



2014 GLOBAL SPA & WELLNESS SUMMIT REVIEW



Memo ON A SUMMIT

The eighth **Global Spa & Wellness Summit** (GSWS) in Marrakech brought Africa, architecture, investment and global data to the industry's attention. Professional Spa & Wellness gives you highlights from the event

WORDS NORA ELIAS



Terry Stevens, PhD



Notes on the GSWS

Spotlight on Africa

Africa was in the limelight at this year's summit. The opening keynote speaker was Senegalese entrepreneur Magatte Wade, founder of skincare brand Tiossan, who urged the industry to recognise the potential of the continent's resources and heritage, and not try to impose western or Asian spa ideologies on Africa. "Don't come to Africa and try to open another Four Seasons just the way you know it, or try to push African wellness traditions aside and give them Ayurvedic or Swedish massages," she said. Dzigbordi K Dosoom, founder of Ghanaian spa and lifestyle business Allure Africa, highlighted the importance of looking at Africa as a continent of individual nations, and not as one amorphous mass. "If you want to know what's going on in Africa, ask specific questions about the different countries," she said. The panel also encouraged the audience to see beyond negative preconceptions about Africa, to the innovation demonstrated by its population, including those working in the spa and wellness sectors. "We should not look at Africa in that broad, negative way," Dosoom said. "Yes, there is danger in Africa, but there is danger everywhere."

An eye on architecture

Architecture and its impact on spa and wellness was also high on the agenda. Marrakech-based artist and sculptor Yahya Rouach spoke on the key role of light in spa architecture. "Light is very, very important, it goes straight to our souls, so imagine how key it is in a spa, where you're striving to create a beautiful and therapeutic environment," he said. "It's not

just about the facilities you provide for body and mind, it's about the entire environment you create." Rouach also emphasised the importance of innovation and creativity and the need to "not be afraid to take risks, afraid of trying new things, afraid of failure. Don't just do what's always been done. If you do, you're not moving forward." Didier Lefort, principal of Didier Lefort architects, and Veronica Schreibeis Smith, principal of Vera Iconica Architecture, discussed the significance of respecting the landscape in which you build, and of bringing it into the spa. Schreibeis Smith commented: "I always look at nature and think, who am I to touch this and believe that I can make it better?" Bob Henry, principal of Robert D Henry architects, drew attention to how an inspirational spa lounge can help stressed city-based clients transition into the spa environment. "The spa lounge should be a point of inspiration and contemplation, so guests can begin to de-stress and bring their shoulders down," he said. Henry also advised spas to make their retail area as inviting as possible. "You have to make retail extremely accessible and present it as a lifestyle choice. Make the products something people want to touch," he said.

The future is millennial

The millennial generation (loosely defined as those born between 1980 and 2000) are the spa-goers of the future and, the summit concluded, the sooner you figure out how to tap into this market, the better. Millennial Alexis Jones, founder of website I Am That Girl, which promotes physical and emotional wellbeing in girls, and one of the summit hosts, explained

that her generation is price conscious, makes purchasing decisions based on online research and requires you to be tech-savvy to appeal to them. Suzanne Duckett, editor of the Tatler Spa Guide and moderator of the media panel on how to get younger consumers' attention, pointed to the importance of striking the right tone in your social media communication with millennials. "If you engage with them in the right way, you'll essentially have them doing your [PR] job for you," she said. The panel also commented that millennials are a generation accustomed to being recognised and rewarded for their achievements and advised spas to take this into account when targeting them as customers. "This is a generation that loves rewards, so reward them, but do it in a way that makes them interact with you," Duckett said.

