



International intentions

With the 2016 Global Wellness Summit just over a month away, we chat to co-chairs **Sue Harmsworth** and **Franz Linser** about the past, present and future of the GWS

Next month sees the 10th annual Global Wellness Summit (GWS) take place in the alpine Austrian town of Kitzbühel in the country's Tyrol region. Following our interview with GWS chairman and chief executive Susie Ellis in the July/August issue, we this time speak to the 2016 summit co-chairs, Espa founder and chairman Sue Harmsworth and former athlete and trainer Franz Linser, managing director of Linser Hospitality. Both members of the GWS board, Linser and Harmsworth share their insight on what makes the summit different, its greatest achievements to date and what to expect from the 2016 event, for which the theme is Back to the Future.



What can we expect from the programme this year?

“There will be a panel on integrative medicine with Dr Christine Stossier, co-founder of Viva Mayr; Dr Elke Benedetto-Reisch, medical director of the Lanserhof group; Dr Imke Koenig, medical and spa director at Schloss Elmau; and Dr Harry Koenig, head of medical care at Brenner’s Park-Hotel & Spa. My personal philosophy is that we should use prevention as much as we are able and can afford to. I think that in the West we are, with the exception of the Germanic countries, not very good at that and I really want to see how we can improve this. The programme is not 100% confirmed yet because you have to wait for confirmation from speakers and the more senior they are the more difficult it is to get that. So it’s a case of waiting to see if people will definitely be available.

“Susie Ellis has done a great job of getting competitors together on stage in an open forum. In our industry people can become quite closed and we don’t want that ”

What can you tell us about this year’s summit location?

“I think Kitzbühel is going to be lovely because everyone will very much be together. It’s going to be much more intimate than when you have a big venue, like in Mexico City last year or Delhi in 2014. This year all the hotels are small, they’re quite close together and Kitzbühel is such a pretty little town where you can walk everywhere so I think it’s going to be quite social. You’ll be outside having coffee and someone from the summit will wander past, for example. And that’s something we very much wanted to do this year; give delegates more time together.”

What makes the GWS so successful?

“The summit is very powerful and the people who go are an important part of that. I think the plan is to keep attendee numbers relatively limited (the GWS this year expects around 500 delegates from 40 countries). The summit gathers opinion leaders from the spa, wellness, medical, travel and tourism industries to share their views, look into the future and network in a safe environment. It has deliberately stayed away from being a sales environment where leaders can be pestered, and that’s also key.

It’s important to keep the summit open in terms of discourse. Susie [Ellis, GWS chairman and chief executive] has done a great job of getting competitors together on stage but without it being a competitive environment. Instead, the summit is an open forum and that’s great because sometimes people can become quite closed in our industry and we don’t want that to happen.” →

Sue Harmsworth, founder and chairman, Espa

What prompted you to say yes to co-chairing the 2016 summit?

“I had been asked to co-chair several times before but my life was just too crazy and busy to accept. It still is but I believe Europe is the heart of wellness and that the Germanic countries especially have a very strong wellness philosophy that goes back a long way. I’m very interested in looking at integrative medicine and wellness in spas and the fact that we can take an in-depth look at real wellness at this year’s summit was of great interest to me.”



Dr Franz Linser, managing director,
Linser Hospitality

What motivated the choice of this year's summit theme and location?

"I brought the application to the board because I thought it would be great to bring the summit back to Europe and they liked the idea immediately. There has been an evolution in the industry and a slight change of focus for the summit. Wellness is now on everybody's minds, and we have quite a history of wellness here in Austria. I also thought the 10th anniversary summit would be a good time to look at where we came from and how the whole wellness idea developed into what it is now."



What would you say defines the GWS agenda?

"There are different conferences out there and some of them rely on saying that people will be hearing from this or that celebrity. I believe, and this is something that's core to my understanding of what the summit is about, that bringing together some 400 [470 last year, this year 500 are expected] of the top experts in the industry is celebrity enough. Every single delegate invited to the summit has a right to be there because he or she has achieved something important for this industry. They all have a message and I think that's the real success of the summit, rather than relying on one single 'superstar'."

What would you say is the GWS's most important achievement?

"Coming up with relevant topics year after year and finding people who really know what they are talking about and are willing to share that information is quite an achievement. Because you often find that people are not willing to share information with other professionals at an event because they want to have the market advantage. So I think the open discourse that is core to the summit is the real success story behind it."

"Also, if you look back seven or eight years, global data about our industry wasn't available. It was the summit that initiated this research [a series of reports on the global spa and wellness market, the first of which was published in 2008] and it's an incredible contribution to the industry as a whole. Who else would have done it? A single company wouldn't do it. A hotel group would do it for its own group, but not for the global industry."

What will be different about this year's summit?

"This year we have tried to let people participate in the surroundings a little more, to show them a bit of the landscape and how people do wellness here. Which means taking the delegates out of the conference, bringing them up on the mountains and living a little of what wellness is about, not just talking about it. Being here in Austria in the mountains where you have fresh air and drinking-quality water in every creek, it would be a sin not to go outside."

“Every single delegate at the summit has a right to be there because they have achieved something important for this industry and I think that's the real success of the summit ”



What would you like delegates to take away from this year's summit?

"It may be a little patriotic but one thing I would really like the delegates to take away is to see how wellness has been defined and interpreted here in the centre of Europe, in Austria. Because I think our truly holistic approach is something delegates from all over the world could learn from and that could benefit their businesses." **PSW**

The 10th Global Wellness Summit takes place in Kitzbühel in the Austrian Tyrol on October 17-19. For more information about the summit, including confirmed speakers, pre and post-event trips and updates to the programme, see: www.globalwellnesssummit.com

