

Trends That Will Help Keep Hotel Spas Attracting Customers

The spa industry has become a cornerstone of the wider hospitality and tourism sectors, and new data from Smith Travel Research (STR) helps explain why. The research firm recently revealed that luxury hotel spas proved significantly more resilient than their 'room' equivalents in a tough 2009: while the Average Daily Rate for rooms fell 16% and occupancy declined 9% – the average spa treatment rate dipped a more modest 4%, and Treatment Room Utilization actually grew 3.5%.

Smith Travel argues that luxury hotel spas' ongoing, comparative strength may mean increased attention from management going forward. After all, as Jan Freitag, STR's vice president, put it, "a hotel room can only be sold once per night, while a spa treatment room can be sold multiple times a day." (And note: some hotel room rates today are lower than the rate for an hourly treatment in their spa!)

A host of forces are keeping the hotel spa a draw. For one, they're increasingly marketing and catering to local clientele to augment revenue – and, according to SpaFinder, this trend will only grow as hotel spas increasingly roll out membership programs for local/traveling clientele to regularly use their fitness facilities, attend classes and hit their spa for weekly/monthly facials and massage.



In addition, the industry has made other smart moves, including re-positioning themselves away from 'mere pampering' toward wellness and health – knowing full well that people pay more to satisfy a 'need' than a 'want.'

But perhaps the key force that has ensured hotel spas keep attracting customers is their constant innovation...with many new approaches and offerings underway in 2010...

A Look at Ten Hot Hotel Spa Trends:

1) Celebrating Celebration

In a recent SpaFinder survey, travel agents reported the #1 spa travel trend was people increasingly hitting hotel/resort spas for special occasions like the big '0s', anniversaries, weddings, etc. And after the severe downturn in hotels' corporate/meetings business, this is a welcome new market. The group

‘staycation’ or ‘spacation’ – families and friends celebrating together at a spa hotel – is a growing reality.

2) Year of the Hammam

With spa-goers increasingly seeking authenticity, tradition, and that magical spa experience that also delivers results, the Middle Eastern hammam represents one of the hottest trends for 2010, albeit with a distinctly modern expression. This year people who have never heard the term will learn the meaning, and those familiar with it will discover new places, including resort hotels, to experience it.

3) Not “Going to,” But “Belonging to” a Spa

Hotel spas are being creatively re-imagined as places of “belonging” – not only through the big rise in membership programs, but also in the diverse ways spas are being recast as social/communal hubs. After all, the hotel spa can trump the local day spa in terms of amenities (think steam, sauna, pools, fitness, food service), and are becoming very attractive places for local well-heeled clientele to frequent regularly.



4) The Price Is (Still) Right

Hotels as well as spas responded to the global recession with discounts, value-adds, and a near-universal focus on deals, deals, and more deals. That will continue across 2010, but with a less intense focus on straight discounts, and a growth in more unique incentives. Increasingly, the spa itself will be the hotel incentive, with complimentary spa services with room bookings. And look for very new loyalty programs to keep the local clientele fully engaged as well.

5) Wellness Tourism

We're very familiar with people seeking spas for wellness. And medical tourism – crossing borders for medical procedures (often plastic surgery, dentistry, knee replacements, etc.) – is on the rise. Well, make room for “wellness tourism,” a new term describing travel across borders for preventive services, diagnostics, and spa and well-being vacations at global hotels.

6) The Hybrid Spa

In general, spas worldwide are incorporating far more fitness, fitness centers are incorporating more spa, hospitals are incorporating spa elements, and spas are bringing in more medical specialists. The era of the integrated hotel-resort-spa-fitness-wellness-beauty center is on the serious upswing. More reasons for hotel guests to venture out of their room to try this hybrid spa, and for local clientele to visit.

7) The New “P” Word

With a healthcare crisis besetting many nations, prevention is poised to be the new “it” word of the global spa industry. But rather than replacing established industry concepts like ‘wellness’ and the old ‘P’ word, pampering, it’s a sharp (and smart) refocusing of the conversation. Pampering, after all, speaks to the stress–reduction, relaxation goal of most spa–goers – and that is itself ‘prevention’.

8) The Online Hotel Spa

2010 will prove a watershed year for the spa industry’s virtual presence. Consumers are online in droves searching for spas, checking online reviews, booking treatments, printing out instant gift certificates, and embracing social networking sites. They can even check their iPhone to pinpoint day/hotel spas nearby thanks to a new SpaFinder App – or game while they exercise in the resort’s fitness center. Get ready for spas to use yield management software that, much like the airlines or hotels themselves, enables price variation, so they can offer a less expensive massage on weekday mornings, compared to Saturday afternoons.

9) Stillness

The modern human experience involves an unprecedented amount of sensory overload, noise, and media stimulation: we’re wired to the gills, bombarded in front of TV/computer screens, texting, tweeting, clattering away – now even on airplanes. But the spa is one of the last, remaining sanctuaries of silence and serenity – so look for hotel spas to put a new emphasis on experiences that focus on stillness, slowness, and silence.

10) Evidence, Science, and Standards

With our worldwide recession, consumers are increasingly insisting on no–gimmick treatments with real, measurable benefits. This is quickening a rising trend: the demand at the hotel spa for evidence–based therapies and greater transparency to help spa–goers separate the wheat from the chaff. Facts, evidence, and science behind spa offerings are moving front and center, at the cost of a few diamond facials...



Health & Wellness Tourism
(Retail Value RSP, US\$ bn)

FORECAST

	2009	2010	2012	2014
World	64.0	65.9	70.2	76.7
Asia Pacific	29.3	30.1	32.3	35.9
Australasia	1.7	1.9	2.0	2.2
Eastern Europe	2.8	2.7	2.9	3.2
Latin America	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.5
Middle East and Africa	4.5	4.7	5.1	5.7
North America	5.1	5.0	5.5	6.1
Western Europe	17.6	18.2	19.1	20.1

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Date: 2010-04-26

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-how-keep-hotel-spas-attract-customers-article1189>