eight months, the company has conducted beta testing at 12 partner locations and says results have exceeded expectations. Both new and regular CBD users reported enhanced benefits, while businesses that incorporated HaloCBD into salt room sessions said they could charge a 30 per cent premium.

This is the next generation of halotherapy, says Spiro

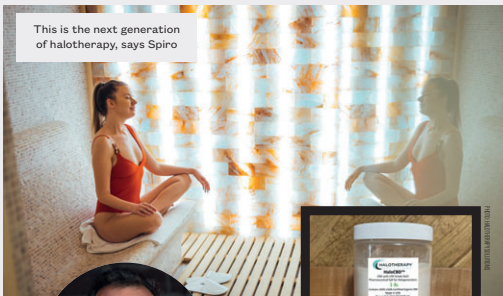


PHOTO: HALOTHERAPY SOLUTIONS



PHOTO: HALOTHERAPY SOLUTIONS

**Businesses can charge a 30 per cent premium for HaloCBD sessions**

Steve Spiro



CBD is mixed with high-grade salt

The company, which co-developed the product, holds the exclusive license to sell the patented HaloCBD compound.

spa-kit.net keywords: Halotherapy Solutions



## Rest and repeat

**Starpool** is drawing on science, innovation and equilibrium to offer the industry's leading recovery solutions

Starpool's professional wellness offering is grounded in more than 50 years of experience in the pursuit of wellbeing through blending scientific innovation and technology. The company's mission is to provide innovative solutions for both mental and physical recovery which underpin performance enhancement and promote a balanced lifestyle.

At the heart of Starpool's philosophy lies the powerful triad of heat, water and rest. This unique combination not only supports mental health and overall wellbeing but also accelerates physical recovery, making it a cornerstone of Starpool's wellness offerings.

### Recovery in focus

In recent years, the understanding that recovery is as vital as physical exertion has reshaped the wellness landscape.

Starpool addresses this need with a comprehensive catalogue of high-end wellness solutions tailored for both professional athletes and individuals seeking an active lifestyle.

The company's new Recovery Class concept is a pioneering format

inspired by collaborations with prestigious international sports teams, including the LA Rams, San Francisco Giants, Cleveland Cavaliers and Atlanta Braves. The innovative approach harnesses the body's natural responses to heat, cold therapy and dry flotation, creating an optimal environment for post-workout recovery, warm-ups and active relaxation during rest days.

Developed by Starpool's Scientific Research Department, Recovery Class enhances muscle recovery and athletic performance, making it ideal for integration into spas, wellness centres, fitness facilities and beyond.

### Recovery in action

Starpool's partnership with Healthfarm by Stilnuovo, a cutting-edge fitness centre in Florence, showcases its versatility and effectiveness. Healthfarm has seamlessly integrated Starpool's formats into its programmes, enhancing both pre-workout activation and post-workout relaxation.

For example, it uses infrared therapy for muscle relaxation

“*Starpool has transformed our vision, integrating a more holistic and scientific approach*” - Francesco Annunziata

complimented by Starpool's Zerobody Dry Float for optimising concentration. In addition, Zerobody Cryo can be used for optimal muscle activation and performance enhancement.

Healthcarefarm can also support individuals with chronic conditions using infrared therapy for muscle activation and Zerobody Dry Float to reduce inflammation.

Francesco Annunziata, founder and CFO of Stilnuovo, said: “Starpool has transformed our vision, integrating a more holistic and scientific approach. Thanks to its innovations, we've redefined our future.”

Starpool prides itself on continuing to trailblaze with its evidence-backed solutions, always offering a complete 350-degree recovery journey.

**More: [www.starpool.com](http://www.starpool.com)**

spa-kit.net keyword:  
Starpool



PHOTO: NADCLINIC

*“We’re not just following the curve of scientific progress – we’re setting it*

Iain de Havilland



The kit includes a syringe and NAD+ solution for self administration

## NADclinic’s Iain de Havilland introduces at-home IV infusions

The potential reach of IV therapy has increased exponentially with the launch of NADclinic’s at-home kit.

“We’re not just following the curve of scientific progress – we’re setting it,” says founder Iain de Havilland.

