

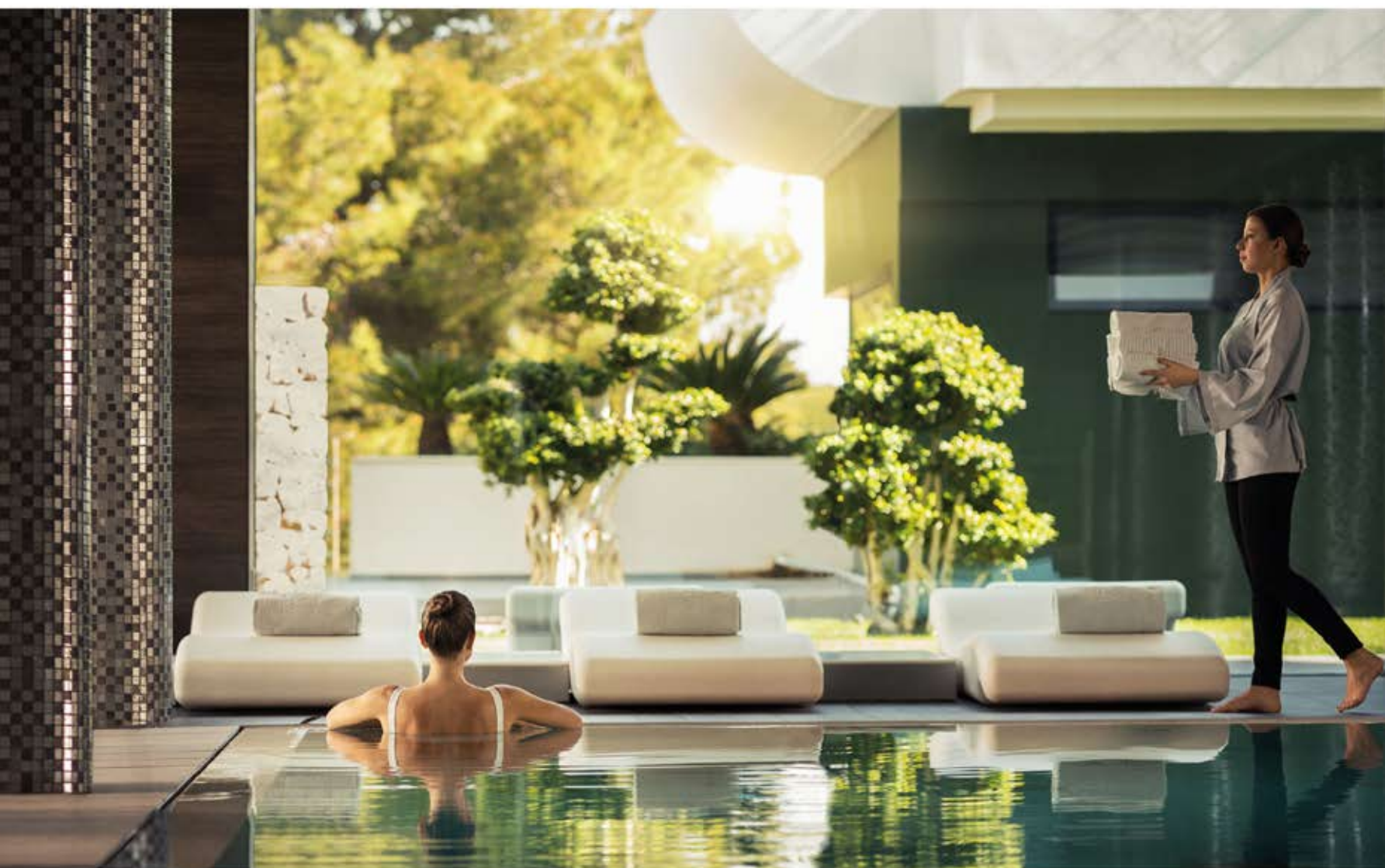
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AUSTRIA'S EVOLUTION

A holistic history of the Global
Wellness Summit's host nation





Cradle of wellness

Ahead of the 2016 Global Wellness Summit, we talk to some of Austria's leading wellness figures about the country's enduring spa and wellness tourism model

REPORT BY SARAH TODD

Despite being a relatively small nation of around 8.5m people, Austria has long been a groundbreaking force in the global wellness tourism market. This year the Tyrol region is set to host the Global Wellness Summit (GWS), which takes place in Kitzbühel from October 17-19. With this in mind, *European Spa* decided to find out more about what makes the country such an innovative and influential presence on the global wellness stage.

