

Are spas and wellness still considered luxurious in today's world?

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ABSTRACT: The world of spas has been around for thousands of years. Built as a supplementary service or facility for luxury hotels, it has quickly become a must have for most if not all luxury hotels around the world. Difficulties may be arising, however. Are spas still considered a luxury? Based on current readings, it could be suggested that spas and wellness have become a part of life, depicting a necessity for survival rather than anything else. Questions are therefore asked: Are spas and wellness still considered a luxury in the current era? This descriptive analysis article will take a critical look at spa and wellness, asking questions about its so-called luxury status.

KEYWORDS: consumers, consumer behaviour, hospitality, luxury, spa, wellness

Introduction

Spas and wellness — a world of extravagance based on "health" and in other cases "beauty". Similarly, the concept of luxury — a world of desire and pleasure according to Berry (1992). It could be argued that both run parallel to one another. The concept of spas as a luxurious idea especially within a hotel environment has been questioned. The concept of spas existence in luxury hotels in the 1980s could now start to be considered just normality rather than a luxurious addition. This conceptual discussion article takes a critical exploration of the past and present of spas' transition throughout time, raising questions about their so-called luxury standpoint. Are spas still considered luxurious today?

Literature review

What is a spa? An unusual definition

Williams (2006, p. 3) states that she believes a spa is "a commercial establishment that provides health and wellness treatments". The Cambridge Dictionary (2020, [Online]) has an original concept of where spa water comes from, and they describe a spa as "a town where water comes out of the ground and people come to drink it or lie in it because they think it will improve their health".

In 2007, the International Spa Association (ISPA) proposed a certified definition: "Spas are places devoted to overall well-being through a variety of professional services that encourage the renewal of mind, body and spirit". All three statements could be correct, as Zill (2009) concurs with ISPA (2007) that the spa experience contains ten elements: water, nourishment, movement, touch, integration, aesthetics, environment, cultural expression, social contribution and time (as one entity), and spa and rhythms (as one entity). Nevertheless, to officially define the term spa is seen to be problematic. Hair and Beauty Jobs (2020) reveal that every spa does not include every domain, whereas Zill (2009) stated that all ten elements are associated and work

in partnership and in parallel. Therefore, who is correct on this topic? Besides, the ten "domains" or "elements" subordinate to core therapies. Crebbin-Bailey et al. (2005, p. 68) disclose that the core therapies are "the most essential part, or innermost part, of the spa", which can be divided into five groups: hot, cold, water, touch, and relaxation. The mixture of the senses can be argued to assist in creating both physical and mental health. These core therapies may be found within the treatments and facilities that spas operate today. What is key to understand, however, is the reasons why such things are developing into the future. Is there a need for future innovations within this domain which will enlighten the spa and wellness concept into a futuristic and luxurious perspective? Only time will tell.

How old are spas and where did they come from?

Spas may have originated in the 14th century, however, this is criticised, where a thermal spring was discovered in Belgium in later times. Lyon Financial (2020) declare, "[f]or the Western world, the earliest proponent of the spa for therapeutic purposes was Hippocrates (460BCE–370BCE)". Preceden (2020) seems to disagree. For example, on their timeline of spa history, they consider that spas could have originated as far back as the Egyptians, with water therapy and herbal remedies in 3100BCE. Van Tubergen and Van Der Linden (2002) consider that spas may have been named after the Latin word *spagere*, which means to scatter, sprinkle, moisten, or could possibly be an abbreviation of the Latin phrase health through water, *sanitas per aquas*. It seems that we can only trace spa therapies back as far as Egyptian times, nevertheless human beings could have been incorporating these sorts of treatments known as spa procedures even further back in history. Were spas therefore a therapeutic means to deliver better health to people?

Wellness — How is it associated with spas?