The company specialises in infusions of nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD+), the molecule that supports biological processes such as ageing and immunity.

NADclinic claims that maintaining NAD levels aids skin and hair health, mental and physical performance, longevity, sleep and weight loss.

IV therapy is typically administered in settings overseen by doctors in spas, social wellness clubs and longevity centres globally. The services are growing increasingly popular and NADclinic already has a presence in 40 countries.

But with the arrival of NADSQ, products can now be up-sold for at-home use. The kit includes a syringe and NAD+ solution – enough for 20 x subcutaneous shots of 50mg or 100mg.

To find out more about IV therapy, visit [www.spabusiness.com/IV](http://www.spabusiness.com/IV)

spa-kit.net keyword:  
NADclinic

## Lyma’s Lucy Goff on new clinic-grade cold near-infrared device and facial

A hand-held near-infrared laser device designed to enable therapists to transform the skin and its underlying structure has been unveiled by Lyma. The Laser Pro can sculpt and lift areas such as the cheekbones, jawline, upper arms and stomach.

Partnering with spas such as Four Seasons Athens and Surrene, UK, it’s launched with a 75-minute facial developed by expert trainer Christina Salcedas and an array of renowned facialists. It can also be used in existing treatments.

A professional variant of its home-beauty wand, Lyma Laser Pro features three (not one) 500mW lasers and



PHOTO: LYMA

*“It represents a new frontier for in-clinic treatments*

Lucy Goff

has a bigger treatment area (20cm2 compared to 8.5cm2) to rebuild muscle tissue.

While heat from other cosmetic lasers can damage skin cells, Lyma says it uses a cold – yet still powerful – near-infrared light. Low-level laser therapy, as it’s known, was originally developed to heal injuries in the 1960s.

Expert trainer Christina Salcedas has created a facial for the launch



PHOTO: LYMA

Founder Lucy Goff says “it represents a new frontier for in-clinic treatments”.

spa-kit.net keyword:  
Lyma

## PROMOTION



The Oteire model allows for multi-layered treatment experiences

### lyashi Dôme spotlights Oteire, the next-generation infratherapy solution

As the wellness sector continues to rapidly evolve, spas must continue to innovate to stay competitive and attract returning clients. Modern consumers demand solutions that blend cutting-edge technology with proven results, and lyashi Dôme is rising to the challenge by redefining industry standards.

Rooted in Japanese tradition, lyashi Dôme's infratherapy technology has conquered minds by offering a unique experience of detoxification, slimming and relaxation since 2004.

Now, the sauna specialist has raised the bar and unveiled the lyashi Dôme Oteire, an advanced infratherapy device designed to elevate traditional manual treatments.

By integrating gentle infratherapy with hands-on protocols for the face, arms and hands, the Oteire experience creates a unique synergy that surpasses conventional beauty practices. This innovation allows wellness practitioners, therapists and beauticians to expand their service offerings while maintaining their practical expertise, transforming routine sessions into complete, multi-sensory experiences.

The Oteire marks a significant step forward for spas, wellness facilities and beauty salons aiming to enhance their professionalism and move into the premium market. Its advanced technology enables salons to deliver



The technology can be paired with treatments for the face, arms and hands

highly personalised treatments while ensuring long-term profitability, thanks to its sustainable design.

"The relationship between wellness and technology is evolving and practitioners must adapt to meet the demands of a more discerning clientele," says Shogoro Uemura, founder of lyashi Dôme. "Our mission is to support beauticians in this new era, where technology enhances manual care to deliver an unparalleled well-being experience."

With Oteire, spas and beauty salons are entering a new chapter where technological innovation meets human expertise, setting a new benchmark for the future of beauty and wellness. ●

More: [www.iyashidome.com](http://www.iyashidome.com)



● *The relationship between wellness and technology is evolving and practitioners must adapt*  
Shogoro Uemura

spa-kit.net keyword:  
lyashi Dôme

FIRST PERSON

# Sparkling water



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

*Mary Bemis immerses herself in a special cleansing ritual at the newly revamped Sacred River Spa in Bali*



A blissful relaxation pavilion set in a lily pond at the new Sacred River Spa

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The 150-minute Tirta  
Ening ceremony begins  
with sipping blessed water



“I had a dream I was flying with someone and guiding them to the river for physical and spiritual cleansing. We arrived at the Ayung River, where I bathed them, making them shine,” recalls Luisa Anderson, regional director of spa at Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, Asia Pacific. This ethereal depiction perfectly symbolises the vision behind the newly conceptualised Sacred River Spa.

