

People Wear Their Stress

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Day Spa Business Thriving as People Seek Respite From Life's Pressures

There are some things people will not give up. Two of those are facials and massages.

"People wear their stress, and the spa gets rid of that," says a Seattle spagoer who makes appointments two or three times a month, no matter what. "At the end of the month, I look at my budget and ask myself, 'What do I get value from?' I certainly get value from my spa visits."

People like this look to spas as inexpensive alternatives to vacations and as tools to stay healthy and look good. Indeed, the number of spa visits continues to grow, increasing 71 percent to 155.8 million from 1999 to 2001, according to the International Spa Association. Meanwhile, the number of spas jumped 69 percent from 2000 to 2002. According to Spa Management Journal there are now over 14 700 spas in U.S. & Canada. As of September 2nd 2003.

A survey of Seattle, Washington, area day spas shows some are expanding for the first time in years. InSpa, a three-location chain based in Bellevue, plans to open three more in the next 12 months. "We hope to be a leader in bringing spas to the mass middle market and make the experience unintimidating and affordable," said Judy Meleliat, InSpa's senior vicepresident of marketing.

"A lot of people think about spas for a birthday or anniversary, but we want to make it more of an everyday experience."

Many people see spa visits not as an indulgence but as a necessity to good health and good looks. Customers have less time to spend and want more results-oriented products and services.

"There has been a shift away from the 'day of beauty,'" said Lynne Walker McNees, executive director of the Lexington, Ky.-based International Spa Association. Spas are responding to this trend by offering more flexibility in their packages -- for example, packages of shorter but more-frequent visits.

As visits become more routine, revenue nationwide has grown, more than doubling from \$5 billion in 1999 to \$10.7 billion in 2001. The spa industry in 2001 generated more money than amusement and theme parks (\$9.6 billion) and movie theaters (\$8.4 billion).

SLEEPLESS NO MORE

Seattle-based Gene Juarez Salons & Spas reports spa treatments have become slightly more popular than hair services. The company's revenue jumped from more than \$53 million in 2001 to more than \$60 million this year. Same-store sales, a measure of retail performance that excludes new and closed stores, grew just shy of 4 percent last year and have jumped more than 8 percent this year. Gene Juarez last opened a spa three years ago but is talking again about growing.

Expanding the chain of three schools and seven salons and spas to include more schools and smaller salons is planned, according to Chief Executive Michael Coe.

At the Salish Lodge and Spa, 35 minutes east of Seattle and 40 minutes east of SeaTac Airport, Joan Southon has been spa director since 1986, when the environment-sensitive resort opened." We have a guest who has a standing 8 a.m. appointment every Saturday for heated river rock massage. And two guests who have four (two treatments each) treatments every week."

Joan was a manager at Nordstrom for many years before deciding to become a massage therapist. Providing TLC for therapists, she supplies special containers for his/her river rocks (the river rocks are not shared since each therapist hand-selects stones). Some of the therapists even have names for their river rocks!

VANCOUVER'S WINNING WAYS

With the world coming to Vancouver for the Winter Olympics in 2010, the spa industry in British Columbia is booming. A Canadian government economic analysis estimates that the Winter Games could boost BC's economy by \$10 billion (\$7.5 billion US), netting about a quarter of that in tax revenue. Creating 228,000 direct and indirect jobs, the events will be held both in the city and at Whistler Mountain resort.

On a clear day in Vancouver you can see the Pacific Ocean stretching beyond downtown office towers and the busy harbor scene. Mountains ring the city, forming a perfect port for cruise ships as well as freighters, blending international trade and tourism. No wonder they call it the gateway to "Naturally Spectacular British Columbia."

Vancouver's award-winning boutique hotel opened the smallest spa in British Columbia. With just two treatment rooms, The Wedgewood Hotel Spa features Canada's first treatments with the exclusive Epicuren skin care products from California.

These medically-based treatments make Epicuren a choice for Vancouverites, as well as many well known visiting film stars. Ultra-private yet minutes from museums and shops, the 14-story, 80-room Wedgewood consistently rates among Canada's best hotels. Joanna Tsaparas, the hotel's co-owner, recommends the Ultimate Cinnamon Enzyme Facial, the Chai Soy Anti-Stress Back Treatment and the Glycolic Peppermint Hand & Foot soak.

Between expanded cruise ship and convention facilities at Canada Place in Vancouver, and the resort village at Whistler Mountain, Canadian developers are gearing up to capitalize on the 2010 Olympics. Covered both ways, Wendy Lisogar-Cocchia's Absolute Spa Group caters travelers downtown and at the airport. Born into the business, Wendy rejuvenated her father's Century Plaza Hotel.

Recently expanded, Absolute Spa at the Century offers double treatment rooms where I experienced an amazing ayurvedic pizzichili treatment by a husband-wife team from India.

For a refreshing facial, lead therapist Doina Denghel used Soluzione Spa Products, and Absolute group member that also produces Y-Spa for Men. Nice touches include a relaxation room where light lunch is included with spa services. Going mobile, Absolute Spa is on the set of movie and TV shoots, and Vancouver airport terminals. Checking in at the international terminal's elegant Fairmont Hotel, I revived with a massage in the full-service Absolute Spa, minutes from airline desks.

Capitalizing on British Columbia's northwestern lifestyle, Vida Wellness Spas in Vancouver at the Sheraton, and Whistler at the Fairmont, teamed with Canadian chemist B. Kamins to indulge your sweet tooth: Maple Sugar Body Scrub contains natural sugars of Canadian maple trees. At the downtown Sheraton Wall Centre, Vida's 11 treatment rooms adjoin a fitness center and pool. Featuring an expansive relaxation lounge, the 4,000-sq.-ft Vida Vancouver is popular with corporate groups and bridal parties. "Vida means natural choice for individuals seeking a holistic approach to health and wellness," says regional spa director Allison Hegedus. Nice touches: cedar steam cabinet for ayurvedic swedana treatment, Dermalogica facials.

Unique ventures are springing up in trendy neighborhoods all over Vancouver.

Eveline Charles Salon-Spa brought a Zen look to the west end of town. Founder and president Eveline Charles created signature body treatments with oriental fragrances. Big seller last summer: Coco-Mango Sunless Tanner. The sleek salon offers 14 styling chairs, hydrotherapy and eight treatment rooms upstairs, retail and reception on ground floor. Colored lighting changes throughout public areas, evoking moods and healing. This is the fifth venue for Eveline Charles, who is based in Edmonton and Calgary.

Skoah breaks the mold with its non-intimidating approach to skin care. Drawing young clients to a former warehouse in Yaletown, there are no scrubs or tubs, whale music or bubbling cherus. "Personal training for your skin is not a guilty pleasure or indulgence," says founder/owner Chris Scott, who researched the market for two years before creating his own line of products for facials. Blended plant extracts from British Columbia make Skoah a refreshing change of pace.

Miraj is Canada's first hammam spa. A sense of Middle Eastern mystique surrounds you as owner Surinder Bains Kassour escorts guests to the mosaic-tiled medina - a low-mist massage chamber with marble slabs where your body is exfoliated with black soap from Morocco.

Full-body gommage followed by massage and facial starts at \$99. Inspired by her visit to a Parisian mosque hammam (the Islamic prophet Mohammed popularized hammams in A.D.600), Miraj has separate days for men and women. Located in South Granville, near a busy waterfront market place, this is a luxury escape from urban stress.

Canadian spas have a lot going for them. Prices are a bargain if you exchange US\$. Let the games begin!