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The Ultimate Incentive

Spa resorts provide relaxation on the road

By Amrit Chima

There is a very important question meeting planners should ask themselves when considering a resort equipped with a spa facility: Does a spa fit with company culture? The answer may depend on a number of variables, such as the type of company, the company's budget and the nature of the meeting. If corporate attendees are in conference rooms all day leaning over documents with no time to spare for foot rubs and manicures, then a spa may be a frivolous and unnecessary expense. However, if the meeting is incentive, client or executive based, the spa can become essential.

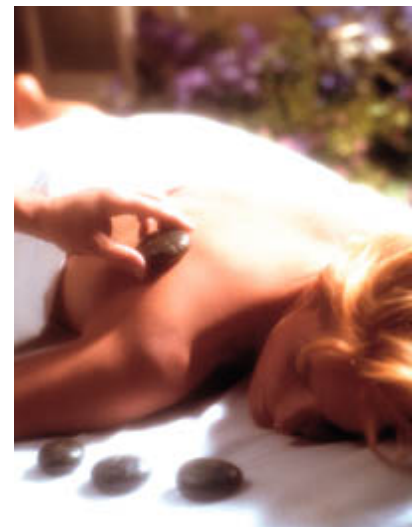
The spa industry—which, according to the International Spa Association (ISPA), is entirely dedicated to "enhancing overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit"—is scooping up U.S. real estate at speeds that would make The Flash and the Roadrunner breathless. The square footage is staggering—38.9 million square feet is dedicated to the 5,689 spas in the U.S. These facilities filled with seaweed and pumice stone also seem to satisfy an ever increasing desire for better and greater luxuries among both leisure and business travelers.

Spas are a huge factor when clients choose a property, asserts Anne Stephany, public relations manager at Loews Coronado Bay Resort & Spa in San Diego. "We opened our \$5 million spa for that very reason; to remain competitive we had to open a spa." Not all planners agree, of course. "Accessibility to a spa is a contributing factor when choosing a property, but not a determining one," says Jennifer Hegner, manager for meetings, events and tradeshows at Boston Scientific. In her opinion, it's nice to have a spa on a property, but she would not turn down an appropriate resort with various other leisure possibilities, such as the beach or golf, just because it didn't have a spa. But if spas are not essential for meetings, why then are resorts building \$5 million facilities?

A relaxing incentive

As planners know, there's a lot more to meetings than just meeting. One spa manager

Generally, if meeting planners are indeed looking to arrange a meeting at a spa resort, both Mr. Perotti and Ms. Hegner agree: the larger the spa the better. A three treatment room spa is simply not attractive. "A larger full-service spa covers all the bases contingent on the program" says Perotti.



Spa Managers noted that business travelers are bringing along the kids, as well as their respective wives or husbands. This was particularly true after 9/11, says Marian Torres, the spa group sales manager of La Quinta Resort & Club near Palm Springs, California. The national tragedy forced many to consider the value of family time. Thus many employees brought the family along when traveling for work. The spa provides something to do—a very extravagant something people might not otherwise treat themselves to—while spouses are tending to business. Many spas even cater to teens, offering rooms decorated with surfboards and flowers, as well as a section of the menu dedicated to these young spa-goers.

The concept of incorporating leisure time into corporate meetings isn't new: how many deals have been made on the golf course? Today, however, golf is facing stiff competition from spas at some resorts. "Our golf course is small," says Tina Newman, director of sales for Enchantment Resort in Sedona, Arizona. "This used to be an issue when making arrangements with meeting planners. Now it's not, because people prefer our spa." Who knew suit- and skirt-clad corporate employees would closet their well-worn clubs and opt instead to spend a day at the spa when not in conference workshops?



At some resorts, it's possible to do both. With its five golf courses, La Quinta Resort has been dubbed one of the best places to play golf in all of Southern California. It's not at all surprising, then that its spa offers two massages (of the 16 on its menu) tailor-made for the weary golfer, targeting the muscles most worn by a day on the green. La Quinta also offers a variety of facials, of which the most unique is the European-based "Champagne Revitalization Facial," using the yeast extract of French bubbly. The resort tailors spa package programs for groups, and also provides information and assistance to incorporate health and fitness breaks into meeting

agendas (www.laquintaresort.com).

At Hawaii's Grand Wailea Resort, on the other hand, golf is no longer the main activity, though it is still quite popular. Whereas events and meetings were previously scheduled around tee times, now spa appointments are woven into meeting schedules. Golf has become simply an activity on a list of many others, of which the Grand Wailea's spa is a major player. "You need expertise and skill to play golf," says Cindy Lawrence, public relations manager of the Grand Wailea, "but at the spa you can just lie there and enjoy." The relaxation benefits are more readily available and much more easily attainable at the spa (www.grandwailea.com).

Golfers aren't the only athletes who benefit from spa treatments. Since Park City's Stein Eriksen Lodge offers skiing in the winter, hiking and biking in the summer, the lodge's spa provides a range of massages to help ease muscle tension accumulated from athletic activity. High in the Wasatch Mountains, the spa's therapists also help to overcome the effects of high altitude for those who need it (www.steinlodge.com).

Of all business travelers, incentive groups—those whose meetings reward employees for their hard work—are most likely to include paraffin treatments and aromatherapy in their agenda. "The spa is certainly important for incentive groups," says Pepper Dombroski, director of group sales for the Grand Wailea. "These people feel like they have worked all year for it." Michelle Fallone, senior account manager for Summit Performance Group, agrees: "It is a chance to spoil [employees] in return for their efforts in the office and a time to allow employees/team members to relax and unwind so they can return to the office rejuvenated and fresh. I think no other activity accomplishes these goals better than the spa experience."

The spa experience

Just what does this experience offer? The relaxation possibilities spas present are endless—well, almost. Just as we can only peripherally grasp the enormity and significance of infinity, so too is it with spa services. Each of the country's 5,689 spas is competing to offer a sublime level of tranquility, and there are myriad choices for what would best loosen those tense shoulders or relieve that stress headache: ancient eastern healing exfoliation techniques, hot stone and deep tissue massages, mud foot wraps, facials and bathing rituals, slimming treatments targeting

cellulite, manicures and pedicures. Each spa lays out these treatments in often-extensive menus.

Sometimes these treatments are designed to heal the body. One of the specialties of Susurru, The Spa at Poets Cove is its "raindrop therapy" (perhaps appropriate for a spa in British Columbia). Masseuses sprinkle the recipient with a sequence of antimicrobial oils designed to soothe inflamed areas and kill the pathogens responsible. According to the spa, the oils continue to work five to seven days after the application (www.poetscove.com).

Other spas heal the mind. One particularly decadent example is the Remède Spa at the St. Regis Hotel in San Francisco. The whitewashed and cream-colored rooms of this 9,000-square-foot facility are lightly aromatic, and subtly warmed by the sounds of drums and flutes. Attendants treat guests respectfully, opening doors for visitors and allowing spa-goers to walk ahead of them rather than follow behind. They are soft-spoken and gentle; they constantly remind visitors to take their time and they ask many questions before each treatment begins in order to better understand each guest.

The facility is equally as welcoming. The showers are large and luxurious, with raindrop showerheads; it's a place to unwind and loosen the body before a massage. There is also a steam room to help rid the body of stubborn tension and stress, either before or after treatment. The "Remede Customized Massage" is also complemented by a parafango wrap, where each foot is snuggled into a bag filled with warm mud. The spa's menu includes a number of additional wraps, scrubs, facials and baths (www.starwoodhotels.com/stregis).

Spa treatments are often available a la carté or in packages. At The Spa at Costanoa in Pescadero, California, for example, guests can choose "The Costanoa Sampler." The treatment starts with a natural bristle dry brush massage, then moves on to an aromatherapy blanket wrap. Here, guests have their hands, feet, neck and shoulders massaged with essential oils before they're swaddled in a warm blanket. For dessert, guests receive a scalp massage, quick trip to a hot tub, and a "Dr. Hauschka Herbal Facial" with milk, exfoliating cream and hot compresses (www.costanoa.com).

A good spa shows a discriminating sense of detail: rooms imbued with an herbal aroma, perhaps jasmine or rosemary with faint sandalwood undertones, cucumber or lemon-flavored water, tea or even champagne to sip while donning a plush robe and bath slippers in a private locker room. A very good spa might also have truffles or fruit to nibble, such as oranges (sliced and peeled, of course) and fresh raspberries, showers equipped with raindrop showerheads, steam rooms and hot tubs, dim lighting and the ambient sound of cascading waterfalls. The spa experience will only be as good as a visitor's state of mind, and such details serve to prepare the spa-goer for what is to come, as well as help maintain the benefits of services just concluded. Most importantly, those benefits will linger for a week, maybe even two if the treatment was particularly exceptional.

Sea Spa at Loews Coronado Beach Resort & Spa is known for exceptional treatments. Located on the shores of the Pacific Ocean and the San Diego Bay, Sea Spa makes use of its natural surroundings with mineral-rich, sea-based products. The spa's menu consists of nine different massages. In keeping with the theme, they include the Watsu, a Shiatsu massage performed in 96 degree water. It's a rare treatment of stretches, massage and gentle pulling on the body to help make the spine more supple, and only a few places in Southern California offer it. Sea Spa also provides eight types of facials to accommodate a variety of skin types, even ones specifically designed for men. Their full body treatments vary, from the Oceanic detox and Tri-Crystal Microdermabrasion to the Rainforest Body Elixir and Coconut Island Wrap. The property houses four outdoor massage rooms, 11 indoor treatment rooms, a wet treatment room and relaxation sanctuary (www.loewshotels.com/hotels/sandiego/).

What to consider

Groups partaking in the many pleasures of the spa must consider many more variables. Size, location and the time of year are significant determinants. Generally, the larger the group, the more herbal steam rooms and gongs of Tibetan meditation music become a part of the package, though smaller groups still have great interest in this sort of luxury. If meeting planners are indeed looking to arrange a meeting at a spa resort, the larger the spa the better. "A larger full-service spa covers all the bases contingent on the program," says Edward Perotti, global meeting manager for Network Appliance, Inc.

As the largest spa in all of Hawaii, Spa Grande at Maui's Grand Wailea Resort holds 40 treatment rooms within its 50,000 square feet, and its menu offers more than one hundred treatments. Perhaps a comparison to infinity is not so far off the mark. Like any quality spa, Spa Grande considers the importance of preparing the body for treatment by heightening the senses with its "Terme Wailea Hydrotherapy." Not surprisingly, there are choices for the hydrotherapy: before treatment, lounge in five aromatic baths, or a Japanese Furo Bath with bubbles, or indulge in a waterfall massage. After treatment, relax in a Roman Jacuzzi Tub or dip in a cold plunge pool. Of Spa Grande's 21—yes, 21—massages, the most unusual are the six-hand massage, the prenatal massage and the Shiatsu back walking massage (www.grandwailea.com).

Of course, smaller spa resorts sometimes make up for their size with quality of service. A much smaller spa than its resort counterparts, Spa Vitale at Vitale Hotel, San Francisco maintains a high quality of individual service that makes up for its size. The three treatment rooms are located on the penthouse level, with views of the Bay Bridge and downtown. The outdoor deep soaking tubs—filled with goat's milk, lavender, or tangerine—are set on the terrace amidst the urban San Francisco high rises, yet shielded by bamboo to create a private garden. The treatment rooms are warmly decorated with dark wood and dimly lit with candles, clearly designed to help guests relax during their massage. Midway through the massage, the therapist places a mask over the eyes, which simultaneously cools and warms. A small touch, but the benefits are significant. When the eyes are relaxed the body soon follows, and is therefore much more receptive to the massage (www.hotelvitale.com).

Location and time are also key: in Palm Springs the best spa times for meeting attendees are in the summer when the heat is too scorching for outdoor activity and the rates are low. However, in Hawaii, August and July are the worst spa months because the islands are packed with vacationers. Some spas cater to specific tastes: what wine lover wouldn't want to combine a morning at The Meritage Hotel's spa with an afternoon in Napa or Sonoma Valley? (www.themeritagehotel.com). Other locations are blessed with natural features as relaxing and stimulating as the spa treatments themselves. At the Boulder Hot Springs Inn and Spa in southwestern Montana, for example, the resort's natural geothermal mineral baths and steam rooms are the main attraction. The hot water fuels clothing-optional indoor "plunges" at temperatures of 103 to 106 degrees (www.boulderhotsprings.com).

Another spa that takes advantage of its location is Sagestone at Red Mountain Spa and Resort, in St. George, Utah. With its January debut, this new spa is situated among red rock canyons, lava bed gardens, rock spires, sand dunes and desert flora. The setting is a testament to the kind of service one will receive upon entering the doors.

Sagestone offers a variety of treatments, such as its "Red Earth Inspired Treatments" with a "Adobe Lavender Hydrating Cocoon," in which the skin is lightly exfoliated, then rubbed with mineral mud from Utah. The "Ancients Inspired Treatments listing" features—among other services—the "Thai Yoga Massage," a combination of stretching and rhythmic massaging and compressions to stimulate energy flow. There are also "Journey," "Botanical & Desert," "Adventure," "Luxury" and "Teen- Inspired" treatments to create a menu that has something for every guest. The spa consists of 14 treatment rooms—including two wet rooms—a multi-purpose room, two facial rooms, eight massage rooms, a couple's massage room, and two outdoor cabanas (www.redmountainspa.com).

A spa's location encompasses more than just physical beauty. It also includes its historic and cultural context. The Mii Amo spa at Enchantment Resort in Sedona, Arizona is a spiritually infused property where the Apache believed a woman made love to the sun and gave birth to their tribe. Framed by the red cliffs of Boynton Canyon, considered sacred by the Apache as well as the Anasazi tribe, Enchantment Resort is naturally equipped with an ambience and energy ideal for meditation, nutrition and fitness, yoga, body feng shui, herbal baths and massages. Not a day spa, use of the 24,000-square-foot Mii Amo facility is only for guests. Go for just a massage, or shed your clothes and spend an entire week wearing only a robe (www.enchantmentresort.com).

Spas are the latest and biggest news in leisure trends, and resorts are hardly worth a mention anymore if they are without Vichy showers and hot pools. But are those Vichy showers essential

for meetings? The spa trend is so new that perhaps the answer to this question cannot yet be fully determined. For now, it seems, it just depends on how much planners are willing to indulge themselves—and their clients.

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