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Fast Forward

Looking towards the further development of the industry, the 2014 Global Spa & Wellness Summit delivered inspiration and enlightenment in equal measure at the Four Seasons Resort in Marrakech

[Report by Sarah Todd and Sarah Camilleri]

The eighth annual Global Spa & Wellness Summit (GSWS) took place in early September at The Four Seasons Resort in the heart of Marrakech, Morocco.

Marking the event's first time in Africa, the 2014 Summit was the largest event yet, with more than 400 spa, hospitality and wellness decision-makers in attendance from over 45 nations. This year's theme of 'Fast Forward' led to an agenda designed to provoke, engage and entertain with its examination of future visions for the spa and wellness industries, and beyond.

Held in a different country each year, GSWS has established an enviable reputation as a leading global research and educational resource for the now estimated \$3.4 trillion global spa and wellness industry. From producing widely quoted global industry reports to launching initiatives such as the WellnessEvidence.com educational platform, GSWS facilitates the exchange of ideas at the highest level.

Host country and sponsor of this year's event was the Moroccan Agency for Tourism Development (SMIT). Spa and wellness is central to tourism in Morocco and with an impressive \$253m in annual spa revenues, the country is one of the fastest growing wellness tourism markets in the world, ranking second in the MENA region. The location allowed delegates to enjoy authentic wellness and healing traditions that are steeped in history and, indeed, form the cornerstone of many contemporary spa experiences.

With a spirit of shared purpose over individual gain, this year's event was particularly insightful, as GSWS CEO and chairman Susie Ellis explains: "This year's agenda included futurists, marketing gurus and, of course, spa and wellness experts. The journey we took together into our future was full of game-changing visions and we identified major shifts that will impact how we will approach wellness in the future."

Sharing expertise

Numerous in-depth keynote addresses, panels, knowledge workshops and research presentations took place across three days and provided a creative and strategic glimpse at the future of the spa and wellness industries. A wide range of topics were covered, including design, retail, marketing, architecture, future

technology, investment and corporate wellness.

Peter Ellis, founder and chairman emeritus of GSWS, warmly welcomed delegates on day one, explaining that the theme of 'Fast Forward' was intended to lead a discussion that would go "deeper into the industry, so we can find out how we can help our consumers and better our business".

Co-chairs Anna Bjurstam and Neil Jacobs of Six Senses Hotels, Resorts & Spas encouraged attendees to strive to make emotional and physical connections with their guests in order to continue to drive growth, before Susie Ellis finished by emphasising that while the wellness industry is in its relative infancy, it is rapidly intersecting other industries – such as technology – which had resulted in the broadest spectrum of delegates yet at this year's event.

The first day of the Summit also hosted the second annual Global Wellness Tourism Congress (GWTC). Organised by GWTC's ministerial and tourism liaison Anni Hood, the one-day meeting involved a wealth of information and discussions centring on how the industry can work to drive recognition of wellness tourism at both national and global levels. In addition, ministers of tourism from several destinations showcased their countries' history of spa and wellness and outlined their plans for future promotion and marketing of wellness tourism.

Fast Forward Africa

The first keynote came from Magatte Wade, CEO and founder of Tioosan. The Senegalese entrepreneur was named one of the 20 Youngest Power Women in Africa by *Forbes* and at this year's GSWS was also given the first-ever 'Leading Woman in Wellness' award.

Wade gave a deeply passionate and inspiring speech about how the 'real Africa' needed to be discovered in all its diversity and repackaged into something relevant to the 21st century.

Wade insisted it was time for everyone to recognise how much Africa, as a continent, has given to the world. "Don't bring your Swedish massages to Africa and ask us to ignore the healing traditions we've had for thousands of years. Africa has its own health, beauty and healing arts that must be respected," she said.

There was applause when she questioned why she

View from the top



GSWS chairman and CEO Susie Ellis gives us her top Summit takeaways

"Last year, GSWS 2013 in India was declared 'a triumph'. This year, the description of our Marrakech Summit that resonated with me most was of it as a 'tipping point'.

