



THE AMERICAS: UNITED STATES

What is making news in your country with regards to spa and wellness?

Wellness in general is playing out in the news in a number of ways. It has been labeled the solution to America's healthcare crisis. The discussion continues to be fueled in the public sector by, among other things, the recent enactment of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). ACA, especially during the last presidential election, dominated the news. It is probably the most comprehensive legislation in recent history to impact the U.S. wellness industry. For example, ACA allows physician and other healthcare providers to bill Medicare (a government healthcare program available to qualifying seniors and those with disabilities) for one annual wellness visit, including a health risk assessment and wellness plan. It provides reimbursement under Medicare for certain wellness-related services; provides grants for small businesses to implement worksite wellness programs; and grants for community wellness initiatives.

The enactment of ACA is newsworthy in and of itself, but what is now dominating the post-election discussion is the ways in which good faith attempts to implement wellness programs can run afoul of other federal laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of age, disability, race, health status, or genetics; and how ACA can violate labor laws addressing employee benefits and compensation (when incentives are offered in exchange for participation in wellness activity). Those of us charged with the responsibility to implement and oversee these programs await additional government guidance.

The private sector focus on wellness is also making the news. We are hearing about the inclusion of wellness-related services in medical practices referred to as lifestyle or integrative medicine, which could include anything from alternative healing (i.e. acupuncture and reflexology) to traditional spa services (i.e. therapeutic massages and pampering offerings).

What is happening with wellness tourism in your country? Medical Tourism?

Wellness tourism in the U.S. is not limited to a particular destination; it is now being woven into the travel experience for business and leisure travelers staying at some 4-star and 5-star hotels. Luxury hotels are not only offering special wellness rooms and suites, in-room wellness programs and wellness menus, but are arming front desk and staff with useful information for the health-conscious travelers. For example, guests are offered (sometimes without asking) maps of areas containing running paths, information on outdoor fitness activities and the location of healthy dining options.

In the U.S. market, medical tourism flows both ways; Americans travel out and other nationalities travel in. The U.S. is one of the most expensive healthcare markets in the world. Americans leave the U.S. in search of more economical healthcare services. We are increasingly becoming more aware of the medical advances around the world that are gaining access to pricing information, and discovering that procedures can be performed safely and more economically elsewhere.

As a result of medical advancements around the world, patients have a number of countries to choose from for many treatments. Those that enter the U.S. for healthcare do so primarily because they are in need of very complex procedures that they believe cannot be received elsewhere and/or they come to the U.S. as a last resort. Typically, they are not drawn to the USA per se, but to a particular facility that is recognized as the best globally in treating certain conditions.

Specialty treatments typically sought by medical tourists in the U.S. market are often concentrated in certain regions where investments by academic and research institutions make it possible for state of the art medical technology to develop, specialty treatment facilities to be built, and world-renowned specialists to find a home. Those seeking care will frequently select a region based on a high concentration of specialists in that area. The top regions for medical tourism in the U.S. are Boston, Miami, Cleveland, New York, Baltimore, and Rochester.

Please give us one sentence to describe what is happening in your country for each of these categories:

Hotel Spas?

U.S. luxury hotels are investing heavily in their spas and spa offerings, making them formidable competition for destination spas.

Destination Spas?

Destination spas are feeling the pressure to meet the higher expectations of spa-goers and are introducing alternative treatments (i.e. cupping, earthing, Ayurveda and Reiki) and wellness services that extend beyond pampering to include healing.

Hot Springs Spas?

Hot Springs Spas are still hot, offering everything from the budget hourly dips to the luxury experience trip.

What is your country's position on investing in the spa industry in 2013?

Both the private and public sectors are investing heavily in wellness in the United States. That investment includes everything from resources focused on promoting and offering primary prevention; urban planning that incorporates hiking and bike paths and community access to healthier food options; and medical providers restructuring services to include lifestyle medicine.

The spa industry, as a wellness sector, is riding the wave. Destination spas are stepping up their game; hotels are no longer looking at spas as an amenity, but rather as a serious revenue-generating offering, and are therefore dedicating more square footage to spa services, allocating resources to attract more talented spa staff, and including on-site branding of their spas as a necessary expense.

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

The moment that has defined the spa and wellness industry today is the mainstream recognition and acceptance that primary prevention, in all of its forms, is intimately connected to an individual's wellbeing. The country is recognizing that wellness is perhaps the single most important ingredient in the formula to combat obesity, reduce the occurrence of chronic and other stress-related diseases, and solve the overall healthcare crisis globally.

SUBMITTED BY:

Linda M. Howard
CEO
Alturative
Alturative.com
lhoward@alturative.com