

spa treatments: an ancient legacy

Since the universe's very beginnings, water has been the single most important determination of life's evolution, the foundation of all living matter. The human body, in all its complexity, is over 90% water, and more than 70% of our earth's surface is covered by it. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the one thing universal to all people is an instinctual belief in water's curative powers.

Although interpretations certainly differ due to factors like climate and religion, almost every culture prizes water as an emblem of spiritual purity and bodily cleanliness.

From the lavish spas of

ancient Rome to the ascetic hot springs of Japan, from the Biblical story of the great flood to an Indian funeral on the Ganges, water is a universal representation truly holistic renewal. How exactly these different peoples, separated by millions of miles, arrived at these conclusions independently is still somewhat of a mystery, but it seems that this attitude is a result of the innate appreciation of water's value that is shared by all animals.

taking the waters

As we move toward the next millenium, the spa industry is flourishing because people are searching for convenient ways to experience the same techniques of rebirth and renewal pioneered by their ancestors. With technological advances beyond our wildest expectations, our "global village" is now open to cultural influences that were previously inaccessible. A few decades ago, in order to sample the curative waters of San Pellegrino in Lombardy, you would have to undertake a perilous journey many months long. Now, thanks to science's advances, the trip would take you no

more than the few moments required to nip into your favorite convenience store. "Taking the waters," as the Victorians referred to spa treatments, encompass a wide variety of therapies, from literally drinking spring waters to receiving a week-long regimen of massage, guided nutrition and colonics. Perfected over centuries of use, spa treatments emphasize a holistic system of balance and restoration; and the myriad of treatments that fall under the spa umbrella offer clients truly ancient solutions to modern problems. Previously viewed only as luxurious add-ons for wealthy customers, these techniques are quickly becoming dominant on service menus everywhere as therapists and clients alike realize the numerous health benefits that they have to offer.

Likewise, skin care companies are flooding the market with at-home salts, soaps, gels and creams to meet a seemingly insatiable demand for what many people call "wellness products"—products designed to impart a sense of wellbeing. Unfortunately, trends are more-often-than-not accompanied by hype, and hype is dangerous when you're trying to build a trustworthy, professional business. This is why it is very important that we examine the history of these "new" developments so that we will not only understand the reasons for spa's medical significance, but will also be able to separate the fact from the fiction.





the spa “legends”

The roots of the spa movement are rather humble ones, harkening back to days when it was believed nymphs, dream water spirits and even demons inhabited wells, springs and rivers everywhere, doling out miraculous recoveries and sudden cures as it suited them. Legends passed from generation to generation told of leprosy cured, rheumatism alleviated and many other deeply-ingrained myths. As heavily steeped as we are in science today, it is difficult to indulge these flights of fancy; yet the same science that debunks these folk stories also tells us that the curative powers of many of these water sources are very real. For example, the high mineral content at many springs or in Fango muds have been credited with boosting the immune system and restoring vibrance to the skin, while their warmth naturally soothes arthritic conditions, helps blood circulation and improves toxin elimination. More important, however, are the intangible effects—the immediate sense of wellbeing, relaxation and calmness that a proximity to such basic elements inspire.

an ancient tradition

Although primitive forms of spa therapies were practiced for centuries prior in such places as Egypt and the Americas, the Greeks and then the Romans are credited with shaping the spa phenomenon as we know it today. The spa was the center of civilized life in these two great empires, and a citizen's day would

include several hours devoted to soaking in hot baths, receiving massages with oils and light exercise. The Romans expended great effort bringing water into their settlements, the results of which are still standing in cities throughout Europe, like world-renowned ruins in Bath, England. The fall of their empire, however, saw a steady decline of Western spa therapy, and only recently have these timeless techniques been rediscovered.

