



Horwath HTL

Health & Wellness

In cooperation with

GOCO
HOSPITALITY

INDUSTRY REPORT

Designing Through the Wellness Lens

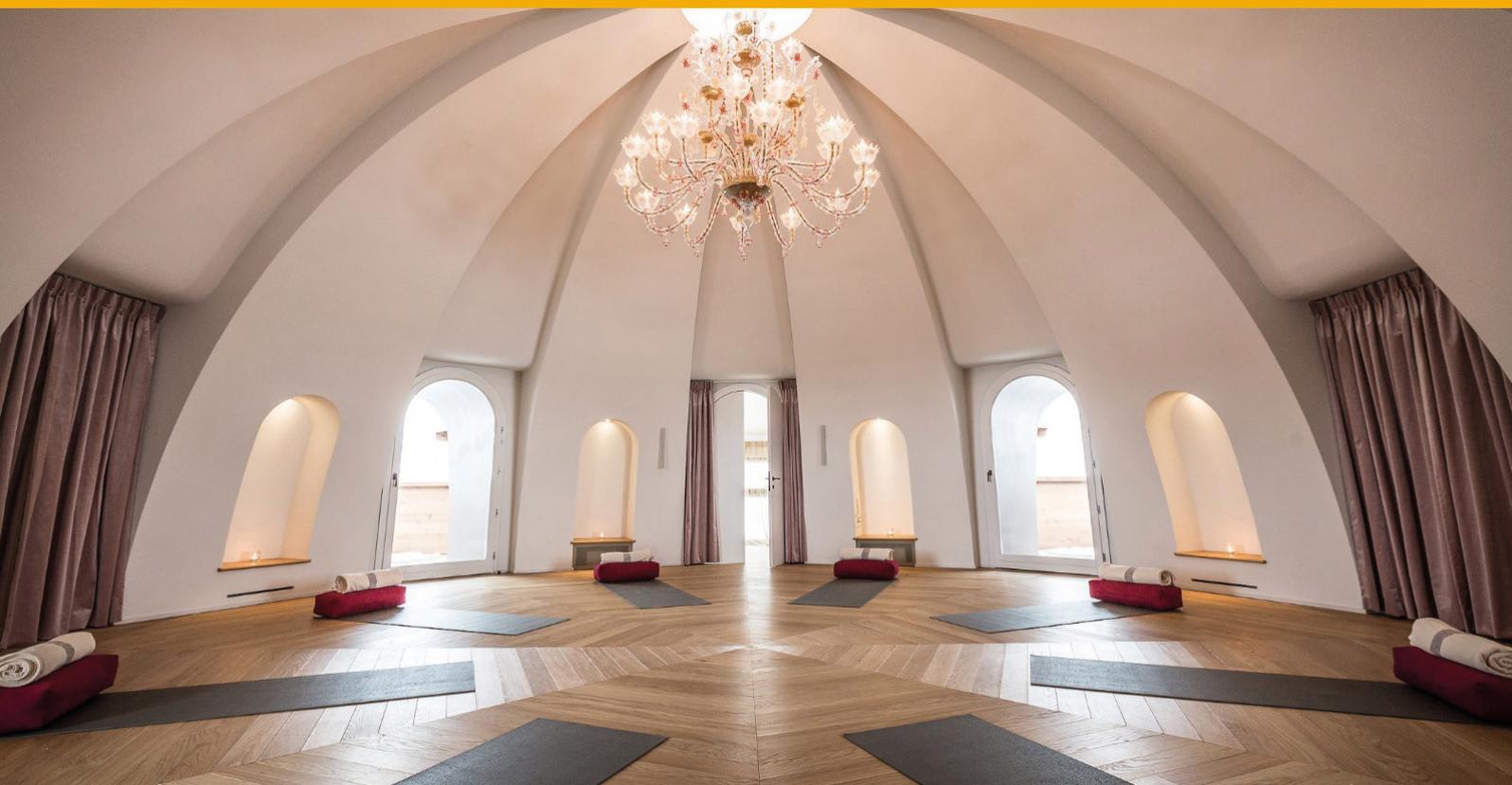
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Introduction

As the global landscape is becoming increasingly complex, turbulent and over-populated, wellness resorts are re-emerging as spaces where people can disconnect from this environment, heal and regain a sense of vitality and centeredness. While wellness resort experiences are generally not integrated with mainstream health care systems, there is a growing body of research that suggests such places can have a significant long-term benefit for people with chronic diseases (The Health Impact of Residential Retreats: A Systematic Review, 2018).