"There were numerous standout moments for me at this year's event, including Magatte Wade taking the stage and challenging delegates to recognise Africa's unique identity. Another was an introduction to the mind-blowingly unique creations of Danish architecture maverick Bjarke Ingels, whose keynote incited us to completely re-think our ideas of design.

"Giving out our first-ever Global Wellness Awards was also a huge moment for me. The founding fathers of wellness, Don Ardell, PhD and Dr Jack Travis, were recognised as Wellness Innovators; Sarah Livia Szekley Brightwood was recognised as Leader in Sustainability, and Magatte Wade was named leading Woman in Wellness. All were brought to tears upon accepting their accolades.

"GSWS never ends though; now it's time to begin planning the 2015 Summit in Mexico City. Exact dates and details to be announced soon."

1. The courtyard at the Four Seasons Marrakech
2. Keynote speaker Magatte Wade
3. Jean-Claude Baumgarten and Peter Greenberg
4. *European Spa's* Sarah Todd and Sarah Camilleri
5. Keynote speaker Paul Price
6. Delegates enjoying the Arabian Nights Gala Dinner



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could travel around the world and find a multitude of Asian and European spas, but none inspired by Africa and concluded by vowing she would not find peace until she was a part of an African renaissance.

Wade's rousing talk was followed by welcome addresses from Morocco's minister of tourism, Lahcen Haddad and Imad Barrakad, chairman of SMIT. Morocco has in place an ambitious 'Vision 2020' plan, which intends to welcome 20m tourists a year by 2020; Dr Haddad emphasised the vital role that spa and wellness would play in this strategy which was, he admitted, a "consciously capitalistic venture".

Experiential one-upmanship

One of the most vibrant and in-depth dialogues on the first day was the packed general session with Jean-Claude Baumgarten, chairman and CEO of CREWE Associates and former president of the World Travel and Tourism Council, accompanied by CBS travel editor Peter Greenberg.

Baumgarten and Greenberg discussed how to best secure the future of wellness travel. One of their main recommendations was for spas to move outside their comfort zone and contribute to the future of the health and wellness industry by creating experiences and appealing to a wider demographic.

For Baumgarten, the definition of wellness was 'irrelevant'. Instead, with spa and wellness representing 2.1% of the worldwide economy, translating into 2.13m jobs, he believed the focus should be on the 'energy' of the experiences spas create.

Authenticity of experience is key for the future of this type of travel, said Greenberg. "Increasingly, it's not the destination that matters, it's the experience," he argued. "Generic luxury no longer satisfies most guests; there is a growing desire to find the heartbeat of a place and culture, then share it with the rest of the world on social networks."

Greenberg and Baumgarten noted that, increasingly, wellness tourism is about 'experiential one-upmanship', especially since the advent of the internet and social media. So if spas give their guests a great experience and the opportunity to do something they've never done before, this will be amplified on the internet, creating a buzz that traditional marketing cannot replicate.

Ultimately, the experience itself markets the destination, they said, particularly in the case of a number of luxury spa resort experiences in which guests are actively encouraged to 'give back' to the



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local community, such as helping to fund a child's place through school.

Advancing technology

As CEO of Creative Realities, Paul Price is a retail expert who has spent more than two decades working with companies such as Pfizer and Coca Cola on innovative marketing strategies. Showing great insight, his two keynote sessions focused on how technology was changing retail forever and how it will embed itself deeper into everything we do – from how we shop to how companies market to us. "Don't let the technology drive your decisions," Price warned. "Instead, consider moving your tech department into your marketing department so the IT team is driven by the marketers, not the other way around."