The World Health Organization (WHO) concurs that wellness is considered an optimal condition of health, physically,

psychologically, emotionally and spiritually, while enhancing the definition by inserting that all aspects of one's life are considered, including workplace and environment. Ellis (2013) mentions that the term spa originated a long time before wellness, which has only been used since 1961, but her research suggests that the spa industry is simply a minor part of wellness, and that the entirety of the activities in spas are wellness related. Stará and Charvát (2013) determine that the term wellness originated because modern medicine in the 1960s was nearing its capacity. People were dying as a result of the way they lived; consequently others recognised that they had to adjust their lifestyle. Dunn (1961, p. 2) was the first person to formally propose the wellness concept in everyday life in his book *High-level wellness*: "Complete well-being calls for all of these states to happen together — wellness of the body, of the mind, and of the environment". Nevertheless, why and where the definition of wellness came from and into popularity is still to be decided. Uberoi (2014) agrees that wellness and spas should not appear as stand-alone concepts, but should work simultaneously as two mechanisms devoted to helping individuals improve their overall well-being. Is well-being therefore a necessity or a luxury ... is well-being a necessity? In today's world, we could argue it is a necessity for the longevity of life – especially in an era whereby pandemics such as COVID 19 and in some mental health cases BREXIT originate. The need for greater health (both physical and mental) accessories is at the forefront of the everyday well-being of life. The Global Wellness Institute (2020) specify that consumers have been operating a more holistic and natural approach to their health by utilising preventative care and self-healing, which has brought the wellness movement into the forefront for wellness in the 21st century.

The wellness movement

As wellness has evolved by consumers adopting aspects such as self-care, nutrition, and meditation practices, wellness could now be seen as a necessity for healthy living instead of a luxury due to a shift in population attitude and approach based on government attitudes and references towards sustaining healthy living. As agreed by Hotel Kralj (2020), "wellness is defined as a necessity, while spa is defined as luxury". Interestingly, the words spa and wellness play an important role in determining where in the dictionary and individual interpretations each one operates. McCann Health (2015) somewhat disagrees by stating that wellness is a model which is so prosperous that the wellness movement is shifting from an apparent luxury to an elementary human right. Questions remain, however. While health is and should be a human right, society could argue that some of humanity disregard and overlook health secondary to other important factors.

Nevertheless, what do we mean by an elementary human right? Does everyone have the right to be "well"? Brown and Zavestoski (2004) state that the wellness movement has led to an amplified popularity of merging traditional medical treatments with complementary and alternative medicine. Hill (1992) showcases what can now influence elements of our health through constructive lifestyle changes, while Schramm (2010) pronounces that wellness programmes are becoming more to individuals. Bush (2008) agrees with Schramm (2010) that wellness programmes are a necessity for enhanced health, whereas Brown and Zavestoski (2004) declared that recent events the majority of health movements have concentrated on

the growth of health care, as well as admittance and improving the quality of health care to the general public, both through private and public health care schemes, especially within the United Kingdom. Cohen and Bodeker (2008) discovered that the trend of mixing medicine and spas had a variety of interpretations, some about prevention and wellness, others a service offering complementary, alternative or integrative aspects. Awofeso (2004) saw that health promotion projects are navigating their way back to societies way of life — and that public health seems to have travelled full circle. Hill (1992) believed that wellness programmes would increase in size and number, as they not only decrease medical bills, but also improve total health, productivity and morale (by how much). Awofeso (2004) suggests that Chadwick's method to safeguard the public's health is as valid today as it was 160 years ago. He published the 1842 report on the sanitary condition of the labouring population of Great Britain, using statistical information to highlight the life expectancy variations caused by class, leading to the Public Health Act 1848. In which, the British Government took responsibility for the health of its citizens and improved health by removing refuse, installing an effective sewage system and clean running water in every house (UK Parliament, 2021). This may seem like minor in the modern day, but it demonstrated the overwhelming influence of verminous environmental conditions on adverse health outcomes (Awofeso, 2004). Uberoi (2014) agrees that the spa industry business proprietors will find that development in the industry will continue to concentrate on the perception of wellness, making wellness more accessible to more people throughout the world. Wellness, it could be argued, comes in multiple disciplines from physical to mental. The need for wellness is essential and, in the era of COVID-19, wellness is now more than ever needed in multiple forms. How can spas help with this is still to be seen. However, queries remain. What is luxury and in what way are spas associated with the luxury phenomenon?

Why do consumers visit spas?