In order for these spaces to create such an effect on people, a specialized and meticulous design process is required, one that differs significantly from the process followed for all other types of real estate asset developments. Whereas this specific design process has to enable a unique immersive and transformative experience that is aligned with the particular psychology of guests staying at wellness resorts, it must equally enable the delivery of personalized, seamless and intuitive guest services. Starting with an overview of wellness resort characteristics and the unique mindset and behaviors of guests staying at such resorts, this paper demonstrates the crucial importance of placing guest experience and ease of operations at the core of the wellness resort design process.



Wellness Resort Characteristics

According to the Wellness Tourism Association (WTA), a wellness resort, also referred to as a wellness sanctuary or wellness clinic, is “any facility with accommodations and a range of hospitality services where the primary purpose is to provide programs and experiences for the wellness traveler¹. The wellness resort is comprised of four primary elements: (i) accommodation, (ii) a variety of wellness activities, (iii) healthy dining options, and (iv) wellness-related facilities.” These elements need to be integrated with an overarching philosophy that guides the development and delivery of wellness services, and includes thoughtful architectural and landscape design that provides access to nature.

Wellness resorts typically do not sell rooms only, but offer programs that are inclusive of accommodation, meals, as well as wellness related services such as consultations, diagnostics, treatments and activities. If two people are staying in the same room, each person will have their own bill, corresponding to their respective personalized program. Wellness programs are designed for guests to efficiently achieve specific and measurable health and wellness goals, and to learn about healthy ways of living.

¹ Often referred to as the “primary wellness traveler,” an individual who makes wellness the primary purpose of a trip.

They range in duration, but are historically seven days, with a minimum of three days in order to provide sufficient time for guests to benefit from the experience.

Wellness programs also include a pre-arrival and post-departure process in order to extend the guest wellness journey beyond the stay. During the pre-arrival process, the resort collects health and wellness data from the guest, such as medical history, family history, lifestyle, habits, past treatments and test results, and determines what the guest’s trip purpose is. The aim of this process is on the one hand to reassure the guest and establish trust, and on the other hand to personalize the wellness program to the specific requirements of the guest. During the post-departure process, one or more follow-up phone consultations are scheduled with the wellness concierge in order to help guests to manifest the desired outcomes that were established during the program, and recommend any potential adjustments.

Overall, wellness resorts operate under a distinctive business model, and thus they must be supported by an equally distinctive design process in order to ensure that the spaces are created to accommodate transformative experiences.



Wellness Resort Guest Psychology

Guests staying at wellness resorts, or wellness travelers, have expectations that significantly differ from guests staying at leisure resorts or other types of hotels. Understanding their particular psychology and related behaviors is essential in order to design adequate supporting spaces and experiences.

Wellness resort guests travel for the purpose of achieving specific goals relating to their health and wellbeing. Rather than simply wanting a holiday, they seek to remove themselves from their routine life and invite a personal transformation that allows them to overcome a significant health challenge, release bad habits, or acquire new skills so they can experience a new way of being when they return home. As such wellness resort guests have a personal development mindset, while also understanding that the process can be challenging and involves detoxification and the release of toxic stress. Therefore, they typically approach their journey with a combination of enthusiasm and apprehension, contradicting feelings that the wellness resort must address through the pre-arrival consultation process, and throughout the guest's entire stay. In addition, guests begin their wellness program with the expectation of being cared for, well advised, and appropriately diagnosed and healed. They therefore place a great amount of trust

in the wellness resort and its staff, and thus expect to be provided with professional, attentive and personalized service in exchange for this trust.

The most important emotion felt by guests undergoing wellness programs, and for wellness resort developers and operators to thoroughly understand, is vulnerability. As people go through different types of treatments, their physical bodies may be weakened at first, as a natural part of the healing journey. This journey may be physically demanding and often triggers an emotional release, resulting in fatigue and the need to rest. At times, this change may also cause challenging physical and mental reactions, before resulting in improvements. Therefore, during the time when their body is weak, guests feel vulnerable, both physically and mentally. It is thus crucial that the spaces where guests are treated, rest, move and circulate support this emotional state and the related needs that arise from it.