One of Price's core suggestions was that spas drop the word 'brand' and replace it with the word 'experience' to make them more relevant to 21st century consumers. His definition of 'competitive advantage' in the technological age focused on the user experience. He added that as emotions are the most powerful currency in business, spas should stop thinking about USPs and start thinking about how best to tell their stories. Ultimately, he explained, the more rounded understanding that businesses have of what they offer and the dreams they fulfil, the more successful they will be.

Looking to the future, Price suggested that new currencies would be developed; 3D printing would deliver products on demand; wearable technology would shape wellness; and location-specific marketing will push offers. He added that breakthroughs in new materials will change how our world is formed and artificial intelligence will affect how we interact. At some point in the future, he predicted, information



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1. The Wellness Tourism round table
2. Pioneer Dr John W. Travis 3. The spectacular Arabian Nights Gala Dinner 4. Magatte Wade, right, with Elaine Okeke-Martin and Dzigbordi K. Dosoo 5. Sarah Livia Szekeley Brightwood receives her 'Leader in Sustainability' award



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Embracing spa culture

Four Seasons Marrakech GM Felix Murillo, reflects on hosting the Summit



Felix Murillo

"To hold GSWS 2014 at the Four Seasons Resort Marrakech brought many blessings. First and foremost it brought attention to Morocco's long wellness tradition with its hammam's and body rituals.

Treatments are being carried out here today just as they were hundreds of years ago and the country's attention to wellness and vitality deserves to be recognised.

"Of course, the Four Seasons family is proud to be associated with the Summit and we here in Marrakech are especially pleased as our city is one that really embraces the spa culture.

"This was a very unique event where it seemed the future was brought to life as the speakers looked into their crystal balls to see what lies ahead for the industry.

"To have all those spa and wellness professionals in one room, in our home was, indeed, a blessing!"

overload will send people looking for a health and wellness concierge to assist in sifting through all the information to simplify their choices.

The history of wellness

During day one's afternoon sessions, a fascinating look at the history of wellness came from two of its 'founding fathers', American wellness pioneers Donald B. Ardell PhD and Dr John W. Travis. Their studied reflections included the fact that, 35 years ago, when they first began working in wellness, they often had to spell the word 'wellness' out for people.

Both agreed that the global spa industry wasn't tied into existing modalities and therefore represents the best chance of 'fast forwarding' wellness.

"We're now beginning to coalesce the best elements over the years that go beyond health and past self-care," said Ardell. "The next issue for wellness will be matters relating to quality of life and joy."

Ardell quoted the American orator Robert Green Ingersoll's creed that 'happiness is the only good' and said a well-examined and full life was to be welcomed. "I am perfectly satisfied that the highest possible philosophy is to enjoy today, not regretting yesterday and not fearing tomorrow," he read. "So, let us suck this orange of life dry, so that when death does come,

we can politely say to him, 'You are welcome to the peeling. What little there was we have enjoyed.'"

Six global industry discussion forums on key industry sub-sectors rounded off the first day. Each dedicated session – on corporate wellness, destination spas, hotel spas, hot springs spas, hydrothermal experiences and spa education – gave global leaders from each sub-sector the opportunity to share strategies and ideas about how to best address their challenges and collaborate to expand opportunities.

Illuminating ideas

The Sixth Annual Student Challenge competition concluded on the second day of the Summit. Four universities competed to design a spa and wellness concept that encompassed North African culture and would be commercially viable for a global roll-out.

Moderated by Susan Harnsworth MBE, founder and CEO of ESPA International and Mary Tabacchi PhD, professor at Cornell University, each entry was judged by a panel, including: Simon Casson, regional vice-president and general manager, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts; Andrew Gibson, vice president, spa & wellness, FRHI Hotels & Resorts; Sheila McCann, general manager, Chiva-Som International Health Resort; Bina Patel, vice president, spa operations & development,



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The Indian Hotels Company; Frank Strobel, director, KLAFS; and Todd Walter, president & CEO, Red Door Spa Holdings.

Announced on the final day, the winning team, from Mohammed V University Rabat, Morocco worked together with the guidance of Luciano Mazza, vice-president of HKS Architects.