Spa demand is made up of international consumers visiting hotels, resorts and destination spas, where they pursue acts of wellness and may be interested in culturally based therapies (Azara, 2017). Tressider (2011) agrees but adds that engaging in with wellness tourism is not a new phenomenon and offers consumer's escape, as well as health benefits. The Global Wellness Institute (2014) distinguished two types of consumers based on their incentives: primary wellness consumers who journey specifically for wellness purposes; and secondary wellness consumers who engage in such activities as a small part of their trip. Nevertheless, they also discovered that 87 per cent of wellness tourism trips as well as 84 per cent of expenditures were accounted for by secondary wellness consumers. This could suggest that as more consumers aim to improve life quality through incorporating wellness into their visit, the spa industry should continue to benefit from such. Burkholder (2007) says that spas are no longer strictly for use by the wealthy, and that the spa experience has become more accessible for the typical consumer, expanding the market potential. Horner and Swarbrooke (2016) declared that spas have an extensive role in the historical development of tourism, and although popularity may have declined in some countries, worldwide it is still a sizeable market. Burkholder (2007) insists that there will be a

growing demand in the future for more tropical destinations, where more culturally based therapies originate.

What do consumers want from their spa experience?

Tressider (2011) states that consumers no longer use spas as a place to just undergo a treatment, but have become relaxation enterprises/venues which combine indulgence and wellness. Todd (2011) declares that consumers visit spas for indulgence, escapism and to work on one's physical and psychological wellness. Globe Newswire News Room (2020) stated that spas meet a new consumer demand for wellness and that while the spa offering may seem time-consuming, it articulates that there are three distinctive characteristics including wellness therapies, appearance developments and indulgent treatments. Wellness therapies remain a fundamental part of the consumer lifestyle, with the wellness paradigm shaping the sector and consumer behaviour influencing innovation in the market.

Bellaïche and colleagues (2010) state that the problems in today's world of luxury cannot be defeated overnight without operators having a better understanding of consumers' needs because consumers preferences have changed. The turn of the experiential economy (Kucukusta & Denizci Guillet, 2014; Pine & Gilmore, 1999) suggested that consumers' requirements have been thought of insufficiently, despite the growth and potential of the industry. In their findings, they stated that spa therapist qualifications, value and level of privacy that consumers receive have been found to be the most important characteristics when consumers are making their bookings. Keri and colleagues (2007) disagree as their findings showed that consumers are more interested in the quality of the product rather than the price. Mohanta (2019) reveals that customer satisfaction is no longer limited to the quality of the services that operators provide, and says that operators must now create an optimum customer experience. Based on the thoughts of Pine and Gilmore (1999) and the needs of the service-based concepts to offer and be of a more experiential nature, the experience which service provider's offer to guests could therefore be a necessity rather than a luxury. Nevertheless, Walls and colleagues (2011) suggest that consumers produce their own dynamic customer experience through the spa atmosphere, with the vendor as well as through other consumers. How can consumers make their own experiences psychologically luxurious? From the tangible or intangible services that they receive, which plays the most important role?

Bellaïche et al. (2010) states the importance of using customer relationship management, together with other business decisions, to gain a more profound understanding of consumer behaviour and improve the consumer insight function performance. Smith and Puczko (2009) found that spa consumers are mainly women despite an insurgence of male usage growth as they tend to be more interested in their physical appearance due to social expectations. Keri et al. (2007) agree, but learned that the number of male consumers visiting spas has increased partly due to the fact that more spas have developed themselves to be gender neutral as well as ethically and culturally neutral and taking into account that spas have initiated treatments specifically targeted at males including that of sports massage and other male dominated treatments. Burkholder (2007) states that spas are harvesting corporate consumers and companies, using spas to combine socialising and business, and more consumers are beginning to combine business with pleasure.

Private companies and business owners are now incorporating workplace wellness visits to spas to motivate employees and cope with health, similarly it could be argued that such initiatives can be seen to be about team building and are using spa grounds for conferences, suggesting that spas have stepped beyond beauty and wellness treatments.

How do consumers see spas in luxury hotels?

