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A bright future

REPORT BY SARAH TODD

European Spa reports from the ninth Forum HOTel&SPA event in Paris

Returning to the Four Seasons Hotel George V, Paris, on June 2, the ninth annual Forum HOTel&SPA featured a packed day of networking and conferencing for more than 100 delegates from countries including the UK, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Thailand, Turkey, France and Belgium. Organised by the VK-Organisation, the one-day event's central theme of 'Looking to the Future' saw speakers deliver high-level presentations on a wide range of spa and wellness-related topics.

First to the stage was Anna Bjurstam, vice-president of spa and wellness for Six Senses, who revealed how the brand was aiming to elevate the spa experience through a combination of scientific research and ancient wisdom as epitomised in the personalised Integrated Wellness programmes that are soon to be rolled out across its portfolio of properties.

Bjurstam said there was still a lack of true personalisation in even the very best spas and that a systemised approach was needed, as too many decisions were overly dependent on individual experts. With Six Senses aligning its approach across its entire offering, she believed it would "take wellness to the next level and continue to do so".

An example of this was given as the groups trial of the Fusionetics Performance Healthcare System to help monitor and analyse guests' movement and fitness. Bjurstam said it had a 95% accuracy rate and chimed with Six Senses core philosophies as it was "preventative but with a wellness perspective".

She added that the concept was also being extended into bedrooms with plans for a 'Sleep by Six Senses' programme to debut in late 2016. Guests will be asked at the beginning of their stay whether they would like their sleep experience personalised, with a team ready to create the ultimate sleeping environment courtesy of tools such as dehumidifiers and moisture-wicking sheets.

A new wave of thalasso

Jean-Jacques Gauthier, director of Amphorm Consulting, followed Bjurstam with a fascinating presentation on the new perspectives of thalassotherapy.

While France, with more than 50 centres, has long been held as the bastion of both traditional and modern thalassotherapy, Gauthier pointed out that recently countries such as Tunisia, Morocco, Greece, Italy and Spain have begun to make in-roads into this enduring market.

Ingrid Breyer, CEO of Thalasso & Spa Consulting, followed Gauthier's session with a thorough examination of present and future thalassotherapy trends in Germany, whose first 'seawater therapy' centre opened in 1793.

Breyer detailed how the country's 2,500km of coast is home to many thalasso centres, while the whole area of Lower Saxony has been certified as a thalasso region. She added that German cruise liners have also begun to have thalasso operations onboard, offering a wide variety of freshly-pumped seawater treatments.

Exploring the future

Following a networking break, the first of two expert panels took place with Sammy Gharieni, CEO of the Gharieni Group, Intracuticals president Philippe Bruny and CEO of Cryo 21 Marie-Anne Burton, each giving a précis of what their brands can offer spas.

Next, a fast-paced, dynamic and engaging panel session entitled 'The What, How and Why of Future Spas' took place with Dr Franz Linser, MD of Linser Hospitality, Ingo Schweder, CEO of GOCO Hospitality and Roger Allen, CEO of Resource for Leisure Assets.

1. Ingo Schweder, Roger Allen and Dr Franz Linser
2. A breakout networking session
3. Fashionizer Spa's Debbie Leon and Marion Demay
4. Event organiser Vladi Kovanic
5. Sammy Gharieni, Elena Bazzocchi and Tolga Er
6. Guest of honour Philippe Coulibaly of Ritz Health Club Paris
7. Anna Bjurstam of Six Senses
8. A champagne cocktail reception concluded the event



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► Topics included how more millennials can be attracted to spas, how spa operators can best cater for an ageing population, and the growth of hybrid fitness-spas.

"I thought this session was exceptional," commented organiser Vladi Kovanic. "We brought together three eminent industry leaders to share ideas and discuss all aspects of future spa and wellness, and they truly delivered."

"The three different industry perspectives were expertly moderated by Andrew Linwood [head of design at Areen Hospitality], who continually challenged the panel to present their freshest thoughts about the future of spas."

Each of the three panellists then gave individual presentations. Ingo Schweder examined the growth of wellness communities around the globe, predicting that the needs of an ageing population would help to create the 'next generation' of wellness real estate where living space, fitness and wellness will merge.

Dr Franz Linser looked at lifestyle change and asserted that one of the biggest issues today was people living 'too fast'. He said the luxuries of the future would be time, mindfulness,

space and silence, adding that instead of life expectancy, the wellness conversation should be refocused around health expectancy. "In the future, spas will have to sell more than just a set of treatments," he claimed. "Wellbeing doesn't come by force – it unfolds in peace and quiet and our new task is to move from the art of healing to the art of living."

Roger Allen then spoke about the economic realities of wellness provision at hotels. His most important takeaway was that the profitability of businesses is paramount. He said that while tracking the bottom line of a spa's operation and defining profitability was becoming more complex, he had seen a large rise in the growth of family spa and wellness facilities, alongside a significant drop in the use of spa hotels, particularly by international guests.

Honouring spa staff

A short ceremony at the end of the event saw the Black and Red Diamond Awards presented respectively to the best spa and thalasso managers of 2016. The jury was chaired by Adilia Oliveira, spa director at The Yeatman in

Portugal, and it was unanimous in its decision to award the Red Diamond for Best Thalasso Manager to Nicolas Guichard of the Grand Hotel les Flamants Roses in France, with the Black Diamond for best spa manager going to Patrizia Bortolin of Italy's Borgo Egnazia resort.

The event finished with organiser Vladi Kovanic sharing details of next year's 10th Forum HOTel&SPA, which will take place on June 1st, 2017 with a theme of 'Building bridges between all aspects of the hospitality industry'. "Following the success of our previous HOTel&SPA events, we will be using the incredible energy from this year to propel us into our Jubilee year in 2017 with another truly unforgettable event," concluded Kovanic.

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1. & 5. Vladi Kovanic with the Black and Red Diamond awards jury and winners
2. Intraceuticals president Philippe Bruny
3. French skincare brand Vinesime travelled from the Burgundy region to attend the Paris event
4. Katherine Pye, head of body and spa at Bamford
6. Representatives of wellness equipment supplier Cryo 21