Working together to raise standards

The Summit later split into two optional sessions, with the choice of either a keynote talk from artist Yahya Rouach, CEO of the Yahya Group in Morocco, or a hydrothermal business development discussion.

Rouach, whose intricate and beautiful lighting installations and screens, which play on the duality of light and shade, and can be found in a range of high-end properties around the world, explained his understanding of spas as places “where we can go on a journey and transcend our souls”.

The hydrothermal business session included brief remarks from Cassandra Cavanah, owner of Cavanah Communications; CEO of Design for Leisure, Don Genders; and Don Camilleri, director of Hospitality & Leisure Concepts. It was a great example of what happens when delegates proactively ‘come together to shape the future’.

Cavanah made a special announcement to a packed forum about the launch of the GSWS-backed *Guide to Hydrothermal Spa Development Standards*. This detailed and informative guide (soon to be available from the GSWS website as a digital download), has been painstakingly edited by Cavanah to showcase a wealth of hydrothermal expertise and features contributions from a host of respected international industry experts and suppliers.

The intention of the guide is to help new investors and architects inexperienced in spa design avoid costly mistakes and common pitfalls. Don Genders, who played a key role in its creation, asked delegates to comment on its content and contribute new information. “This is a gift to the industry, so give us



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your feedback,” he urged. “This guide is something tangible that can be put in front of owners and investors to help them understand the costs and value of their investment”.

The session ended with a detailed presentation by leisure and spa development specialist Don Camilleri, who, as development director of Center Parcs UK, championed the outstanding success of the Aqua Sana spa brand. Camilleri, who has recently launched his own company Hospitality & Leisure Concepts, took delegates on a journey of innovation, detailing how Center Parcs’ bold investment in a dynamic spa concept, with thermal experiences at its heart, has grown into a successful £20m business.

A burgeoning spa industry

This engaging session was followed by a presentation of data from the much anticipated *2014 Spa & Wellness Economy Research Report*, presented by SRI International. The information covered the wider wellness and spa tourism market, as well as several sub-segments including hot springs spas.

According to SRI, wellness tourism worldwide reached \$494 billion in revenues, rising 12.5% from 2012-2013, 3.5% higher than previously predicted.

Between 2007-2013, Europe experienced a growth ▷



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1. Founder and chairman emeritus of GSWS Peter Ellis 2. & 4. The annual Student Challenge Competition returned for a sixth year, moderated by Susan Harmsworth MBE and Mary Tabacchi PhD 3. Traditional Moroccan tea 5. The Global Wellness Tourism Congress



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1. SRI's senior consultant Ophelia Yeung
2. Debating 'Getting the New Generation's Attention' with moderator Susan Duckett and a panel including GSWS host Alexis Jones
3. and 5. Networking at the Gala Dinner
4. The first day's interactive lunchtime was a chance to have a 'tabletop discussion'

Moroccan hospitality



Morocco's Minister of Tourism Lahcen Haddad looks back on the event

"GSWS 2014 has been a cultural feast. We have been really excited to welcome the international delegation to Morocco and for them to have the opportunity to enjoy our magical city.

"Marrakech is a great choice of destination for industry leaders to come and exchange, debate and share ideas about the future.

"Moroccan culture has many different elements running through it – the cultural influences of the Berber, the African, the Arab and the European have combined to forge a multi-faceted community and one with a tangible sense of tolerance that provides an excellent forum for the topic of wellness.

"Add to this our unique climate, history and ecology and you have the perfect environment for the discussion of such matters.

"The traditions packaged within our wellness and spa industry really give Morocco a distinct and competitive edge. As a country, we would like to work further with investors and spa leaders to showcase our unique wellness culture."



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of \$29.8 billion, a 62% increase, cited as being 'very much dominated' by Eastern Europe. Other exciting markets were Sub-Saharan Africa, with a 186% increase to \$800m, and the Middle East and North African region, up 134% to \$1.7 billion.