Cohen and Bodeker (2008) states that spas have been developed as an ordinary characteristic of luxury hotels and resorts. Heyes et al. (2015) agree that a luxury hotel would have severe weaknesses against competitors if it offered no wellness activities to the guests, particularly now that spas are an anticipated and expected component. Trihas and Konstantarou (2016) explained that hotel and resort management should incorporate the word spa in the name of their hotels, as this may entice more customers. Bellaïche and colleagues (2010) state that luxury has mislaid its proper meaning, in that operators must manage financially the spa as a business and withhold their proper meanings when it comes to offering a wellness package. Horner and Swarbrooke (2016) reveal that including spas as a fragment of hotel design remains a moderately new trend, nevertheless the focus on in-house spas has brought bonuses to a number of hotel groups, and has sparked increased international hotel development worldwide (in which locations etc.). In addition, consumers will in the future be predominantly interested in traditional bathing benefits meanwhile budget airlines will enable these consumers to reach these destinations frequently. Trihas and Konstantarou (2016) believe that as more consumers take preventative measures to maintain psychological and physiological health, the demand for wellness products and services can only intensify.

What is luxury?

Luxury is something that is believed to be above and beyond everyday normality (Hoffmann and Coste-Marnière, 2012). While luxury has in the past been understood to be about excess, extravagance and prosperity, it has been noted and seen to be highly product related in regards to the purchasing of products to showcase wealth and prosperity (Hoffmann and Coste-Marnière, 2012). In today's experiential economy, consumers are now looking for something more than just "good" treatment in a manner of speaking — the essence of feeling fit, healthy and wholehearted are of high interest, suggesting that intangibility has an extensive part to play in the luxury domain. What was once seen as being tangible related in regards to products is now regarded as being more emotive feeling related— that is to say, there is a need for people to feel "special" parallel to what purchasing luxury is all about. The need to feel unique, successful and in high esteem are high on the agenda of many luxury consumers.

The query of luxury and spas

Questions are presently being asked about the alleged luxury aspect of spas as to the above suggestions. Historically, spas were and could be considered to be very much luxurious in their presence and consumption (Intel Group, 2011; TNS, 2005), while others have begun to question whether spas are immediately seen to be the same as they were formerly. As time continues, great resources have been used to extract

the necessities out of the wellness concept as well as moving it away from the prehistoric notions/beliefs that it is all about therapeutic beauty. The differences between the two, however, are astounding — where does one finish and the other begin still needs to be investigated.

Questions are asked; that is to say, luxury is based on one thing — “an exception to everyday normality” (Hansen & Wanke, 2011, p. 789). In regards to wellness, one may assume that wellness is a part of everyday life; that is to say, in order to stay well and in some cases alive, we need to conform with an array of different wellness consumers throughout the globe. Is spa and wellness therefore still considered a luxury or in today's world a necessity is what could be asked.

The personal and interrelated nature of spas, in particular that of treatments, suggests that feeling, emotion and empathy are strong characteristics which spa consumers can relate to. Similar to the above, the intangible emotion-based nature of spas may be a strong indicator of their possible luxury status; the human connection or interaction is fundamental for its luxury image, along with a thoughtful and empathetic ear. Nevertheless, certain difficulties still arise.

The issue with luxury

What was once seen as a luxury could now be considered a necessity — and as Berry (1994, p. 147) says “luxury is an exception to the everyday normality of life”. If therefore spas and wellness are to be introduced into everyday parts of life, how can this be an exception to the everyday normality? If wellness is seen as a necessity, surely spa and wellness should be a perfect opportunity for development? Certain cultures may establish spas to be in higher regard than others — with spas and wellness being at the centre of everyday life (Ellis, 2008). Therefore, are spas and wellness still a luxury concept? Are spas and wellness still considered luxurious depending on cultural backgrounds? Does culture play a part in the perceptions of spas and their luxurious reputation? Do certain cultures play a role in peoples perceptions of spas and how they are formulated? Does the integration of spas into everyday life effect one's perception of spas and their luxurious stance? In some cases, culture could already be seen to be playing a role in this equation, with spas and wellness being a relevant part of life in many countries across Asia.

