

The Future of Spas

How will the spa experience change in a post-Covid world?

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As the world cautiously begins to reopen following the first wave of the pandemic, the wellness industry is shaping up as the second frontline in the fight against the virus; with spas both supporting guests keen to reset after the trauma of lockdown as well as providing strategies to future-proof their health in the face of predicted further outbreaks. Dealing with disrupted sleep and anxiety top the list of guests' issues but their main concern may cause surprise in some circles. 'They don't really ask about hygiene protocols. They don't ask about face masks. The thing everyone wants to know is will the experience be the same as before?' says Frances Geoghegan, founder and managing director of Healing Holidays. 'Our clients just want spas to go back to "normal". They are desperate for massage. They are not fearful about being touched at all.'

Geoghegan says demand is particularly high for medical resorts such as Villa Stephanie in Germany and Grand Resort Bad Ragaz in Switzerland, despite the latter being subject to quarantine restrictions, as both run highly regarded sleep programmes. Villa Stephanie even has suites where, at the touch of a button, guests can completely disconnect from the room's electrics and wifi to aid sleep.

Those suffering from anxiety are generally opting for more nurturing, holistic solutions. Treatments such as Trauma Touch Skill with master therapist Stefano Battaglia at Preidlhof in South Tyrol are proving popular as are the Classical Chinese Medicine

therapies of acupuncture and moxibustion at Lefay Resort & Spa on Lake Garda. 'Although they are not nervous about contracting the virus at spas,' adds Geoghegan, 'they are looking for spas set in rural locations, which have a wide range of outdoor activities such as Schloss Elmau in the Bavarian Alps.'

There is also a noticeable ambition to reconnect emotionally on various levels, according to Nicola Baillie, Head of Education at natural skincare brand Espa. 'People are looking for ways to have a greater sense of connection and compassion - to themselves, to others and to the natural world,' she says. Spa-goers are particularly embracing elevated pampering treatments that help bring balance and inner peace. Espa has found its Awakening Face Experience, which includes breath work and a soothing scalp massage as well as the more usual exfoliation and cleansing techniques, and its Strength and Resilience Massage, which features aromatherapeutic oils and yogic stretches, and helps bolster the immune system are in great demand.

Many spas put their free time during lockdown to good use developing packages designed to support the immune system. One of the best has been devised by Palace Merano in the Italian Dolomites, which fuses scientific and complementary approaches. 'In Italy, we have seen how ozone therapy has helped hospital patients recover from Covid 19,' says Dr Max Mayrhofer, healthcare director. 'Ozone powerfully stimulates the immune system so we will offer this treatment along with IV infusions of vitamin C and glutathione but moxibustion, acupressure massage and reflexology are also important ways to boost immunity.' Guests are also eagerly embracing the spa's advice to tackle sleep issues through yoga and energy work.

The Foreign Office is currently advising against all non-essential travel to our two favourite wellness destinations, Thailand and India, but their leading spas remain positive and are looking to the future. The grande dame of the healing world, Chiva Som in Hua Hin is running complimentary online wellness classes and talks until the end of October to keep its legion of loyal fans engaged. These sessions, which cover everything from pilates to gut health, have proved a resounding success. Acknowledging the general trend to travel less frequently but for longer periods, Kamalaya on Koh Samui is offering 40% discounts on retreats of 21 nights or more booked by October 31 for travel by December 2021. While in India, Vana plans to reopen on October 5 and is responding to the global desire for less consumerism by offering a scaled-back, more affordable basic retreat that focuses on ayurveda and yoga. Owner Veer Singh says, 'I wish to take the experience of Vana closer to that of a refuge, an ashram, a monastery, a sanctuary. There is enough luxury, pampering, clutter and noise in the world. Vana should be life changing and nothing else.'