During the same six-year period, the research reported that the number of spa locations worldwide grew 47% from 71,762 to 105,591.

Co-presented by SRI's senior economist Katherine Johnston and senior consultant Ophelia Yeung, four trends were predicted to shape future growth. These included an increase in the global middle class (currently at 2 billion people); spas being seen as a 'standard amenity' for most five-star properties; and the concept of wellness as 'health is wealth', a global idea whereby people are beginning to consider many spa therapies as a part of their regular health and lifestyle routine.

The final trend encompassed innovation and entrepreneurship, which the researchers identified a great deal of, particularly in the fields of franchise and membership models within the spa market. These, along with concepts such as airport and 'pop-up' spas, are expanding access to spas and making it easier for people to visit them which, in turn, leads to a broader demographic reach for individual businesses.

Johnston concluded SRI's session by encouraging spas to develop in a mindful way. "We encourage you not just to grow, but to grow consciously, inclusively and collaboratively – and grow well", she urged.

The loneliness epidemic

Keynote speaker Kjell Nordström PhD, the Swedish economist and co-author of *Funky Business*, presented a unique view of future macro trends.

During a fast-paced session, he asserted that a significant demographic shift in power from men to women was occurring. Due partly to women living longer lives, but also because of their increasing wealth and higher levels of education, Nordström suggested that women were set to grow more rapidly in influence. "The population of women in cities is massively on the rise and wealth is being transferred from men to women," he noted.

Nordström also spoke about the epidemic of loneliness – where once people used to die of old age, "soon we'll be dying of loneliness", he opined. "We are not created to spend large amounts of time alone", he suggested, but referred to a combination of rapid urbanisation, the isolating effect of technology and sizeable demographic shifts that was creating a sense of being 'alone, together'.



He suggested that spas could help to abate this sense of 'aloneness' by being places of connectivity, continuing to create innovative wellness solutions for an ever-wider demographic with multiple requirements to satisfy.

This year's Summit also saw delegates share their favourite items of personal wellness technology during the afternoon's 'Tech Jam' session. Highlights included a breathalyser that plugs into a smartphone; the 'motivation at a glance' Misfit Shine that monitors fitness and sleep; and the HAPIfork that follows and assesses eating habits.

Hedonistic sustainability

Danish architectural innovator Bjarke Ingels delivered an inspirational keynote session on the future of architecture, entitled 'Hedonistic Sustainability'. He began by expressing his feelings towards design. "Architecture happens in response to local conditions and experience – it never happens out of the blue," he said. "It's about creating a man-made eco-system, not just about creating a pretty building."

Discussing the alchemy of architecture, he asked delegates to re-think their approach to the design and feel of their spas. "You not only have the ability, you have the responsibility to change the spaces we live in."

Future visions

The final session of the second day involved short presentations from leading spa and wellness architects on their visions of the future.

Anthony DiGiuseppe, president and CEO of DiGiuseppe Architect, said that, above all, spas should "provide a feeling of safety and nurturing" but emphasised that they also have to work in practice. "I don't care how beautiful it is, a spa is not a success if it doesn't work operationally", he ruled.

For Bob Henry, principal of Robert D. Henry Architects, integration in the built environment was crucial to bringing about a sense of transition, particularly important within an urban landscape.

Having worked for more than two decades in spa and overseen 25 international projects, Henry's vision of the future was one in which there was flexibility and a "re-purposing of space" wherever possible.

Abigail Levy, an associate at global design powerhouse HBA, posited that the future of spa design would be about "creating spaces that are bespoke, private, elegant and tactile" and that for a spa design to be future-proof and timeless, architects must really pay attention to their design brief.

Luciano Mazza, vice-president of HKS Hill Glazier Studio shared his vision for Ananda Spa in the Sahyadris, in India. Located three hours south of Mumbai in the forest of the Maharani, Mazza said his vision had been focused on creating a community around the spa with links to its business.