Asian consumer behaviour and attitudes towards spas

The Asian systems of medicine such as Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine planted the seeds of the health and wellness concept (Wilkinson, 2020). Ancient China was renowned for using nature to heal the body and promote well-being, which could mean that wellness is a part of everyday life, and not seen as a luxury by consumers. (Tsang, 2015). Mirza (2017) found that consumers in Asia are becoming ever more conscious of their health. Rangsit (2013) agrees and specifies that the expectations of Asians are different from Europeans. Wilkinson (2020) confirmed that the Asian region is rediscovering its historical principles and enhancing them with 21st century medicine to extend consumers' life expectancy. Rangsit (2013) discovered the link between the medicinal and spa industries through medical spas, where Eastern and Western healthcare viewpoints are merging as consumers become more interested in their physical and mental wellness. Tsang (2015) found that as consumers age, they become more conscious of their physical

and mental well-being. This may encourage them to travel to meet health demands due to long waiting lists for medical treatments. Due to the changes in the environment, Mirza (2017) unearthed that consumers are now trained to pay more attention to their health and general well-being, to protect themselves in an ever-changing world. Wilkinson (2020) found that the Asia-Pacific's demand for wellness trips is far ahead of the rest of the globe, which means an increase in wellness tourism expenditure. Tsang (2015) stated the importance of merging wellness and tourism for worldwide consumers, as healthcare and overall wellness are now viewed as a commodity and asset by today's consumer culture. However, Mirza (2017) says that the demand for luxury products is stable, as the objective for luxury purchases remains; therefore, the demand for luxury goods is predicted to maintain in peoples lives for the foreseeable future. Tsang (2015) learned that this new age tourism concentrates on overall physical well-being and satisfaction of consumers, and that China is superior in leading the way in wellness trends. There are new markets which are yet to be discovered. While previously tangible related in regards to facility use, it could be noted that the change in consumerism and humanity's preferences for luxury may now be intangible related, that is to say there is a need for emotions and feelings to resurrect themselves when using spas. Consumers are looking for improved experiences which promote health and well-being.

Conclusion

Spas have been used as a therapeutic means to deliver better health to consumers for centuries. The spa industry can be seen as a part of wellness, as the activities in spas are wellness related, therefore the research shows that if used simultaneously they can help individuals improve their well-being as more of a necessity rather than a luxury.

Certain treatments provided in spas could be considered a luxury, as these are not incorporated into everyday life by all cultures across the globe. Nevertheless, the need for more health related items is at the forefront of everyday life. Consumer attitude and approach towards lifestyle has caused the wellness movement to shift full circle, as wellness is now seen as a necessity for healthy living and a greater longevity of life it is hoped. The spa and fitness movement has built itself into the foundation for wellness in the 21st century, the modification is that using preventative care mixed with medicinal interventions could provide an optimum effect.

Spa consumers are mainly women, but men are starting to use spas more as they become gender neutral and initiate male-specific treatments. Spas have also introduced corporate wellness packages to combine socialising and business, which could mean that spas have stepped beyond beauty and wellness treatments. The so called movement of the corporate domain could ask multiple questions including whether spa is still considered luxurious.

Spas have had to diversify or modify their offerings to meet consumer's needs as they are looking for more of an intangible, emotion-based experience, as well as value for their money. Despite the growth and potential of the industry, consumer requirements have in the past been thought of insufficiently, which could mean that the spa market is not functioning to its full potential. Nevertheless, consumers visit spas for indulgence, which could be an indicator that spas may still be considered a

luxury despite the fact that wellness should be implemented into every person's day.

Luxury hotels must offer both spa and wellness activities if they want to be more in demand than their competitors (Heyes et al., 2015). Spas have been developed as a characteristic in luxury hotels that may not be considered luxurious if they do not have one. But, if they contained the word spa, this may entice more customers. Hotel owners should incorporate spas into the offering to attract more customers and increase revenue.

More primary research may need to be carried out to establish the separation between spas and wellness concepts, as they may be different in different cultural settings, such as Europe and Asia. Wellness tourism, however, incorporates both spas and wellness to meet consumer demands. Consumers are becoming more aware of their health and well-being, which could encourage them to travel to meet their personal wellness requirements. Providing that business owners present the new age tourism model in an attractive way to both primary and secondary consumers, the spa industry could continue to be advantageous and still retain luxury demand. As more consumers take preventative measures to maintain psychological and physiological health, the demand for wellness products and services can only intensify with growth.

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