Anderson and I sit in the serene atmosphere of the redesigned facility at Four Seasons Resort Bali at Sayan. Nestled near Ubud, on the banks of the Ayung River – the longest, widest and most revered waterway in Bali – this spectacular resort is ensconced in a vibrant rainforest. It’s the grand reopening day of this tranquil space and I’m honoured to be the first guest to experience Tirta Ening – a 150-minute water ceremony that translates as ‘sparkling water’. This exceptional IDR4,5 million (US\$286, €264, £221) ritual pays tribute to the healing powers of Bali’s sacred water.

## TRULY MAGICAL

“I knew we had to create a treatment that made water a central element,” Anderson explains. While developing the spa’s concept, she delved into the country’s cultural uses of water. Three aspects inspired her: the taste of water from the local Tirta Empul temple that’s infused with Balinese healing plants such as cananga, chempaka and pandan; a traditional cleansing ritual known as melukat, where holy water is poured over the individual for spiritual purification; and the subak system, Bali’s unique irrigation method for rice fields.

These influences are elegantly integrated into Tirta Ening, which begins with setting an intention through the resonant tones of a crystal singing bowl and sipping blessed water infused with local botanicals and crystals. This is accompanied by the gentle sound of flowing water – part of a specially composed music track which plays throughout.

“Water is said to hold the memory of the Divine,” Anderson notes. The journey continues with a gentle steam followed by a scrub and one of the most invigorating Vichy experiences I’ve

Bemis says the Vichy experience was one of the best she's ever had



► had to date – courtesy of Lemi. It's an exhilarating nod to melukat and Bali's tropical rains.

The massage that follows is no less extraordinary. Conducted on a special Lemi Dream Table equipped with a warm water mattress, it uses fluid lomi lomi techniques, emphasising the body's connection to water. "The flow and long strokes remind the body of its watery essence," Anderson explains, while ensuring the muscles receive deeper attention. The massage features Water Dreams, a locally sourced essential oil by Bali Radiance, which blends ylang ylang, vanilla, lavender and patchouli.

The ceremony closes with a crystal sound bath and a final sip of blessed water.

This was an extraordinary experience where every movement, every delicate touch, seemed infused with reverence. It was truly magical and I'm left feeling invigorated and renewed with a lightness of being that's hard to come by.

#### **POWERFUL 'UNSEEN' ENERGY**

Four Seasons Resort Bali at Sayan celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2023 and was overdue for a spa upgrade. The original spa was situated on the lower level of the main building and consisted of three rooms. Treatments, says Anderson, always nodded to Balinese traditions with classics such

“

*Every movement,  
every delicate touch,  
seemed infused  
with reverence*

as lulur and boreh scrubs. In 2014, she introduced

Chakra Ceremonies and "cleaned up" the menu. "We always knew a major refurbishment was essential," Anderson tells me. "In Asia, a treatment room without natural light or vegetation wasn't going to cut it." The thoughtfully redesigned spa complex spans 4,970sq m and was crafted by Australian architects, The Fulcrum Agency; Japanese interior designers, Design Studio SPIN; and Indonesian landscape consultants Bukit Kembar Permai. Every centimeter – indoor and out – is meticulously designed to harmonise the body and mind with the rhythms of nature. ►

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THE SPA BUSINESS



PHOTO BY GUY AROZ/GETTY IMAGES

Luisa Anderson, Four Seasons' regional spa director, created the exceptional concept



The spa covers nearly 5,000sq m and has just reopened after a complete overhaul

PHOTO BY GUY AROZ/GETTY IMAGES

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## FIRST PERSON: SACRED RIVER SPA

- ▶ There are seven stunning Spa Villas that are named after sacred Balinese Elements. Nestled beneath the jungle canopy, these offer a seamless blend of natural beauty and modern design. Each villa is equipped with a humongous bathtub hand carved from Indonesian stone. Other noteworthy spaces include Dharma Satya, a lovely yoga pavilion that sits adjacent to the river and a blissful relaxation pavilion set in a lily pond.