Veronica Schreibeis Smith, principal architect at

1. Economist Kjell A. Nordström PhD 2. GWTC's ministerial and tourism liaison Anni Hood 3. Keynote speaker Bjarke Ingels

Global Wellness Institute: a new voice for the industry

GSWS board member **Mia Kyricos** tells European Spa about the five key areas of focus for the new Global Wellness Institute, which will fast-forward industry development and engagement with other sectors



Mia Kyricos

"After eight years of considerable growth in both our industry as well as our organisation's scope and reach, it became clear to the GSWS board that we needed an identity that better represented all that we are today, as well as our future potential.

As a result, we have created the **Global Wellness Institute (GWI)** as a new umbrella organisation which will deliver five key areas of wellness expertise, namely events; research and information; representation of a wide range of industry verticals including innovation and related best practices; education and recognition of today and tomorrow's leaders, and advocacy to increase support of wellness-related business interests around the world.

The GWI will be tasked to oversee international events such as the annual Global Spa & Wellness Summit and Global Wellness Tourism Congress, as well as our important global roundtable

discussions, which will continue to grow in the coming years throughout different regions.

The Institute will also aim to improve the progression of vital research and education initiatives, such as SRI's newly released reports '2014 Spa & Wellness Economy Research Report and The Global Wellness Tourism Economy 2013'. The growing role of WellnessEvidence.com will also be supported as a much needed online portal to communicate the benefits of different spa and wellness modalities, adding to the organisation's current reputation as a hub of resources already available at gsws.org.

GWI will further examine how we can best serve the growing number of verticals in our industry, such as spa, corporate wellness, fitness, nutrition, mindfulness and beauty.

It will of course take us some time to transition our existing assets and bring this new umbrella identity to life, but we will do so over the course of 2015, including www.globalwellnessinstitute.com which is currently under development.



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Vera Iconica Architecture, concluded the session with her assertion that an intuitive design process results in buildings that have a soul; “we should sculpt functional, logical spaces that add wellness to our lives and places of grace.”

Conscious leadership

The final day of the Summit began with a stunning presentation from filmmaker Louie Schwartzberg, the founder of Moving Art. His work focuses on revealing ‘the heart of the human soul through nature’ and Schwartzberg shared how he is applying his unique vision to the spa and wellness space.

The assembled delegates then divided into two streams in order to choose their next speakers, with Dr Daniel Friedland, the founder of SuperSmartHealth, delivering a fascinating and deeply personal presentation on brain science, and the impact it has on leadership, beauty and spas.

His examination of how to create the ‘soul’ of a truly healing spa centred on data involving Intensive Care Units, where it has been shown that bringing nature and light into the space significantly increases the rate of post-operative discharges.

Speaking about conscious leadership, Dr Friedland said: “If we bring down the walls, we truly are one planet. We are all working to elevate humanity and we’re all leveraging health, wellness and consciousness to do so. Our ability to tap into inspiration will ultimately lead us to creativity, fulfillment and high performance leadership.”

The second presentation option was a sharp focus on wellness communities and wellness living, looking at the investment opportunities.

Birth of the Global Wellness Institute

“Susie Ellis, Peter Ellis and Mia Kyricos, chief brand officer of Spafinder Wellness Inc and GSWS Board member, jointly unveiled plans for the launch of a new umbrella organisation, the Global Wellness Institute (GWI). Already encompassing GSWS,



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WellnessEvidence.com and the Global Wellness Tourism Congress, the GWI will continue to bring together leaders from private and public sectors with the aim of facilitating global collaboration (see Global Wellness Institute boxout, p50).

The afternoon sessions included the first-ever Global Wellness Awards, in which Sarah Livia Szekely Brightwood of Rancho La Puerta was named ‘Leader in Sustainability’; and Magatte Wade was honoured as ‘Leading Woman in Wellness’. Donald B. Ardell PhD and Dr John W. Travis jointly received the ‘Wellness Innovator’ award.

