



ASIA: RUSSIA

What is making news in your country when it comes to spa and wellness?

The first National Governmental Standard for non-medical spa treatments, initiated and elaborated by Spa & Wellness International Council (SWIC) has been officially adopted in Russia. With practically all beauty treatments considered medical in Russia, and the developing spa and wellness market threatened with very strict regulations, the new standard constitutes a real breakthrough for the whole industry, not only in Russia but in CIS states - Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan - that also follow Russian regulatory patterns. The obligatory medical license that has been a great obstacle for new spas, especially in the hospitality segment, would be easier to obtain for hotel /resort spas, as well as day spas, due to the new federal standard. SWIC has managed to gain support from the governmental authorities for the further standardization of the spa and wellness market in Russia and neighboring states.

What is happening in your country when it comes to wellness tourism and/or medical tourism?

For quite a long period of time the majority of Russian tourists have been traveling abroad both for health and leisure. The huge segment of the Russian wellness market represented by traditional health resorts was immobilized and near stagnation. The situation started to change with private investments in the wellness market, as well as with “locality” trends becoming popular among Russian citizens. There are about 600 former health resorts and rehabilitation clinics that have chosen spa and wellness as their new focus. Operating as healthcare institutions, they are located in climatic resorts, like seashores, and often possess their own mineral sources. It is still problematic to attract international tourists to Russian wellness resorts, as the infrastructure is generally undeveloped. But the 2014 Olympic games in Sochi, a city popular for its historic health resorts where a large number of modern spa hotels have been constructed recently, is sure to give a boost to wellness tourism in Russia.

Please give us one sentence to describe the latest developments in your country for each of these spa categories:

What is happening with hotel spas?

The category of hotel spas was the last one to develop in Russia, as the hospitality business followed the old Soviet model for years, adhering to the strict rules and regulations. With the entry of international hotel operators onto the Russian market, spas in hotels became an important issue. There are about 50 hotel spas already operating and a lot more due to open in the near future, as the analysts predict a 70 percent growth of the hospitality market. The international spa operators (ESPA, Mandara Spa, Bliss) have been able to maintain the highest rating of popularity among clients.

What is happening with destination spas?

A number of destination spas have recently opened as “spa hotels”, both in traditional resorts and in the newly developing areas, such as Altai, Urals, Siberia and even the Far East of Russia. Focusing on local treatments, ethnic healing traditions and natural resources, the new spa destinations would be attractive for international tourists. Most unexpectedly, there are some destination spas located close to big cities, i.e. Moscow, and despite the high prices for accommodation and treatments, their occupancy rates are continuing to grow.

What is happening with hot springs spas?

Hot springs spas are an old-age tradition for Russians. Since Balneology is still considered part of the healthcare system, practically all mineral spring spas operate with a medical license and provide full-scale rehabilitation services, including medical check-ups, detoxification and nutritional programs.

What has been the general attitude about investing in the spa/wellness arena in 2013?

The Russian spa industry is showing tremendous growth activity in private investments, both national and foreign. But there is little initiative coming from the governmental authorities, leaving spa to be classed as an “outlaw” notion. The inevitable development of the hospitality industry is most likely to be followed by another spa boom, on the condition that serious obstacles such as bureaucratic regulations are removed.

Looking back at the past four decades of spa and wellness, what would you consider “a defining moment?”

Last year the GSWS in Aspen was marked by reaching “the point of no return” for the global spa industry , when the absolute necessity of the scientific and medical evidence for spa treatments was declared. The presentations by prominent scientists and physicians at the summit demonstrated that spa business is open to implementing innovative technologies. It is becoming more and more evident that spa of the future will be not so much about relaxation but would be considered the right place for self-improvement and active longevity.

SUBMITTED BY:

Elena Bogacheva

President

Spa & Wellness International Council (SWIC)