Often referred to as the 'cradle of wellness tourism', Austria was one of the first countries to incorporate this offering into its tourism pitch over 25 years ago. What is more, according to the Global Wellness Institute (GWI), at \$15.7 billion (€13.9 billion) per year the country now has the highest wellness travel spend per capita in Europe.

With nearly half of the country covered by forest, Austria's bountiful natural resources include an abundant supply of mineral-rich thermal waters as well as the purifying benefits that its high-altitude air can bring. The Alpine environment hosts a wide range of outdoor activities and sports, including skiing, hiking and biking, while a sense of sociability pervades the Austrian wellness experience, with many of its core spa activities best enjoyed in a group environment.

The wellness tourism sector continues to experience healthy growth in its pioneering heartland. According to recent estimates from the GWI, the number of wellness tourism trips to Austria grew 11.8% between 2013 and 2015, from 12.1 million to 13.5 million visits, while the country's wellness tourism revenue grew 7.5%, from €11.8 billion in 2013 to €12.7 billion.

Left: The majestic Tyrolean mountains pierce the clean, fresh air that adds to the health-giving properties of the stunning thermal offering at Aqua Dome wellness resort in Längenfeld

Its defining spa and wellness offerings are curated with a truly holistic sensibility, complemented by effective, centuries-old therapies and an outstanding level of medical knowledge.

Back to the future

"Many modern-day wellness practices began in Austria and it continues to be at the forefront of the evolving wellness market," says GWS chairman Susie Ellis. "In particular, Tyrol puts wellness at the centre of its economy and holds a unique place in wellness history as a pioneer, uniting people and businesses to promote the region's health-focused offerings.

As such, adds Ellis, the region was a natural choice to host this year's event. "Tyrol was the location of the first wellness hotel collaboration roughly 25 years ago and it is an amazing example of a destination that has centred its tourism initiatives around wellness, transforming from a single-season destination to a year-round attraction," she adds.

This view is echoed by Dr Franz Linser, founder and managing director of international consulting firm Linser Hospitality, and 2016 GWS co-chair.

"I think Austria's inter-disciplinary approach to wellness, combining hotel experiences, hospitality, therapy, education, sports and the outdoors, will truly enable this year's Summit delegates to rethink their wellness offering and strategy in terms of the host country's enduring holistic approach," he states.

Linser says it was the country's hoteliers who were largely responsible for cultivating its current reputation by embracing the spirit of wellness tourism and linking it with the natural surroundings.

"Wellness as a concept, philosophy and health strategy was first developed around 25 years ago in Austria," he explains. "Hoteliers added wellness features to their existing hotels, which were previously predominantly sports and health-focused, and began calling them 'wellness hotels' in the late

Meet the Experts



Susie Ellis, chairman & CEO, Global Wellness Summit
www.globalwellnesssummit.com



Dr. Franz Linser, CEO, Linser Hospitality GmbH,
www.linserhospitality.com



Dr. Barbara Kolm, director, Austrian Economics Center
www.austriancenter.com



Thomas Köhle, director, Tyrol Economic Chamber
www.wko.at



Heinz Schletterer, chairman, Medical Spa & Wellness Group
www.msw-group.com



▷ 1980s. This led to Austria being called the ‘cradle of wellness’. Because the Austrian wellness hotels were created by small, privately-owned hospitality businesses – 95% of our hotel businesses are privately owned – outdoor activities and being close to nature have remained very dominant factors.”

This aspect of Austria’s wellness tourist industry continues to be fostered at both regional and national levels. “Tourism in Austria, particularly in Tyrol, has a huge economic strategic importance and contributes greatly to our overall economic success,” says Linser. “This means that wellness tourism has always been well supported publicly and politically. Our Alpine environment and the beauty and variety of our landscapes creates the perfect environment to develop a high-end tourism destination.”

A year-round offering

A combination of unique wellness resources, a highly developed tourism infrastructure and an excellent hospitality offering continues to ensure Austria is a leading year-round destination for wellness tourism.

“Austria ranks number one in wellness travel spend per capita at \$15.7 billion annually, and is the fifth largest market in the world with a relatively small

From top: Austria’s spa and wellness hotels, such as Bio-Hotel Stanglwirt, are keen to maximise the benefits of altitude and clear air on their guests’ wellbeing; Susie Ellis and Dr. Franz Linser announce the destination for this year’s Global Wellness Summit on stage at the 2015 event in Mexico City



population of only 8.5 million inhabitants,” confirms Thomas Köhle, director of the Tyrol Economic Chamber. “It is worth considering that the Austrian federal state of Tyrol attracted over ten times as many inbound tourists [11 million] last year than it has full-time residents [under a million].”