Adjacency Design Guidelines

Given the particularities of their concepts and business models, as well as the specific mindset and behavior of the guests that they host, wellness resorts can only deliver the desired and expected experience with carefully designed adjacencies. Such adjacencies also need to enable operations to be run seamlessly, thus maximizing service levels and financial performance. In order to develop accurate and functional design adjacencies, certain key guidelines must be followed, and adapted to the unique elements that define each project. The following section presents an overview of some of the key design guidelines that should be considered, both at the wellness resort level and at the wellness center² level.

Wellness Resort Adjacency Guidelines

Although there are numerous types of wellness resorts that differ from each other through the wellness service platform that they offer, there are certain adjacency design parameters that are common across all types. These parameters include the following:

- The main resort arrival should be smaller than for traditional leisure resorts. In wellness resorts, guests only visit the main arrival twice during their stay, during the check-in and check-out processes, which occur every three, seven or more days, depending on the duration of the wellness program. Therefore, since this facility supports minimal functions, its scale must be reduced and provide an intimate setting.
- If the concept of the resort includes components that are accessible to external guests or day users, a clear separation needs to be implemented between the resort's private inner core, and the semi-public facilities. In such a case, the semi-public facilities are typically located before and adjacent to the main resort arrival, as a way to prevent external guests from accessing the resort's private areas, and to isolate in-house guests from potential noise and other distractions coming from the semi-public areas. However, semi-public areas should also be easily accessible to in-house guests. Such semi-public areas may include a community village with retail, food and beverage, activities, meetings and events facilities, as well as a medi spa, which offers more medically oriented diagnostics and treatments such as beauty and cosmetic procedures, among others.

² The wellness center includes all of the facilities dedicated to diagnostics and treatments, such as consultation and treatment rooms, changing rooms, heat and water experiences, fitness studio, and other, depending on the wellness resort's concept.

Additionally, by being in the semi-public areas, the beauty salon and male barber benefit from higher traffic flow than if these facilities were located in the private resort areas.