Wellness in
the urban
landscape

The rapid and ongoing global urbanisation and the way in which this affects wellness now and in the future was the topic of much conversation at the GSWS. Keynote speaker and economist Dr Kjell Nordström outlined a trend that in 30 years' time will see 80% of the world's population living in cities, commenting that we "are at the beginning of the fastest urbanisation in human history". Urban environments are increasingly composed of single households and Nordström underscored a development in which the world's population once died primarily from poverty, before health conditions related to overconsumption became an increasingly common cause of illness and death. Now, he said, we are "beginning to die from loneliness, because we're not built for it". Professor Terry Stevens, managing director

of leisure and tourism consultancy Stevens & Associates, told the audience that with seven billion people set to live in cities by 2050, "we need to put the citizen at the heart of city planning". With the daily stresses that accompany modern city life and a potential loneliness epidemic brewing, the wellness aspect of the industry's role and the part the sector can play in offering solutions for both physical and mental wellbeing is set to become more important than ever.

Delivering
data

New research from GSWS research partner SRI International revealed that the spa and wellness sector is now a US\$3.4 trillion (£2.1tr) global industry, with 105,591 spas around the world. Growth is led by emerging markets. The sector has expanded by 186% in Africa since SRI's previous report on the industry economy in 2008, by 134% in the Middle East and North Africa and by 86% in Latin America and the Caribbean. This compares to a growth of 65% in the Asia Pacific region, 62% in Europe and 35% in North America. However, Europe continues to lead on revenue generation, representing US\$29.8bn (£18.3bn) of global revenue, with the Asia Pacific region following on US\$18.8bn (£11.6bn), North and South America on US\$18.3bn (£11.3bn), Latin America and the Caribbean on US\$4.7bn (£2.9bn), the Middle East and North Africa on US\$1.7bn (£1bn) and Africa on US\$800million (\$493m).

Senior SRI consultants Katherine Johnston and Ophelia Yeung explained that the rapid expansion of the spa and wellness industry is largely driven by the worldwide growth of a middle class with spare cash to spend, and the inclination to spend it on wellness. Consumers around the world are now increasingly investing in preventative

wellness, with the industry attracting a greater number of clients as a result of the failure of conventional medicine in this area. Other trends highlighted by SRI included the fact that spa treatments are increasingly no longer viewed as a luxury by the general public and that the growing number of people now visiting spas has resulted in a savvier and more discerning clientele. Speaking on the future of the industry, Johnston said: "This summit is the place where you can shape what kind of growth will happen in the industry. Think about how you grow sustainably, in a way that creates more jobs." SRI also presented an updated report on the global wellness tourism economy, now a US\$494bn (\$304bn) global industry, and the first summit report on the thermal and mineral springs sector – valued at US\$50bn (\$31bn).

Industry investment

Like any industry, spa and wellness relies on continued investment to flourish. The summit session on this topic was hosted by Espa founder Sue Harmsworth, with a panel that included Neil Jacobs, chief executive of Six Senses Hotels Resorts and Spas, Richard Weissmann, partner at KSL Capital Partners and Omer Isvan, president of the Servotel Corporation. The panel agreed on seeing a growing demand for spas in residential complexes, recommending membership as a way for such businesses to drive revenue. Hoteliers' frequent lack of interest in and failure to understand spa was stressed as one of the primary problems for the hotel spa sector. Isvan underlined the importance of not

merely viewing the spa as an amenity to be included for marketing purposes, as he commented that many property developers do. "The spa also has to be a business in its own right," he said.

Educating the industry

Education remains high on the industry agenda and this year's GSWS served as the launchpad for a mentorship pilot programme. Inspired by the 2012 Spa Management Workforce & Education report from SRI International and discussions at last year's summit, the first three-month pilot will launch in January next year, with a second to commence in April. The programme will be overseen by the Global Spa Education Initiative task force, founded after the 2013 summit. The task force's members include Anna Bjurstam, managing director of spa consultancy Raison d'Etre and vice president of spa and wellness at Six Senses Hotels Resorts and Spas, and Jean-Guy de Gabriac, owner of spa consultancy Tip Touch International.

The programme will see senior spa industry professionals from around the world take on two mentees each, with the aim of encouraging ambition, and furthering the progression of young therapists and other industry staff to management level.

The location of next year's event was announced on the final day of the summit. To be held in Mexico City, the ninth annual GSWS will no doubt feature an agenda as diverse and interesting as the Morocco summit. ☺

For more from the 2014 Global Spa & Wellness Summit, see:
www.globalspaandwellnesssummit.org