



Europe: United Kingdom

I think one of the overwhelming changes is that the spa industry in itself is failing to meet customers' expectations, with more and more people wanting to consider total wellbeing rather than just a regular massage to help alleviate stress or pain.

Whilst spa converts recognize the importance of having regular massages, so often the quality of the massage fails to reach expectations and one feels like “another piece of meat on the slab.” There is really little connection between the therapist and the client—this is not about talking or even listening, it is about a level of intuition on the part of the therapist to recognize the emotional needs of the client. This is probably in the main downside to employers pushing massage therapists to work too long hours doing something that requires a huge amount of emotional as well as physical energy.

Secondly I think that customers are looking for authenticity. Regular spa-goers know what works for them and what does not, and find it irritating to be “sold” unnecessary services and products. Five-star customers are paying high prices for spa treatments and expect to receive value for money with considered, honest advice and no “up-selling.”

Thirdly, I get the impression that there is a movement away from Botox© and fillers and that customers are looking for a truly natural/organic way of anti-aging, through diet, exercise, detox, anti-stress, mindfulness, meditation, yoga, Pilates, etc. It is becoming recognized that the former is really just a “sticking plaster” approach and that a truly holistic approach to wellbeing has much greater longevity in the youthfulness stakes and is less likely to come with the caveat of potential damage to the body.

Following on from this, I think one of the growing sectors will be wellbeing and spa, rather than just spa itself. A holistic approach to wellbeing means the integration of medical services, both in terms of traditional and complementary treatments. Whilst I am, personally, most concerned with the high end market, I can see a real need for total integration of traditional and complementary medical practices with spas as a new approach to medical health in the U.K. primarily prevention rather than cure.

We have an obesity problem in the U.K. as severe as that of the U.S. (we are the fattest nation in Europe), we have huge social problems connected to alcohol and drug abuse, and large numbers of the population suffer from depression caused by high levels of stress due to work and financial worries. People are not listening to the government about the long term side effects of this behavior and if spa-going was more available to a greater number of people, together with tried and tested treatments such as massage, acupuncture, exercise, nutritional advice, etc., the health of the nation would begin to improve and the cost to the National Health Service and taxpayers would diminish.



But this is an ideal and requires a major paradigm shift. I believe those that can afford it will continue to spend on keeping their bodies in the best possible condition through spa, exercise, nutrition, counseling and ensuring that they pay attention to their bodies and seek medical advice in good time to help prevent disease.

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