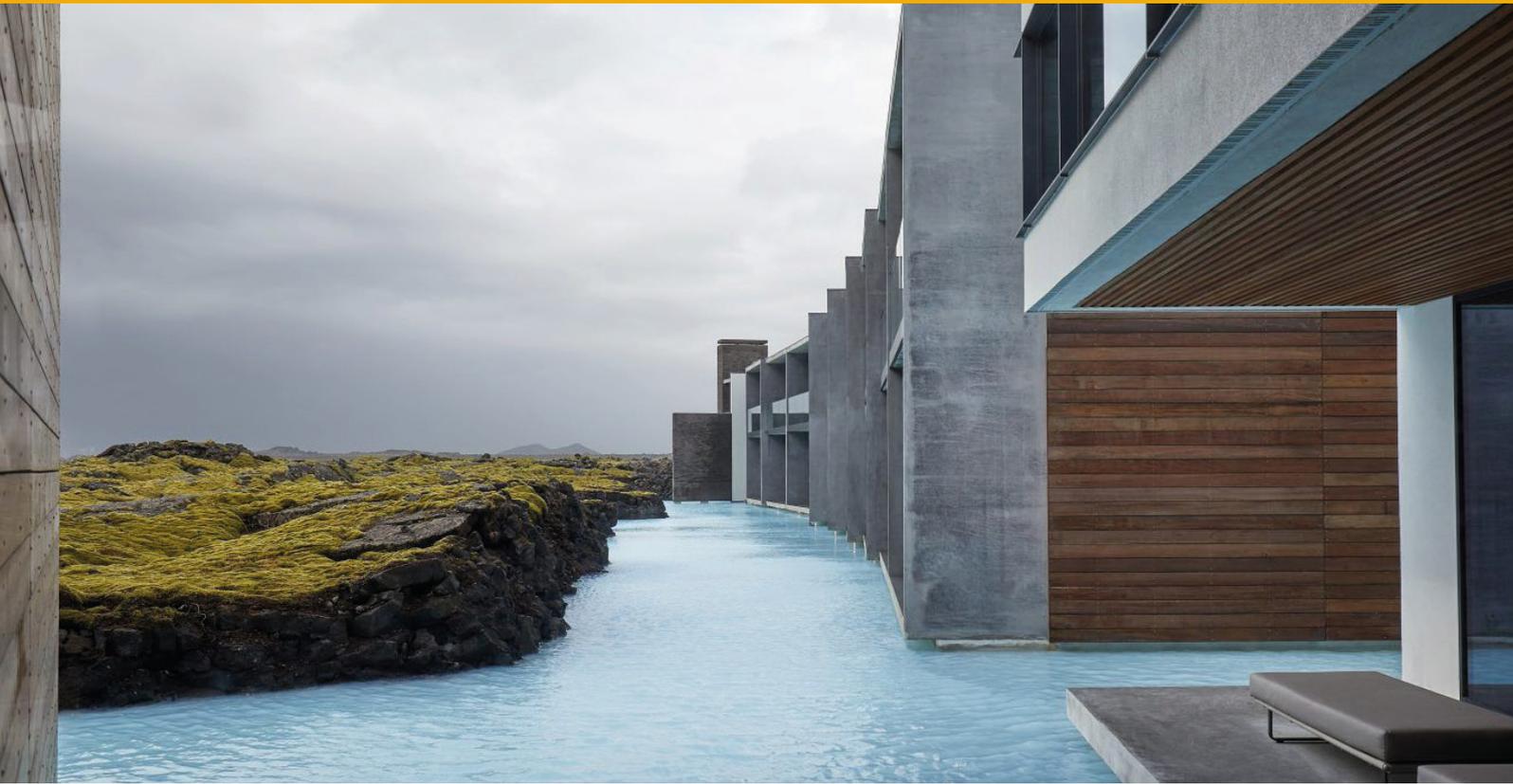
- Although the medi spa, as described above, should be located in the resort's semi-public area, it must also be adjacent to the resort's wellness center, which is only accessible to in-house guests. Such a layout is essential in order to create operational synergies between both facilities, from an in-house guest flow, staffing, products and equipment, and servicing perspective. Furthermore, the medi spa should provide a discreet access for both in-house and external guests, as people undergoing aesthetic treatments expect privacy due to potential visible after-effects. Finally, and depending on the level of medical treatments provided, the access road to the medi spa should be able to accommodate emergency vehicles in case of hospitalization needs.
- In the case where the resort includes branded real estate residences, these must have a dedicated residential access road, entrance and security gate in order to maintain privacy and exclusivity. The residences should also be located outside of the resort's private inner core but nonetheless adjacent to the wellness center, which becomes the "clubhouse" for the residents.
- Overall, the wellness center must be located at a central point of the entire resort, as it corresponds to the most important and visited facility of the development. Thus, it should be easily visible and within a comfortable walking distance for all in-house guests. Typically, the more premium accommodation units are located closer to the wellness center but with maintained privacy and views.
- In addition to the semi-public meetings and events facilities, wellness resorts typically feature more intimate meeting spaces that are part of the private inner core and accessible only to in-house guests. Such spaces should be less formal than what is offered in traditional resorts, as their purpose is for guests to exchange, learn and reflect. They typically consist of a library, dialogue rooms, and smaller seating areas, among others.
- It is common for the all-day dining food and beverage outlet of wellness resorts to include a community table, in addition to the usual clusters of tables and seats. Such a table has a much larger seating capacity than usual tables, and serves as a place for guests to exchange and bond. Adding this element supports the development of a community among resort guests, which is beneficial to the enhancement of individual healing journeys.
- It is also recommended to feature an organic garden as part of the wellness resort, including a show garden adjacent to the all-day dining food and beverage outlet. Such a show garden located at proximity from a facility that is visited daily serves to reinforce the resort's educational component by helping guests to understand the value of clean food and healthy nutrition.
- In wellness resorts the parking facilities are typically more discreet than in traditional resorts, as guests tend to stay within the premises of the property throughout their stay and thus have less need for a convenient access to parking. The parking area may potentially be located underground if the site permits.
- For family oriented wellness resorts, it is important to allocate certain areas of the development as family zones and children's education and activities components. Such facilities should be appropriately separated from other resort components in order to isolate noise.
- Finally, given the importance of outdoor areas, wellness resort adjacency components should be laid out in relation to natural or landscaped spaces, in order to provide as much green immersion as possible.