While Europe is credited with “creating” the spa, it is important to note that other cultures also have rich traditions of spa-like treatments that greatly complement European-derived therapies. For example, many Native American tribes developed sweat lodges as a source of ritual purification, creating a sauna-like environment by splashing water onto super-hot rocks. They often coupled these sessions with purifying herbs and meditation, eliminating bodily toxins and energizing the self. In Japan, natural hot springs created the heat necessary for sweat elimination, while northern Europeans eventually developed a sauna room as we know them today to experience some warm, humid air in their otherwise cold, dry climate. On their most basic levels, all of these cultures were seeking the same solace with their rudimentary treatments—they differ only in what resources they could use.

The aforementioned therapies represent but a few of the many that have been passed from generation to generation, refined at every step, for many millennia. We are fortunate today because science has afforded us both the knowledge of cultures distant from our own and the cutting-edge ingredient

technology to make it possible for us to create highly-effective in-salon treatments that are reshaping the face of modern medicine. A true indication of this shift in thought, from pamper palace bathhouses to ultra-modern spas, lies in the fact that many insurance companies are now offering significant reimbursements for spa therapies undertaken to help calm, revitalize and strengthen the body. Spa treatments are no longer mere add-ons, they are prerequisites for a successful business in today's competitive market. The International Dermal Institute has even broken new ground with its Spa Certification Program, a first in the industry.

introducing spa treatments

So, how do you adapt your business to offer these treatments, or



expand your menu with new ones? Fortunately, most spa services do not require extensive facilities and expensive plumbing upgrades. The key to successfully integrating your new spa services lies in education. First, you will need to learn how to successfully complete the treatments you plan on providing at a reputable training facility. Take note of what equipment and supplies are required for each, and make sure that you have them on hand. Next, demonstrate the service to your coworkers, especially your front desk staff—if they don't understand a treatment, chances are they will not do a very good job of convincing people to book for it. Last, inform your clients by mail and in person that you are offering a new selection of services. Perhaps give them a free “sampler” service when they schedule their regular appointment. You will soon have a repeat spa clientele and, best of all, your retail profits will skyrocket.

Of course, the question of what treatments to offer is not an easy one, and you should only add a technique once you feel comfortable with it. At present, most skin care centers have begun adding the more common spa-style treatments like a Solar Bronzing and Mineral Salts Scrub duo, Paraffin Wax Dips and Loofah Glows. There is no reason to stop there, however. There are many other techniques that can easily be incorporated into your treatment menu. For example, Seaweed Mud Packs, Ayurveda-based Shirodhara,

herbal wraps and Reflexology are all highly-effective ways to balance the skin and soothe the mind. Add to that advanced Vichy showers, hydro-tubs and saunas, and you have a comprehensive system of health.

the spa attitude

Transforming a run-of-the-mill “beauty salon” into a successful urban retreat requires more than a few additional services—it means adopting the “spa attitude.” Because clients frequently have busy schedules, they expect maximum performance in minimum time. What this means is that, from the moment they walk in the door to the moment they leave, they are looking for more than an individual service. They want an experience, and chances are that they are willing to pay top dollar for it. It is essential that you create a comfortable atmosphere in your reception area, eliminating unnecessary noise and clutter. Offer every client herbal tea or mineral water, always have fresh fruit on hand, and scent your entire salon with a light, calming essential oil blend. Lighting is also key as garish fluorescent lights can cause undue stress, and should be at the very least minimized with the addition of





soft incandescent sources. These are all simple, cost-effective solutions that can be implemented in any skin care centre.

a timeless tradition

Marketing analysts everywhere stress time and time again that consumers are looking for the “tried-and-true,” and that they have an inherent distrust of newfangled gimmicks that fail to live up to their expectations. Couple this with an almost religious attitude towards health and hygiene and it makes immediate sense why spa therapies have such widespread appeal. Their rich history, combined with their unparalleled

results and calming effects, make clients feel as if they are part of something bigger, maintaining the timeless. And, in many respects, they are.

Sources:

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