The location for this year’s GWS has invested heavily to create a year-round wellness offering throughout its region. Formed around 15 years ago, ‘Wellness Cluster, Tyrol’ now consists of 120 member businesses responsible for 7,300 jobs and generating more than €461 million annually. The group includes both public and private partners who were brought together, according to Köhle, to increase their competitiveness through synergies within the network.

As Köhle explains, Tyrol is Austria’s tourism





▷ **Clockwise from above:** VIVAMAYR's mix of traditional wellness approaches with medical expertise continues Austria's history of innovation; a wall of windows brings the outside into the pool area at Alpin Spa Goldener Berg; an ultra-modern Inviion 4 Senses Lounger aids guest relaxation at Hotel Tirolerhof Zell am See

stronghold precisely because it puts wellness at the centre of its economy.

“By bringing people and businesses together to promote the region’s distinct health-focused offerings, Tyrol is known as a pioneer in the modern wellness tourism industry,” he says. “High-class Tyrolean spa and wellness products, conveying intense authenticity and the power of Alpine nature, enable a unique stage of self-transformation. The range of wellness retreats offered is also plentiful; they can be found on mountain tops, in the snow, deep in the woods and on the water.”

Quality of life

A mature spa offering and well coordinated business efforts are still just part of the story when it comes to Tyrol’s wellness tourism success. “Tyrol is a region with around 700,000 inhabitants and 573 mountains stretching over 3,000m into the sky while a third of the region is covered by forest,” says Josef Margreiter, CEO of the Tyrol Tourism Board. “Our mountains have around 10,000 natural springs, while the water in almost all the region’s many lakes is clean enough to drink. We have a quality of life that is matched by few other places in the world.”

According to Margreiter, these natural assets are at the centre of the region’s wellness and wealth creation. “In contrast to many other spa regions, it is not only the resorts in Tyrol, but also the landscape and authentic alpine lifestyle that delivers energizing recreation for mind, body and soul.

“In Tyrol, spa and wellness holidays mean much more than just a few treatments within the four

The power of ideas

Dr. Barbara Kolm, director, Austrian Economics Center explains how the Austrian wellness industry works according to an indigenous economic theory

“In his research, the late Austrian economist Friedrich August von Hayek – who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1974 – explained the power of ideas, spontaneous order in a marketplace and the important role of the individual in this process.

“His theory stated that all actions are a consequence of the knowledge, or experience, of the individual, elaborated and further shaped by demand on the market. This is how supply is adapted and consequently how innovation processes work.

“Looking at the Austrian tourism and hospitality industry, we can see this theory in action.

“With mainly small and medium sized enterprises, most of them family owned and run, an invested party is permanently at the point of sale – researching and detecting what the consumer demands – as well as permanently experimenting

in order to innovate and create new products and solutions.

“This is true for all fields in the Austrian tourism sector. In Tyrol, a total of 77.9% of the tourism enterprises are small, with a maximum of nine employees; 19.7% employ up to 49 people; and only 2.3% have a staff of up to 249 people.

“This results in a short string of information, with owners and staff close to the point of sale, adjusting and improving to compete internationally.

“And their success proves them right. A total of 14% of the Tyrolean GDP (excluding construction, 6.9%; transport, 7%; health and social, 7.1%) is a result of the 25,960,346 overnight stays in Tyrol in 2015. Tyrol is the third wealthiest state in Austria with more than €40,000 GDP/capita – more than the country as a whole, which ranks fourth highest in the EU.”

www.austriancenter.com

▷ walls of your hotel. We aim to provide visitors with a holistic sense of wellbeing through a balanced combination of activities, health, fitness and relaxation combined with our unique location.”

Pioneering facilities

More than two decades ago, Austrian wellness pioneer and chairman of Medical Spa & Wellness Group, Heinz Schletterer began to develop innovative and luxurious wellness and spa facilities around the world. In Austria, aiming to increase occupancy rates at Alpine hotels during the slower seasons, he looked to the past for inspiration.

“When I initially began to develop my ideas, I referred to the ancient Roman thermal spas,” he recalls. “I used this knowledge to develop some of the first health and wellbeing facilities at hotels in the Alpine region. As a result, the hotels began to record very good occupancy rates and the once weaker periods of spring and autumn, when most hotels were previously closed, often became their strongest seasons.”

The future-forward spa facilities that Schletterer created provided a huge boost to the Austrian hotel market. “With these unique wellness and spa projects, not only could the occupancy rate be increased, but also the room rates could be raised and the overall profits of the hotels could be significantly increased,” he states.

“The success of the Austrian wellness hotel industry motivated many other countries to follow their example and I believe this is the reason why the majority of high-end resorts around the world now have their own wellness facilities.”