Wellness Center Adjacency Guidelines

As previously explained, the wellness center represents the focal point of wellness resort developments, and corresponds to the facility that is most visited by guests on a daily basis. Thus, whereas a spa in a traditional leisure resort is often treated as an amenity, or “nice to have,” generally has a small area, and offers a limited range of treatments, a wellness center is key in the overall guest experience, presents a much larger area and much more complex and specialized facilities. As a result, similarly to wellness resorts as a whole, wellness centers should follow certain key design parameters, adapted to the resorts particular wellness concept, program offering and treatment menu. The design parameters are as follows:

- Wellness center adjacencies are based on the fundamental concept of active zones and passive zones. Active zones correspond to areas where guests are fully clothed and have a normal or higher heart rate. In such zones, guests have not yet entered the relaxation stage and their nervous system remains active. Passive zones, on the other hand, correspond to areas where guests have changed into treatment or bathing attire, and have a slower heart rate. In such zones, guest have entered the relaxation stage and their nervous system is calmed. It is crucial that the wellness center active zones be distinctively separated from the passive zones, as the behavior and psychology of guests in each zone differ significantly, thus need to be accounted for with different layouts, design elements, and operational processes.
- The wellness center arrival, an active zone as the central core, should be larger than the resort’s main arrival, as it is visited by in-house guests multiple times per day, thus accommodates a much larger operational volume than the main arrival. The arrival must include sufficient sign-in counters and waiting areas for guests in order to limit waiting time.
- If the beauty salon, barber shop and retail outlet are not located within the resort’s semi-public areas, it is recommended that these facilities be adjacent to the wellness center arrival, as all of these components together also form part of the active zone.
- Consultation and diagnostic rooms are also included within the active zone, and correspond to the first component located after the wellness center arrival, as the services provided in these rooms help to determine the treatment journey of guests within the wellness center during their entire stay.
- Fitness and mind and body practice spaces, both indoor and outdoor, may either be located within or adjacent to the wellness center, and are also considered as active zones.
- The changing and locker rooms serve as a place for guests to transition from the active zone to the passive zone, and vice-versa (i.e. pre- and post-treatment). Gender-specific heat and water areas, such as sauna, steam room, and bathing facilities, are located within the respective changing rooms as an extension of the locker areas, and co-ed heat and water areas, if provided, are located after the changing rooms. If both indoor and outdoor co-ed heat and water areas are featured, both spaces should be connected.
- All of the treatment rooms form part of the passive zone, and are typically accessed from the changing rooms, once guests have transitioned away from the active zone. If the wellness center features multiple specialized treatment centers (i.e. oriental healing, Ayurveda), each of these centers should feature their own arrival and seating areas. However, these areas should be comparatively smaller than the main wellness center arrival, and should avoid duplications, such as reception counters, for more efficient operations.
- Relaxation areas, which are used by guests either before or after treatments, are located within the passive zone of the wellness center, and may include both indoor and outdoor facilities.

The above wellness resort and wellness center design guidelines serve as a high-level framework only, and need to be adjusted to the specificities of each project from a location, land topography, site area, wellness concept strategy, treatment menu, regulation and budget perspective. In order to optimize the design of wellness resorts and wellness centers, we recommend partnering with a consultant specialized in the space.



Conclusion

Wellness resorts are a unique type of real estate asset due to the nature of their business model and the profile of people that they cater to. In order to maximize the performance of these assets, it is essential to place their program-driven model and the psychology of individuals undergoing healing journeys at the core of the design process. Only through such a method can wellness resorts stand out from competition and achieve high occupancy and return rates, driven by the unique and personalized experiences that they provide to their guests. Failing to align with such a method and engaging in a design process that does not follow certain guidelines may result in poor guest satisfaction and performance, and thus obsolete assets.

With its growing predominance, technology will progressively become a more essential element to consider as part of the wellness resort design process. Incorporating technology in a carefully planned way can enhance guest experience by creating more comfortable and uncluttered spaces that are supportive of healing journeys. Yet, the challenge will stem from the need to maintain authentic and grounding environments by ensuring that the use of technology remains discreet and unintrusive.