The new spa draws inspiration from the ancient Balinese philosophy of *niskala* (unseen energy), tapping into practices such as biogeometric design for example. "Few places in Bali have 'unseen' energies as powerful as those in the Ayung River basin," Anderson says, adding that it's been a privilege to connect with these energies throughout the spa's relaunch.

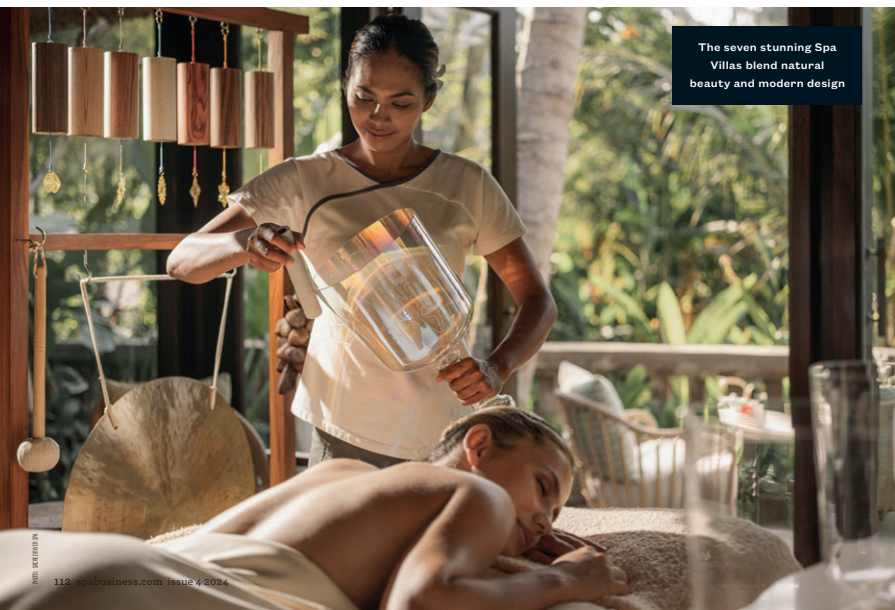
Indeed, being situated along the revered river means the spa is perfectly positioned to connect guests to the natural flow of the landscape. In an age where nearly every destination is striving to innovate with water therapies, Sacred River Spa shines as a model of thoughtful, intentional design. It's set to become a true-blue destination spa grounded in authenticity and my time there left a lasting impression. ●



Bemis was the very first guest to try the new water ritual

“

*Few places in Bali have unseen energies as powerful as here*



The seven stunning Spa Villas blend natural beauty and modern design

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# At your service

We reveal some of the latest, most thought-provoking spa and wellness treatments, programmes and experiences from around the world

📍 Evian Spa, Hôtel Royal, Evian-les-Bains, France

🕒 3 hours

💰 €180 (US\$195, £150)



Yog'apnee combines  
yoga and a freediving  
training session



Tailored aqua  
workouts are  
available in Tokyo

Evian Spa Tokyo, Japan

120 or 150 minutes

JPY39,200 (US\$262, €241, £201)  
or JPY47,200 (US\$316, €291, £242)

## Evian Spas get creative with water experiences

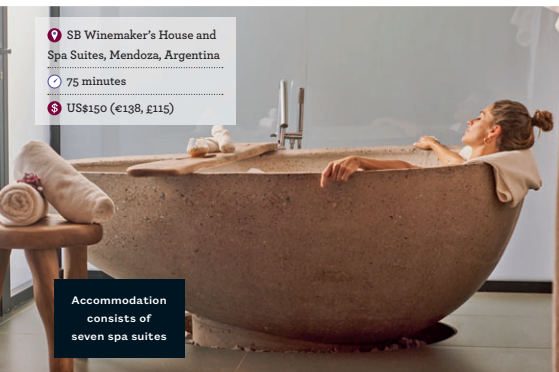
Evian Spa, the wellbeing concept inspired by the mineral water brand and developed by Patrick Saussay of GPSA Consulting, is making a splash with some interesting aqua-based experiences.

