

New Worldwide Spa Trends

The number of spas is increasing, but they are all so different from the ones in the past. In the United States, the largest expansion has been in the day spa category. Former beauty salons have added massage rooms, hydrotherapy, body treatment rooms, wet rooms and so on. As they increased the number of services they offered their

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clients, they were able to increase their client base, mainly from a local clientele

that went to destination or resort spas and were looking for similar treatments close to home.

At first the treatments offered were deep tissue and Swedish massages; European facials, cleansing masks and light facial massages. Even if those are still in favor in some areas of the country, there is a new awakening to more sophisticated treatments.

Asian treatments are now all the rage at most spas, including Thai, Ayurvedic and Chinese massages, Lulur and Lomilomi treatments, baths with floral extracts, Moroccan hammam Rasul envelopments and exfoliation. The facial departments now also offer microdermabrasion, lymphatic drainage, chromolifts and sometimes permanent makeup.

With great interest shown in the West for feng shui, decorators are going more toward Zen-like designs and getting away from the past Roman and Grecian themes. In Asia, they call day spas "Esthe studios," which feature a very strong influence of anything French. Asian spas capitalize on their attraction to European styles and fashion in the same way Asian influences are more and more prominent in spas in the West.

For a long time now, European destination spas have added a medicinal aspect. Spas are often run by medical doctors, and many on staff have a medical background. It is not unusual in a European spa to receive a medical examination before being allowed to have a massage, wrap or time in the sauna — vestiges of times when the state paid for "cures" and treatments. There is a change that began some years ago that tends to get away from that model of operation. Beauty corners were created within the confines of the spa but separated from the supervision of the medical staff. Estheticians were not allowed to give massages; this activity was reserved for physiotherapists with four years of schooling (including one year of medical school) until France passed a new law in July 2001 creating a new category of massages of a non-medical nature that estheticians can give. This legislation has now paved the way for spas to do away with a medical presence.

Hotels and resorts are the first beneficiaries of this shift. European countries put themselves in that box, and as the client's perception of treatments in spas continues changing, the transition is taking place. It is slow

and encounters much opposition from labor unions and the medical field who do not look very favorably to sharing the cake they have enjoyed exclusively until now. The combination of clients' wishes and the willingness of hotels and resorts to offer spa services to their patrons are slowly but surely fueling the spa movement in those countries.

In former European colonies in the Mediterranean basin in Africa, spas were predominantly created on the Thalano-therapy model. Companies specializing in saltwater therapies and installations have brought to these countries the methodology and engineering. It is very lucrative for those selling the equipment but quite costly for the operators. A Thalano therapy spa with 25 or 30 workstations will cost \$1.5 million just in equipment to bring sea water into the spa, filtering it, heating it and then disposing of it. Whereas a spa of the same size can be outfitted for one-third of that price and produce the same — or better — income. That factor will be the key element in the future developments of spas in those parts of the world.

Southeast Asian spas are using local ethnic culture treatments in their spas, much to the delight of their patrons. Exotic treatments using local flora often come from marriage rituals and the local approaches to beauty

and serenity. The foundation of techniques are found in traditional Chinese medicine or Indian Ayurvedic philosophy, the delivery of treatments done with beautiful ceremonies

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that stimulate the spirit and the aesthetic senses. Those lucky enough to have experienced these spas just rave about them. As they return to their homelands, they will be looking to find similar services in their local spas. In Eastern Europe, the shift from medical spas to more beauty and pleasure-oriented spas has just begun but is restricted to the high-end clientele that travels and is very much attracted to all things Western.

Globally, the trends at resort and day spas seem to evolve in a merging curve. Another universal trend will be that of specializations in North and South America. Medical spas related to beauty and esthetics will appear as complementary services to plastic surgery and dermatology.

Detox spas dealing with problems of smoking, overeating, alcohol and pollution will become more and more popular. Family spas, where children will partake in therapies and treatments along with their parents, will also be on the rise along with spas for senior citizens and stress relief clinics. (See more information on the rise in family spa packages in this issue's Voices From ISPA, starting on page 12.)

Under various forms, the spa movement will continue for years to come for the benefit and pleasure of their patrons. ■