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As Group Director of Design & Development, Josephine Leung is responsible for overall project management and delivery of GOCO Hospitality's Design & Technical Services. Constructing detailed development strategies, she manages concept creation, master planning, strategy, programming, technical services and site administration of all GOCO Hospitality projects. In addition, Leung is also the Co-Founder and Director of Horwath HTL Health and Wellness.

As a licensed Architect and Urban Designer, Josephine has an extensive portfolio ranging from regional city master planning, mixed-used developments, wellness communities and hospitality projects internationally. Well recognized in the industry, Josephine holds many awards for her work on over 200 projects in her professional career. Highlights include 'Best Urban Design Firm of the Year', 'AIA Sustainable Urban Design Award' and 'Best Urban Design & Master Planning' for her work as Vice-President of HOK International.

With this extensive background, Josephine shares her knowledge with each client, perfectly tailoring her expertise to fit every project type. While working for GOCO Hospitality, she has conducted conceptualizations and master planning for a range of GOCO-branded spas, retreats and wellness community projects in countries such as Indonesia, China, Thailand, Portugal, Norway and the United States. She is currently leading GOCO's Hospitality's Temescal Valley wellness community project in California.

At the age of 23, Leung was appointed as the Project Designer for The Landmark Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong. She has also led design development for many world-class clients such as Address Hotels & Resorts, Bvlgari Hotels & Resorts, Capella, Four Seasons, InterContinental, Viceroy, Octave, Ritz-Carlton and Steigenberger Hotels.



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As a Consultant at Horwath HTL Health and Wellness, Adrien is responsible for feasibility analyses and strategic advisory for international wellness hospitality and mixed-use real estate developments. Since joining Horwath HTL, he has conducted in-depth feasibility studies, including concept and planning strategies, for medium- to large-scale development projects in Europe, North America, the Caribbean and Asia Pacific.

Adrien started his career working with Heidrick & Struggles where he was responsible for recruiting and developing senior executives on behalf of multinational clients in the property, real estate, construction and engineering industries. Prior to joining Horwath HTL Health and Wellness, Adrien founded his own investment advisory company structuring and brokering cross-border investments in Asia.

With his range of experience in entrepreneurship, investment advisory, project management and human resources, Adrien brings a strategic outlook to the multi-layered wellness-centric development projects at Horwath HTL Health and Wellness.

He holds a Bachelor's degree in Finance from McGill University, a Master of Science in Management from ESSEC Business School, and a certification in Real Estate Financial Modeling from REFM.



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With over 10 years of dedicated spa and wellness design experience, Andrea brings a trained eye to all of her design projects at GOCO Hospitality. Ensuring that spa and wellness spaces are highly effective and meet the demands of target guests, she is able to flawlessly execute design and development strategies and processes, working closely with clients, consultants and project teams.

While at GOCO Hospitality, Dubois has used her skills as design manager to coordinate and deliver technical services to both GOCO-branded spa and wellness retreats and clients including Capella, Four Seasons, and St. Regis Hotels. She is also the lead designer for GOCO Hospitality's Kazakhstan project, a 220 room wellness resort with 8,000sqm of integrated medicine and wellness facilities, currently in development.

By fully comprehending a client's vision before bringing it into reality, Andrea is able to offer design and technical services that provide both creatively unique and operationally functional results.

Acknowledgments:

With special thanks to Dr. Marc Cohen for his invaluable contributions to this paper from a wellness guest experience and psychology standpoint. Dr. Marc is one of Australia's pioneers of integrative and holistic medicine. He is a registered medical practitioner with degrees in western medicine, physiology and psychological medicine along with PhDs in Chinese medicine and biomedical engineering. He is also the Founder of the Extreme Wellness Institute and Co-Founder of the Bathe the World Foundation. Professor Marc Cohen currently Chair of the Australasian Wellness Association, a Board Member of the Global Wellness Summit and Professor of Health Sciences at RMIT University where he leads online Wellness Programs and conducts research into various aspects of holistic health including lifestyle, detoxification and human performance. He is also Past-President (from 2000-2007) of the Australasian Integrative Medicine Association (AIMA).

Photos:

Aro Hā, New Zealand
 Lefay Resorts, Italy (Sharon Radisch)
 Mandali, Italy
 Lanserhof Tegernsee, Austria (Alexander Haiden)
 Vana Retreat, India
 The Retreat – Blue Lagoon, Iceland



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