In Evian-les-Bains, France, the new Evian Spa at Hôtel Royal, is offering yog'apnee – which combines an hour of yoga with a 90-minute freediving training session in either Lake Geneva or the heated pool onsite. The experience invites guests “to explore new sensations while working on breath control, to achieve a deep and long-lasting feeling of calmness”.

At its outpost in Tokyo, Japan, Evian Spa is taking water workouts further by introducing a tailored pool movement and massage package.

Aqua Move begins with a trainer briefing and a 10-minute warm-up poolside. Each in-water session can be customised to the desired level of fitness. It can include light cardio paired with gentle stretching to promote mobility or intense fat-burning exercises for those seeking a more vigorous workout.

The experience concludes with a brief hot tub soak before either a 60- or 90-minute massage.



📍 SB Winemaker's House and Spa Suites, Mendoza, Argentina

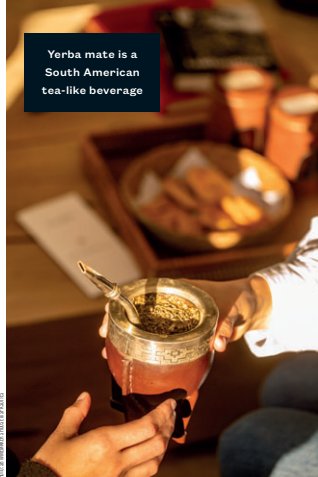
🕒 75 minutes

💰 US\$150 (€138, £115)

Accommodation consists of seven spa suites

PHOTO: GUY LAWRENCE/GETTY IMAGES

Yerba mate is a South American tea-like beverage

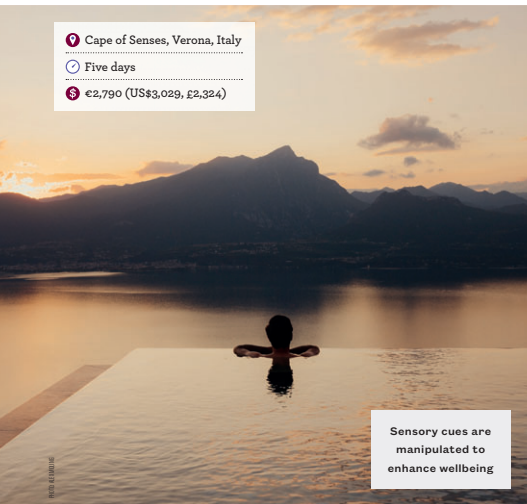


## Going tea total at Argentine wine spa

A boutique wine and wellness hotel in the heart of Argentine wine country has introduced the Yerba Mate treatment derived from the iconic South American antioxidant-rich tea-like beverage.

The energising treatment takes place in one of seven spa suites at SB Winemaker's House in Mendoza – each complete with a steamroom, experience shower, massage table and access to a wellness butler.

It includes a yerba mate exfoliation, a warm shower, a green yerba mate herbal body mask and a soft vegetal fibre body wrap. Afterwards, guests can enjoy a traditional yerba mate service in their suite and soak in a prepared bath.



📍 Cape of Senses, Verona, Italy

🕒 Five days

💰 €2,790 (US\$3,029, £2,324)

Sensory cues are manipulated to enhance wellbeing

## Sense hacking retreat coming to Lake Garda

A retreat has launched in Lake Garda, Italy, to help guests discover the power of their senses and use this to reduce stress and enhance overall wellbeing.

Led by life coach and counsellor Constanze Spagnolli, the programme draws on the work of 'sense hacking' psychologist Charles Spence, who *Spa Business* first interviewed in 2006.

The practice involves manipulating sensory inputs – such as sound or scent – to influence how we perceive and interact with our environment. By carefully adjusting these sensory cues, Spence says it's possible to enhance experiences, boost mood and improve mental and physical health.

Each day will include the exploration of a different sense, immersive experiences, mindfulness coaching, yoga and meditation, spa treatments and nourishing meals.

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📍 Thompson Spa, Thomson  
Houston Hotel, Texas, US

🕒 3 hours

💰 US\$1,500 (€1,381, £1,151)

## Texan spa offers six-hand ritual

The Thompson Spa in Houston, in the US, has introduced a six-hand treatment in which three skin and body specialists conduct a massage, body ritual and facial over 3 hours.

