

EUROPE: SWITZERLAND

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

To be honest, Switzerland seems to have slept through the wellness boom and megatrend. Some properties took a leading position at an early stage, such as the Tschuggen Grand Hotel Arosa, designed by Matteo Thun, Victora-Jungfrau Grand Hotel and Spa (host of GSWS 2010), “Park Weggis” or the Kulm Hotel, St. Moritz. All these hotels are 5-star-deluxe hotels and resorts.

The latest 5-star opening in 2013 was the Park Hotel Vitznau on Lake Lucerne, with 47 residences, junior and regular suites and 2,000 square meters of spa. One highlight of its “Health and Wealth Spa” is a fish-tank of 65,000 liters of salt water, offering a habitat for 7,000 fishes and native corals from the Seychelles. No wonder the total investment for revitalizing the historic property, which dates back to 1903, was about 270,000 million Swiss Francs.

But there were two outstanding openings in 2013 I must tell you about. The first one, “Cocon” at Hotel Seerose, is located in the German speaking Aargau region in the north of the country, 45 km from Zurich. Hotelier Felix Suhner started a design competition to expand his existing hotel “Seerose,” where he already runs a Thai restaurant, one of the five best in Switzerland. He invested 20 million francs out of his pocket, and the result is a lakeside Swiss-Thai hideaway named Cocon, with 32 modern suites in boathouse style and an authentic spa. Therapists are all native Thai and deliver exotic Thai spa rituals and classical Thai massage. To complete the integrated concept, Thai Tea Time and cooking classes are arranged.

The other new opening, Kurhaus Cademario, is located in the south of Switzerland, high above Lake Lugano. When you hear its story, you almost want to believe that wellness was invented there a century ago. It was 1914 when a Swiss-German doctor decided to open a “Kurhotel” high up in the mountains in sunny Ticino to realize his idea of “real wellbeing,” no drugs, just prevention, healthy food grown on his own premises and a lot of exercise in fresh air.

Dr. Keller started with 18 guests and great enthusiasm. In 1924, a wing and a pool were added, not heated, of course, but as cold and fresh as the water running from the taps in the bathrooms. At a time when nobody talked about detox, the founder of the Kurhotel wrote a book on cleansing and detoxifying the body.

Today, the new Kurhaus Cademario Hotel and Spa offers stylish rooms; fresh, hearty cuisine and a spacious 2,200 square-meter DOT.Spa area. The “Dot Spa” is hitting the spot via a holistic concept with a strong focus on people. “In the midst of being” is the guideline, to make sure all guests find their own suitable programs and use their stay to mark a turning point in their lifestyle. Hosts at Cademario are Rafaela and Peter Hoeck Domig, who have contributed greatly to the successful concept.

2. With the buzz about wellness technologies, how do you see spa and wellness establishments using wellness technologies?

This is not only a question of economics but of philosophy. There have been widespread discussions about the use of internet and wifi in spas, with some hotels strictly opposed to these things. But the customer is speaking another language and does not want to be restricted. Social media as a marketing tool for spas will be an important trend for the future.

But technology is a rising challenge for the customer as well. In a world where we are constantly distracted and are increasingly forced to adapt to multitasking, it depends on how our clients allow themselves to drift with the crowd or set a signal to stop.

3. When it comes to wellness tourism, what is happening in Switzerland?

Swiss tourism has seen a significant decline in overnight stays by local and foreign tourists over the last couple of years. The reasons are largely economic, and primarily result from financial and economic crises in important source markets. In particular, the strong Swiss Franc has weakened the price competitiveness of Swiss tourism. 2013 brought a turnaround, with an increase of 3.5 percent in foreign tourists, including the leading source countries, Germany, the UK and the United States.

The catch-up process looks set to continue in 2014. Wellness hotels and spa resorts contribute to this positive development. However, their importance has not yet impacted official statistics: there are statistics on skiing schools, camping facilities and hiking trails, for example, but none at all on wellness providers.

4. Please provide one sentence that best describes the latest developments in your country for each of these categories:

Hotel spas:

Switzerland hosts some of the most amazing luxury spa hotels in the world. Overall, the number of wellness hotels in Switzerland has increased, and they are no longer limited to deluxe-properties. Of the 20 best wellness hotels selected by the Swiss tourist board, around one-half are 4-star or 4-star-superior hotels. But the number is still very low compared with the 2,400 wellness hotels and spa resorts in other German-speaking countries.

To my knowledge, there is no marketing platform specializing in wellness hotels and spa resorts, with the exception of Private Selection Hotels. Brought together under the Private Selection umbrella brand, member establishments offer their services with a special focus on wellness, plus golf, city breaks, sea-/lakeside and Alpine summer and winter holidays. The platform “Premium Switzerland” acts as an online guide to the best that Switzerland has to offer: luxury services, premium holiday destinations, city guides, private medical clinics, Swiss boarding schools and financial services. The website offers a selection of 17 spa hotels.

Destination spas:

In my opinion, the Grand Resort Bad Ragaz is Switzerland’s top destination spa. To meet all requirements and to satisfy the highest expectations, they have created “Europe’s leading wellbeing and medical health resort.” Peter P. Tschirky, CEO of Grand Resort Bad Ragaz, has confirmed in an interview with “Hotelier” that he welcomes the decision to strictly separate wellness tourism and medical travel in the future. “There has been much uncertainty and confusion about buzzwords such as medical wellness. Therefore, the differentiation is not only desirable, but a must.” Recently, Condé Nast Traveller’s Spa Guide named the 36.5° Wellbeing & Thermal Spa at the 5-star resort as “Winner, Best Medi Spa.”

Hot springs spas:

Switzerland is a traditional home to cures connected with spa treatments. As can be seen from the Cademario example, hotels are linked to history and proud to be named a “Kurhaus” or “Kurhotel,” but it is a broad term and can easily be misunderstood. Many other hot spring spas are public bath-institutions of different quality.

Remarkable even without thermal water is the “Splash e Spa Tamaro,” an innovative new tourist attraction in Ticino. This is the first water park in Switzerland, covering more than 10,000 square meters dedicated to leisure and well-being, offering aquatic leisure activities together with spa and wellness treatments. A third of the center is dedicated to a deluxe spa with a special focus on regional products such as grapes and chestnuts.

5. Fast-forward five years and tell us what you think the spa and wellness industry in your country will look like.

We are sure that the catching-up process for wellness hotels and spa resorts in Switzerland will continue apace in 2014. Good things need time to ripen – in the Swiss mountains, perhaps a little longer. But we can count on Swiss quality of the highest standards and on Swiss hoteliers as excellent hosts.

We wait to be surprised!

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