Space and authenticity

Another man whose vision for a ‘green’ spa resort typified the pioneering spirit of the early Tyrolean wellness entrepreneurs was Balthasar Hauser, who in the early 1980s transformed an ancient property into the trailblazing Bio-Hotel Stanglwirt, incorporating a term barely recognised at the time.

“Stanglwirt has existed for more than 400 years and is still run by its host family, Hauser, who have



From top: Outdoor massage typifies the holistic approach at Bio-Hotel Stanglwirt; the design of Aqua Dome spa reflects its Alpine surroundings

owned it since 1722,” says Maria Hauser, a member of the owning family. “It was first established as a ‘bio-hotel’ in the early 1980s at a time when there was little understanding of what it meant to operate a hotel based on either green or eco-principles.

“Today, our newly designed 12,000sqm spa is sustained and heated by our resort’s own mountain spring water and remains a deeply holistic place of energy for body, mind and soul.

“Our treatments are guided by the four elements of water, fire, air and earth, and provide enduring relaxation; balancing energy, bringing the body into harmonic balance and perfectly representing the philosophy of Stanglwirt. Meanwhile our sophisticated face and bodycare uses pure Alpine natural ingredients to replenish the skin.”

“Above all, wellness requires nature, space and authenticity,” says Hauser, “and our magical backdrop of the wonderful Alpine world of the Wilder Kaiser means our guests can benefit from a unique combination of tradition and luxury on their

Meet the Experts



Maria Hauser, Member of owning family, Stanglwirt
www.stanglwirt.com



Josef Margreiter, CEO, Tyrol Tourism Board
www.tirolwerbung.at



Andrea Csics, general manager, Lanserhof LANS
www.lanserhof.com



Dr. Sepp Fegerl, medical director, VIVAMAYR
www.vivamayr.com



path to wellness, while the energy of nature and sustainability remain our central focus.”

Connect and cure

For Andrea Csics, general manager of Lanserhof LANS, whose award-winning LANS Med concept sets the standard in the burgeoning medi-spa sector, Austria’s wellness offering is unique within the global marketplace as it is an ideal location to focus on individual wellbeing.

“Austria is the perfect destination to focus on personal wellness,” she elaborates. “Clean air, clear water, mountains, meadows and lakes form an unparalleled landscape and the power of nature has become an essential part of many Austrian spas and wellness hotels. Away from the big cities, the environment provides relaxation, space to focus and encourages new energy.”

Csics believes the wealth and degree of medical knowledge within the country’s spa industry is now an important factor in its continuing success. “Austria distinguishes itself with an exceptionally high level of education in the medical field,” she states. “Guests embarking on their journey to optimal health want to know that they are in good hands and will receive great service. Austria excels in this respect thanks to staff who take considerable pride and joy in looking after guests from around the world.”

Lanserhof has a strong link to one of the country’s wellness figureheads. “Austria is the birthplace of Dr Franz Xaver Mayr, the man behind the FX Mayr Cure, which centres round the idea that overall health stems from a healthy gut,” points out Csics. “This concept forms the basis of the renowned LANS Med Concept, making it an ideal place for the Lanserhof’s original medical spa in Lans.”

Austria’s incorporation of a medical take on spa and wellness has certainly given it a competitive edge. “What makes the Austrian medical wellness market unique is our experience in naturopathic and complementary medicine,” says Dr Sepp Fegerl, spa



medical director at VIVAMAYR “We have a long tradition of treating clients from across the world in an unpolluted, clean environment and we shape the European spa market with quality.”

VIVAMAYR combines a broad base of wellness interests with different medical routes for maximum benefit to the individual. “The modern human in a busy, connected world can get a little bit lost,” explains Dr Fegerl. “Mayr Medicine offers the possibility to really experience how different wellness changes can add real benefit to life.”

However, Dr Fegerl is adamant that one element is of most benefit to his guests. “Nature is our best medicine,” he states, “as it offers the free space to release the burdens that our clients carry with them for so many years. The possibility to experience nature, unspoilt by clocks, traffic sounds and urbanisation, means our guests truly go back to the essential elements, while the altitude has great effects on the body’s ability to regenerate.”

All this and more awaits delegates at this year’s Global Wellness Summit as they enjoy the opportunity to be cradled in wellness. ●●●●●

Clockwise from top left: Guests enjoy high-specification equipment in the Spa Chalet at Spa-Hotel Jagdhof; Lanserhof’s LANS Med Concept draws from the work of Austrian-born FX Mayr; soaking up the benefits of nature at Bio-Hotel Stanglwirt

Global Wellness Summit

GWS is an international organisation that brings together leaders and visionaries to positively impact and shape the future of the global wellness industry. The 2016 Summit will take place on October 17-19 at KitzKongress, Kitzbühel in Tyrol, Austria. www.globalwellnesssummit.com