The Trio Luxe begins with an exfoliation and massage with synchronised movements, aromatherapy and sound therapy. It then transitions to a bespoke facial, which includes the application of skincare masks and face massage techniques – namely cupping and gua sha – to leave the face, neck and décolleté firm, bright and nourished. A deep tissue enhancement can be added on for US\$30 (€28, £23) more.

Three therapists  
work on the body and  
face at the same time



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## Ear acupuncture touted as 'holistic Ozempic alternative'

UK-based spa chain Champneys has introduced an ear acupuncture ritual designed to aid weight management. Developed by skincare specialist Jennifer Young, the treatment is being billed as a natural alternative to weight loss drug, Ozempic, targeting hormonal imbalances related to weight issues.

The experience focuses on 12 acupuncture points linked to hunger, metabolism and pleasure hormones.

The session includes a consultation, followed by needle placement and a 45-minute lower leg massage focused on areas associated with the stomach and spleen meridians in traditional Chinese medicine - believed to aid digestion and overall wellbeing. Ear seeds are applied post-treatment to maintain pressure on the points for three days.

PHOTO: WALTER BAKER



It focuses on 12 energy points linked to hunger and metabolism



PHOTO: JAMES CHEN

Jennifer Young

📍 Champneys day spas, multiple UK locations

🕒 50 minutes

💰 £96 (US\$125, €115)

## Mayan traditions inspire immersive healing in Mexico

A fresh spa menu at Kempinski's Kayantá Spa in Cancún, Mexico, has been created to showcase the depth and richness of Mayan healing therapies.

It comprises four immersive journeys that include elements such as a spiritual cleansing and scrubs using local medicinal herbs.

The Sac-Nicté Journey, celebrating the sacred white Sac-Nicté flower, for example, consists of a full-body exfoliation that prepares the skin for a Yucatan floral bath infused with salts from the mines of Las Coloradas. The journey is rounded out with a back and body massage and moisturising body wrap. ●

Local healing herbs and flowers are used in treatments



📍 Kempinski Hotel Cancún, Cancún, Mexico

🕒 80 minutes

💰 MXN4,600 (US\$233, €214, £178)

PHOTO: JAMES CHEN

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# AGE-APPROPRIATE

Research shows society needs to update its perception of older people

**R**etirees of today are living more active, healthy and dynamic lifestyles than ever before and are switched on culturally and technologically, yet many feel excluded.

*The New Ageing Index 2024* – a survey of 1,000 people of all ages and classes by UK care company Home Instead – found that 35 per cent of respondents believe that being old is like being cancelled. This

rises to 43 per cent of women over 75 and frequently leads to a sense of isolation and loneliness.

Despite being the fastest-growing cohort in society, 60 per cent of older people feel ignored by fashion brands, while 44 per cent said they'd love to wear more stylish clothes if they were marketed to them. They also feel culturally excluded, with more than half feeling that TV, cinema and music are rarely, if ever, aimed at them.

## LUST FOR LIFE

The report showed that many older people are less anxious about ageing and open-minded about how to remain youthful. Eighty-nine per cent of those over 75 believe staying active is important, but 58 per cent feel they're not encouraged to play sport. Sixty-six per cent believe diet and exercise will slow ageing, while 47 per cent are open to taking medication.

This should be a wake-up call for businesses to provide better and more innovative services and opportunities for older consumers

The lust for life continues as 42 per cent of the over-75s said they'd be happy to start dating if they found themselves alone and 61 per cent said they want to stay sexually active.

## WAKE-UP CALL

Martin Jones, Home Instead CEO, says: "The image we may have of retirees whose horizons have shrunk to just a bit of daytime TV and a cup of tea simply doesn't stand up to scrutiny. We urgently need to challenge how older people are both perceived and treated.

"It should be a wake-up call for businesses to provide better and more innovative services and opportunities for older consumers and older employees – and those that don't heed it are missing out on potentially enormous revenue streams." ●

Read more: [www.spabusiness.com/ageindex24](http://www.spabusiness.com/ageindex24)



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