

NORTH AMERICA: UNITED STATES

1. What is currently making news in your country when it comes to wellness or wellbeing?

From my vantage point it seems that spa and wellness are finally becoming more integrated in the lifestyle of Americans. In our spa located in New York City, our traffic has increased by 67% over the past year alone. Even though I like to think that we are the best urban spa brand in the US, I cannot attribute this spectacular growth to our talent and attention to details alone.

Something is changing in the mentality of urbanites. They realize that going to the doctor is not only an increasingly disagreeable and expensive proposition but it also means that something happened too late in terms of self-care. Prevention is not perceived as a nice to have reserved for the rich and crunchy people anymore: it is essential to a proper quality of life and longevity.

Spa treatments and approach have also evolved from the pampering for rich ladies of the past to significant and useful treatments that can be integrated into most people's lifestyle.

The combination of these two (long awaited) trends is creating a very positive context and opportunity for our industry.

2. Please provide one sentence that describes what you think are important developments in your country for each of the following:

Spas: broader adoption

Wellness Tourism: attractive travel alternative

Wellness Living Communities/Real Estate: focus on quality of life

Beauty: better client information

Fitness: not just about quantity anymore

Nutrition: basis of healthy living and longevity

3. How would you describe the state of workplace wellness in your country?

I thought, a little naively, that workplace wellness would have taken off by now (2015) and would have been adopted as a priority by most companies. Except for the really progressive (and cash rich) ones such as Google, it has mostly remained wishful thinking. Corporations say that they care about their employees wellness but they send mixed messages to their workforce: we love you and want you to be healthy and balanced, but stay at your desk and work 14h days if you want to be promoted. Employees cannot reconcile these contradictory messages and end up sacrificing their health. If corporations really mean what they claim in their employee brochures, they have to take workplace wellness seriously and create real space for it as well as meaningful partnerships with our industry.

4. What has been the general attitude about investing in spa/wellness in your country in 2015? Specific examples?

In the hospitality and hotel industry, it seems like spas are becoming a necessary amenity, even in smaller boutique hotels. This is a positive development except that hotel spas are still being created without real visions and still considered like a painful but somewhat necessary cost to the property. Hotels usually also do not recognize that spa management requires a very different skill set and expertise than hotel management. And that's usually a fatal mistake.

It's also unfortunate that hotels still design their spas as either a "trophy" that should get design awards or a second thought hidden in the basement rather than a useful and complementary offer to their hospitality offer.

In real estate development, the trend towards wellness is still slow to take off and probably where hotels were 15 years ago.

5. Whose responsibility is it to create a well world?

As a politician said a few years ago, it takes a village. In other words it takes leadership from the government and lawmakers, industry leaders and obviously the consumers themselves.

The government has to establish rules that favor building a well world. A great example was New York City's ex mayor Bloomberg that banned smoking in public and most private spaces as well as tried to ban large sugar beverages. As usual in the US, his efforts have been bitterly fought by private interests and lobbies.

Industry leaders and influencers have to set proper examples in their companies and continue the diffusion of reliable and measurable information about wellness and health to the public.

And finally the consumers and the public itself has to demand that wellness and prevention be integrated into their lifestyles. A great example is the increased demand for organic products in smaller outlets that fueled the creation of Wholefood as a major distributor and even incentivize a company like Wal-Mart to create and expand its organic product offering.

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