The Summit wrap up by futurist consultant Edie Weiner, put forward the idea that the biggest challenge the spa and wellness industries faced was that of ‘educated incapacity’; their leaders, she warned, would be the last to see the future differently as they are so ingrained in their knowledge and practices.

Weiner urged spas to name the older demographic as the ‘Diamond Generation’ instead of the ‘Silver Generation’, as from the ages of 35 to 75 there was little psychological difference. She said the spa and wellness industries should embrace a self-fulfilling prophecy for the future. “Where you see a future that may not be right, use your vision and passion to make it so”, she instructed. www.gsws.org



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1. Belly dancing entertainment at the Gala Dinner 2. Futurist consultant Edie Weiner 3. Dr Daniel Friedland, founder of SuperSmartHealth 4. Wahanda's Lopo Champalimaud and Belgin Aksoy, founder of Global Wellness Day 5. Mexico City is announced as the host city for GSWS 2015



Hamмам magic at Four Seasons Marrakech

GSWS delegates enjoyed the luxurious hammam ritual at Four Seasons Marrakech. Senior spa director Verena Lasvigne-Fox reveals how it was designed to be a cornerstone of its luxurious treatment menu



Verena Lasvigne-Fox

The art of the hammam is an ancient and integral part of Moroccan life.

Water and cleanliness are essential elements of Islam and in a part of the world where family and community are everything, the hammam is a place where people can go to socialise, gossip, make

connections, do business and even arrange marriages.

The hammams found in the medina, the old part of Marrakech, are truly authentic – a couple of small, tiled rooms announced by a faded 'Sunsilk' sign. Others are hundreds of years old and full of character, with great domed rooms heated from beneath by wood fires, with beams of sunlight filtering through stained glass into the steamy darkness within.

A treatment with tradition

Our wish at the Four Seasons was to provide guests with a traditional hammam experience, but with added Occidental influences and comfort. The big difference is that our therapists accompany guests throughout this beautiful cleansing ritual, making it an integral part of our treatment programme.

The usual path through a hammam consists of a warm room, a hot room and a cold room, but ours has just the first two of these. Instead of a cold room we use a beautiful, refreshing plunge pool just in front of the hammam to close the pores and conclude the treatment (of course, guests have been thoroughly rinsed by their therapist before this stage).



Clockwise from top left: A guest is rinsed after their authentic hammam experience; the refreshing plunge pool at Le Spa Four Seasons Marrakech; there are separate steam rooms for men and women; the stylish spa reception area; a restful and comforting treatment room

We have one big public steam room (the hot room) in the female spa and one in the male spa. Here, the body is prepared for the treatment with plenty of warm water and black soap is applied, before guests are left to sweat for 10-15 minutes.

Our black soap is sourced locally and made from olive and argane oil with water and salt. This recipe is centuries old and its exfoliant power is complemented by the use of a horse hair glove. The elimination of dead skin allows it to breathe while making it clean and free of toxins and impurities.

A therapist then escorts the guest to one of our private homage rooms where the black soap is rinsed off, a complete body scrub is given and a ghaassoul body mask is applied to eliminate dirt embedded in the pores of the skin. Our ghaassoul is typical Moroccan clay, sourced from the Fès region in the Atlas mountains and supplemented with seven herbal extracts and essential oils, including rose, cloves, rosemary and myrtle. These extracts play different roles in relaxation, purification and improving peripheral circulation in the skin and scalp.

To conclude the ritual we take our guests to our fragrant relaxation garden where we harvest local herbs for personalised tea infusions. We hope they will treasure this moment of wellbeing under the sunny blue sky of Marrakech, surrounded by jasmine, geranium, rosemary, sage, mint, verbena and lavender.

www.fourseasons.com/marrakech

Verena Lasvigne-Fox is senior spa director, European region, at Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts.