Chapter 11
Marketing Global Luxury Spa and Wellness Trends, Experiences, and Challenges

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ABSTRACT
Luxury hotel and resort spas have been perceived and criticized for their similarities and for not having a true authentic or culturally thematic identity, and for losing their original intention of a spa experience due to rapid commercialization. Empirical research relating to spa management is also limited. The purposes of this chapter are (1) to highlight some of the important global market trends that force all sectors of the travel industry to gear towards a healthy, wellness-minded concept in designing their products and services; (2) to define wellness tourism and the meaning of spa; (3) to address several under-researched variables that account for a crucial role in differentiating or characterizing a spa’s identity and customers’ preferences or perceived authenticity of a spa. Relevant literature is reviewed. Theories from multiple fields are applied. Future research and managerial implications will also be discussed in the content of this chapter.

INTRODUCTION
The global spa and wellness industry has moved from its infancy to the growing stage. It has much potential for continuous growth as the aging population is increasing worldwide and as people are becoming more health-conscious, wellness-minded, and interested in sustaining a good quality of life. Spa is a core business within wellness tourism and it accounts for a significant portion (about 41 percent) of wellness tourism economy (Yeung, Johnston, & Chan, 2014). Currently, there is a spa service establishment in just about all the luxury hotels or resorts in the world. The growing demand for healthier travel will increase 9 percent annually through 2017. This growth is 50 percent faster than tourism in general (“Health Hotels 2.0,” 2014). As the spa industry continues to grow, sophisticated consumers also want things that are authentic rather than
homogenized. This chapter begins by defining the basic terminologies of wellness tourism and the meaning of spa followed by some highlights of the macro-environmental trends in the travel, spa and wellness industry.

**WELLNESS TOURISM**

The essence of wellness refers to the balance and harmony of health, body, mind, spirit, quality of life, and well-being. Health includes nutrition and diets; mind relates to mental activity or education; body refers to physical fitness and beauty care; spirit associates with meditation and relaxation; well-being directs attention to individual self-responsibility of all components of wellness attributes. Wellness tourism has developed rapidly as a component of health tourism since the 1970s (CBI Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). Today, spa tourism also emerges as a component of wellness tourism and the terms “wellness” and “spa” can even be used interchangeably as long as the goal of the individual’s spa experience is geared towards maintaining and improving health (“Spa Finder’s Top Ten European Spa Trends,” 2006). Sheldon and Bushell (2009) define wellness tourism as “…a holistic mode of travel that integrates a quest for physical health, beauty, or longevity, and/or a heightening of consciousness or spiritual awareness, and a connection with community, nature, or the divine mystery; it encompasses a range of tourism experiences in destinations with wellness products, appropriate infrastructures, facilities, and natural and wellness resources” (p. 11).

**THE MEANING OF “SPA”**

“Spa” or “health through water” includes various meanings from different countries, cultures, and languages. The word spa derives from the influence of the Belgian town called Spa, where a thermal spring was discovered in the 14th century (Tubergen & Van der Linden, 2002). Some of its various meanings from Latin are “espa,” meaning fountain (Tubergen & Van der Linden, 2002), “spagere” (to scatter, sprinkle, moisten), and “Sanitas per aquas” (health through water) (Tubergen & Van der Linden, 2002, p. 273). Johnson and Redman (2008) postulate that the underpinning substance of spa lies in the forms that water brings into existence (i.e., ice, cold, cool, hot, warm, steam, etc.). De Vierville (2003) claimed that

Regardless of the spa type, the true purpose of a spa is to provide, through some form of the waters, helpful health services and treatments that are relaxing, restful, regenerating and socially re-creative… A spa is an eco-sociocultural learning community that attempts to bring together and truthfully integrate all the dynamic dimensions of time and space, temperatures, touch and therapeutic treatments within a supporting context of goodness, beauty, harmony and wholeness of nature. (p. 23).

Today’s luxury spas are criticized for losing the essence of the spa experience and a lack of authenticity and over-commercialization. O’Dell (2010) argues that the original intentions for a spa are often lost because many spas fail to act upon and connect these elements with culture and nature or humanity and earth, or soul and cosmos. Customers continue to expect spas to take the lead and guide them towards holistic wellness—body, mind, and spirit (Tabacchi, 2010). Spa consumption is not a necessity for survival; usually, customers have specific motivational factors or purposes in mind (Mak, Wong, & Chang, 2009). Luxury spas help individuals strike a balance among physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness. Rather than focusing on the money given up, some consumers emphasize the benefits and all components (money, time, and effort) they receive from a service or product as the most important,
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